



Consequences of Polarizing Language by Republican Elites on Social Media



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Problem

- Elite polarization as political distance separating parties is increasing
- Most US adults get their information from social media
- Partisan animus contributes a lot to citizens' opinion formation
- Social media as a platform for polarizing politicians

Research Question

How does the mode of tweeting in terms of the use of polarizing language by Republican elites affect the citizens' engagement with their tweets?

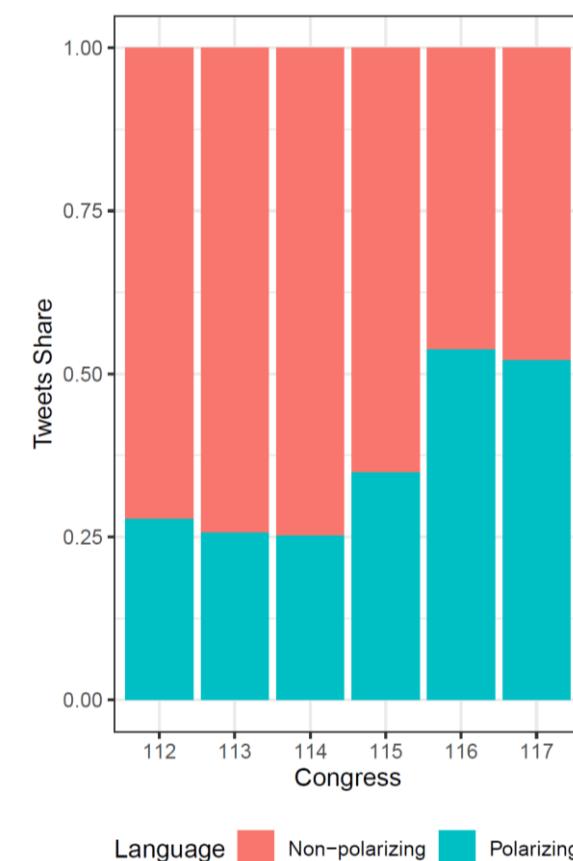
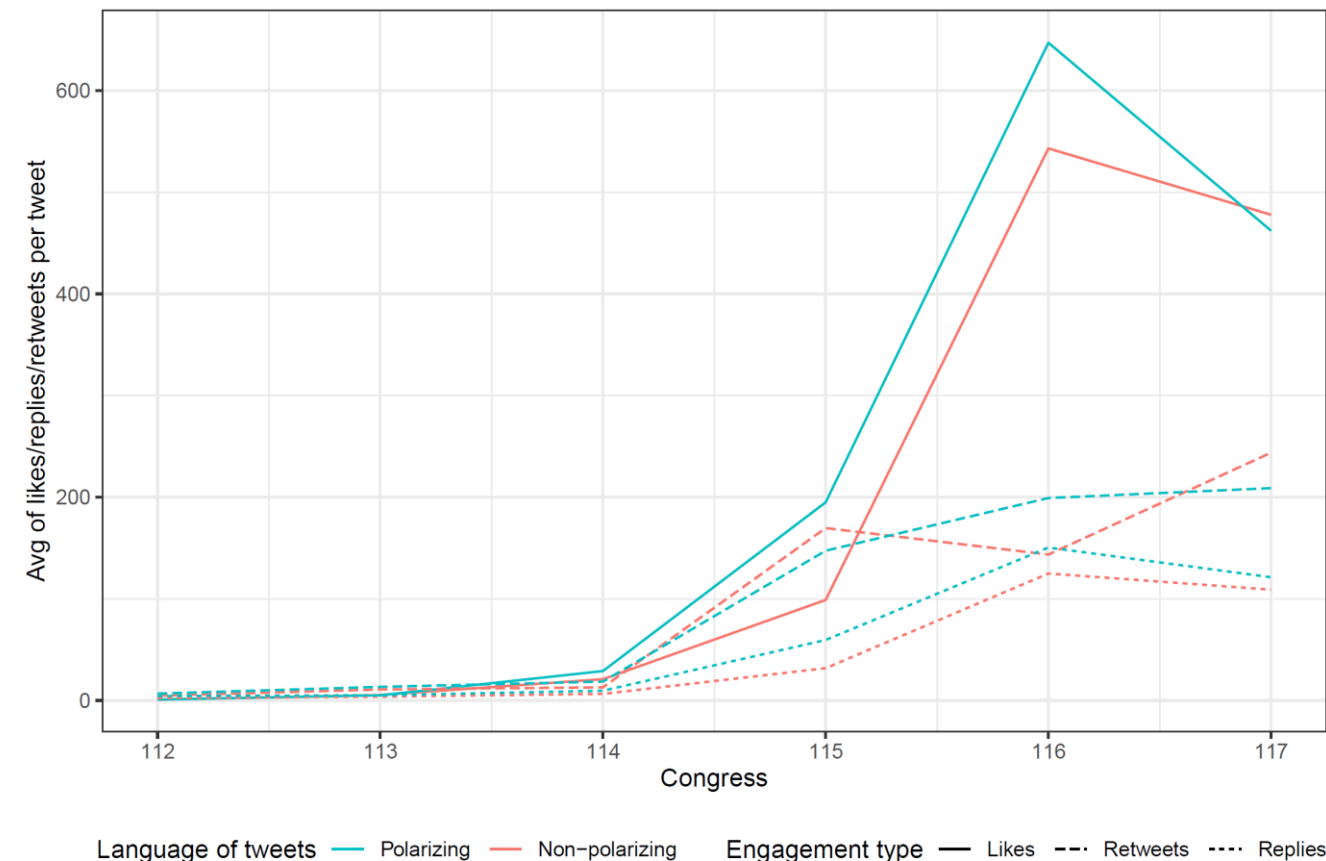
H1: The more polarizing language politicians use on Twitter, the more engagement they receive.

H2: There is a tendency towards a particular type of engagement.

Theories

- **Negativity bias:** things of negative nature have a greater effect on one's psychological state than neutral or positive things
- **Intergroup contact theory:** intergroup contact is an effective means to reduce mutual prejudice and to increase trust and forgiveness

Polarizing Language Used by Republicans in US Congress



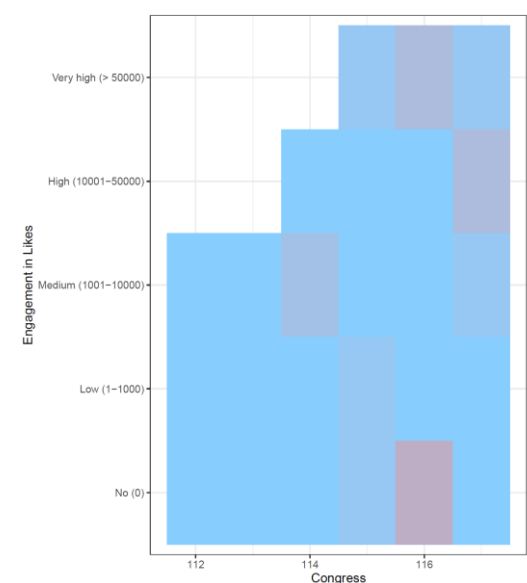
Data

- Time period: 112th-117th Congress (January 3, 2011 – January 3, 2022)
- ~1,3 Mio tweets by Republican members of US Congress
- Measurement of engagement: number of likes, retweets and replies
- Degree of polarization: number of occurrences of polarizing words in a tweet (polarization increases with the number of occurrences)

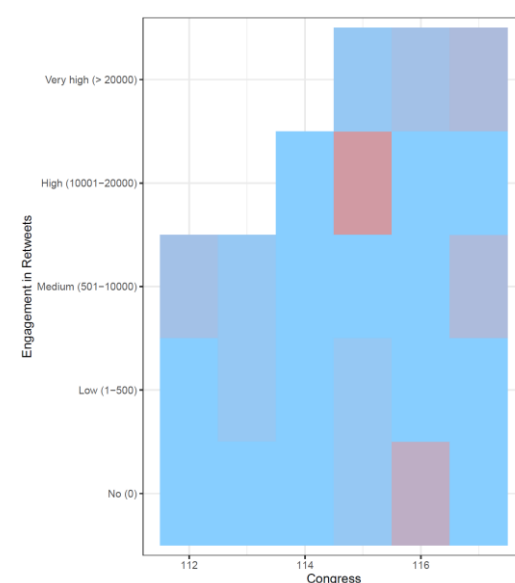
Methodology

1. Manual collection of Twitter handles of Republican politicians and tweets collection via Twitter API
2. Development of a dictionary of polarizing words based on the "Troll and Divide" dictionary and its manual validation
3. Data pre-processing, labeling based on the dictionary, and visualization

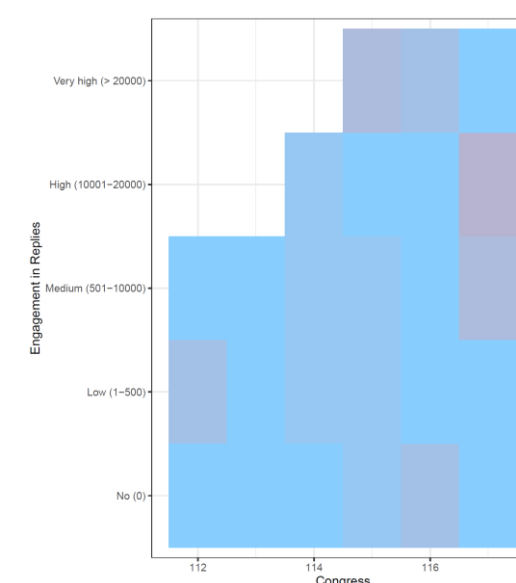
Engagement via Likes



Engagement via Retweets



Engagement via Replies



Conclusion

H1 is true. Users tend to engage more with tweets containing polarizing language.

H2 is true. Users engage with polarized tweets predominantly via likes.

→ Use of polarizing language by elites leads to higher citizens' engagement.

→ Evidence also shows a rise in the share of polarizing tweets over time.