

Social Media and Democracy: Experimental Results

Social media have become a main source of information for many voters. Political interest groups on social media platforms have the ability to (i) microtarget news based on individual-level voter data and (ii) obfuscate their identities, which can be exploited to spread disinformation. Two proposed interventions to prevent election manipulation by disinformation are a microtargeting ban and disclosure requirements. An empirical foundation for these interventions is missing. We experimentally study the effects of the implementation of a microtargeting ban and disclosure of interests in a social media environment on voting behavior. Our results show that mandatory disclosure of interests, in combination with or without a microtargeting ban, increases the efficiency of aggregate voter decision-making. However, only the combination of disclosure of interests and a microtargeting ban counteracts election manipulation. The implementation of a microtargeting ban without disclosure requirements has adverse effects.