

## Media

### Mary Olivia Rentner – Chapter 9

Social media is a useful tool for political ideas to be stated, heard, and discussed. Unfortunately, social media has become a place where people are politically polarized. The solution to reducing psychological polarization, which is prevalent on Facebook, is not to get rid of platforms like Facebook or getting rid of “weak ties” (interacting with friends of friends). We also can’t stop people from talking about political matters because free speech is important to our country. There needs to be a change in mindset about how we communicate on social media and what we are trying to gain from these interactions. This chapter discusses five potential solutions, increasing information quality, increasing political transparency, incentivizing moderation, reacting deliberately, and eliminating highly visible quantification.

The idea behind increasing political transparency is that people would report their ideology on a scale, take quizzes that show their political beliefs, etc and then these results are shared with friends. Ideally, this would reduce people’s ability to assume what another person’s political beliefs are. Person A may be against immigration and post articles about it, but they also wrote on their profile that they believe everyone should have access to health care. You wouldn’t have to make assumptions about every aspect of someone’s political beliefs based on where they eat and the cars they buy, because it would be readily available information. It would link us in many ways, and hopefully, help people find common ground.

Reacting deliberately on Facebook would allow for civil and intellectual debates that are not based on emotion as much as they are based on logic and reasoning. Social feedback on social media (the ‘like’ button) reinforces what people believe about the world, especially about politics. They either get support from people who are similar to themselves or they get negative responses from people who are very different ideologically. Facebook could use “deliberative reaction” buttons for political posts so that people aren’t just reacting emotionally, but asking for ‘clarification’ or ‘sources’ so that they can have a civil conversation.

Over time, these changes should alter the psychology of polarization and impact how we discuss politics and how we respond to new information. Positive social interactions on Facebook will decrease hatred felt toward people who have opposing ideologies. Getting rid of social media would be harmful because that is how many people access the news and learn about members of the other political party. The intended outcome of these solutions is to increase understanding and civility.

### Daniel Xu – Chapter 13: Curbing Political Polarization through GOTV

Political polarization in American politics has been encouraged by two newly-developing trends in party identification; more of the electorate is identifying themselves as Democrats or Republicans, and those partisan voters are now voting for candidates of the same party at a higher rate than ever before. Scholars have different explanations for how this trend came to be, but agree on one worrying development. These partisan voters have grown to be ‘reflexively

polarized’—voting for their own party’s candidate no matter how extreme their views, and automatically discounting the opposition. As a result, many have pointed to moderate voters—or rather, getting moderate voters to the polls—as a counter to partisan politics.

Moderates are more likely to cross the aisle and vote for candidates for reasons other than their political affiliation. They are less tethered to a single political party, and their presence can motivate candidates to shift their rhetoric towards the center rather than the extremes. However, many of those moderate or independent voters do not vote on election day, leading to the increased influence of partisan voters. As a result, one of the solutions to countering polarization is using Getting Out the Vote (GOTV) measures to encourage non-voting moderates to get to the polls—thereby decreasing partisanship and polarization.

Typically, GOTV efforts consist of face-to-face canvassing, phone calls, distribution of materials, voter education, mail campaigns, and many more initiatives. They are effective in encouraging more people to vote, but due to their financial costs, are usually used in a partisan fashion by the candidates with adequate resources to do so. Prior and Stroud propose for independent, non-affiliated operations to begin targeting moderates, rather than partisans, with GOTV. This way, more moderate positions and priorities would be represented at the polls than before—encouraging the political landscape to adjust in order to reflect that change.

Prior and Stroud propose using voter files and other electoral databases to determine which homes independent groups should target with their GOTV efforts. Such operations would provide potential voters with important information about elections that would directly affect them—thereby encouraging them to go and vote. Citizens would be told the times and dates of their elections, be given absentee forms if needed, and reminded of their civic duties.

Admittedly, there are some disadvantages to convincing a large group of non-voters to vote. Many of these individuals do not prioritize political participation, and therefore do not know much about the candidates, their respective parties, or the issues that they are campaigning on. Therefore, they are especially susceptible to misinformation—often promulgated by social media and other forms of communication. Additionally, there are many situations in which non-voters, or those perceived to be moderates, can actually behave like partisans. However, the overall benefits of using GOTV measures to target moderates far outweigh the negatives. Furthermore, if GOTV efforts aimed at moderates are coupled with informational campaigns, many of the possible issues could be mitigated.