

Twitter and the electoral connection

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Objective: U.S. politicians use social media to engage directly with citizens, though the motivations that determine the choice to use social media remain opaque. We argue that there is a clear “electoral connection” in using social media that exceeds the influence of other motivations. Politicians use social media to cultivate support from electorally relevant actors.

Methods: We analyze Twitter usage from 2017 to 2020 by state attorneys general (AGs), who vary in being appointed or elected.

Results: We find that elected AGs are more likely to have Twitter accounts, use the accounts more often, and receive more engagement from other users as a result. We also find that they automate their tweeting more often. We replicate our primary findings on state secretaries of state and find similar results.

Conclusion: Our findings point to the importance of elections for motivating social-media use by politicians.