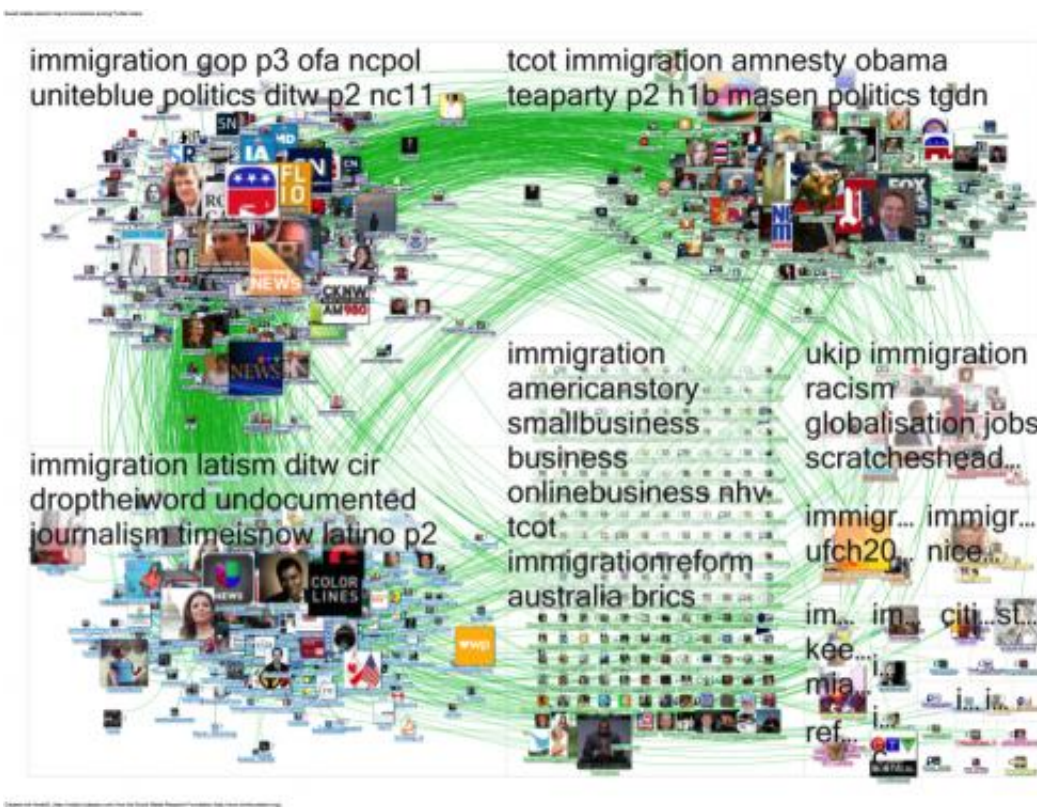


Twitter analysis shows Boston bombings had little effect on immigration reform conversations

May 7 2013



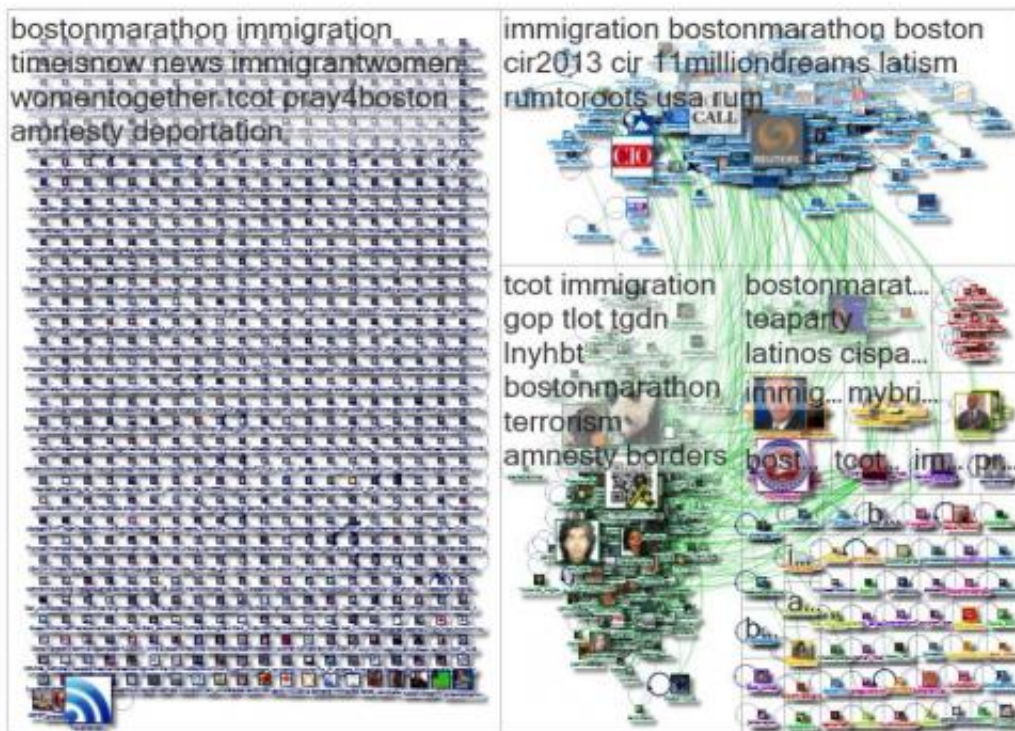
Twitter conversation clusters about immigration about two weeks before the Boston Marathon bombings. Credit: George Mason University IIR

An analysis by researchers at the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) at George Mason University shows that the Boston Marathon

bombings had little effect on conversations on social media regarding immigration reform.

Using two different [data mining](#) applications, the researchers collected more than 750,000 tweets containing the word "immigration" beginning in February 2013.

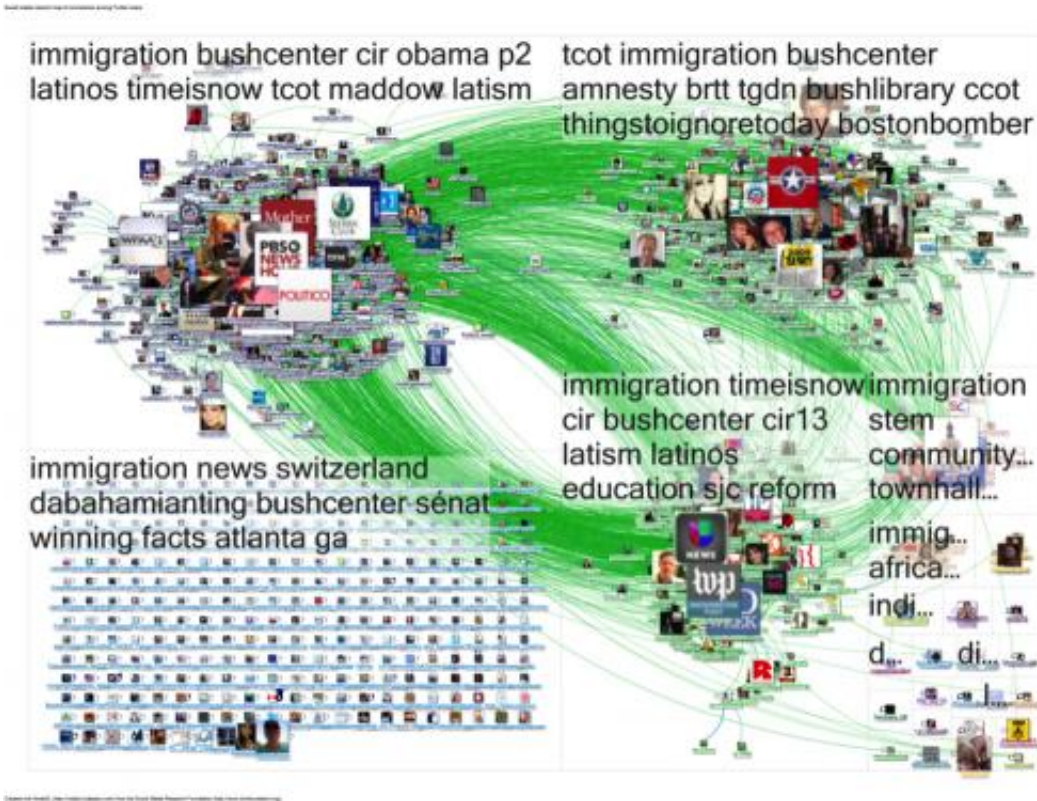
"The Boston Marathon bombings on April 15, 2013 provided an unexpected opportunity to examine how this event has affected the immigration reform debate," says Jim Witte, director of the IIR. "We compared conversations about immigration on Twitter before, during, and after April 15."



On the day of the Boston Marathon bombings, conversations switched -- and many new individuals started tweeting about immigration. Credit: George Mason University IIR

Before the bombing, Witte says, conversations on Twitter were very polarized—with separate conservative and liberal clusters not interacting much with each other in conversation. Another cluster of users talking about immigration included more diversity. "It's best described as a mainstream cluster that includes both liberal as well as conservative viewpoints," says Witte. "These tweeters tend not to be as extreme, and they have many connections with the two more ideological clusters, which suggests that this the mainstream cluster acts in part as an informational bridge between them."

On the day of the Boston bombings, the conversation on Twitter shifted a little, the researchers saw. "Tweeters in all clusters were tweeting about the bombing in relation to immigration—even though there was not yet any evidence of such a connection," says Witte. The conservative [cluster](#) diminished in size and there was a large influx of tweeters who weren't connected to any other immigration tweeters.



Two weeks after the bombings, conversations seem to be back to the same patterns they were before the event. Credit: George Mason University IIR

With evidence that Chechnyan [immigrants](#) Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were responsible for the [Boston Marathon](#) bombing, [mainstream media](#) were speculating whether their status might affect the immigration debate in America. Words like "[deportation](#)," "amnesty," "terrorism," and "borders" were associated with immigration tweets after the bombings.

However, just two weeks after the bombing, Witte says, the conversations looked very similar to those before the bombings took place. "In the short run, we found no indication that this connection has left a permanent mark on the conversation on [Twitter](#)," Witte says.

Witte says that tracking these conversations via social media is important not only to look at the progress of issues like immigration reform but also to understand the relationship between social media and public opinion.

Provided by George Mason University

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