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How Twitter helped Trump win the U.S. Elections

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New research published today, 9 April, 2019 found a movement of Twitter followers helped President Donald Trump garner support during his election campaign for the 2016 U.S. presidency.

The research paper, Underlying socio-political processes behind the 2016 U.S. Election, was published in *PLOS ONE* and is a collaboration between Royal Holloway, The University of Glasgow and The London College of Political Technologists in the UK.

The research found that a new influential group of Trump supporters formed over a period of months on Twitter during his campaign, putting slogans such as 'Make America Great Again' on their profiles and garnered quite a following.

The paper also reveals how the new Trump group effectively knocked the old Republican Party group off the top spot as everyone started to follow the accounts in the new group.

There was also very little evidence found that this new group's success was due to Twitter 'bots' or foreign intervention, which is especially relevant in light of what is currently known about the report on Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election from Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

The research results fit into a picture where the Trump campaign's mobilisation of a targeted group of supporters more than made up for Hillary Clinton's funding advantage: a significant shift in the U.S. political landscape.

Dr. John Bryden, who researches social networks and language transmission at the School of Biological Sciences at Royal Holloway, University of London said: "Mr Trump's ascent to the Presidency has prompted a great deal of effort amongst pollsters, political scientists and social scientists to unearth the reasons for his unexpected success.

"By developing the more robust understanding of how political factions can be identified and analysed, it gives us a way of following these fast-appearing and highly-motivated supporter groups, and their influence on politics.

"Recently, we have witnessed a number of rapid shifts toward populism in the rhetoric and policies of major political parties, as exemplified in the 2016 Brexit Referendum, 2016 U.S. Election, and 2017 UK General Election.

"Our perspective in the research was to focus on understanding the underlying societal processes behind these recent political shifts."

The research, which looked at 250,000 Twitter accounts, demonstrates a powerful method for tracking the evolution of societal groups and reveals complex social processes behind political changes.

Dr. Eric Silverman from the University of Glasgow, added: "During the recent surge of populist movements around the world, we have seen that traditional methods of political polling are at times falling short in terms of predictive accuracy.

"Our research shows that Mr Trump's supporters mobilised and usurped the Republican Party's Twitter following surprisingly quickly, and our method is able to identify and analyse these mass movements.

"We hope that this work will help to improve the analysis of political

movements in future elections, both in the U.S. and elsewhere."

More information: John Bryden et al. Underlying socio-political processes behind the 2016 US election, *PLOS ONE* (2019). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0214854

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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