

New study finds people are using Twitter to bridge political divides

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Given the current atmosphere of political polarization, conventional wisdom suggests that conversations about politics—especially those taking place online—are both unpleasant and unproductive. However, a new study finds the opposite: average citizens are participating in rich and engaging political conversations online that have the potential to bridge divides and push people beyond their information bubble. This study, "Why Keep Arguing? Predicting Participation in Political Conversations Online," was recently published in *SAGE Open*.

In order to better understand why individuals engage online, researchers Sarah Shugars and Nicholas Beauchamp looked at Twitter conversations about President Trump to examine what drives continued engagement in contentious political conversations. While drivers included an enjoyment of arguing, desire to affirm [political beliefs](#), and hope to engage productively with those of opposing views, they also found some less-obvious results:

- People are likely to engage with those who have different beliefs and backgrounds
- While [negative comments](#) are more likely to spark sustained [conversation](#), positive tweets are most likely to receive positive replies, suggesting that pleasant political conversations are possible
- Individuals fall into engagement patterns—if they engage, they do so frequently and if they don't, they tend to remain disengaged

"Taken together, these findings suggest that average citizens are participating in rich and engaging political conversations," commented study authors Sarah Shugars and Nicholas Beauchamp.

The researchers propose broadly increasing conversational activity online and developing tools to make it easier to engage and follow long threads in order to extend and enrich these interactions. In addition, given users' willingness to respond to those unlike themselves, the researchers suggest that there is value in showing users new and different content, rather than recommendations based on the content with which they have already interacted.

More information: Sarah Shugars et al, Why Keep Arguing? Predicting Engagement in Political Conversations Online, *SAGE Open* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/2158244019828850](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019828850)

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