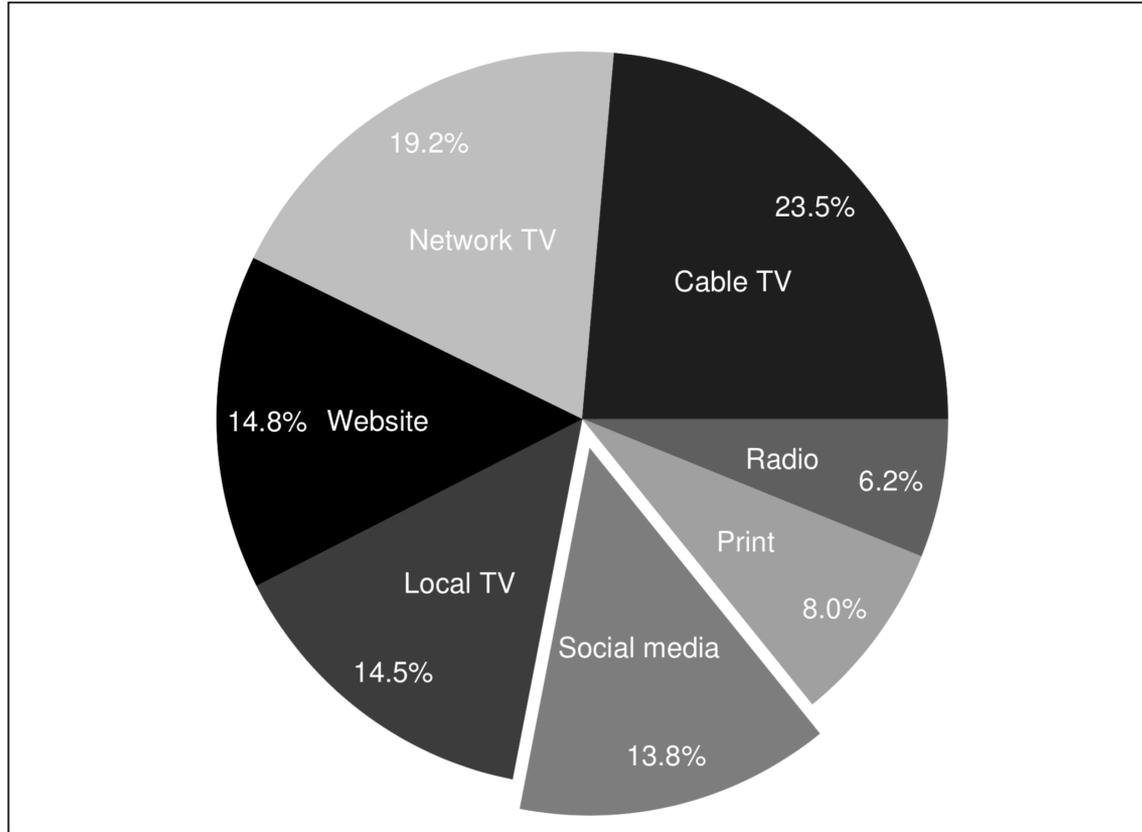


Digital Power & Politics

Matthew Gentzkow
Stanford University

Most Important News Source (2016)



How do social media affect the distribution of political news and information?

1. “Theory”

2. Experimental evidence

1

“Theory”



YAHOO NEWS

NETFLIX

AMAZON

HUFFINGTON POST

WASHINGTON POST

YOU

GOOGLE

FLIPBOARD

Echo Chambers circa 2008

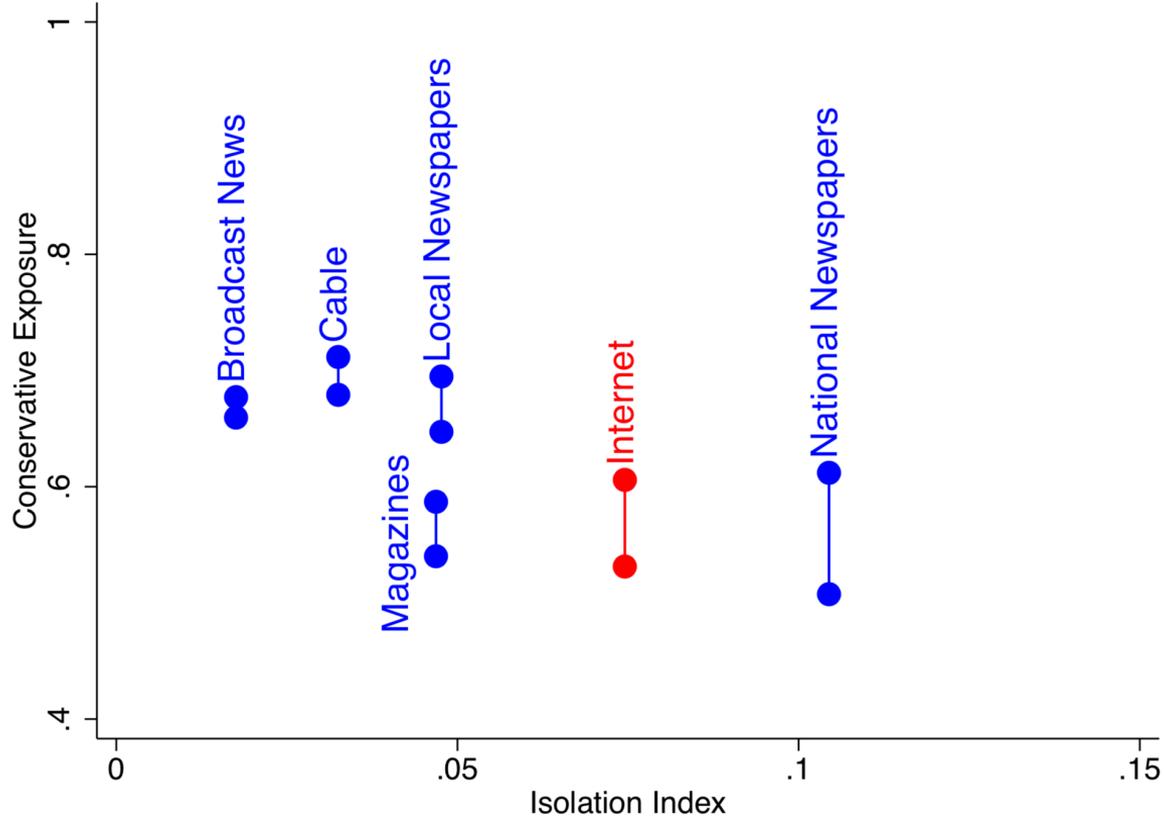
IDEOLOGICAL SEGREGATION ONLINE AND OFFLINE*

MATTHEW GENTZKOW AND JESSE M. SHAPIRO

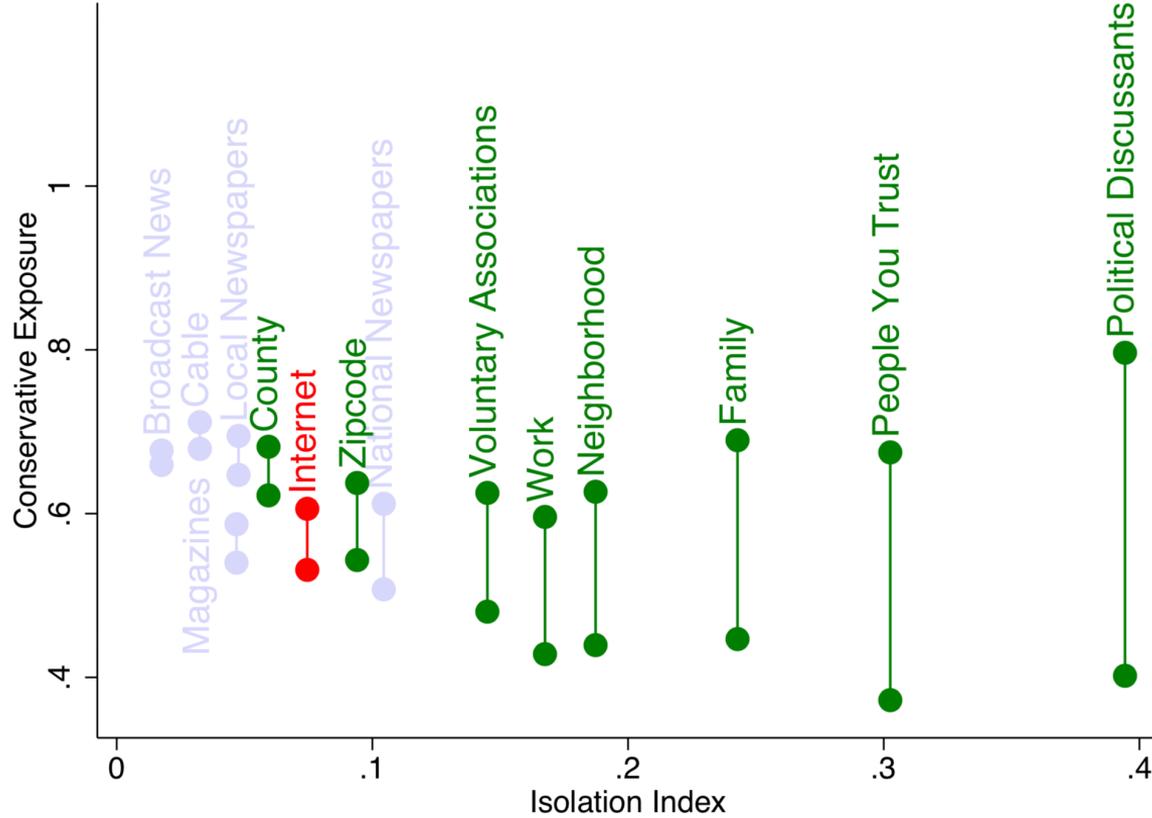
We use individual and aggregate data to ask how the Internet is changing the ideological segregation of the American electorate. Focusing on online news consumption, offline news consumption, and face-to-face social interactions, we define ideological segregation in each domain using standard indices from the literature on racial segregation. We find that ideological segregation of online news consumption is low in absolute terms, higher than the segregation of most offline news consumption, and significantly lower than the segregation of face-to-face interactions with neighbors, co-workers, or family members. We find no evidence that the Internet is becoming more segregated over time. *JEL* Codes: D83, L86.

The Quarterly Journal of Economics

Media



Face to Face Social Networks



Two Key Forces

1. Most people get news from big, brand-name sites
2. The only people who go to extreme sites are heavy users, and so they also see non-extreme sites as well

Should social media
be any different?

Social media...

- Filters content through your *social network*, which we saw above is highly segregated
- Makes sources less important
- Exposes even light users to niche content



Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook

Eytan Bakshy,^{1*†} Solomon Messing,^{1†} Lada A. Adamic^{1,2}

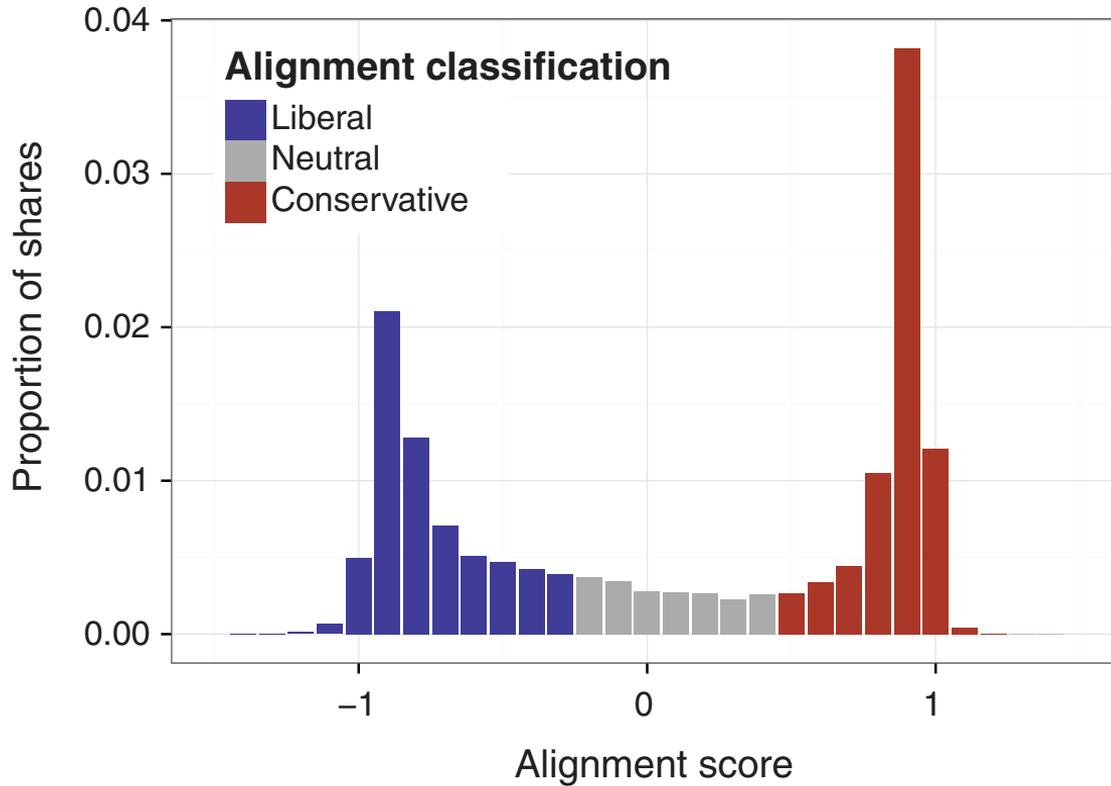
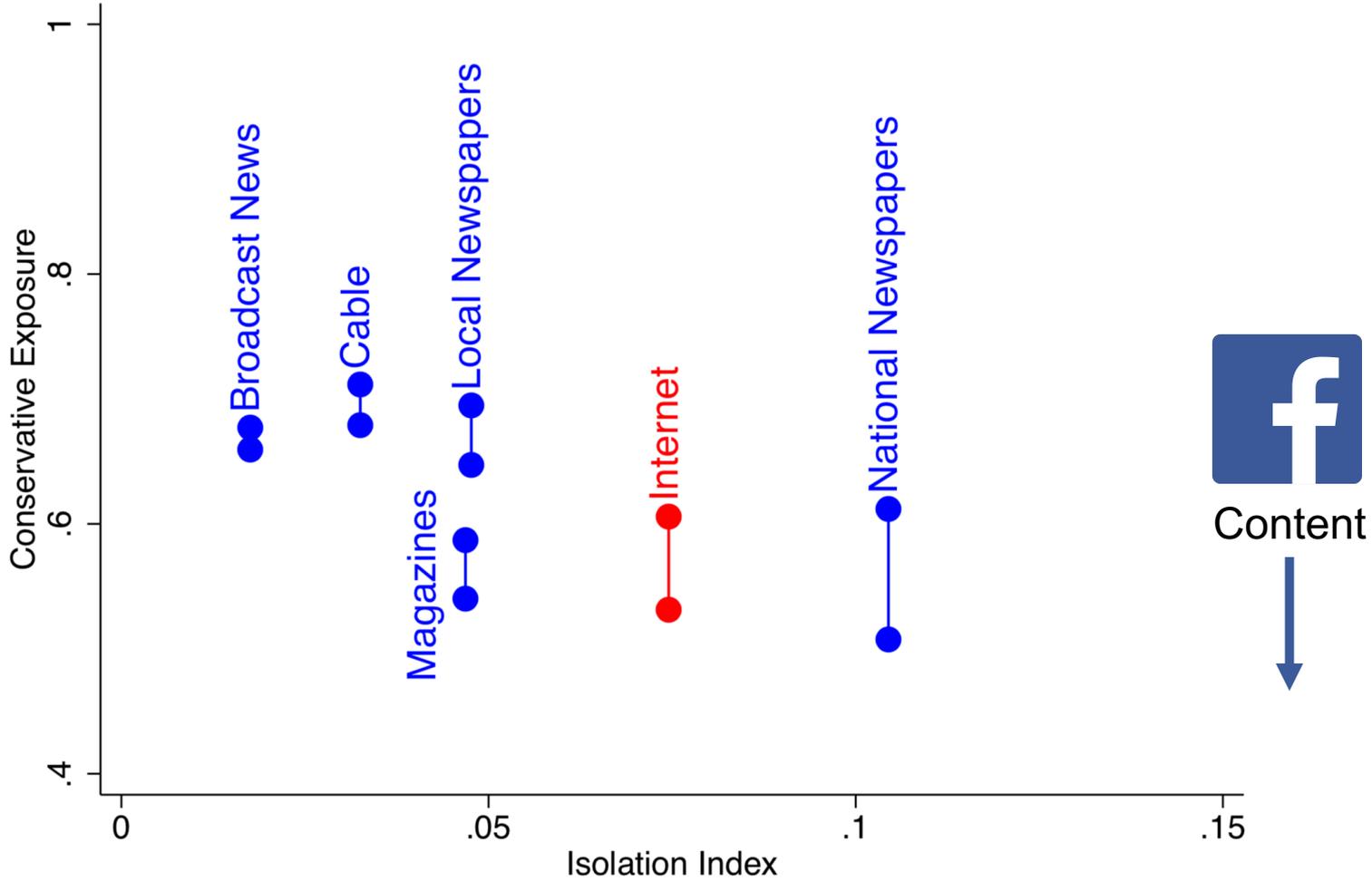


Fig. 1. Distribution of ideological alignment of content shared on Facebook measured as the average affiliation of sharers weighted by the total number of shares. Content was delineated as liberal, conservative, or neutral on the basis of the distribution of alignment scores (details are available in the supplementary materials).



Bottom Line

- Digital media need not exacerbate segregation and polarization
- But the structure of *social* media platforms make them likely to do so

2

Experiment

Allcott, Braghieri, Eichmeyer & Gentzkow 2019

Randomized experiment: Paid users to deactivate Facebook for 4 weeks before the US 2018 midterm election

Individual effects

- Substitute time uses
- Happiness
- Post-experiment use & valuation

Broader social impacts

- News knowledge
- Voting
- Political polarization

Timeline (2018)

Sept 24 – Oct 3: Recruitment, pre-screen, and baseline

Oct 11: Midline

Nov 8: Endline

Dec 3: Post-endline

Recruitment

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Participate in online research study about Internet browsing and earn an easy \$30 in electronic gift cards!



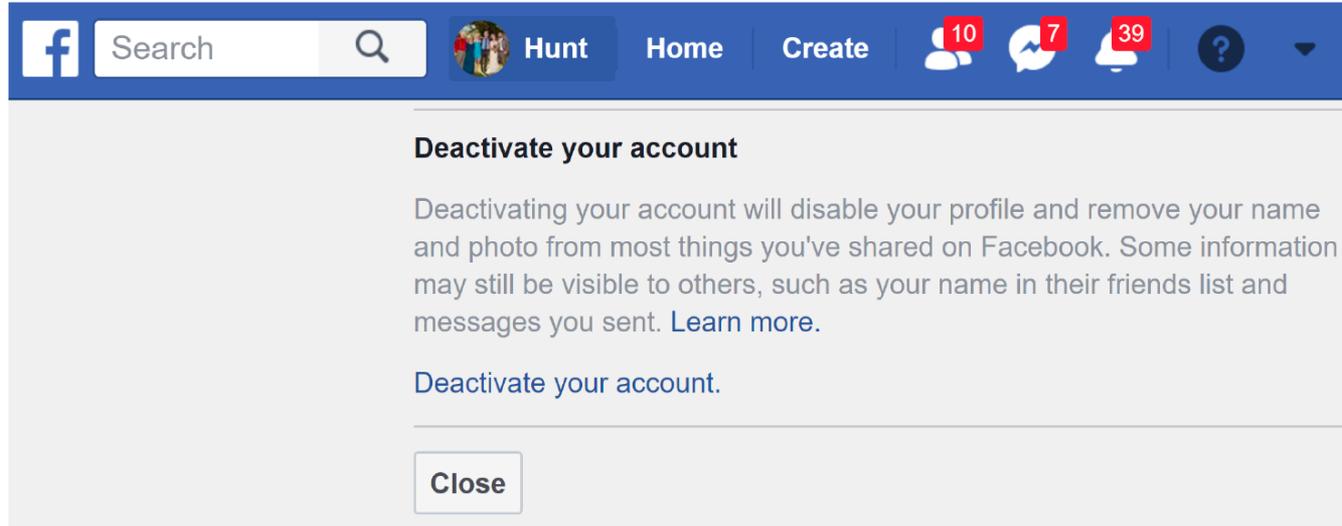
STANFORDUNIVERSITY.QUALTRICS.COM

Earn an easy \$30 by participating in online study [Learn More](#)

 Like  Comment  Share

- Quotas: attempt to be representative of Facebook users age ≥ 18 on gender, age, college, and political ideology

Deactivation

A screenshot of the Facebook deactivation dialog. The top navigation bar is blue and contains the Facebook logo, a search bar with the text "Search", a magnifying glass icon, a profile picture of a group of people with the name "Hunt", and navigation buttons for "Home" and "Create". On the right side of the navigation bar are icons for friends (10), messages (7), and notifications (39), along with a help icon and a dropdown arrow. The main content area is light gray and features the heading "Deactivate your account" in bold. Below the heading is a paragraph of text explaining the consequences of deactivation. At the bottom of the dialog is a "Close" button.

Deactivate your account

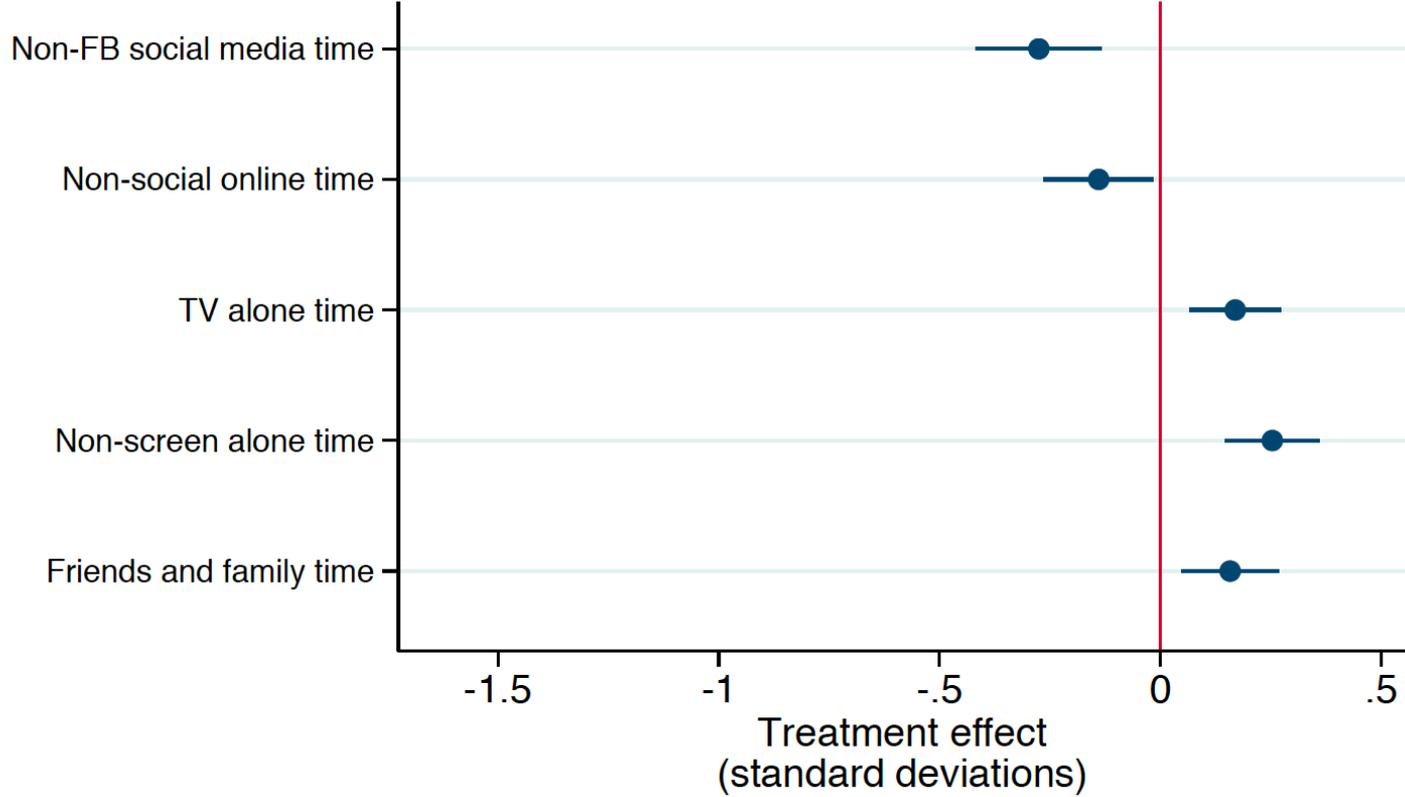
Deactivating your account will disable your profile and remove your name and photo from most things you've shared on Facebook. Some information may still be visible to others, such as your name in their friends list and messages you sent. [Learn more.](#)

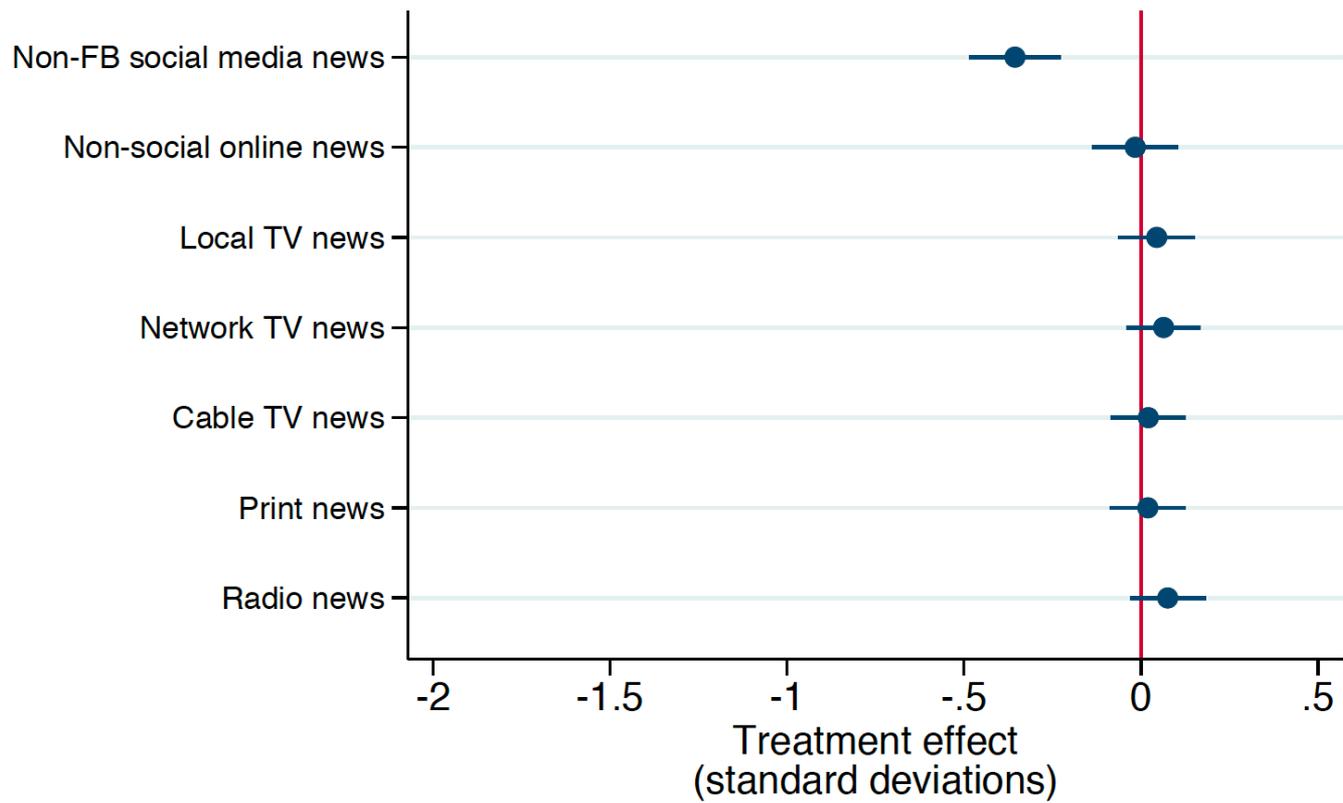
[Deactivate your account.](#)

Close

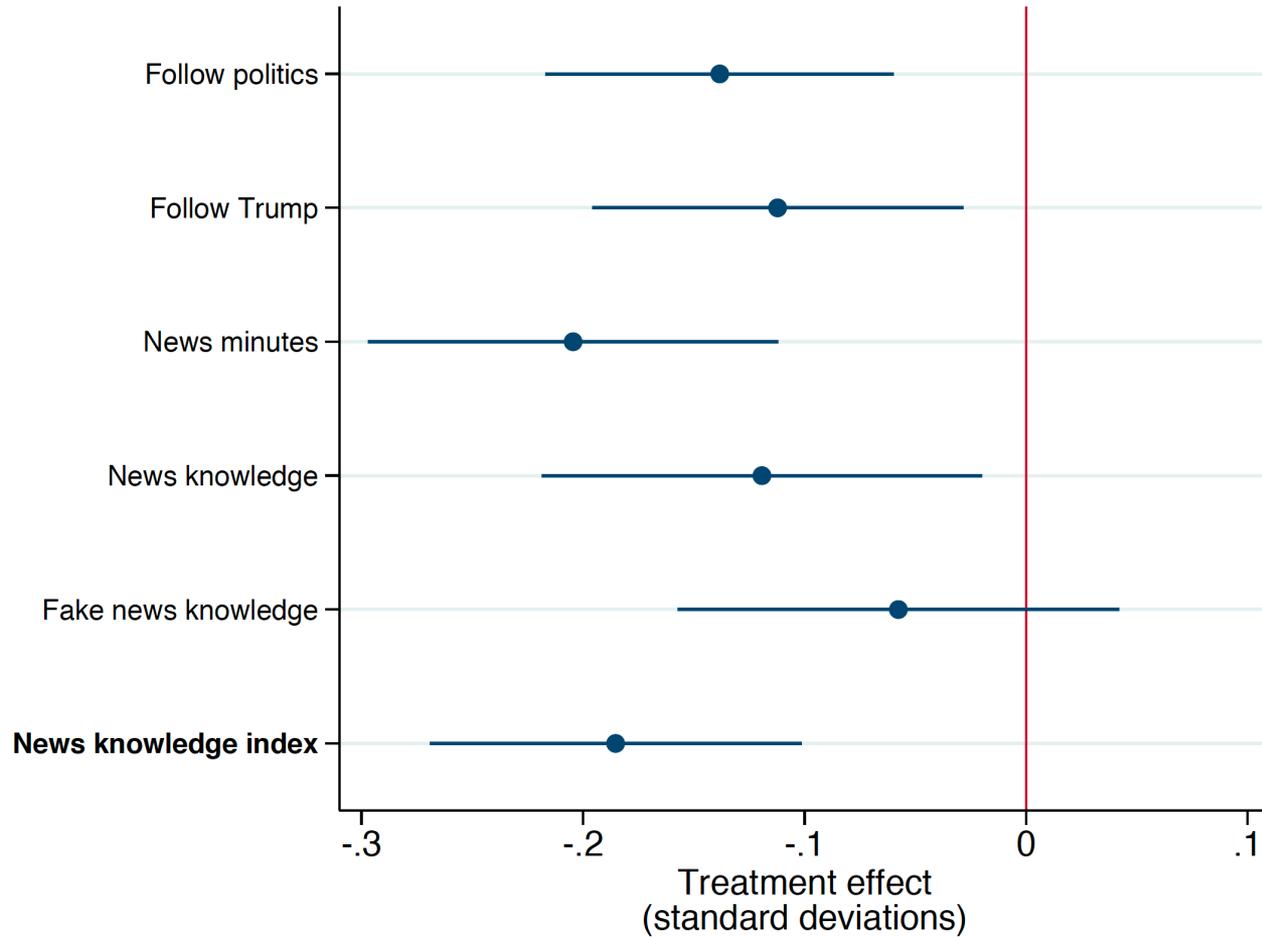
| Phase | Sample size |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Recruitment and baseline | N=1,690,076 were shown ads N=30,064 clicked on ads N=2,897 consented and had valid baseline |
| Midline | N=2,743 finished midline, of which: N=1,661 were in impact evaluation sample |
| Endline | N=2,684 finished endline, of which: N=1,637 were in impact evaluation sample |
| Post-endline | N=2,067 reported Facebook mobile app use, of which: N=1,219 were in impact evaluation sample |

Substitution

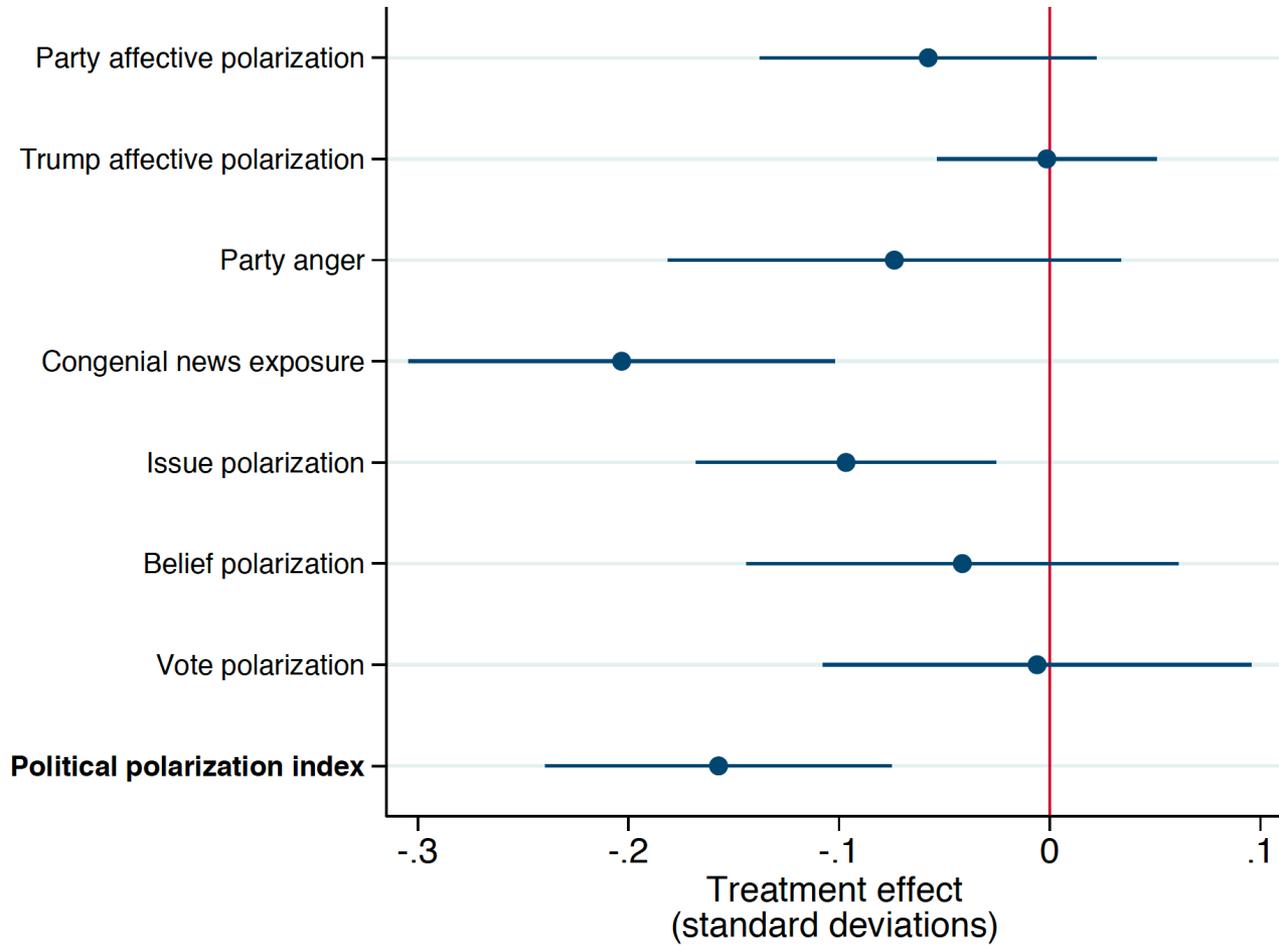




News Knowledge



Polarization



Bottom Line

- Facebook makes people more informed
- Facebook makes people more polarized