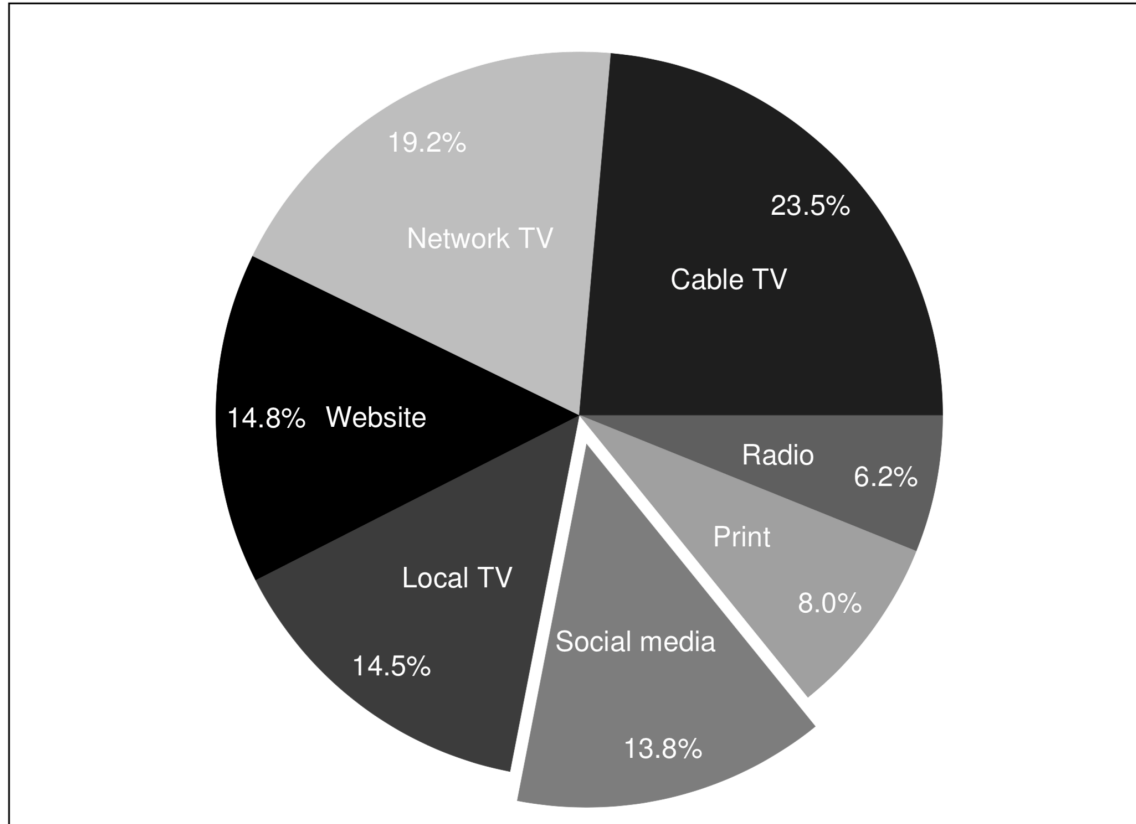


# Digital Power & Politics

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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

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**“Theory”**



YAHOO NEWS

NETFLIX

AMAZON

HUFFINGTON POST

WASHINGTON POST

YOU

GOOGLE

FLIPBOARD

# Echo Chambers circa 2008

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## IDEOLOGICAL SEGREGATION ONLINE AND OFFLINE\*

MATTHEW GENTZKOW AND JESSE M. SHAPIRO

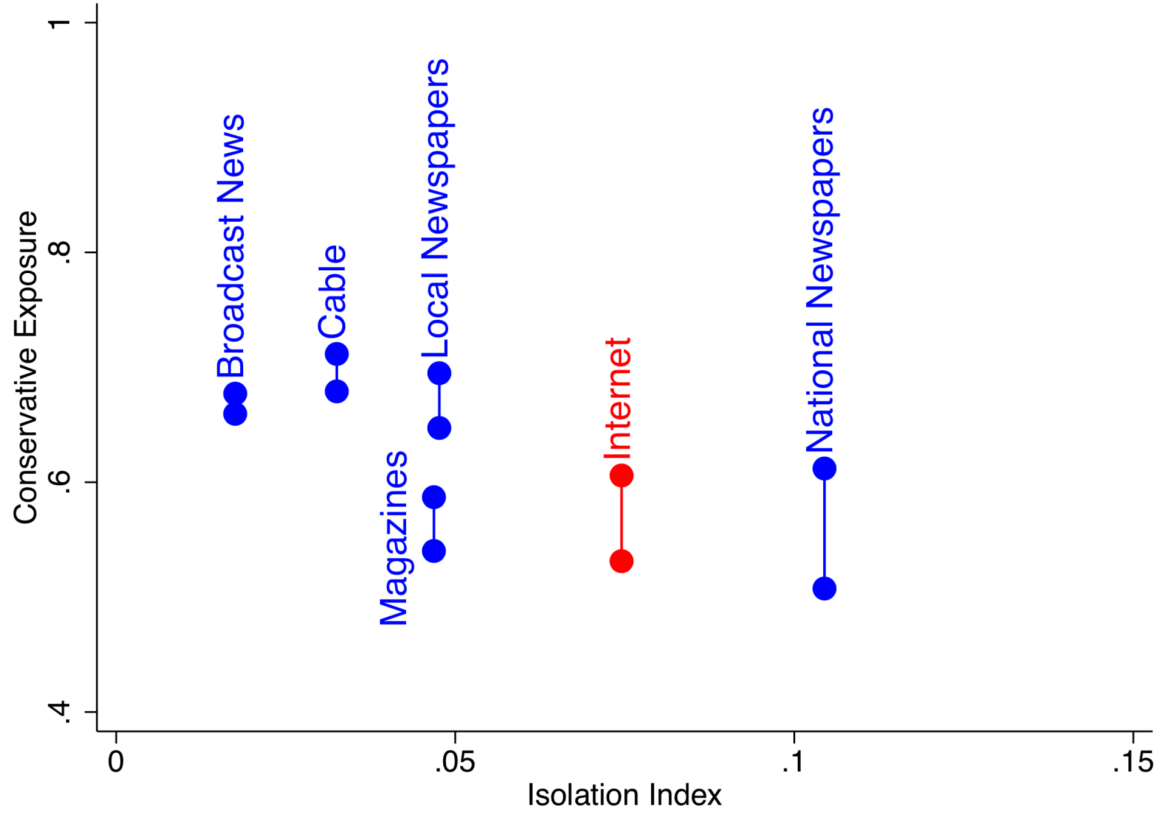
We use individual and aggregate data to ask how the Internet is changing the ideological segregation of the American electorate. Focusing on online news consumption, offline news consumption, and face-to-face social interactions, we define ideological segregation in each domain using standard indices 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*

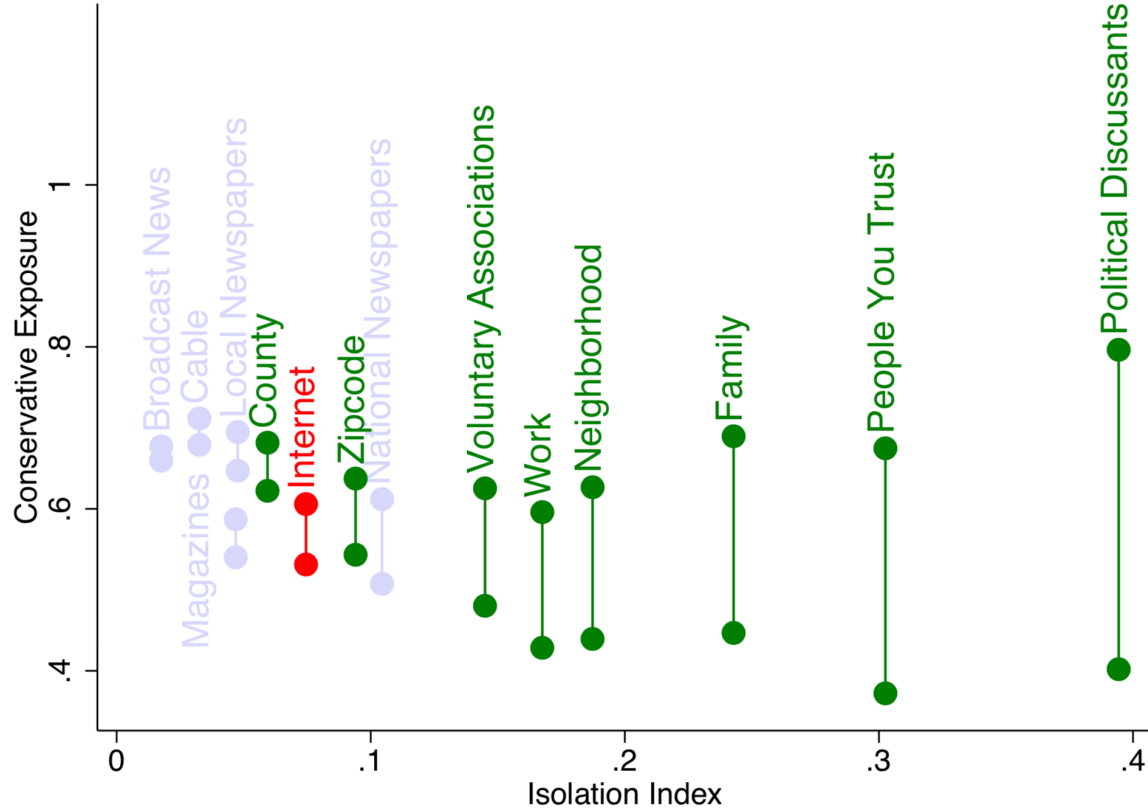
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# Media

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# Face to Face Social Networks





# Two Key Forces

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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...

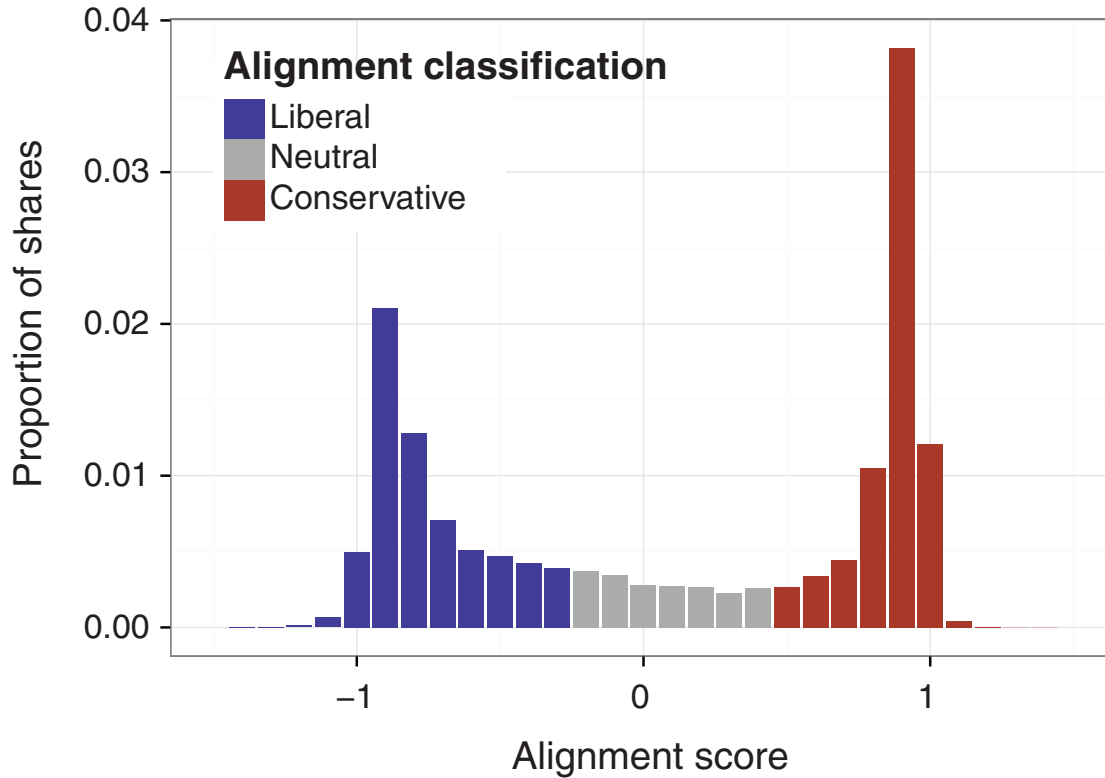
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- Filters content through your *social network*, which we saw above is highly segregated
- Makes sources less important
- Exposes even light users to niche content

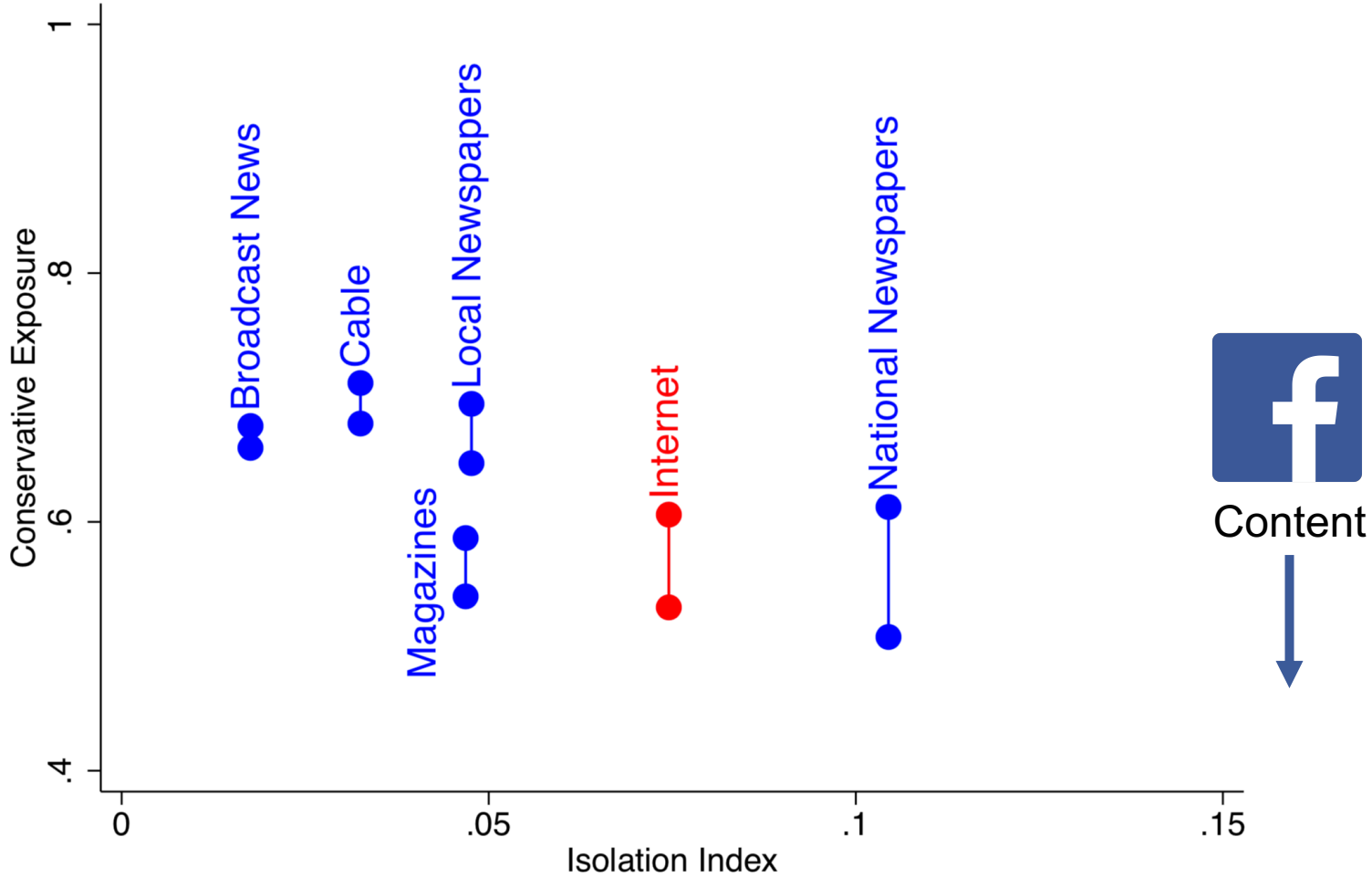


# Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook

Eytan Bakshy,<sup>1\*†</sup> Solomon Messing,<sup>1†</sup> Lada A. Adamic<sup>1,2</sup>



**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

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

# 2

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## 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)

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

**Oct 11:** Midline

**Nov 8:** Endline

**Dec 3:** Post-endline

# Recruitment

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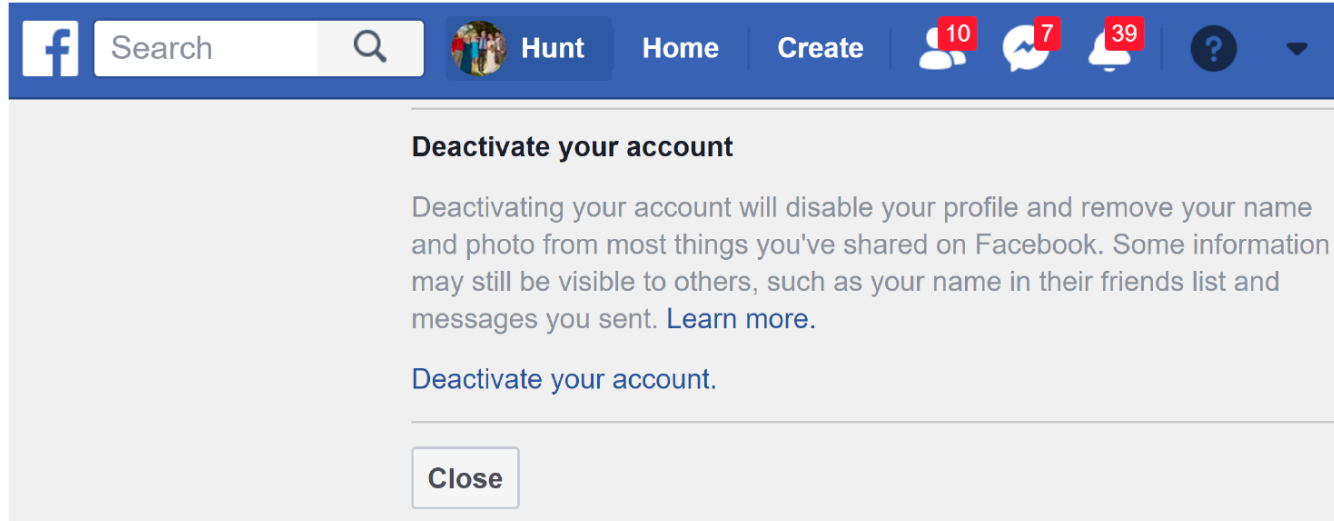


The image shows a Facebook advertisement for a research study. At the top left is the Stanford/NYU Research Study logo, which includes the Stanford 'S' and NYU 'NYU' logos. To the right of the logo, the text reads 'Stanford/NYU Research Study' and 'Sponsored' with a small globe icon. Below this, the main text of the ad says 'Participate in online research study about Internet browsing and earn an easy \$30 in electronic gift cards!'. The central image features three young adults sitting on the floor against a plain grey background. They are holding up large, colorful speech bubbles: a blue one on the left, a yellow one in the middle, and another yellow one on the right. Below the image, the URL 'STANFORDUNIVERSITY.QUALTRICS.COM' is displayed. Underneath the URL, the text reads 'Earn an easy \$30 by participating in online study'. To the right of this text is a button labeled 'Learn More'. At the bottom of the ad, there are three icons: a thumbs-up for 'Like', a speech bubble for 'Comment', and a share icon for 'Share'.

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

# Deactivation

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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" and 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 bar are icons for friends (10), messages (7), and notifications (39), followed by a help icon (question mark) 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: "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.](#)". Below this text is a link that says "Deactivate your account.". At the bottom of the dialog is a button labeled "Close".

**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.](#)

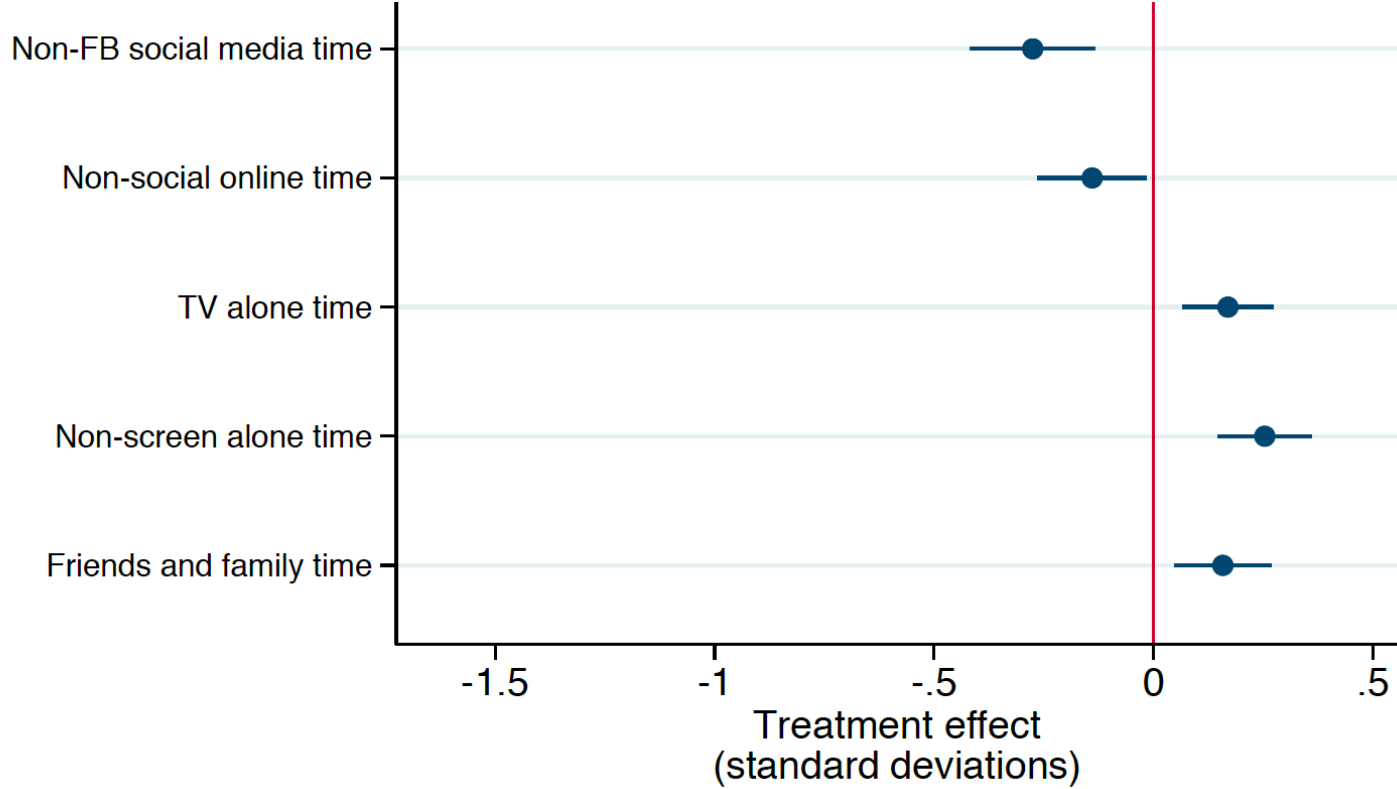
Close

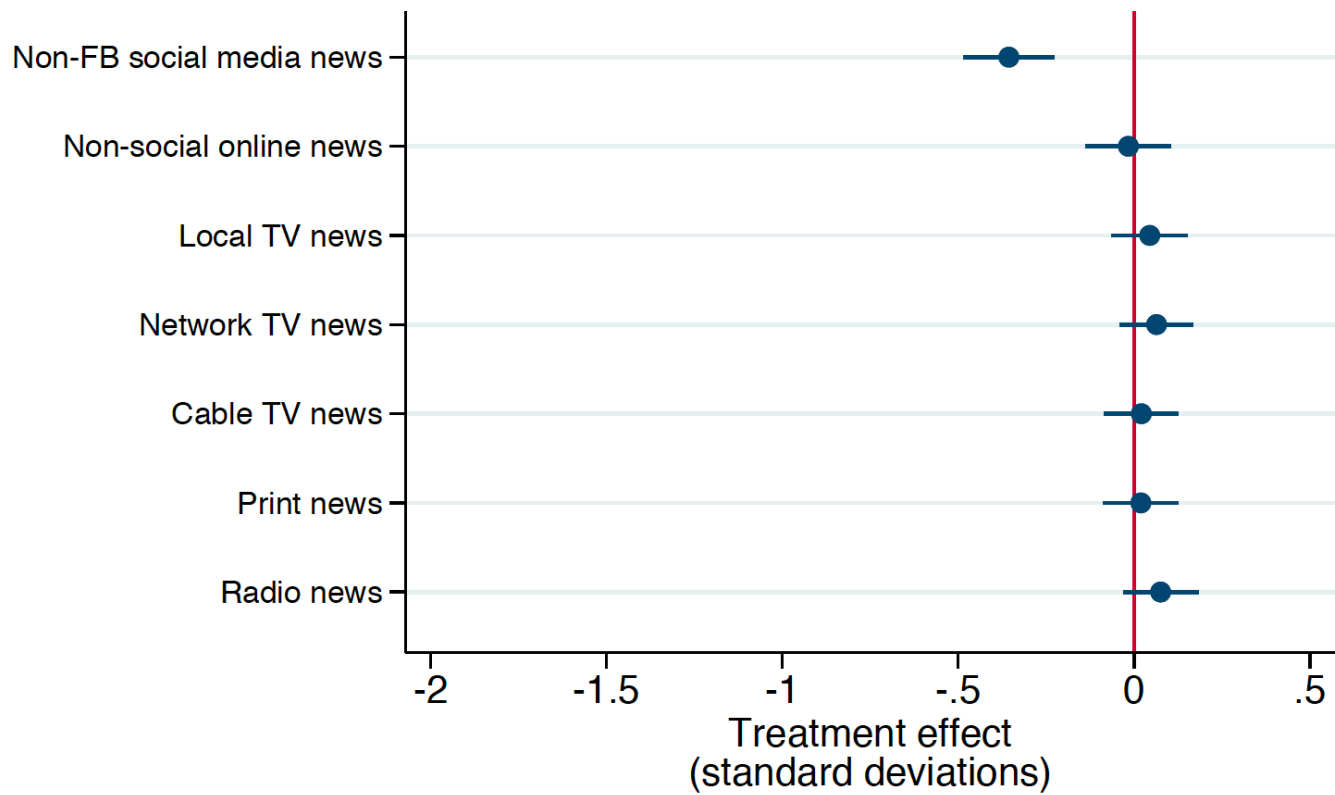
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Phase	Sample size
Recruitment and baseline	N=1,690,076 were shown ads N=30,064 clicked on ads N=2,897 consented and had valid baseline
Midline	N=2,743 finished midline, of which: N=1,661 were in impact evaluation sample
Endline	N=2,684 finished endline, 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

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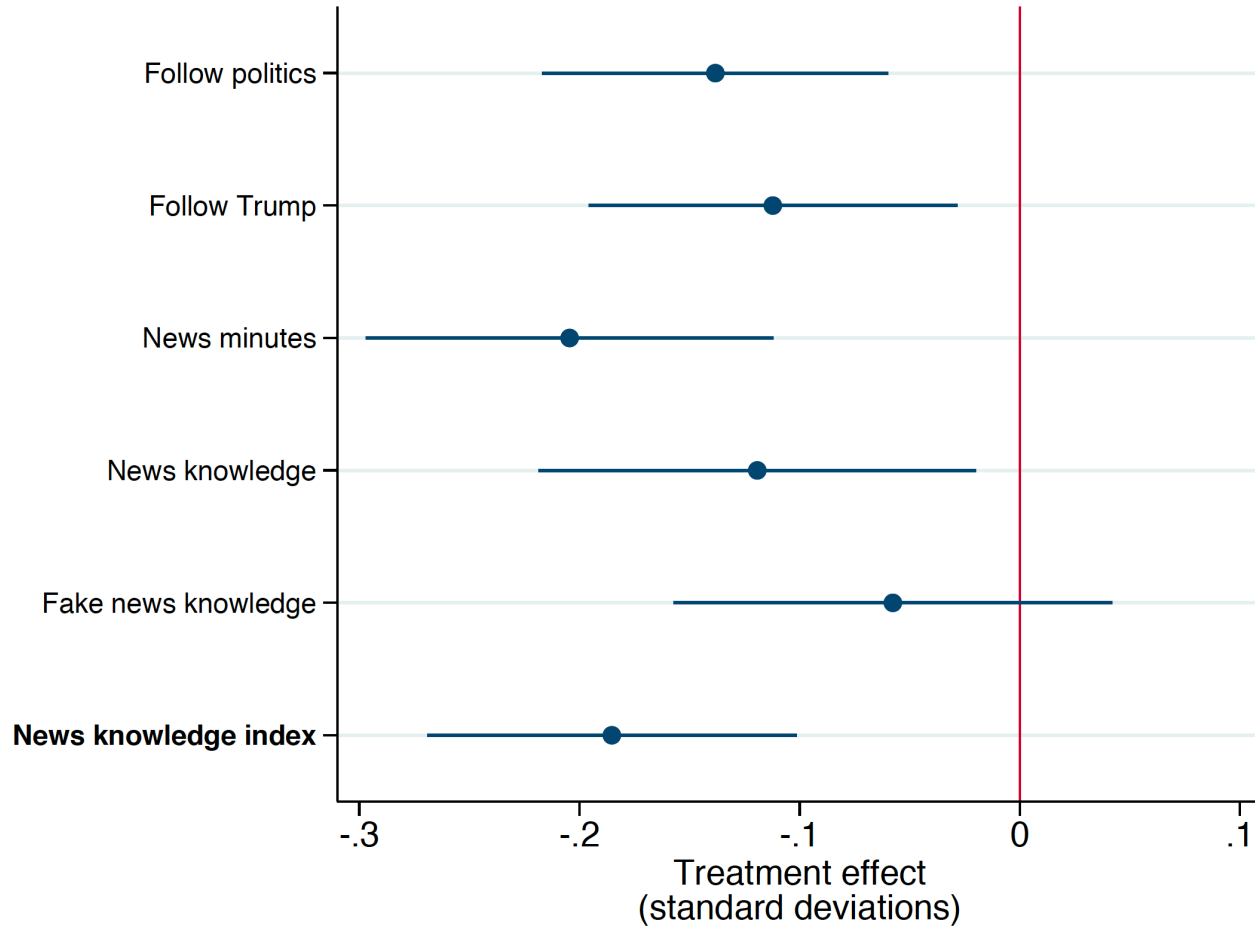
# Substitution



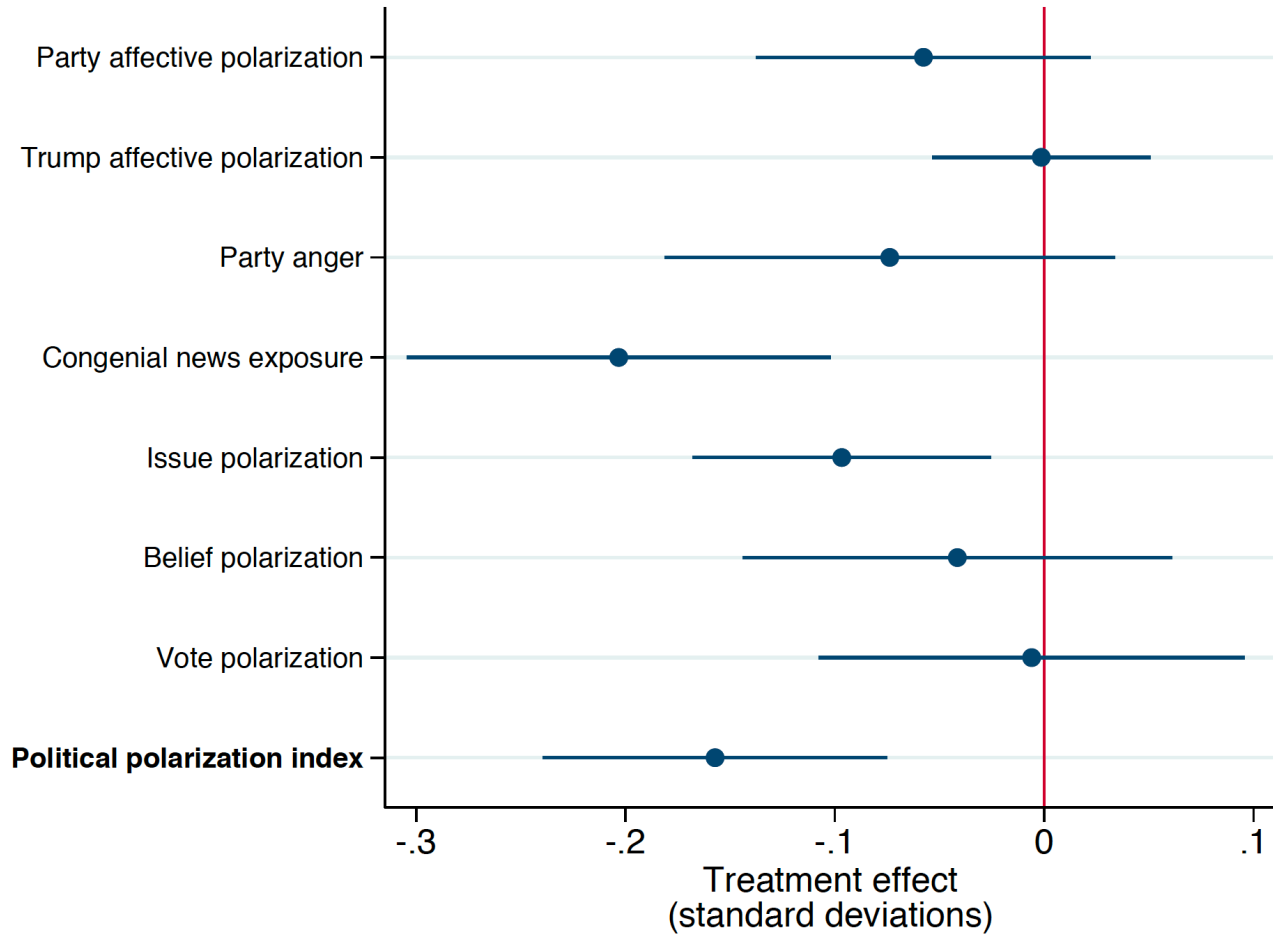




# News Knowledge



# Polarization



# Bottom Line

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