

# DRIVERS OF POLARIZATION

On social media, many debates fracture into opposing camps which are often openly hostile towards each other. Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences in Leipzig analyzed 19 million tweets on Twitter/X regarding daily trending topics in Germany between 2021 and 2023. Since retweeting generally expresses agreement, they were able to infer camps of opinion from retweet behavior. The researchers found that users tend to align with the same ideological group across various topics, such as climate change, Covid-19, migration, and trust in the media. The large retweet network illustrates the debate over mandatory vaccination. Supporters have gathered around @Karl\_Lauterbach in the cluster at the bottom left, and opponents have gathered in the cluster at the top right, with @Bild serving as a prominent voice for them. The node connecting the two groups belongs to @phoenix\_de, whose posts were retweeted by both sides.

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@PHOENIX\_DE

@KARL\_LAUTERBACH

## LEFT-WING INFLUENCERS, RIGHT-WING MULTIPLIERS

An analysis of activity on Twitter/X shows that two groups in particular reinforce the cross-topic divide: influencers whose content is retweeted most frequently and multipliers who primarily retweet others' posts. Camp affiliation is evident in retweet behavior across various topics. The influencers with the greatest reach tend to belong to the left-wing camp (blue), while multipliers tend to belong to the right-wing camp (yellow). White bars indicate that an account was not active on the relevant topic.

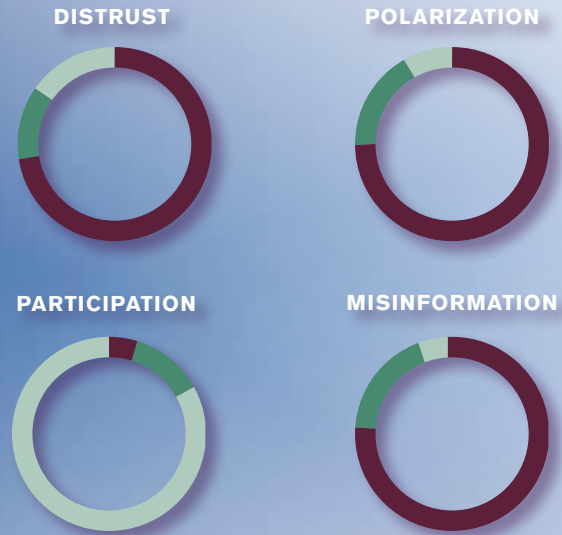
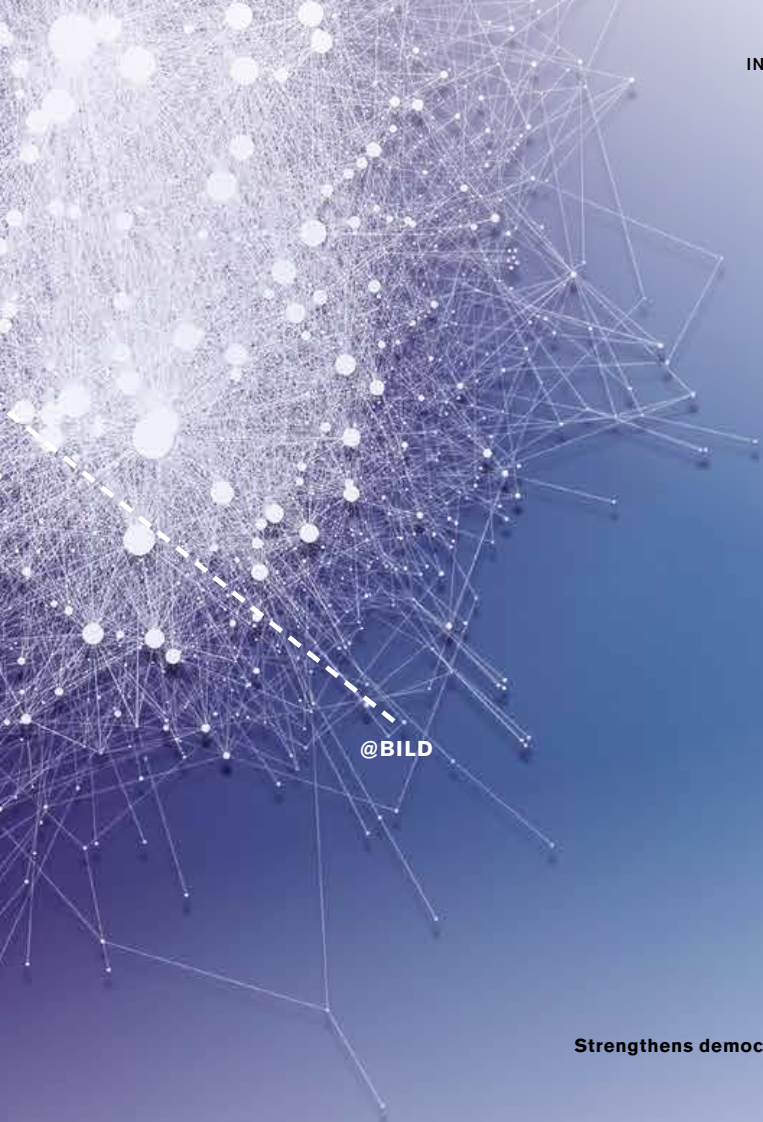
You can find more information on social media and democracy here:



GRAPHIC LEFT: GCO USING DATA FROM POURNAKI, A. ET AL. (2025). HOW INFLUENCERS AND MULTIPLIERS DRIVE POLARIZATION AND ISSUE ALIGNMENT ON TWITTER/X. PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL AAAI CONFERENCE ON WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA, 19(1), 1599-1615; GRAPHIC TOP RIGHT: GCO USING DATA FROM LORENZ-SPREEN, P. ET AL. A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF WORLDWIDE CAUSAL AND CORRELATIONAL EVIDENCE ON DIGITAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY. NAT HUM BEHAV 7, 74-101 (2023)

**A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY**

Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin analyzed nearly 500 publications on the effects of social media on democracy. According to their findings, social media improves opportunities for everyone to participate in political debates. However, there are also many harmful aspects. For example, social media fosters distrust in politics, the media, and government institutions. It is also linked to growing polarization and the spread of misinformation.



PROPORTION OF STUDIES SHOWING:

Strengthens democracy (Light Green)    Has no effect (Dark Green)    Weakens democracy (Dark Red)    21

**INFLUENCERS**

**MULTIPLIERS**

