

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: HOW DO FACEBOOK VIDEOS AFFECT
INDIVIDUALS' POLITICAL VALUES?

By

Anna Phillips

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By

Anna Phillips

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Approved by:

Dr. Jody Baumgartner

Department of Political Science, Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

One of the greatest innovations in the 21st century is the high level of accessibility to information via forms of media such as Facebook, Twitter, and online news services. In this scholarly article, the intent is to examine how the videos individuals view on Facebook affect their opinions on current issues. With the emergence of social media as a distinctive news source, sharing information on sites like Facebook has become one of the main methods used by political organizations to educate the masses on their stance. The purpose of this research study is to observe correlations between the sharing of videos on Facebook and those videos' ability to sway the views of participants. Methodology used will be based on a survey conducted after participants view selected videos. A posttest only questionnaire will be distributed to Facebook users through the website. Participants are split into three groups: a control group, and two groups that each viewed a short video about a current issue. The videos selected are chosen from the most popular posts on Facebook. After viewing the videos, participants from groups 1 and 2 each filled out the same survey as the control group. Once the data is collected, independent variables such as age and education will be used to determine whether viewing the videos was associated with a difference in participants' opinions or reinforced opinions they already held. I expect to find that opinions of participants who watch the videos will tend to be more message consistent with the video viewed than the opinions of participants who did not view it. This research increases our understanding of how social media can be used as a platform for political groups to gain support of their positions.

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Social media has been a way to share thoughts, pictures, videos, and other content en masse since 1997. As such, communication has changed as we have become able to not only share our opinion, but learn the opinions of others without face to face interaction.

A product of the Internet has been the sharing of personal opinions on social and political issues with masses of people. It is not uncommon to scroll down any given news feed on Facebook and see multiple posts about issues such as animal rights, feminism, or an upcoming election. While voicing one's opinion is a right of every American citizen, sharing en masse anonymously may have some unforeseen consequences. It has been reported by the American Press Institute that Americans consume 69% of their daily news online. More specifically, Americans receive 44% of their news through social media (American Press Institute, 2014). Therefore, the videos their Facebook friends or followers on other social media post regarding news is what is presented to the reader for their consumption. It isn't hard to imagine how this could potentially affect someone's views on issues as they are being exposed to videos that are generally opinionated based on their friends' beliefs. This study examines how these online interactions affect our political views and democracy as a whole.

This essay examines the effect of Facebook videos on voters' opinions. The study was conducted in the context of the 2016 presidential election season. It uses a survey distributed through Facebook to users during October of the election season when attention on politics is at its height. I hope to illustrate that the most popular forms of mass communication can be used to help voters form opinions.

A Review

Research regarding political trends on the Internet and specifically social media sites is not a new endeavor. Scholars have been taking notice of the potential and the growth of social

media since Internet-based information and communication technologies were first created (DiNucci, Giudice, & Stiles, 1999; O'Reilly & Battelle, 2004). Even before social media was in use for presidential campaigns, the importance of the Internet was evident (Chadwick, 2008). For example, in 2000, Al Gore, the Democratic candidate, received instant communication from his BlackBerry moments before conceding to George W. Bush (Benbunan-Fich, 2006). Then, in 2003, Howard Dean, another Democratic candidate, introduced DemocracyForAmerica.com which has been credited as the first blog devoted to a presidential candidate (Chadwick, 2008). The Internet, and of late social media have been an increasingly important tool for winning elections (Austin, 2008).

Research shows that young adults view social media as a distinct source of news (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Forty-nine percent of adults under the age of 25 used social media to receive information about the U.S. presidential primaries in the 2008 election (Pew Research Center, 2008). Another study noted that 48 percent of their sample of young adults received news from social media sites at least once a week (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

It is not just young adults using these websites anymore either because social media use has extended considerably within the general population (Lenhart, 2009). So, the findings regarding social media use for news might to some degree be extended to all social media users. In late 2007, 32 percent of social media users received information about presidential primaries from those sites (Pew Research Center, 2008).

Social media has been examined multiple times as an outlet for political discourse due to its usefulness in past elections. It has also been examined as a source for political knowledge and a tool to encourage political involvement. For example, the level of enthusiasm for a candidate on Facebook has been found to be reflective of overall enthusiasm for that candidate (Williams

& Gulati, 2008). However, this does not necessarily mean that Facebook causes more people to be interested in candidates or politics in general. Social media networks have created an environment where individuals can connect with people they know from the real world and see what they share as well as things that interest them (Boyd, 2008). So, people with an interest in politics tend to know others with similar interests and can stay involved and informed through social media.

Still, social media is used as a medium through which people receive and share information and news. For example, the 2008 U.S. presidential election provides an excellent case study. Facebook users shared links to news organizations such as CNN, the *New York Times*, and the Huffington Post. They also posted comments on their own profiles and those of the main candidates (Robertson, Vatrappu, & Medina, 2010). All of the sharing done on social media was made possible due to a few changes that had been taking place. First, in 2008, 55 percent of Americans had broadband Internet connections, double the number of those with it 4 years prior. Because of this, more people could easily access media-rich content online. This development was accompanied by a maturing of social media sites to become more user friendly. As this happened, users became more comfortable with the sites (Talbot, 2008).

One study's findings suggested that social media users' interest in politics on sites reflects their interest in the real world. (Boyd, 2008). However, it has also been found that use of social media is positively associated with Internet political participation, such as posting a political opinion or signing a web petition. When it came to more traditional political involvement, it was found that the impact of social media had similar effects to other forms of media, which were insignificant (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Contrary to this, another study

found that more support on Facebook translated to higher voter turnout in the 2006 midterm election for races with incumbents and open-seat elections (Williams & Gulati, 2008).

Social media has been described as an outlet for “soft news,” which gives it the ability to incorporate some information into entertainment, soft news makes it possible for individuals who are disengaged to become more politically knowledgeable (Baum, 2003a; Baum, 2002; Baum, 2003b). This could have implications proving that viewing videos linked or shared on Facebook could help users form their identity and views. It could also show that sharing those same videos has an affect on the formation and maintenance of the views held by others. But, does the news people are obtaining shape their feelings on issues, or do their their views shape the news they receive?

Social media sites are designed to cater to the interests of individual users. So, their content preferences can play a large factor in what specific users are exposed to on the Internet. There is a growing tendency among all Americans to avoid content they feel is undesirable (Prior, 2005; Sunstein, 2001). This suggestion could mean that the new information collected by users of social media just reinforces their preexisting beliefs. Simultaneously, users may very well use social media for identity construction, trust and status maintenance, as demonstrated, again, by Facebook use in the 2008 election. The sharing of information on candidates may have been performed for the purpose of expressing a political commitment towards a campaign, or due to the status of opinion leader of a particular Facebook user among their peers (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). There is no debate on whether social media has the potential to be an excellent tool for campaigns. This study hopes to reveal that social media is helping users form opinions on current issues.

There is sound theoretical reason to believe that social media could shape opinions of users. The theory of framing and opinion formation demonstrates how an issue's presentation affects public opinion regarding it. However, with competitive environments like politics it is almost impossible that only one side of an issue will be heard. So, when multiple views are presented to the public, much more goes into shaping public opinion. One of the key details to winning public support of a specific view is framing it in a way that shows support for a popular value (Chong & Druckman, 2007) For example, when asked whether they favored or opposed allowing a hate group to hold a political rally, 85 percent of respondents answered positively when the question was prefaced with the suggestion, "Given the importance of free speech." Only 45 percent were in favor when the question was prefaced with the phrase, "Given the risk of violence." (Sniderman & Theriault, 2004)

Individuals experiences and perspective determine what values someone holds and how strongly they feel about them. So, an individual's opinion regarding a candidate may depend on how strongly the candidate favors the values the individual supports. (Enelow & Hinich, 1984; Jones, 1994) The values that an individual evaluates views based on is an individual's "frame in thought." For example, if an individual believes in free speech above all other considerations then that individual's frame in thought is free speech. (Chong & Druckman, 2007)

Politicians attempt to sway voters by encouraging them to think about their policy ideas along the lines of specific values. This is called a "frame in communication." It is used to identify an issue and frame a view of it by using key considerations to sway voters. (Chong & Druckman, 2007) Framing is relevant to this study because the media, social activists, politicians, and normal citizens all have been known to share frames they have learned from others (Riker, 1996; Edwards III & Wood, 1999; Scheufele, 1999; Entman, 2004; Carragee &

Roefs, 2004; Fridkin & Kenney, 2005; Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2003) The framing effect, as it is often referred to, is demonstrated very clearly by social media users. On these websites, especially Facebook, the media, politicians, and everyday citizens are given the opportunity to share their views with others. In doing so, issues are framed and shape how users view them.

Based on previous research and framing theory, the general expectation of this study is that Facebook videos will have a message consistent effect on the opinions of those who view them. The specific hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Those who watched *Mic*'s Stop-and-Frisk video will be more likely to agree that stop-and-frisk laws are unconstitutional than those who did not.

H2: Those who watched *National Review*'s Voter Fraud video will be more likely to agree with voter ID laws than those who did not.

Methodology

As the study is conducted in a posttest only questionnaire format, testing for change is not possible. Instead, this test will look at if viewing videos is associated with greater or less support for the issue addressed. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis from Facebook.com. In order to observe the correlations between videos and opinion, participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions or to the control condition.

The first experimental group viewed a video found on Facebook's Top Posts page regarding issue #1, stop-and-frisk laws. The second group viewed a video of similar length and found in a similar manner regarding issue #2, voter identification laws. As the aim of the experiment was to see whether Facebook videos were associated with greater or less support for an opinion, the third condition, which serves as the control, did not view a video. Participants in

all three groups completed the same survey; which was administered to experimental group participants after viewing the video.

The dependent variables that were examined focused on how people feel about issues after having seen the selected videos. Questions focused on their stance on the issue as well as how strongly they hold their belief regarding it. Participants answered questions focused on opinions and attitudes specifically regarding the video they watched. These questions included: “On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 equals “I don’t care at all” and 10 equals “I care a great deal,” how much do you care about the issue of voter fraud?” and “Watching this video: with the answer choices: “Changed my mind in favor of voter ID laws,” “Changed my mind, opposing voter ID laws,” “Reinforced my existing views about voter ID laws,” “Had no effect on my opinion about voter ID laws.” Respondents were questioned on whether they had seen the chosen video clips before, and if so, had they watched the video all the way through. Regarding the voter ID laws video, 91.1% of respondents had neither seen nor watched it. The video on stop-and-frisk had similar responses.

The independent variables used examine demographics of participants. They were asked what gender they identify with, their age group, their religious preference and their level of education. Participants were also asked how often they use social media for news, how many videos they have seen prior to the survey regarding the issues discussed, and about their opinion on the issues prior to taking the survey. In addition, respondents were queried about the kind of news they follow and how closely. For example, they were asked how closely they follow news about political figures and events in Washington, international affairs, and entertainment. Finally, political knowledge was tested through questions about the statistics regarding each

issue. My expectation was that the opinions of those who watched videos would be associated with greater support for a specific opinion. Formal hypotheses are:

H1: Those who watched *Mic*'s Stop-and-Frisk video will be more likely to agree that stop-and-frisk laws are unconstitutional than those who did not.

H2: Those who watched *National Review*'s Voter Fraud video will be more likely to agree with voter ID laws than those who did not.

To ensure internal validity in the study, I created a Facebook post to distribute the survey to the website's users. The survey began by having participants view short videos regarding the issues they were to be questioned about. The videos selected for use in this research were a video by *Mic* on the issue of stop-and-frisk and one by the *National Review* regarding voter fraud. They were among the "Top Posts" or most viewed and interacted with videos on Facebook regarding the issues in question. In an attempt to increase response rates, I included a humanitarian incentive by donating \$.10 of my personal money for each survey response to a charity that they wrote in upon survey completion. Other questions addressed what types of social media posts participants view the most often, in an effort to examine whether articles shared to the site, videos linked to it, or other postings have the most effect in developing and maintaining identity and views. Participants were also questioned about how closely they followed recent news reports on the issues.

In order to compare the posttest questionnaire results from the three groups, I took care to maintain control across the conditions by ensuring that the videos selected were as similar as possible. I used multivariate regressions to determine how demographic variables like age and education can predict the effects viewing Facebook videos has on participants.

This study offers the opportunity to learn how our Internet behaviors affect our views as well as the views of others. It hopes to demonstrate how our time spent on social media shapes our opinions and how we shape the opinions of others through interactions on social networking sites. The findings from this study could be used to improve campaign strategies on all scales as well as reach a younger demographic of voters. Before we can begin to communicate effectively with target audiences, we must know what is actually effective. That is why this research could help us gain the necessary understanding to communicate with voters of all demographics using social media. The power to reach hundreds of people at once is a relatively new one and one that we must tap the potential for.

Some biases must be acknowledged due to the nature of the survey and participants. As the table below demonstrates, women made up 88.5% of the respondents, which is unrepresentative of all Facebook users as only 64% are women (Fitzgerald, 2012). The second bias that must be acknowledged is that 45.3% of respondents identified themselves as Republicans while only 18.5% identified as Democrats as you can see in the table included below. In fact, more respondents identified as Independent than as Democrats with 25.2% identifying as Independent. This bias is more drastic when examining only the control group as 50.7% identified as Republicans and a mere 14.2% as Democrats. In this group, 26.1% identified as independents, as you can see in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	<i>Control</i>	<i>Experimental Group 1</i>	<i>Experimental Group 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
Female	120 (88.9%)	53 (89.8%)	52 (89.7%)	225 (88.5%)
<i>Age</i>				
18-34	40 (29.7%)	29 (48.3%)	21 (36.2%)	90 (35.4%)
35-54	50 (37%)	24 (40%)	21 (36.2%)	95 (37.4%)
>54	45 (33.4%)	7 (11.6%)	16 (27.6%)	68 (26.8%)
<i>Education</i>				
*High School	35 (25.9%)	2 (3.3%)	3 (5.2%)	40 (15.8%)
*College	58 (43%)	45 (75%)	33 (56.9%)	136 (53.6%)
*Postgraduate	41 (30.4%)	11 (18.3%)	20 (34.5%)	72 (28.4%)
<i>Partisan Identification</i>				
*Democrat	25 (18.7%)	19 (31.6%)	15 (25.9%)	59 (23.2%)
*Republican	74 (55.2%)	25 (41.7%)	30 (51.7%)	129 (50.8%)
*Independent	35 (26.1%)	16 (26.7%)	13 (22.4%)	64 (25.2%)
<i>Ideology</i>				
*Liberal	60 (44.4%)	17 (28.3%)	17 (29.3%)	94 (37%)
*Conservative	41 (30.4%)	25 (41.7%)	27 (46.6%)	93 (36.6%)
*Moderate	34 (25.2%)	18 (30%)	14 (24.1%)	66 (30%)
Knowledge (Mean Score)	0.91 (0.24)	0.95 (0.52)	1.16 (0.49)	0.98 (0.12)

* High School = High School or Less; College = Some College/College Graduate; Democrat = Democrat/Strong Democrat; Republican = Republican/Strong Republican; Independent = Independent/Neither; Liberal = Liberal/Very Liberal; Conservative = Conservative/Very Conservative; Moderate = Moderate/Neither

Results

The first result that is clearly noticeable is that those who viewed the stop and frisk video expressed more concern for the issue than those who did not. As table 2 demonstrates, 35.1% of respondents from the control group answered that on a scale of one to ten their concern regarding the issue was between eight and ten. 54.2% of the group that viewed *Mic's* video on the issue answered that their concern was between eight and ten regarding the issue. Interestingly, 44.8% of participants who viewed a video regarding voter fraud ranked their concern on stop-and-frisk

between eight and ten. The higher concern among viewers of the other video suggests that watching videos regarding any current issues makes users think more about their views overall.

A similar question was asked regarding the issue of voter fraud in America, but the results were not as clear. Table 3 shows that 66.4% of the control group responded that on a scale of one to ten their concern about voter fraud was a ten. This was considerably higher than the concern of those that watched the *National Review's* Voter Fraud video where only 47.4% ranked their concern at a ten. However, 70.2% of this group ranked their concern between an eight and a ten. The lowest concern for the issue came from the group that viewed the other video. 63.3% of that group's participants said that their concern was between an eight and a ten on this issue.

Another interesting insight taken from table 2 is the difference in responses to whether respondent's agreed that stop and frisk laws might violate the rights of some Americans. In the control group, 25.4% strongly agreed and 24.6% agreed. Meanwhile, in the group that viewed *Mic's* video 38.3% strongly agreed and another 35% agreed. Considering the voter fraud video was meant to persuade viewers that voter identification laws are not, it is interesting that 25.9% strongly agreed and 37.9% agreed.

Respondents were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement; "All voters should be required to prove their identity before being allowed to vote." Of the group that viewed the video persuading viewers that voter identification laws are necessary, 63.8% strongly agreed. In the stop and frisk group, only 48.3% strongly agreed. The control group had 68.1% strongly agree. This supports the theory that viewing a video persuading of discrimination is associated with a greater likelihood that people will believe in systemic discrimination.

Table 2. Stop and Frisk Responses by Experimental Group

	<i>Control</i>	<i>Experimental Group 1</i>	<i>Experimental Group 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>How much do you care about stop and frisk?</i>	5.67 (2.86)	7.08 (2.07)	6.88 (2.46)	6.28 (2.69)
<i>Followed news about S&F laws</i>				
*Not at all	100 (74.1%)	46 (76.7%)	27 (47.4%)	173 (68.1%)
*Closely	35 (25.9%)	14 (23.3%)	30 (52.7%)	79 (31.1%)
<i>Favor or oppose S&F laws</i>				
*Oppose	48 (35.6%)	33 (55%)	25 (43.1%)	106 (41.7%)
*Favor	68 (50.4%)	22 (36.7%)	22 (37.9%)	112 (44.2%)
Neither	19 (14.1%)	5 (8.3%)	11 (19%)	35 (13.8%)
<i>Increase or decrease crime</i>				
*Decrease	74 (55.2%)	23 (38.3%)	27 (46.5%)	124 (48.8%)
*Increase	8 (6%)	2 (3.3%)	3 (5.2%)	13 (5%)
Neither	52 (38.8%)	35 (58.3%)	28 (48.3%)	115 (45.3%)
<i>S&F violate rights</i>				
*Disagree	54 (40.3%)	10 (16.6%)	14 (24.1%)	78 (30.7%)
*Agree	67 (50%)	44 (73.3%)	37 (63.8%)	148 (58.2%)
Neither	13 (9.7%)	6 (10%)	7 (12.1%)	26 (10.2%)

* Not at all = Not at all/Not very closely; Closely = Somewhat closely/Extremely closely; Oppose = Oppose/Strongly oppose; Favor = Favor/Strongly favor; Decrease = Decrease/Greatly decrease; Increase = Increase/Greatly Increase; Disagree = Disagree/Strongly disagree; Agree = Agree/Strongly agree

Table 3. Voter Fraud Responses by Experimental Group

	<i>Control</i>	<i>Experimental Group 1</i>	<i>Experimental Group 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>How much do you care about voter fraud?</i>	8.81 (2.06)	7.57 (2.59)	8.07 (2.33)	8.34 (2.30)
<i>Followed news about voter fraud</i>				
*Not closely	27 (20%)	33 (55%)	19 (32.8%)	79 (31.1%)
*Closely	108 (80%)	27 (45%)	39 (67.2%)	174 (68.5%)
<i>Seriousness of voter fraud problem</i>				
*Not serious	33 (24.4%)	20 (33.9%)	13 (22.4%)	66 (26%)
*Serious	102 (75.5%)	39 (66.1%)	45 (77.6%)	186 (73.3%)
<i>ID required to vote</i>				
*Disagree	14 (10.4%)	5 (8.4%)	7 (12.1%)	26 (10.3%)
*Agree	115 (85.1%)	50 (83.3%)	47 (81%)	212 (83.5%)
Neither	6 (4.4%)	5 (8.3%)	4 (6.9%)	15 (5.9%)
<i>ID laws discriminate</i>				
*Disagree	98 (72.6%)	37 (63.8%)	40 (69%)	175 (68.9%)
*Agree	28 (20.7%)	14 (24.2%)	15 (25.9%)	57 (22.4%)
Neither	9 (6.7%)	7 (12.1%)	3 (5.2%)	19 (7.5%)

* Not at all = Not at all/Not very closely; Closely = Somewhat closely/Extremely closely; Not serious = Not serious at all/Not very serious; Serious = Somewhat serious/Extremely serious; Disagree = Disagree/Strongly disagree; Agree = Agree/Strongly agree

More explicit evidence that the stop and frisk video was effective at persuasion is that twice the number of participants responded that the video changed their opinion as those who viewed the voter fraud video. It seems the voter fraud video was more effective as reinforcement, or that participants were already in agreement with the video's message, as 70.7% of respondents said the video reinforced their views. For the stop and frisk respondents, only 56.7% said that the video reinforced their existing views. Neither had the opposite effect of what they were trying to accomplish.

Some demographics were better predictors of the effect a video would have on respondents than others. Among those that viewed the stop and frisk video, their party

identification was the strongest predictor of their views as the table below demonstrates. The video was more likely to reinforce the views of those that considered themselves strong Democrats than those that considered themselves Republicans. It was also more likely to change the views of those that considered themselves strong Republicans. It is unsurprising that Democrats expressed greater concern regarding the issue than Republicans did.

A second predictive factor was education. Those with more education expressed more concern regarding the issue. The next best predictor was political views. It seems odd, but based on table 4, those that considered themselves moderate or conservative expressed more concern regarding the issue. While it may not be expected based on recent conservative stances, as President-elect Donald Trump called for a nationwide stop and frisk policy during his campaign, this fits with traditional conservative values of independent freedoms similar to the views of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Table 4. OLS Regression: Stop and Frisk

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Watched Video	.850	.351	.142	2.421	.016
Gender	-.189	.489	-.022	-.387	.699
Age	-.239	.112	-.135	-2.135	.034
Education	.516	.118	.290	4.378	.000
Religion	.145	.085	.108	1.714	.088
Party ID	1.222	.219	.431	5.574	.000
Ideology	-.761	.215	-.281	-3.541	.001
(Constant)	3.360	.990	.142	3.395	.001

Interestingly, the same was not the case for viewers of the voter fraud video. Age was the most successful predictor for the viewers of this video. Younger people, from ages 18-24, were more likely to have their opinion changed in a message consistent direction while older respondents were more likely to have their views reinforced by the video. As the table below

shows, older people were also much more likely to be concerned about voter fraud than younger people were.

Party identification was another strong predictor for how concerned individuals were regarding voter fraud. Republicans expressed considerably more concern regarding the issue than Democrats did. Just watching the *National Review's* video did not have a significant effect on the views of participants as table 5 demonstrates.

Table 5. OLS Regression: Voter Fraud

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Watched Video	-.427	.299	-.091	-1.426	.156
Gender	.286	.441	.042	.649	.517
Age	.489	.103	.353	4.726	.000
Education	-.081	.107	-.060	-.757	.450
Religion	-.023	.083	-.021	-.278	.781
Party ID	-.623	.209	-.283	-2.982	.003
Ideology	-.003	.209	-.001	-.015	.988
(Constant)	8.950	.869		10.300	.000

Conclusions

The data collected shows that there is a general correlation between viewing videos regarding current issues and increased concern about them. However, it seems that some videos may be more effective than others. I conclude that the hypotheses can be accepted as the videos were reported to reinforce existing views or change opinions in a message consistent direction. It is hard to say whether any specific demographics can be used to predict how effective a video will be. While some are better than others, none had a strong correlation. It seems any person can be effected by viewing persuasive videos on Facebook. More evidence of the effectiveness of the videos is that no respondents reported the videos having the opposite of the intended effect.

Also, it is clear that many social media users are more concerned about the issue of voter fraud more than stop and frisk policing. This could have to do with President-elect Trump's

statement from early August that the election was “rigged” (Qiu, 2016). With the country more politically focused during the month of October when the survey was distributed, it is unsurprising that many were very aware of this issue.

Another interesting insight from the research is that viewing a video that is meant to persuade viewers that a policy is discriminatory makes people consider that systemic discrimination may exist in other parts of the law. It does not seem, however, that viewing a video that has the opposite goal is associated with people being less likely to believe in institutional discrimination.

It seems the theory of framing and opinion formation is also supported by the results of this research as the political and religious views of participants had the strongest correlation to their responses. Which suggests their values had an effect on their stances regarding the issues presented. Overall, this research suggests that we can accept both hypotheses. With the new investigations into Facebook’s filtering methods and allowance of fake news to spread virally, this research provides evidence that Facebook is an important aspect of democracy today and the things shared may have an effect on the stances users take on issues.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Demographic Variables

Q1. What is your gender? (0 = Male, 1 = Female) [**Gender**]

Q2. How old are you? (1 = 18-24, 2 = 25-34, 3 = 35-44, 4 = 45-54, 5 = 55-64, 6 = 65 and over)
[**Age**]

Q3. What is the last grade or class that you completed in school? [**Education**]

1 = Less than High School Graduate

2 = High School Graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)

3 = Some College, no 4-year degree (including associate degree)

4 = Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school

5 = College Graduate

6 = Postgraduate training or professional schooling after college (e.g., toward a master's degree or PhD; law or medical school)

Q4. What is your religious preference or affiliation? [**Religion**]

1 = Mainline Protestant (Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian)

2 = Evangelical Protestant (Baptist, Pentecostal)

3 = Catholic

4 = Other Christian

5 = Jewish

6 = Other

0 = None

Attitudinal Variables

Q5. Generally speaking, which party do you tend to affiliate with? Choose one from the list provided. **[Party ID]**

1 = Strong Democrat

2 = Democrat

3 = Independent or neither; don't know; haven't given it much thought

4 = Republican

5 = Strong Republican

Q6. In general, how would you describe your political views? **[Ideology]**

1 = Very liberal

2 = Liberal

3 = Moderate; don't know; haven't given it much thought

4 = Conservative

5 = Very conservative

News Preference Variables

Q7. On a scale of 1-10, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

“I like news sources that share my political point of view”

“I like news that offers competing points of view on political issues”

Q8. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being NOT AT ALL and 10 being VERY CLOSELY, how closely do you follow these types of news either in the newspaper, on television, the radio, or the Internet?

News about political figures and events in Washington

International affairs

Entertainment

Facebook News Exposure Variables

Q9. During a typical week, indicate how many days do you: (0-7 scale)

Watch news videos linked on Facebook?

Read news articles linked on Facebook?

Read news about politics from Facebook?

Watch clips from late night talk shows linked to Facebook?

Share news articles or videos on Facebook?

Policy Knowledge Variables

Each variable was coded as, 1 = correct answer; 0 = incorrect answer or “don’t know.”

Q10. Between 2000 and 2010, about how many credible cases of in-person voter impersonation occurred?

0 – 50*

51 – 500

501 – 1,000

More than 1,000

I don’t know

Q11. Approximately 197 million votes were cast for federal candidates between 2002 and 2005. Do you happen to know about how many voters were convicted of voter fraud (or pleaded guilty to voter fraud) during this period of time?

0 – 100*

101 – 1,000

1,001 – 5,000

More than 5,000

I don’t know

Q12. About how many voting-age U.S. citizens do not have at least one valid form of state ID?

1% - 15%*

16% - 35%

36% - 50%

More than 50%

I don't know

Q13. In 2011, New York City officers made 685,724 stops as part of the "stop and frisk" policy. During these stops, about how many people were determined NOT to have engaged in any unlawful behavior?

0 – 50,000

50,001 – 200,000

200,001 – 500,000

More than 500,000*

I don't know

Q14. In 2011, New York City officers made 685,724 stops as part of the "stop and frisk" policy. Approximately what percentage of those who were frisked were found to have had a weapon?

1% - 15%*

15% - 30%

31% - 50%

More than 50%

I don't know

Stop-and-Frisk Policy Variables

Q1. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 equals "I don't care at all" and 10 equals "I care a great deal," how much do you care about the issue of stop and frisk policing?

Q2. How closely have you followed news reports about New York City's stop and frisk law?

1 = Not at all

2 = Not very closely

3 = Somewhat closely

4 = Extremely closely

Q3. New York City allows police to stop and frisk anyone on the street whom they consider suspicious. Do you favor or oppose having a stop and frisk law where you live?

1 = Strongly oppose

2 = Oppose

3 = Neither favor nor oppose

4 = Favor

5 = Strongly favor

Q4. Do stop and frisk laws increase crime or decrease it? Or do such laws have no impact on the level of crime?

1 = Greatly increase crime

2 = Increase crime

3 = Neither increase nor decrease crime

4 = Decrease crime

5 = Greatly decrease crime

Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Stop and frisk laws might violate the rights of some Americans.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

Voter Fraud Policy Variables

Q1. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 equals “I don’t care at all” and 10 equals “I care a great deal,” how much do you care about the issue of voter fraud?

Q2. How closely have you followed recent news reports about voter fraud?

1 = Not at all

2 = Not very closely

3 = Somewhat closely

4 = Extremely closely

Q3. How serious of a problem is voter fraud in America today?

1 = Not serious at all

2 = Not very serious

3 = Somewhat serious

4 = Extremely serious

Q4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: All voters should be required to prove their identity before being allowed to vote.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Laws requiring photo identification at the polls discriminate against some voters.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree