



# DOES SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE PERSPECTIVES ON ECONOMIC INEQUALITY?

A research project on online echo chambers  
and polarisation

# Testing the existence of echo chambers: data & methods

- **Echo chambers:** social media may encourage self-selection of information and news, ignorance of conflicting evidence, and thus, result in increased polarisation
- **BES Data:** includes surveys over six years, with questions regarding internet and social media use, as well as questions on the perception of inequality (using two waves,  $N=62\ 769$ )
- **Questions:**
  - *“Differences in incomes between rich and poor are larger or smaller?”*
  - *“When someone is unemployed, it’s usually no fault of their own”*
  - *“Too many people these days like to rely on government handouts”*
  - *“Many people who get benefits don’t really deserve help”*
- **Social media use** was measured through Twitter and Facebook use, general internet use, and posting on social media
- **Controls:** age, gender, personal income, education, traditional media use (TV, radio, newspapers), self-placement on left-right political scale
- **Linear regression in SPSS:** recoded dependent variables into standard deviation (SD) measures

**Hypothesis 1** – People who use social media more frequently are more likely to be polarized in their opinions of economic inequality.

**Hypothesis 2** - People who use social media more frequently are more likely to polarized in their opinions of the poor.

# Results & Discussion

- Internet use and social media use was **significantly correlated** with increased polarisation for meritocratic attitudes, but **not perspectives** on economic inequality being larger or smaller



**Posting content** to Facebook had one the largest polarizing effects. Simply **using** Facebook was not enough to see a polarizing effect.



**Posting content** to Twitter had a stronger effect than simply **using** Twitter, although general Twitter use was also significantly linked to higher polarization.

The strongest effect was found when **measuring the combined use of Twitter and Facebook in addition to political posting on these platforms**, with a moderate, positive effect ( $\beta=0.27$  when controlling for education level, age and personal income)

- It is unclear whether higher levels of political posting to social media is what causes higher polarization, or whether participants that are polarized are more likely to post frequently on social media.
- Active political use on all platforms is key
- Important to take note there are many limitations of this study – measurement issues inherent to complex subjects