



IKMZ Speaker Series

(Mis)representing Ideology on Twitter: How Social Influence Shapes Online Political Expression

by *Andrew M. Guess, Princeton University*

Monday, 16th November 2020

16:00 – 17:00

Zoom [*Link will be communicated*]

Expressing opinions on social media has become a standard form of participation in the political process, but we know little about the factors that shape it. In this paper, we investigate the role of social context. Decades after the development of the canonical "Spiral of Silence" model, the public sphere has radically shifted toward a networked space mediated by social platforms. We articulate a theory of conformity in social media expression and test it by analyzing unique datasets linking U.S. survey respondents to their public Twitter accounts. To measure political expression, we develop and validate a supervised classifier of tweet-level ideology and apply it to respondents' tweets and the tweets of people they follow. We find that the ideology of Twitter followees' tweets is predictive of respondents' own expressed ideology on Twitter, even after holding constant self-reported ideological predispositions. Our findings offer the first real-world evidence of social conformity effects on social media and demonstrate a powerful methodological approach for studying these dynamics.

Andy Guess is an assistant professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University. Via a combination of experimental methods, large datasets, machine learning, and innovative measurement, he studies how people choose, process, spread, and respond to information about politics. Recent work investigates the extent to which Americans' online news habits are polarized, patterns in the consumption and spread of online misinformation, and the effectiveness of efforts to counteract misperceptions encountered on social media. His research has been supported by grants from VolkswagenStiftung, Russell Sage Foundation, and the National Science Foundation and published in peer-reviewed journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Science Advances*, and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

