

Political Leadership Emerging in the Twitter Communication Stream

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Our politics is about who we are as a people, who we want to be, and how we make our way to who we want to be. How we work our way through that journey is in communication, and the communication that is available is determined by the infrastructure of communication of the moment. When the infrastructure of communication changes the politics changes. This paper is about one of the changes in infrastructure in what is called social media. It is about Twitter and the emergence of a new political leadership that is possible by virtue of this change in infrastructure.

The paper is organized in four sections. The first traces the historical development of political leadership with a final focus on what Richard Fenno found in his research. The second section examines the infrastructure that Twitter makes available for communication, and suggests that networks are what most political communication on Twitter becomes. The third section describes four individuals who embody what this change in political leadership is becoming. Two reside in the United States and two reside in the United Kingdom. The fourth section discusses how these political leaders may be found.

Political Leadership

Political leadership has been a central concern of political analysis at least since Aristotle linked moral character to virtuous leadership. As technology and political institutions have evolved, so too has scholarly understanding of political leadership.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the second World War, Lester Seligman noted that while the 18th century embraced popular sovereignty and direct democracy, and the 19th century turned on questions of stratification and group conflict, the troubled political history of the first half of the 20th century heightened sensitivity to the role of political leadership. Seligman described several elements of the new pattern of "politics by leadership" including the shift in power from parliamentary bodies to executive leadership, and with it, a reconfiguration of the public voice in "a direct and an interactive relation with the chief executive" (1950:904).

For Seligman, the centrality of leadership in modern politics raised certain questions to the fore, among them: "can democracy provide for the orderly continuity and succession of leadership: Is the recruitment of leadership representative and not restricted? Does the path of ascent enhance or weaken the capacity of potential leaders to cope with the problematic situation confronting leadership today?" (1950:906-7). Such questions would occupy generations of scholars and would flow in several prominent streams of work. For our present purposes, we can begin by discussing work addressing the recruitment of leaders.

Kazee (1994) traced the evolution of recruitment research from its initial emphasis on sociological considerations (with socio-economic status and occupation as driving forces), through a turn to psychological analyses (including personality traits linked to

leadership), and the eventual ascendancy of rational actor theories, which placed sociological and psychological influences in the context of personal ambition and political context. Joseph Schlesinger's (1966) work, positing a "structure of opportunities" provided a point of departure for what would become the dominant understanding of candidate emergence. The political career ladder structured the options available to would be office seekers, who as rational actors would not deviate from "following clear cut and predictable patterns of advancement" (Fowler 1993:8).

Fowler challenged the direction of subsequent work in this vein, arguing that ambition had been under-theorized. She noted that ambition was assumed to be constant among all politicians, and suggested that in addition to the career-climbing progressive ambition, some politicians possessed discrete or static ambition, either holding office then leaving, or staying put in a given office without venturing "upward." Central to Fowler's analysis is the role that context plays in structuring the environment of candidate emergence (Fowler 1993).

Indeed, as the political context has changed, so too has the skill set requisite to electoral success. Alan Ehrenhalt (1991:19) argues that in the age of strong parties, loyalty was prized, but modern campaigns turn on communication. He writes:

More than in the old days, campaigns for all offices are exercises in communication: in town meetings, in door-to-door canvassing, on television, in direct mail literature ... (politics) is an enterprise where the inarticulate have no place to hide. (1991:19-20).

Such communication with ones' constituents lies at the core of what Richard Fenno described in his landmark study as "homestyle." Comprised of three activities: resource allocation, presentation of self, and explanation of Washington activity, "homestyle" reflected the ongoing process of negotiation that is representation (Fenno 1978; 2003).

For Fenno, presentation of self was at the core of a member's homestyle. More important than policy congruence with constituents, members sought their trust. This trust would be earned through constant communication. Trust, he wrote, "is hard to win; and it must be constantly renewed and rewon." It is, he wrote, why members "spend so much of their time working at home.

Viewed from this perspective, the archetypical constituent question is not "What have you done for me lately?" but "How have you looked to me lately?" (Fenno 1978:56). Fenno found three strategies for gaining trust: qualification, identification ("I am one of you"), and empathy ("I understand you and think like you do").

For Fenno, representation was best conceptualized as a process, and "the idea that best conveys process is the idea of connections" (Fenno 2003:5). This leads representatives to be both "context interpreters" and "experiential learners" (Fenno 2003:7).

Fenno posited a nest of concentric circles, representing the different sets of constituents that representatives must respond to. The broadest was the geographic constituency (the entirety of the district), with the reelection constituency embedded within that and finally a primary constituency of the most committed and active supporters. In his study of African-American legislators, Fenno identified a fourth constituency, "a national constituency of black citizens ... with whom black members share a set of race-related concerns" (Fenno 2003:7).

If trust, as Fenno suggested, is an important factor for political leadership the elected officials of the United States have not fared well. The Gallup Poll has tracked public views of government over decades and found sharp declines in trust in government.

Are members of congress generally out of touch with average Americans?
79% agree (Dugan, 9/28/2015)

How much do you trust "the men and women in political life in this country who either hold or are running for political office" to make "judgments under our democratic system about the issues facing our country." The response was 65% said a great deal or a fair amount of trust in the early 1970s, but that had fallen to 42% in 2016. (Jones, 9/21/2016)

First, how much trust and confidence do you have in our federal government in Washington when it comes to handling international problems and domestic problems. Only 11% said they had a great deal of trust for international problems and only 8% had a great deal of trust in the federal government to handle domestic problems. (Gallup, 9/7/2016)

There is some variation in the numbers based on how the questions were asked, but it is clear that the current level of trust in the office holders of government is not high. It is not clear what political leadership is in this situation. They occupy office and perform the duties of the offices. They do not lead people.

However, political office holding is not the only way to consider political leadership. For example, no one would doubt the leadership of Martin Luther King even though he held no elected office. He was able to reach out to a large 'constituency' helping them understand what the world might become and how that future could be achieved. The first step is reaching out to a large audience, and that is the point at which Twitter becomes important for a new route to political leadership. Before social media the carrying capacity of the infrastructure of communication was limited and broadcast was the organization of that limited carrying capacity. Social media - the change in the carrying capacity of the infrastructure - has given everyone what was broadcast capability. Hence broadcast can no longer be the organizing principle. While the infrastructure of speaking has changed dramatically the infrastructure of attention has not. It is the same human capacity that may be redirected by the new communication capability but its limits have not changed. Attention remains a scarce resource. How that is directed becomes the organizing principle, and that can be called reach. What is the

reach of what was the broadcast industry? What is the reach of the elite who depended on the broadcast industry for reach? Are there individuals who take advantage of the new speaking capacity and come to have a reach that equals what in the past was limited to the broadcast industry and through them the elites?

With this as a starting point the focus of the section becomes twofold. Is it possible to find individuals who can use Twitter to reach very large numbers of other Twitter users? For some the widespread reach seems relatively easy because of their positions. For example, Mr. Obama has 101.9 million followers who receive every tweet he posts. That is largely based on his having been elected president. News media also have large numbers of followers. The *New York Times* leads the way with 34.3 million followers. That is Twitter and the old route to political leadership. Are there individuals who can reach widely based on what they do on Twitter? Does their communication become the basis of their reach? That is the first question. Second, if there are individuals whose communication leads to widespread reach how does that happen? Do Fenno's ideas, which he called homestyle, help in understanding this new role of political leadership?

The answer to the two questions begins with a single person for whom the answer is yes and yes.

Twitter as infrastructure of communication

To make clear that this new infrastructure of communication can have a dramatic effect the section begins with a story from early in the 2016 presidential election. It is a story about leadership and the reach that was available to a young woman in Florida.

The evening of March 16, 2016 the results were in for the two Florida primaries. The Clinton team posted -- we won. Simultaneously Lexi4prez posted an animated gif. It was a rabbit vigorously sawing off Florida from the rest of the country and then Florida floating out to sea.



For her it was the worst possible outcome as Trump won and Bernie Sanders lost. Then a geometric explosion happened. After five hours the Clinton tweet had been retweeted 3.4 thousand times. After the same five hours the Lexi4Prez tweet had been retweeted 13.4 thousand times. Ms. Clinton had 5.7 million followers which gives a 0.0006% retweet rate. Lexi4prez had 78,000 followers, and 17% of them had retweeted her message. As retweet rates go Lexi4prez was way ahead of the Clinton campaign. The average number of followers in political communication is approximately 500. By this count the Clinton tweet could have been seen by 1.7 million Twitter users. Florida floating out to sea could have been seen by 6.7 million Twitter users. Even if you do some adjustment to the numbers 1.7 million-adjusted and 6.7 million-adjusted are very large audiences for the two tweets. Geometric explosion starts with a single tweet that is available to all of one's followers, and then can explode as followers receiving the message pass it along to their followers. That gets you to 1.7 million and 6.7 million as the viewing audience, which is the potential explosion built into Twitter communication.

Is the animated gif a fluke? The way to answer that is to count over an extended period of time. Tweets were collected for 34 days in late spring of 2016. At the end of the 34 days Ms. Clinton had 5.4 million followers and Lexi4Prez had 85,234 followers. The search requested tweets mentioning Clinton or Lexi4Prez every five minutes from the Twitter Search API. There were 2,497,682 tweets mentioning Clinton and only 95,005 tweets mentioning Lexi4Prez. There are far more followers and tweets mentioning Clinton than Lexi4Prez. However, retweeting is equally unbalanced. One percent, 28,882, of the messages mentioning Clinton were retweets. But 61.5%, 58,439, of the messages mentioning Lexi4Prez were retweets. The importance of retweets is they produce a geometric explosion of reach. If the 28,882 tweets mentioning Clinton were seen by an average of 500 people each that would be a reach of 14,441,000. That is in addition to the 5.4 million tweets that were seen by individual followers. For Lexi4Prez if the 50,429 retweets were seen by 500 individuals that would be 25,218,500 views. However, Lexi4Prez's followers average many more than 500 followers, and the total is 48,924,744.

One more count; this time post election. The count is for the three weeks February 18 through March 12 of 2017. Again the Search API of Twitter was used to locate tweets mentioning Lexi4prez. The total for the three weeks was 73,244 tweets. It is a subset of the total since Twitter does not provide all tweets in response to a request addressed to that API. Half of the tweets, 36,434, were retweets. Most of the retweeted messages were 45 tweets that were retweeted many times. Twitter provides the number of times each had been retweeted, and 15 had been retweeted frequently enough that they had been seen by more than a million Twitter users. The total views for those 15 tweets was 59.8 million. Those are not 60 million different individuals. Many individual saw more than one of the retweets, but it is a count of how many times tweets posted by Lexi4prez were available to Twitter users.

What is the infrastructure that makes the reach of Lexi4prez possible? It is

1. Global

2. Public
3. Each user has a unique 'name'
4. Each user can use both images and words to portray him or herself
5. Searchable -- for both individuals and subjects
6. Individuals can 'follow,' which is automatically receive the tweets posted by another individual
7. Individuals can retweet tweets, which is sharing another's tweet with one's followers

With the exception of a few countries that will not permit Twitter within their borders geography is no longer a barrier to communication. This is the public square on the grandest scale. Anyone in this world may see the tweets of Lexi4prez.

In two papers we traced the flow of communication in the political stream. Three tactics may be employed to spread the word through Twitter. 1) Flood the stream -- post a large number of tweets to increase the chances of one of them being encountered by a person using Twitter. 2) Direct address -- It is easy to find individuals interested in a subject. Their tweets include their user account names. Make a list of user names and post messages that each begins with one of the user names. 3) Networks -- networks are patterns of communication that go beyond the individual tweet. There is ongoing interaction among a collection of individuals following, mentioning, retweeting each other. The two papers tackled the same questions, hence the same titles, but they were based on different data sets for the analysis. (Boynton and Richardson, 2018a, 2018b)

The counts showed that flooding the stream and direct address were modest elements of the stream. The stream is dominated by retweeting. Roughly 75% of political tweets are retweets. Retweeting is the connectivity of networks and as shown in the example of Lexi4prez it can produce a geometric explosion of flow of tweets/ideas.

We believe tweets moving through networks is the primary flow of messages in political messaging on Twitter. Only some of those networks are part of the new route to political leadership. To be clear about the networks that are the new route to political leadership we will briefly characterize six specific structures of which only one is the network of direct concern in this paper.

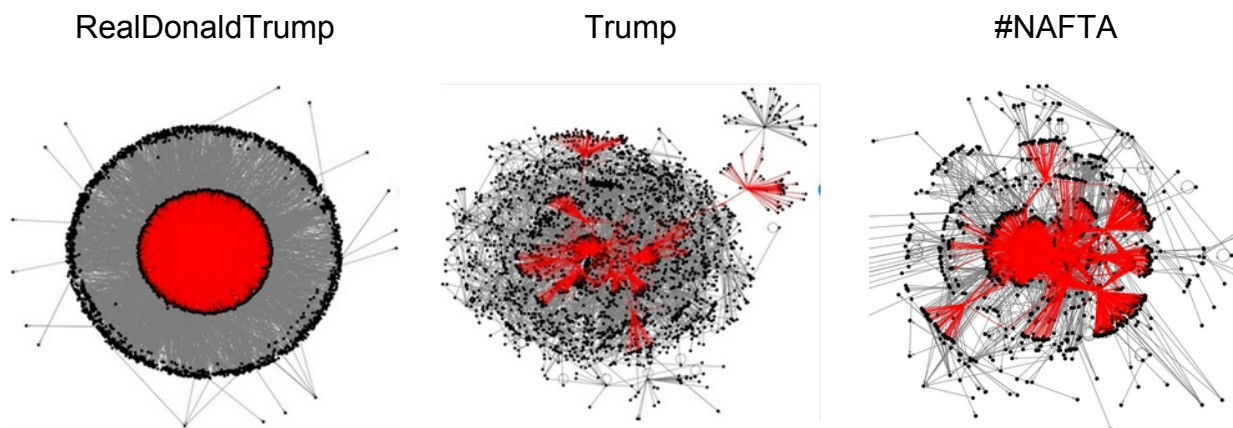
The formal properties of the networks give a view of the flow of communication. One property is number of vertices or nodes. How large or small are the networks? A second property is the division between tweets aimed at the user account and tweets of the user account mentioning others. "In" is the designation for tweets that are directed at a user by others, and "out" is the designation for tweets that begin with the user account and are aimed at another. The third property is betweenness centrality. It is a count for each user of the number of times that user is in the middle of the shortest path between two tweets. The more times a user is in the middle of the communication the more central that user is in the network. For this property the distribution of betweenness centrality counts is examined using the Gini index to compare that distribution. The networks examined here were all collected using NodeXL.

Table 1.
Selected Network Properties

	RealDonaldTrump	Trump	#NAFTA	Beverly92619463	Ocasio2018	RVAwonk
Vertices	5154	5202	3147	582	2697	3861
In	3317	163		28	1506	2611
Out	13	0		396	4	8
Gini	0.81	0.42	0.76	0.95	0.79	0.81

The networks found by searching for RealDonaldTrump and Trump are the two biggest of the six. Both have just over 5K vertices or nodes. But that is the end of their similarities.

Figure 2.
Networks:
RealDonaldTrump, Trump, and #NAFTA

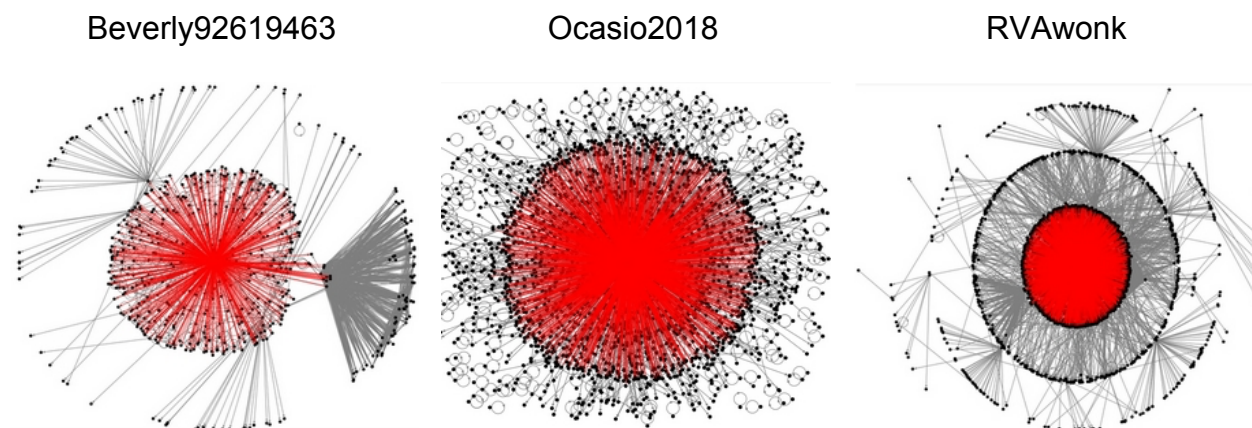


RealDonaldTrump is an identity network. There are far more tweets mentioning or retweeting RealDonaldTrump than there are tweets posted by RealDonaldTrump. The domination of the personal is reflected in the Gini index for betweenness centrality of 0.81. The redlines connecting to RealDonaldTrump as well as the betweenness centrality show RealDonaldTrump is the central figure in the network.

But the Trump network is completely different. When the search term is Trump the top user account found is RealDonaldTrump, but it is one of many. There are few in or out tweets. These are tweets by one user referring to another user and using Trump's name in the tweet. In the figure it is one of the little connections of vertices. The selection of connections shown by the red lines are for the 24 best connected user accounts. The twenty-four are almost independent even though including Trump in the tweet. That spread of the betweenness centrality is reflected in the Gini index which was only 0.42 in this case. One way to understanding what is going on in the Trump network is to compare it to the #NAFTA network. The network was collected in early fall of 2018 using #NAFTA as the search term. There are 3147 vertices in this network, but all of the tweets have both an author and a user account referred to and #NAFTA is only the

subject of the tweets. The disjointed connections in the network are similar to the disjointed connections in the Trump network. There is more connection in this network than in the Trump network which is reflected in a Gini index for betweenness centrality of 0.76.

Figure 3.
Networks:
Beverly92619463, Ocasio2018, and RVAwolk



Beverly92619463 is a bot or most likely a bot. NodeXL's search for a network using the search term Beverly92619463 found a network with only 582 vertices. It is by far the smallest network of the six. It is primarily a network in which tweets by Beverly refer to other user accounts. So 'in' is limited to 28 and 'out' is 396. This shows the extent to which the network is Beverly retweeting the tweets of others. There is almost no network action by others. The two deviations from this are pictured as outside the central network. Both are tweets that begin with a list of user accounts. One is up to 20 and the other is somewhat less. The larger has no message. It is only user names and Beverly's is one of them. The extent to which Beverly dominates the action of the network is shown in the red lines in the figure. Each is a tweet by Beverly. That dominance is also seen in the distribution of betweenness centrality. The Gini index is 0.95. An equal distribution gives a Gini index of 0. For 0.95 the distribution of betweenness is almost wholly Beverly tweets.

Ocasio2018 is the Twitter user name of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She is from Queens and she ran in the 2018 Democratic primary against U.S. Representative Joseph Crowley who was one of the most important Democrats in the House of Representatives. And she won becoming an instant celebrity. The news media found it a striking win and her win got more attention than other primary winners received. Then she took off with Senator Sanders to campaign for other young Democrats. This is a personal network. She is at the very center. But the 1506 in (tweets mentioning her) compared to 4 out that she posted suggests that she is not spending much effort on Twitter communication. The striking feature of this network is that none of the 1506 tweets mentioning her is a retweet. She is not being retweeted. So the best characterization of the network is that it is a celebrity network. In this it is rather like a