Methodology

This analysis examines a complete set of Facebook posts and tweets created on any account managed by any member of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives between Jan. 1, 2015, and Dec. 31, 2020. Researchers used the Facebook Graph API, CrowdTangle[1] API and Twitter API to download the posts. The resulting dataset contains more than 1.7 million Facebook posts from 714 different members of Congress who used a total of 1,438 Facebook accounts, and over 3.8 million tweets from 717 different members of Congress who used a total of 1,470 Twitter accounts.

This analysis includes all text from these Facebook and Twitter posts, including image captions and emojis. Photo and video posts were not included in this analysis unless the post also contained meaningful text, such as a caption. Text that appeared only within images was not included in the analysis. Posts by nonvoting representatives were also excluded.

To facilitate a more complete over-time analysis, posts created during congressional recesses were included, and terms of office (which typically begin and end in the first week of January) were adjusted by a few days to start and end at the beginning and end of each year, respectively. For example, posts by members of Congress that served full terms in the 116th Congress are included in the analysis if they were created between Jan. 1, 2019, and Dec. 31, 2020 (inclusive), even though the official term began on Jan. 3, 2019, and ended on Jan. 3, 2021.

The broader data collection process is described in more detail here.

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[1] CrowdTangle is a public insights tool owned by Facebook.