

# Political Polarization and Platform Migration: A Study of Parler and Twitter Use By United States Congress Members

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Clarkson University, FATES 2021

# Introduction

- Growing dissatisfaction with platform governance decisions on major platforms
- This has led to increasingly more attempts at mass migration from these major platforms
- One of the largest mass migration movements belong to the political right and conservative America towards Parler.
- Parler is a self-proclaimed free speech and saw a massive spike in June 2020 and November 2020
- Our study is focused on how Parler was used by U.S. Congress members before, during, and after January 6

# The Goal

Study the large-scale movement from **Twitter to Parler** and its impact on **US political polarization** and **political processes** in the real world.

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**535 Members of  
United States  
Congress**

**December 10,  
2020 to January  
9th 2021**

Product

# Updating our approach to misleading information

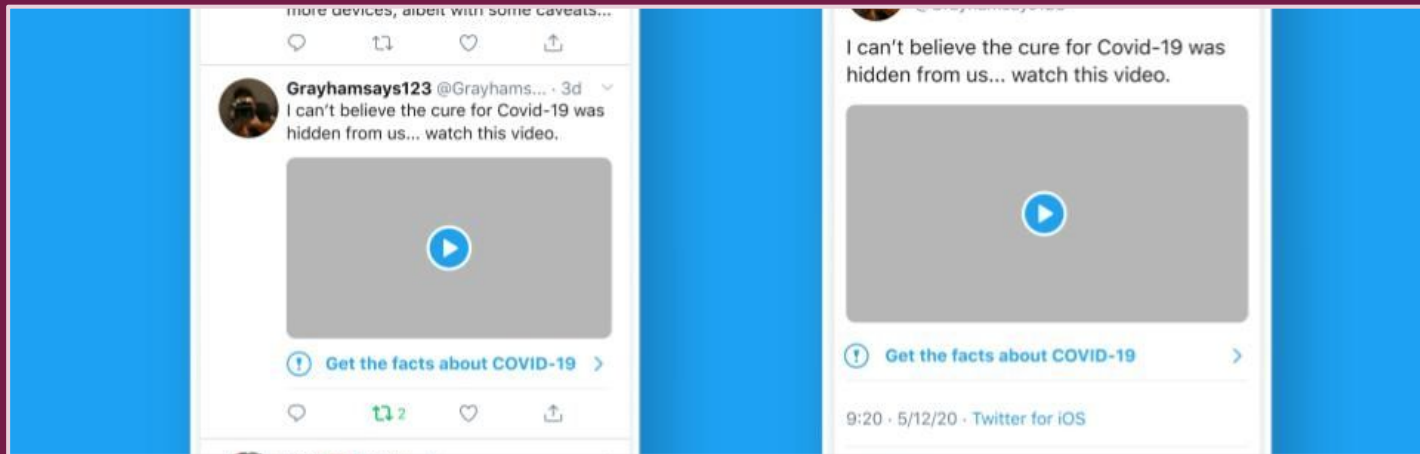
By Yoel Roth and Nick Pickles

Monday, 11 May 2020 [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Share](#)

## New labels and warnings



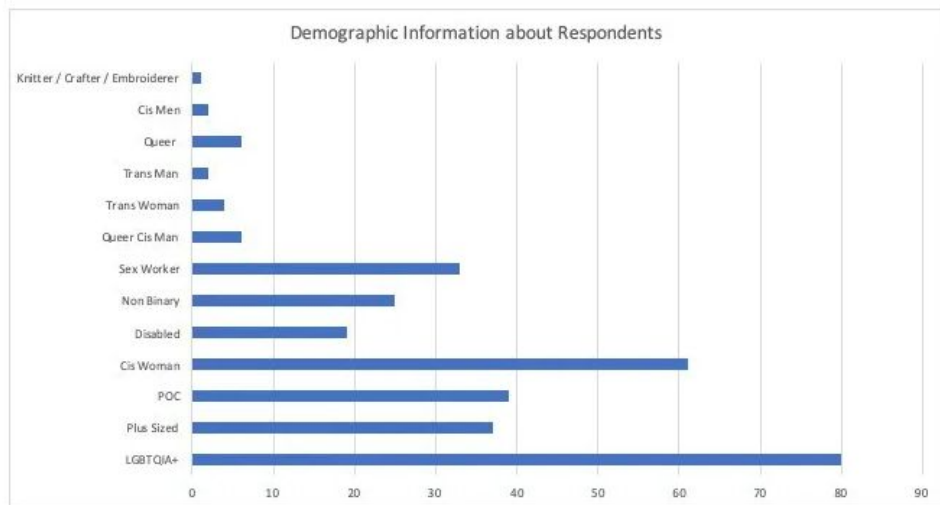
<b>Misleading Information</b>	Label	Removal
<b>Disputed Claim</b>	Label	Warning
<b>Unverified Claim</b>	No action	No action*
	Moderate	Severe
Propensity for Harm		



# The Complexity of Content Moderation

## Who is Affected by Censorship

The demographics of our survey respondents (118 people total) reflects our readership. Many of the respondents identified as LGBTQIA+, people of color, plus sized, and sex workers or educators. All of these Instagram users experienced friction with the platform in some form, such as content taken down, disabled profiles or pages, and/or rejected advertisements.



- Not one-size-fits-all
- Algorithms often incorporates bias

**Moderation is still needed to protect users from harmful content!**

Technology

## Conservatives grumbling about censorship say they're flocking to Parler. They told us so on Twitter.

The pro-Trump Internet can't stop talking about their exodus from Big Tech. But very few of them have actually abandoned their long-time social media homes.

The New York Times

2020

Election Results: Biden Wins Electoral College Votes Congress Defies Mob Georgia Runoff Results Democrats Win Senate Control

## Fact-Checked on Facebook and Twitter, Conservatives Switch Their Apps

Since the election, millions have migrated to alternative social media and media sites like Parler, Rumble and Newsmax.



ARTS & LIFE MUSIC SHOWS & PODCASTS SEARCH

TECHNOLOGY

## Conservatives Flock To Mercer-Funded Parler, Claim Censorship On Facebook Twitter

NOVEMBER 14, 2020 · 6:38 PM ET

Weekend Edition Sunday

ANNON BOND

## Mass Migration of Users to Parler Prompts Concerns Over Security and Disinformation

NOVEMBER 19, 2020 · CHARITY WRIGHT

During the weekend after Election Day in the United States, over 4 million social media users pivoted to conservative social platforms such as Parler, MeWe, Rumble, and Gab, citing concerns over censorship on

# Context on Parler

## Community Guidelines:

- Heavy focus on free speech; “Create a social platform in the spirit of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution”
- 1. Do not use the platform for unlawful purposes 2. Do not spam

## Concerns:

- Recommendations skewed politically conservative
- Features for identity protection exist (badges), MANY parody accounts exist
- Search engine is slow (glitchy), “suggested” hashtags are not dynamic or representative of currently popular hashtags being used

personalize your experience



Parleys from these sources will be appear in your feed



**Sean Hannity**  
@SeanHannity

Follow



**PragerU**  
@PragerU

Follow



**The Babylon Bee**  
@TheBabylonBee

Follow



**Daily Mail**  
@TheDailyMail

Follow



**Jsolomonreports**  
@Jsolomonreports

Follow



**American Greatness**  
@AmericanGreatness

Follow

**Young platform with  
little community  
guidelines that is  
overloaded with users of  
one political ideology**



# Parler vs. Twitter

- Both are very similar in their functions. Twitter reshares are called “retweets” and Parler reshares are called “echos” same with “liking” by Twitter and “voting” by Parler
- Biggest differences:
  - Community guidelines
  - Age of platform
  - Range of users on each platform
- A notable section is the synthetic and manipulated media section
- Parler’s guidelines lack depth and nuance compared to Twitter

# January 6, 2021 and the Aftermath

- On January 6, 2021 a mob of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol building in an attempt to overturn the defeat of President Donald Trump
- Five people were killed and dozens were arrested.
- Many referred to this as an act of domestic terrorism
- Parler was accused of serving hate groups that used the platform to organize and strategize for this event
- Many demanded a change in moderation of illegal and violent activities on Parler
- By Sunday January 10 at 11:59 PM PST Amazon pulled their web services leaving Parler shutdown

# Permanent suspension of @realDonaldTrump

By [Twitter Inc.](#)

Friday, 8 January 2021



As such, our determination is that the two Tweets above are likely to inspire others to replicate the violent acts that took place on January 6, 2021, and that there are multiple indicators that they are being received and understood as encouragement to do so.

## Parler jumps to No. 1 on App Store after Facebook and Twitter ban Trump

Jonathan Shieber @shieber / 1:45 PM EST • January 9, 2021



## *Amazon, Apple and Google Cut Off Parler, an App That Drew Trump Supporters*

The companies pulled support for the “free speech” social network, all but killing the service just as many conservatives are seeking alternatives to Facebook and Twitter.



# US Politicians on Parler vs. Twitter

104  
/ 535

**US Representatives had both Parler and Twitter accounts.**

18  
/ 104

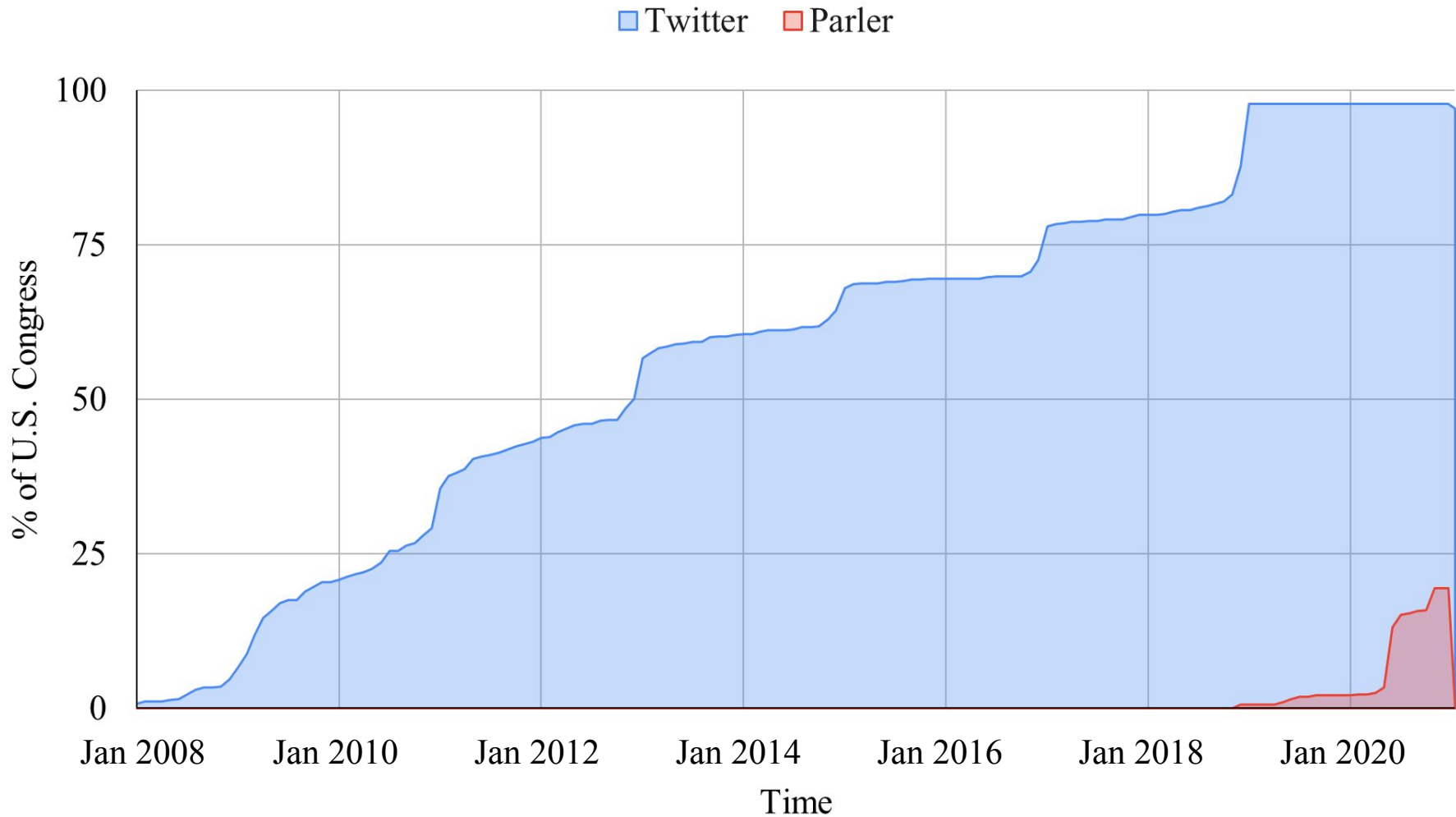
*active* US Representatives, meaning that they had posted within the past week.

**Of the 18 active US Representatives...**

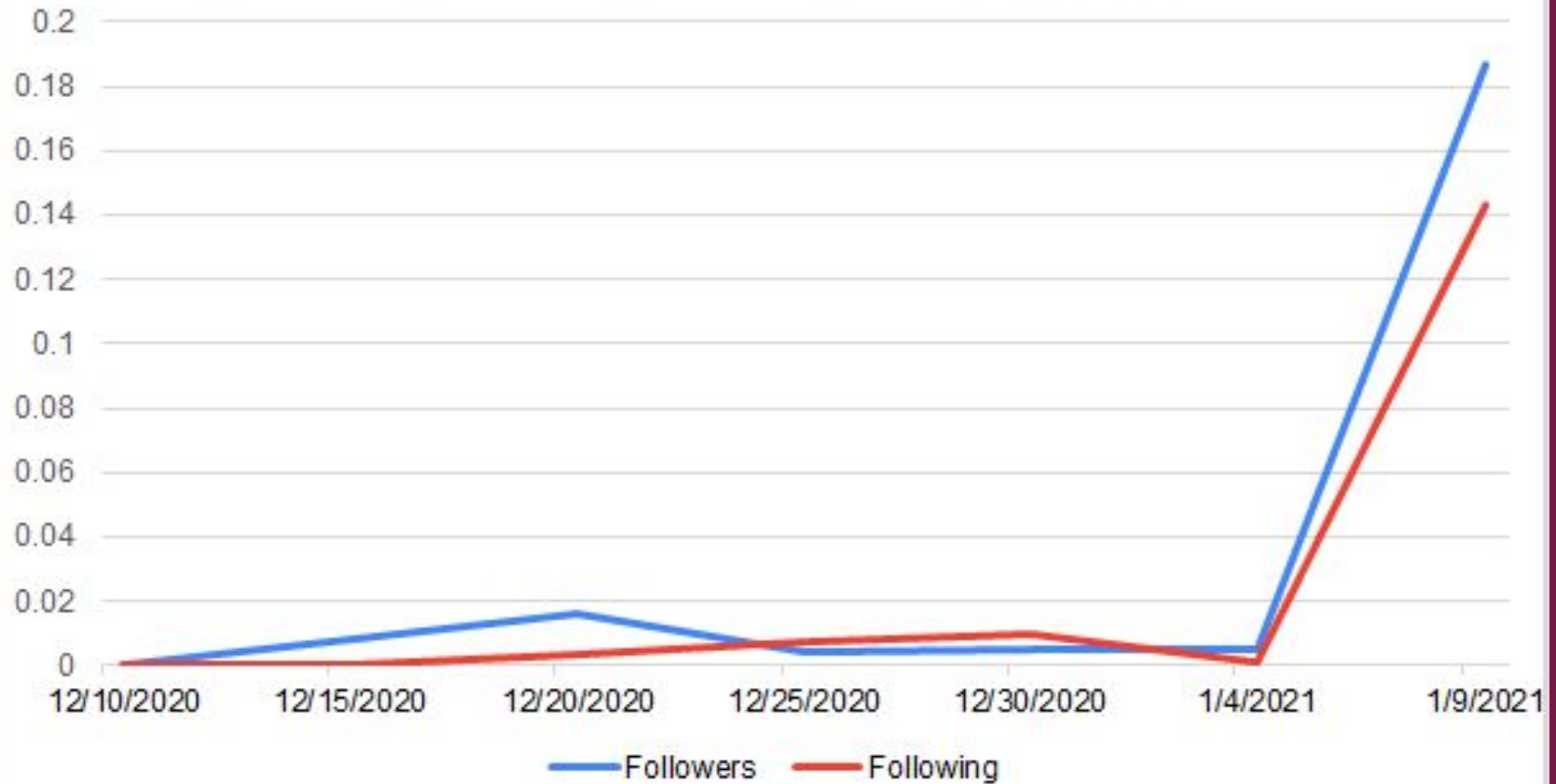
**100%** are Republicans.

**83%** objected to the Electoral College Vote on Jan.6th.

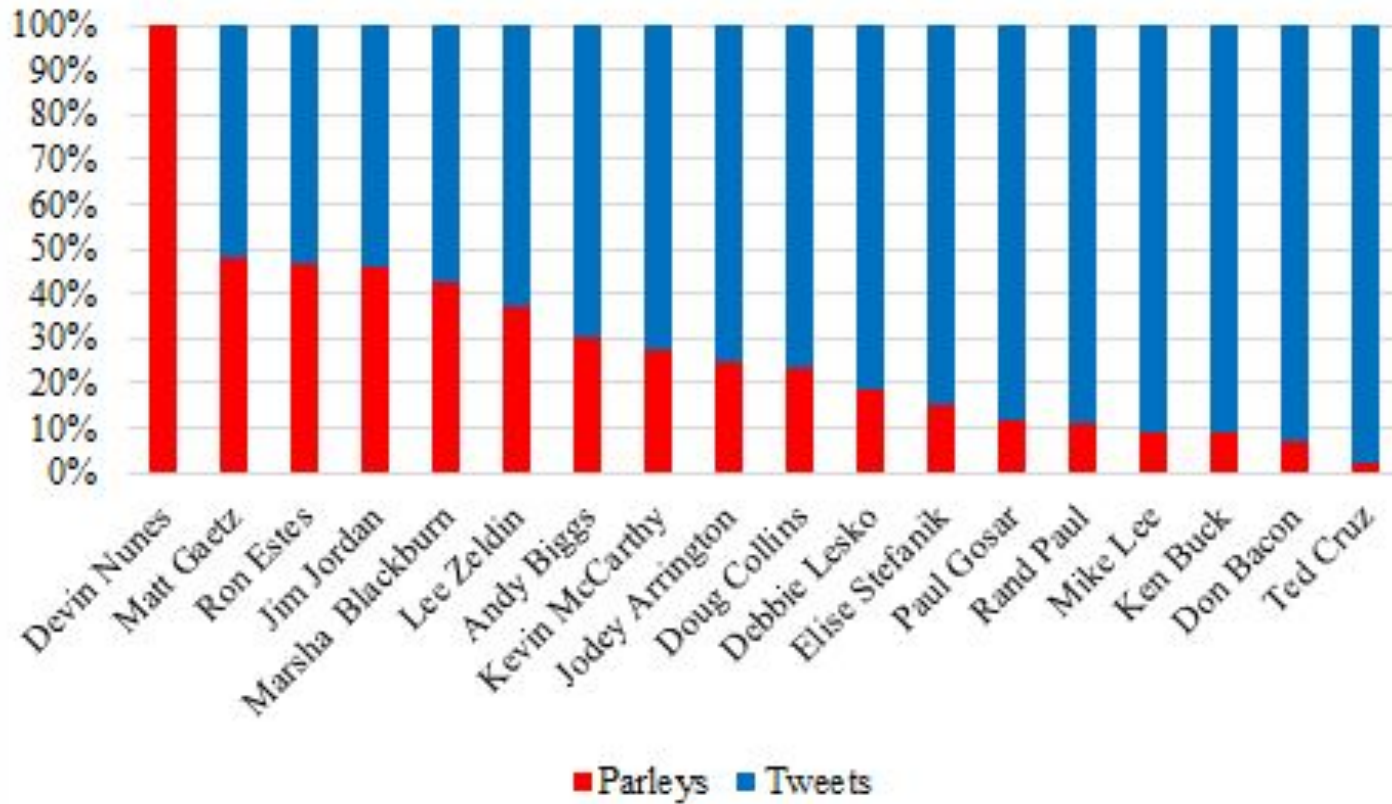
Compared to the  $\approx 24\%$  of total representatives who objected.



## Increase Rate of Followers and Following of US Politicians on Parler



Percentage of social media activities of each politician in the sample





## Larger Takeaways

**<50%** Even among active Parler users, the majority of their posts were still on Twitter.

**Politicians' posts weren't as extreme as they could have been.**

**Still clear evidence of underlying polarization and Congress members presence served to legitimize.**

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For more questions, feel free to email [gadraki@clarkson.edu](mailto:gadraki@clarkson.edu)

