

ONE COUNTRY

Rural Voices & Issues



(IA, PA, WI)

Social Media Analysis

February 15, 2019 to May 15, 2019



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to use social media listening and analysis to assist OCP in understanding the needs and aspirations of those in rural communities. The report was broken down into two stages:

Stage one: Impact Social completed an initial 'open listening' analysis of rural counties in Iowa, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. This captured all conversations including sports, TV, the weather, day-to-day life, etc. as well as the key political issues during the period (which can be found [here](#))

Stage two: Impact Social then identified the most regularly discussed political issues for further analysis:

- Abortion
- Immigration
- Education
- Women
- Health / healthcare
- Climate change
- Farming

We took each of these and analyzed online conversations and sentiment across rural counties with the aim of understanding the overall conversation; the level of sentiment and what is driving it; the topics under discussion and share of voice. Filtering and analyzing social media sentiment in this way creates a set of benchmark data against which:

- Future changes in sentiment can be tracked
- The impact of any new factor or intervention can be measured

Key features of the benchmark data:

Sentiment in each state is largely similar.

- Small regional variations are likely attributable to, for example, local factors such as industry and employment, school performance, Medicare coverage, weather patterns, etc

Common concerns drive online conversations.

- We do not choose the topics we categorize – the data takes us there – but we found the same drivers of social media discussions were repeated from state to state (although the weight of sentiment varies)

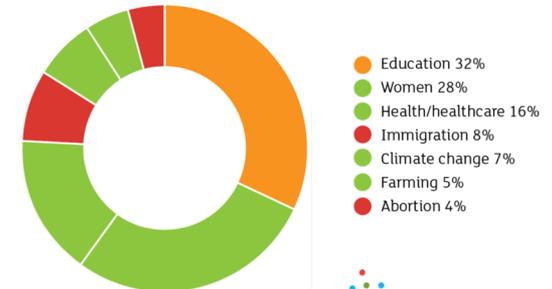
The themes cannot be treated in the same way.

- We found that the seven topics we focused on divided into three categories:

Topic ranking:

RED	AMBER	GREEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Abortion ➤ Immigration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Health / healthcare ➤ Climate change ➤ Farming ➤ Women

Share of Discussion:



Red

- Where sentiment and opinions are expressed in this category, they are often strident. Debate is polarized and many comments demonstrate total inflexibility. It is difficult to see an immediate route to positive engagement with these online conversations – though there are areas where the broader arguments/policy could be more nuanced

Amber

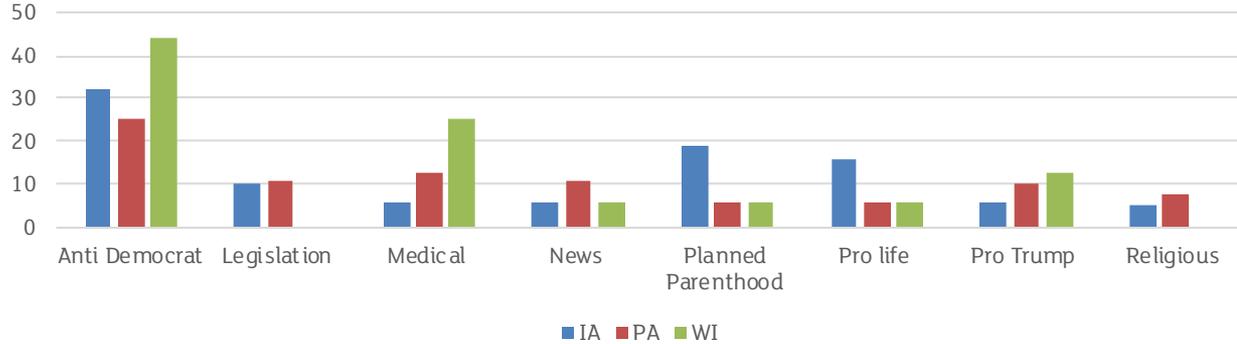
- We found that current political messages or policy proposals have gained virtually zero traction in online conversations.
- It is unclear at this stage if such messages are being badly delivered or if people simply aren't listening
- Almost none of the national debate has trickled down to local social media conversations, nor are national ideas reflected in local sentiment

Green

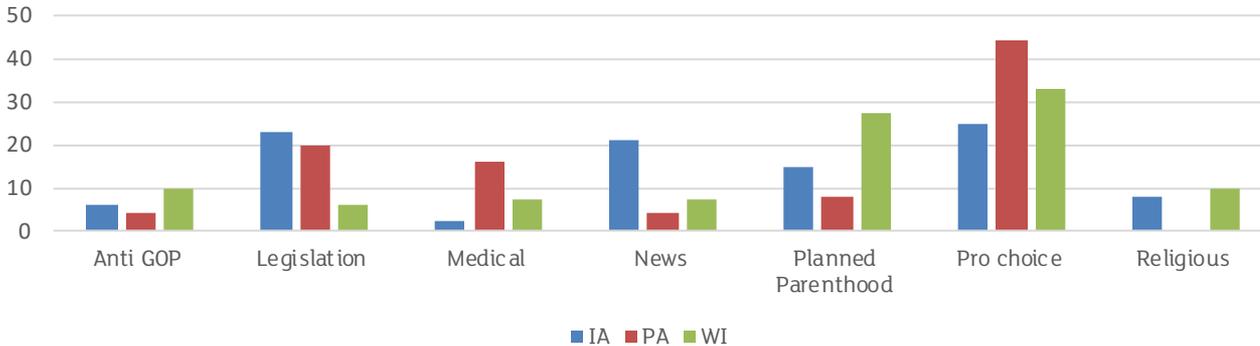
- It is striking that, in this category, social media discussions are calling out for political leaders to suggest new solutions to old problems. There are calls for 'someone' to fix broken systems. There are complaints that current ideas are too narrow. People don't understand why action isn't being taken
- The online conversations suggest that political leaders have either abandoned efforts to make change, or are ignoring pleas for action, leaving voters angry and confused

ABORTION

Anti Abortion



Pro Abortion

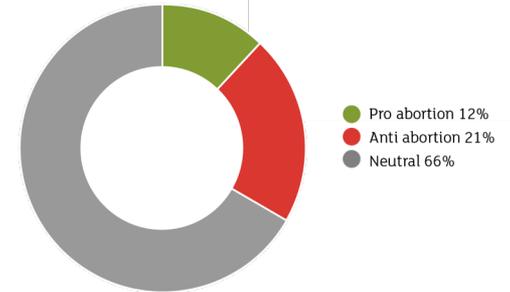


10,000 original posts



635 unique authors

SENTIMENT



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states. The donut chart shows the average sentiment across the three states combined

Key takeaways:

- Abortion policy brings many more pro-lifers than pro-choice proponents into social media conversations.
- The Democratic Party often emerges badly from these discussions whilst the Republicans rarely get any direct criticism either for the policy or the outcomes
- This is a conversation hugely driven by politics. The issue itself appears secondary. Notice neither 'woman' or even 'baby' are listed as specific topic areas under discussion (*N.B. this topic analysis should be considered in conjunction to the analysis on 'women' later in this report*)

Social media discussion:

Opinion on abortion is polarised. Social media conversations are often highly emotionally charged and occasionally include personal abuse and foul language. It is not a debate to be entered lightly

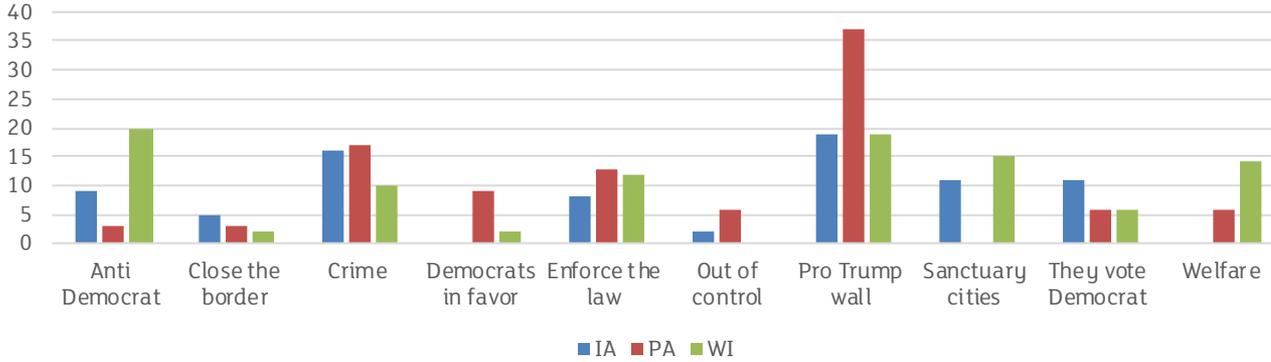
Reasons for joining the conversation on abortion vary widely. However, comments triggered by news events or legislative developments are frequent. This suggests that abortion policy generates more public awareness than many political issues. Planned Parenthood is a trigger issue on both sides

In the 'pro life' conversation, there is a consistent undercurrent of approval for President Trump. Anti-Democratic Party sentiment is visible and high among people opposed to current abortion laws and/or who support greater restrictions on access to abortion

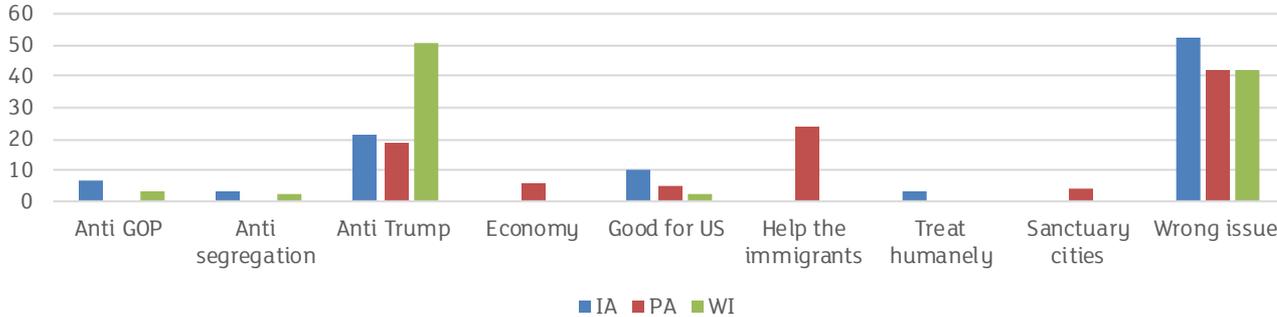
On the 'pro choice' side, it is notable that there is no political balancing effect. Directly-expressed opposition to the president or the GOP is low among those defending current abortion policy and/or rejecting attempts to change it. Democratic politicians or the party generally receive very little credit for their position among this group

IMMIGRATION

Anti Immigration



Pro Immigration

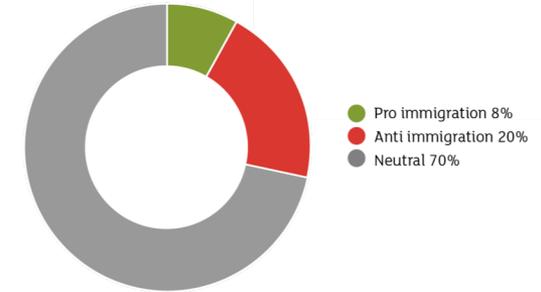


20,000 original posts



1,013 unique authors

SENTIMENT



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states. The donut chart shows the average sentiment across the three states combined

Key takeaways:

- Much of this analysis was conducted during the period of the 2019 shutdown which saw the president in a bitter standoff with Congress over a proposed border wall with Mexico. Consequently, anger over the issue of immigration is heightened during the period
- President Trump personally enjoys large support for his immigration stance and his vow to build the wall
- Democratic views are swatted away in all three states as being typically liberal and offering no solution to a real problem/emergency
- There is a sense that some of the Democratic discussion is actually more anti Trump than pro immigrant

Social media discussion:

It is hard to call this discussion a 'debate' in any form. Views are deeply held and defended with anger and passion. During this period, the term 'immigrant' is almost universally directed at people trying to enter the US via the Mexican border

President Trump's stated belief that immigrants are attracted to the US to collect welfare payments is often repeated. In support, stories of immigrants receiving preferential treatment at the expense of Americans are shared. Many are also convinced that the cost of the wall would in time save the US money as it would reduce the cost of welfare payments to immigrants. Similarly people parrot Trump lines that immigrants are criminals who thieve, deal drugs and rape women

Many on the right also believe that Democrats privately support the Republicans' immigration policy as proven by Obama's hard line on immigrants whilst in office. Democrats, they argue, only support the current influx because the immigrants would vote liberal

IMMIGRATION:

Despite the overwhelming support for Trump (not GOP) to build the wall, some are starting to lose patience and call for him to 'get on with it'. They also tell him to 'enforce the law' which they feel is being applied too liberally

For their part the Democratic conversation is a little more nuanced. For many this is about empathy, decency and humanity. They question 'how can the US turn away these desperate people?'. Whereas for others this is a question of spending priorities. They share information online of where billions spent on a wall might be better used in areas such as health and education. They also argue that immigrants greatly benefit the US economy and quote George W Bush in support of this view

At the same time more moderate Democratic voters use this issue as a stick with which to beat Trump - rather than it being something they truly believe in and/or feel passionate about

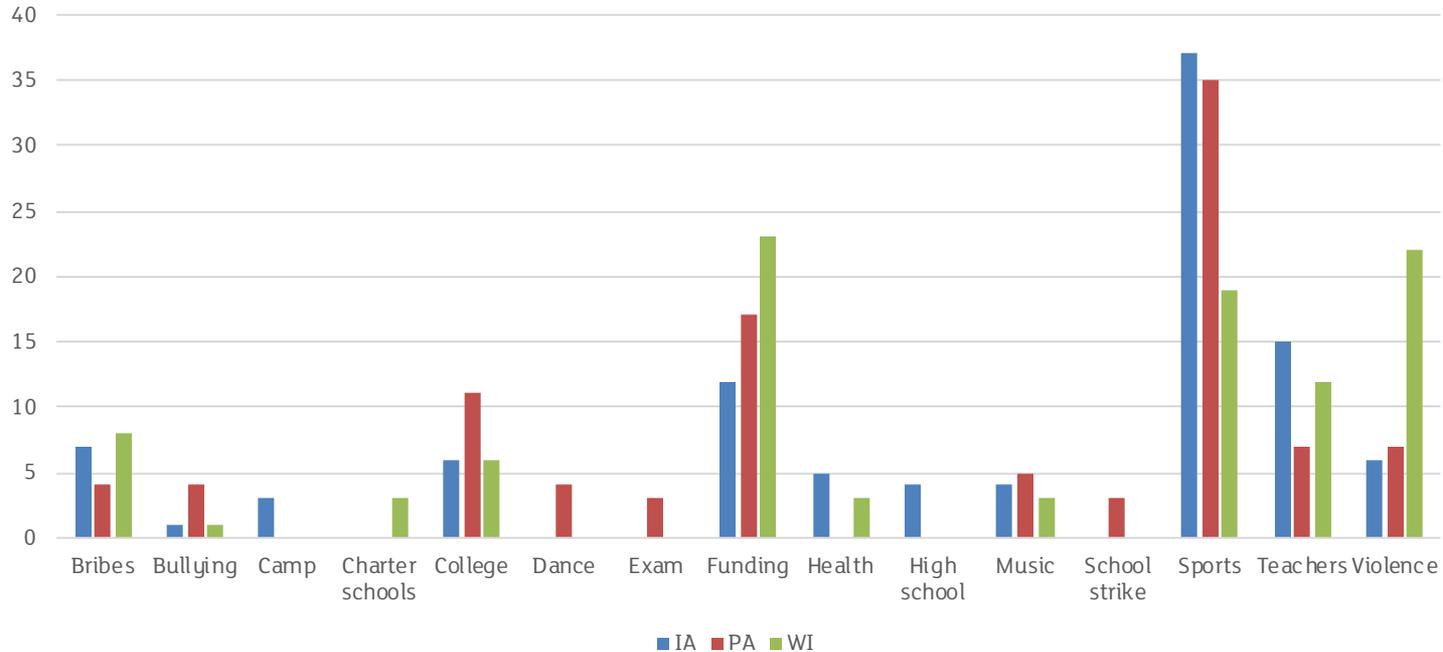
EDUCATION



76,000 original posts



4,433 unique authors



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states

Key takeaways:

- Almost nothing that politicians say about education gets through to online conversations on social media platforms
- Even on the 'hot topic' of funding, less than 20% of these specific conversations had a political element, with most simply decrying the excessive cost and/or expecting policymakers to continue to do nothing

Social media discussion:

There is no single leading topic in online conversations about education.

Sports – discussions about school and college teams and individual students' results and records – ranks highest. Discussions about teacher quality, college life and campus violence – especially gun crime – are also frequent. The timing of this analysis means that there is also highly negative sentiment expressed about the recent college admission 'bribery' scandal

Only a small portion of the discussion is overtly political. Most centers on funding, student debt and a perceived lack of government interest in doing anything to help. Recent policy proposals from Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) on eliminating debt are considered by some, but not in detail

Senators Sanders (I-VT) and Harris (D-CA) and Rep Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) are mentioned favorably, but mostly in online conversations passing wider comment on student funding failures and/or teacher pay. Sen. Harris is also namechecked on her approach to gun crime. Except for Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, Republican political figures – including President Trump – are also absent from education conversations

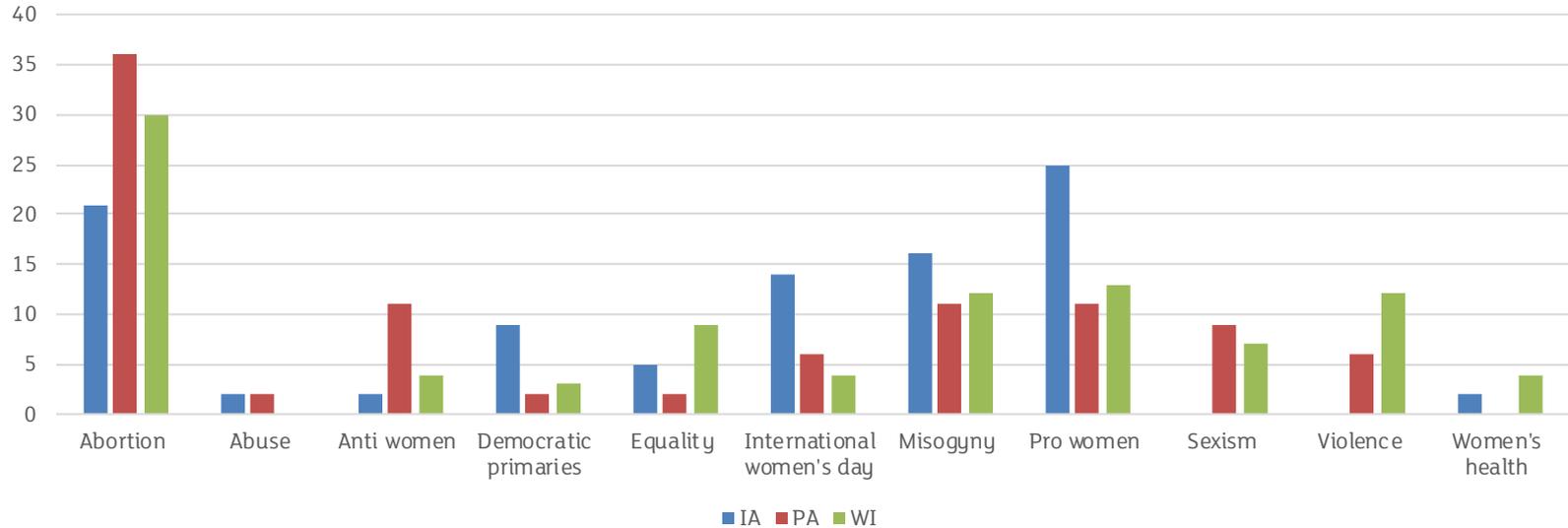
WOMEN



66,000 original posts



3,168 unique authors



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states.

Key takeaways:

- Recently proposed changes to abortion laws across the US have created much personal anger by women and some men across all three states. Few women come out in support of the new laws
- Stories of violence and harassment against women are widely discussed
- Casual conversations involving sexism and misogyny are regularly posted with a sense of normality
- Positive, supportive comments, between women are commonplace. Women encourage one another to succeed. This also applies in the Democratic primary race

Social media discussion:

The impact of abortion on women dominates discussion in all three states. This conversation is entirely personal. The threat of major changes to abortion law has created much anger as women feel they are being singled out, marginalized and criminalized

Many come out against men, they ask ‘how do they get to choose what a woman should and shouldn’t do with their body?’ Whilst others channel their rage more practically by pointing out that a six week pregnancy to one woman is often just a late period to another – despairing at the level of male ignorance. Underlying this discussion is a feeling that women’s health, rights and lives are irrelevant in this issue

It is interesting to note that pleas against changes to abortion laws are also being expressed by men. Yet there are very few women coming out in open support of these changes

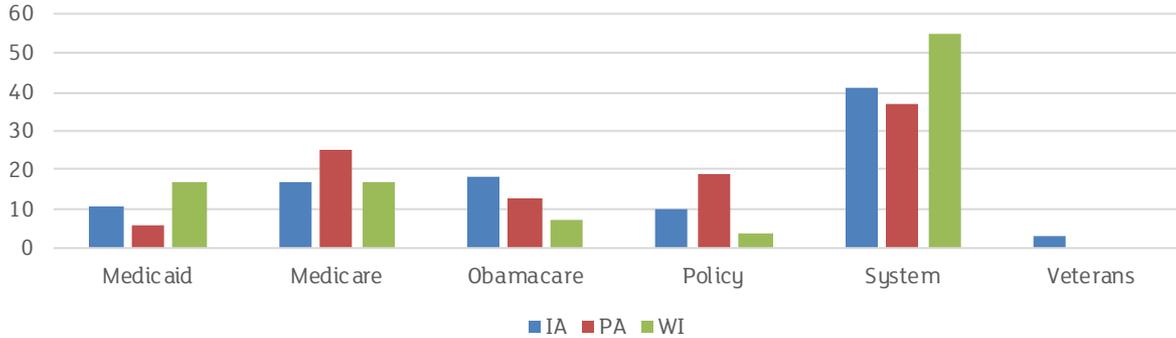
Women’s health is a small but essential issue here as people speak of the importance of focusing Medicare towards the specific needs of women

There is a broad discussion regarding violence and harassment against women. Women share stories of male physical aggression which either they or someone they know has experienced. They also discuss general harassment and how many men simply don't understand that such behaviour is not acceptable

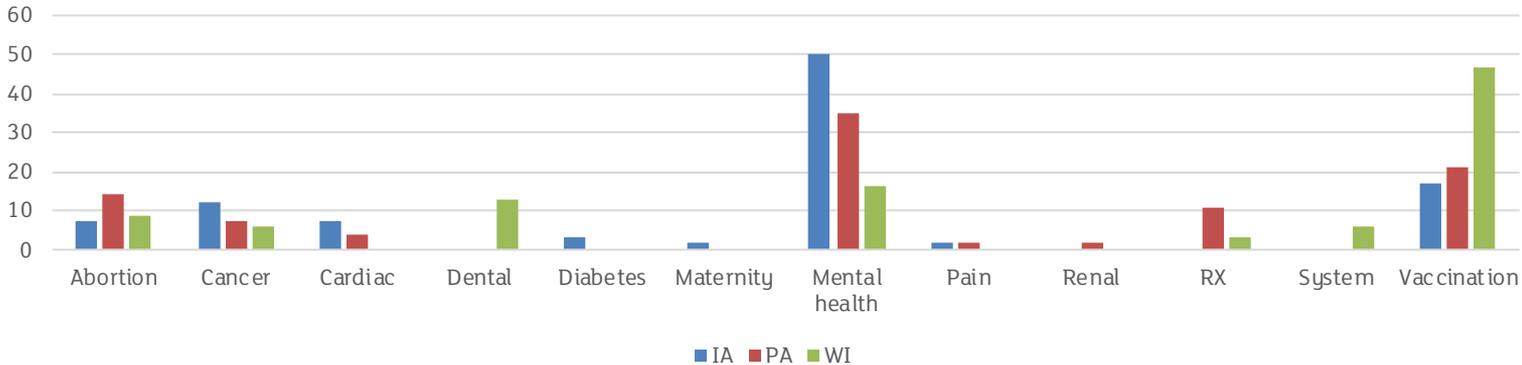
Similarly, conversations around sexism and misogyny are being shared by men who happily go online to discuss women, share jokes and make comments which are demeaning and often derogatory

On a more positive note, women encourage one another and share a desire to see more women succeed. It is clear that they see inequality as something which must be fought and see no reason why more women can't succeed in all walks of life – particularly business. The Democratic primary race also creates positive discussion, particularly in Iowa where women candidates enjoy much support

Healthcare



Health

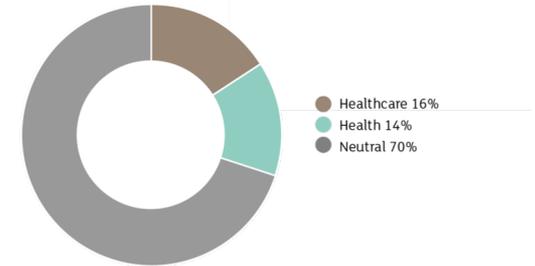


38,000 original posts



2,132 unique authors

DISCUSSION SPLIT



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states. The donut chart shows the average discussion split across the three states combined

Key takeaways:

- There is online rage about the US healthcare system, but it lacks a clear focus as it is often driven by politics/ideology
- Whilst individual and community health concerns remain private, people in social media conversations are willing to talk about the underlying policy issues with reference to their personal experience
- There is a sense that political space exists for a genuine offer to voters which addresses widespread eagerness to fix a broken system – and that many understand that this may come at significant cost

Social media discussion:

Healthcare

There is a common thread of anger in social media conversations about healthcare. People are enraged about:

- the cost of general medical care;
- access to services;
- restrictions on specialist (often higher-cost) treatment;
- political failure to fix a system widely considered ‘broken’;
- concerns about the role of insurers;
- medicine prices

The rage about healthcare lacks a common cause. Sentiment is split between anger at failed efforts to support, reform – or repeal – ‘Obamacare’ and general dissatisfaction with elements of Medicare or Medicaid. Some blame policies of the Trump administration, others blame Democratic politicians for inadequate energy

However, the strongest sentiment is simply rage at ‘the system’ – that it shouldn’t be like this, and that politicians should do something to make things work better

In this context, Medicare For All is regularly quoted as an option worthy of greater consideration. Ending budget cuts for Medicare and Medicaid programs are often mentioned. There is also praise for Democratic Governor Evers’ signing-up Wisconsin to federal support for Medicaid

Health

In the parallel online conversation about health in general, news items such as vaccination provoke interest and comment. Mental health receives more attention than most other issues. People are willing to talk broadly about policy issues – such as access to insulin or support for community mental health outreach services – triggered by their own or their neighbors’ experiences

CLIMATE

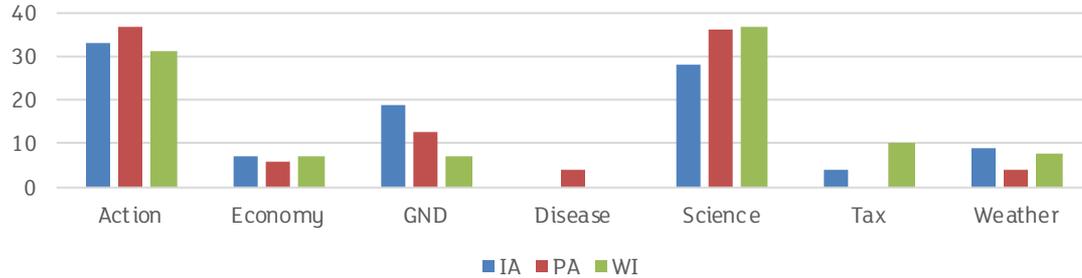


16,000 original posts

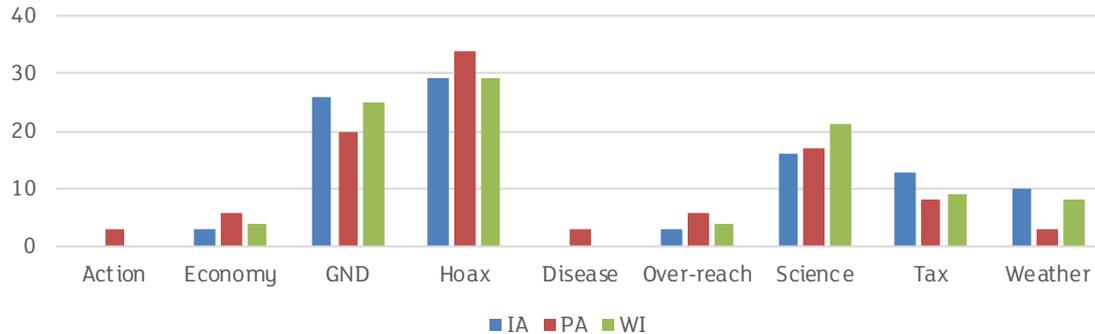


975 unique authors

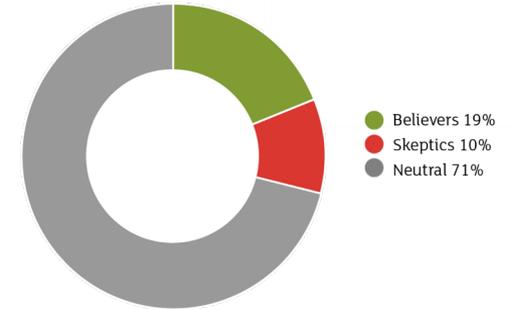
Believers



Skeptics



SENTIMENT



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states. The donut chart shows the average sentiment across the three states combined

Key takeaways:

- There appears to be a clear divide between likely supporters of the Republican and Democratic parties, with the shadow of President Trump looming large in this online conversation
- The Green New Deal has achieved significant cut-through and, for both sides, acts as a lightning rod for sentiment
- Amongst those who are 'believers' in climate change – the larger of the two groups by far – there is deep support for 'action', though this political space is still open to leadership and direction

Social media discussion:

Many more people believe in the science of climate change than reject it or use it to justify doing nothing. The Green New Deal (GND) dominates sentiment. There is a hard-core of climate skeptics who believe enthusiasts have 'over-reached' in their effort to prove global warming. They are more thoughtful than those who think the whole thing is a 'hoax', and they appear to include probable Democratic supporters

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) is the most highly visible Democratic Party politician during the period. Her GND proposals are widely discussed in online conversations. Left-leaning and centrist sentiment is largely that the GND could be a start-point for a more developed and deliverable policy

Among probable Republican supporters, there is alarm at the scope of the changes suggested. Among both groups, there is sarcasm, derision and anger that Democratic Senators did not show more active support, and that they were played by Republicans. There is a subtext among GND supporters that current Democratic Senators are a roadblock to progress

The demands for 'action' on climate change are unfocussed but widespread. There is support for the school strike movement, for electric vehicles, for solar power and for (undefined) legislative action. In our analysis, there is also a local issue in Iowa relating to solar energy and a perceived lobbying campaign by energy companies and utilities to close down public support for solar panel installation

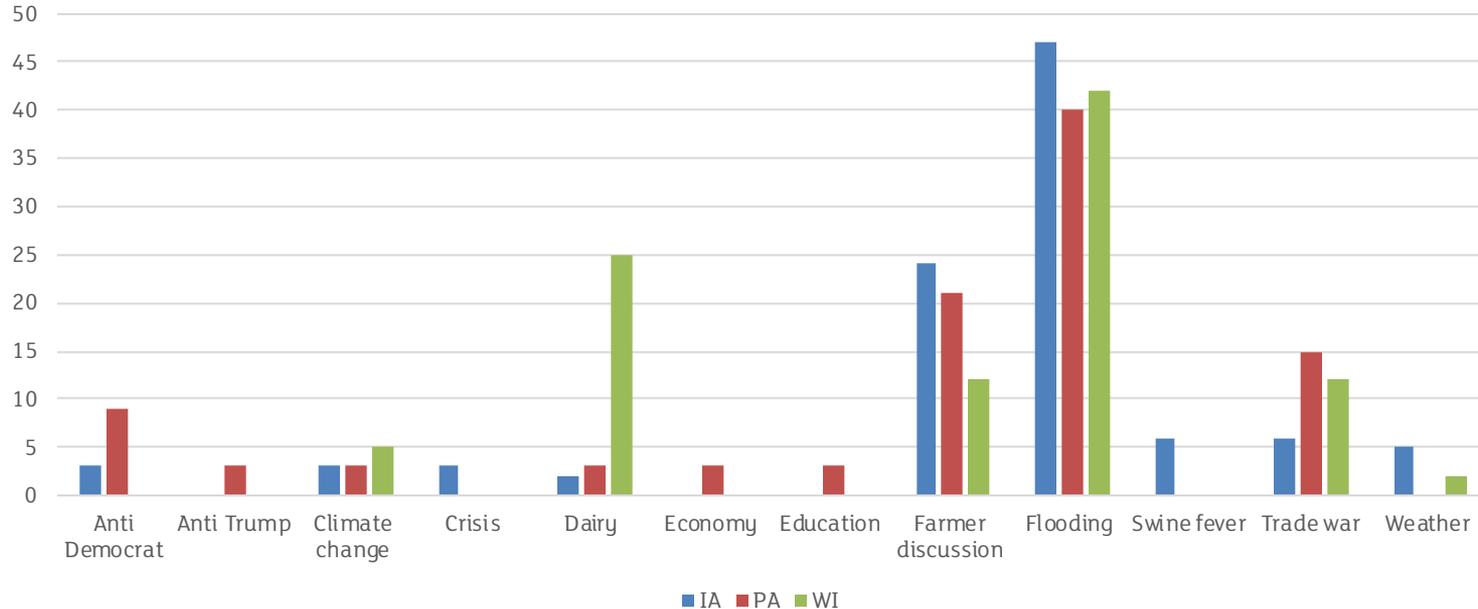
FARMING



11,000 original posts



810 unique authors



Notes on data: The bar chart above shows the proportionate share of key topics (%) in each state. Data numbers (posts and unique authors) are combined total numbers across the three states.

Key takeaways:

- Discussions regarding the impact of severe weather and flooding dominates online chatter in all three states. Included is a real sense that climate change is the cause and needs to be addressed
- Dairy and soybean farmers are unhappy at the impact of the trade war on their industry
- Farmers share disgruntlement that their role is neither sufficiently respected, nor fully appreciated by fellow Americans

Social media discussion:

Discussions regarding the severe weather endured during this period fall into two categories:

- 1.) The impact of flooding on farming such as harm to crops, saturated fields, damage to buildings, roads and bridges
- 2.) The impact on everyday life such as going work/school, canceled sports events, getting to the shops

The conversations clearly reflect the hardship endured. Farmers in particular show concern and fear for their future. Despite this there exists a real sense of community with people informing one another of where support can be found, alternative routes and weather warnings

In amongst this discussion is a belief in the impact of climate change. The severity of the weather, coupled by its longevity and the damage caused has left many to either conclude or reaffirm that the issue is real and that something needs to be done

The trade war is also having a detrimental impact on farmers with some speaking of a negative long term outcome. In particular dairy farmers speak of how Trump is driving their industry into extinction. In terms of solutions, a return of the Dairy Pride Act and the lifting of USDA Regulations and new initiatives are being mooted

Soybean farmers are expressing similar sentiment with some speaking of bankruptcy and how Trump's solo fight against the Chinese is resulting in Brazilian and Australian farmers stepping in and stealing their customers

Of note in the general farming discussion (marketing, offers, events etc), is a grumble that their role is not respected enough. They believe more appreciation should be shown to those who feed America

Remaining topics of conversations prevalent in all three states refer to general concerns such as swine flu, efforts towards GM foods, methane and falling incomes