



# DYNAMICS OF THE TOPICS AND DRIVERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCUSSIONS RELATED TO IMMIGRATION POLICY IN CANADA

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# AGENDA SETTING THEORY

**Agenda-setting involves the transfer of salience from the media to the public**  
(Kiousis 2011)

Media news was at time the predominant or the only source of information for the public (Lippman, 1922)

Choice of issues covered by the news media can define public agenda (Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller, 1980)

Social media provides a different source of information (crowd-sourcing), which could contribute to agenda setting

# UNDERSTANDING AGENDA SETTING IS IMPORTANT

Defines what the public will worry about

Bias can be introduced by the choice of topic (Puglisi, 2011)

News coverage is more responsive to unexpected adverse events than to unexpected positive events (Costa and Kahn 2017).

The news media channels can play watchdog or lapdog roles (Puglisi 2011).

# SHIFT...

Journalists working for news media typically share common principles (Deuze 2005):

*Public service, Objectivity, Autonomy, Immediacy, and Ethics*

Individuals sharing information on social media are **not** bound by such principles

A background network diagram consisting of a complex web of thin grey lines connecting various circular nodes. The nodes vary in size and color, including light blue, grey, and white. Some nodes are highlighted with larger, semi-transparent circles of the same color. A vertical blue line is positioned to the left of the main title.

# RESEARCH QUESTION

Could social media re-define or change the public agenda?

- Is it the case?
- To what extent is it different from the agenda proposed by traditional media?

# GENERAL TOPIC SELECTION: IMMIGRATION

Immigration conversations during federal election campaign 2019

Immigration as a topic can lead to polarized discussions (Vilella et al. 2020)

Discussions on immigration happen even among people who are not affected or directly exposed to events (Gualda and Rebollo, 2016)

Therefore, it was deemed an appropriate topic to consider, leading to potentially interesting agenda items.

A background network diagram consisting of various sized circles (nodes) in shades of blue and grey, connected by thin grey lines. The nodes are scattered across the page, with some larger nodes and some smaller ones. The overall pattern is a complex web of connections.

# AGENDA ITEMS

Language is used to determine “shared conversations”

Ideology adopted or promoted by a participant will be reflected by the choice of words made (Van Dijk, 2003)

# DATA COLLECTION

Use of Twitter crawler (Thingnes, 2019) based on the Twitter's Search API

3,548,769 tweets collected for three time periods in 2019:

- 11-29 May (pre election);
- 23 July - 29 August (pre election);
- 31 October- 20 November (post election).

The periods were selected because they included the federal election in Canada on October 21, 2019. It was expected to be an active period for politicians and commentators to actively engage in discussions on immigration.



# HASHTAGS

#	Hashtag	Number of tweets	Description of the hashtag
1	#immigration	214632	Issues and topics related to immigration
2	#immigrationcanada	220	Immigration in Canada
3	#immigrationmatters	3111	Encouraging conversation about the benefits of immigration for Canadian communities
4	#refugeeswelcome	33557	Campaign advocating for welcoming refugees in Canada
5	#cdnpoli	1636472	Canadian politics
6	#qcpoli	9451	Quebec politics
7	#Quebec_immigration_injustice	7288	Campaign denouncing an immigration reform in Quebec
8	#Asylum	22727	Asylum issues
9	#AsylumSeekers	14079	Asylum seekers issues
10	#stop_bill9	7	Related to Bill 9 that introduces changes to the Québec Skilled Worker Program and Immigration to Canada

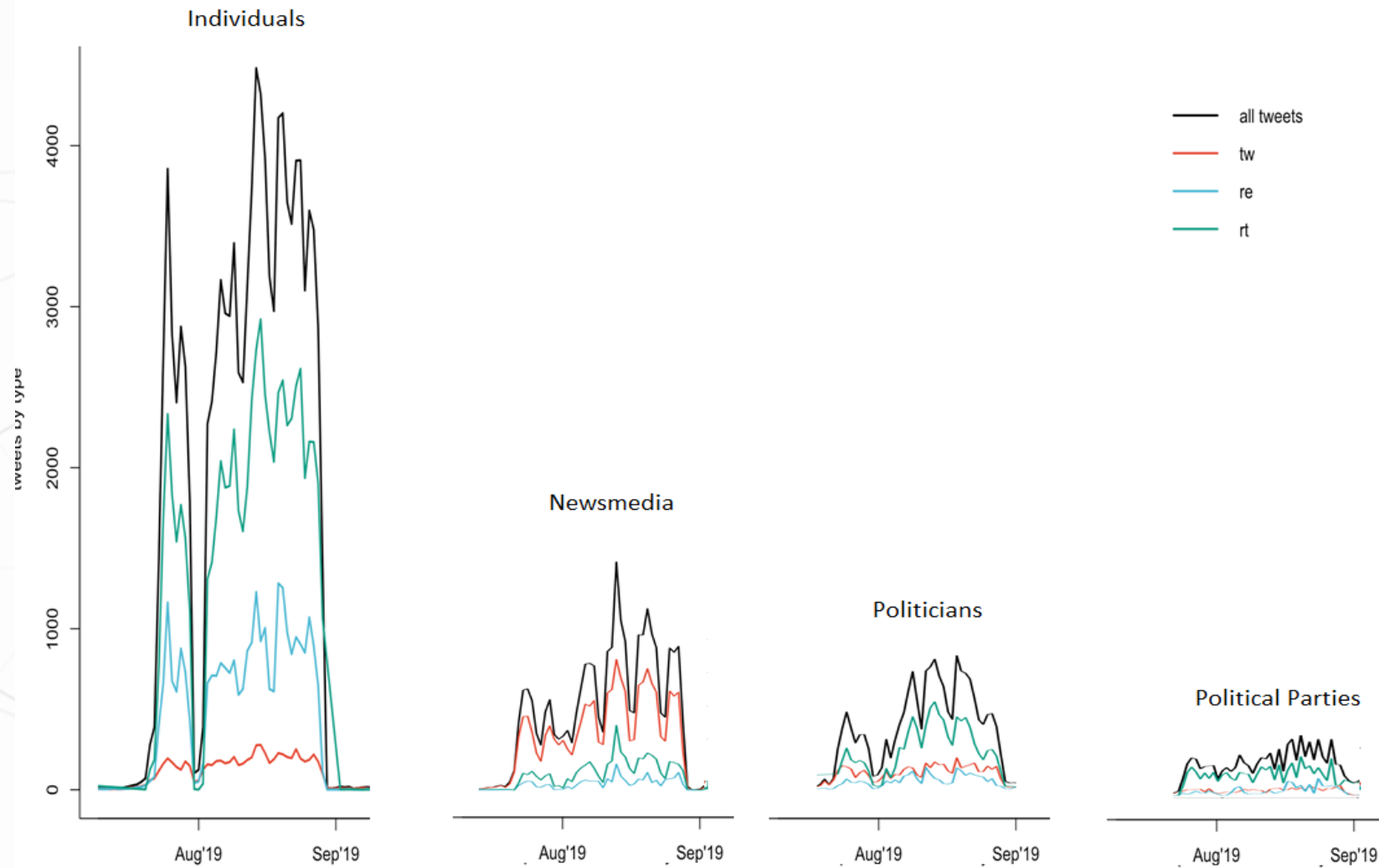
# TWITTER ACCOUNTS FOLLOWED

#	Twitter handle	Description
1	@MaximeBernier	Canadian MPthe founder of the People's Party of Canada (PPC)
2	@peoplespca	Political party
3	@ppopulaireca	Political party
4	@fordnation	Premier of Ontario
5	@canadavisa_com	immigration feed
6	@Pier21	museum of immigration
7	@Newcomers_Ca	Talent attraction experts for Canadian employers
8	@CBCNews	National news (public)
9	@iciradiocanada	National news (public)
10	@JdeMontreal	Regional news (private)
11	@nationalpost	National news (private)
12	@globeandmail	National news (private)
13	@MIDI_QC	ministry of immigration
14	@SJB_CAQ	Quebec minister of immigration
15	@CitiesMigration	Project from Ryerson U
16	@TashaKheiriddin	Journalist
17	@mbockcote	Columnist
18	@ImmigrantQuebec	Organization helping migrants
19	@RiMartineau	Columnist
20	@FaithGoldy	Political commentator (usually associated with far right supremacists)
21	@Plaroch	Commentator (usually associated with right-wing nationalists)

# DATA COLLECTED: EIGHT GROUPS OF TOP 2000 USERS

Group	Number of coded handles	Description and example
Newsmedia	475	News media (e.g., @cbcnews, @nationalpost, @globeandmail)
Politician	384	Canadian politicians (e.g., @fordnation, @maximebernier)
Political party	82	Account(s) of political party (e.g., @peoplespca)
Event/org	131	E.g., @debates_can, @judicialwatch
Government or agency	107	@uscis, @gotransit
Expert/org	99	@nitesh_mynation, @uoft, @gordongchang
Individuals	462	@mikeggibbs, @jaggermickoz
Cultural/ influencers	75	@deniseincanada, @mapleleafs

# CONTRIBUTORS



# FIRST OBSERVATION

Individuals form the bulk of traffic

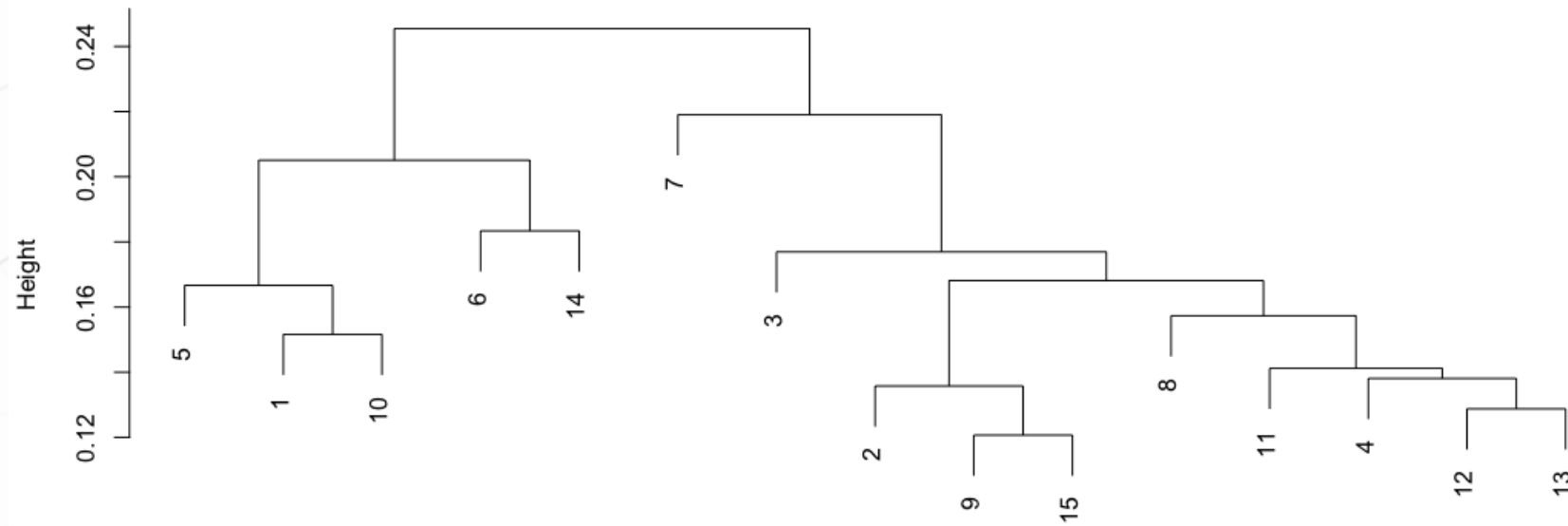
Media produce a much higher proportion of original content

Individuals mostly retweet – selection of the topics to retweet could influence agenda

Governments, experts, events, or cultural organizations were not very active compared to the first four groups (individuals, media, politicians, and political parties)

# TOPIC MODELING

Cluster dendrogram, 15 topics, set 5



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# FOR EACH TOPIC

Assessment of the content of the most representative tweets

Assessment of the content of the most retweeted messages

## Sample of representative tweets :

**Norman Spector** @nspector4  
A man has a greater chance of having a baby than Canada has of getting an abortion law like Alabama's #cdnpoli

**Katie Telford** @telfordk  
Alabama is closer than we think - "any presumption that Canada is a unique country untouched by what's happening in Alabama is made entirely at our own peril" @anne\_kingston

#AbortionIsAWomansRight #ProChoice #standforchoice  
Macleans.ca macleans.ca/opinion/alabam...

10:27 AM · May 20, 2019

206 67 people are Tweeting about this

**earthling** @candymaptones  
thanks @sandhubhamra for your excellent 5

**Rex Glacier** @rexglacier  
Once again John Tory makes shit up like his Liberal masters in Ottawa, none of these guns were on the streets but the gangsters with guns are...

Toronto gun buyback nets 2,700 firearms as part of effort to reduce gun violence [ctvnews.ca/canada/toronto...](http://ctvnews.ca/canada/toronto...) #cdnpoli

1:35 PM · May 19, 2019

120 90 people are Tweeting about this

**Elizabeth May** @ElizabethMay  
The Greens are not running "against" anyone. We are running FOR our future: honest hope in the face of the climate emergency, stronger social safety net, ending poverty. And decision making more like what you advocate in TDFD. #GPC #cdnpoli

## Top 6 most retweeted tweets in this topic:

**Brian Lilley** @brianlilley  
So let me get this straight... The country just elected a man who wore blackface more times than he can say, who backs a values test for immigrants but only to Quebec, backed dropping Quebec's immigration level and was weak on Bill 21. But Don Cherry is the big problem? #cdnpoli

4:04 PM · Nov 10, 2019

5.7K 2.7K people are Tweeting about this

**Naomi Smith** @pimlicat  
Britain doesn't just need the "brightest and the best" talent from abroad. We also need the kindest. And the diligent. And the patient. And the wise. To care for our sick, our elderly and our children. The NHS is on its knees. #immigration 1/2

3:28 AM · Nov 18, 2019

4.6K 1.3K people are Tweeting about this

**Richard Corbett** @RichardGCorbett

**Mike Hudema** @MikeHudema  
Wow. This is what #climate leadership looks like. #Denmark's new gov't unveils one of the world's most ambitious green plans. 70% reduction target by 2030 enshrined into law.

Who's next?

#ActOnClimate #Energy #climatestrike #GreenNewDeal #cdnpoli @GretaThunberg @justinTrudeau [pic.twitter.com/4UPpbYVXmr](https://pic.twitter.com/4UPpbYVXmr)

8:32 PM · Nov 16, 2019

4.5K 1.7K people are Tweeting about this

**Derek Fildebrandt** @Dfildbrandt  
If you think Don Cherry should be fired but Trudeau shouldn't, you might be a Liberal.

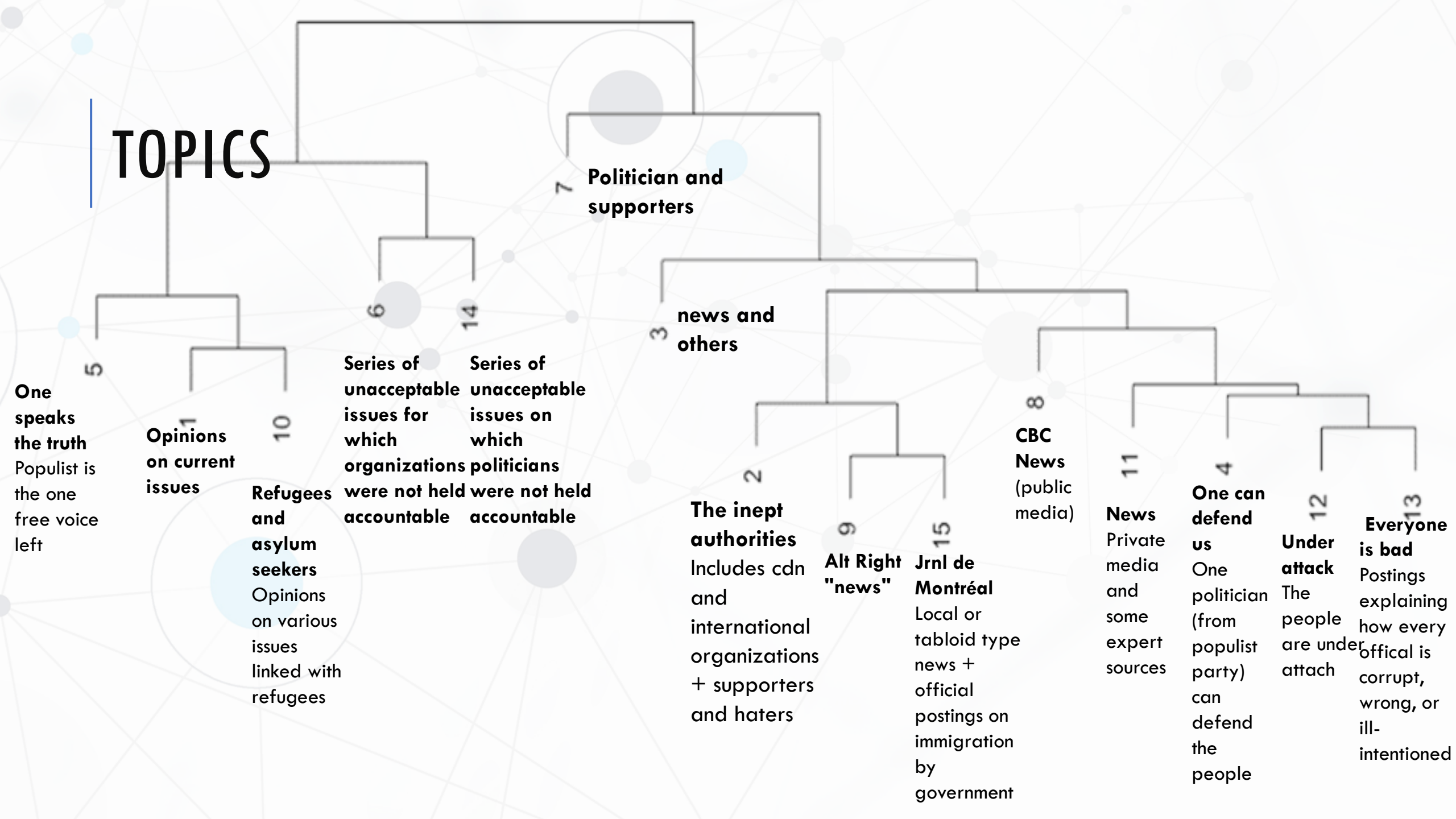
#cdnpoli #ableg

6:31 PM · Nov 10, 2019

4.5K 1.5K people are Tweeting about this

0.205555555555555

# TOPICS



7 **Politician and supporters**

3 **news and others**

8 **CBC News**  
(public media)

2 **The inept authorities**  
Includes cdn and international organizations + supporters and haters

9 **Alt Right "news"**

15 **Jrnl de Montréal**  
Local or tabloid type news + official postings on immigration by government

11 **News**  
Private media and some expert sources

4 **One can defend us**  
One politician (from populist party) can defend the people

12 **Under attack**  
The people are under attack

13 **Everyone is bad**  
Postings explaining how every official is corrupt, wrong, or ill-intentioned

6 **Series of unacceptable issues for which organizations were not held accountable**

14 **Series of unacceptable issues on which politicians were not held accountable**

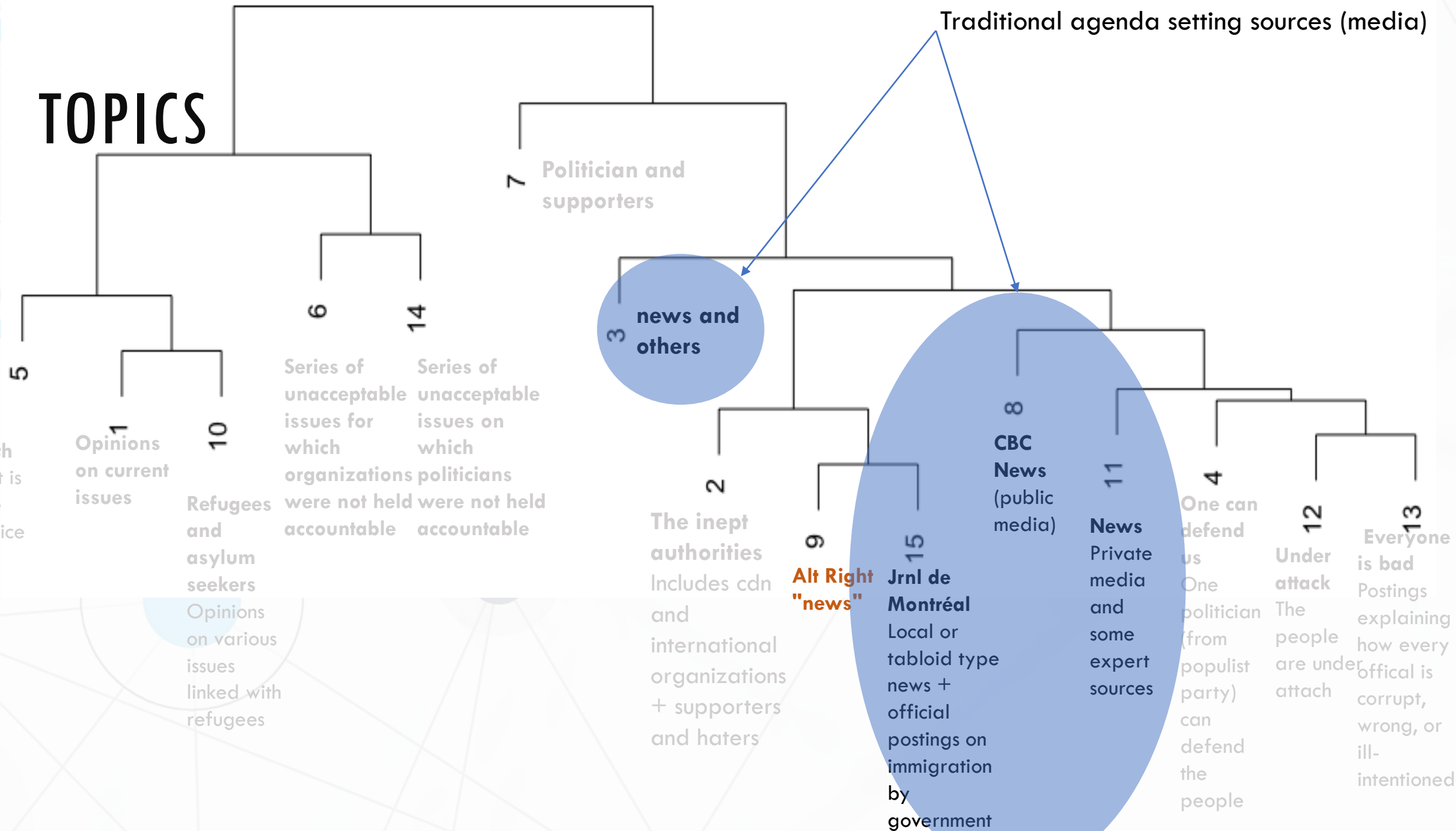
10 **Refugees and asylum seekers**  
Opinions on various issues linked with refugees

1 **Opinions on current issues**

5 **One speaks the truth**  
Populist is the one free voice left



# TOPICS



# FIRST INSIGHTS

Only four of the 15 conversations were mainly containing information deemed “neutral” that would be abiding by journalism standards – these were the “traditional agenda setting conversations

One conversation was mainly a “pseudo-journalistic” alt-right source

The 10 other conversations were made of opinions

- Only one of the 10 contained different opinions (representing both sides of a topic). The other 9 were mainly one-sided

# IMPLICATION FOR AGENDA SETTING

Traditional media are not the main source of agenda setting on social media

Agenda setting is not about topic (as it used to be), it is now about opinion

- We are moving from “what you should think about” to “what you should think”

Politicians and parties have a direct voice in agenda setting – unmediated

Special interest groups (alt-right in our sample) have a direct voice into the setting of the agenda

Discussion (exchange of different ideas) is very limited

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