



# Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action

By Helen Margetts, Peter John, Scott Hale, Taha Yasseri

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As people spend increasing proportions of their daily lives using social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, they are being invited to support myriad political causes by sharing, liking, endorsing, or downloading. Chain reactions caused by these tiny acts of participation form a growing part of collective action today, from neighborhood campaigns to global political movements. *Political Turbulence* reveals that, in fact, most attempts at collective action online do not succeed, but some give rise to huge mobilizations--even revolutions.

Drawing on large-scale data generated from the Internet and real-world events, this book shows how mobilizations that succeed are unpredictable, unstable, and often unsustainable. To better understand this unruly new force in the political world, the authors use experiments that test how social media influence citizens deciding whether or not to participate. They show how different personality types react to social influences and identify which types of people are willing to participate at an early stage in a mobilization when there are few supporters or signals of viability. The authors argue that pluralism is the model of democracy that is emerging in the social media age--not the ordered, organized vision of early pluralists, but a chaotic, turbulent form of politics.

This book demonstrates how data science and experimentation with social data can provide a methodological toolkit for understanding, shaping, and perhaps even predicting the outcomes of this democratic turbulence.

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### Editorial Review

Review

**One of The *Guardian's* Best Politics Books of 2016, chosen by Gaby Hinsliff**

"[C]ontributes an important series of creatively and rigorously researched insights into the social mechanics of Internet-based collective action, handing researchers a new toolbox of methods and techniques in the process."--*Science*

"A comprehensive study."--**Ivor Gaber, *Times Higher Education***

"A revelatory study."--**Stuart Weir, *Open Democracy UK***

"Sheds interesting light on the year's great upheavals."--**Gaby Hinsliff, *Guardian Best Politics Books of 2016***

From the Back Cover

"This engagingly written and elegantly designed study tests to their limits half a century's worth of big ideas about collective action. The authors convincingly show why information signals, visibility, and the distribution of thresholds are important for explaining the pace and scale of political engagement. Essential reading if you want to understand how it all kicks off online."--**Andrew Chadwick, author of *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power***

"This compelling book shows how, when, and why individuals decide to join online collective actions, and what makes those actions scale up. Using a fascinating array of cases taken from the news headlines of our time, the authors draw an important set of conclusions about democracy in turbulent times. *Political Turbulence* provides invaluable insights into political participation, individual choice, and democracy in an age of changing societies and politics."--**Lance Bennett, University of Washington**

"*Political Turbulence* is an exciting book. The authors bring a psychological perspective to the analysis of experimental results and big data to tell an insightful and fresh story about social media and collective action dynamics at the individual level."--**Bruce Bimber, author of *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power***

"This is great, adventurous social science."--**Philip N. Howard, coauthor of *Democracy's Fourth Wave?: Digital Media and the Arab Spring***

About the Author

**Helen Margetts** is professor of society and the Internet and director of the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford. **Peter John** is professor of political science and public policy at University College London. **Scott Hale** is a data scientist at the Oxford Internet Institute. **Taha Yasseri** is a research fellow in computational social science at the Oxford Internet Institute.

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