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Mobilization vs. Demobilization Discourses on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

While scholarly attention has been devoted to social media's potential mobilizing function, they may also contribute to demobilization discourses: social communication actively promoting nonvoting. This paper examines discourses around mobilization vs. demobilization in the context of the municipal elections in Jerusalem. As the sweeping majority of East Jerusalem Palestinians have continuously been boycotting Jerusalem's municipal elections, this is a potent case through which to examine how demobilization functions in action, through social media conversations. Using a mixed-methods analysis of Twitter contents as structured by different languages, our findings show how mobilization and demobilization discourses can co-occur during the same election event. Users of different languages – reflecting different social and political identities – interpret the elections in contrasting ways, with tangible implications for (in)equality in political participation. The study thus contributes theoretically to several domains of political communication, including election studies, local politics, and language fragmentation in online political discourse.

In democratic contexts, elections are meant to provide all eligible citizens an equal voice. However, democracies often suffer from inequalities in participation, resulting in unequal political voice for some citizens vs. others. As Verba et al. (1995, p. 1) claim: "Since democracy implies not only government responsiveness to citizen interests but equal consideration of the interests of all citizens, democratic participation must also be equal."

In their analysis of US politics, Verba et al. (1995, p. 16) claim that three main factors explain why Americans do not take part in politics: they don't have the necessary resources, they lack sufficient motivation, or they are not embedded in networks of recruitment. However, their focus on the *mobilizing* role of social networks assumes full democracies, and social contexts in which democratic participation is the norm. As Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck (2012) claim, most political communication research to date has assumed that voter abstention derives mostly from a *lack* of active encouragement. Yet, people's willingness to vote may also be *actively undermined* by communication asking them to abstain, or downplaying the importance of the election. This is known as

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the social logic of *de*mobilization: an active disincentive to voting, operating through communication (Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010).

Understanding the social logic of demobilization is central to addressing inequalities in democratic participation. While most democratic theory assumes that being embedded in political communication networks would increase participation (Verba et al., 1995), the demobilization perspective shows how under circumstances where the dominant social norm is *one of nonvoting*, active communication with other nonvoters may suppress turnout (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012). In such contexts, communication may actually increase democratic gaps in participation, exacerbating inequality in political voice.

Demobilization has so far been studied in the context of Western democracies (e.g., Germany, the US), among citizens enjoying full democratic rights. In this study, we consider how complex local political contexts, where some groups are institutionally disenfranchised, may shape mobilization and demobilization processes. To do so, we choose a local context where inequality in political voice is extreme. In the contested city of Jerusalem, both Jewish-Israelis and East Jerusalem Palestinians are entitled to vote in local elections; however, the sweeping majority of East Jerusalem Palestinians have continuously been boycotting the municipal elections, as electoral participation is widely considered as recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the city (Prince-Gibson, 2018). The extent of this boycott, which has been reinforced by the Palestinian authority, led to a stably low voter turnout among East Jerusalem Palestinians, particularly since 1989 (averaging 3.25%, in contrast to the general voter turnout of around 68%, see Seidemann, 2018). While the clear consequence of the boycott is that East Jerusalem Palestinians lack political representation within the city, this trend in fact reflects the political complexity of a context where full democratic rights cannot be taken for granted for all.

While demobilization processes have so far been studied in face-to-face contexts (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010), we examine such discourses as naturally occurring on social media. In today's hybrid media environment, social media, which combine and reshape both mainstream media messages and interpersonal communication (Chadwick, 2013), cannot be ignored as a locus for voicing and negotiating political standpoints. In our case, we see social media conversations as a means for voicing opinions within the manifest Israeli-Palestinian struggle over meaning (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2013). Here, the struggle concerns the interpretation of the municipal elections in Jerusalem.

Focusing empirically on local Twitter content, we ask: How is participation in the Jerusalem elections interpreted by different groups in the Jerusalem Twittersphere? And how are these interpretations connected to discourses around mobilization/demobilization? To answer this, we employ a mixed-method analysis, combining an analysis of Twitter networks, automated topic modeling of Twitter messages, and qualitative analysis of emergent themes. Our multi-layered analysis shows how, in a single local context, users of different languages – reflecting different social and political identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004) – interpret the election in contrasting ways, with contrasting implications about how citizens should partake politically. Based on our findings, we offer a broader theoretical model presenting the potential cumulative effects of the social logics of mobilization and demobilization.

Mobilization and Demobilization, Face-to-face and through Social Media

Face-to-face social networks have long been recognized as important structures for political mobilization, in what is known as the "social logic" of mobilization (Zuckerman, 2005). Voting specifically has been described as a "contagious" behavior that can "spread" from person to person. Face-to-face mobilization is particularly effective when using social pressure and appealing to social identity (e.g., Gerber & Green, 2000). Social pressure is an important mechanism for voter mobilization; people are more likely to vote when their action is publicized (Gerber et al., 2008). The implications of findings from face-to-face contexts to social media mobilization are more ambiguous. A controversial large-scale study conducted by Facebook researchers (Bond et al., 2012), offering a clickable "I voted" button, found mobilization effects, leading to claims that social media platforms are effective venues for voter mobilization. A meta-analysis (Boulianne, 2015) found moderate indications for a relationship between social media use and election campaign activities (e.g., voting, encouraging others to vote), with approximately 68% of the coefficients positive and 27% statistically significant.

While research to date has mostly examined the mobilizing role of social networks, on- or off-line, the perspective highlighting demobilization as an active social dynamic is a rather new one. As Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck (2012) claim, voter abstention has generally been assumed to derive mostly from a *lack* of active encouragement. However, people's willingness to vote may also be *actively undermined* by communication asking them to abstain, or downplaying the importance of the election. Scholars studying demobilization as an electoral behavior (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010) argue that under some conditions, we may find an active disincentive to voting, operating through communication (Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). In this "social logic" of demobilization, abstention from voting is not only the consequence of insufficient enforcement of the voting norm – rather, in some segments of the electorate the dominant social norm may *be one of nonvoting*. In this case, active communication with other nonvoters may suppress voter turnout. Such messages may come both from the mass media and from interpersonal communication (Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010) – both of which today often take place through social media.

Demobilization processes have been studied in face-to-face contexts (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010) but not on social media, which are a key component in citizens' current political media environment (Chadwick, 2013). Moreover, demobilization has so far been studied in the national context of Western democracies (e.g., Germany, the US), among citizens enjoying full democratic rights. In this study, we consider how complex local political contexts, where some groups are institutionally disenfranchised, shape mobilization and demobilization discourses on social media.

The Local Political Context: Jerusalem as a Contested Space

Political communication studies have often neglected investigating local contexts (Lang, 2000), whose importance Friedland (2016, p. 25) explains: "Citizens live in blocks and in neighborhoods, which […] determine their schools, their taxes, their food choices; their transportation and livelihoods." This is particularly true for a city like Jerusalem, which is

structured by contestation and inequalities along ethnic and religious lines (Shtern, 2016), which are in turn often reflected and reinforced through language use. In Jerusalem, we can expect this divide to map onto the political discourse around voter mobilization and demobilization.

To understand the current context of electoral behavior in Jerusalem, some historical context is needed. Jerusalem has been considered contested since the 1967 War, when the Israeli government annexed the Jordanian part to the Israeli Western part of the city. Palestinian residents remaining in the city were given "permanent residency," contingent upon proving continuous physical presence in the city, and prohibiting them from voting in national elections or holding an Israeli passport (Shtern, 2016). They *are* entitled to vote in municipal elections, and can run for the Municipal Council – though only Israeli citizens may run for Mayor.

Despite this legal right, the sweeping majority of East Jerusalem Palestinians have been continuously boycotting the municipal elections, as electoral participation is widely considered as recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the city (Prince-Gibson, 2018). This collective boycott has been continuously reinforced by the Palestinian authority. In the six rounds of municipal elections that took place since 1989, voter turnout among East Jerusalem Palestinians has averaged 3.25% (Seidemann, 2018), meaning that East Jerusalem Palestinians lack political representation within the city. The boycott must be understood in relation to a political context where full democratic norms cannot be taken for granted.

In the recent 2018 election round, there were some signs of a possible attitudinal change. According to a poll published in July by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (2018), 22% of East Jerusalem Palestinians indicated that they have considered voting, or are intending to vote, in the municipal elections. In another survey of East Jerusalem Palestinians, 58% said that East Jerusalem Palestinians *should* vote in the municipal elections (Leonard Davis Institute, 2018). Eventually, however, only 1.6% of East Jerusalem Palestinians voted in the 2018 municipal elections (Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2019).

To understand how mobilization/demobilization discourses may co-occur during the same election among different groups, we examined language networks within the Jerusalem Twittersphere. While political communication on Twitter has been extensively studied in the US context, where it is a dominant mainstream platform, it has received only limited attention in the Israeli context, where Twitter is a more niche platform used prominently by journalists, opinion leaders, and celebrities (Tenenboim, 2017). Accordingly, its usage rates in Israel are lower than in the US. Among Israelis, Twitter is used by around 10% of the adult population (Bezeq Report, 2017), and among Palestinians, around 18% (Social Studio, 2017). This lower penetration rate means that Twitter does not represent the population at large. However, as a platform used to disseminate news and information during major political events in Israel (Tenenboim, 2017), Twitter is an appropriate site to study public processes of mobilization/demobilization.

Communication Networks and the Structuring Role of Language

Processes of mobilization/demobilization around the municipal elections in Jerusalem occur in the context of users employing different languages in a shared local space[1]. In the contested city of Jerusalem, we encounter three main languages. The vast majority (80%-90%) of the Jewish-Israeli population in Israel speaks Hebrew (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Among Arabs in Israel, 98% speak Arabic at home. More than 60% of Arabs in Israel speak Hebrew well or very well, though about 25% of them read little to no Hebrew. In terms of Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem, though they live in the same city, mutual encounters are relatively limited. East Jerusalem Palestinians usually live in segregated neighborhoods, though they increasingly visit West Jerusalem for commerce and leisure (Shtern, 2016). West Jerusalem Jews rarely visit East Jerusalem neighborhoods, which are perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming spaces for them. As Tsfati (2007) claims, "severe, mutual mistrust, hatred, and alienation exist between Jews and Arabs in Israel" (p. 638). Jerusalem also has a large English-speaking contingent, including expatriates, international journalists, NGO employees and diplomats, whose political affiliation is more ambiguous. Both professionally and personally, different English-speakers in Jerusalem may be more strongly embedded within networks of either Hebrew- or Arabic-speakers.

For our empirical examination, we consider the structuring role of language in communication networks through two theoretical concepts: *homophilous clustering* and *linguistic bridges*. Homophily – the tendency to form social connections with similar others – is the most significant mechanism of social network cohesion (McPherson et al., 2001). From the macro perspective, homophily leads to the emergence of homogenous clusters, with languages and national affiliation playing significant roles (Bruns et al., 2013). Although homogenous language clusters are likely to structure the Twittersphere of Jerusalem, it is very unlikely that these clusters are hermetically isolated from one another. On the contrary, social networks usually feature bridging weak ties, connecting the more densely interconnected cohesive subgroups of users. The literature suggests that users establishing so-called *linguistic bridges* either use English as a "lingua franca," or communicate in multiple languages. For example, Bruns et al. (2013, p. 890) studied interaction patterns among language communities on Twitter during the Arab Spring and found tentative indication that multilingual users serve a bridging position between the Arab and the non-Arab language communities.

Based on these relations between language and network formation, we expect to find a strong political and ideological divide as structured by language: that is, strong homophily *within* and a disconnect *between* linguistic groups. Specifically, we expect the topic of the municipal elections to be debated quite differently in two language camps – Hebrew and Arabic. These different discussion networks may reflect different interpretations of the local election, which in turn may encourage different behavioral outcomes in terms of voting. With regards to the English-speaking contingent, it is an open empirical question whether it's more strongly connected to one of the language networks (Hebrew/Arabic), or whether it can serve a bridging role (see Bruns et al., 2013), that perhaps may ameliorate participation gaps between the groups.

To investigate mobilization and demobilization as reflected on social media in the context of the local Jerusalem Twittersphere, we thus ask:

RQ1: What is the structure of the local Jerusalem Twittersphere discussing the municipal elections, and how is it shaped by language?

RQ2: Within each language network, how is participation in the election interpreted, and how are these interpretations connected to discourses around mobilization/demobilization?

Methods

To address these questions, we employed a mixed-method analysis, with complementary components. Network analysis shows the structure of the local Jerusalem Twittersphere and the extent of interactions between different language networks. Topic modeling helps identify key topics by language and understand the share of mobilization/demobilization-related content in relation to the whole corpus; while qualitative analysis enables interpreting tweets holistically, in their respective cultural contexts. A brief description of each component follows, while the Online Appendix/Data Repository includes full details[2].

Data Collection and Filtering

To capture the local Twitter debate about the municipal elections, we had to first identify users from Jerusalem. We queried Twitter's Search API for messages sent from the area of the center geo-coordinates of Jerusalem and a 20 km radius around it. We collected only original posts (original tweets, replies, quotes), excluding retweets. The 2018 municipal election in Jerusalem evolved across two rounds, as in the first round no candidate reached the necessary 40% share of votes. Our dataset covers the two rounds of the municipal election (October 30, 2018 and November 13, 2018) and ten days preceding and following them (October 20, 2018 – November 26, 2018).[3] The initial dataset consisted of over 323,000 tweets by approximately 7,000 users. To focus only on election-relevant users and messages, multiple steps of filtering and data cleaning were conducted. We filtered the data set by language to include only tweets in the three major languages in Jerusalem: Hebrew, Arabic, and English. This accounted for 66.3% of tweets, with all other languages appearing in very small numbers (under 5% each). On these tweets, we conducted keyword filtering to focus on election-relevant data, based on a list of 37 election-related terms, included in three languages (see Online Appendix). Due to the stark skew of the tweets-per-user distribution (i.e., few users tweet many times while most send only one or two tweets) we considered a maximum of 50 tweets per user. Altogether, 10,852 tweets by 1,299 users were analyzed.

Network Analysis

We used information about user interactions – mentions, replies, and quotes – to reconstruct a communication network for the Jerusalem Twittersphere. Each communicative interaction between a pair of users was defined to represent a directed tie in a user dyad. The frequency of interaction in a relationship of users was taken as a weighting attribute for ties (for the visualization only). After network reconstruction, isolated

nodes – users who do not connect to any other user in the data set – were excluded from further analysis.

Automated Topic Modeling

In order to identify the content of the public debate around the local elections in the Jerusalem Twittersphere, we calculated structural topic models (Roberts et al., 2018). In our study the topic model analysis was used as a supportive means for the qualitative analysis, pre-structuring the debate and situating the qualitatively analyzed tweets in the full spectrum of election-related talk on Twitter. Details on the preparation process for topic modeling can be found in the Online Appendix. Due to the language heterogeneity of our corpus, we followed recent methodological research that found machine translation services to offer a viable and valid solution (e.g., Lucas et al., 2015; Reber, 2019).[4] Following these suggestions, we translated Arabic/Hebrew tweets into English using the *Google Translate* API.

Five candidate topic models with different specifications for the *K* number of topics were calculated (*K* = {10, 15, 20, 25, 30}). Based on disciplinary standards we selected the best interpretable model, while simultaneously considering established quality metrics (Maier et al., 2018).[5] This led to the final model with *K* = 15 topics. The topics were then validated by reading through the documents with high topic proportions (Maier et al., 2018). In the final interpretation, three topics were excluded because their content was deemed uninterpretable. Language effects and further information about the model are available in the Online Appendix.

Qualitative Analysis

While topic modeling enabled us to surface key topics in the Jerusalem Twittersphere, we wanted a deeper, more contextualized understanding of how the election was interpreted in the different languages, and how this was related to mobilization or demobilization discourses. To do so, we employed a qualitative analysis of original-language tweets[6], conducted by researchers fluent in the three languages and embedded in the local context. For the qualitative analysis, in addition to perusing the full dataset, we zoomed into parts of the corpus focusing on voting/nonvoting, by using the keywords *vote, participate, boycott*, in all three languages (see Kligler-Vilenchik & Literat, 2018 for use of a keyword strategy for qualitative analysis of social media content). This resulted in a sub-sample of 2589 tweets (1202 in Hebrew, 1105 in English, 282 in Arabic)[7]. Our qualitative analysis was inspired by Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), seeking to identify emergent themes for each language. This involved identifying recurring concepts, such as "occupation municipality" or "voting is a betrayal" in Arabic; "Go vote" and "fulfilling a civic duty" in Hebrew; and, in English, a focus on political analysis and prediction. Next, we employed theory-driven analysis to consider how each lingual part of the corpus reflects different interpretations of the election, and how this connects to discourses reflecting mobilization vs. demobilization.

Findings

Arabic users made up the largest sector of the corpus, with 521 users and 4,056 tweets. There were 389 English-speaking users responsible for 2,725 election-related posts. Hebrew-speaking users were the smaller share with 298 users and 2,436 election-related tweets in our corpus. In addition, we had 91 multilingual users writing a total of 1,635 tweets.[8]

RQ1: The Structure of the Local Jerusalem Twittersphere

The structure of the Twitter network was examined based on the communication ties among users. The network visualization in Figure 1 indicates, and quantitative metrics of network analysis further confirm, that ties within the Twitter network are mostly homo-philous between users of the same language (degree of language-assortativity = 0.51)[9] – confirming theoretical expectations (Bruns et al., 2013). Yet beyond this expected pattern, the network tells an interesting story about the connections and bridges between different languages.
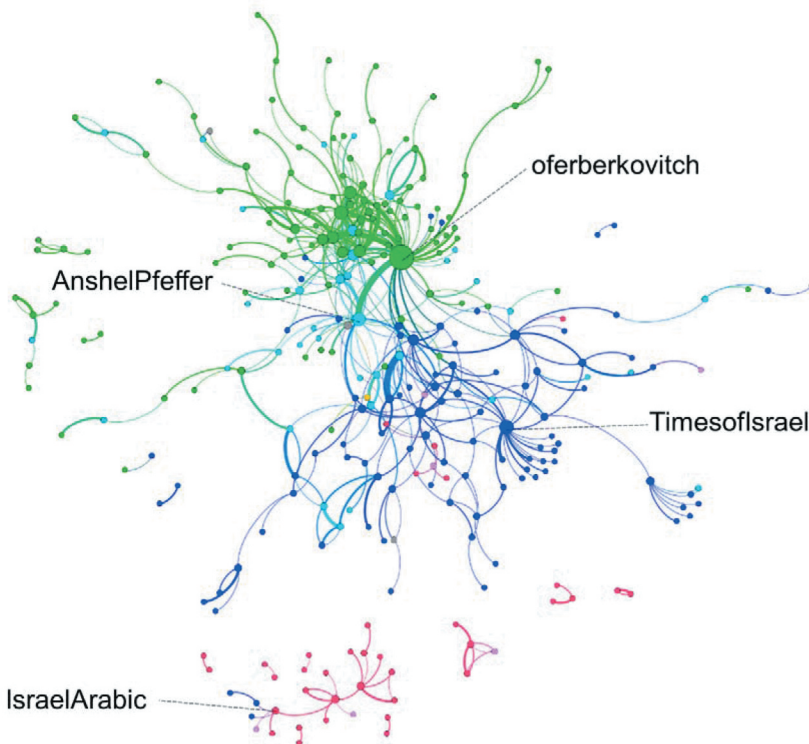

Figure 1. Connected components of the Twitter network.
Note. nodes = users (N = 288); ties = communicative relations (replies, mentions, quotes; N = 451). Colors indicate languages: blue = English; green = Hebrew; red = Arabic; light blue = English & Hebrew; pink = English & Arabic; gray = English & Arabic & Hebrew; yellow = Arabic & Hebrew. Node size proportional to degree; tie thickness proportional to weight. For network visualization, we used Gephi (Bastian et al., 2009); visualization algorithm: Yifan Hu.

Among Hebrew-speakers, we see rich interaction around the elections. The Hebrew-speaking compartment of the network stands out in terms of connectivity, featuring the strongest degree of local clustering (C_{Hebrew} = 0.11) and the highest average degree (D_{Hebrew} = 2.6). In contrast, the Arabic (C_{Arabic} = 0.06, D_{Arabic} = 1.4) and the English ($C_{English}$ = 0.06, $D_{English}$ = 2.2) compartments are less well connected. For Hebrew (marked green), some key nodes include politicians (secular candidate Ofer Berkovitch) and journalists (Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer) and in English (marked blue), news websites (e.g., *The Times of Israel).*

In terms of contact between users of different languages, we find that English-speaking users are strongly intertwined with the Hebrew-speaking community, with connections between journalists, politicians, and individual actors. In contrast, the Hebrew- and English-language network is completely disconnected from the Arabic-language one. Within the Arabic-language component, there is one weak connection to a few English-speaking actors, yet this is created by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) digital diplomacy department (@IsraelArabic), "a resource of information on the State of Israel in Arabic." This connection can be seen as part of Israel's attempts at spreading its message, rather than a sign of bottom-up communication. The disconnect between the English- and Arabic-speaking networks may come as a surprise: in contrast to research showing the bridging position of English-language communication (Bruns et al., 2013), in the Jerusalem Twittersphere the local English-speaking contingent, which could vary in terms of its political affiliation, is found to be strongly connected to one side (Israeli Jews), rather than bridging between Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking communication networks.

The most striking aspect of the election-related Jerusalem Twittersphere is its fragmented nature, which manifests in the isolation of the Arabic-speaking users. Arabic-speaking users (depicted in red) are not only scantly connected to the other language clusters, they are also very minimally connected amongst each other. According to the network typology of Himelboim et al. (2017) the municipality elections network can be classified as a mix of a *fragmented* and a *clustered* network. While the English- and Hebrew-speaking network partitions align well with the clustered type – with multiple small cohesive groups – the Arabic part appears to be torn apart, with a more fragmented character. Importantly, this fragmented network reflects not the full Arabic-speaking Twittersphere of Jerusalem, but rather the *election-related* content. That is, Arabic-speaking users in Jerusalem are not interacting with each other *about the elections*, either because it is not a salient topic of discussion for them, because they are actively ignoring it, or because they are self-censoring due to fear of backlash (see, e.g., Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011). This structural disconnect, particularly between Hebrew- and Arabic-speakers, means that they may be exposed to a completely different discourse around the elections, with contrasting implications for political participation.

RQ2: The Interpretation of the Elections within Each Language Network

To examine the key topics in the election-related Jerusalem Twittersphere, we calculated structural topic models (Roberts et al., 2018). Table 1, listing the topics, shows the extent to which each language's share of the corpus differs topically. In what follows, we conduct a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis by language.

Table 1. Topic model for the election discourse tweets.

Index	Label	Top 10 words (FREX)	Share of Hebrew tweets (%)	Share of English tweets (%)	Share of Arabic tweets (%)	Overall prevalence of topic (%)
Predominantly Hebrew	*The elections and their national ramifications*					
1	Local and national elections	knesset, bibi, bennett, early, coalition, government, likud, election, netanyahu, minister, wing, party, defense, lieberman, netanyahu's	**54**	31	15	6.9
2	Candidates for the municipal elections	berkowitz, leon, ofer, berkovits, moshe, awaken, jerusalemites, deri, secular, likud, public, meretz, support, choose, elkin	**96**	3	1	6.3
3	Religious aspects of the municipal elections	gt, council, yossi, ultra, mayor, shas, rabbi, degel, candidate, orthodox, hatorah, deitch, resident, municipality, faction	**87**	10	3	5.8
4	Political institutions	law, court, democracy, bank, exactly, build, identity, future, talk, join, think, lecturer, state, power, rule	**48**	40	12	5.5
Predominantly English	*Elections – Prediction and interpretation*					
5	Pittsburg shooting	anti, murder, jew, hate, american, pittsburgh, antisemitism, trump, semitism, hatred, synagogue, semitic, white, blame, conservative	11	**87**	2	10.2
6	Election predictions	vote, voter, count, ballot, poll, turnout, box, lion, soldier, win, republican, percentage, result, station, haredi	38	**61**	2	8.8
7	Discussing antisemitism and boycott	boycott, land, muslim, bd, racist, british, u, jewish, century, temple, steal, zionist, jew, allow, expelp	12	**69**	18	6.3
8	Israeli-Palestinian conflict	report, hamas, border, gaza, idf, fire, rocket, fence, palestinian, strike, act, bomb, egyptian, target, terrorist	16	**60**	24	4.5
Predominantly Arabic	*Personal and political life*					
9	Spiritual/poetic discourse	life, love, heart, beautiful, feel, soul, eye, add, away, light, everything, hope, something, smile, face	11	11	**78**	10.1
10	Israeli occupation forces	occupation, occupy, police, village, urgent, camp, town, force, hebron, arrest, photo, settler, storm, shu'fat, al	6	19	**76**	6.3
11	Israeli-Arab relations	visit, participate, foreign, prime, conference, culture, relation, november, minister, synagogue, community, ambassador, netanyahu, oman, ceremony	21	39	**40**	4.4
12	Palestinian resistance	health, ramallah, university, school, martyrdom, child, resistance, hospital, yasser, prisoner, student, medical, anniversary, teacher, arafat	3	5	**92**	4.3

Estimated using the structural topic models R package stm (Roberts et al., 2018). Three topics excluded due to poor interpretability.

Hebrew Language: Actively Partaking in the Elections

The most dominant Hebrew-language topics focus specifically on the Jerusalem municipal elections. Topic 1 (6.9% of the corpus) discusses the local elections in a broader national context. Topics 2 and 3 (summing up to 12.2% of the corpus), focus on the candidates for the municipal elections and on religious aspects of the event, respectively. Topic 4 (5.5% of the corpus), highlights the importance of political institutions in the debate.

A qualitative analysis of the Hebrew-language data shows that the focus on the Jerusalem municipal elections is dominated by calls for active participation. These can be summarized under the proclamation to "go vote." Both individual persons as well as journalists use Twitter to share their own voting experiences, often while making direct calls to their followers to vote:

> On my way to broadcast the local elections in the special studio of @news10 in Jerusalem – going through the ballot boxes. #fulfilled (Media actor[10], October 30)

The hashtag "fulfilled" in Hebrew can be interpreted as fulfilling a duty, but also as exercising a right, and in the emotional sense of feeling fulfilled. Private people were also taking part in the mobilizing discourse surrounding the local election, stating their own opinions, predictions and wishes for the election outcomes, while inviting other users to participate in the discussion:

> Jerusalemites feed, your opinions for tomorrow? Mostly about the [party] lists, for Mayor there are not so many options (Private person, October 29)

The expression "Jerusalemites Feed" is employed by Twitter users to address the community of (Hebrew-speaking) Jerusalem residents in matters concerning the city. Such messages pose the municipal election as a shared topic of interest and experience. Furthermore, users employed a strong normative tone about voting as a desired civic act, exemplified by the common use of the hashtag "go_vote," as in this tweet by the CEO of a local NGO:

> I don't know what it indicates, but long queues in all the ballot boxes in [local West Jerusalem school] #go_vote (Civil society actor, October 30)

A common practice was sharing photos of voting together with children (usually letting the kids insert the envelope into the ballot box), with messages praising their socialization into the democratic ritual. Twitter users even jokingly suggested a sanction for those who do not vote:

> Whoever does not vote tomorrow, won't be entitled to a day off in future elections (there should be such a law) #localelections2019 (Private person, October 29)

Thus, the Hebrew-language Twittersphere devoted a large share of its discussion to the local elections, a discussion integrating private individuals, journalists, and civil society actors. Among Hebrew-language users, the municipal elections were presented as a salient shared phenomenon, one all are taking part in, and which people present as an enjoyable and festive "democratic celebration." In this discourse, voting – often recognized as a key participatory act for the democratic citizen (Verba et al., 1995) – was encouraged normatively as a common and expected act for every citizen. Research suggests that such messages may exert social pressure (Gerber & Green, 2000), with a potential mobilizing effect (Bond et al., 2012; Boulianne, 2015).

English Language: Partakers in the Election or Neutral Observers?

English tweets in our corpus also discussed the municipal elections (Topic 6, 8.8% of the corpus), though from a more external point of view, focusing on election predictions. The overall scope of the English discussion is broader than the Hebrew one, including topics such as the Pittsburg

shooting (Topic 5, 10.2% of the corpus), antisemitism and boycott (Topic 7, 6.3% of the corpus) and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Topic 8, 6.8% of the total corpus).

We know from the network analysis that the English-speaking contingent is more strongly connected to the Hebrew-speaking one. The qualitative analysis underscores this connection, showing that the municipal elections discussion in English is similar to that in Hebrew in terms of its emotional valence. English tweets also invoke a positive view of the local election, promoting it as a shared experience, and mobilizing people to vote, as in this tweet by a European-born freelance journalist covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

> I voted. Have you? (Media actor, October 30)

A new immigrant to Israel from the UK shared with his Twitter followers his feeling of pride:

> Proud to vote for the first time today as an Israeli citizen in the #Jerusalem Mayoral and City Council elections. Waiting to find out the results (Private person, October 30)

Some English-language users presented themselves as cosmopolitans, affiliated with several communities, while contextualizing the Israeli municipal elections as part of the global family of democracies. An example is the tweet by this ultra-orthodox Rabbi:

> Voted in two countries in one week! Go democracy! (Religious actor, October 30)

Voting was also encouraged by collectives, such as *Janglo*, which is an online community for English-speakers in Israel. On their website, they published "The ultimate and complete guide to elections in Jerusalem," which they also shared on Twitter. Presumably, the target audience are people who are entitled to vote in the Jerusalem elections, but may not be familiar with the local politics or even the practicalities of voting. On election day, they tweeted:

> No matter who you vote for, just get out and vote! (October 30)

In comparison to this insider language of partaking in the ritual of voting, other English-language tweets presented a more neutral, outsider view, reporting on or analyzing the elections more "objectively." The more neutral analysis – often directed toward an international imagined audience – was led by media and civil society actors dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

An Israeli expert on Jerusalem, founder of two Jerusalem-based NGOs, tweeted his prediction about the participation of Palestinians in the local elections in Jerusalem:

> The small informal community of Jerusalem wonks (…) will soon find out who won the lottery: will Palestinian voting grow. (…) My bet is that the vote won't exceed 2-3%. (Civil society actor, October 30)

Some English-language users provided a nuanced treatment of the subject of the East Jerusalem Palestinians' boycott, while taking into account the dilemma inherent in it:

> Palestinian Jerusalemites face a dilemma: vote and gain a voice on the city council or boycott because they live under occupation? (Media actor, October 29)

The "celebration of democracy" idea receives a cynical turn in this tweet by the same journalist:

Happy local election day in Israel: police reported road blockages to prevent voters from reaching polling stations, fist fights, tear gas and disruptions (Media actor, October 30)

These are the kinds of tweets which may serve more of a bridging function, connecting the interpretations of Israeli Jews (elections as vital for democratic voice) with those of Palestinians (the elections as another tool of oppression). Yet we find that such messages are rare in our corpus, even in the English-language part of it, and do not seem to be directed at opening up a conversation with or among East Jerusalem Palestinians.

English-language tweets thus present two somewhat contrasting sides: those partaking actively and enthusiastically in the democratic festival of the Jerusalem municipal elections, versus those supplying a more neutral or objective analysis of the elections, sometimes including references to the Palestinian point-of-view. In either case, English-language Twitter users present themselves as outsiders to the Palestinian community and do not identify with their position, in contrast to the segment of English-speakers who seem to identify with West Jerusalem Jews. Thus, both topically and particularly in terms of valence, the English-language Twittersphere does not seem to play a bridging role around contrasting interpretations of the local elections.

Arabic Language: Voting as Betrayal of the Palestinian Cause

The topics predominantly discussed in Arabic-speaking tweets are distinct from those in Hebrew and English. The most salient Arabic-language topic pertains to creative expression of poetry and spirituality/religiosity (Topic 9, accounting for 10.1% of the total corpus). Other salient topics are more political: reporting about the Israeli occupation forces (Topic 10, 6.3% of the corpus) and Palestinian resistance (Topic 12, 4.3% of the corpus). These topics are talked about predominantly in Arabic. In contrast, Israeli-Arab relations (Topic 11, 4.4%) are discussed almost equally in Arabic and English, and to a lesser extent in Hebrew.

As we can see, none of the predominantly-Arabic topics are devoted specifically to the municipal elections, or to mobilization/demobilization. However, in our qualitative analysis, we found Arabic-language discussion pertaining to boycotting the municipal elections in Jerusalem. These were mostly allocated to Topic 10 – Israeli occupation forces, suggesting that demobilization messages were voiced in the context of resistance to Israeli domination.

In the Arabic-language election-related Twittersphere, voting in the municipal elections is presented as the opposite of fulfilling one's democratic rights. Rather, it is interpreted as enhancing the existing political force that is seen as denying East Jerusalem Palestinians their rights – voting is thus seen as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. In stark contrast to Hebrew and English, we did not find a single Arabic tweet encouraging people to vote in the Jerusalem municipal elections. Rather, we find tweets by individuals and collectives (civil society organizations, news agencies) aimed at direct demobilizing, e.g., by this civil society actor:

Boycotting the Jerusalem municipal election is a national duty. (October 30)

If for Hebrew-speakers the civic duty is to vote, here it is the opposite – the civic duty is to boycott the elections. As a flipside to the democratic idea that in elections "every vote counts," in the Arabic Twittersphere, every vote is seen as sabotaging the collective

aspiration of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. A Palestinian political activist tweeted:

> Voting in the Jerusalem Municipal elections is literally a betrayal of the city. It is also a national and religious crime. (Civil Society actor, October 30)

In addition to direct calls to boycott the elections, we also found a more neutral genre of Arabic tweets reporting on the boycott. Despite their neutral stance, such tweets are positioning the boycott as an uncontested reality, and thus can be seen as contributing to the demobilization discourse. An example is this tweet by a Palestinian radio station:

> Jerusalemites boycott the occupation's municipal elections in the city and the polling stations are empty. (Media Actor, October 30)

A Palestinian news agency tweeted a quote by Dr. Ahmed Majdalani, a Palestinian politician and university professor, referring to the municipal elections as an attempt to enforce Jewish dominance upon East Jerusalem Palestinians:

> Majdalani: The municipal elections in Jerusalem are one of the projects aiming to judaize Jerusalem (Media actor, October 30)

While these tweets show active attempts to demobilize, an additional aspect of the election-related Twittersphere in Arabic is the *absence* of discourse surrounding the municipal elections (also manifested in the smaller share of Arabic tweets that include voting/nonvoting related keywords). In contrast to the Hebrew and English-language tweets, which present the municipal elections as a shared collective experience, most Arabic-language Twitter users are simply ignoring it. This cannot be seen as a form of demobilization, which by definition is active communication asking people to abstain from voting (Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). However, completely negating the election's existence, relevance, or importance – an additional aspect of demobilization – may be another contributor to resulting gaps in political participation.

Discussion

Our mixed-methods analysis of the local Jerusalem Twittersphere in the context of the 2018 municipal elections presents an empirical and theoretical contribution to several areas of political communication. First, it studies the role of social media not only for mobilization processes (Bond et al., 2012; Boulianne, 2015), but also to disseminate active attempts to discourage voting. Demobilization processes, an understudied aspect of political communication in general (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010), have not yet been studied in the context of social media – which, by combining and reshaping both interpersonal communication and mainstream media communication, are a central locus for the construction of meaning and the formation of political opinions in today's media environment (Chadwick, 2013). Recent research calls to contextualize political communication studies, explaining how they are shaped by specific local contexts (Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019). Our unique political context applies the concept of demobilization beyond the Western democracies studied so far (Germany, the US), to include contexts where full democratic rights for all cannot be taken for granted, thus making an important contribution to election studies.

Examining both mobilization and demobilization discourses, and the ways in which they co-occur for different social groups around the same election event, is a central endeavor for addressing political inequality. Partaking in communication networks is usually thought to increase political engagement (Verba et al., 1995) – yet understanding demobilization as a social process shows that this is not always the case. Given a dominant social norm of *nonvoting* in a specific segment of the population, communicating with others about politics may have demobilizing effects. Analyzing how these two processes – mobilization and demobilization – may co-occur around the same election event for different social groups highlights the acute potential implications in terms of political participation – and resulting representation.

The analysis of the Jerusalem Twittersphere during the municipal elections helps us foreground how discourses of mobilization and demobilization co-occur on social media, among different segments of the population. Moreover, our analysis shows how these dual processes unfold discursively, through the assignment of different interpretations to the elections by different political groups. The Hebrew- and some of the English-language tweets played the role often assigned to social media in elections – attempts at voter mobilization (Bond et al., 2012; Boulianne, 2015). This process, which involved regular citizens as well as journalists and media outlets, included not only direct calls at mobilization (go vote!), but also a pronouncement of voting as a national duty for all, as well as interpreting the elections as a festival of democracy that all partake in, quite joyously. Mobilization discourses thus reflect common understandings of voting as a key participatory act for citizens in a democracy (Verba et al., 1995).

The Arabic-language Twittersphere, in contrast, presented a wholly different interpretation of the elections, and thus of the required form of participation. Voting in the municipal elections was interpreted as sabotaging the collective aspiration for a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Voting is thus *the opposite* of fulfilling one's democratic right; it is an act of betrayal of one's collective identity. Such calls can be interpreted as manifestations of demobilization as a form of social communication (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010), though – importantly – we see that demobilization operates differently in different political contexts (Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019). In the German context, where voting is the dominant social norm, Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck (2012) found that relatively rare conditions increase nonvoting behavior, such as political discussions with specific individuals: politically informed nonvoters. Our findings mirror a different reality. In the context experienced by East Jerusalem Palestinians, since the elections are interpreted as a betrayal of the collective Palestinian cause, abstention from voting *is* the dominant collective social norm, and *nonvoting* is the dominant collective behavioral expectation.

Social media (here, Twitter) provide a unique opportunity to understand how demobilization functions in a specific, complex political context. Specifically, we found demobilization through social media occurring through both direct calls to boycott the election and "neutral" reports on the election boycott reinforcing its uncontested nature. We also found a lack of discourse, ignoring the elections as a process with any relevance to one's life. Our granular analysis shows how in different macro settings – full democracies versus contexts where full democratic rights are not equally distributed – demobilization may take on different characteristics, requiring differing remedies.
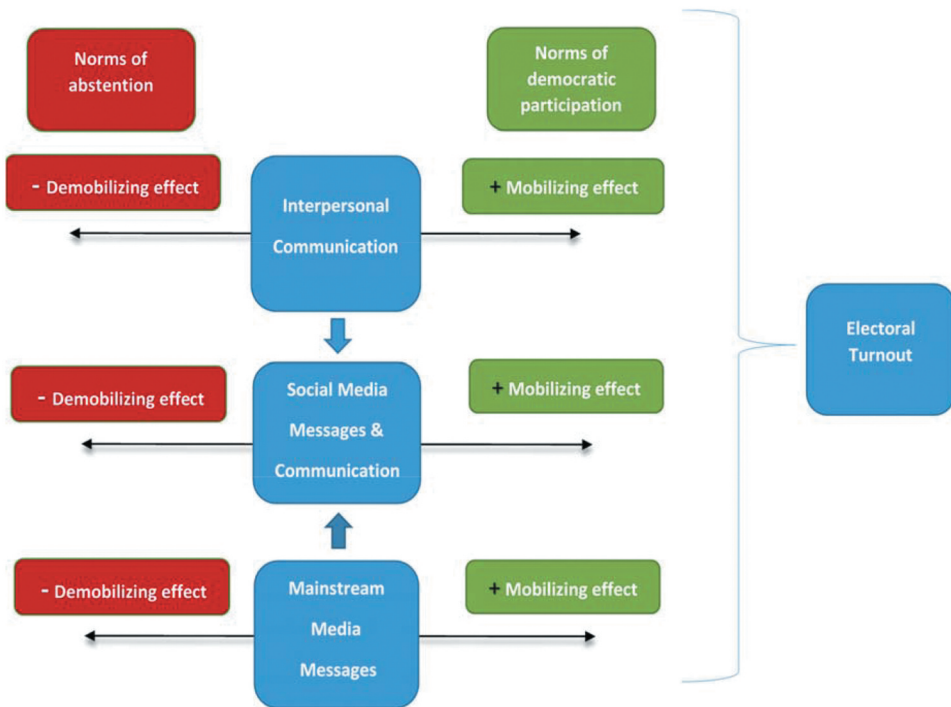
**Figure 2.** Potential cumulative effects of social logics of mobilization/demobilization.

At the same time, to be more widely applicable to differential contexts, we suggest a broader model presenting the potential cumulative effects of social logics of mobilization *and* demobilization (see Figure 2). Building on existing research on demobilization in face-to-face contexts (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010), we know that both interpersonal communication and mainstream media messages (rows 1 and 3 in the figure) may exert discourse that may be geared more toward mobilization *or* demobilization, depending on the norms governing the local context: is the dominant social norm one of democratic participation or one of abstention. We argue that in today's media environment, social media (row 2) are a key locus for negotiating political standpoints that cannot be ignored, as they combine messages from interpersonal communication and from mainstream media, and reshape them (Chadwick, 2013). As has been demonstrated for interpersonal communication (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010), we show here that social media messages can also include not only mobilization but also demobilization discourses, depending on the democratic norms governing the social context. We know from past research that face-to-face contexts may have demobilizing effects on voter turnout (Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). Methodologically, our content analysis does not allow us to infer behavioral mobilization or demobilization effects of social media, yet our model provides future experimental research with a roadmap for examining how not only mobilization but also demobilization may take place, and even co-occur simultaneously, through various communication forms, and in various national and social contexts.

As our case study shows, far from being a mere theoretical construct, demobilization (operating through face-to-face contexts, or through social media) is a key social process to take into account, with clear relevance to political representation and political (in)equality.

Notes

1. While we use language as a proxy for social identity, we acknowledge that the relationship between identity and language is multi-layered, complex, and contextually specific (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).
2. The Data Repository also includes a fully reproducible version of the network analysis and topic model as well as further statistics on both analytical steps. See: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/8754H.
3. The election-related discourse is largely concentrated on and around the immediate voting days, rather than spread out across a longer campaign period – we thus focus on this time period.
4. A more elaborate discussion of these methods appears in the Online Appendix. The translation was applied only for the purpose of topic modeling; for qualitative analysis, we used original-language data.
5. Our model selection was based on interpretability. Calculation of quality metrics – mean semantic coherence, and mean exclusivity of the topics – corroborated good interpretability (see Online Appendix).
6. Hebrew and Arabic language tweets cited in the qualitative analysis were translated by authors fluent in the respective language. For English tweets cited, we made light phrasing edits to make tweets non-searchable.
7. We address the numerical gap for Arabic later on in the paper, after the qualitative analysis.
8. Of the 91 users tweeting in multiple languages, 63 posted in Hebrew and English (1191 tweets), 22 in Arabic and English (320 tweets), 2 in Arabic and Hebrew (42 tweets), and 4 in all three (82 tweets).
9. A detailed mixing matrix of ties within and across the language compartment of the network is provided in the Online Appendix.

Classification of User Profiles by Botometer
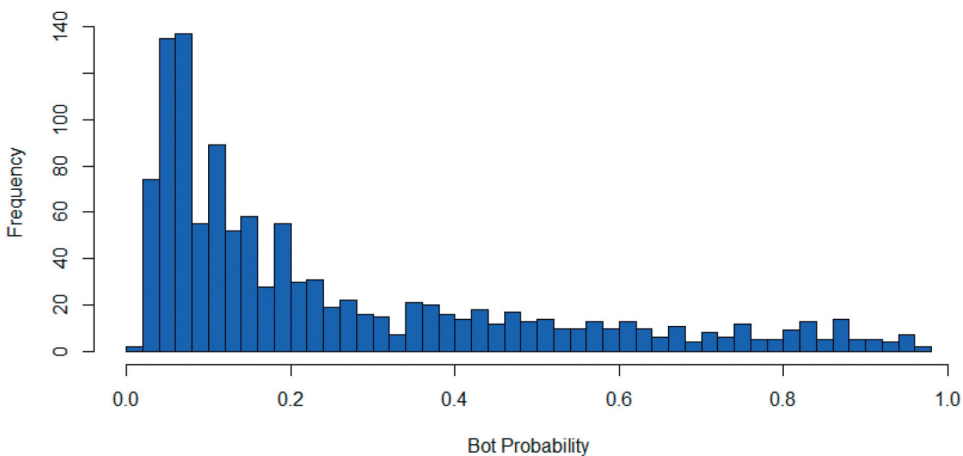
10. To provide further context for quotes presented in the qualitative analysis, we coded users based on their profiles. Four trained coders classified the profiles, with Krippendorff's alpha reliability values averaging at satisfactory levels of 0.82 (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 241).

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Data Availability Statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/8754H.

Open Scholarship

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