International Security in the Age of Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

Modern communications such as social media are increasingly playing a more significant role in political conflict in terms of protest mobilization, increased communication, access to information, and as a tool for state and non-state actors to further their agendas. Political leaders are adopting social media to reach domestic and international audiences (Barberá & Zeitzoff, 2017). However, the literature on the relationship between social media and political conflict is limited and further research is needed on the nexus between political actors and international security (Gohdes, 2017).

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of our research is to understand which factors enable certain political leaders in the Middle East region to gain more popularity on social media platforms (e.g. Twitter) than others. Popularity refers to the number of followers, retweets, and likes a political leader receives.

Some of the characteristics we focus on are the number of social media users within the country, the verification status of their accounts, the level of engagement with other political actors on Twitter, their activity level on social media, the level of political crisis a country is experiencing, the language of their tweets, the rate of controversial tweets, and their age. This research will enable us to answer the bigger questions relating to how social media influences political conflict and international security.

Figure 1: World leaders with the most Twitter followers as of May 2018 (J.Clement, 2019)

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The data collection process is completed in two stages:

- <u>Twitter data collection:</u> manually gathering Twitter account information (screen name, username, verification/legitimation) of political leaders
- <u>Personal information collection:</u> collecting information about birth date, education level, gender identity, marital status, vital status, political group/party affiliations, length of involvement in political affairs of political leaders, etc.

PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS
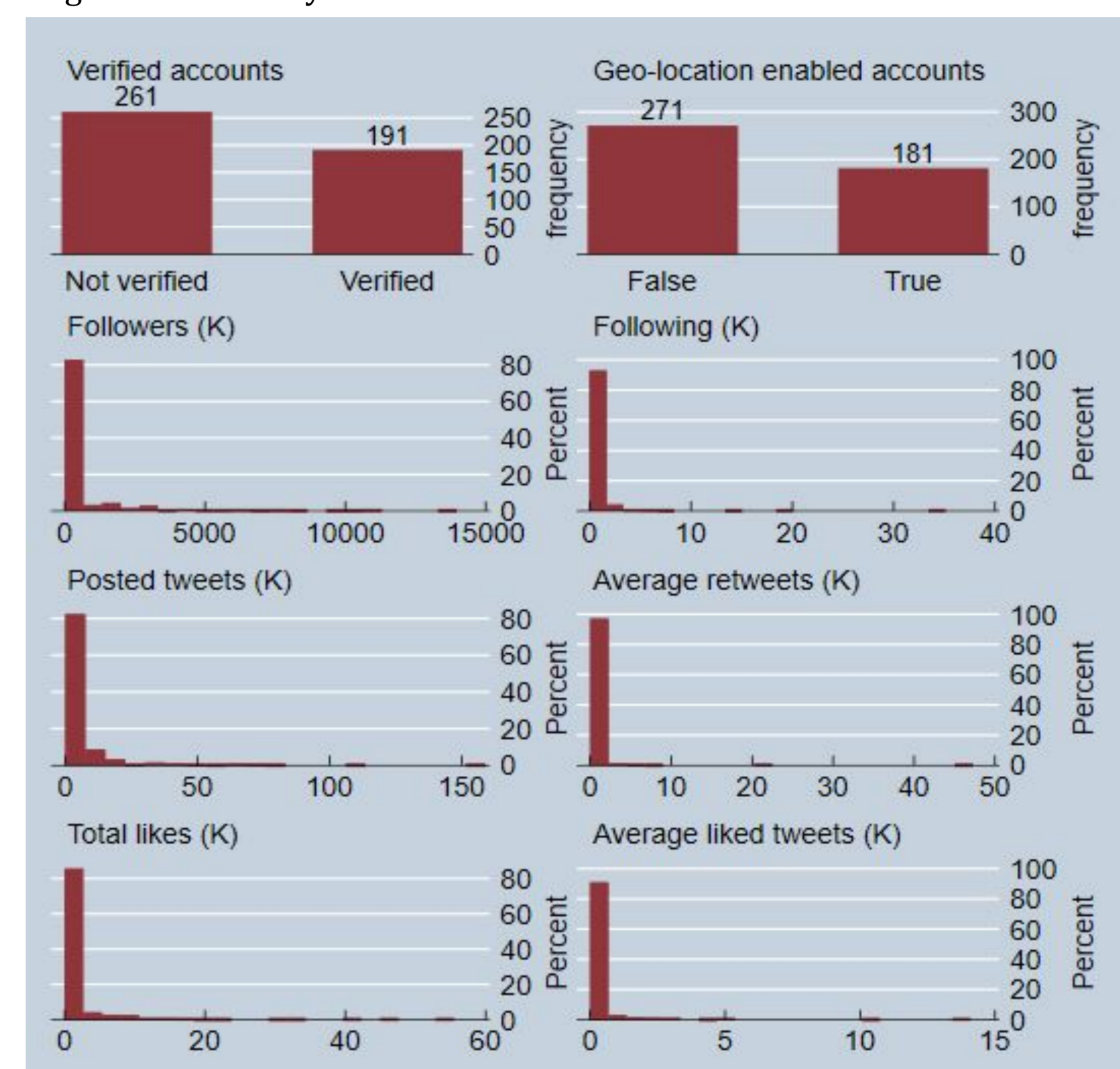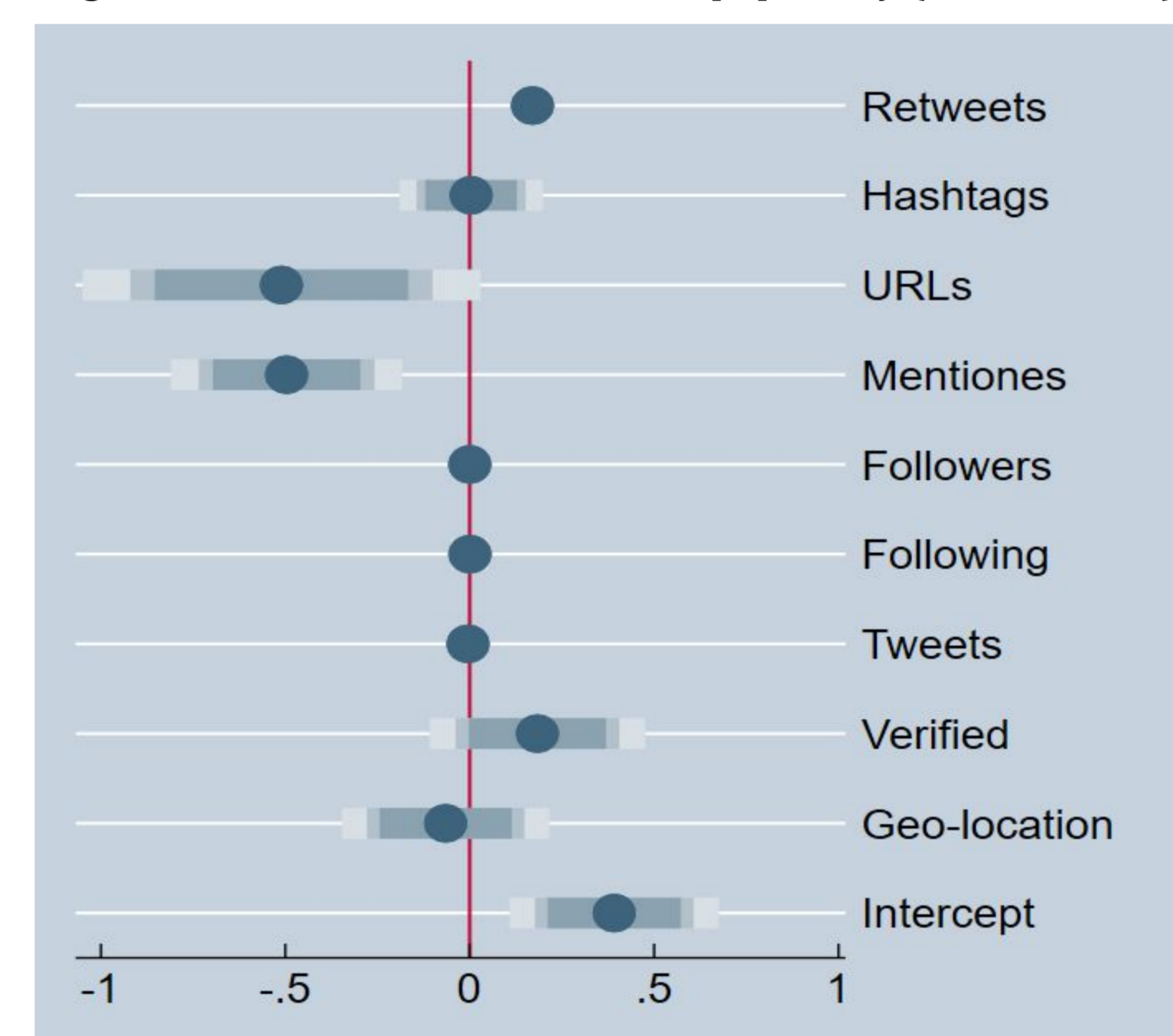
Figure 1: Summary of variables

Figure 2: OLS estimation of accounts popularity (Mean of likes)

CONCLUSIONS

The initial analysis of collected data shows that the features of both accounts and tweets affect the average number of likes that an account receives. Verified accounts are more popular, but this can be due to an endogeneity problem. We do not know that popular accounts are more likely to become verified, or verified account receive more attention on Twitter. Also, it seems including URLs and mentions has a negative effect on the popularity of account.

We will continue this analysis by adding more information from the text analysis of tweets and more information on political background of account holders.

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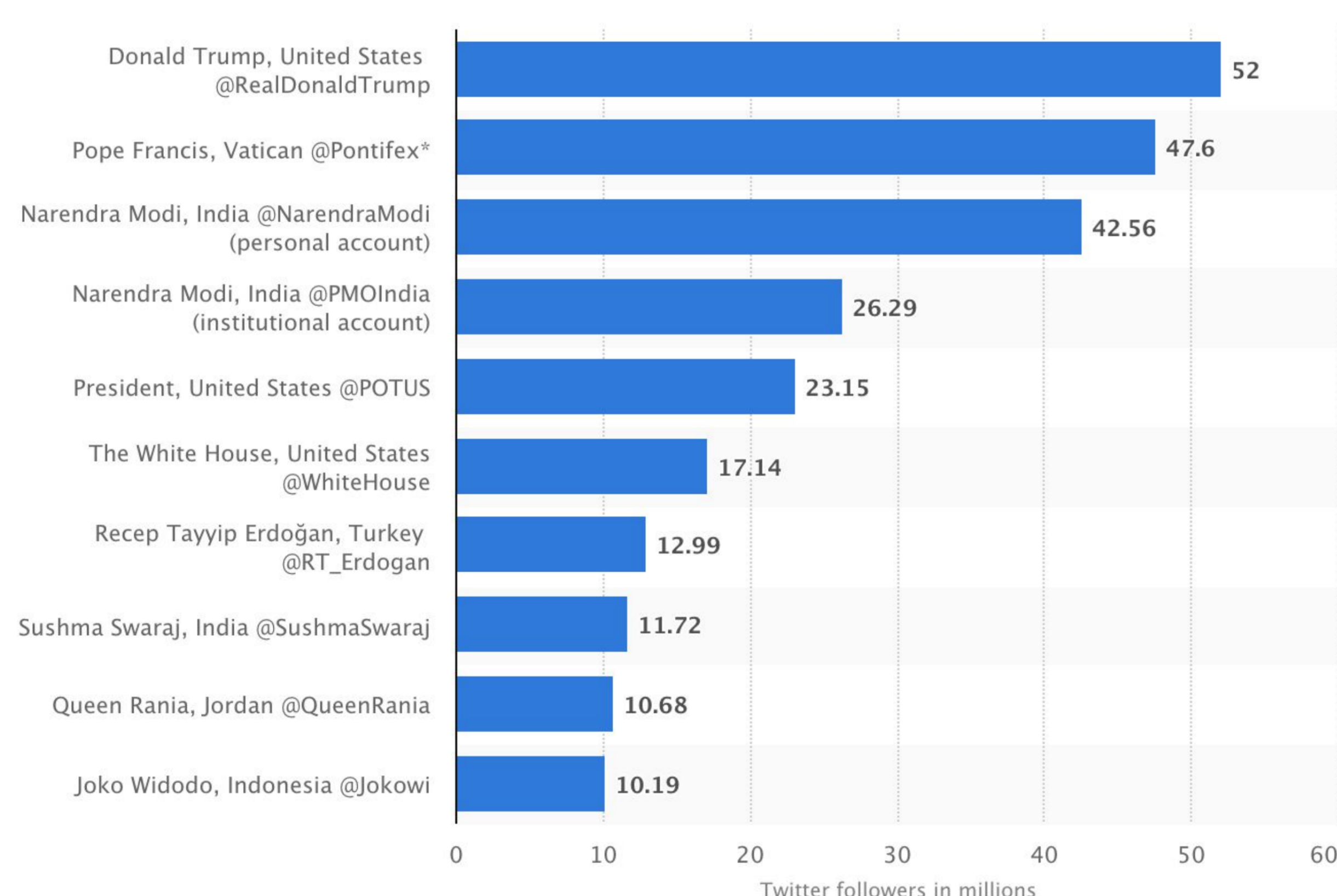- Zeitzoff, T. (2017). How Social Media Is Changing Conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution,61*(9), 1970-1991. doi:10.1177/0022002717721392