

Looking Them Up: Wikipedia Attention, Facebook Engagement and Votes for European Parties, 2015 to 2020

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Abstract

Online attention to parties is often read as a sign of their support. I compare two kinds of attention to 112 European parties in 17 countries from July 2015 to September 2020: views of their Wikipedia articles, in the local language and in English, from the Wikimedia pageviews data, and interactions with their Facebook pages, from CrowdTangle. The two were related but far from identical: within country-months, the median rank correlation between parties' shares of views and of interactions was 0.50. Both rose around national elections, with different timing. Facebook interactions rose by about 160% in the month before an election and stayed at about that level in the election month; Wikipedia views roughly doubled in the month before and were almost five times their usual level in the election month, when results bring people to look parties up. In 20 elections in 14 countries, parties' shares of Wikipedia views in the two months before the election month tracked their vote shares more closely than their shares of Facebook interactions (correlation 0.84 against 0.62, across the same 111 party-elections, with shares taken among the parties in the data), but less closely than their previous vote shares (0.92). Adding either measure to the previous result reduced the average error of out-of-sample predictions only slightly, from 4.0 points to 3.8 or 3.9. Parties without a previous result drew about twice as large a share of attention as of votes. Wikipedia attention was a better guide to parties' relative size than Facebook engagement, but neither added much to knowing how they had done last time.

Keywords: Wikipedia; pageviews; online attention; Facebook; election prediction; political parties; Europe; CrowdTangle

1 Introduction

Online attention is cheap to measure and tempting to read as support. Studies have used Twitter mentions to predict election results with mixed success (Gayo-Avello 2013), and Wikipedia views have been found to carry some information about outcomes, mainly alongside polls and past results rather than on their own (Yasseri and Bright 2016; Smith and Gustafson 2017). In earlier work on British parties and leaders, I found that Facebook engagement and Wikipedia views rose and fell together only loosely, and that

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neither matched vote shares well at British elections ([Hotham 2026](#)). Wikipedia views may capture a different kind of interest from Facebook engagement: people look a party up to find out about it, while engaging with a party's page usually requires following it or being shown its posts.

This paper compares the two for parties across Europe. It asks three questions. **RQ1.** How closely do parties' shares of Wikipedia views and of Facebook interactions move together? **RQ2.** How do the two respond to elections? **RQ3.** Which tracks vote shares more closely, and does either add to knowing a party's previous result?

2 Data and method

Parties. The parties are the 112 parties in 17 countries whose official Facebook pages I tracked through CrowdTangle for my doctoral research, exported in October 2020 ([CrowdTangle Team 2020](#); [Hotham 2021](#)). They come from lists built for that research, not a complete census of parties. For each I summed the interactions (reactions, comments and shares) on its page's posts by month.

Wikipedia views. For each party I identified its Wikipedia article in English and in the main language of its country through Wikidata, and collected monthly views by users (excluding automated agents) from July 2015, when the data begin, to September 2020 from the Wikimedia pageviews interface ([Wikimedia Foundation 2026](#)). Views are counted by title, so I summed views of each article and of all redirects to it, which captures most renamed articles. Where an article had been moved and its old title became a disambiguation page (the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom, in April 2017), I added the old title's views for the months before the move. Attention is the sum of local-language and English views, or English only for British and Irish parties. A party's series begins in the first month in which each edition used had at least 100 views; earlier months, before the articles existed or were established, are treated as missing. The data contain 133 million views; in countries whose main language is not English, 54% were of the local-language article. A party's *share* of attention is its share among the parties in the data in the same country and month. Views are page loads, not unique visitors.

Elections. National parliamentary election results and previous results come from ParlGov ([Döring et al. 2024](#)). There are 25 national elections in the period in 16 of the 17 countries; the French elections of 2017 are not coded, so French parties are left out of the election analyses. For the comparison with votes, 21 elections in 15 countries have at least two parties with both measures (129 party-elections). Of these, 111 party-elections in 20 elections and 14 countries have a previous result and at least one other party with one. Vote shares, previous vote shares and attention shares are all computed among the same parties in each election, so they are shares of the parties in the data, not of all votes. Some elections include only a few parties: three in Germany in 2017 (the CDU, the CSU and Die Linke), in both Swiss elections, in Greece in 2019 and in Slovakia in 2016. Because monthly views in the election month include the days after the vote, when results drive attention, I measure pre-election attention in the two calendar months before the election month. Depending on the election date, these end between one and eight weeks before the vote.

Method. For the election months, I regress the log of each measure (plus one) on indicators for the month before, the month of and the month after a national election, and for May 2019, the month of the European Parliament election, with page and month fixed effects, and report standard errors clustered by page and by country. Because the month fixed effects absorb May 2019 in the European Union countries, the May 2019 estimate is identified mainly by comparison with Norwegian and Swiss parties and should be read as indicative. For votes, I regress the log of the vote share on the log of the previous

vote share and the log attention shares (adding half a point before logging), with election fixed effects and standard errors clustered by election, and predict each election's results from models estimated on the other elections, and, as a check, on the other countries.

3 Results

3.1 Two kinds of attention

Parties' shares of Wikipedia views and Facebook interactions were related but far from identical. Within the 964 country-months with at least three parties, the median rank correlation between the two shares was 0.50. Comparing the same party across months, a 1% rise in Facebook interactions went with only about a 0.05% rise in Wikipedia views (SE 0.02).

3.2 Elections

Both measures rose around national elections (Figure 1, left), with different timing. Compared with the same party in other months, Facebook interactions were about 160% higher in the month before an election (0.95 log points, SE 0.09 clustered by page, 0.19 by country) and about 180% higher in the election month (1.02, SE 0.07 and 0.10), then back to normal. Wikipedia views were about 90% higher in the month before (0.65, SE 0.05 and 0.12) and almost five times their usual level in the election month (1.59, SE 0.05 and 0.10), when results bring people to look parties up, and stayed about 19% higher in the month after (0.17, SE 0.04 and 0.08). In May 2019, the month of the European Parliament election, both were about 0.8 log points higher (Wikipedia 0.77, Facebook 0.78), although, as noted, this estimate rests mainly on the comparison with Norway and Switzerland.

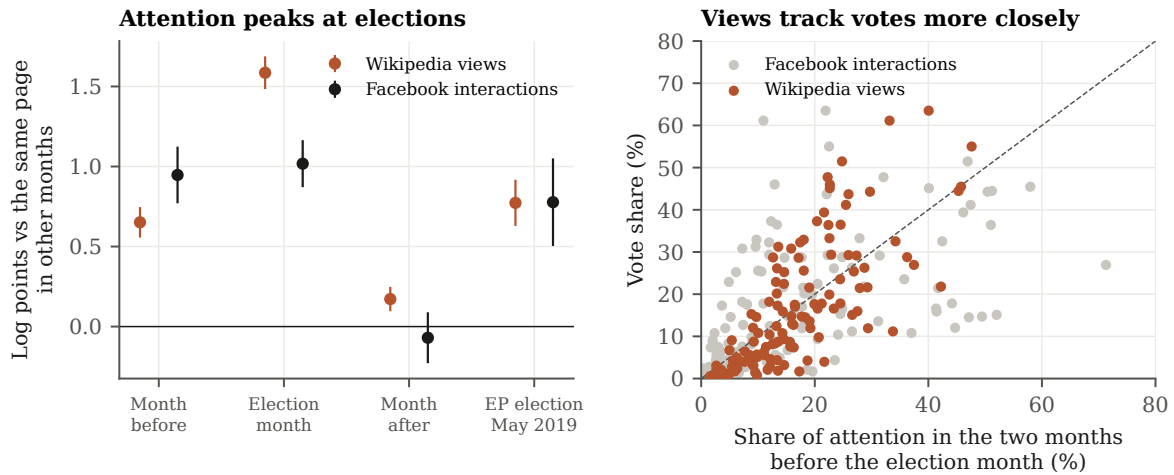


Figure 1. Left: Wikipedia views and Facebook interactions around national elections and in May 2019, compared with the same party in other months, in log points; 95% confidence intervals clustered by page; 100 parties in 16 countries (France excluded). Right: vote share against the party's share of Wikipedia views and of Facebook interactions in the two calendar months before the election month, all shares among the parties in the data; 129 party-elections in 21 elections. The dashed line marks equal shares.

3.3 Attention and votes

Wikipedia views tracked vote shares more closely than Facebook interactions did (Figure 1, right). Across the 111 party-elections with a previous result, the correlation between vote share and share of Wikipedia views was 0.84, against 0.62 for Facebook interactions and 0.92 for the previous vote share. Within elections, the median correlations were 0.86, 0.51 and 0.96. Among the parties in the data, the party with the most Wikipedia views won the most votes in 11 of 21 elections, the party with the most Facebook interactions in 8.

Both measures added a little to the previous result in sample. With election fixed effects, the elasticity of vote share with respect to the previous vote share was 0.88 (SE 0.03; within R^2 0.85). Adding the Wikipedia share gave it a coefficient of 0.57 (SE 0.14; within R^2 0.88), and adding the Facebook share instead gave 0.19 (SE 0.03; within R^2 0.88). With both, each kept a coefficient (Wikipedia 0.45, SE 0.13; Facebook 0.14, SE 0.04). With 20 election clusters these standard errors should be read with caution.

Out of sample the gains were small. Predicting each election from models estimated on the others, the average absolute error was 4.1 points if each party's previous share was carried forward, 4.0 with the previous-vote model, 3.9 adding Wikipedia views and 3.8 adding Facebook interactions. Leaving out each country in turn instead, the errors were 4.1, 3.9 and 3.9, so the two measures did about equally well. Wikipedia views alone gave an error of 5.9 points, Facebook interactions alone 8.5. Carrying forward the previous result identified the largest party in 14 of the 20 elections, as did the model adding Wikipedia views; the model adding Facebook interactions did so in 16, Wikipedia views alone in 13 and Facebook interactions alone in 9.

Changes told a weaker story. Comparing the two months before the election month with the same months a year earlier, a rise of one point in a party's share of Wikipedia views went with a rise of about 0.6 points in its vote share relative to the previous election, but this was not statistically distinguishable from zero (SE 0.35; correlation 0.38; 92 party-elections in 16 elections). The two moved in the same direction in 71% of cases.

3.4 Attention without votes

The largest gaps between attention and votes were for new and insurgent parties, as earlier work on Wikipedia and European Parliament elections also found (Yasseri and Bright 2016). The 17 party-elections without a previous result in ParlGov, which include new parties and parties that had previously run in alliances or under other names, drew on average 17% of Wikipedia views and 17% of Facebook interactions among the parties in their election, but 8% of the votes. Among the parties in the data, Vox in Spain in April 2019 drew a third of views against 11% of the votes, and MeRA25 in Greece in 2019 a fifth against 4%. Large governing parties drew less attention than votes: among the three Romanian parties in the data in 2016, the Social Democratic Party had a third of views and 61% of the votes.

4 Discussion

Wikipedia views and Facebook engagement are different measures of attention, and they moved together only loosely. Wikipedia views were a better guide to parties' relative size, consistent with research finding that they carry information about election outcomes (Yasseri and Bright 2016; Smith and Gustafson 2017). But much of that information was already in the previous result, and neither measure improved

much on it out of sample.

Both kinds of attention favoured the new. Insurgent parties drew attention out of proportion to their votes, consistent with people looking them up to find out who they were, and established parties drew less than their votes. Any attempt to read support from online attention would need to allow for novelty.

The analysis has limits. Monthly views cannot be split around election day, so pre-election attention is measured one to eight weeks before the vote. Views of an article depend on its title, its redirects and how prominent it is in search results, which differ across languages, and renamed articles may not be fully captured. Shares are computed among the parties in the data, not all parties, and some elections include only a few. The number of elections is small, the parties come from lists built for another purpose, and the French elections are not included.

5 Conclusion

Across 112 European parties from 2015 to 2020, Wikipedia views tracked parties' relative vote shares more closely than Facebook interactions did, but neither added much to knowing how parties had done at the previous election. Both measures rose at elections and both overstated the support of new parties. Online attention is a measure of interest, not of votes.

Data and code

The Facebook data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020. CrowdTangle's terms do not permit sharing the raw posts. The Wikipedia pageview data are public and were collected from the Wikimedia pageviews interface in October 2026. The analysis code, the list of parties and articles, the pageview series and party-month aggregate Facebook data are available from the author.

Provenance and AI use

The Facebook data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis ([Hotham 2021](#)). The Wikipedia data were collected, and the analysis and writing completed, in 2026.

I designed the study and am responsible for the analysis and conclusions. I wrote the text, with drafting and editing assistance from Claude (Anthropic), which also helped prepare the analysis code and collect the pageview data. I reviewed and checked all text and results.

Ethics

Not applicable: the study involves no human participants. The data are aggregate counts of views of public Wikipedia articles and of interactions with public posts by the official Facebook pages of political parties, analysed by party and month. No post content is quoted or reproduced, and no data on individual users are used.

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