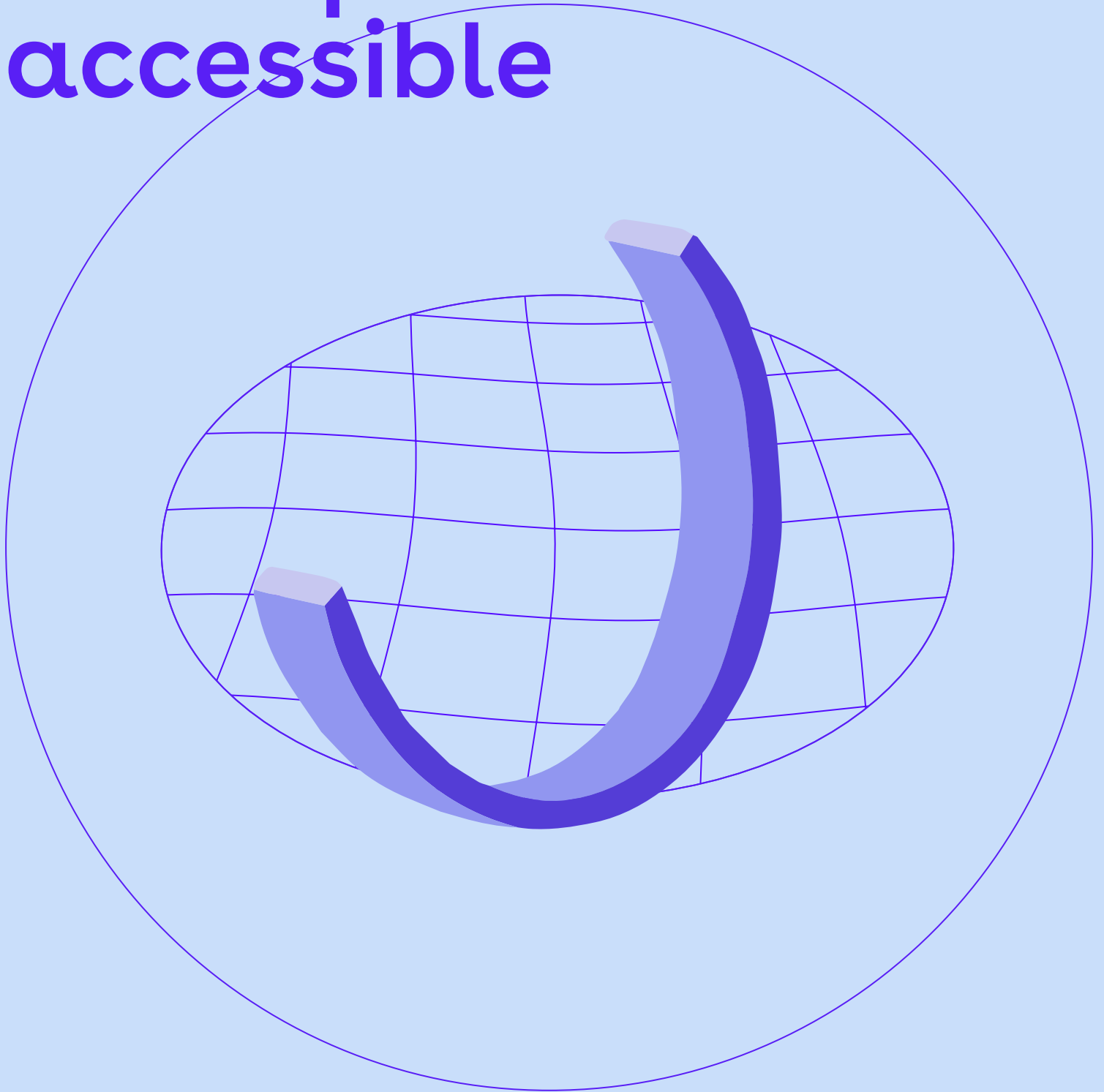


Make power accessible



This signal is part of Civic Signals, a larger framework to help create better digital public spaces. We believe it's a platform's responsibility to design the conditions that promote ideal digital public spaces. Such spaces should be designed to help people feel Welcome, to Connect, to Understand and to Act. These four categories encompass the 14 Civic Signals.

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At a glance



Making power accessible means that the public is heard by those in power, whether in government, business or other institutions. It also means the public has access to the decision-making process.

Why It Matters

Access to power ensures that the democratic norm of equal representation of interests is upheld, increases the likelihood that government actually responds to people's concerns, and raises the public's feelings of empowerment. Access to power also means that companies and non-profits understand the full breadth of public needs.



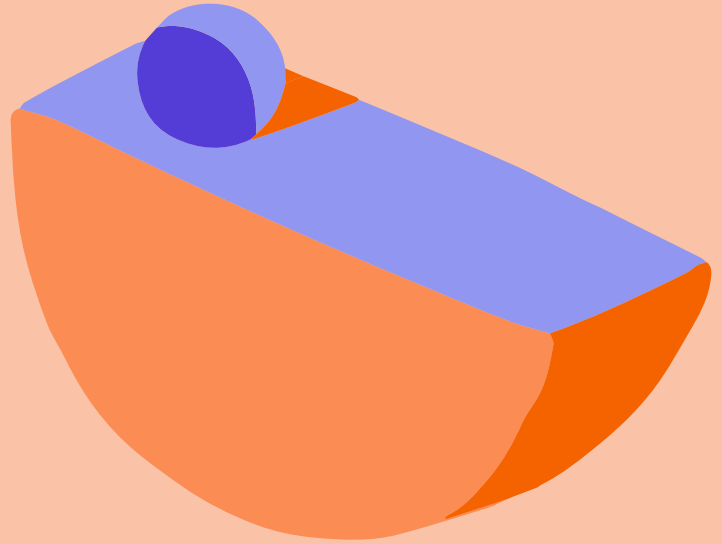
It's extremely important for people who are above us, the people who rule the country, who use our money, the society's money, to be accessible and listen to what we would like to get from the government, the company, and so on."

– Socorro, Brazil focus group participant

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Former mayor Stephen Goldsmith and intellectual property lawyer Susan Crawford wrote *The Responsive City* as a guide to governance in the digital age. The authors curate case studies from the book and their ongoing research here: <https://datasmart.ash.harvard.edu/news/article/the-responsive-city-cases-788>
- The #BlackLivesMatter movement has been aided by social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. Through protests that demanded access to power, this movement has begun to bring about changes both in governments and businesses across the country. <https://www.axios.com/police-reform-george-floyd-protest-2150b2dd-a6dc-4a0c-a1fb-62c2e999a03a.html>
- Facebook's Town Hall function displays users' local, state and federal representatives, with buttons for messaging and calling them. <https://www.facebook.com/townhall>
- As the global COVID-19 pandemic spread, Twitter worked with the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control to put out accurate information while also promoting their #AsktheGov and #AsktheMayor events to connect citizens with those in power. https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/covid-19.html
- The #Boycott hashtag has frequently succeeded in getting companies to change their behavior, even when people do not actually boycott the businesses. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/12/are-we-at-peak-boycott.html>
- Participatory budgeting is a process that gives community members a say in how public funds are spent. Learn more from the Participatory Budgeting Project: <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb/>

Literature review



By Jay Jennings,
Center for Media Engagement
With thanks to Jennifer Earl,
University of Arizona

What the Signal Is

Power is the ability to shape, alter, or make decisions that affect other people. It is important to consider both who has power *and* who has access to power. Our democratic institutions, in theory, make those in charge of our government accountable to the citizenry. By voting, for example, people can exert power over leaders, policies, and all sorts of decisions governments make. Business leaders are accountable to shareholders, and ultimately to consumers who determine whether to purchase whatever they are selling. There are other ways for citizens to influence those in power, of course,

and today there are more ways than ever to communicate with leaders. But this is not the same thing as power being accessible.

By "make power accessible," we mean that those who are influenced by the decision-making of the powerful are heard by those in power. The public needs to not only be free to share their opinions without fear of retribution, but those opinions need to be heard by those in power as valid input into the decision-making process, not drowned out by bots and misinformation. When considering access, it is also important for the public to know who holds the power, when key decisions are being made, and who else has had input into the decision. If

this information is not known, broad access is impossible. Making power accessible is not just about giving the public a forum to voice their opinions, but it also involves giving the public access to the process of decision making. If those in power are truly accessible to the public, we should see the voices of the people reflected in policy agendas and the design of specific policies. If power is accessible, it ideally is also responsive.

It is important to consider that power can take many forms and some forms are less apparent than others. Political theorists Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz noted that at times, the most powerful influence on an important public decision is the power to limit the options that are considered. Other times, as the social theorist Steven Lukes pointed out, power can take the shape of creating norms and social pressures. Power can also intimidate into silence others who may have different views. When studying power, we need to take into account all forms even if some are less visible than others. This is particularly important when we look at access to power. If we only look at who has access to visible forms of power, we may miss important ways to improve access to the powerful.

Related Concepts

A related concept is civic engagement, covered in our [Support Civic Action](#) signal. Civic action is public participation in reaching community decisions and addressing problems. It can take the form of volunteering, organizational involvement, protest, or electoral participation, to name a few. When members of the public use their voices,

that constitutes civic engagement. Making power accessible, on the other hand, is making sure public voices are being heard, are contributing to the policy agenda setting process, and are considered in decision making. Essentially, both civic engagement and accessible power are needed for true democratic change. More civic engagement may lead to those in power addressing constituent concerns, but this is influenced by the accessibility of those in power.

Another related Civic Signal is [Invite Everyone to Participate](#). This is about helping people to participate in society. Inclusion has more to do with social interactions and a sense of welcoming individuals regardless of their background, whereas access to power is about allowing individuals to influence a particular group of people – the powerful – for the purposes of changing their community, nation, or the world.

Finally, the signal [Elevate Shared Concerns](#) stresses the importance of the media – including social media, messaging and search platforms – shining a light on issues that matter to a variety of people. That signal is important partially because the issues topping the media's priorities list can have an influence on the issues topping policy-makers' own agendas. In order for agendas atop the public's mind to have an influence on policy-making, however, the public must have access to the powerful.

Why It's Important

In an ideal world, everyone would participate civically, everyone would have their voices heard, and differences in social position or connections would not translate

into unequal influence with government or non-governmental powers.

In reality, this is far from the case. Political scientists Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page found that U.S. government policy is strongly dictated by economic elites and organized groups representing business interests. They did not find that average citizens or organizations representing citizen interests have much effect on public policy outcomes when pitted against economic elites. There is an imbalance in who gains access to power through participation and there is a corresponding imbalance to the decisions those in power make. Many countries beyond the U.S. inconsistently allow citizen input into governance, as the Freedom House ratings document.

This research coincides with similar conclusions from political scientists Larry Bartels, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, who found that inequality in access to the powerful has led to a government that does not represent the public. Instead, it represents those who have the resources to participate. As political scientist Sidney Verba and his colleagues put it, "public officials hear more from some kinds of citizens than from others and thus jeopardize the democratic norm of equal protection of interests." Government responsiveness is possible in a variety of settings, but the extent to which power responds to public opinion varies by country and over time. Political scientists Sara Binzer Hobolt and Robert Klemmensen analyzed the U.S., U.K. and Denmark, and found that the more uncertain future election outcomes were, and the more opposition parties and legislative institutions were able to constrain executive power, the more responsive government was to people's concerns. In authoritarian regimes, people cannot influ-

ence power through elections but may still affect policy through the threat of protest or uprising. Government professor Zheng Su and political scientist Tianguang Meng's analysis of a Chinese state-run message board for connecting citizens and government found that 33% of public demands received a response.

As we can see from the work of public policy scholars Elizabeth Rigby and Gerald Wright, having a broader set of voices is important because people from different stations in life have different preferences. And allowing people constructive ways to share their grievances can prevent those concerns from emerging in more confrontational, destructive ways, sociologist Jennifer Earl argued. Access to power appears to have positive side effects. Taking part in a virtual townhall has the effect of increasing participants' feelings of empowerment, their knowledge of key policies, and the frequency with which they discussed politics with their friends and family, according to an experiment by political scientists Michael Neblo, Kevin Esterling, and David Lazer. Political scientist Anthony Fowler found that by increasing voter turnout by 24%, the enactment of compulsory voting in Australia shifted the public policies of that country significantly. The increased turnout gave a stronger voice to the working class, who were less likely to vote before the policy. Means of influencing power are not limited to voting and town halls. Protests are another long-proven route to influencing decision-makers, and online media have shown themselves to be an effective staging area for protest, as well as a tool for facilitating offline events. At the same time sociologist Zeynep Tufekci has pointed out, drawing on protest movements from Mexico to Turkey to New York to the Arab

World, that new technologies enable government tools for monitoring and suppressing dissent. #BlackLivesMatter in the U.S. is an example of when a segment of the population has a dysfunctional relationship with those in power. The protests arising from the murder of George Floyd and other African-Americans at the hands of law enforcement are a meaningful way those without access to power have forced those in power to listen to their needs. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has been aided by social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. Through protests that demanded access to power, this movement has begun to bring about changes both in government and business across the country.

Although these are just a few examples, they give us an understanding of what can happen when more people's voices are heard. If there are limits on who participates, we should also expect corresponding bias in the decisions and policies passed down by those in power. Work by Larry Bartels and Sidney Verba suggests that when access is open and more people are encouraged to participate, these biases dissipate. When more people are given access to power, those in power are better at responding to citizens.

This is important for non-governmental organizations as well. Companies or non-profit organizations need to ensure that those making decisions within their ranks are accessible to a broad spectrum of those they wish to serve or the decisions they make are at risk of alienating these key constituents. Providing access to power for these organizations is important because it also means those in power understand the full breadth of public needs.

How We Can Move the Needle

The professionalization of government can affect how accessible power is. By looking at differing levels of responsiveness across the 50 U.S. states, political scientists Jeffrey Lax and Justin Phillips found that states whose legislators were more professional (meaning they worked more days, had larger staffs, and were paid more) had legislatures that were more responsive to the opinions of their citizens than states with less professional legislatures. Working more days and having a larger staff seem to allow representatives to be more effective listeners. Although government efficiency will always be a priority for many, it is important to realize that we need to arm our public officials with the tools they need to be accessible. For tech platforms, this supports efforts to help government officials who may be lacking in sufficient staff better use the platform to connect with their constituents.

Former mayor Stephen Goldsmith and intellectual property lawyer Susan Crawford, both now at Harvard, chronicled ways in which they saw technological advancements aiding in government's ability to engage with citizens. In their book *The Responsive City*, they show how cities began using a 311 app to give citizens better ways to report non-emergency problems. By using technology, leaders and street-level bureaucrats became better able to listen to constituents and solve their problems much more efficiently.

Professor of government Archon Fung suggests citizens can gain greater access to power when they are empowered to be decision makers. He gives the examples of direct participation in local budget processes

and collaborative health care networks as evidence of the effectiveness of active citizen involvement. As Fung notes, although we tend to think of participation as a way to influence public policy, “democratic governance ought to include a fuller range of activities through which individuals influence organizational decisions and actions—and themselves take action—to protect their interests.” It is important to note that not all action to protect the public’s interest needs to be funneled through government policy or regulation. Community groups, businesses, and non-profits have the opportunity to work for the interests of the people.

David Karpf illustrated that direct participation in government is not the only way that concerned members of the public can leverage technology to influence those in power. He noted that interactive “e-government” initiatives, such as members of the public taking a deliberative role that directly informs policy, work where public interest is high and where it is relatively evenly distributed, rather than concentrated in the hands of a highly mobilized group. When these conditions don’t pertain, more appropriate e-government initiatives might include online service delivery, the provision of better public data, and better systems for the public to make comments on policy proposals.

Technology platforms have taken steps to make the powerful accessible. For example, Facebook’s Town Hall function displays users’ local, state and federal representatives, with buttons for messaging and calling them. As the global COVID-19 pandemic spread, Twitter worked with the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control to put out accurate information while also promoting their #AsktheGov and #AsktheMayor events to connect citizens with those

in power. Platforms like Twitter have also made it easier for people to contact the powerful in business, because the powerful either monitor Twitter themselves or employ others to do it on their behalf. By publicly airing their grievances, customers often find they get a quicker resolution to their complaint – whether that complaint is an inferior product or poor ethical practices by the company. The #Boycott hashtag has frequently succeeded in getting companies to change their behavior, even when people do not actually boycott the businesses, journalist Collier Meyerson writes.

Many of the actions tech companies could take to move the needle on making power accessible correspond to our other Civic Signals principles. For example, platforms could better police for misinformation and bots that drown out the actual concerns of real people (see [Show Reliable Information](#)). They could [Promote Thoughtful Conversation](#), [Invite Everyone to Participate](#), [Ensure People’s Safety](#) and [Keep People’s Information Secure](#). More on these signals can be found in the corresponding literature reviews. Although such actions arguably constitute necessary groundwork towards helping people be heard by power, they are not enough on their own – which is why we make the suggestions above, and outline potential measurement tools below.

How to Measure

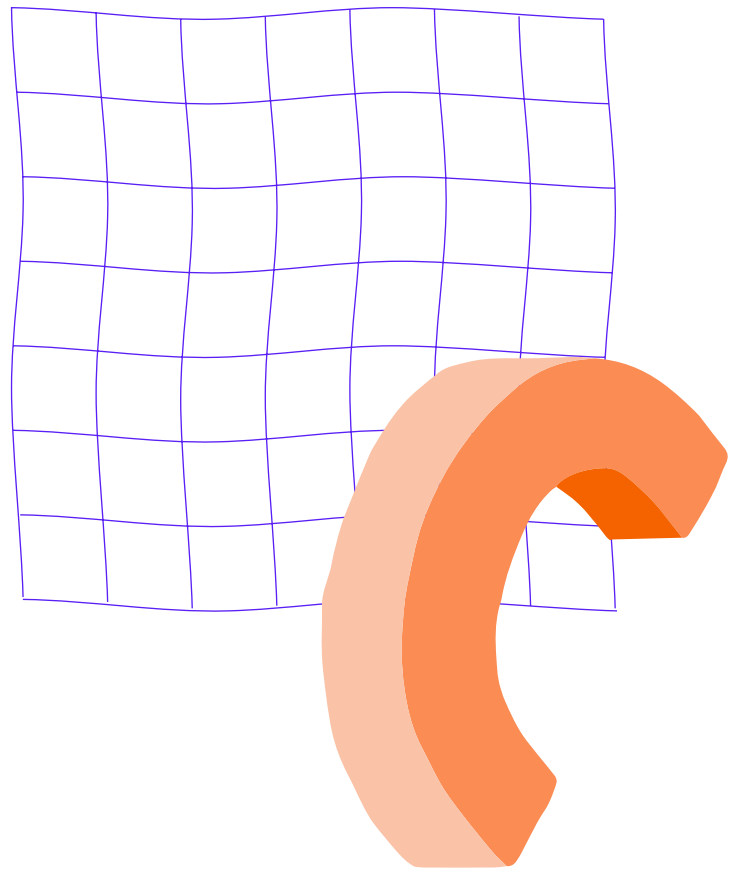
Public opinion scholars such as Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro measured how accessible power is by looking at how well policy decisions match up with public opinion. This has been particularly effective when research has looked at policy

decisions in the aggregate. There are valid reasons why policy may not always match up perfectly with the attitudes of the public; however, if decision-makers are accessible and responsive, their decisions should roughly line up with the preferences of their constituents.

Using this measurement strategy, scholars have found that public policy is responsive to movement in public opinion in some contexts, but there are many inefficiencies in the relationship. There are circumstances and issues where those in power do not listen to their constituents. In particular, public policy scholars such as Elizabeth Rigby and Gerald Wright have found that low income citizens exert little influence over policy decisions and that this is true for both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. Jeffery Lax and Justin Phillips found that while gay rights policies largely are responsive to public opinion, when the policies are incongruent with public opinion, they almost always are in the direction of limiting gay rights.

Another way to measure the people's access to power is to assess how much their voices are drowned out by maliciously generated messages on social media. As noted above, social media offers the capability of meaningfully connecting those in power with the public. If the sincere voices of the public are being muted by non-human or deceptive bot-generated content, then this limits access to power. Measuring the ways platforms such as Twitter or Facebook are accurately assessing and limiting the activity of bot accounts is important for how effective these platforms are in giving the public access to power.

This research points to both problems and reasons for optimism. Although we see plenty of evidence that decision-makers listen and respond to citizens, some voices are muted. We can make power more accessible by giving decision makers the training, tools, and capacity to be effective listeners.



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Expert Q&A



Three key questions with **Jennifer Earl**, University of Arizona

How does this principle help create a world we'd all want to live in?

Feeling one is treated fairly, has a voice, and can object to perceived civic or political wrongs are key elements of the social compact that allows for successful governance and the legitimacy of democratic systems. Indeed, the importance of the ability to speak truth to power is so central to our nation that it forms the basis of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As I have pointed out in my own research,¹

¹ Earl, J. (2012.) "Private Protest? Public and Private Engagement Online." *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(4), 591-608.

while there are public areas through which people can exercise First Amendment rights offline (e.g., parks, sidewalks, etc.), termed public fora in the law, there are no First Amendment rights on private property. Since the servers that run digital and social media platforms are either privately held (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) or publicly managed but not considered public fora and thus not accessible for free speech acts, the ability to speak truth to power could be severely constrained online if digital and social media companies are not committed to making power accessible. Given the pervasiveness of digital and social media usage in people's civic and political lives, this represents a very grave issue. We have a nation that guaran-

tees one's ability to speak freely, and speak in public places so that decision-makers may be likely to hear, but this right is being lost in practice as the rise of digital and social media platforms means that the spaces in which most people routinely speak to one another have no legal obligation to protect free speech or to try to make authorities accessible to the governed.

There are additional reasons to make power accessible. Democracies run on participation and communities thrive based on engagement. Making power accessible provides moments for engagement and the potential for efficacious action. Moreover, history shows that people will find a way to speak but it may be more confrontational after being suppressed — this is clear as cities around the country grapple with substantial protest in the wake of so much police violence against African Americans and people of color more generally. Second, while there is evidence that in some ways, America is an incredible polarized political landscape, there is actually substantial agreement on many practical policy issues amongst Americans that is not reflected in policy making. Making power more accessible through social and digital media may help publicly identify these gaps and close them. Right now, the information asymmetry between powerful actors and average people is too high and platforms can help address this. Third, when people feel processes are fair and they have a say, law and society research shows they are more likely to obey the law because they view it as legitimate. Fourth, as companies become more influential (whether the companies are running digital platforms or marketing through them), opening up avenues for people to address corporate decision-making is also important. Finally, platforms where people get to

engage in issues they care about are stickier and more popular. It is in platforms' own interest to build these kinds of engagement opportunities.

If you were to envisage the perfect social media, messaging or web search platform in terms of maximizing this principle, what would it look like?

Making power accessible involves a number of initiatives. First, platforms could develop spaces and/or events through which users could register their concerns to specific decision-makers, instead of waiting for decision-makers themselves to offer opportunities. There are a number of models for allowing statements, petitions, etc. and community voting procedures for prioritizing issues, which could be adopted and improved.

Several follow-on steps are also important to really make power actually accessible, as a laissez faire attitude about such spaces will void any potential they have to be positive engagement spaces. First, platforms need clear, consistent, and consistently applied community standards for engagement; the current quagmire Facebook faces (and its current and former users face) demonstrates what happens when platforms don't enforce community standards on powerful actors. Hate speech and threats of violence — which prevent people from using their voices and/or punish them for doing so — are strong, if informal, ways of making power substantially less accessible. Platforms should address this through clear standards applied to all and designed to create safe spaces for engagement. Second, misinformation, disinformation, and bots are drowning out authentic and informed voices. Platforms have been aware of this

but financially benefit from bot traffic, and as Facebook's calculations show, platforms benefit from hate groups and the commodification of polarization. Finding ways to identify and remove false information and bots, attach warnings or risk indicators to content that may be false or shared by bots, and seeking to commodify the number of real users, versus apparent users, of a platform are all important.

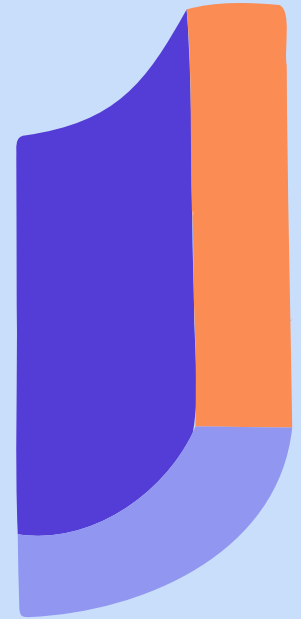
On the more positive side, political communication scholars know quite a bit about what leads to healthy debates and more civil discourse and should be consulted on what kinds of reward systems, and early warning signals, might encourage users to themselves behave well and to alert platforms to the relative health and civility of encounters happening on their servers. In particular, reducing the dehumanization of opponents and reducing polarization are two important levers for the translation of voice into political action. Other positive incentives include lowering the cost of learning and becoming active. For instance, platforms could make trusted information by experts related to topics more accessible and highlight information from expert and civil sources.

How would you measure a messaging, social media, or web search platform's progress against this principle?

There are a range of ways progress towards the above goals could be measured. First, is there an increasing number of spaces or events to allow users to voice their concerns to decision-makers? To the extent that these spaces/events increase, do user statistics show they are being used? Does the analysis of users show that the users are predominately from social groups that might

be expected to already have other ways of voicing their concerns, or is the access to voice being equitably distributed across users? If not, looking into why this is the case and working to improve on this metric is important. How successful is the platform at clarifying their community standards and how consistent are they in enforcing them, even when that involves removing powerful users or the artifacts of some of their platform activity? Is there a reduction in the presence of bots, or, at a minimum, are users being notified at least an X% chance that the post/message is from a bot or false? Are posts of material that have been fact-checked by trusted sources such as PolitiFact and Snopes being removed or having warnings consistently placed alongside them? What is the average time between first post and having a warning applied or a removal occur? Has the platform worked with services like PolitiFact or Snopes to provide priority indicators based on number of shares, likes, etc. that certain items are more important to check in timely ways? For items that are not checked and not from standard sources, are warnings posted that indicate the information is not verified? Is the average time of investigations and content removal for threatening posts and/or posts otherwise violating community standards going down? Are security ratings for platforms improving so that as people participate, they don't have to worry that governments and/or hackers are accessing their information, etc.?

Survey results



**By Jay Jennings, Taeyoung Lee,
Tamar Wilner, and Talia Stroud,
Center for Media Engagement**

We conducted a survey with participants in 20 countries to understand more deeply how the signals resonated with people globally. Please find more about the methodology [here](#).

The survey asked people to evaluate whether it was important for platforms to “give the public access to people in power, such as those at companies and in governments,” and asked people to assess how well the platforms perform with respect to this signal. People were only asked about the platforms for which they are “superusers,” by which we mean people who identify the platform as their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

We analyzed how different demographic and political groups rate the importance of this signal, as well as the platforms’ performance. In particular, we looked at age,

gender, education, ideology, and country. We did this analysis for five platforms: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp.¹ Only statistically significant results are shown and discussed.

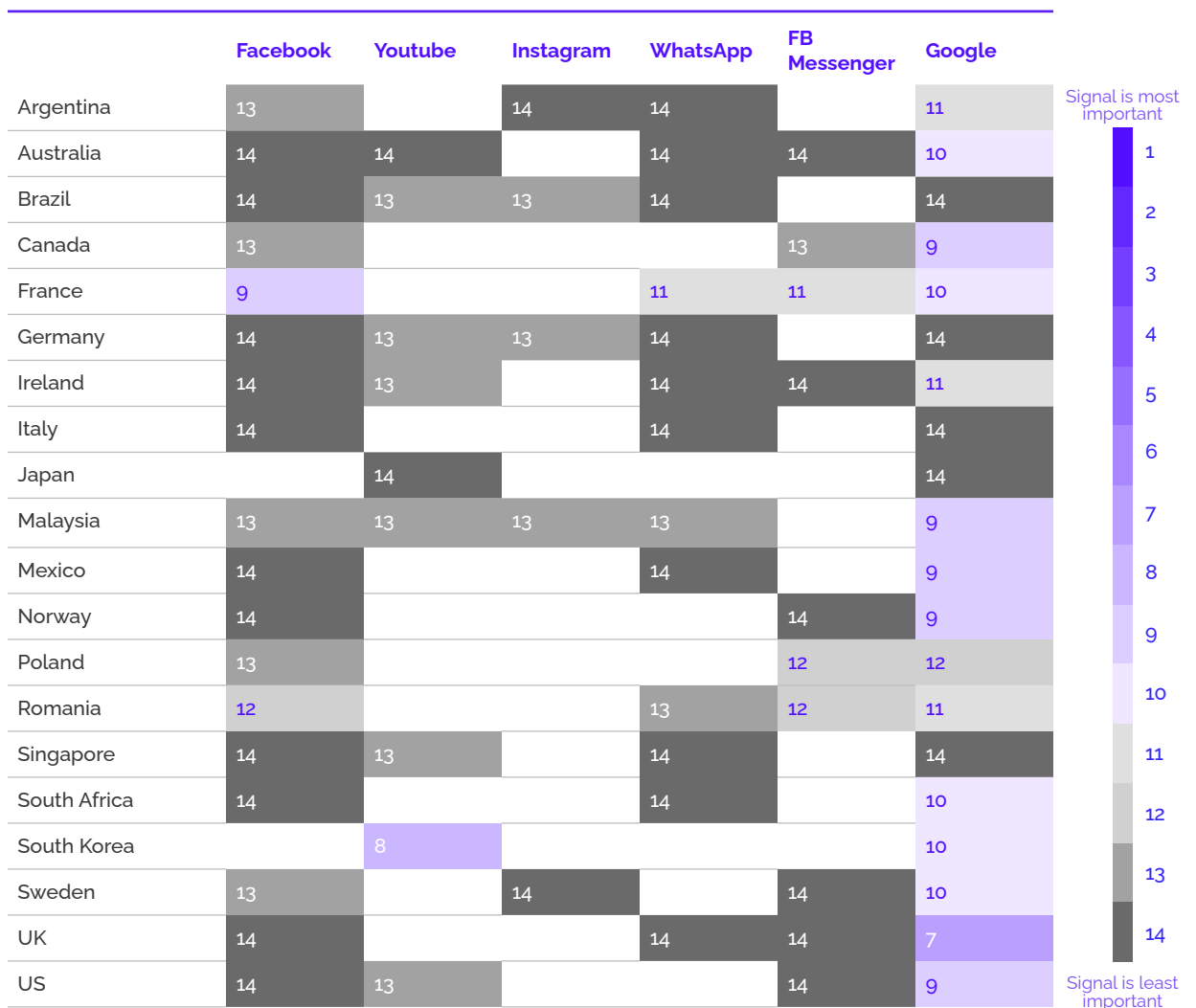
¹ The analyses include only countries where at least 200 people responded that the social/ message/ search platform was the one that they use most frequently, and then only those platforms where we had data for at least 1,000 people. For Google, this includes all 20 countries. For Facebook, this includes 18 countries and excludes Japan and South Korea. For YouTube, this includes Brazil, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States. For Facebook Messenger, this includes Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, the U.K., and the United States. For WhatsApp, this includes all countries except Canada, Japan, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States. Note that the total number of respondents varies by platform: Google = 19,554; Facebook = 10,268; YouTube = 2,937; Facebook Messenger = 4,729; and WhatsApp = 10,181. The larger the sample size, the smaller the effect that we are able to detect.

Importance of the Signal

We first examined whether platform superusers thought that the signal was important. This signal was not ranked as most important for any platform or country. It was, however, ranked as more important by Google superusers compared to the other platforms. It is possible that the lower importance accorded to this signal is because people cannot imagine its value yet and future products and platforms can increase the importance rankings of this signal.

Importance ranking: Make power accessible

A ranking of "1" means that the signal was seen as the most important of the 14 signals for superusers of a given platform in a given country based on a survey of over 20,000 people across 20 countries.

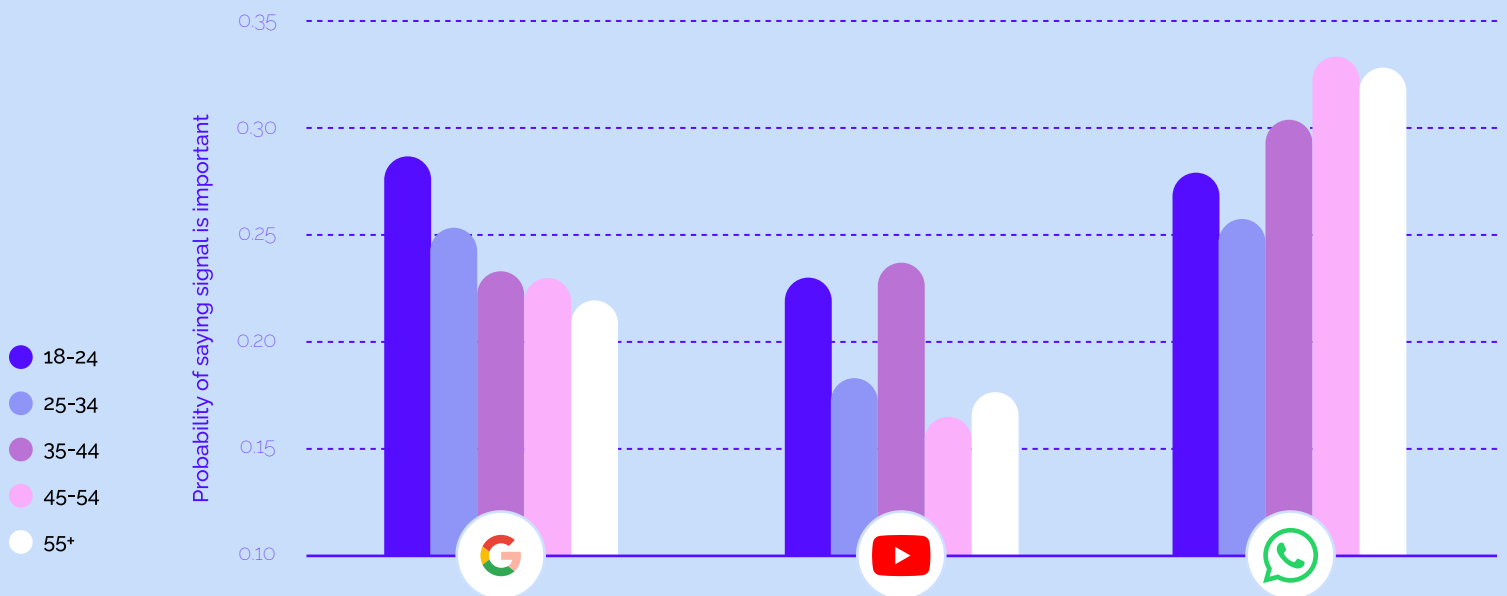


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording: Which of the following do you think it is important for [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] to do? Please select all that apply. Data only shown for those countries where at least 200 survey respondents said that the platform was their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

Importance of the Signal by Age²

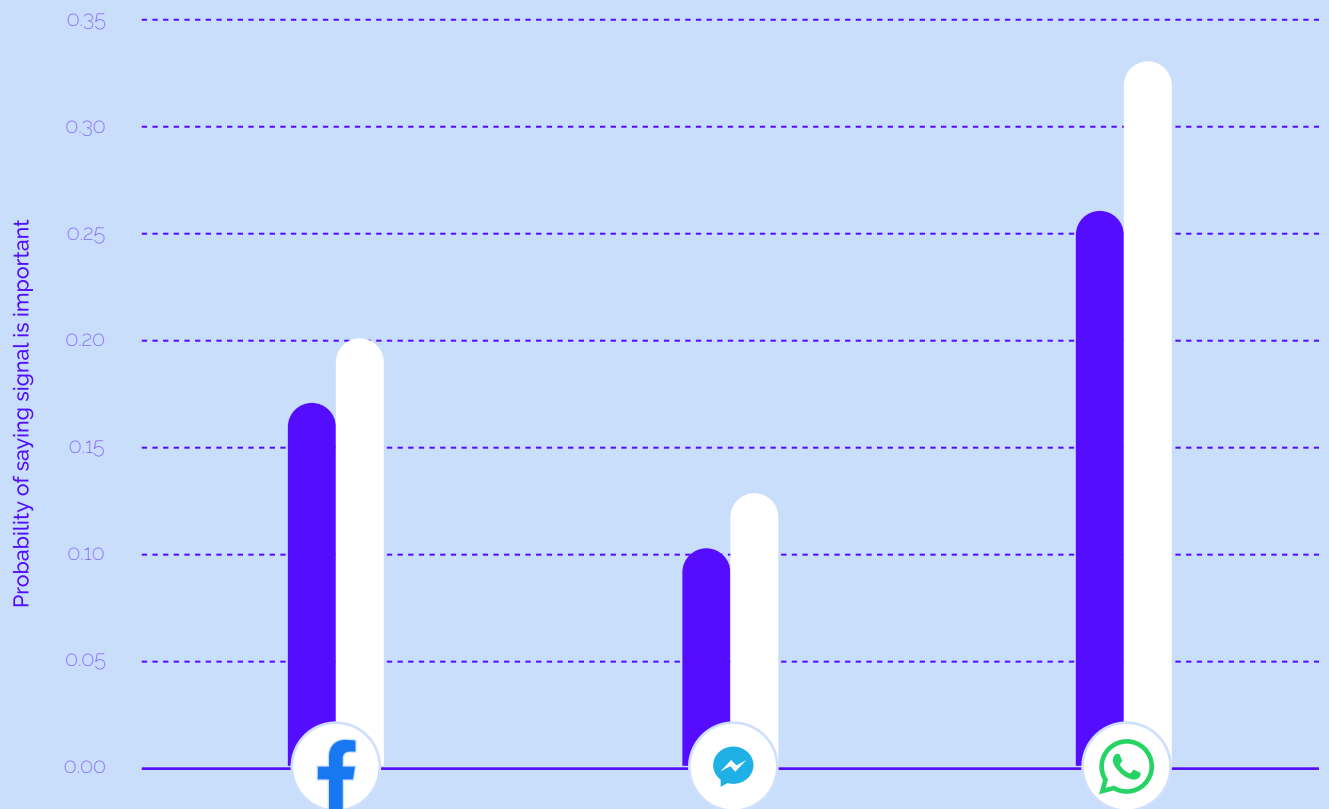
Age predicted whether superusers thought it was important to “give the public access to people in power, such as those at companies and in governments” for three platforms: Google, YouTube, and WhatsApp. For Google, the older the age group, the less likely they were to rate access to power as an important signal. For YouTube, the relationship between age and importance is not as clear. The age groups of 18-24 and 35-44 were more likely to rate as important than those in the 25-34, 45-54, and 55+ age groups. When looking at WhatsApp, the older age groups generally thought this was of more importance than the younger age groups.

² Results shown are predicted probabilities, calculated from a logistic regression analysis predicting that the signal is important based on age, gender, education, ideology, and country, each treated as a categorical variable. The baseline (based on the excluded categories) is a 55+ year old male with high education and middle ideology from the United States (except for WhatsApp, where the baseline is South Africa).



Importance of the Signal by Gender

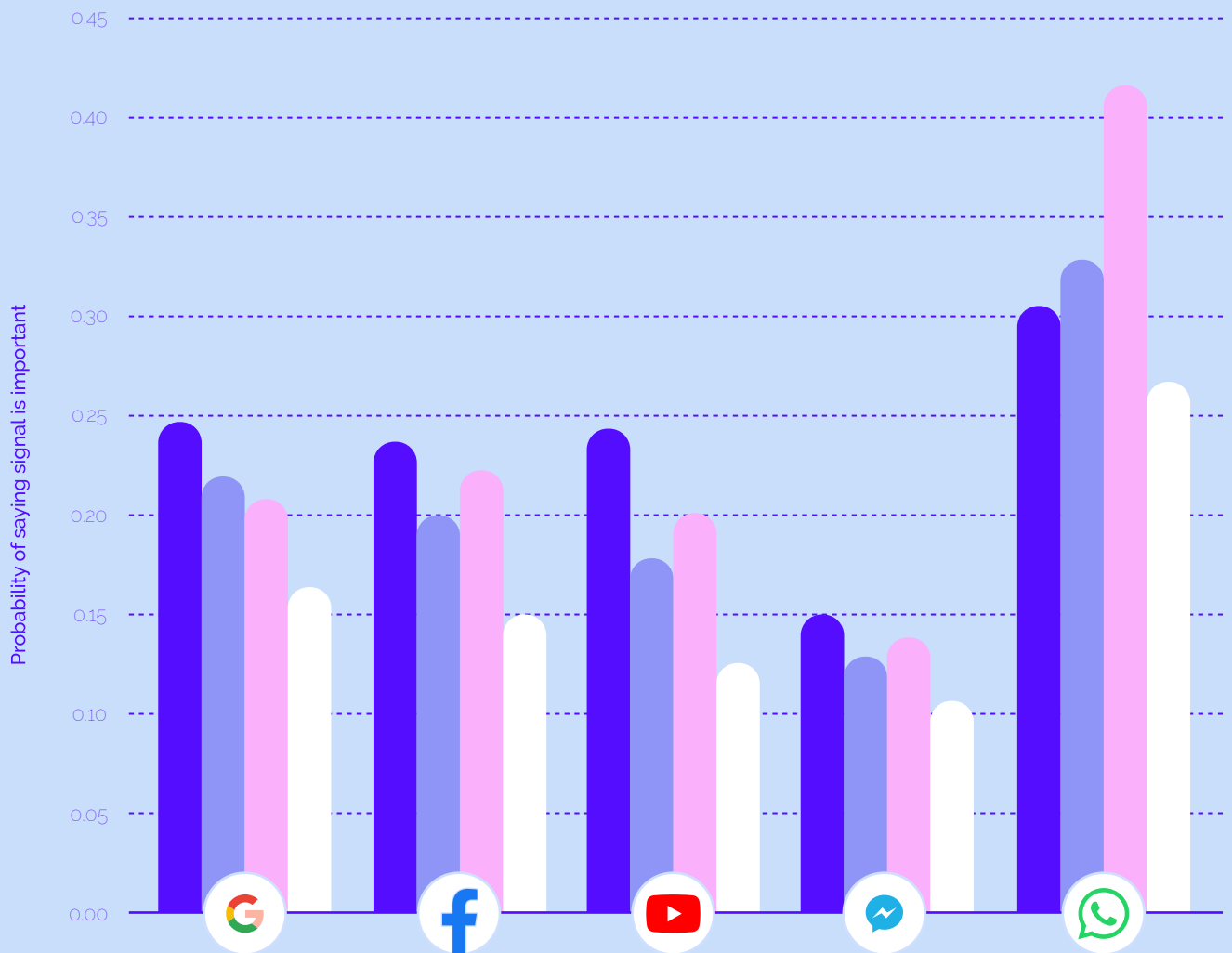
Men and women differed in the importance they ascribed to giving access to power only for three platforms: Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. Here, men were more likely than women to say that the signal was important.



Importance of the Signal by Ideology³

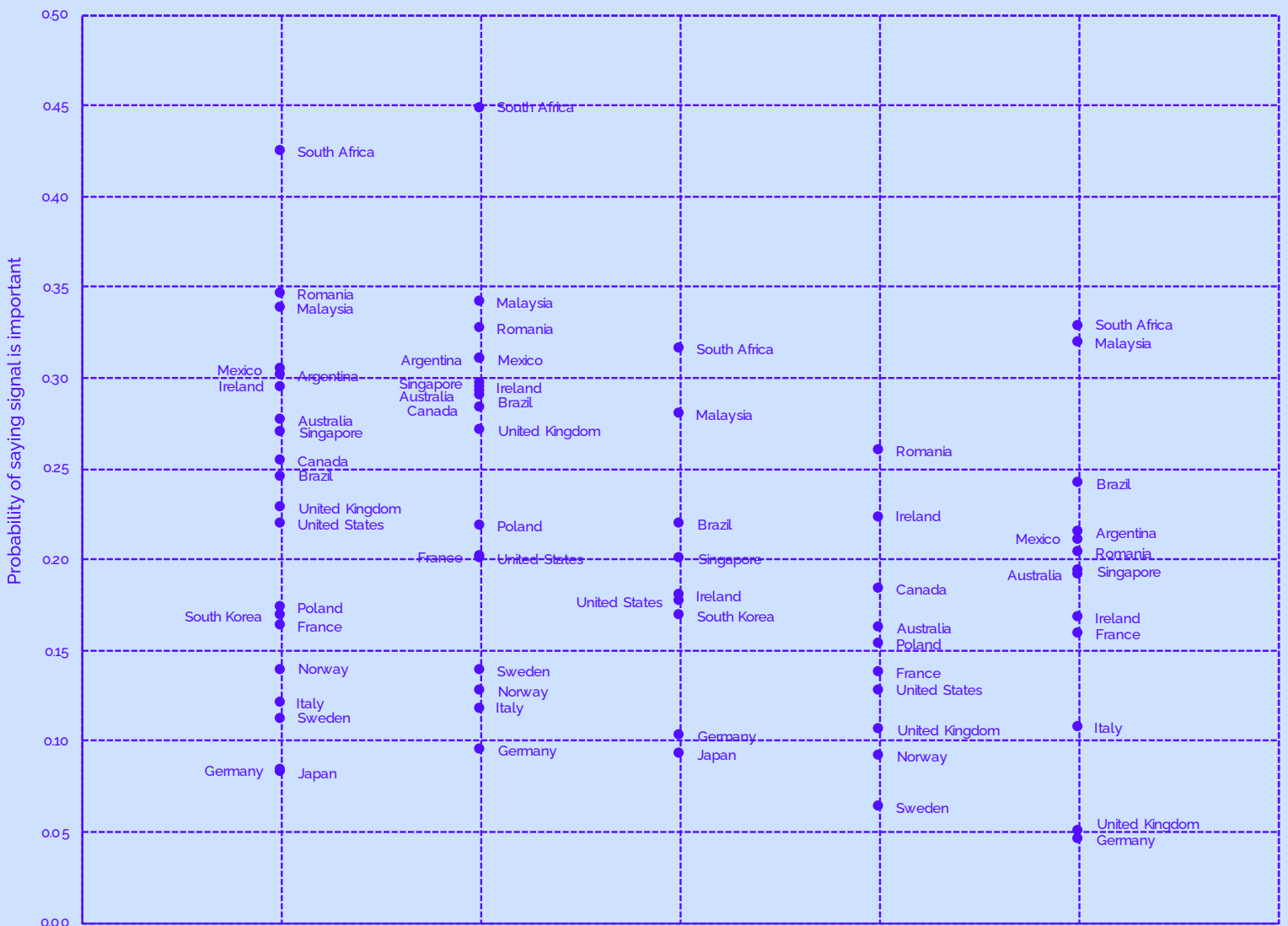
There were differences by political ideology in those who say it is important to “give the public access to people in power, such as those at companies and in governments” for all five platforms. Across all of the platforms, superusers who didn't know their ideology rated the signal as less important than those with a stated ideology. For Google, those on the left were more likely to state that the signal was important, whereas for WhatsApp, those on the right were more likely to state that the signal was important. For Facebook and YouTube, those on the left were more likely than those in the middle to say that the signal was important. For Facebook, those on the right were also more likely than those in the middle to say that the signal was important.

³ Ideology was asked on a 10-point scale and people were given the option of saying “don't know.” This was recoded into 4 categories (1 through 3, 4 through 7, 8 through 10, and “don't know”).



Importance of the Signal by Country

There was significant variation by country for all five of the platforms we examined based on how important people thought it was to "give the public access to people in power, such as those at companies and in governments". The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, superusers in South Africa were the most likely to say this signal was important for Google, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. German superusers were the least likely to say this was important for WhatsApp and Facebook and second least likely for Google and YouTube.



Platform Performance on the Signal

For specific platforms, superusers were first asked to say on which of the signals they thought that the platform was doing well, and then on which of the signals they thought that the platform was doing poorly. We then categorized people's responses as (0) believe that the platform is doing poorly, (1) believe that the platform is doing neither well nor poorly, or (2) believe that the platform is doing well. Across all platforms and countries, superusers didn't see the platforms as performing particularly well or poorly. The highest ratings were a 1.2 from Instagram superusers in Brazil.

Performance index: Make power accessible

Responses of "2" indicate that everyone in a particular country thought that the platform was performing well on a signal; responses of "0" indicate that no one in a particular country thought that the platform was performing well on a signal based on a survey of over 20,000 people across 20 countries.

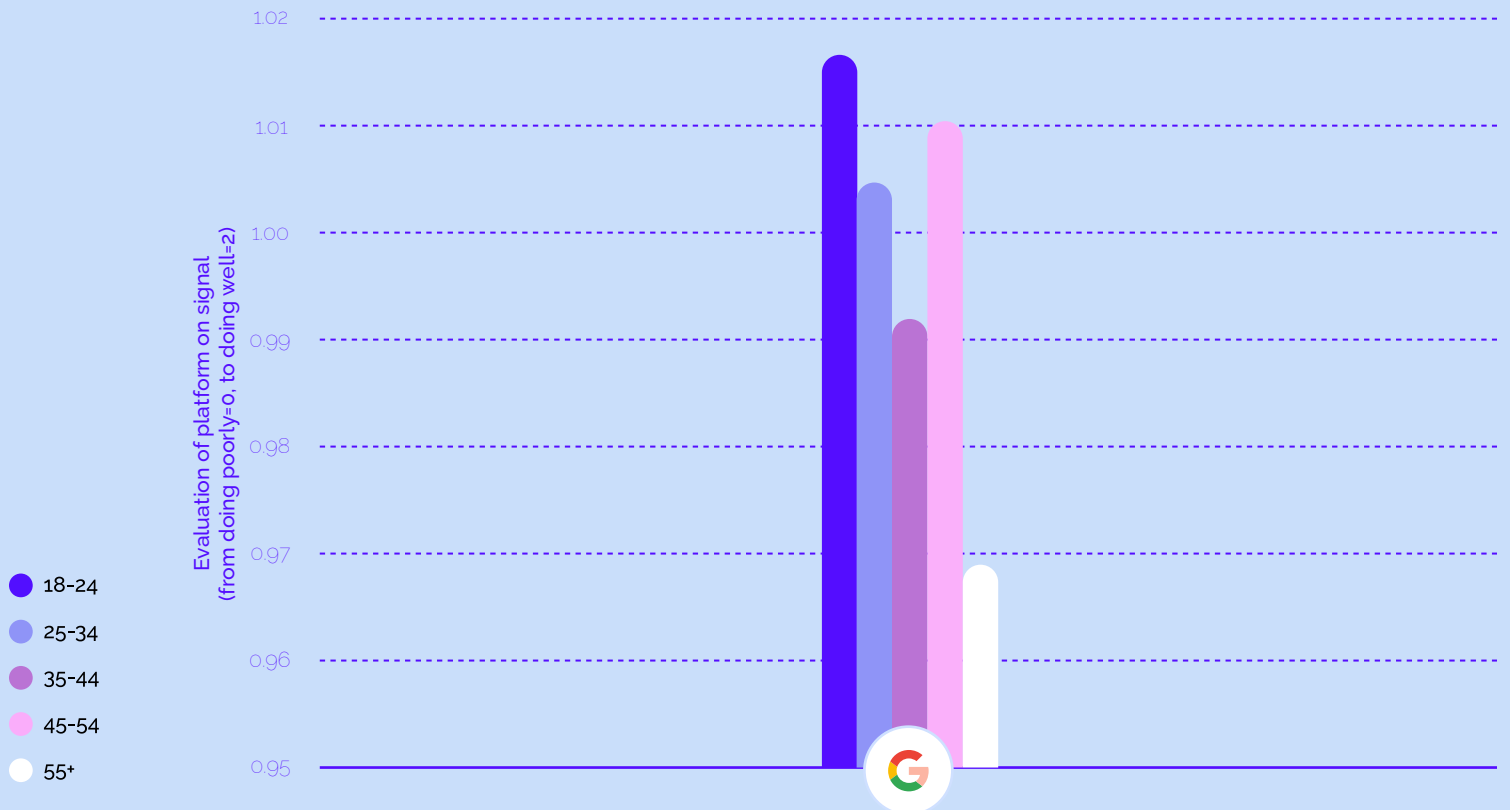


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording - Which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does well at? Please select all that apply. And which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does poorly at? Please select all that apply. Data only shown for those countries where at least 200 survey respondents said that the platform was their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

Platform Performance on the Signal by Age⁴

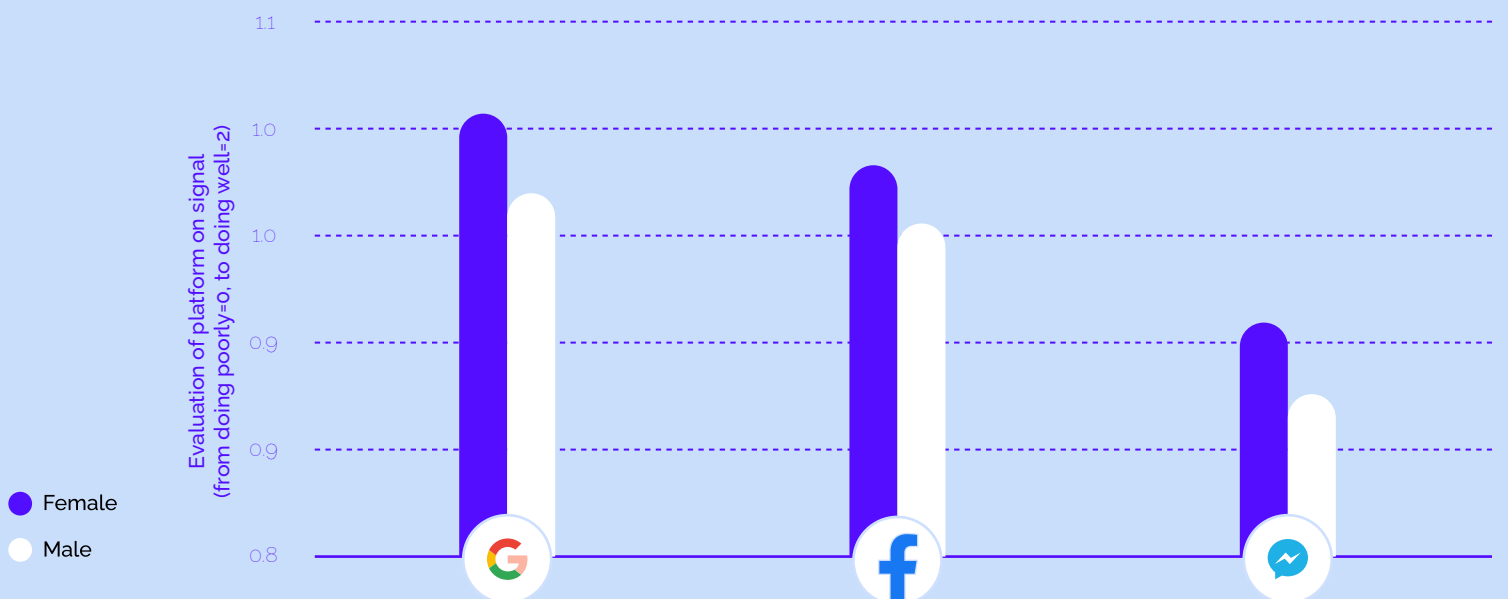
Only for Google did the responses about signal performance differ by age. Superusers aged 55+ gave Google the lowest ratings compared to those 18-34 and those 45-54.

⁴ Results shown are predicted responses, calculated from a regression analysis predicting that the signal is important based on age, gender, education, ideology, and country, each treated as a categorical variable. The baseline (based on the excluded categories) is a 55+ year old male with high education and middle ideology from the United States (except for WhatsApp, where the baseline is Germany).



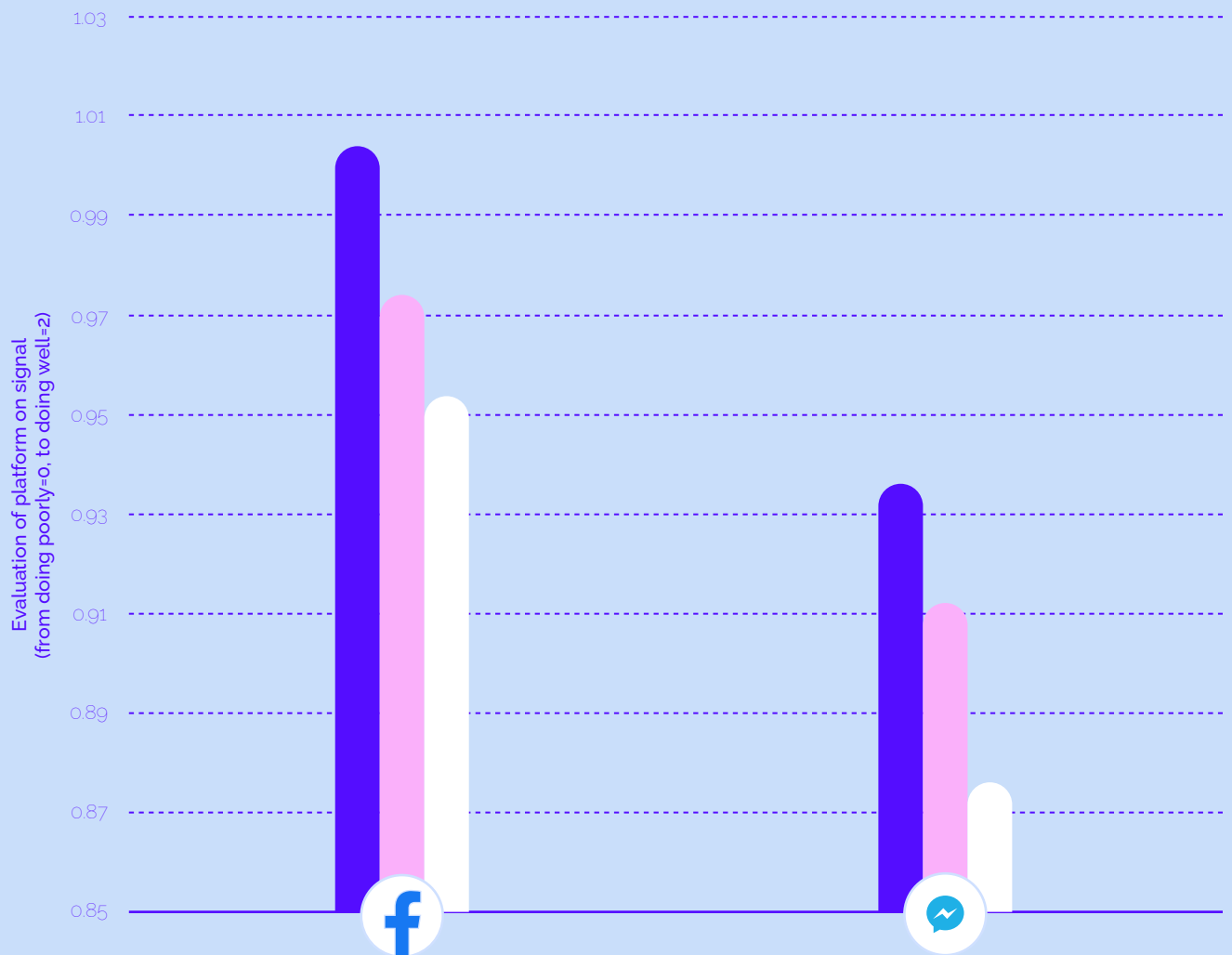
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

For Google, Facebook, and Facebook Messenger, women rated the platforms' performance on "giving the public access to people in power, such as those at companies and in governments" better than did men.



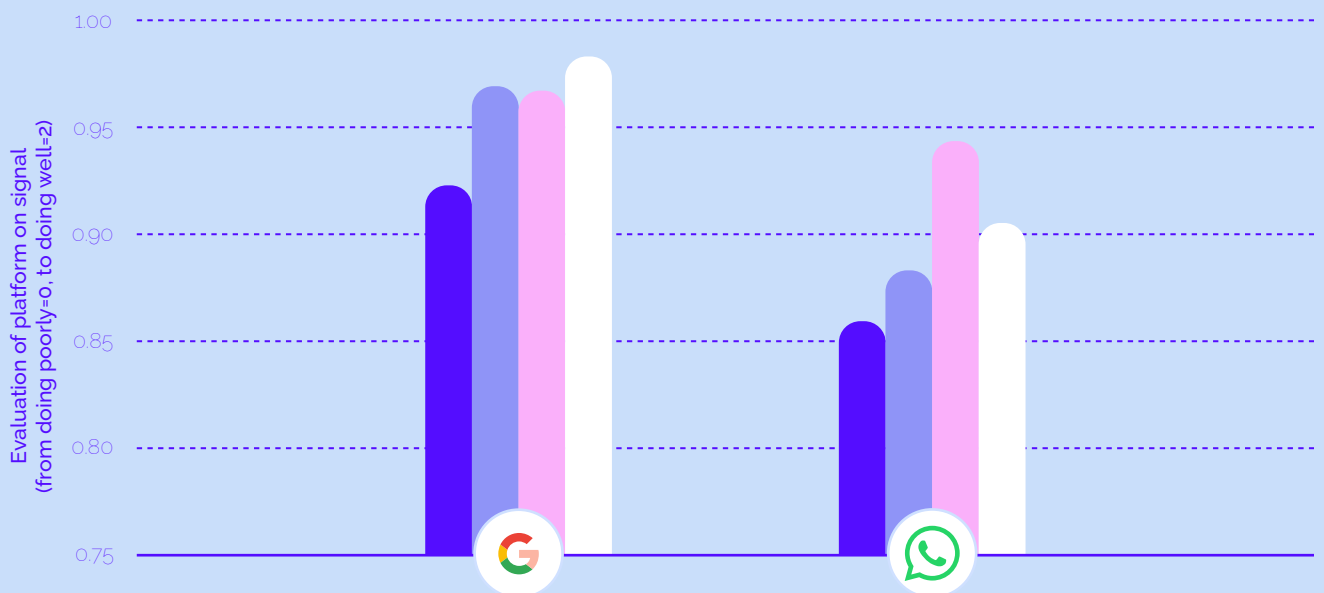
Platform Performance on the Signal by Education

Superusers with higher education levels rated Facebook and Facebook Messenger's performance lower on access to power than did those with less education.



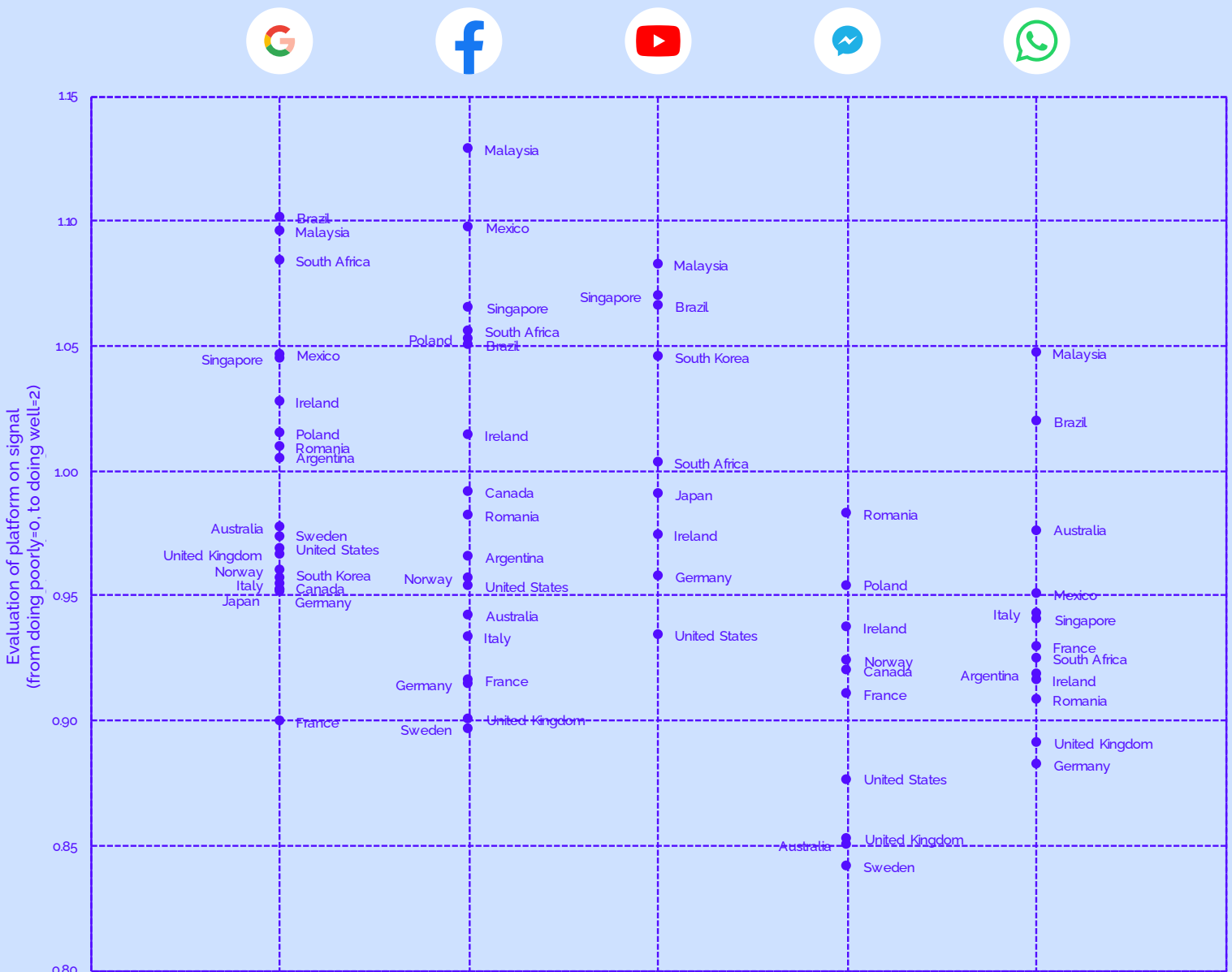
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

Only for Google and WhatsApp did responses differ for platform performance on the making power accessible signal. Superusers on the political left evaluated Google less favorably on “giving the public access to people in power, such as those at companies and in governments” than did those with other ideologies. For WhatsApp, superusers on the right were more positive in their assessment of their performance for this signal than others and those who didn't know their ideology were more positive than those on the left.

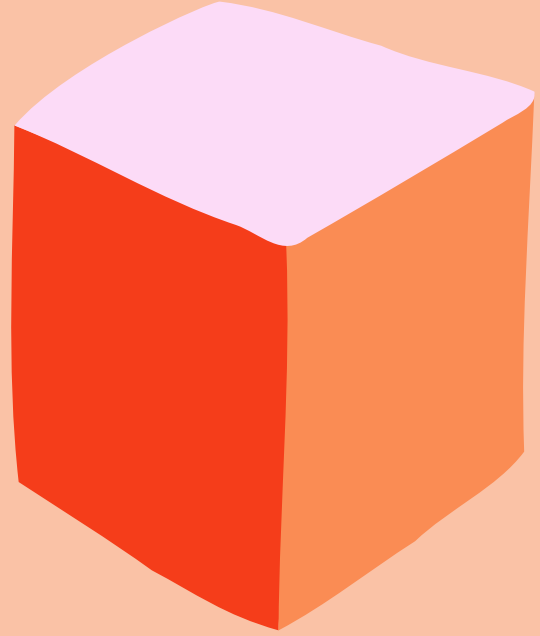


Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

There was variation by country in evaluations of platform performance. The chart below shows how superusers rated the platforms' performance in each country, controlling for age, gender, education, and ideology from "doing poorly" (0) to "doing well" (2). Superusers in Malaysia rated Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp as performing better than superusers in all other countries. Facebook and Facebook Messenger superusers in Sweden rated the platforms' performance most poorly.



Focus group report



By Gina Masullo, Ori Tenenboim,
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Center for Media Engagement

We conducted two focus groups in each of five countries (Brazil, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States). Please find more about the methodology [here](#). Participants were asked to reflect on their social media experiences and the proposed signals. With respect to this signal, participants

made several observations. Please note that all names included are pseudonyms.

The idea that social media should create or facilitate access to people in power generated mixed reactions. Participants wanted access to political or commercial actors, but

they worried people in power would misuse social media. Some participants felt it was not social media platforms' responsibility to ensure access to power.



I think the fact that you can tweet the President right now and tell him what you're thinking, regardless of whether he responds or not, that's really important because it makes you feel like you have a voice in our land." – Andrew, U.S. focus group participant



What would happen if I write: Hello, Ms. Merkel, I just wanted to say this and that... Do they mean that these people become more accessible?"
– Elizabeth, German focus group participant

Participants – particularly in the United States – talked about the importance of having access to companies and people in power. As Andrew put it: “I think the fact that you can tweet the President right now and tell him what you’re thinking, regardless of whether he responds or not, that’s really important because it makes you feel like you have a voice in our land... I feel like years ago, if you wanted to take your opinion on something you would feel powerless because there’s no way to reach your representative; whereas now, you can just reach out in any way. And I think that’s really great.” Focusing on commercial actors, Mary, also of the U.S., shared that she had tweeted to an airline company she had issues with. “I’ve gotten miles back, so that’s a real result,” she said.

Participants also talked about the responsibility of political and commercial actors to be accessible and to hear what people say. “It’s extremely important for people who are above us, the people who rule the country, who use our money, the society’s money, to be accessible and listen to what we would like to get from the government, the company, and so on,” noted Socorro, of Brazil.

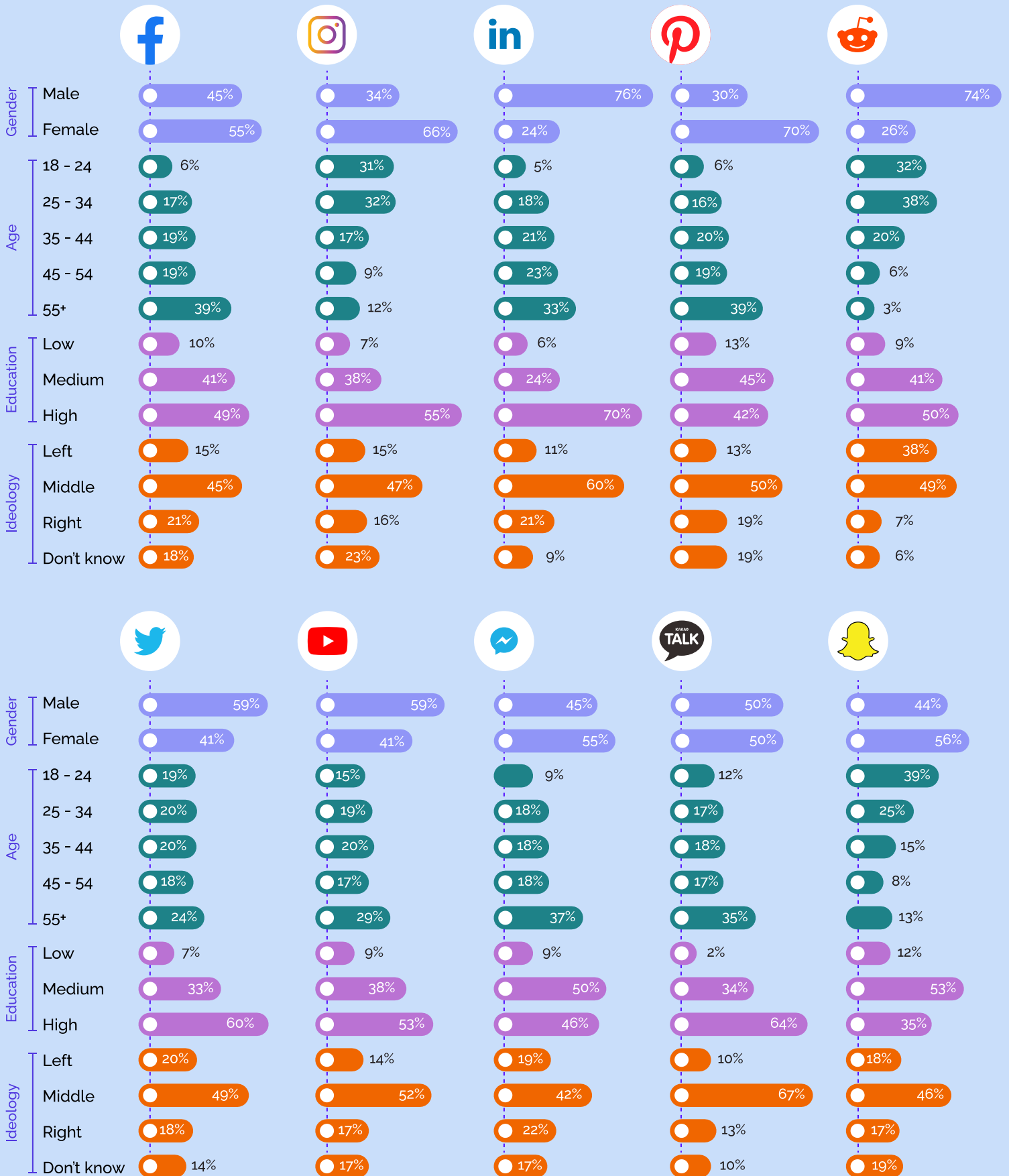
However, some participants were not convinced the idea of accessibility to power would work in practice. They thought that access to political and commercial actors does not mean that those actors are listening or responding. “Politicians or big companies, such as VW or so, have their own pages and profiles where you can

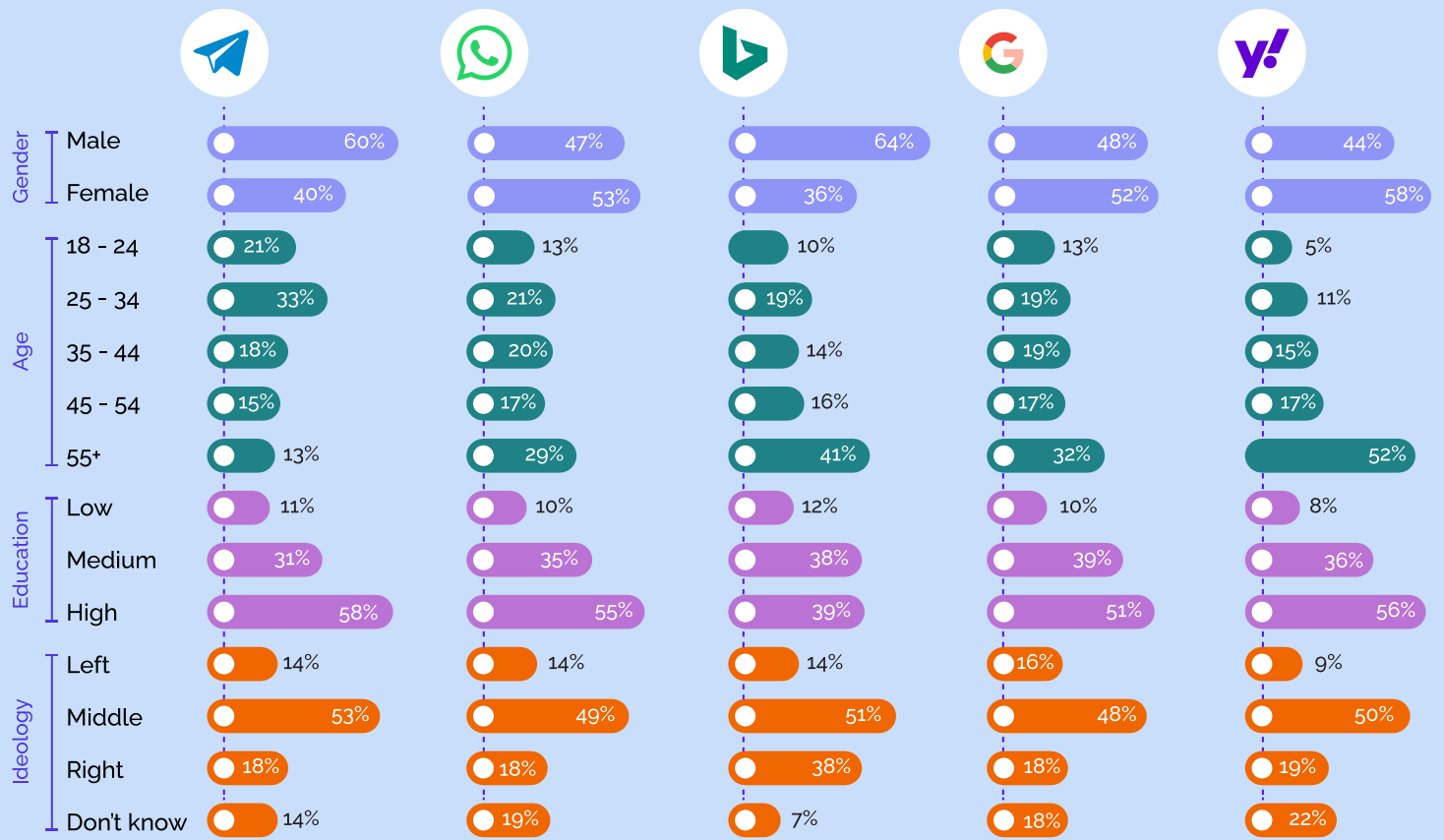
theoretically get into contact with them,” explained Elisabeth, of Germany. “... That these pages are expanded, and you get more direct access. I don’t know what would happen – I don’t know if Angela Merkel has her own profile... What would happen if I write: Hello, Ms. Merkel, I just wanted to say this and that... Do they mean that these people become more accessible?”

In addition, participants raised concerns that social media give those in power the ability to use the platforms for negative purposes. “The bad side (is) being misused... Financial people would misuse it to do bad things... There are good and bad,” remarked Jevesh, of Malaysia. Brad, of the U.S., expressed a similar viewpoint. “I’m conflicted,” he said. “I think accessibility is important. I also think certain political figures encourage violence, and so, them being accessible is also harmful. And I also think [about] the spread of ‘fake news.’ I think more people in power – political figures ... advertise on social media to target people with incorrect news.” Some participants thought that although social media platforms could facilitate access to people in power, platforms should not initiate access. It is up to political and commercial actors to build presence on social media, and it is up to users to contact them. For example, according to Alexander, of Germany, “This access already does exist. And I think that this should be initiated by the people themselves and not by social media.”

User demographics from survey

Based on the survey respondents across all 20 countries, we looked at the demographics of superusers. For example, of those naming Facebook as their most used social media platform, 45% are male and 55% are female.





Logo glossary

Social media



Messaging



Search engines



