

Social Media, Intelligence, and Modern Warfare

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Abstract:

We study how social media affects intelligence collection and targeting in modern wars, using Ukraine as a case study. Exploiting Ukraine's March 2022 ban on posting images of destruction without military approval, we compare areas with high and low prewar Telegram activity (akin to a difference in differences approach). We find the policy sharply reduced posting and was followed by fewer strikes, hospital attacks, and civilian casualties in high-social-media areas. The results suggest that user-generated online content can improve military targeting and that restricting such information may reduce harm to civilians. We can also make some inference about pre-policy military targeting.