Discussion on “Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behavior”

Maximilian Ben Ali, March 2021

Computational Social Media

Poll : What can we predict?

What features do you think we could predict from public likes?

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What features do you think we can predict?

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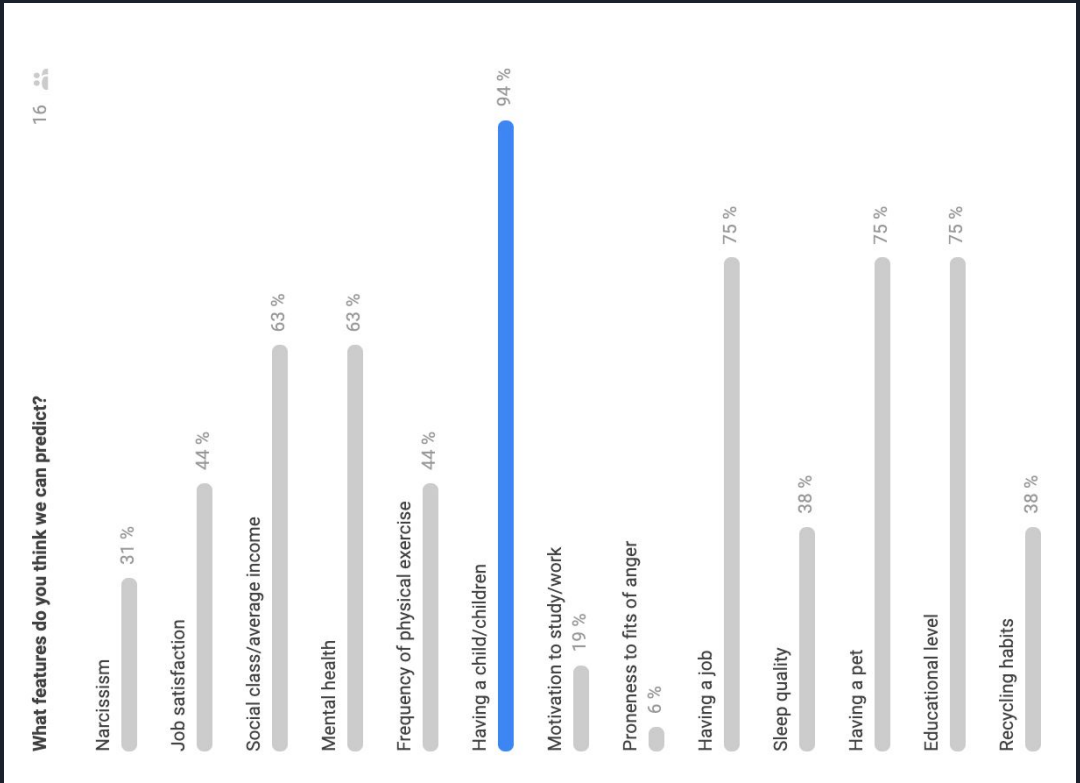
Poll : What can we predict?



Poll : What can we predict?

In their experiment, seems to be a trend:

- Lowest accuracy for items pertaining to relationships
- Medium for habits/behaviours (e.g. addictive substance uses)
- Highest for stable/socio-demographic traits

Political targeting and advertising

- This can be useful for targeted advertising campaigns… But what about political ones?
- Between June and November 2016, Trump's team ran: 5.9M ads on Facebook ($44M) only using Facebook's automated advertising system.
- How do you think this could affect how politicians organise their campaigns? What about the outcomes of elections?

Political targeting and advertising

Some articles on Trump's use of Facebook advertising:

https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/04/how-facebooks-ad-technology-helps-trump-win/606403/

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-2020-disinformation-war/605530/

Gerrymandering : first explanation

- Practice intended to establish an unfair political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating district boundaries ;

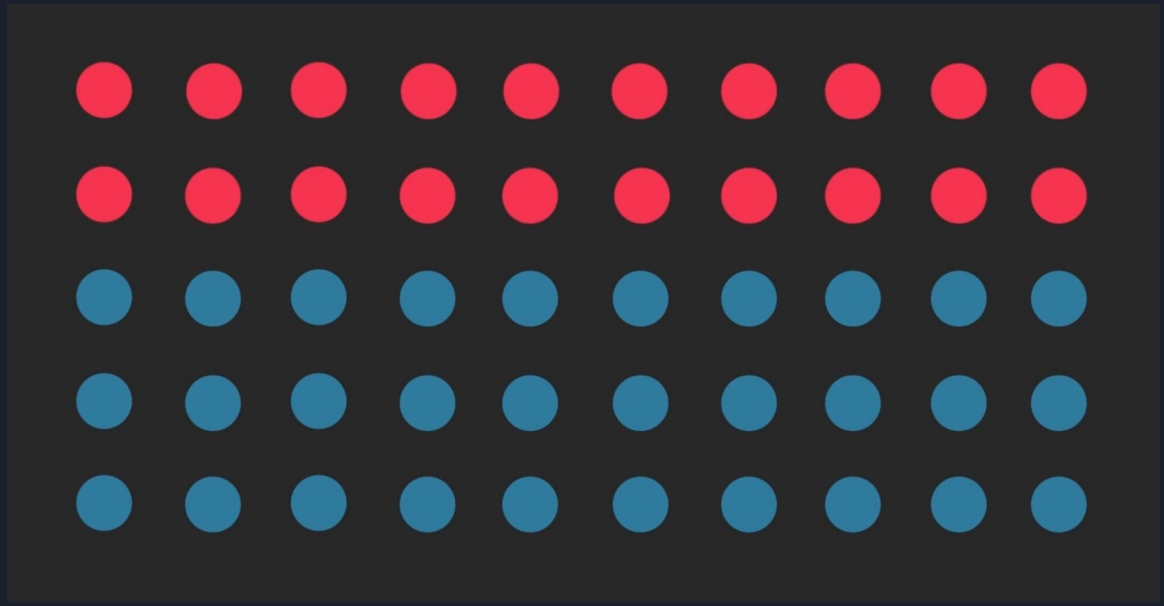
- Main idea : divide electoral districts in such a way as to **concentrate the votes of perceived opponents into a small number of districts** where the governing party will lose by a large margin, but win by small majorities elsewhere in a larger number of districts ;

- Already possible without Facebook data, but their use could increase accuracy / predictability for voters, and allow to bypass laws against racial discrimation.

Gerrymandering : origin

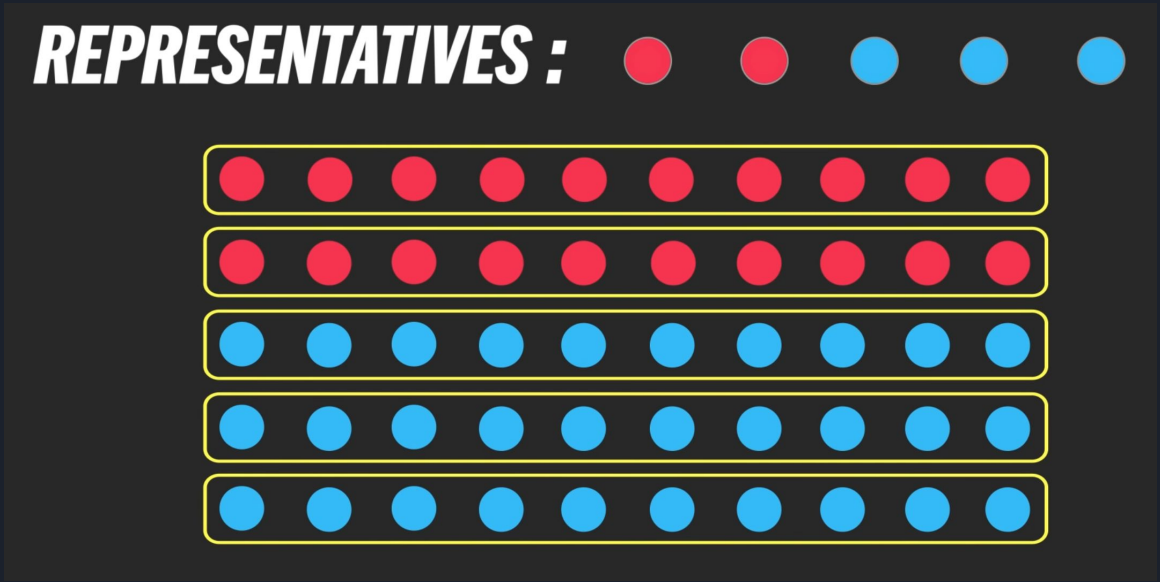
- From Elbridge Gerry (/Gherry/), who ,in 1812, signed a bill that created a partisan district in the Boston area that was compared to the shape of a mythological salamander ;

Gerrymandering : how to ? An example



Illustrations from the following Washington Post video (2:41) :
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGLRJ12uqmk

Gerrymandering : “Perfect representation”



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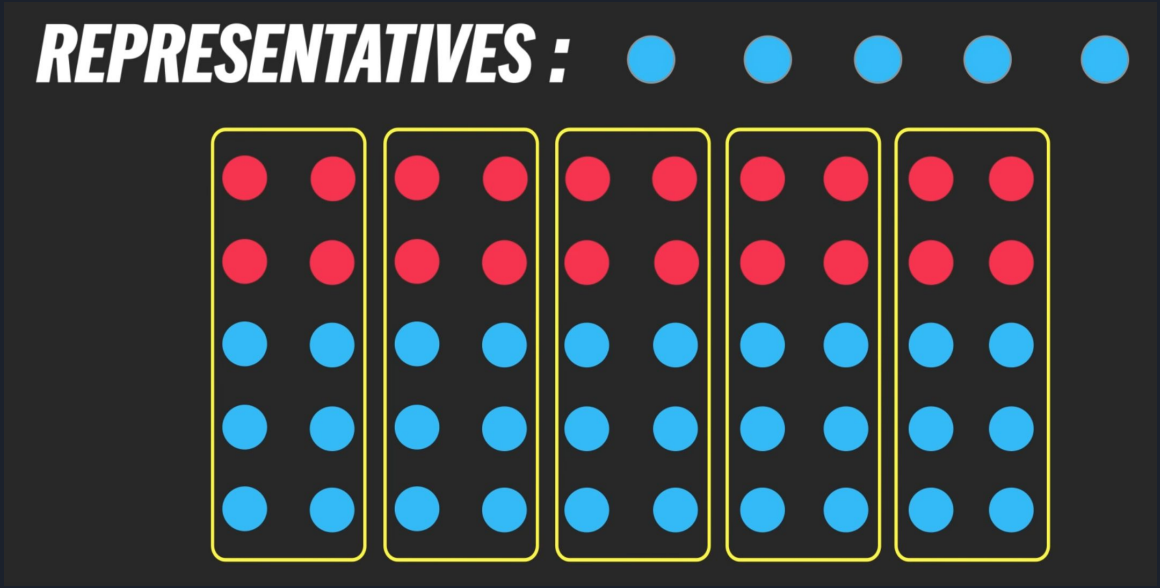
Gerrymandering : “Compact but unfair”



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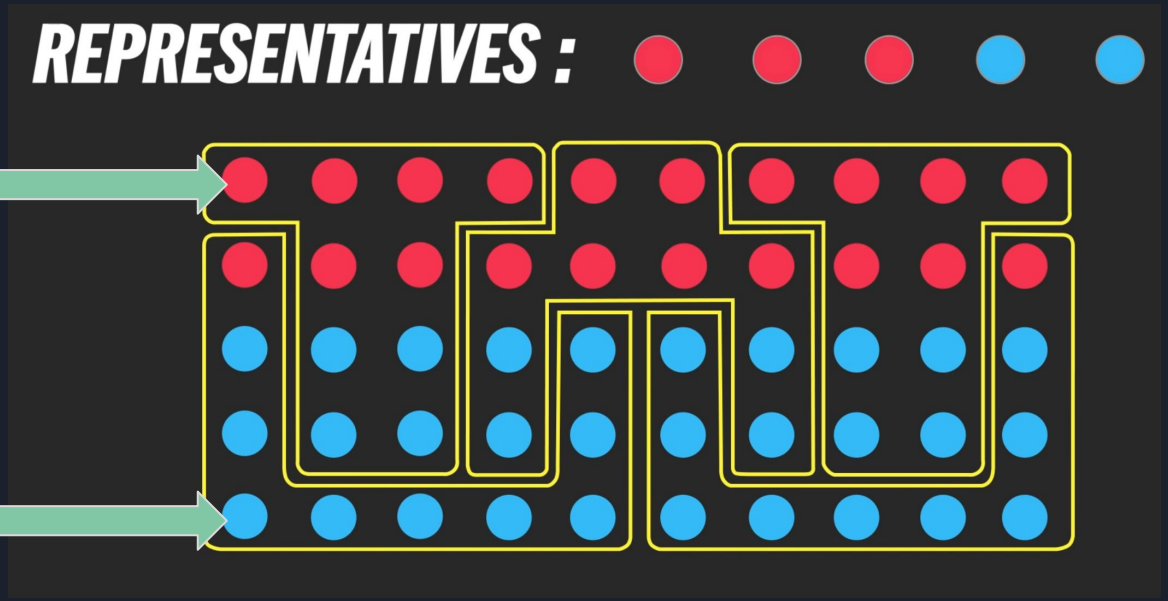
Gerrymandering : “Neither compact nor fair”



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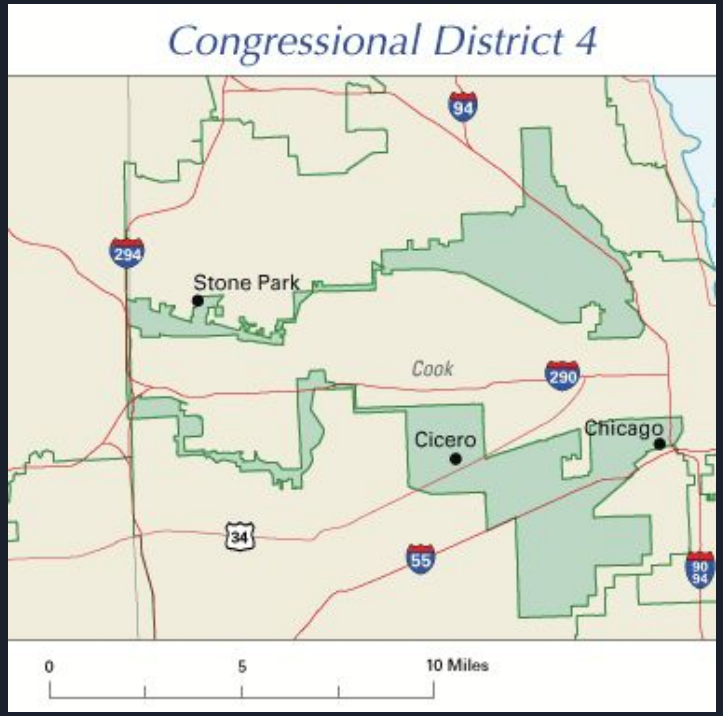
Gerrymandering : discussion

1. Did you know about this political tool ?
2. Do you think it’s a threat to democratic representation ?
3. Can it be enhanced through the methods discussed in the paper? To what extent?

Gerrymandering : example of posi



Illinois's 4th congressional district

Gerrymandering : if you want to go further...

Mini-game to explore the idea and mechanisms with simple examples :
http://gametheorytest.com/gerry/game/

3:52 Ted-Talk on the topic :
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcUDBgYodIE

19:33 Last Week Tonight, humoristic show
with John Oliver on the topic :
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-4dIImaodQ

Poll : Would you give your personal data ?

For research purpose, for commercial use, for other use ?

If so, what data ?

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Would you be okay to give the following data for research purposes?

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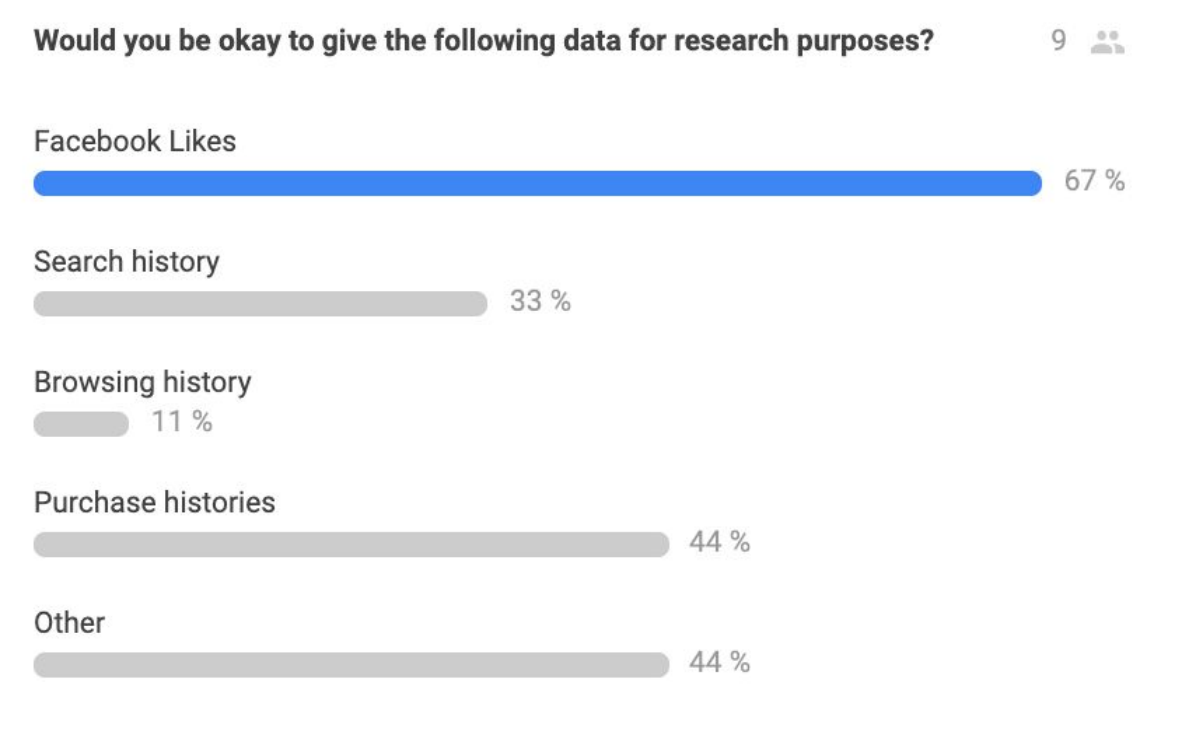

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Would you be okay to give the following data for commercial/marketing purposes?

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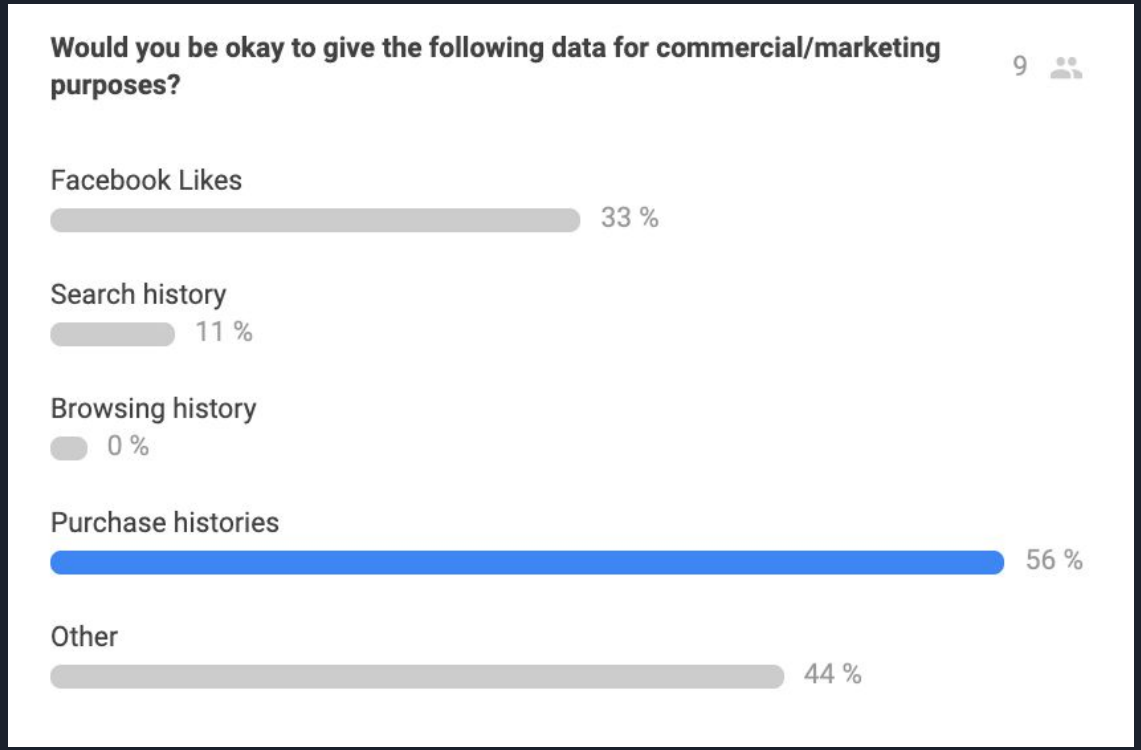

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Would you be okay to give the following data for political (e.g. census) purposes?

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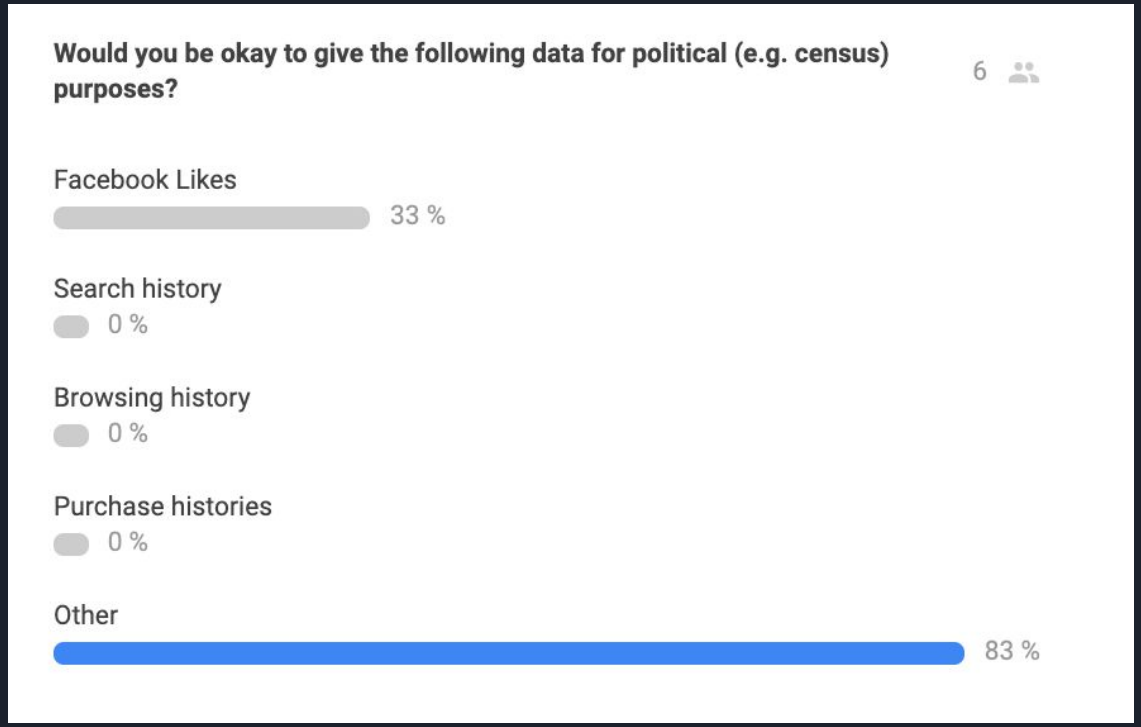

Advantages for research

What advantages for research?

- Sampling : access to hard-to-reach populations
  - Example : the Swiss LGBTQI+ panel and Respondent-Driven Sampling
  - Other ideas of hard-to-reach populations ?
- Easily accessible raw data
- Cost reduction, especially useful for longitudinal studies (data collection on same participants over time)

Thank you for the discussion !

Additional questions / remarks ?