BLM in the Battleground:
An Analysis of Racial Justice-Related Election Ads in Georgia

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BACKGROUND

- Georgia played a pivotal role in the 2020 election season by helping to both elect Joe Biden as president and place Democrats in control of the Senate. In a year riddled with demands for greater racial justice, Georgia elected its first pair of Democratic senators since 2005, one of whom was the state's first Black senator.
- This study analyzes Facebook ads run by presidential and Georgia senatorial candidates in 2020 to discern how they discuss racial justice in their digital advertising.

METHODS

- Structural topic modeling (STM) and keyword search on the creative text of 90,602 distinct Facebook ads.
- **Politicians:** Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Rev. Raphael Warnock, Kelly Loeffler, Jon Ossoff and David Perdue.
- **Timeframe:** September 1 - November 3, 2020.
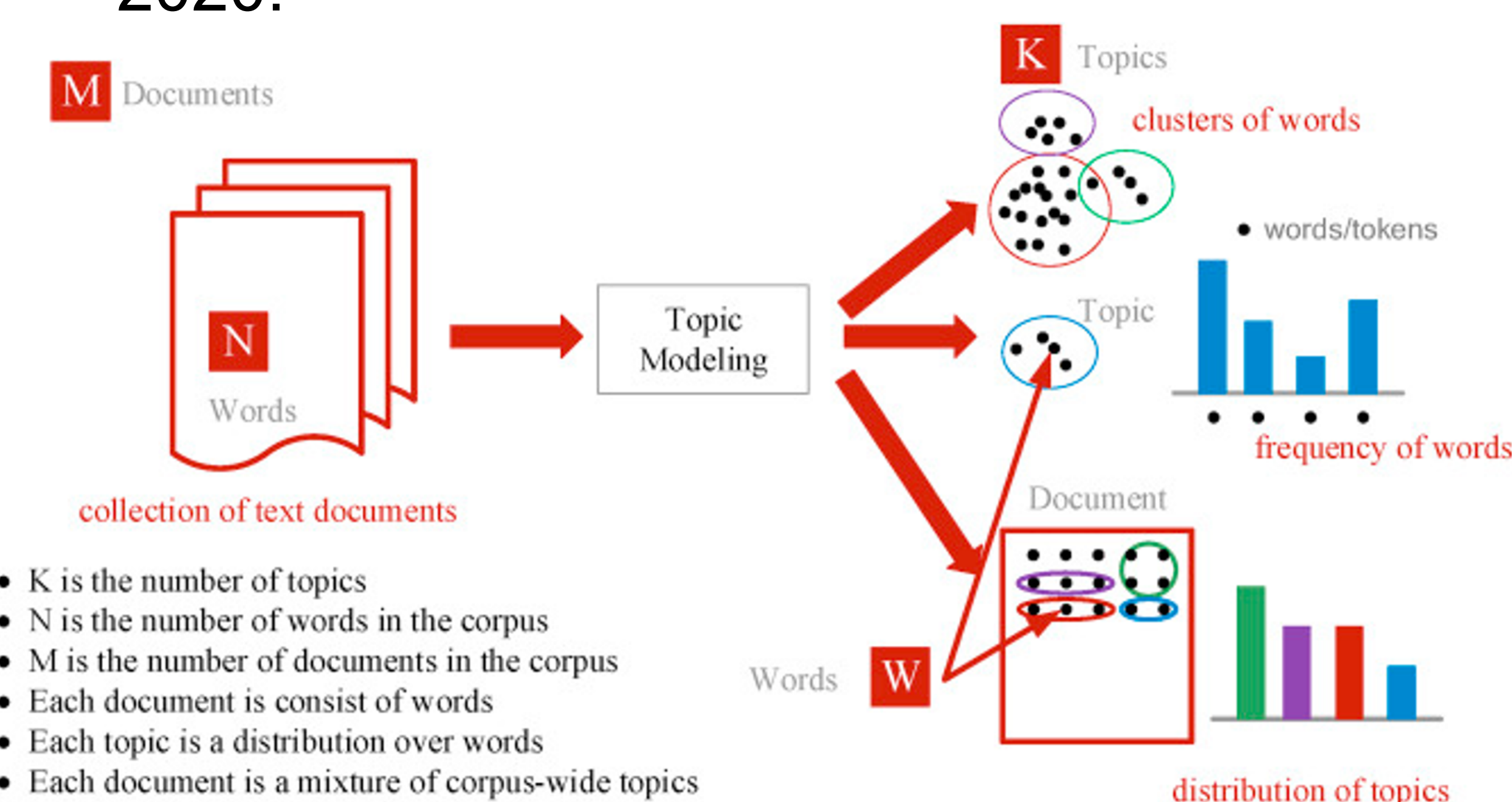
(A schematic outlining the topic modeling process.)

FINDINGS

- The STM model could not detect any topics dedicated solely to racial justice.
- Keyword search revealed Republicans explicitly declared movements like Antifa "terrorist organizations."
- Democrats explicitly mentioned Black Lives Matter and addressed issues such as Black voting rights.

Republicans are the only candidates to mention **Antifa** in their ads, while **Democrats** are more likely to mention **Black Lives Matter** and address issues like **Black voting rights**.
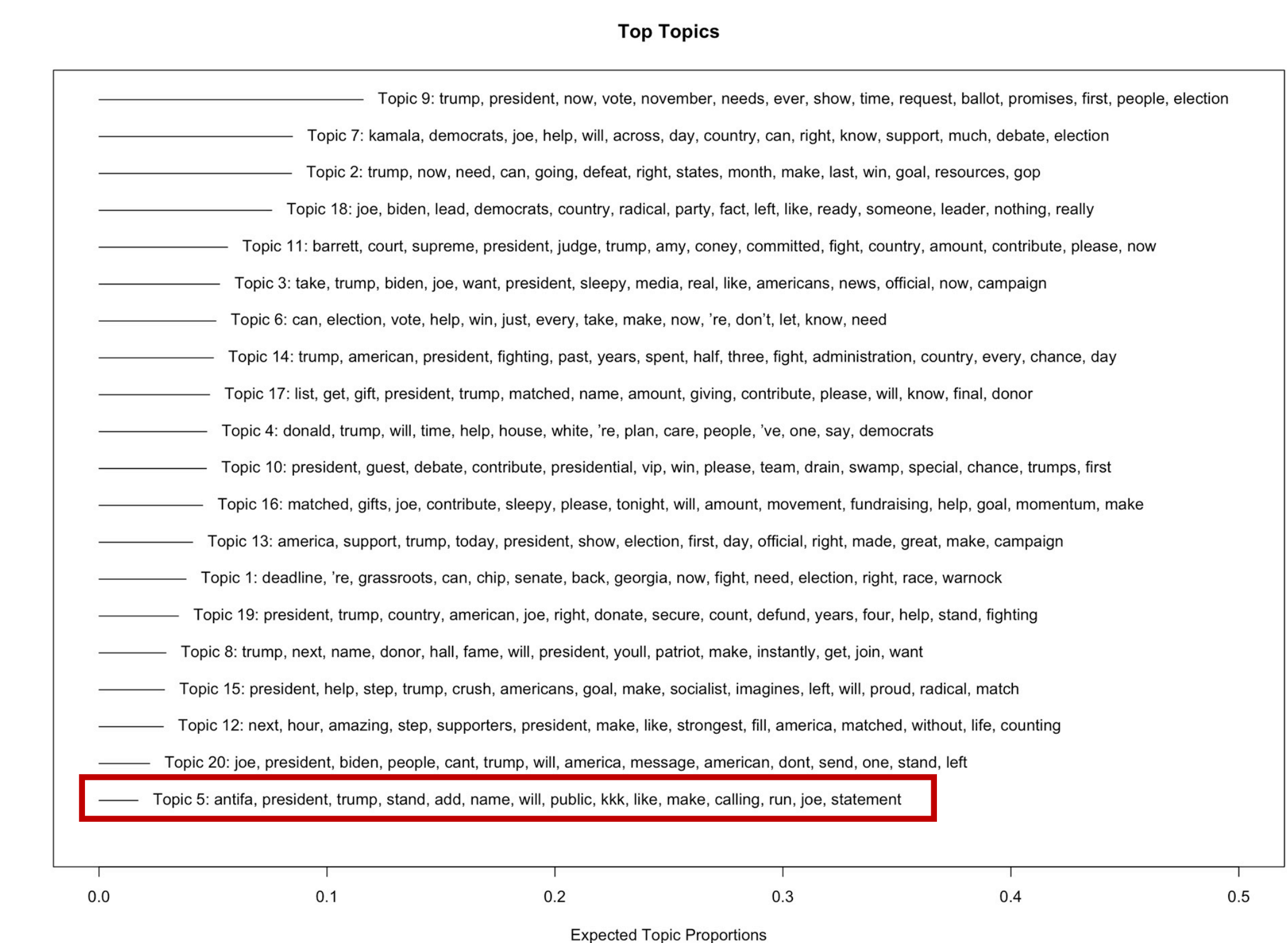
(The top topics generated from the STM model. The one outlined in red contained the terms "antifa" and "kkk".)

Estimated Effects of Democrats vs. Republicans

Topic 1: Grassroots Campaign Support
Topic 2: Taking Down the GOP
Topic 5 ("antifa", "kkk")
Topic 11: Supreme Court
Topic 16: Campaign Fundraising
Topic 18: The "Radical Left"

Democrats ... Republicans

DISCUSSION

- Overall, candidates from either party primarily ran ads requesting donations to campaigns and voter turnout funds.
- Facebook does not allow political advertisers to run new ads the week before Election Day (i.e., October 27 – November 3, 2020), so none of the ads in the dataset accounted for developments from that timeframe.
- Of the six politicians analyzed in this study, Trump ran the most ads (50,662) in the dataset, while Perdue ran the least (61).

NEXT STEPS

- Lengthen the timeframe of interest.
- Incorporate ads from other battleground states.

REFERENCES

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2. Lebryk, T. (2021, April 18). *Introduction to the Structural Topic Model (STM)*. Medium. https://towardsdatascience.com/introduction-to-the-structural-topic-model-stm-34ec4bd5383.

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