



Perspektiven auf globale Politik

ATLANTA AND #ALLMALEPANELS: #ISA2016 AS IT HAPPENED ON TWITTER

13. April 2016 · von Felix Haass · in *Debatte, Konferenzbericht* · 4 Kommentare

Does the ISA Annual Convention have a gender problem? Twitter users sure think it does. And they might have a point. I've downloaded and looked at all the tweets about #isa2016—and the tweet that received by far the most likes and retweets was this one:



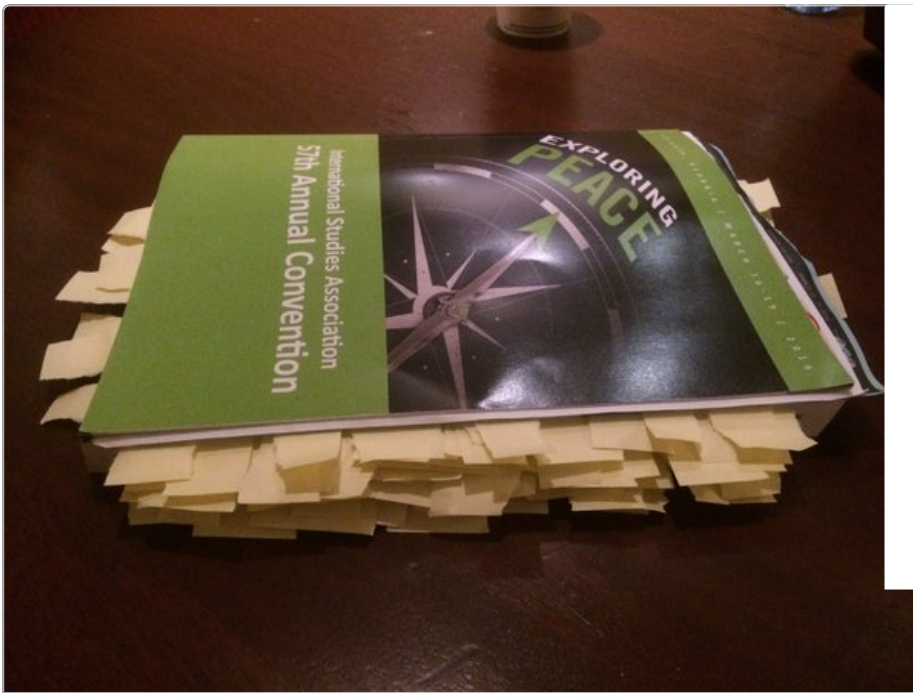
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1 week ago



Saara Särmä
@huippumisukka

Spotted some [#allmalepanels](#) from the [#ISA2016](#) program. Congrats!

00:16 - 18 Mär 2016

59 61

How did it come to this?

Before I answer that question, let me take a step back. This post started out as the third installment of a blog post series (three make a series, right?) in which I crunch numbers about Twitter usage at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (2014,2015). Since I'm currently in heavy dissertation writing mode, I thought I'd quickly dust off the old code, download all the tweets, produce some nice figures and be done with it, back to the dissertation. Well, it didn't really go down like this.

This year was the first year I didn't attend the ISA myself (dissertation writing, remember?). So other than first-hand gossip from some of colleagues I only had Twitter as my source of the hot conference topics. Since last year's talk of the town was [coffee](#) (in a now deleted tweet by [Shit Academics Say](#)), I figured this year it would probably be Coca Cola or something like that, since the conference took place in Atlanta.

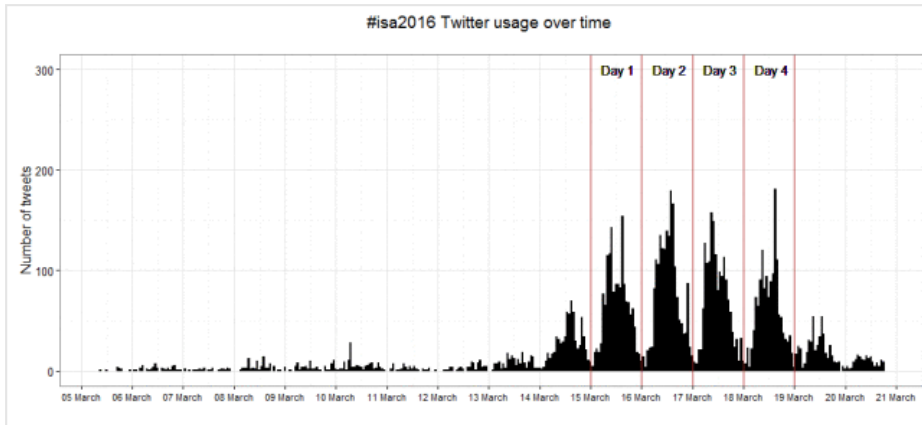
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- A View From the Cave
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- ISN Blog ETH Zürich
- Jihadica

I was in for a surprise.

When I fired up R and ran the first numbers, everything looked more or less normal. I count 2023 unique Twitter users writing 8513 tweets about #isa2016. This number of Tweets is in the ballpark of **last year's 8187 tweets**. (Now, many of those are retweets; the number of original tweets, i.e. without retweets is considerably lower: 4188.)

Like last year this data allows for some nice timeline visualization of when twitter users would tweet most often.

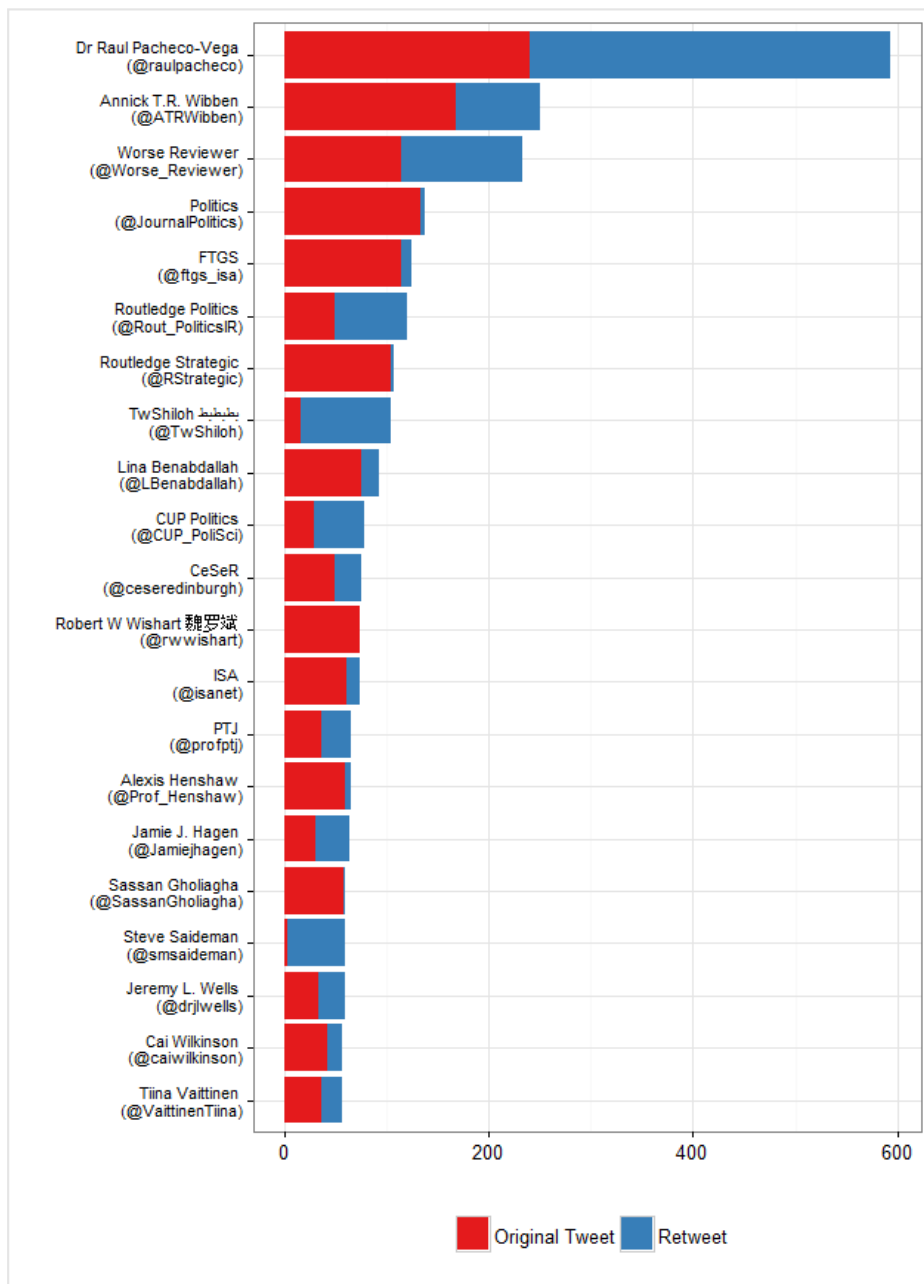


And, yes, I also did the notorious ranking of Twitter heavy-users during ISA. The second year in a row, Dr **Raul Pacheco-Vega** wins with almost 600 tweets (over 200 original tweets). Unfortunately, I don't have any official prizes to hand out.

- Junge UN Forschung
- Junge Wissenschaft im öffentlichen Recht
- Justice in Conflict
- Kings of War
- menschenhandel heute
- Mobilizing Ideas
- Opinio Juris
- Political Violence @ a Glance
- Pundicity – Aymen Jawad Al-Tamimi
- Radikale Ansichten
- Sicherheitspolitik-Blog
- Stephen M. Walt
- Syria Comment
- The Disorder of Things
- The Duck of Minerva
- The Monkey Cage
- Theorieblog
- Theorieleben
- Theory Talks
- Thought Economics
- Völkerrechtsblog
- World Peace Foundation – Reinventing Peace
- zoon politikon

META

- Registrieren
- Anmelden
- Beitragsfeed ([RSS](#))
- Kommentare als [RSS](#)
- Bloggen auf WordPress.com.



But I digress. Back on topic.

It's usually more interesting to see *what* people are talking about, rather than who tweets most and when people tweet. To get an idea of the topics (Coca-Cola? MLK? Atlanta? Beer?), I ranked the most frequent hashtags.

RANK	HASHTAGS	NUMBER
1	allmalepanel	135
2	atlanta	116
3	ir	97
4	isa2017	68

5	peace	68
6	freeaccess	55
7	isa16futures	53
8	starwars	51
9	femsecst	47
10	audiencejerk	45
11	mexico	45

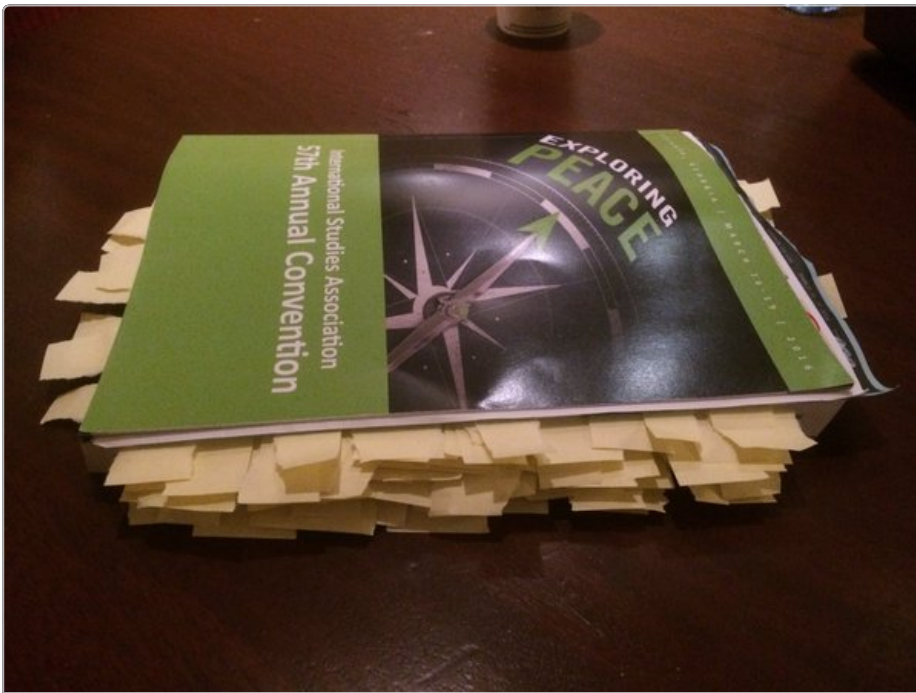
And here it was, the surprise. A whopping 135 times “allmalepanel” shows up, leading the list of most frequent hashtags by far. Yes, you read that right. **People mentioned “allmalepanel” more than the fra**ing town in which the conference took place!** Wait, you say. What is an all male panel? And why are people so mad about it?

Well, I’ll let the [Guardian](#) explain:

For the uninitiated, an all-male panel is exactly what it sounds like: a group of (mostly white) men plunked on stage at a conference, usually under the auspices of being the “experts” in their fields, whether that field is agrarian developments in the Sudan, developments in the music industry, advances in chemical engineering, global banking regulation, or even women’s reproductive rights.

So, basically, an all male panel is a strong indicator that someone forgot that **women also know stuff. There is even a tumblr for it.** And from the hashtag analysis it seems that it’s exactly these kinds of panels that was #isa2016’s most talked about topic on Twitter.

As further analysis showed, this high number of hashtags is the result of one particular tweet, that was retweeted and liked 110 times during the time under analysis (I only looked at tweets between 5 March and 21 March). Yes, you guessed right, that was [Saara Särmä](#)’s tweet I quoted in the beginning, and which is well worth repeating, because it shows the problem in all its absurd glory:



Saara Särmä
@huippumisukka

Folgen

Spotted some [#allmalepanels](#) from the [#ISA2016](#) program. Congrats!

00:16 - 18 Mär 2016

59 61

And here is the rest of the most popular tweets, at least the ten most popular (popularity is the sum of a tweet's retweets and likes):

RANK	TWEET_TEXT	TWITTER_USER	LINK_TO_TWEET	POPULARITY
1	Spotted some #allmalepanels from the #ISA2016 program. Congrats! https://t.co/G7BtppRX9C	huippumisukka	Link	110
2	Now it's truly official, yay! ISA Best Book Award for Peaceland (https://t.co/wGMMRC9QDq) #ISA2016 https://t.co/AxoqyJkkRo	SeverineAR	Link	70
3	Ironia completa: amanhã vou dar uma palestra na #ISA2016 falando do impacto político do	msantoro1978	Link	44

grampo da NSA em Dilma.

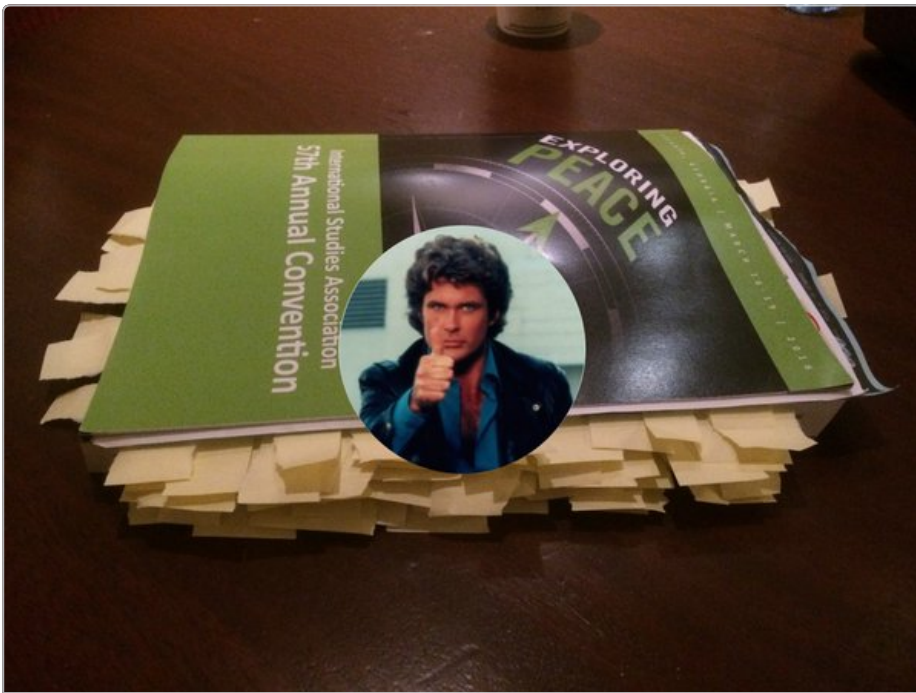
4	People ask why I don't go to ISA. Post it strips visualizing all-male panels in the #ISA2016 program: https://t.co/JyHmwdzyJq	dadakim	Link	43
5	Sad to miss #ISA2016 but grateful for generous uni & federal leave that allows me to enjoy this in stead https://t.co/R5HG3UpukP	vmkitchen	Link	42
6	This Star Wars panel is fully costumed and presents solid scholarship. This is great #ISA2016 https://t.co/rrQTEdIUj3	andrewheiss	Link	42
7	Thank you to all who joined us in Atlanta for #ISA2016. We look forward to seeing you next year in Baltimore for #ISA2017!	isanet	Link	42
8	Momento mais triste da #ISA2016: acadêmica síria, mãe de dois filhos apátridas, narrando sua história. Apenas três pessoas na plateia.	msantoro1978	Link	40
9	That moment you send off your #ISA2016 "paper" to your colleagues and think "Well, I guess respect is overrated". https://t.co/q0HQv3vJDN	StephanieCarvin	Link	39
10	Seconded. AND please don't start your presentation with all sorts of disclaimers and apologies. Own it! #ISA2016 https://t.co/9NFbQmOa5u	ATRWibben	Link	33
11	O que os professores de Relações Internacionais fazem quando alunos não estão olhando. A mesa foi ótima. #ISA2016	msantoro1978	Link	33

So, now you might say, wait a second, the second most popular tweet ([Severine Autessere's tweet about her winning the ISA best book award](#)) was about a scholarly prize that went to a woman! That's evidence that women are being recognized in the profession! To which I'd answer: that is the same as if one would argue that by electing Obama as the first African-American president of the United States all racial problems in the US are solved. The prize is well deserved. But it should not divert from the real issue at hand.

And let me point out that the fourth popular [tweet](#) by [Kim Yi Dionne](#) picks up the same picture as [Saara Särämä's](#) tweet. So, technically we could add the popularity of both tweets together and arrive at a popularity count of 153, **more than twice as high as the second popular tweet!** (Yes, popularity might not be the best term, but for the lack of a better word, I'll continue to use it) Also, let me emphasize that the hashtag count and popularity count is an inexact science. The hashtag count most likely underestimates the true number of tweets about all male panels, since my regex-search did not pick up when a tweet mentions "all-male panel" (with spaces and dashes in between instead of #allmalepanel). The true number is therefore likely to be higher.

What does this overwhelming reaction to this topic on Twitter tell us? First, a lot of people obviously think that gender representation at ISA is a problem. You might think that political science should do better in handling gender problems, it being a discipline that, you know, sometimes deals with issues such as justice and stuff. But you'd be wrong. The Twitter reaction to ISA's #allmalepanels is indicative of a broader problem with gender in political science. The Duck of Minerva ran [some](#) insightful [posts](#) on the topic.

Second, the reaction highlights that conference organizers should pay attention to gender representation—not only because it's the right thing to do, but attendees (both male and female) care! And, because they care, people might ultimately decide not to show up anymore:



kim yi dionne
@dadakim

Folgen

People ask why I don't go to ISA.

Post it strips visualizing all-male panels in the
[#ISA2016](#) program:

15:31 - 20 Mär 2016

25 27

I don't mean to imply that ISA organizers deliberately underrepresented women on so many panels (quite the opposite, from what I've heard and read on Twitter, Paul Diehl did a great job as conference organizer). The problem certainly runs much deeper: there is still a massive gender gap in IR and political science. Our colleagues from the [IR blog covered the issue back in 2013](#). Conference organizers should take away two things from this: a) pay attention to the gender composition of your panels, and b) if that leads you to the conclusion that there are too few women that could participate on a panel, address it openly, by discussing it at the conference, pointing it out in the conference program, etc.

I'll make sure to check back next year to see what the Twitter community thinks about the issue at the ISA in Baltimore. But I'd like to leave this post on a hopeful note and will emphasize this: [#starwars](#) ranked 8th on the hashtag popularity and [Andrew Heiss' tweet](#) about the famous Star Wars panel (which itself sparked [some](#)

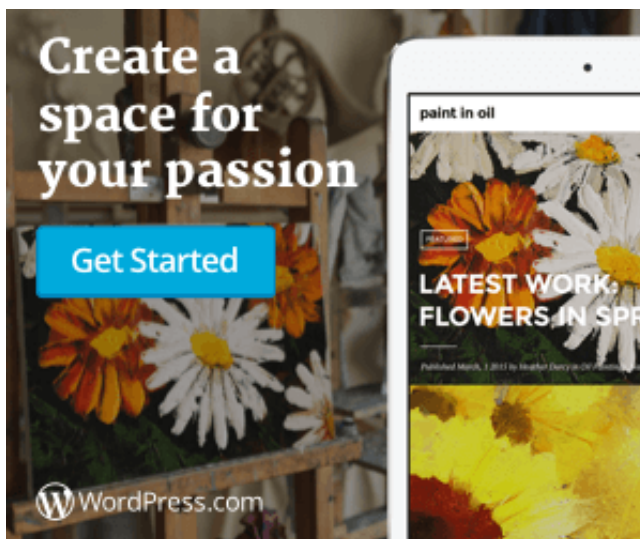
[discussion](#)) was the 6th popular tweet at the conference.

Seeing that Star Wars is so widely loved among ISA attendees: why don't we follow the example of the world's most successful science fiction franchise, which managed to include two **strong female lead characters** in two years in a row. If Star Wars can do it, why can't we?*

*No, I haven't seen Rogue One yet. But let's say the **trailer** strongly suggests that the female lead will also be great.

PS: I've uploaded the script to replicate the analyses in this post [here](#), if you're only interested in the data (i.e. the tweets) you'll find it [here](#).

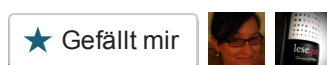
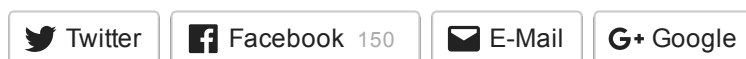
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Netzschau
In "Links"

Ai Weiwei erhält
kein 6-
Monatsvisum für
das UK
In "Debatte"

IB Online (3/2):
Eine kleine
Netzschau
In "Links"

4 Kommentare



Jack · 13. April 2016 - 18:05 · Antwort→

This is not just on the conference organizers, but also the scholars who propose panels. Make sure the panels you propose are not all-male!



Annette · 13. April 2016 - 18:55 · Antwort→

It might have something to do with topics. I actually attended a panel that was all female (it was instantly recognized by everybody as something unusual...) and interestingly there were only one or two men in the audience. The panel was on participation in peace and some of the scholars used participatory action research. It was an extremely interesting panel but probably not something that would be considered “mainstream IR”

Urban Studies beyond the male and pale | Emma Jackson · 14. April 2016 - 17:42 · Antwort→

[...] I am writing about this because this conference season it seems that many are still sat fuming through #allmalepanels, or not noticing (see for example this article about the American Sociological Association). [...]



Daniel Petzokat · 19. April 2016 - 17:41 · Antwort→

It would be interesting, though, to learn how big the problem is. But for that we would need to know something about the actual number of all-male panels, the total number of panels, the gender balance in the applications to ISA and, of course, some reflection on whether one all-male and one all-female panel are worse than two mixed panels. But when people retweet pics and get all excited about it on social media there must be a problem.

Don't get me wrong. I get the gender bias problem. But I am surprised to see Bretterblog just rely on social media excitement and the power of images.

Kommentar verfassen

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← [“Die EU kann ein zentraler Partner für den Vorderen Orient werden”](#)

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