

Democracy in the Digital Age

Spring 2021, Friday, 9:30-12:00pm, Location: Bldg: BOBS, Room: LL141

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Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description. The seminar focuses on how digital technologies and big data impact political processes in democratic and non-democratic countries.

The first part of this seminar will investigate how democratic processes and elections are shaped by big data's emerging role in contemporary political campaigns in established democracies. Recent electoral campaigns in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other representative democracies have been increasingly data-driven as political parties have amassed an incredible amount of personal data on voters, far beyond simple registration records and citizens' political affiliations. These electoral databases allow parties to construct detailed profiles on individual voters and to micro-target precise messages to refined segments of the electorate, with the 2012 and 2016 U.S. presidential elections and the U.K.'s 2016 Brexit referendum serving as prime examples of campaigns shaped by this new paradigm. The course will discuss how big data in electoral campaigns, electoral databases and voter micro-targeting affect political equality, political accountability, deliberative democracy, and other important democratic ideals.

The second part of the class will explore how digital technologies affect the prospect of democracy and the relationship between state and society in non-democratic countries. Media figures, public intellectuals, and scholars have debated the relationship between digital technology and democratization for decades, with some arguing that digital technologies facilitate mobilization against the state and others countering that the same technologies allow authoritarians to strengthen their grip on power. Will new technologies empower social movements, enabling them to demand human rights protections and even topple repressive regimes? Or will digital technologies bring newfound power to the state, facilitating mass surveillance and control, driving resistance further and further into the shadows? The course will survey the extant literature that tackles the question of how digital technologies affect the future of democracy and human rights.

Course Requirements. The format of the seminar is discussion-based. Students are expected to attend class, complete all of the assigned reading before class, and actively participate in class. The course grade will be a weighted average of a midterm exam (40%), a final exam (40%), and class participation (20%).

Participation consists of more than attendance. Active participation in classroom discussion is an essential component of the seminar experience. During our discussions, students will be expected to demonstrate successful mastery of the week's assigned readings. Your participation grade will be determined primarily by how frequently you participate in class and how well your comments reflect an understanding of the readings (whether or not you agree with what the readings say). If you feel that shyness is preventing you from participating as fully as you would like, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss strategies for improving your performance in class discussions.

The mid-term and final exams will test your understanding of and ability to analyze material from the readings and lectures. They will be in essay format, and you will have a week to work on the exam essays. Be prepared to recall and apply what you have learned and to write clear, thoughtful, and well-supported answers to challenging questions. Students missing an exam will receive a grade of zero. If you must miss an exam, please contact me before the scheduled test time, and if the excuse is justified and documented through the Moses center (such as in cases of illness or family/personal emergencies), we will schedule a make-up. The mid-term exam will be handed on March 5 (in class) and will be due on March 12. The final exam will be handed on May 7 (in class) and will be due on May 14. In general, no extensions will be granted and exams will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B) per day late.

NYU Classes (ex Blackboard): This class has a Course Web Page that contains all the required readings. To be able to access the Course Web Page you must activate your NYU home account; to do so, login on <http://start.nyu.edu> and follow the step-by-step instructions.

Academic Integrity. All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. No cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper attribution) will be tolerated. All ideas not your own must be properly cited. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be handled according to university policy. For more information on university policy, see <http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html>

Course Outline

January 29: Introduction

Sue Halpern. “How campaigns are using marketing, manipulation, and ”psychographic targeting” to win elections—and weaken democracy.” *The New Republic*, October 18, 2018

Yuval Harari. “Why Technology Favors Tyranny.” *The Atlantic*. August 31, 2018.

February 5: Political Campaigns and Big Data I

Nickerson, David W., and Todd Rogers. 2014. “Political Campaigns and Big Data.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28 (2): 51-74.

Kosinski M, Stillwell D, Graepel T. 2013. “Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behavior.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110 (15): 5802–5805.

Sasha Issenberg, How President Obama’s Campaign Used Big Data to Rally Individual Voters, *MIT Technology Review*. December 16, 2012.

Terrence McCoy, The Creepiness Factor: How Obama and Romney Are Getting to Know You, *The Atlantic*. April 10, 2012.

Jeff Chester. Our Next President: Also Brought to You by Big Data and Digital Advertising. *BillMoyers.com*. January 6, 2017

Hannes Grassegger and Mikael Krogerus. The Data That Turned the World Upside Down. January 28, 2017. *motherboard.vice.com*.

February 12: Political Campaigns and Big Data II

Colin J. Bennett. 2016. “Voter databases, micro-targeting, and data protection law: can political parties campaign in Europe as they do in North America?” *International Data Privacy Law* 6 (4): 261-275

Howard, Philip N., and Daniel Kreiss. 2010. “Political parties and voter privacy: Aus-

tralia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States in comparative perspective.” First Monday 15 (12).

Anstead, Nick. 2017. “Data-driven campaigning in the 2015 UK general election.” The International Journal of Press/Politics 22 (3): 294-313.

Matthew Rice. What we’ve learned from asking political parties: Who do you think we are? December 03, 2019. www.openrightsgroup.org

Amien Essif. “CDU, SPD and Greens use big data to target Bundestag voters.” Deutsche Welle, August 26, 2017.

Frederic Simon. EU politicians convert to big data as campaign weapon. Jun 20, 2016. www.euractiv.com.

Emily Schultheis. Can a French Political Upstart Ride Obama’s Strategy to Victory? The Atlantic. April 21, 2017.

Rowland Manthorpe. The Lib Dems are using data to profile every voter in UK - and give you a score. 14 October 2019. news.sky.com.

February 19: Voter Privacy and Big Data

Ira Rubinstein. 2014. “Voter Privacy in the Age of Big Data.” Wisconsin Law Review: 861

Information Commission’s Office. “Democracy Disrupted? Personal Information and Political Influence.” 11 July, 2018. ico.org.uk.

Jennifer Baker. New rules regulate data-use in EU political campaigns. Mar 26, 2019. www.iapp.org.

Brendan Finucane. A Post-GDPR Checklist for Political Parties. June 11, 2018. www.cpomagazine.com.

Amy Shepherd. Profiling, Political opinions, and Data Protection - The Legal Background. December 09, 2019. www.openrightsgroup.org.

February 26: The Perils of Big Data

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2014. "Engineering the public: Big data, surveillance and computational politics." *First Monday* 19 (7).

Borgesius, Frederik J. Zuiderveen, et al. 2018. "Online political microtargeting: Promises and threats for democracy." *Utrecht Law Review* 14 (1): 82-96.

Enos, Ryan D., Anthony Fowler, and Lynn Vavreck. 2014. "Increasing inequality: The effect of GOTV mobilization on the composition of the electorate." *The Journal of Politics* 76.1: 273-288.

Panagopoulos, Costas. 2016. "All about that base: Changing campaign strategies in US presidential elections." *Party Politics* 22 (2): 179-190.

March 5: The Perils of Digital Technologies

Munger, Kevin, Patrick Egan, Jonathan Nagler, Jonathan Ronen, and Joshua A. Tucker. 2020. "Political knowledge and misinformation in the era of social media: Evidence from the 2015 UK Election." *British Journal of Political Science*.

Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. 2018. "The spread of true and false news online." *Science* 359 (6380): 1146-1151.

Lazer, David MJ, et al. 2018. "The science of fake news." *Science* 359 (6380): 1094-1096.

Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social media and fake news in the 2016 election." *Journal of economic perspectives* 31 (2): 211-36.

March 12: Midterm Exam

March 19: No Class

March 26: Liberation Technologies I

Diamond, Larry. 2010. "Liberation Technology." *Journal of Democracy* 21 (3): 69-83.

Howard, Philip N., and Muzammil M. Hussain. 2011. "The upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: The role of digital media." *Journal of Democracy* 22 (3): 35-48.

Ruijgrok, Kris. 2017. "From the web to the streets: internet and protests under authoritarian regimes." *Democratization* 24.3: 498-520.

Steven Feldstein. 2019. "The Road to Digital Unfreedom: How Artificial Intelligence is Reshaping Repression." *Journal of Democracy*, 30 (1): 40-52.

April 2: Liberation Technologies II

Rød, Espen Geelmuyden, and Nils B. Weidmann. 2015. "Empowering activists or autocrats? The Internet in authoritarian regimes." *Journal of Peace Research* 52 (3): 338-351.

Steinert-Threlkeld, Zachary C. 2017. "Spontaneous collective action: Peripheral mobilization during the Arab Spring." *American Political Science Review* 111 (2): 379-403.

Hassanpour, Navid. 2014. "Media disruption and revolutionary unrest: Evidence from Mubarak's quasi-experiment." *Political Communication* 31 (1): 1-24.

Reuter, Ora John, and David Szakonyi. 2015. "Online social media and political awareness in authoritarian regimes." *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (1): 29-51.

April 9: Technology and Authoritarian Control

Deibert, Ron. 2015. "Authoritarianism goes global: Cyberspace under siege." *Journal of Democracy* 26 (3): 64-78.

Gunitsky, Seva. 2015. "Corrupting the cyber-commons: Social media as a tool of autocratic stability." *Perspectives on Politics* 13 (1): 42-54.

Hellmeier, Sebastian. 2016. "The dictator's digital toolkit: Explaining variation in Internet filtering in authoritarian regimes." *Politics & Policy* 44 (6): 1158-1191.

Pearce, Katy E., and Sarah Kendzior. 2012. "Networked authoritarianism and social media in Azerbaijan." *Journal of Communication* 62 (2): 283-298.

April 16: How Non-Democratic Regimes Use Technology

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. "How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression." *American Political Science Review* 107: 326-343.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2014. "Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation." *Science* 345.6199: 1251722.

Deibert, Ronald, Joshua Oliver, and Adam Senft. 2019. "Censors Get Smart: Evidence from Psiphon in Iran." *Review of Policy Research* 36 (3): 341-356.

Druzin, Bryan, and Gregory S. Gordon. 2018. "Authoritarianism and the Internet." *Law & Social Inquiry* 43 (4): 1427-1457.

April 23: Why Technology Favors the Autocrat I

Tiberiu Dragu and Yonatan Lupu. 2021. "Does Technology Undermine Authoritarian Governments?" *International Organization*.

Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, Erica Frantz and Joseph Wright. 2020. "The Digital Dictators: How Technology Strengthens Autocracy." *Foreign Affairs* Mar/Apr.

Charlie Campbell. "How China Is Using 'Social Credit Scores' to Reward and Punish Its Citizens." *Time Magazine*, Jan. 16, 2019

Emily Sherwin. Kremlin Aims to Unplug Russian Internet from World Wide Web. February 12, 2019. *Deutsche Welle*.

April 30: Why Technology Favors the Autocrat II

Richard Fontaine & Kara Frederick. "The Autocrat's New Tool Kit." *Wall Street Jour-*

nal, March 15, 2018.

Paul Mozur, Jonah M. Kessel and Melissa Chan. “Made in China, Exported to the World: The Surveillance State.” The New York Times, April 24, 2019.

Feldstein, Steven. 2019. “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance.” working paper.

Anna Mitchell & Larry Diamond. “China’s Surveillance State Should Scare Everyone” The Atlantic, February 2, 2018.

May 7: Final Exam