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.


February 5: Political Campaigns and Big Data I


February 12: Political Campaigns and Big Data II


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

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.


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


Information Commission’s Office. “Democracy Disrupted? Personal Information and Po-

www.iapp.org.


Amy Shepherd. Profiling, Political opinions, and Data Protection - The Legal Background.
February 26: The Perils of Big Data


March 5: The Perils of Digital Technologies


March 12: Midterm Exam

March 19: No Class

March 26: Liberation Technologies I


April 2: Liberation Technologies II


April 9: Technology and Authoritarian Control


April 16: How Non-Democratic Regimes Use Technology


April 23: Why Technology Favors the Autocrat I


April 30: Why Technology Favors the Autocrat II

Richard Fontaine & Kara Frederick. “The Autocrat’s New Tool Kit.” Wall Street Jour-


May 7: Final Exam