DIGITAL POLITICS*
MA Seminar, Winter 2021/22

Wednesdays, 14:00-15:30, IBW Building, Seminar Room S103.

Instructor:
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Office hours: By appointment.

1   Course Overview

"Facebook is killing democracy!"; *"YouTube makes conspiracy theorists famous!"*; *"Everyone's now in their own online bubbles isolated from different opinions!"*. These are some common things we hear when talking about the political impacts of the ongoing information technology revolution. However, social scientists are only starting to make sense of how the rise of digitalization and social media affects politics. In this course we will review the most advanced academic literature in this area, discussing some of its most pressing topics, from the spread of fake news to the role of social media on protests, and why the most likely right answers to the three statements opening this paragraph are respectively *"Probably not"*, *"Yeah, sort of"*, and *"Nope, not at all, quite the opposite"*.

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*This is a preliminary syllabus, subject to changes before the course starts.

2   Course Requirements

- Participation in **one of the three debates** (30 pts): During the semester, three sessions (on Dec. 16, Jan. 20, and Feb. 3) will be a debate on a specific proposition related to those weeks' topic. We will form six debate teams, two to debate on each day, and each student must be part of one (and only one) team. The four groups not debating on the day will be the judges. Students will be graded based on their and their team's performance on the debate, based on content, presentation, and interaction. These are also the criteria the judges will use to evaluate the teams. The winning team in each day will get **3 bonus points** added to their grade. More details on the debate format are on Ilias.

- **Two reaction papers** (15 pts each): during the semester students should pick any two sessions and write one reaction paper for each. The paper should be a critical evaluation of all readings for that week, to be uploaded up to Wednesday at 13:00 of the week when we discuss those readings. Each reaction paper should be no longer than two pages. **You cannot write a reaction paper for the topic which you are debating.**

- **A final project** (40 pts). TBD

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Points are converted to final grades as follows:

Points	Grade
100–96	1,0
95–91	1,3
90–86	1,7
85–81	2,0
80–76	2,3
75–71	2,7
70–66	3,0
65–61	3,3
60–56	3,7
55–51	4,0
50–0	5,0

3 Schedule

Week 1 (Oct 13): General Introduction: The Changing Landscape of Politics

Tucker, Joshua A., Yannis Theocharis, Margaret E. Roberts, and Pablo Barberá. "From liberation to turmoil: Social media and democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (2017): 46-59.

Week 2 (Oct 20): How and Why Political Actors Communicate Online

Readings:

Castanho Silva, Bruno, and Sven-Oliver Proksch. 2021. "Politicians Unleashed? Political Communication on Twitter and in Parliament in Western Europe". *Political Science Research and Methods*.

Gilardi, Fabrizio, Theresa Gessler, Maël Kubli, and Stefan Müller. "Social media and political agenda setting." *Political Communication* (2021): 1-22.

Week 3 (Oct 27): Acquiring Political information

Readings:

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Scharkow, Michael, Frank Mangold, Sebastian Stier, and Johannes Breuer. "How social network sites and other online intermediaries increase exposure to news." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 117, no. 6 (2020): 2761-2763.

Bode, Leticia. "Political news in the news feed: Learning politics from social media." *Mass communication and society* 19, no. 1 (2016): 24-48.

Week 4 (Nov 3): Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news

Readings:

Vraga, Emily K., and Leticia Bode (2020). "Defining Misinformation and Understanding its Bounded Nature: Using Expertise and Evidence for Describing Misinformation", *Political Communication*

Marchal, N., B. Kollanyi, L.-M. Neudert, and P. N. Howard (2019). Junk news during the EU parliamentary elections: Lessons from a seven-language study of Twitter and Facebook. University of Oxford.

Week 5 (Nov 10): Correcting Misinformation

Pennycook, Gordon, Ziv Epstein, Mohsen Mosleh, Antonio A. Arechar, Dean Eckles, and David G. Rand. (2021). "Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online." *Nature* 592, no. 7855 590-595.

Humprecht, Edda, Frank Esser, and Peter Van Aelst. "Resilience to online disinformation: A framework for cross-national comparative research." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25, no. 3 (2020): 493-516.

Week 6 (Nov 15): Data-driven campaigning

On Monday **Nov. 15**, at 18:30, we'll get together to watch the documentary "The Social Dilemma" (2020) and have a discussion about the movie afterwards. This will be a 3-hour session, and will make up for the seminars on Nov. 17 and Dec. 22.

There will be no seminar on Nov 17!

Readings:

Zarouali, Brahim, Tom Dobber, Guy De Pauw, and Claes de Vreese. "Using a personality-profiling algorithm to investigate political microtargeting: assessing the persuasion effects of personality-tailored ads on social media." *Communication Research* (2020): 1-26.

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Fowler, Erika Franklin, Michael M. Franz, Gregory J. Martin, Zachary Peskowitz, and Travis N. Ridout. "Political Advertising Online and Offline." *American Political Science Review* 2020.

Week 7 (Nov 24): Policy and Regulation

On this session we have our first debate. The topic is:

> *Presidents and Prime Ministers who are considered to violate social media networks' terms of service by posting misinformation or hate speech should have their accounts suspended.*

Justification: After the January 6, 2021 events in Washington DC, when protesters stormed the US Congress, Twitter and Facebook suspended Donald Trump's accounts, for considering that the then still president had used the platforms to incite the insurrection. Some say that this ban should have come sooner, arguing Trump had violated the platform's terms of service several times before. Others say that giving social media giants the power to suspend elected leaders can give these companies too much influence over political processes and is an attack on political freedoms.

Readings:

Florian Saurwein & Charlotte Spencer-Smith (2020): Combating Disinformation on Social Media: Multilevel Governance and Distributed Accountability in Europe, *Digital Journalism*, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2020.1765401

Kreiss, Daniel, and Shannon C. McGregor. "The "arbiters of what our voters see": Facebook and Google's struggle with policy, process, and enforcement around political advertising." *Political Communication* 36, no. 4 (2019): 499-522.

Week 8 (Dec 1) : Online political participation

Boulianne, Shelley, and Yannis Theocharis. "Young people, digital media, and engagement: A meta-analysis of research." *Social Science Computer Review* 38, no. 2 (2020): 111-127.

Bode, Leticia. "Gateway political behaviors: The frequency and consequences of low-cost political engagement on social media." *Social Media+ Society* 3, no. 4 (2017)

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Week 9 (Dec 8): Social Media in Authoritarian States

Readings:

Gohdes, Anita R. (2020). Repression technology: Internet accessibility and state violence. *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(3), 488-503.

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

Week 10 (Dec 15): Polarization and echo chambers

On this session we have our second debate. The topic is:

Social media is responsible for increased polarization and radicalization of individuals in contemporary Western European societies.

Readings:

Barberá, Pablo, John T. Jost, Jonathan Nagler, Joshua A. Tucker, and Richard Bonneau. "Tweeting from left to right: Is online political communication more than an echo chamber?." *Psychological science* 26, no. 10 (2015): 1531-1542.

Asimovic, Nejla, Jonathan Nagler, Richard Bonneau, and Joshua A. Tucker. "Testing the effects of Facebook usage in an ethnically polarized setting." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118, no. 25 (2021).

Week 11 (Dec 22): No Session

NB! We do not have a session on December 22, making up for watching The Social Dilemma in November.

Week 12 (Jan 12): Doing Political Research on a Digital World

Reading:

Munger, Kevin. "Tweetment effects on the tweeted: Experimentally reducing racist harassment." *Political Behavior* 39, no. 3 (2017): 629-649.

Mancosu, Moreno, and Federico Vegetti. "What You Can Scrape and What Is Right to Scrape: A Proposal for a Tool to Collect Public Facebook Data." *Social Media+ Society* 6, no. 3 (2020).

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Week 13 (Jan 19): Online Hate speech

On this session we have our third debate. The topic is:

> *The EU should pass regulation forcing Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to strengthen the moderation of content posted in their platforms in order to curb hate speech.*

Readings:

Massanari, Adrienne. "#Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures." *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (2017): 329-346.

Bernardez-Rodal, Asuncion, Paula Requeijo Rey, and Yanna G. Franco. "Radical right parties and anti-feminist speech on Instagram: Vox and the 2019 Spanish general election." Party Politics (2020): 1-12.

Week 14 (Jan 26): Human and algorithmic bias

Readings:

Pradel, Franziska (2020): Biased Representation of Politicians in Google and Wikipedia Search? The Joint Effect of Party Identity, Gender Identity and Elections, *Political Communication*, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2020.1793846

Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism.* New York: NYU Press, 2018. Chapter 1, pp. 15-63

Week 15 (Feb 2):Presentation of final projects

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