

Media, Information Technology, and Democracy

Instructor: Shuyuan Shen

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Office Hours: W/F 10am-11am (DKH 317B or Zoom)

Course Description:

This course explores one of the most pressing and contentious issues in contemporary politics: the impact of media and information technology on democracy. In many advanced democracies, there is an ongoing and intense debate over whether and how traditional and social media may undermine democratic support and participation in an increasingly polarized and partisan political landscape. In autocracies, the role of media and information technology in both sustaining and challenging authoritarian rule has garnered significant attention from scholars, politicians, journalists, and the public alike. While discussions often highlight the role of social media in movements such as the Arab Spring and the Belarus Protests, there is also a focus on the Chinese state's censorship capabilities in stifling collective action. However, many of the claims made in these debates are unsubstantiated and overlook the growing body of scientific evidence emerging from social science research.

The primary goal of this course is to deepen students' understanding of the complex relationship between media, information technology, and democracy, enabling them to critically engage with and contribute to these discussions using solid theoretical and empirical foundations. Specifically, the course examines the role of media and information technology within the broader contexts of democratic transition and democratic consolidation. It explores how these technologies 1) shape political attitudes, knowledge, and support for democracy, and 2) influence political participation within these critical democratic processes.

This course adopts a global perspective, incorporating theories and empirical evidence from a wide range of regions and regime types, with a special focus on knowledge from and about the Global South. The readings are drawn from cutting-edge research across various social science disciplines, including political science, communication, psychology, and economics, among others.

General Goals of Course:

This course has four general goals.

1. Students will gain a substantive body of knowledge on how media and information technology shape citizens' political attitudes and behavior in both democracies and autocracies.
2. Students will understand the positive and adverse effects of media and information technology on democratic transition and consolidation.
3. Students will be able to critically engage in and contribute to the scholarly and public discussion on the effects of media/information technology on democracy.

4. Students will develop the research skills required to develop a basic understanding of an issue related to media, information technology, and democracy.

Course Format

Class sessions consist of lectures and discussions. At the beginning of each session, the instructor outlines the theme of the week and explains the key concepts and findings in the readings. Students will be encouraged to share their thoughts and questions on the readings. There will be small-group discussions in which students discuss some of the most important questions on the week's topic raised by the instructor or their fellow students. The latter four weeks of the course will also include short presentations by all students in the course, with unifying discussions following the presentations.

Assessment

- Class Participation (20%)
 - Students are expected to attend each session having read the assigned articles and prepared to discuss them.
 - Students will be assigned to give short presentations (5 minutes each) about the required readings in groups at the beginning of each class. Each student will be randomly assigned into one of the groups and give 3 or 4 short presentations, depending on the size of the class. Presentations should include the research question, significance of the question, theoretical arguments, data and methods, and findings. The group in charge of the presentation should also propose three questions based on the reading for class and small-group discussion.
 - The instructor will, at irregular intervals, provide non-spoken means of participation for students who are less comfortable speaking actively in class.
- Critical Reading Summaries (20%)
 - Choose three weeks and one reading from each of the three weeks to write a critical summary. In total, students write three critical reading summaries.
 - The summary should (1) summarize the research question, main arguments, data and methods, and findings; (2) evaluate the arguments and findings and raise questions and criticisms; (3) connect to other readings of the week to highlight common themes or contradictions; (4) future directions of research on the issue.
 - Each summary should be 1-2 pages in length, 1.5 spacing, excluding references.
 - The deadline is two days before the class in the chosen weeks.
- Country Analysis Paper (20%)
 - Choose a country that you are familiar with or interested in.
 - Justify whether the country is democratic or autocratic with diverse indicators of democracy introduced in class.
 - Analyzing how media and information technology influence people's political attitudes and behavior in the country. If the country is autocratic, focus on how media and information technology sustain or undermine the autocratic rule. If the country is democratic, focus on how media and information technology lead to democratic consolidation or backsliding.

- The paper should be 3-4 pages in length, 1.5 spacing, excluding references.
- The deadline is Sunday of Week 7.
- Presentation of Country Analysis Paper (10%)
 - Prepare a 10-minute presentation of your country analysis paper, to be presented in the latter four weeks of the course.
 - For any country duplicates, the concerned students should write their papers independently but prepare to present together (max three students per group).
 - Week 8's class time is dedicated to the presentations.
- Research Design Paper (30%)
 - Choose a topic and research question related to media, information technology, and democratization.
 - Write a 7-8 paged, 1.5 spacing, paper describing *how* you would complete a full research paper to answer this question. The paper should include an introduction, significance of the question, literature review, theory/argument, and research design.
 - Students are encouraged to discuss their topic in advance with the instructor.
 - The deadline is five days after the last class.

Course Grade

Though adjustments may be made, the following letter grade cutoffs are used as benchmarks:

A+ 97%	A 93%	A- 90%
B+ 87%	B 83%	B- 80%
C+ 77%	C 73%	C- 70%
D+ 67%	D 63%	D- 60%

Course Policies

Attendance in the course is required, as much of the learning will come from open and active discussion of the topics and materials. Students are permitted to use their electronic devices for notetaking and materials reference in class, but should be conscious of responsible use of those devices. As this is a shortened 8-week course, no unexcused absences are permissible. Any unexcused absence will result in a loss of half of the class participation grade (5%). Excused absences should be approved before the absence unless an emergency situation occurs.

Schedule and Readings

Note that the topics and readings below are subject to change by the instructor as needed. All readings are required for students, and will be accessible either via the library website or via the instructor. Readings should be completed prior to the class meeting time for that week.

There is no required textbook for this course. Digital copies of all readings, including book chapters, can be found either through the university library website or links provided by the instructor. Please contact the instructor if you cannot access any of the readings.

Readings for this class come from the most cutting-edge research in this field. It is totally legitimate to feel overwhelmed or confused about the readings assigned. Group presentations as part of class participation are designed to facilitate the comprehension of the readings. In addition, instead of trying to understand every single word or the technical details of the analyses, students should try to grasp the main components of the readings. More specifically, you can focus on the following questions in your reading process:

1. What is the main question(s) the author tries to answer in this article?
2. Is this question important? Why?
3. What are some existing theories to answer the question?
4. What is the author's answer to this question and how is it different from existing theories?
5. Does the author provide any empirical evidence to support the claim? What data and methods do the author use in the empirical analysis?
6. What are the empirical findings?
7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical and empirical arguments?
8. What are some future research directions based on this article?

Week 1: Introduction: AI and Democracy

1. Course Syllabus
2. Kreps, Sarah, and Doug Kriner. 2023. "How AI Threatens Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 34 (4): 122–31.
3. Ovadya, Aviv. 2023. "Reimagining Democracy for AI." *Journal of Democracy* 34(4): 162–70.

Week 2: What are Democracy, Democratization, and Democratic Consolidation?

1. Przeworski, A. 1999. "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense." In *Democracy's Value*, edited by Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
https://is.muni.cz/el/fss/podzim2019/POLn4002/um/Przeworski_Minimalist_Conception_of_Democracy.pdf
2. Coppedge, M., et al. 2011. Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 247-267.
3. Geddes, B. 2009. "What Causes Democratization." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, edited by Carles Boix and Susan Carol Stokes. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 317–229.
4. Schedler, A. 1998. What is Democratic Consolidation? *Journal of Democracy*, 9(2), 91-107.

Week 3: What is the Media Expected to Do for Democracy? Normative Perspectives on Political Communication

1. Bachrach, Peter, and Morton S. Baratz. 1962. "Two faces of power." *American Political Science Review* 56 (4):947-952.

2. Graber, Doris. 2003. "The Media and Democracy: Beyond Myths and Stereotypes." *Annual Review of Political Science* 6(1): 139–60.
3. Zaller, John. 2003. "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication* 20(2): 109–30.
4. Althaus, Scott L. 2012. What's good and bad in political communication research? Normative standards for evaluating media and citizen performance. In *Sage Handbook of Political Communication*, edited by Holli A. Semetko and Margaret Scammell, 97-112. London: Sage Publications.

Week 4: How do Media Interact with Politics: Models of Media Systems across Democracy and Autocracy

1. Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. 2004. *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (read Introduction and Chapter One.)
2. Hanitzsch, T., et al. 2011. Mapping Journalism Cultures Across Nations. *Journalism Studies* 12(3), 273-293.
3. Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. 2008. A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 707-731.
4. Bennett, W. L., and Pfetsch, B. 2018. Rethinking Political Communication in a Time of Disrupted Public Spheres. *Journal of Communication* 68(2), 243-253.

Week 5: Media and Democratic Transition: Modernization Theory

1. Lerner, D. 1958. *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. Free Press. (read Chapter One and Two)
2. Lipset, S. M. 1959. Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *American Political Science Review*, 53(1), 69-105.
3. Randall, V. 1993. The Media and Democratization in the Third World. *Third World Quarterly*, 14(3), 625-646.
4. Tetey, W.J., 2001. The Media and Democratization in Africa: Contributions, Constraints and Concerns of The Private Press. *Media, Culture & Society*, 23(1), 5-31.

Week 6: Information Technology and Democratic Transition: Mobilization

1. Diamond, L. 2010. Liberation Technology. *Journal of Democracy* 21(3), 69–83.
2. Deibert, R., and Rohozinski, R. 2010. Liberation vs. Control: The Future of Cyberspace. *Journal of Democracy* 21(4), 43–57.
3. Jost, John T. et al. 2018. How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Networks: Social Media and Political Protest. *Political Psychology* 39: 85–118.
4. Manacorda, M, and Tesei, A. 2020. Liberation Technology: Mobile Phones and Political Mobilization in Africa. *Econometrica* 88(2), 533–67.

Week 7: Informational Autocrats: Why Media and Information Technology Sometimes Sustain Authoritarian Regimes

1. Huang, H. 2015. Propaganda as Signaling. *Comparative Politics*, 47(4), 419-444.
2. Kern, H. L., and Hainmueller, J. 2009. Opium for the Masses: How Foreign Media Can Stabilize Authoritarian Regimes. *Political Analysis* 17(4): 377-99.
3. King, G., Pan, J., and Roberts, M. E. 2013. How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression. *American Political Science Review* 107(2): 326-43.
4. Gohdes, A. R. 2020. Repression Technology: Internet Accessibility and State Violence. *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(3), 488-503.

Week 8: Presentations of Country Analysis Paper

Week 9: Media, Information Technology, and Democratic Consolidation I: Knowledge, Attitude, and Participation

1. Jerit, J., Barabas, J., & Bolsen, T. 2006. Citizens, Knowledge, and the Information Environment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2), 266-282.
2. Boulianne, S. 2015. Social Media Use and Participation: A Meta-Analysis of Current Research. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 524-538.
3. King, G., Schneer, B., & White, A. 2017. How the News Media Activate Public Expression and Influence National Agendas. *Science*, 358(6364), 776-780.
4. Goidel, K., Gaddie, K., & Ehrl, M. 2017. Watching the News and Support for Democracy: Why Media Systems Matter. *Social Science Quarterly*, 98(3), 836-855.

Week 10: Media, Information Technology, and Democratic Consolidation II: Accountability

1. Ash, Elliott, and Sergio Galletta. 2023. "How Cable News Reshaped Local Government." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 15(4): 292-320.
2. Snyder Jr, J. M., & Strömberg, D. 2010. Press Coverage and Political Accountability. *Journal of Political Economy*, 118(2), 355-408.
3. Prat, A. 2015. Media Capture and Media Power. In *Handbook of Media Economics*, edited by Simon P Anderson, Joel Waldfogel, and David Stromberg. Elsevier, B.V., 1-18.
4. Kellam, M., & Stein, E. A. 2016. Silencing Critics: Why and How Presidents Restrict Media Freedom in Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(1), 36-77.

Week 11: Media, Information Technology, and Democratic Consolidation III: Polarization

1. Prior, M. 2013. Media and Political Polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, 101-127.
2. Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. 2017. Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211-36.
3. Bail, C. A., et al. 2018. Exposure To Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(37), 9216-9221.
4. Guess, Andrew M. et al. 2023. "How Do Social Media Feed Algorithms Affect Attitudes and Behavior in an Election Campaign?" *Science* 381(6656): 398-404.

Week 12: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, and Autocracy

1. Trauthig, Inga K., Zelly C. Martin, and Samuel C. Woolley. 2023. "Messaging Apps: A Rising Tool for Informational Autocrats." *Political Research Quarterly*: 10659129231190932.
2. Farrell, Henry, Abraham Newman, and Jeremy Wallace. 2022. "Spirals of Delusion: How AI Distorts Decision-Making and Makes Dictators More Dangerous." *Foreign Affairs* 101: 168.
3. Byman, Daniel L., Chongyang Gao, Chris Meserole, and V. S. Subrahmanian. 2023. *Deepfakes and International Conflict*. Brookings Institution.
https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FP_20230105_deepfakes_international_conflict.pdf.
4. Yang, Eddie, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2023. "The Authoritarian Data Problem." *Journal of Democracy* 34(4): 141–50.

Week 13: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, and Democracy

1. Jungherr, Andreas. 2023. "Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework." *Social Media + Society* 9(3): 20563051231186353.
2. Nemitz, Paul. 2018. "Constitutional Democracy and Technology in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 376(2133): 20180089.
3. Kostka, Genia, Léa Steinacker, and Miriam Meckel. 2021. "Between Security and Convenience: Facial Recognition Technology in the Eyes of Citizens in China, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States." *Public Understanding of Science* 30(6): 671–90.
4. Brayne, Sarah. 2017. "Big Data Surveillance: The Case of Policing." *American Sociological Review* 82(5): 977–1008.

GLBL 296: Media, Information Technology, and Democracy

Week 1. Introduction

Shuyuan Shen
Mar 20, 2024

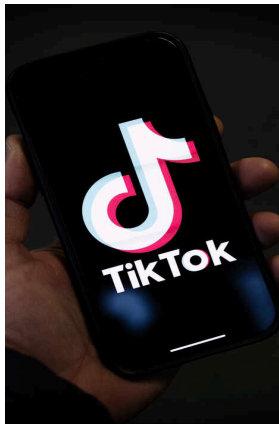


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Can the U.S. government restrict misinformation / disinformation?

Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



The TikTok Bill

- The House voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to approve a bipartisan bill that would require ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, to sell the social media app or face a ban on all U.S. devices.
- The vote was 352-65.


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
What words come to your mind when you think of “democracy”?

Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Motivations

**The Guardian**
Real news v fake news: Is AI a threat to democracy?
How do we navigate the onslaught of disinformation in a blockbuster year of elections?
1 week ago

**Financial Times**
The rising threat to democracy of AI-powered disinformation
Experts fear 2024 could be the year a viral undetectable deepfake has a catastrophic impact on an election.
Jan 11, 2024

**Bloomberg**
Elections 2024: Fake News Could Destroy Democracy
Will 2024 Be the Year Fake News Destroys Democracy? With almost a billion people heading to the polls, countries urgently need to band together...
Dec 28, 2023



Answer

No, with a few exceptions including defamation, fraud, political advertisements, and broadcast speech.

“The Court has suggested the government may not regulate false ideas, and even false factual statements receive some constitutional protection.”

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12180>

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Do you support the TikTok Bill

Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

What is a political regime?

- A set of institutions and norms that regulate the government.
- Rules of the political game.

