

# PWB-ST-VS Digital Media in Autocracies: Seminar's Plan

Sergei Pashakhin, M.A.\*

## Description

Almost half of the world is connected to the Internet. At the same time almost half of the countries on the planet are governed by some sort of autocratic regime. This raises the question how people in autocratic regimes can use digital media to contest governments and how governments can use digital media to control publics. In this seminar, we will learn how autocratic regimes treat groups and individuals enabled by digital media. Particularly, we will focus on social media websites and platforms that provide users with facilities to share messages and other content, organize groups, and propagate information for political expression and action. We will explore the agency of platforms, and their mediating role between citizens and their autocratic governments. Finally, we will study research on the Arab Spring (2011), China, and Russia. These cases will guide participants in their group projects exploring understudied countries that are already under autocratic regimes or presently experiencing autocratization.

## Week 1: Introduction: seminar organization and overview (April 19, 2023, 16:15—18:00)

### Background reading

1. Collier, D., Daniel Hidalgo, F., & Olivia Maciuceanu, A. (2006). Essentially contested concepts: Debates and applications. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(3), 211–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600923782>

---

\*sergei.pashakhin@uni-bamberg.de, Feldkirchenstraße 21, Raum FMA/01.14

2. Chapter 2 in Schroeder, R. (2018). *Social theory after the internet: Media, technology and globalization*. UCL Press.

## **Week 2: Autocratization and democratization (April 26, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Luhrmann, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2019). A third wave of autocratization is here: What is new about it? *Democratization*, 26(7), 1095–1113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029>
2. Boese, V. A., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Sato, Y., & Lindberg, S. I. (2022). State of the world 2021: Autocratization changing its nature? *Democratization*, 29(6), 983–1013. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2069751>

### **Presentation**

- Chapter 1 in Bennett, W. L., & Livingston, S. (Eds.). (2020). *The Disinformation Age*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108914628>

## **Week 3: Effects of Internet on political outcomes (May 3, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Zhuravskaya, E., Petrova, M., & Enikolopov, R. (2020). Political Effects of the Internet and Social Media. *Annual Review of Economics*, 12(1), 415–438. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-081919-050239>
2. Boulianne, S. (2018). Twenty Years of Digital Media Effects on Civic and Political Participation. *Communication Research*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218808186>

### **Presentation**

- Olaniran, B., & Williams, I. (2020). Social Media Effects: Hijacking Democracy and Civility in Civic Engagement. In J. Jones & M. Trice (Eds.), *Platforms, Protests, and the Challenge of Networked*

*Democracy* (pp. 77–94). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36525-7\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36525-7_5)

## **Week 4: Social media logic, platformization and governance (May 10, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding Social Media Logic (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 2309065). <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2309065>
2. Van Dijck, J. (2021). Seeing the forest for the trees: Visualizing platformization and its governance. *New Media & Society*, 23(9), 2801–2819. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820940293>

### **Presentation**

- Keremoglu, E., & Weidmann, N. B. (2020). How Dictators Control the Internet: A Review Essay. *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(10–11), 1690–1703. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020912278>

## **Week 5: Network citizenship (May 17, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Reijers, W., Orgad, L., & de Filippi, P. (2023). The rise of cybernetic citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 27(2), 210–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2022.2077567>
2. van, J. (2018). The Platform Society as a Contested Concept. In J. van Dijck, T. Poell, & M. de Waal (Eds.), *The Platform Society* (p. 7-30). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.003.0002>

### **Presentation**

- Aziz F. Performing Citizenship: Freedom March Selfies by Pakistani Instagrammers. in: Kuntsman, A. (Ed.). (2017). *Selfie Citizenship*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45270-8>

## **Week 6: Autocracy, uncertainty and information (May 24, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Chapter 2 in Schedler, A. (2013). *The politics of uncertainty: Sustaining and subverting electoral authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.
2. Chapter 1 in Guriev, S., & Treisman, D. (2022). *Spin dictators: The changing face of tyranny in the 21st century*. Princeton University Press.

### **Presentation**

- Keremoglu, E., Hellmeier, S., & Weidmann, N. B. (2022). Thin-skinned leaders: Regime legitimization, protest issues, and repression in autocracies. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 10(1), 136–152. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2021.19>

## **Week 7: Case study: Arab Spring (May 31, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Bellin, E. (2012). Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring. *Comparative Politics*, 44(2), 127–149. <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041512798838021>
2. Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E., & Sheafer, T. (2013). Social Media and the Arab Spring. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212471716>

## **Week 8: Censorship and social media (June 7, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Roberts, M. E. (2020). Resilience to Online Censorship. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1), 401–419. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050718-032837>

2. Chang, C.-C., & Lin, T.-H. (2020). Autocracy login: Internet censorship and civil society in the digital age. *Democratization*, 27(5), 874–895. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1747051>

### Presentation

- Wong, S. H.-W., & Liang, J. (2021). Dubious until officially censored: Effects of online censorship exposure on viewers' attitudes in authoritarian regimes. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 18(3), 310–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2021.1879343>

## Week 9: Case study: China (June 14, 2023, 16:15—18:00)

### Required reading

1. Chapter 3 in Roberts, M. E. (2018). *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.23943/9781400890057>
2. Chen, H., & Greitens, S. C. (2022). Information capacity and social order: The local politics of information integration in China. *Governance*, 35(2), 497–523. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12592>

## Week 10: Social media and civic engagement (June 21, 2023, 16:15—18:00)

### Required reading

1. Chapter 9 in Weidmann, N. B., & Rød, E. G. (2019). *The internet and political protest in autocracies*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190918309.001.0001>
2. Turner, K. (2023). A win or a flop? Measuring mass protest successfulness in authoritarian settings. *Journal of Peace Research*, 002234332211404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221140434>

### Presentation

- Bennett, W. L., Segerberg, A., & Yang, Y. (2018). The Strength of Peripheral Networks: Negotiating Attention and Meaning in Complex

Media Ecologies. *Journal of Communication*, 68(4), 659–684. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy032>

## **Week 11: State propaganda and astroturfing (June 28, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Carter, E. B., & Carter, B. L. (2021). Propaganda and Protest in Autocracies. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65(5), 919–949. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720975090>
2. Kawerau, L., Weidmann, N. B., & Dainotti, A. (2023). Attack or Block? Repertoires of Digital Censorship in Autocracies. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 20(1), 60–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2022.2037118>

### **Presentation**

- Stoycheff, E. (2020). Relatively Democratic: How Perceived Internet Interference Shapes Attitudes about Democracy. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(3), 390–406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220909741>

## **Week 12: Case study: Russia (July 5, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Oates, S., & Lokot, T. (2013). Twilight of the Gods?: How the Internet Challenged Russian Television News Frames in the Winter Protests of 2011-12 (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 2286727). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2286727>
2. Litvinenko, A., & Toepfl, F. (2019). The “Gardening” of an Authoritarian Public at Large: How Russia’s Ruling Elites Transformed the Country’s Media Landscape After the 2011/12 Protests “For Fair Elections.” *Publizistik*, 64(2), 225–240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-019-00486-2>

## **Week 13: Digital activism under autocratic regime (July 12, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Pan, J. (2022). The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review. *Science Advances*, 8(10), eabl8198. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl8198>
2. Gorokhovskaia, Y. (2019). What it takes to win when the game is rigged: The evolution of opposition electoral strategies in Moscow, 2012–2017. *Democratization*, 26(6), 975–992. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1577380>

### **Presentation**

- Lokot, T. (2018). Be Safe or Be Seen? How Russian Activists Negotiate Visibility and Security in Online Resistance Practices. *Surveillance & Society*, 16(3), 332–346. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v16i3.6967>

## **Week 14: National security and agency of social media companies (July 19, 2023, 16:15—18:00)**

### **Required reading**

1. Pohle, J., & Thiel, T. (2020). Digital sovereignty. *Internet Policy Review*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2020.4.1532>
2. Gray, J. E. (2021). The geopolitics of ‘platforms’: The TikTok challenge. *Internet Policy Review*, 10(2). <https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/geopolitics-platforms-tiktok-challenge>

### **Presentation**

- Törnberg, P. (2023). How platforms govern: Social regulation in digital capitalism. *Big Data & Society*, 10(1), 205395172311538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153808>