Digital Era Government and Politics

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<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>2017-18, Hilary Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>Day and Time</td>
<td>Mondays, Weeks 1-9, 09:15-11:15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Seminar Room, Oxford Internet Institute, 1 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3JS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Providers</td>
<td>Dr Victoria Nash, OII, <a href="mailto:victoria.nash@oii.ox.ac.uk">victoria.nash@oii.ox.ac.uk</a> Professor Philip Howard, OII, <a href="mailto:Philip.howard@oii.ox.ac.uk">Philip.howard@oii.ox.ac.uk</a> Professor Helen Margetts, OII, <a href="mailto:helen.margetts@oii.ox.ac.uk">helen.margetts@oii.ox.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Prerequisites</td>
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Background
In the digital era, political institutions, activities and relationships are increasingly mediated and shaped by the technologies of information and communication. This paper examines the impact of the Internet and related technologies on the core activities and institutions of government and politics and considers whether the developing use of these technologies serves to reinforce, undermine or otherwise alter traditional political models or patterns of behaviour.

Commentators have disagreed about the effect and importance of the internet and related technologies for politics and government. Utopian accounts predict the transformation of political life through Internet-based mediation, with ‘peer production’ and on-line networks enhancing political participation and technological innovation driving policy innovation. In contrast, dystopian arguments emphasise the risks and dangers of technologically strengthened government and the ‘database state’. A number of ‘politics-as-usual’ accounts underplay the likelihood of technology-driven change and the importance of the internet for politics and political theory, stressing that technologies reinforce existing relationships and inequalities. Meanwhile, mainstream political science has tended to ignore the phenomenon, appearing to view technological development as policy neutral with no profound implications for contemporary government and politics; many interesting questions remain consequently under-explored, for example, regarding the changing viability of pluralist, elitist, market liberal and cosmopolitan models of democracy.

This course aims to equip students with the theoretical tools and empirical evidence necessary to identify, evaluate and critique these various positions and debates. It will enable students to investigate the implications of the Internet and related technologies for political participation and government, reviewing available evidence and new methodological approaches to the study of politics in the digital-era. Students will be asked to question and in some cases re-assess traditional approaches to the study of government and democracy in the light of such
evidence. The course thereby provides students with the toolkit of concepts, theories, methods and principles to carry out ‘e-literate’ analysis of politics and policy and to conduct further postgraduate research in this field.

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, students should have an in-depth understanding of the changing nature of digital-era governance and politics and the theoretical, practical and ethical questions surrounding the role of the Internet and related technologies in political life. Specifically, students will:

- Be able to understand and critically review theoretical approaches to digital-era governance and politics and be aware of the key arguments and debates surrounding its implications for political participation, policy-making and the shape of the contemporary state.

- Have a sophisticated understanding of the potential for Internet technologies to shape political relationships, activities and outcomes.

- Be aware of the empirical evidence available to assess the role of Internet technologies in politics and policy-making and to use it to question key micro-foundations of mainstream theoretical approaches.

- Be familiar with the methodological tools necessary to research digital-era governance and politics nationally and internationally, and be in a position to embark on further research in this field.

This paper does not assume prior knowledge or study of politics and government. Students will thus be introduced to core concepts, theories and texts and will be expected to develop a significant degree of political fluency. In addition, students will be required to read emerging approaches to digital-era governance and politics and will be expected to critically assess this literature in the light of available empirical evidence. Reading lists and teaching will be organized in such a way that students are exposed to traditional texts and new and emerging studies in relation to each topic.

The course is international in scope. Due to the focus on democratic institutions and politics, the main countries covered in readings and discussions will be liberal democratic states; however, students are welcome to bring in examples from other states where appropriate.

Teaching Arrangements
The course is taught in eight weekly classes, each consisting of a lecture followed by student presentations and seminar discussion. The classes will meet in weeks 1-4 and 6-9 of Hilary term. Each student will be required to give one ten minute presentation on a specific aspect of the session topic or to review the argument of one or more of the books under the additional readings for each session topic. Details of these presentations will be agreed in Week 1.

From Week 2 onwards, core reading is indicated for each session of the course. In addition, we have listed some introductory or classic texts for each of the topics covered. We ask students who have not previously studied politics at postgraduate level to read at least one of these texts each week.
Note
Students should note that over the course of the year, small changes may be made to the content, dates or teaching arrangements set out in this reading list, at the course provider’s discretion. These changes will be communicated to students directly.

Assessment
Students will be assessed through a final essay that is no longer than 5000 words which must be submitted via Weblearn by 12 noon of Monday of Week 1 of Trinity term (23 April).

Formative Assessment
All students will have to complete one short essay on any of the 8 topics covered (advised length: 1500-3000 words) for the purposes of formative assessment. This essay must be submitted via Plato by the end of Week 6 (Friday by 5pm). This essay will provide a means for students to obtain feedback on their progress before they submit the final essay. Students will also be given feedback on their oral presentations.

Submission of Summative Assignments
The summative assignment for this course is due on Monday of Trinity Term Week 1 (23 April) by 12.00pm and should be submitted electronically via the Assignment Submission WebLearn Site. The assignment should also be submitted electronically by 5:00 pm on the same day to teaching@oii.ox.ac.uk. If anything goes wrong with your submission, email teaching@oii.ox.ac.uk immediately. In cases where a technical fault that is later determined to be a fault of the Weblearn system (and not a fault of your computer) prevents your submitting the assessment on time, having a time stamped email message will help the Proctors determine if your assessment will be accepted. Please note that you should not wait until the last minute to submit materials since Weblearn can run slowly at peak submission times and this is not considered a technical fault.

Full instructions on using WebLearn for electronic submissions can be found on Plato under General Information. There is also an FAQ page on the Assignment Submission WebLearn Site. Please note that work submitted after the deadline will be processed in the standard manner and, in addition, the late submission will be reported to the Proctors' Office. If a student is concerned that they will not meet the deadline they must contact their college office or examinations school for advice. For details on the regulations for late and non-submissions please refer to the Proctors website at https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/examinations/candidates/.

Any student failing this assessment will need to follow the rules set out in the OII Examining Conventions regarding re-submitting failed work.

Weekly topics

1. The nature of politics and democracy in the digital era
2. Digital citizenship and political (in)equality
3. Political representation
4. Political communication, agenda setting and public opinion
5. (Week free for reading and assessments)
6. Formal processes of political participation: parties, campaigns and elections
7. Civic engagement, social movements and collective action
8. Digital-era government and bureaucracy
9. The digital nation state

Key to Readings

A reading list is given below for each class. Weekly items marked with an asterisk (*) are essential reading and MUST be read by all students in preparation for the class. Items which are not marked with an asterisk are additional readings which need only be consulted in the preparation of student presentations or for essays.

General Readings

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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chadwick, Andrew</td>
<td>Internet Politics: States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies.</td>
<td>Oxford University Press.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexandra Segerberg</td>
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Week 1: The nature of politics and democracy in the digital era
Instructor: Vicki Nash

In this session we will introduce and discuss key concepts which will be used throughout the course. We will look at politics, public goods and democracy in particular, exploring democratic principles of popular control and political equality of that control, as well as alternative models of democracy (pluralism, elitism, market liberalism). Democratic institutions: the role of elections, legislatures, elected representatives, parties, bureaucracy and the media in a democracy. Finally, we will discuss the general dimensions of an internet ‘effect’, in terms of the way the appearance of new communications technology affects previously settled social practices.

Question: How might we start to assess the influence of the Internet on the extent to which a state may be regarded as democratic?

Introductory texts to political science and democracy

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<td></td>
<td>• Especially Chapter 2 by David Beetham</td>
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The expression of social differences as forms of political inequality have long been studied in political science. With the advent of digital era government, the question arises whether traditional sources of inequality are reproduced in digital form, or whether new patterns of political inequality have emerged. This question can be addressed at a variety of levels, including longstanding debates about the persistence of digital divides and access to political debate or services, as well as more nuanced consideration of how the voices of different groups are received in online civic spaces, thus raising policy-relevant questions about how best to support equality in both formal and informal opportunities for political engagement. This session will consider both examples of the available empirical evidence as well as the potential policy implications of inequality in an era where government services and political debate are increasingly ‘digital by default’.

Question: ‘Far from ensuring greater political equality, the move towards delivery of government services and political engagement online will result in even more damaging forms of social and political exclusion’. Discuss.

Classic texts on citizenship, participation and (in)equality

S. Verba et al Participation and Political Equality (1978)

R.J. Dalton Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced
Core reading


S. Levmore & M.C. Nussbaum The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy and Reputation 2012. Chapter by Nussbaum


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**Week 3: Political representation**

Instructor: Vicki Nash

Democracy is about connecting popular will to the process of national government. The size of nations, and the complexity of government, has meant that this connection has typically made through representation: appointing individuals to make governing decisions on our behalf. Many of democracy’s fundamental problems result from
the challenges that representation throws up: how can we appoint experts to act on our behalf, whilst
nevertheless retaining control over government? And many of the core institutions of democracy (such as
parliaments) are designed as ways of making representation work.

This session will discuss the process of representation in the internet era. We will discuss general theory of how
representation should work, before moving on to look at the use of innovations such as open data and social
media, critically assessing the extent to which they improve representation.

Question: Does the internet increase or decrease the need for representation in political processes?

**Introductory texts on political representation**

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<tr>
<td>Jane Mansbridge</td>
<td>Rethinking Representation</td>
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**Core reading**

* Leston Bandeira, C and Bender, D
  *How Deeply are Parliaments Engaging on Social Media?* 2013. Information Polity, 18 (4). pp. 281-297. ISSN 1570-1255

* Maguire, Sean

* Jackson, Nigel and Lilleker, Darren
  *Microblogging, Constituency Service and Impression Management: UK MPs and the Use of Twitter, 2011, Journal of Legislative Studies, 17(1), 86-105

* Griffith, Jeffrey and Leston-Bandeira, Cristina
  *How Are Parliaments Using New Media to Engage with Citizens?, 2012, Journal of Legislative Studies, 18(3-4), 496-513

* Karatzia, Anastasi

* Ostling, Alina
  *Parliamentary Informatics Projects: Who are their users and what is their impact?, JeDEM 2012, 4(2), 279-300

* Coleman, Stephen and Blumler, Jay.
Week 4: Political communication, agenda setting and public opinion
Instructor: Phil Howard

The way we receive political information has long been a vital part of the process of democracy. Communication from the news media, politicians, friends and family all help shape what we think are the important political issues of the day.

The internet has both simplified and complicated the systems of political communication. The business model of traditional media actors, especially print newspapers, is under increasing threat, with print sales declining rapidly and revenue from online advertising not filling the gap. At the same time, a variety of new actors and new platforms are emerging. Bloggers, citizen journalists, news aggregators, and hacktivists all have roles in contemporary political communication. At the same time, social media makes the way we receive news highly problematic. In this session, we will discuss the democratic and undemocratic features of contemporary political communication systems.

Question: What does it mean to be an “informed citizen”?

Introductory texts on political communication, agenda setting, and the crisis of the news media

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Core reading

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Week 5: BREAK

Week 6: Formal processes of political participation: parties, campaigns and elections
Instructor: Phil Howard

The question of when and why people participate in the democratic process is one of the most vexed in all of political science. Economic theory suggests that, as the potential pay-offs from voting are very small, rationally speaking, no-one should vote; but people always have done, often in dangerous and difficult circumstances. Widespread use of the Internet has changed the context of traditional modes of political activity—voting and party politics. Against a backdrop of overall decline in voter turnout and party membership, some have argued that the Internet holds the potential for increasing voter participation by re-invigorating election campaigning on-line and reconfiguring party systems. Others argue that change occurs only at the margins (by reducing the entry costs for smaller parties, for instance) or acts to reinforce existing inequalities (only larger political parties can dedicate the resources necessary for successful on-line campaigning).

This session considers whether and how digital communication is shaping opportunities for formal political participation in political parties, elections and campaigns.

Question: Have social media and information technologies had an impact on elections and referenda?

Introductory texts


Early theorists of democracy such as Mill and de Tocqueville recognised that healthy democratic political institutions depended upon the existence of a vigorous civil society in which the habits of participation might be developed and the dangers of political and social dogmas challenged. Modern democratic theory has continued to embrace this idea, and many proponents of the Internet have claimed that the new communication tools and networks it supports have the potential to invigorate civil society. Other theorists have countered such optimism.
with fears that online engagement will lead to a narrowing of personal interests and connections or that it is a shallow substitute for more effective forms of offline activism. This session will consider the theoretical underpinnings of both hypotheses and will ask what empirical evidence might be required to support or reject either view.

**Question: What reason, if any, do we have to believe that the Internet might strengthen civil society?**

**Classic texts on the relationship between democracy and civil society**

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**Core reading**

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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source/Volume</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelon, D., McIlwain, C., &amp; M. Clark (2016).</td>
<td>Quantifying the power and consequences of social media protest. In New Media and Society (online first).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuckerman, E</td>
<td>‘New Media, New Civics’. Policy and Internet. 6:2 151-168. (To be read together with responses from other academics in same journal)</td>
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**Week 8: Digital-era government and bureaucracy**  
*Instructor: Helen Margetts*

Digital technologies have been regarded by many as the key to the modernization of government, from a radical strengthening of Weberian rationality and bureaucracy, to the facilitation of decentralized power and alternative forms of state organization resting on crowdsourcing and digital ‘co-production’. Some claim that a model of ‘essentially digital governance’ has replaced ‘new public management’ (NPM) as the dominant paradigm for public management reform, where digital technologies take centre stage and digital channels become the default. In practice, all governments in the industrialised world and beyond are reliant for their operations on a large digital presence and complex network of large-scale information systems which go beyond being critical for policy implementation to shaping the whole context within which policy and service delivery choices are made. But governments can struggle to negotiate the rapidly changing digital world and to capitalize on the potential of internet-related technologies to deliver innovative public policy solutions and efficient, effective and equitable public services.

In many departments, the organizational and cultural legacies of Weberian and NPM models co-exist uneasily or clash with internet-based cultures and failed or stalled attempts to introduce digital government. This session will explore the key approaches in practice and scholarship to digital era change in government and also the implicit approach of mainstream public administration and public policy – that digital technology is policy neutral with little importance for the fundamentals of policy and administration.

**Question:** ‘The history of digital government is littered with failures, disasters and disappointed expectations in terms of efficiency and innovation.’ Discuss.

**Introductory texts on government and bureaucracy**

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Week 9: The digital nation state

Instructor: Vicki Nash

From the early days of the Internet, commentators have speculated on its contribution to the phenomenon of globalization, forecasting ‘the death of distance’, the increasing irrelevance of space and place, the incapability of governments to control the flow of information and capital across national boundaries and the evolution of a global information society or ‘regime’. At the same time, political revelations in many states have revealed the extraordinary prevalence and scope of the ‘control’ or ‘surveillance’ state, driven by a technologically strengthened security services with greater capacity to protect and control citizens within state boundaries and also beyond.

On the international stage, grand claims about the embrace of e-diplomacy or ‘digital statecraft’ suggest that the potential of the Internet can easily be harnessed to support the goals of foreign policy actors without risk, yet from an academic perspective it remains to be seen whether any meaningful change can yet be observed in the day-to-day activities of this oldest branch of government activity. This session highlights some of the various ways in which national governments find their policies subverted or strengthened by the growth of the Internet.
Question: ‘Claims that the Internet and digital technologies would lead to the end of the nation state were fatally flawed; rather, such technologies have allowed national governments to strengthen power and control over their jurisdictions.’ Discuss.

Introductory texts on globalization

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Core reading

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Please note: Option papers will only run if selected by at least four students.