Course Description

Information technologies, data, and algorithms increasingly impact multiple aspects of democracy and society. Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, this course focuses on the power and social dynamics in (and of) cyberspaces, and their effects democratic regimes. Such dynamics challenge traditional political and societal structures of institutions and are core of social change, changing practices, behavior and awareness of individuals, collectives, business and societies.

Here are some questions we will discuss in class:

How do fake news and other (social) media manipulations affect voters? What steps can democracies take to minimize foreign intervention in elections?

What role do various types of social media play in mobilizing collective action?

How do information flows impact democratic institutions and processes? Who controls them?

What kind of societal and ethical challenges does artificial intelligence present and how
can we address them?
What are the power relations between the leading stakeholders in the information era – tech giants, governments, users?
How does platform moderation affect freedom of speech?

Course Goals

The course attempts to take a socio-technical perspective to political change. As such, one of the main goals of the course is to provide students with theoretical and practical frameworks that can serve later as a tool-kit, and lay the groundwork for the student’s development as leaders. Second, another goal is to bring to students the broader context for understanding societal and political changes that occur in a networks context.

Grading

1. Class Participation – 0%

The topics of this course require a high level of involvement from the students. So how you participate? First, show up for the lessons. Second, make sure you do your readings for each week. Readings are an important and essential component. Third, be cognitively present in class, ask questions, provide examples, discuss etc...

2. Mid-term paper (Group Assignment) - 30%
Groups consist of 3 students per group.
More instructions will be given during the semester.
Due date: 4.6.2020

3. Final paper (Individual/Group Assignment) - 70%
Groups consist of up to 3 students per group (No - 4 are not allowed!).
More instructions will be given during the semester.
Due date: 1.8.2020

Course Grading:
The course grading will be structured as follows:

1. Participation 0%
2. Mid-term paper 30%
3. Final Paper 70%

Total 100%
Reading List

Lessons and Readings:

PART 1: How Information Flows change the Democratic Process?

1. Introduction: changes in power dynamics

No readings assigned for this week.


2. Participation I

[Topics] Polarization, Homophily and Power Law


3. Participation II

[Topics] Disinformation


4. Representation

[Topics] Personal politics, Populism, Institutional Changes, Disinformation


5. Disruptive Information Flows

[Topics]: Definitions - information flows, virality of information, memes

[Read] Nahon Karine and Hemsley, Jeff, 2013, Going Viral, Polity, Cambridge: UK. Chapter 2
and Chapter 6.


**PART 2: Intermediaries and Democracy**

6. Intermediaries I: Platforms

[Topics] Platforms vs. States, Moderation


[See] Mark Zuckerberg's speech, Oct. 17, 2019, On Freedom of Expression - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E419_V2Gk_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E419_V2Gk_g)

[See] Sacha Baron Cohen's speech, Nov. 21, 2019, at the ADL International Leadership Award. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymaWq5yZIYM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymaWq5yZIYM)

7. Intermediaries II: Algorithms

[Topics] Artificial Intelligence, Bias, Fairness, Quantification


[See] Crawford Kate, 2018, AI Now: Social and Political Questions for Artificial Intelligence, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2IT7gWBfaE&t=516s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2IT7gWBfaE&t=516s)

**PART 3: Challenging Institutions of Power in Democracies**

8. From Collective action to Connective Action


[Read] Marcea Dan, 2016, Civic Participation in Contentious Politics, Palgrave: MacMillan, chapter 1

9. Privacy and Surveillance: Before and after the Coronavirus


10. Elections: What have changed?
