

PWB-ST-VS Digital Media in Autocracies: Syllabus

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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.

Topics

1. Introduction: autocratization, digital technology, and essentially contested concepts.
2. Effects of the Internet and social media on political outcomes.
3. Practices of control and resistance in the digital space.
4. Network citizenship.
5. Agency of platforms.

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6. Case study: Technology and citizens during the Arab Spring.
7. Case study: the state and social media in China.
8. Case study: the Russian state against technology affluent publics.

Literature

- Schedler, A. (2013). *The politics of uncertainty: Sustaining and subverting electoral authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.
- Schroeder, R. (2018). *Social theory after the internet: Media, technology and globalization*. UCL Press.
- Guriev, S., & Treisman, D. (2022). *Spin dictators: The changing face of tyranny in the 21st century*. Princeton University Press.
- Keremoğlu, 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>

Learning Objectives

- To learn about the effects of the Internet on political outcomes.
- To understand the current research on the process of autocratization/democratization accompanied by increasing digitalization of the daily life.
- To learn about practices of control and resistance observed in digital spaces.
- To learn how to critically engage academic literature on political science and communication for personal research projects.

Grading

Participants will get a grade for the course based on their paper (10 pages) developed during the semester. The paper must be based on the group project that participants develop during the seminar.

Language

- English

Office Hours

- By appointment.