Authoritarianism in the Digital Age
Spring 2022

Schedule: Monday & Wednesday 3:35-4:50 PM
Professor: Alexandra Siegel
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11-1pm, or by appointment
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Course Overview:

This course explores how changes in information communication technologies (ICTs)—including the internet, social media, mobile phones, and big data—have shaped politics in authoritarian regimes. This course will examine how governments and nonstate actors use digital technologies to manipulate and surveil the public, as well as how activists and everyday citizens use these tools to organize and mobilize. Students will be introduced to cutting-edge research on the role of social media in authoritarian politics, while learning how this work is grounded in long-standing theories in the comparative politics literature.

Over the course of the semester, we will discuss questions such as: Is social media a "liberation technology" or a tool that helps authoritarian regimes stay in power? When and how can social media facilitate protest in repressive environments? Are censorship and internet shutdowns effective strategies for authoritarian regimes? Does social media cause or exacerbate ethnic violence and extremism? Many of these questions do not have clear answers and require rigorous analytical thinking. We will address these topics (and many more) through readings, discussions, writing assignments, and designing research proposals. This course will help students learn to conduct original research, which may become the impetus for senior thesis projects.

Learning Objectives:

1) To give students an understanding of the social science literature on the relationship between digital media and politics in authoritarian regimes.

2) To provide students with a more analytical approach to studying important questions in the social sciences.

3) To help students develop original research questions and designs.

4) To enable students to become more informed consumers of popular news media on these topics.

Recommended Pre-requisites: Introduction to Comparative Politics (PSCI 2012)

Course Requirements:

1. Research Proposal (30%)

Students will develop a research proposal to answer a social science question about the relationship between social media and politics in authoritarian regimes. While students will not be required to collect data or conduct statistical analysis in this course, their proposals should describe the data and methods they would ideally use to answer their research questions.

- **Research Topic (5%):** A 2-page summary of your basic research question, hypotheses, and the data you would ideally use to test these hypotheses is due on **February 9.** What is your research question? What are your preliminary hypotheses? What data would ideally help you to test these hypotheses and answer your research question?

- **Literature Review (5%):** A literature review on the topic you have chosen to explore is due on **March 16.** What do we know about this topic? Where are there gaps in the literature? How does your topic help to fill these gaps? How have you updated your hypotheses or methodological approach after conducting a more thorough review of the literature?

- **Presentation (10%):** You will be required to present an overview of your research proposal in the final week of the course. Depending on course size, each presentation will range from 5-10 minutes (including Q&A).

- **Final Proposal (15%):** You should turn in your proposal on Canvas as a PDF. It should be approximately 10-15 pages (double-spaced, paginated, 1-inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman) and is due by April 27th.

2. Attendance and Participation (10%):

Attendance and participation in class discussions and will account for 10% of your grade. Students are expected to have done all of the required readings and to be prepared to discuss them in class.

3. Current Events Response Papers (20%)

Students will write two current events response papers throughout the semester. In each assignment, students will identify a news article discussing the topic of a particular week's readings (e.g. censorship, internet shutdowns, surveillance, etc.). They will then write a 1-2 page response paper discussing whether and how the news article either confirms or contradicts the findings in that week's readings.

4. Midterm & Final (30%)

The midterm and final will be open-note take-home exams consisting of short answer and essay questions. The exams will be made available on Canvas between 9am and 9pm on exam days and you will have a three-hour window in which to complete each exam.

Readings:

All readings will be posted to Canvas. Readings for each week are listed under in the class schedule and assignments section below.

Class Schedule and Assignments:

Week 1: Course Introduction (Jan 10)

Weeks 2: Liberation Technology (Jan 12 & Jan 19)

Diamond, L., 2010. Liberation technology. *Journal of Democracy*, *21*(3), pp.69-83.

Tucker, J.A., Theocharis, Y., Roberts, M.E. and Barberá, P., 2017. From liberation to turmoil: Social media and democracy. *Journal of democracy*, *28*(4), pp.46-59.

Lynch, M., Freelon, D. and Aday, S., 2016. How social media undermines transitions to democracy. *Blogs and Bullets IV: Peace Tech Lab*.

Zhuravskaya, E., Petrova, M. and Enikolopov, R., 2020. Political effects of the internet and social media. *Annual Review of Economics*, *12*.

Week 3: Social Media and Protest (Jan 24-26)

Jost, J.T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., Sterling, J. and Tucker, J.A., 2018. How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks. *Political psychology*, *39*, pp.85-118.

Tufekci, Z. and Wilson, C., 2012. Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations from Tahrir Square. *Journal of communication*, *62*(2), pp.363-379.

Enikolopov, R., Makarin, A. and Petrova, M., 2020. Social media and protest participation: Evidence from Russia. *Econometrica*, *88*(4), pp.1479-1514.

Larson, J.M., Nagler, J., Ronen, J. and Tucker, J.A., 2019. Social networks and protest participation: Evidence from 130 million Twitter users. *American Journal of Political Science*, *63*(3), pp.690-705.

Optional:

Caren, N., Andrews, K.T. and Lu, T., 2020. Contemporary Social Movements in a Hybrid Media Environment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *46*.

Valenzuela, S., 2013. Unpacking the use of social media for protest behavior: The roles of information, opinion expression, and activism. *American behavioral scientist*, *57*(7), pp.920-942.

Week 4: Internet Shutdowns (Jan 31 & Feb 2)

Howard, P.N., Agarwal, S.D. and Hussain, M.M., 2011. The dictators' digital dilemma: When do states disconnect their digital networks?.

Lutscher, P.M., Weidmann, N.B., Roberts, M.E., Jonker, M., King, A. and Dainotti, A., 2020. At home and abroad: The use of denial-of-service attacks during elections in nondemocratic regimes. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *64*(2-3), pp.373-401.

Crabtree, Charles, and Nils B. Weidmann. "Internet Service Provision under Authoritarian Rule: A Field Experiment in Belarus." (2018).

Gohdes, A.R., 2015. Pulling the plug: Network disruptions and violence in civil conflict. *Journal of Peace Research*, *52*(3), pp.352-367.

Optional:

Wagner, B., 2018. Authoritarian Practices in the Digital Age| Understanding Internet Shutdowns: A Case Study from Pakistan. *International Journal of Communication*, *12*, p.22.

Rydzak, J., Karanja, M. and Opiyo, N., 2020. Internet Shutdowns in Africa| Dissent Does Not Die in Darkness: Network Shutdowns and Collective Action in African Countries. *International Journal of Communication*, *14*, p.24.

Week 5: Online Censorship (Feb 7 & Feb 9)

King, G., Pan, J. and Roberts, M.E., 2013. How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, pp.326-343.

Roberts, M.E., 2020. Resilience to Online Censorship. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *23*.

Pan, J., 2017. How market dynamics of domestic and foreign social media firms shape strategies of internet censorship. *Problems of Post-Communism*, *64*(3-4), pp.167-188.

Hobbs, W.R. and Roberts, M.E., 2018. How sudden censorship can increase access to information. *American Political Science Review*, *112*(3), pp.621-636.

Optional:

Esberg, J., 2020. Censorship as Reward: Evidence from Pop Culture Censorship in Chile. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(3), pp.821-836.

Week 6: Computational Propaganda (Feb 14 & Feb 16)

Adena, M., Enikolopov, R., Petrova, M., Santarosa, V. and Zhuravskaya, E., 2015. Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *130*(4), pp.1885-1939.

Woolley, S.C. and Howard, P., 2017. Computational propaganda worldwide: Executive summary.

Sanovich, S., 2017. Computational propaganda in Russia: the origins of digital misinformation.

Freelon, D. and Lokot, T., 2020. Russian Twitter disinformation campaigns reach across the American political spectrum. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, *1*(1).

Optional:

Woolley, S.C. and Howard, P.N., 2016. Political communication, computational propaganda, and autonomous agents: Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*.

Leber, A. and Abrahams, A., 2019. A storm of tweets: Social media manipulation during the gulf crisis. *Review of Middle East Studies*, *53*(2), pp.241-258.

Week 7: Pro-State Mobilization (Feb 21 & Feb 23)

Hellmeier, S. and Weidmann, N.B., 2020. Pulling the strings? The strategic use of pro-government mobilization in authoritarian regimes. *Comparative Political Studies*, *53*(1), pp.71-108.

Gunitsky, S., 2015. Corrupting the cyber-commons: Social media as a tool of autocratic stability. *Perspectives on Politics*, *13*(1), pp.42-54.

Bozcaga, T., Dekeyser, E., Freedman, M. and Steinert-Threlkeld, Z., 2017. From on High: Imams, Religious Networks, and Pro-Regime Mobilization.

Lu, Y. and Pan, J. 2020 Capturing Clicks: How the Chinese Government Uses Clickbait to Compete for Visibility. (Working Paper)

Week 8: MIDTERM (March 2)

Week 9: Surveillance (March 7 & 9)

Pfaff, S., 2001. The limits of coercive surveillance: Social and penal control in the German Democratic Republic. Punishment & Society, 3(3), pp.381-407.

Xu, X., 2020. To Repress or to Co-opt? Authoritarian Control in the Age of Digital Surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science*.

Jones, M.O., 2013. Social media, surveillance and social control in the Bahrain uprising.

Grinberg, D., 2017. Chilling developments: Digital access, surveillance, and the authoritarian dilemma in Ethiopia. *Surveillance & Society*, *15*(3/4), pp.432-438.

Week 10: Repression and Online Dissent (March 14 & 16)

Davenport, C. and Inman, M., 2012. The state of state repression research since the 1990s. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *24*(4), pp.619-634.

Pan, J. and Siegel, A.A., 2020. How Saudi crackdowns fail to silence online dissent. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(1), pp.109-125.

Esberg, J. and Siegel A.A. 2020. How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela

Gohdes, A.R., 2020. Repression technology: Internet accessibility and state violence. *American Journal of Political Science*.

Week 11: No Class (Spring Break)

Week 12: State-Sponsored News Media (March 28 & March 30)

Rotaru, V., 2018. Forced Attraction? How Russia Is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the "Near Abroad". *Problems of Post-Communism*, *65*(1), pp.37-48.

Metzger, M.M. and Siegel, A.A., 2019. When State-Sponsored Media Goes Viral: Russia's Use of RT to Shape Global Discourse on Syria. *Working paper*.

Orttung, R.W. and Nelson, E., 2019. Russia Today's strategy and effectiveness on YouTube. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *35*(2), pp.77-92.

Lu and Pan 2020. How China Spreads State Media Online (Working Paper)

Huang, Z.A. and Wang, R., 2019. Building a network to "tell China stories well": Chinese diplomatic communication strategies on Twitter. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, p.24.

Week 13: Social Media and Conflict (April 4 & April 6)

Armand, A., Atwell, P. and Gomes, J.F., 2020. The reach of radio: Ending civil conflict through rebel demobilization. *American Economic Review*, *110*(5), pp.1395-1429.

Zeitzoff, T., 2017. How social media is changing conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *61*(9), pp.1970-1991.

Gohdes, A.R., 2018. Studying the Internet and Violent conflict. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *35*(1), pp.89-106.

Lynch, M., Freelon, D. and Aday, S., 2014. *Syria's socially mediated civil war*. USIP.

Motherboard Cyber Podcast: "The Cyberwar In Yemen"
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qvgk5x/the-cyberwar-in-yemen

Optional:

Starbird, K., Arif, A., Wilson, T., Van Koevering, K., Yefimova, K. and Scarnecchia, D., 2018, June. Ecosystem or Echo-System? Exploring Content Sharing across Alternative Media Domains. In *ICWSM* (pp. 365-374).

Week 14: Social Media and Ethnic Violence (April 11 & April 13)

Yanagizawa-Drott, D., 2014. Propaganda and conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan genocide. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *129*(4), pp.1947-1994.

Fink, C., 2018. Dangerous speech, anti-Muslim violence, and Facebook in Myanmar. *Journal of International Affairs*, *71*(1.5), pp.43-52.

Mirchandani, M., 2018. Digital hatred, real violence: Majoritarian radicalisation and social media in India. *ORF Occasional Paper*, *167*, pp.1-30.

Siegel, A., Tucker, J., Nagler, J. and Bonneau, R., 2018. Socially Mediated Sectarianism. *Unpublished manuscript*.

Week 15: Social Media and Extremist Groups (April 18 & April 20)

Rothenberger, L., 2015. Terrorism as strategic communication. *The Routledge handbook of strategic communication*, pp.481-496.

Berger, J.M., 2015. Tailored online interventions: The Islamic state's recruitment strategy. *CTC Sentinel*, *8*(10), pp.19-23.

Siegel, A.A. and Tucker, J.A., 2018. The Islamic State's information warfare: Measuring the success of ISIS's online strategy. *Journal of language and politics*, *17*(2), pp.258-280.

Mitts, T., 2019. From isolation to radicalization: anti-Muslim hostility and support for ISIS in the West. *American Political Science Review*, *113*(1), pp.173-194.

Week 16: Research Presentations (April 25 & April 27)

Week 17: FINAL EXAM (May 2)

Classroom & University Policies:

Absences: Regular class attendance is your obligation, and you are responsible for all the work of all class meetings.

Lateness Policy: Late assignments will be graded down 10% for each day they are late. Extensions can be accommodated, but only if students reach out in advance of the due date.

Classroom Behavior: Both students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote or online. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. For more information, see the policies on <u>classroom behavior</u> and the <u>Student Code of Conduct</u>.

Requirements for COVID-19: As a matter of public health and safety, all members of the CU Boulder community and all visitors to campus must follow university, department and building requirements and all public health orders in place to reduce the risk of spreading infectious disease. Students who fail to adhere to these requirements will be asked to leave class, and students who do not leave class when asked or who refuse to comply with these requirements will be referred to <u>Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution</u>. For more information, see the policy on <u>classroom behavior</u> and the <u>Student Code of Conduct</u>. If you require accommodation because a disability prevents you from fulfilling these safety measures, please follow the steps in the "Accommodation for Disabilities" statement on this syllabus.

CU Boulder currently requires masks in classrooms and laboratories regardless of vaccination status. This requirement is a precaution to supplement CU Boulder's COVID-19 vaccine requirement. Exemptions include individuals who cannot medically tolerate a face covering, as well as those who are hearing-impaired or otherwise disabled or who are communicating with someone who is hearing-impaired or otherwise disabled and where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication. If you qualify for a mask-related accommodation, please follow the

steps in the "Accommodation for Disabilities" statement on this syllabus. In addition, vaccinated instructional faculty who are engaged in an indoor instructional activity and are separated by at least 6 feet from the nearest person are exempt from wearing masks if they so choose.

If you feel ill and think you might have COVID-19, if you have tested positive for COVID-19, or if you are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated and have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, you should stay home and follow the further guidance of the Public Health Office (contacttracing@colorado.edu). If you are fully vaccinated and have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, you do not need to stay home; rather, you should self-monitor for symptoms and follow the further guidance of the Public Health Office (contacttracing@colorado.edu).

Accommodation for Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the Disability Services website. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see Temporary Medical Conditions on the Disability Services website.

Preferred Student Names and Pronouns: CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

Honor Code: All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the Honor Code Office website.

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation: The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or protected-class discrimination or harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, anonymous reporting, and the campus resources can be found on the OIEC website.
Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, stalking, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

Religious Holidays: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance.
See the campus policy regarding religious observances for full details.