

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
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Call for Papers for a Special Issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics*

“Digital Threats to Democracy: Comparative Lessons and Possible Remedies”

Manuscript submission deadline: 1 September 2019

In recent years, democracies appear to have been caught off guard by pitfalls associated with the rise of digital media. Issues such as mass surveillance, disinformation, declining trust in journalism, challenges to journalistic institutions, electoral interference, partisan polarization, and increasing toxicity online threaten democratic norms, institutions, and governance.

While these phenomena have raised widespread concerns in the United States and have been the subject of vast bodies of US-centric research, there is much to be learned from addressing these issues in a comparative perspective—by studying digital media and politics both inside and outside the US and highlighting generalizable implications. The media and political systems in the United States function in ways that are quite different from most Western democracies and most of the concerns highlighted above have been paramount in the US. However, other countries have also experienced high levels of polarization, substantial foreign interference, erosion of democratic norms, and weakening media institutions. In some cases, these developments occurred and required political responses well before the same issues came to the forefront in the United States.

Comparative research, both across time and across space, can shed light on how countries adapt and respond to digital threats to democracy. How can democratic competition, representation, and inclusiveness be safeguarded amidst challenges to their foundations? What lessons can we learn by comparing how these processes unfold and how institutions respond across democratic and non-democratic countries?

Research Topics

This special issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics* aims to shed light on three key sets of questions on the evolving relationship between digital media and politics. First, **what insights can we glean from comparing liberal democracies to each other?** How have democracies approached the frequently competing goals of protecting free speech, privacy, and anonymity, regulating political speech on digital media, ensuring fair elections, and promoting competitive digital markets? Second, **what lessons can we learn from the experiences of countries where liberal and democratic norms cannot be taken for**

granted? Finally, how do existing political and media institutions shape the political impact of, and responses to, digital disruptions and threats?

We invite submissions that make both theoretical and empirical contributions to existing bodies of knowledge in the comparative study of political communication, elections, public opinion, digital media, and democracy. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Disinformation Campaigns:** How is the propagation of (or accusation of propagating) disinformation used to damage opponents and mislead or confuse segments of the public? How are these strategies resisted in practice?
- **Surveillance:** What is the relationship between the need for connectivity and the need for privacy? What are the individual and systemic consequences of failing constitutional, regulatory, or normative protections of privacy?
- **Violence and Intimidation:** Do mechanisms that allow citizens to coordinate collective action also facilitate violence against other citizens? Are journalists, politicians, and activists more vulnerable to threats and coercion when professional norms require they maintain a social media presence that potentially exposes them to abuse and limits their privacy?
- **Mobile Politics:** What are the implications for political equality of the global growth in mobile online connectivity, especially among sectors of the population that do not use computers? How does easy-to-use, ephemeral, and encrypted mobile communication contribute to political discourse, mobilization, and engagement?
- **Platform Politics:** How well can US-born or US-centric platforms respond to democratic challenges in other countries? Should digital platforms provide bespoke solutions to non-US problems, and how can they accomplish that?

An international workshop exploring these issues, hosted by the Social Science Research Council, took place in New York on 13-14 June 2019. Participants were invited after an [open call for proposals](#). **This special issue is open to any contributions** focusing on the themes described here—whether they were included in the SSRC workshop or not.

Submission Information

Manuscript submissions for this special issue are due on **1 September 2019**.

Please submit your work through our [online submission portal](#) and ensure that the first line of the cover letter states: “Manuscript to be considered for the special issue on Digital Threats to Democracy”. Manuscripts should follow the [IJPP submission guidelines](#). Submissions will be subject to a double-blind peer review process and must not have been published, accepted for publication, or under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Authors interested in submitting their work are encouraged to contact Cristian Vaccari (c.vaccari@lboro.ac.uk), Editor-in-Chief of *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, with questions.

Expected Timeline

- Paper submissions: 1 September 2019
- First decision: 1 November 2019
- Paper revisions: 1 January 2020
- Final decision: 1 March 2020
- Online publication: April 2020
- Print publication: July 2020