

**University of Toronto  
Department of Political Science**

**POL106H1F 2022  
Contemporary Challenges to Democracy: Democracy in the Social Media Age  
Asynchronous Delivery**

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## Description

Social media are the predominant means by which most of the world communicates and seeks and receives information today. Like all communication technologies, the character of social media can have an important influence on identity, society, and politics. Social media themselves are also important sites of political struggles, and are subject to varying types of state control and interference. In this course, we examine the relationship between democracy and social media. We will explore the underlying business model of social media, widely known as “surveillance capitalism,” and then discuss some of the ways the business model may distort public communications. We will look at disinformation on social media, and both targeted and mass surveillance undertaken in and through the platforms. We will also examine the overlooked ecological impacts of social media. Finally, we will explore ways to reform and regulate social media in the public interest.

## Asynchronous lectures, synchronous tutorials

Due to COVID-19, this course will be delivered online, both asynchronously and synchronously. Recorded lectures will be uploaded to Quercus (under “Modules”) for viewing the week before the scheduled topic. Tutorials are mandatory and will be held synchronously (online or in-person). You must sign up for tutorials using ACORN (search for “POL106” to see the list of tutorial sections and choose one based on your availability). Tutorials are led by teaching assistants (TAs) and TAs will post their tutorial information on Quercus on September 12, 2022. You can post your questions and undertake asynchronous discussions on Quercus Discussion Boards. We also hold live Q and A sessions with students over Zoom on Tuesdays (attendance is optional and will not be graded).

## Session recordings

This course's Tuesday optional Zoom Q and A sessions, including your potential participation, will be recorded on video and will be available to students in the course for viewing remotely and after each session. All course videos and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other sources depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright. **Do not** download, copy, or share any course or student materials or videos without the explicit permission of the instructor. For questions about recording and use of videos in which you appear, please contact the course instructor directly.

## Course materials

You can find the course materials on the "Library Reading List" page on Quercus. All required readings (e.g., [journal articles](#) and [newspaper articles](#)) are accessible for free through the UofT Libraries' website. If you have questions about accessing the readings, please use the "Chat with a Librarian" function on the [UofT Libraries](#) homepage. Information about the course is posted and regularly updated on Quercus. It is the student's responsibility to regularly check Quercus for communications from the teaching staff, course content, assignments, and the syllabus.

## Course format and requirements

<b>Participation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tutorial participation and contributions</li></ul>	Tutorials are mandatory. There are 8 (eight) tutorial sessions in the course.	15%
<b>Quiz: About POL106 Quiz</b>	Due on September 19 at 12 PM EST	10%
<b>Essays: Critical Reflection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>3 (three) critical reflection essays on 3 (three) different weeks.</li></ul>	Due on the Monday of your chosen week at 12 PM. Each essay is worth 25%	75%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Table 1. Course format and requirements for POL106

**Please note that all assignments must be submitted on Quercus.**

## Participation (15%)

### Tutorial participation and contributions

**Tutorials are mandatory, so don't forget to sign up on [ACORN!](#)** (Search for "POL106" to see the list of tutorial sections and choose one based on your availability.) There are 8 (eight) tutorial sessions throughout the term.

Students can find more information about tutorials and teaching assistants on Quercus. Students must attend each tutorial and come fully prepared to contribute to the discussion on the required readings. Your contributions in each session will count towards your tutorial grade and your attendance will be taken into consideration in this calculation. In tutorial sessions, your teaching assistants (TAs) will assign specific questions or tasks to help you better understand the course materials. Your tutorial grade will be calculated by your TA. TAs will host office hours in the weeks when there are no tutorials, except during Fall Reading Week (November 7-11).

You can also participate and ask questions about the course materials and assignments by attending live Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions with the course instructor and the Head TA over Zoom on Tuesdays (attendance is optional and will not be graded). The Q&A sessions will take place throughout the term, except during Fall Reading Week.

### Course and tutorial schedule

Tutorial#	Week	Date	Class topic
1	1	13-Sep	Introduction
2	2	20-Sep	The Internet and social media
No tutorial	3	27-Sep	Surveillance capitalism
3	4	4-Oct	To consent or not to consent
4	5	11-Oct	Social media addiction and behavioural sciences
No tutorial	6	18-Oct	Misinformation, disinformation, subversion, dark PR
5	7	25-Oct	Targeted digital espionage
6	8	1-Nov	China's social credit and information control regime
<b>FALL READING WEEK (Nov. 7-11) - No tutorials, No Zoom Q&amp;A</b>			
7	9	15-Nov	Superpower policing
8	10	22-Nov	COVID-19 and the 'new normal'
No tutorial	11	29-Nov	Burning data
No tutorial	12	6-Dec	What to do?

Table 2. Course and tutorial schedule for POL106

Have questions about the course, but you are unable to attend office hours or tutorials are not in session? Come to the [Q&A session on Tuesdays](#) at 10-11 AM to get your questions answered!

## Assignments (85%)

### University-level expectations

[Learn more](#) about some important differences between high school rules and university expectations. As this is a university-level course, you are expected to use high quality external sources (e.g., book chapters and journal articles) in all of your assignments.

### Citation style

Chicago Style is the [citation style](#) used in this course. Read "POL106HS Handout for Students: Citing Quoting Paraphrasing" (under Quercus' "Modules"). Read more about [citing, quoting and paraphrasing](#).

### Plagiarism

Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic offenses and will be dealt with accordingly. Read more on [how to avoid plagiarism](#) and [academic integrity](#).

### About POL106 quiz (10%)

**Due date: Monday, September 19 at Noon EST.**

**Details:** The purpose of this quiz is to help you understand the course policies and expectations. You must answer the About POL106 quiz on Quercus. The quiz has 10 questions and the answers are in the syllabus.

### Critical reflection essays (75%)

**Due date: Monday at Noon EST.**

**Length: 1,000-1,200 words, double spaced (excluding cover page and bibliography)**

**Worth: 25% per essay x 3 essays = 75%**

**Details:** The purpose of this assignment is to help you to thoughtfully engage with the core arguments advanced in the readings, critically reflect on the theme of and/or debates in each session, and develop critical thinking skills.

Each student will prepare 3 (three) critical reflection essays in 3 (three) different weeks. Each essay covers one week's worth of required readings. You may write on any week, except for the first week. Each essay should be 1,000-1,200 words, not including cover page and bibliography.

**A critical reflection essay is not just a summary of the required readings.**

Instead, you are to reflect on the broader implications of the topic as related to the course (i.e., why does this topic or issue matter?), and evaluate the required readings using external sources. (You may use "I" while writing.) Questions that the essays can answer (in paragraph format, and not bullet points) include: What is the one thing you've learned from this week's topic? Why is this topic significant? What are the strengths and limitations of the required readings? What do the scholars writing on this topic (e.g., in peer-reviewed journal articles and books) agree or disagree about? What are some outstanding or unresolved questions on this topic? What are potential areas for improvement or future research? To help you write the essay, read more about [critical reading](#) for critical writing. You are also strongly encouraged to attend consultations (drop in or by appointment) with trained writing instructors at the UofT [Writing Centres](#) and obtain feedback on your draft essays.

**The essay that you submit in any given week must be on that week's readings. Essays from previous week's readings will not be accepted.** Your essay will be evaluated based on its fulfillment of the assignment's purpose, as stated in the syllabus, the organization and development of ideas, the use of high quality external sources (e.g., books and journal articles) to support all arguments in the essay, citations using Chicago Style author-date, and proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. All arguments advanced in the essay must be supported by high quality external sources (e.g., books and peer reviewed journal articles). Essays should be typed using 12-point Times New Roman, double spaced with 1" (2.5 cm) margins, and submitted in PDF or Word format. The title page of your assignments should contain the following: The title of the paper, the author's name, the author's tutorial section and TA name, course number and name, instructor's name, and assignment due date.

## Course policies

**Quercus:** You must submit your assignments electronically through Quercus. If you think that there are technical problems with Quercus, then you should email your assignment to your assigned TA.

**Email and communication:** Please use the Quercus Discussion Board to ask questions about the course and assignments. For questions or concerns that are personal and confidential in nature, please contact your TA or the Head TA via email and remember to include the course

code (POL106) in the email subject line. We will aim to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. **Please be respectful in interacting with others** in the course and treat all communication with the instructor as a professional form of communication with proper grammar, sentences, and formal greetings and sign-offs. Read [“Reaching out to Instructors”](#) (PDF) for guidance on how to connect with your professors and [read more](#) on how to talk to your professors.

**Office hours:** TAs will hold office hours for students in their assigned tutorials. As this is a large class, one-on-one appointments should be scheduled ahead of time by emailing the TA. Please make sure you have read the assignments’ instructions and the Quercus Discussion Board before attending office hours.

**Accommodations:** Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach the course instructor, TA, and/or Accessibility Services. If you have an accommodation letter due to a disability, please provide a copy to your TA. Questions regarding accommodation or accessibility concerns can be directed to [Accessibility Services](#) or email [disability.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:disability.services@utoronto.ca).

**2 Days ‘life happens’ extension:** Students are allowed to request an extension for 2 (two) days without explanation or documentation. To use this extension, students should email their assigned TA with the subject line “Life Happens” and a 2-day extension will be automatically applied without any questions. **Late penalties will begin to accrue after the two days have passed.**

**Late penalty:** Assignments handed in late without appropriate medical or other appropriate official documentation will be penalized **5% per day late (weekends included)**. These penalties can accumulate very quickly - so do not be late!

**Extensions:** Please note that assignments in other courses or late registration in the course are NOT grounds for an extension. You should plan your calendar for the semester accordingly. Extensions will be no more than one week (7 days). If you need an extension past seven days, you must contact your college’s Registrar’s Office (or Accessibility Services, if you have an accommodation letter) for assistance.

**Supporting documentation is required before any extension is granted**, and the appropriate documentation must be submitted within one week of the late assignment. All requests for extensions or deferrals, along with the appropriate documentation, must be submitted before the assignment deadline and in writing to the Head TA, Irene Poetranto ([irene.poetranto@utoronto.ca](mailto:irene.poetranto@utoronto.ca)) with the subject line “POL106 - Extension request.”

## Grades and grading

**This course uses additive grading**, which means that you earn your grades throughout the term through tutorial participation and assignments. A **grading rubric** is provided on Quercus for each assignment that describes how students can earn points. The teaching team **does not** arbitrarily raise, round up, or deduct grades.

All assignments are graded by teaching assistants. We will try our best to release your grades within three weeks of the due date; at the same time, please keep in mind that this is a large class, so we appreciate your patience.

## Grade appeals process

**It is your responsibility to understand [what grades mean](#) in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences before submitting an appeal. Please note that your grade can either go down, go up, or remain the same due to the appeal process.**

After grades are released, there is a **72-hour waiting period** before you can file a grade appeal. Appeal requests made before the waiting period ends will **not** be read or receive a response.

## Appeals process

1. If you have good reason to believe that you were assigned an inappropriate grade in an assignment, then after the 72-hour waiting period has ended, you can appeal your grade **within 48 hours** by requesting an office hour appointment with your TA to obtain clarification regarding the grade.
2. If you still wish to submit an appeal, you must submit a written request to your assigned TA for a re-grade **within 48 hours** after the office hour appointment has ended. The written request for a re-grade can only be filed after the office hour appointment, and must specifically describe how the grade received does not conform to the grading rubric's criteria (e.g., Purpose, Organization and Development of Ideas, Grammar and Punctuation, and Citation Style).
3. If you wish to appeal further to the course instructor and Head TA, you must [submit a form](#) requesting the re-grade **within 48 hours** after receiving the re-graded assignment. In this form, you must describe specifically how the grade received after the re-grading process still does not conform to the rubric's criteria (e.g., Purpose, Organization and Development of Ideas, Grammar and Punctuation, and Citation Style). You must also send a copy of your re-graded assignment to the course instructor and Head TA **within 48 hours**. Assignments must first be re-graded by the assigned TA before they can be re-graded by the course instructor and Head TA.

Once again, please be aware that your mark could either go down, remain the same, or go up as a result of the appeal.

## Resources

### Writing Centres

The writing centres at the University of Toronto offer services and resources to help you develop your writing skills. You can get individual consultations with trained writing instructors to help clarify your ideas or attend group workshops to help you overcome common writing problems. Please consult the [Writing Centres website](#) for more information.

You may wish to take advantage of the [English Language Learning](#) (ELL) program, which supports all U of T undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts & Science (multilingual and native speakers) seeking to improve their English language skills. You can also check out other services and workshops that are also offered by the [Academic Success Centre](#).

### Libraries

**Need assistance with accessing the readings? Have questions about finding relevant resources for an essay topic?** You can use the "Chat with a Librarian" function on the [UofT Libraries](#) homepage. [Learn more](#) about library resources.

### General advice on academic writing

- Understand the [differences between high school rules and university expectations](#).
- Keep in mind the assignment's purpose (as per the syllabus) while you write.
- Relate your thinking and analysis to the course's broader theme (Democracy in the Social Media Age).
- Review the grading rubric provided on Quercus and take note of the important components that you should address, such as assignment length and citation style.
- Use an outline and start writing early, even before you are "ready" to write. Writing can be used as a means for thinking through your thoughts or ideas.
- Obtain feedback on your draft essay from the Writing Centres.
- Meet with your TA during office hours in advance to discuss the assignment and get your questions answered.
- Schedule time to revise or redraft the essay (i.e., to put the essay aside for a few days, allowing the mind to process it, so that you can see it more objectively when you reread it).
- Copy-edit the essay with special attention to transitions (i.e., the sequences of ideas within sentences, from sentence to sentence, and from paragraph to paragraph), diction (exactness and aptness of words), and economy (the fewest words without loss of clear expression and full thought).
- Format the essay according to [Chicago Style](#) citation style.



## Support for your learning in the course

### **Have questions about the course or assignments? Help is available.**

Note: This is a large class and it will be challenging for the teaching staff to respond immediately to everyone's emails. Therefore, ask your questions ahead of due dates, and before emailing us, please do the following:

1. **Check the syllabus and Quercus** for information about the course and assignments.
2. **Use the Quercus' discussion boards to ask questions.** Read previously posted questions first to see if your questions have been answered.
3. **Attend tutorials** and ask your questions in class to your peers and the TA.
4. **Attend office hours** with your assigned TA.
5. **Ask your questions during the Tuesdays live Q&A on Zoom.**

**Have questions about finding relevant resources for your assignments?** [Ask a Librarian.](#)

**Have questions about how to improve your writing?** [Contact the University's Writing Centres.](#)

If you still need to contact the course instructor or Head TA directly, please do the following:

1. Include the course code (POL106) in the email subject heading.
2. Use your University of Toronto email account or the Quercus email (Inbox) function.
3. Make sure that the question has not been already answered on Quercus, and write clear and succinct questions. Please treat all communication with the teaching team as a professional form of communication.

## Health and wellness

If you find that you need to talk to someone about your mental health and general wellbeing, please do not be afraid to reach out and get help.

Visit [UofT Student Life Health and Wellness website](#) to find out more about mental health resources and services (e.g., workshops and counselling), as well as and visit the "[Support when you feel distressed](#)" page for information about emergency support.

If you are in distress or need emotional support, please contact UofT My Student Support Program (My SSP) at 1-844-451-9700.

If you are outside of North America, call 001-416-380-6578 for mental health and counseling services in 146 languages for all UofT students.

You may also contact Good2Talk Student Helpline at 1-866-925-5454 for professional counseling, information and referrals helpline for mental health, addictions and students well-being.

For further information, please visit [UofT StudentLife's website](#).

## The risks of international, online learning

The global pandemic has forced us to radically transform the way we work, teach and learn. Our homes, wherever that is in the world, are now our new classrooms.

**However, there is something really important we need to discuss:** If you are a citizen of another country, and/or accessing your courses at the University of Toronto from a jurisdiction outside of Canada, you remain subject to the laws of the country in which you are residing, or any country of which you have citizenship.

**You may be assigned readings, or discuss topics that are against the law in other nation-state jurisdictions. Your online activities may be monitored or surveilled from within the country where you are studying.** There is nothing that the University of Toronto can do about this reality. You may be already familiar with this problem or this may be a new concern. Either way, it's important that you know your local laws.

### Students Connecting from Abroad

**Please note that this course deals with highly sensitive material in the context of authoritarian countries like China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and others.** Unfortunately, there is no simple or secure alternative we can recommend to reduce your risks of connecting from these countries. Some of our readings and other resources link to material that may be censored from within those countries, and your access to this material may constitute a serious personal security risk. **You may wish to consider alternative courses as a consequence.**

## Course evaluations

Mid-way through the term, students will be asked by their TAs to provide feedback about their learning experience in the course to date using an online form. This feedback is extremely valuable, as it will help us improve your learning experience while the course is still in session. Your feedback in the mid-term evaluation is anonymous, but is shared with the instructor and all teaching assistants.

At the end of the term, students will also be asked to provide feedback using a course evaluation form. However, please do not wait until the end of the term if you have questions or **Your feedback in a course evaluation is anonymous, but** is shared with the instructor and the teaching assistants, concerns about the course or course materials. as well as read by

others at UofT, including department chairs, faculty deans, the provost, and the president. Course and TA evaluations are used for a variety of purposes, including as part of an academic job application (e.g., for TAs to apply for course instructor/professor jobs), to assess instructors for tenure and promotion review, and to make changes and improvements to individual courses.

**Comments that are not related to the course or your learning experience would diminish the value of your feedback.** For example, it is **not** helpful to include personal insults or comments about your instructor's or TA's appearance in your feedback. Instead, please provide specific and constructive suggestions regarding the course and teaching or instructional behaviours (e.g., tutorials and office hours), so that we can improve the course and your learning experience.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete the POL106 course evaluation.

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## Course materials

Please note that the course schedule is subject to change.

Required readings listed in the syllabus must be completed by the start of the week for which they are assigned. All required readings are accessible on the Web or available for free through Uof T Libraries. If you have any issues accessing the readings, please use the "Chat with a Librarian" function on the [UofT Libraries](#) website.

Recommended readings are for further investigation about a topic or to help you prepare to write your assignments.

### 1. Introduction and Overview (Sep. 13)

During the Q&A session this week, we go through the course's subject matter, breakdown the assignments, explain tutorials, and introduce our head TA, Irene Poetranto. We will also talk about course readings, grade appeals, cheating/plagiarism, and accessibility issues.

In this week's tutorials, you will introduce yourself to your fellow classmates and assigned TA. Your participation and assignments in the course are graded by TAs. Come to tutorials prepared by having done the readings and watched the asynchronous lecture for the week.

- **Required Readings**
  - Paul Edwards, University of Michigan, School of Information. "[How to Read a Book](#), 5.0."

This resource is essential reading for the entire course. It gives you some tips on how to approach reading with a strategy - a set of skills that will benefit you not just for this course, but also for all of your other courses as well.

- Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, "They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing." ([Hard copies](#) available through U of T Libraries. You can also find copies of the book online using a search engine of your choice or you can purchase used or new copies from your favourite bookstores.)

Whereas the previous resource teaches you how to read, this resource teaches you how to analyze an article, and then how to write. Start with Part 1 - Chapter 1 ("Starting with What Others Are Saying") and Chapter 2 ("The Art of Summarizing") this week, and then read the rest of the volume in subsequent weeks.

## 2. What is the Internet? What is Social Media? (Sep. 20)

The Internet is all around you, and impossible to ignore. But how much about that device in your hand do you really know and what it connects you to? This week we take a close look at the communications environment that surrounds us: the Internet, social media, and all of the supporting technologies that underlie it. We explore how it's all organized, define some of its central characteristics and then discuss what those characteristics might mean for how we communicate.

### ● Required Readings

- Bob Dormon. (2016) "[How the Internet works: Submarine fiber, brains in jars, and coaxial cables](#)," *Ars Technica*.
- "[The Urban, Infrastructural Geography Of 'The Cloud'](#)" by @alanwiig
- Laura DeNardis (2012) "[Hidden Levers of Internet Control](#)," *Information, Communication & Society*, 15:5, 720-738,

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- "Introduction." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society.
- CBC Massey Lecture 1: [Love at that Device in Your Hand](#)
- CBC Spark Episode 482: [The Politics of Technology](#)
- [CBC Spark Episode: Spark Summer Episode One](#): From Sea to Sky (especially the second half on undersea cables)

## 3. Surveillance Capitalism (Sep. 27)

Social media and most tech platforms today describe themselves in many different ways that highlight their fun and convenience (e.g., "All the world's information at your fingertips."). But deep down, their underlying business model is about monitoring as much data as they can extract from their users for purposes of targeted advertising. We are, in essence, the livestock for their data

farms.

- **Required Readings**

- Deibert, Ronald J. 2019. "[The Road to Digital Unfreedom: Three Painful Truths About Social Media.](#)" *Journal of Democracy* 30 (1): 25–39.
- Knight, Christina, dir. 2021. [Shoshana Zuboff: How Surveillance Capitalism Is Undermining Democracy](#) | *Amanpour and Company*. PBS.
- Greene, A. K. (2019, August 12). [Data sweat.](#) *Real Life Magazine*.

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- "Chapter One: The Market for our Minds." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society.
- CBC Massey Lecture 2: [The Market for Our Minds](#)
- "In Real Life" (IRL) Podcast Season 4 Episode 5: "[The Surveillance Economy](#)"
- Pringle, Ramona. 2020. "[Surveillance Capitalism: Who Is Watching Us Online — and Why?](#)" | CBC Radio." *CBC*, November 10, 2020.

#### 4. To Consent or Not to Consent (Oct. 4)

We swipe them away on a daily basis like mosquitoes on a humid, summer day. But to what, exactly, are we consenting when we agree to the "terms of service" on our social media platforms and applications? This week, we explore this question in depth, and focus on the ways consent processes have been trivialized but with serious consequences for user's privacy, security and property rights.

- **Required Readings**

- Custers, B. (2016). [Click here to consent forever: Expiry dates for informed consent.](#) *Big Data & Society*, 3(1).
- Calo, R., & Rosenblat, A. (2017). [The taking economy: Uber, information, and power.](#) *Colum. L. Rev.*, 117, 1623. (Note: read the introduction and conclusion only; other sections are optional).

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- CBC Massey Lecture #3: [Toxic Addiction Machines](#) (first half)
- Chapter Two "Toxic Addiction Machines." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society" (first half).
- "[Terms of Service, Didn't Read](#)".
- Chen, Brian X. 2021. "[The Battle for Digital Privacy Is Reshaping the Internet.](#)" *The New York Times*, September 16, 2021, sec. Technology.

## 5. Social Media Addiction and Behavioral Sciences (Oct. 11)

You know the feeling: *you panic when you can't find your device*. In order to capture and retain user's interests, social media platforms and application designers make our devices and applications as compelling as possible. These design features tap into our cognitive traits and instincts, borrowing from behavioral psychology and other large-scale experiments. But at what cost?

### ● Required Readings

- Philipp Lorenz-Spreen, Stephan Lewandowsky, Cass R. Sunstein & Ralph Hertwig, [How behavioural sciences can promote truth, autonomy and democratic discourse online](#), *Nature Human Behaviour* (2020).
- Berthon, P., Pitt, L., & Campbell, C. (2019). [Addictive devices: A public policy analysis of sources and solutions to digital addiction](#). *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 38(4), 451–468.

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- Documentary by Cade Huseby: "[Project Socialize](#)" (32:17)
- CBC Massey Lecture #3: [Toxic Addiction Machines](#) (second half)
- Chapter Two "Toxic Addiction Machines." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society" (middle parts of chapter).
- Herrman, J. (2018, February 27). [How tiny red dots took over your life](#). *The New York Times*.

## 6. Misinformation, Disinformation, Subversion, Dark PR (Oct. 18)

An ecosystem that is designed to promote extreme, sensational, and emotional content turns out to be the ideal environment for those who wish to undermine accountability, sow division, and seed chaos. This week, we examine how social media has become a giant "disinformation laboratory" for influence and subversion operations, and a burgeoning "dark PR" marketplace that knows no boundaries.

### ● Required Readings

- Silverman, Craig, Ryan Mac, and Pranav Dixit. 2020. "[Whistleblower Says Facebook Ignored Global Political Manipulation](#)." *BuzzFeed News*, September 14, 2020.
- Fitzgerald, C. W., & Brantly, A. F. (2017). [Subverting reality: the role of propaganda in 21st century intelligence](#). *International Journal of intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 30(2), 215-240.

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- Chapter Two "Toxic Addiction Machines." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society" (final part of the chapter).
- Video by BBC Click: "[What is fake news?](#)" (24:30)

- Watch [The Moderators](#), a 20-minute documentary.
- Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2012. “[Missed Connections: What Search Engines Say About Women](#).” *Bitch Media*. Spring 2012.
- Elliott, Vittoria, Nilesh Christopher, Andrew Deck, and Leo Schwartz. 2021. “[The Facebook Papers Reveal Staggering Failures in the Global South](#).” *Rest of World*, October 26, 2021.

## 7. Targeted Digital Espionage (Oct. 25)

It was conventional wisdom to believe that social media and the Internet would empower civil society and bring about liberalization and democratization. It turns out that an ecosystem that is highly insecure, invasive by design, and poorly regulated is an autocrat’s best friend. Using sophisticated and readily available surveillance technologies, nation-state intelligence and security services, and even large unethical corporations, can organize far-reaching targeted digital espionage campaigns against their adversaries -- often with lethal consequences for victims.

### ● Required Readings

- Mazzetti, M., Goldman, A., Bergman R., and Perlroth, N. (March 21, 2019). “[A New Age of Warfare: How Internet Mercenaries Do Battle for Authoritarian Governments](#),” *New York Times*.
- Scott-Railton, John, Bill Marczak, Irene Poetranto, Bahr Abdul Razzak, Sutawan Chanprasert, and Ron Deibert. 2022. “[GeckoSpy: Pegasus Spyware Used against Thailand’s Pro-Democracy Movement](#).” Citizen Lab, University of Toronto.
- Aronson-Rath, Raney. 2021. “[VIDEO: How NSO Group’s Pegasus Spyware Was Found on Jamal Khashoggi’s Fiancée’s Phone](#).” *FRONTLINE*, July 18, 2021.

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- RESET, “A Great Leap Forward for the Abuse of Power,” (Chapter 3 - first half).
- CBC Massey Lecture 4: [A Great Leap Forward ... For the Abuse of Power](#).
- OTF. 2020. “[The Silencing Effect of Digital Transnational Repression](#).” *Open Technology Fund* (blog). February 26, 2020.
- Barshad, Amos. 2021. “[Inside Israel’s Lucrative — and Secretive —Cybersurveillance Industry](#).” *Rest of World*, March 9, 2021.
- Deibert, Ron. “[Protecting Society From Surveillance Spyware](#).” *Issues in Science and Technology* 38, no. 2 (Winter 2022): 15–17.

## 8. China’s Social Credit and Information Control Regime (Nov. 1)

Early in the Internet’s history, many predicted the technology would hamstring authoritarian regimes. China’s information control regime defies these expectations, showing how censorship and surveillance of social media can be

combined with profitable IT innovation. It also gives us a glimpse of what the combination of “Big Data” and “Big Brother” might look like in an environment largely absent of the type of safeguards that protect citizens against abuse of state power.

- **Required Readings**

- Ahmed, S., & Weber, S. (2018). [China's long game in techno-nationalism](#). *First Monday*, 23(5).
- Leibold, J. (2020). [Surveillance in China's Xinjiang region: Ethnic sorting, coercion, and inducement](#). *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(121), 46–60.
- Video: “[Leave No Dark Corner](#)” documentary (27:12).

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- RESET, “A Great Leap Forward,” (Chapter 3, middle section).
- [CBC Spark 465](#): Open / Closed

————— FALL 2022 READING WEEK (Nov. 7-11) —————

## 9. Superpower Policing (Nov. 15)

One of the unexpected outcomes of the “information revolution” and the development of social media has been the way it has quickly transformed the practice of law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies now have access to an astonishing array of surveillance platforms, services, and data feeds that even a decade ago was the stuff of science fiction. These new technical capabilities are contributing to a “great leap forward” in policing practices, but largely without accompanying legal safeguards to prevent the abuse of power. Absent the latter, these changes threaten to deepen and amplify existing prejudices and biases around local law enforcement practices -- particularly, forms of racialized policing.

- **Required Readings**

- ["Algorithmic Policing in Canada Explained"](#) by @citizenlab.
- Garcia, Megan. 2016. ["Racist in the Machine: The Disturbing Implications of Algorithmic Bias."](#) *World Policy Journal* 33 (4): 111–17.
- TED Radio Hour on NPR by Joy Buolamwini: [How Do Biased Algorithms Damage Marginalized Communities?](#)(8:35)

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- CBC Massey Lecture 4: [A Great Leap Forward ... For the Abuse of Power](#).
- CBC Spark with Nora Young Episode 485: [Oh, Algorithms!](#)
- CBC Spark Episode 480: [Tech, surveillance and racism](#)
- CBC Spark Special Episode: [Tech and Policing](#)



- Podcast by Brave New Planet Episode 5: [“What Algorithms Say About You”](#) (1:14:50)
- Raji, Deborah. 2020. [“How Our Data Encodes Systematic Racism.”](#) *MIT Technology Review*, December 10, 2020.
- [Atlas of Surveillance: Documenting Police Tech in Our Communities](#). A resource of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.
- Bryan Carney, [“You Have Zero Privacy.” Says an Internal RCMP Presentation. Inside the Force’s Web Spying Program,](#) The Tyee, 16 November 2020.

## 10. COVID and the “New Normal” (Nov. 22)

The COVID pandemic has brought about a sudden and far-reaching shift in societies around the world, including widespread “work-from-home” routines and an expansion of biomedical surveillance technologies. While much debate has focused on “contact tracing applications,” the latter are merely one example of a far-reaching and growing reliance on a vast array of biomedical surveillance and other digital technologies that are embedding themselves into our daily lives. As we embrace digital technologies as “lifelines” -- in some cases, out of necessity -- we are also embracing all of their biases and shortcomings.

### ● Required Readings

- Parsons, Christopher. (2020). [“Equity, inclusion and Canada’s COVID Alert app,”](#) First Policy Response, August 2020.
- Ronald J. Deibert, [“The pandemic has made us even more dependent on a highly invasive technological ecosystem,”](#) The Globe and Mail, (November 21, 2020).
- Al Jazeera English, dir. 2020. [Coronavirus: Tracking the Outbreak, or Spying on People?](#) | *The Listening Post (Full)*. Al Jazeera English.

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- [CBC Spark Episode 476:](#) The Pandemic and Internet Health
- LawBytes Podcast Episode 63 by Michael Geist: [Ontario Privacy Commissioner Patricia Kosseim on the COVID Alert App](#) (40:09)
- Poetranto, Irene, and Justin Lau. 2020. “COVID-19 and Its Impact on Marginalised Communities in Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines.” *DATACTIVE* (blog). July 14, 2020.
- Molnar, Petra. 2020. [“COVID-19: Can Technology Become a Tool of Oppression and Surveillance?”](#) *OpenDemocracy*. May 1, 2020.
- Ruan, Lotus. 2020. [“Chinese-Style Censorship Is No Fix for the COVID-19 Infodemic.”](#) *East Asia Forum* (blog). November 4, 2020.
- Parsons, Christopher. (2020). [“Contact tracing must not compound historical discrimination,”](#) Policy Options, April 2020.

## 11. Burning Data: Ecological Impacts of Digital Electronics (Nov. 29)

Our consumption of social media and digital technologies feels clean, weightless and virtual. But it is far from it. Social media and our entire communications ecosystem cast a very large ecological footprint, from mining and manufacturing to energy consumption and waste. This digital ecological footprint is easily overlooked, or even concealed deliberately by the tech platforms.

### ● Required Readings

- Ensmenger, N. (2018). [The environmental history of computing](#). *Technology and Culture*, 59(4), S7–S33.
- Video by France24: "[Indonesia's tin miners who slave away for the world's computer and phone giants](#)" (17:45)

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- CBC Massey Lecture 5: [Burning Data](#).
- RESET: Chapter 4, "Burning Data."
- Crawford, K., & Joler, V. (2018, September 7). [Anatomy of an AI system: The Amazon Echo as an anatomical map of human labor, data and planetary resources](#).
- Levenda, Anthony M., and Dillon Mahmoudi. 2019. "[Silicon Forest and Server Farms: The \(Urban\) Nature of Digital Capitalism in the Pacific Northwest](#)," June.
- Nordgren, Anders. 2022. "[Artificial Intelligence and Climate Change: Ethical Issues](#)." *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society* ahead-of-print (ahead-of-print).

## 12. What to Do? (Dec. 6)

While the negative implications of social media and related technologies is now widely appreciated and acknowledged, there is less of a clear consensus about what to do about them. In this final week, we survey various proposals to reform or regulate social media and our entire communications ecosystem, and discuss the most promising of them. We also start to chart a viable path forward for how to implement them.

### ● Required Readings

- Andrew Marantz, "[Why Facebook Can't Fix Itself](#)," *The New Yorker*, 19 October 2019.
- Goodman, E. (2020). "[Digital Information Fidelity and Friction](#)." Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University.

### ● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- RESET, Chapter Five, "Retreat, Reform, Restraint,"

- CBC Massey Lecture #6: [Retreat, Reform, Restraint](#).
- Pomerantsev, P. (2019). [The Death of the Neutral Public Sphere](#). The American Interest.
- Douek, E. (2020). [The Rise of Content Cartels](#). Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia.