Digital Campaigning and Electoral Democracy

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Virtual Conference

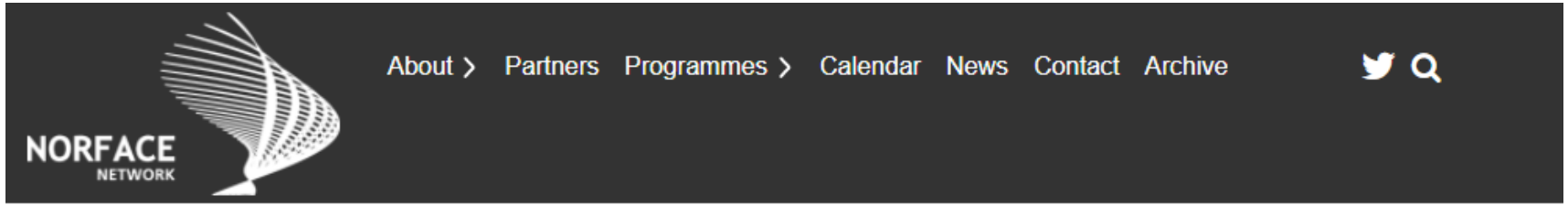
Political Targeting & Privacy

DiCED

European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

Aspect

Digital Information Literacy: a Programme for Schools (DILPS)



Data-driven campaigns: intended and unintended consequences for democracy (DATADRIVEN)

DiCED Key Goal

To build a clearer, more systematic and accurate picture of nature, spread or extent of the new forms of ‘data-driven’ campaigning (DDC) across established and newer democracies. To investigate the consequences of these developments for citizens, parties and the wider democratic system.

Motivated by observation of 2 recent trends

1st Key Trend : Democratic Deconsolidation

"when…a sizable minority of citizens loses its belief in democratic values, becomes attracted to authoritarian alternatives, and starts voting for "antisystem" parties, candidates, or movements that flout or oppose constitutive elements of liberal democracy. Democracy may then be said to be deconsolidating." (Foa and Mounk, 2016).

2 main components: decline in view that democracy is the best form of government and rise in support for non-democratic /authoritarian governing options

2nd Key Trend: Rise of New 'Anti-democratic' Campaign Methods

"Political parties or candidates often use social media as part of a broader campaign strategy. Here we are interested in political parties or candidates that use social media to manipulate public opinion during a campaign, either by purposefully spreading fake news or disinformation, or by trolling or targeting any support for the opposition party. This is different to traditional digital campaign strategies, which have generally focused on spreading information about the party or candidate's platform, or sent advertisements out to voters. (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017)

Is there a connection?

- Are changes in the 'supply' side of politics, and particularly a growing reliance on digital tools and data during elections fostering these changes in the 'demand' side?
- Campaigns have long been seen as an 'afterthought' in terms of their capacity to influence voters and decide outcomes.
- The question posed here is whether this is now changing and campaigns are taking on a more influential role, but the effect is actually not mobilizing, aggregating preferences, and informing citizens, but instead demobilizing, dividing and disinforming.
- If this is happening, how do we test this?

Broken down into 4 key research questions.

- (RQ 1) What is data-driven campaigning (DDC) and can it be seen as forming a new and distinct era of electioneering in conceptual and historical terms?
- (RQ2) Where is DDC emerging? Both in party and national or country level terms and what are the organisational and systemic-level factors appear to be most closely associated with its development?
- (RQ3) What are the key effects (positive and negative) of the use of these DDC at the individual (micro), party (meso) and systemic (macro) level?
- (RQ4) What are the policy and regulatory implications of DDC? What does it require from citizens in terms of Digital Information Literacy skills and how might those be delivered?

Data driven NORFACE project

DATA DRIVEN NORFACE

What are the constitutional and legislative frameworks shaping the extent and nature of data-driven campaigning in European countries?

Research Question 2

Research Question 1

How do organizations shape election campaigns by targeting potential voters online during elections

Research Question 3

How are data-driven targeting practices perceived? To what extent do data-driven targeting practices actually affect voters?

The studies will focus on micro (consequences for citizens), meso (consequences for political elites), and macro level effects (consequences for democracy).

Work Package 2: The Macro Context of Data-Driven Campaigning

- Goal is to identify the main legal-institutional factors that affect the spread of data-driven campaigning across countries – within the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and the UK.
- Specific focus on comparing and contrasting the data privacy regimes surrounding voter personal data use in elections in these countries.
- To design an data privacy typology based on de jure and de facto implementation of the regulations that allows us to categorise and compare our 4 countries and locate other countries.
- To relate these classifications to the adoption of DDC among parties and level of voter exposure.

Digital Information Literacy: a Programme for Schools (DILPS)

Focus of project: DILPS is designed to bring key findings from social science research about the spread of misinformation, and particularly misinformation around election campaigns to commercial providers of secondary educational resources with the goal of enhancing teachers' and young peoples' digital information literacy skills in this critical domain (DIL). Specifically, we will explore how the findings from research on political misinformation and digital information literacy (DIL) can be transferred into the secondary education curricula by social enterprises specialising in civics education. The main output from DILPS will be the development of a pilot resource for secondary school teachers that will:

a) increase their understanding of the dynamics behind the spread of online political misinformation and key strategies for challenging the problem.
b) empower them to identify the teaching and learning opportunities for passing this understanding on to their students at Sixth Form level.

Relevant Publications

- When the Nerds Go Marching In: How Digital Technology moved from the Margins to the Mainstream of Political Campaigning Oxford University Press (September, 2020)
- 'Scientific and Subversive: Two Faces of the 4th Era of Political Campaigning.' with Andrea Rommele. New Media & Society 2020. 22(4): 595-610.
- 'New forms of mobilization, new people mobilized?: Evidence from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) with John Aldrich and Pedro Magalhaes. Party Politics 2018 26(5): 605-618
- See www.rachelgibson.info for further details of my work and research interests.