



Dialogues on Digital Society

Special Issue: Authoritarianism in the Digital Age

Proposal deadline: May 16, 2025

Submission deadline: July 1, 2025

Max length: 2,000 words, including references.

Events in the U.S. since the 2024 presidential election have brought into stark relief that digital technologies, industries, and systems are central to the growing intensity of reactionary and conservative politics and the expanding influence and activities of authoritarian movements across the world. While these political agendas and related governance systems have a long and wide-spread history, their increased presence is fraying the global economic, social, and political order in place since post-WWII accords. What the role of the digital is, has been, or could be, in this emerging geopolitical landscape is the theme of this special issue of *Dialogues on Digital Society*.

Digital technologies are implicated in contemporary authoritarian politics in a variety of ways. Social media platforms and AI-powered bots have long been recognised for enabling the creation, distribution, and amplification of reactionary political views. Remotely controlled drones drop bombs on civilians, relying on satellite technologies owned by digital media oligarchs with close ties to authoritarian leaders. Governments seek control over the digital information landscape, demanding deletion of “unauthorised content” from websites and libraries, while governmental communication is at times routed through unofficial platforms, potentially avoiding scrutiny, recording, and/or archiving. States draw on granular surveillance data from bespoke or compliant apps and platforms to police their populations, often in the guise of public safety measures. Digital infrastructures such as satellites or undersea cables become political weapons, used to force compliance by nations reliant on their capabilities, or remain under threat of disruption by rogue political actors.

At the same time, digital technologies are vital tools for the organising of resistance against authoritarian incursions into social and economic liberties. News updates and information about personal and collective safety are shared through encrypted digital systems. Acts of genocide are livestreamed. Protests, street demonstrations, and direct interventions against authoritarian acts are instigated and promoted through digital platforms, while culture jamming online protests seek to block up digitally mediated governance systems. Archivists, librarians, and ordinary citizens mobilise to preserve digital records. Solidarity messages created and shared online sustain individuals as they navigate an increasingly perilous sociopolitical landscape.

We welcome short commentary articles (1,500-2,000 words) that report on, reflect on, critique, and illuminate our picture of **the role of digital technologies** in building, sustaining, and challenging authoritarian rule. We especially welcome papers that place this role in the longer histories of these political systems and those that explore these dynamics as they are occurring within a variety of jurisdictions. We are particularly keen to include analysis from **across the global geopolitical landscape** and not just the present U.S. moment - that is, an

analysis of digitally-mediated authoritarianism in Asia, Africa, South and Central America, North America, and Europe.

Topics may include – but are not limited to:

- Digital infrastructures of authoritarian rule
- Digital warfare in support of authoritarian states
- The role of digital media industries and owners in authoritarian states
- Digital tools and organization of resistance
- Digital information and democracy
- AI and smart technologies as authoritarian infrastructure
- Cultures of online resistance
- Digital surveillance tools and their applications
- Smart city systems in authoritarian contexts

Send a proposed title and abstract (150-250 words) by May 16, 2025 to kylie.jarrett1@ucd.ie. Submission of completed commentaries will be by July 1, 2025. All submissions will be subject to review. Also, feel free to get in touch if you have concerns about the risks associated with such a publication but still wish to contribute (we are prepared to facilitate anonymous publication).