



– Call for Participation –

## ***Quo vadis Digital Democracy?***

### ***Strengthening and Preserving Democracy in the Digital Age***

*An International Hybrid Conference of the Research Association NRW Digital Society*

**29 September – 01 October 2022, University of Bonn, Germany and Online**

Universitätsclub Bonn e.V.  
Konviktstraße 9  
53113 Bonn

[www.quovadisdigitaldemocracy.com](http://www.quovadisdigitaldemocracy.com)

Digitalization implies a wide range of transformation processes at all levels and subsystems of democratic and non-democratic societies. The political, public and academic debates about digitalization and democracy have always been controversial and still are today. Greatly intensified international research activities in recent years have expanded our knowledge about the effects of digitalization, but show that debates still range from optimistic views to sceptic or even dystopian perspectives. The former emphasize the potential of the internet to drive innovation in society and to enhance democracy. Moreover, the expanding digitalization of everyday life seems as an opportunity for increasing individualism and free choice. From this perspective it is claimed that digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and algorithms are to be seen as helpful tools in optimizing social life. In contrast, skeptical views highlighting the risks and even threats of digitalization for democratic values have increased recently. This finds expression in many well-researched aspects such as the growing relevance of fake news and “alternative facts” online. Algorithmic filtering promotes visibility of polarizing content and politically extreme positions. Furthermore, social media platforms can no longer be seen as neutral gathering places for rule-governed discourse. They have increasingly become digital arenas, and partially developed to democracy-damaging intermediaries empowering populist and anti-democratic ideas. In addition, it is warned about AI threatening autonomous decision making and the digitalization of everyday life is critically viewed as a misuse of data in terms of public surveillance and control. All of this results in ongoing debates about corporate responsibility, regulation and norms in the digital sphere. The urgency of these issues is dramatically increased by the war in Ukraine, as it highlights the security policy dimension of digital media and communication. While in Russia, the use of social media is more and more restricted, and even used for digital propaganda, they function as essential communication tools of the Ukrainian government, as platforms for sharing war-related content by citizens, and as a medium for expressing solidarity in the rest of the world. This emphasizes how closely the conditions and consequences of digital media communication depend on the concrete political contexts in which they are embedded.

This international conference aims to bring together empirical research and theory on the digital transformation of democracy with regard to strengthening and preserving democracy in the digital age.

*We invite you all to Bonn and look forward to your participation on site. Since we have no planning certainty due to the Corona pandemic, our conference will be held as a hybrid conference. You can attend the conference virtually from anywhere or opt to visit the physical venue.*

Submissions from **all social sciences, humanities, and technology disciplines** related to the following topics are highly welcome, but do not need to be limited to these:

**The Rise (and Fall?) of Platforms as Digital Public Spheres:** Which questions arise in the context of social media being gathering places for democratic discourse and digital arenas with democracy-damaging consequences at the same time? To what extent should social media be regulated? What regulation of social media can be observed in non-democratic systems? To what extent are alternative platforms being developed in different parts of the world?

**Digital Practices of Participation and the Formation of Political Will:** What are new digital forms of political participation and decision-making? What role does digital technology play in participatory processes, such as referendums, citizens' councils or protest movements? How does this differ between countries? To what extent can digital participation also be viewed critically, e.g. concerning the exploitation of labor in digital capitalism?

**Digital Governance and Digitalization of Democratic Institutions:** How does the state utilize digital technologies? How has the digitalization of democratic institutions, e.g. administration and political parties progressed? Which forms of digital institutionalized practices have been established? How does digital governance vary between different countries?

**Defending und Attacking Democracy in Times of War:** Which role does digital media play in the war in Ukraine and other conflicts? Which groups of actors make use of which digital media and how? What forms of digital warfare are applied by whom? How do social media change the image and reception of war as a media event? What changes can be observed regarding the security policy dimension of digital media?

**Ethics for the Digital Age:** Which ethical questions and problems arise in the digital age and how can they be solved? How can the answers beneficially be reimplemented in the development and regulation of digital technologies and media? Which ethical principles are particularly relevant for the development of digital technology in democracy? How does this vary from non-democratic systems?

**Theories of Democracy and Digitalization:** As digitalization affects all democratic and non-democratic societies, dedicated theory work in all academic fields is needed. Which social theories help to understand digital democracy? How does social theory adapt to digitalization? How are digitalization processes to be theorized from different traditions of democratic theory, e.g. deliberative, participatory and liberal-representative models?

**Quo vadis Digitalization Research?** Is digitalization research an emerging new discipline or do we see the constitution of an interdisciplinary research field which several disciplines contribute to? How can digitalization research and science communication in particular help to identify risks or dangers and help political and societal actors to strengthen and preserve democracy in the digital age?

## Keynote Speakers

We are pleased to announce the keynote speakers for the conference.



**Prof. Dr. José van Dijck**

University of Utrecht (Netherlands)  
Keynote 1  
September 29



**Dr. Dmytro Khutkyy**

University of Tartu (Estonia)  
Keynote 2  
September 30

## Submissions

The CfP invites contributions to: (1) individual presentations, (2) short talks and poster presentation in a high-density session, and for (3) thematic panels. If possible, submissions should be assigned to one of the topics above. Please let us know whether you would like to come to Bonn or only participate online. This is not a final decision. We will ask you for a final decision during the registration process (July 2022).

**(1) Submissions for individual presentations:** Submissions for individual 20-minute presentations include an abstract of max. 2000 characters (including spaces, title and bibliography with max. three titles plus a short CV). Please make clear in the submission whether the submitted talk can be considered for a short talk and poster presentation, if applicable.

**(2) Submissions for Short Talks and Poster Presentation in a High-Density Session:** In high-density sessions participants present their topic within five minutes, followed by discussions with the panel members in a poster session. Submissions for a five-minute short talk and a poster presentation in a high-density session include an abstract of max. 2000 characters (including spaces, title and bibliography with max. three titles plus a short CV). If accepted for a high-density session, the preparation of a poster is obligatory.

**(3) Submissions for thematic panels:** Proposals for thematic panels include three to four individual papers (per individual paper an abstract of max. 2000 characters incl. spaces, title and bibliography with max. three titles as well as a short CV) as well as a frame text (max. 2000 characters incl. spaces, title and bibliography with max. three titles) outlining the topic of the panel, the context of the papers as well as the fit to the conference topic. Please include a proposal for the panel moderation.

Please submit via email to

[anastasiadis@uni-bonn.de](mailto:anastasiadis@uni-bonn.de) or [y.peters@uni-bonn.de](mailto:y.peters@uni-bonn.de)

## Review

All submissions will be reviewed by the members of the Research Association NRW Digital Society in a double-blind review process. The following evaluation criteria apply to (1) individual presentations and (2) posters and short presentations:

1. Clarity and conciseness of the presentation
2. Originality and innovativeness of the contribution
3. Relevance of the research question
4. Quality of the theoretical framework
5. Quality of methodology/approach
6. Fit of the contribution to the conference topic

For (3) panel submissions, the entire panel, rather than the individual presentations, will be evaluated, and therefore will be judged based on the following criteria:

1. Clarity and conciseness of the presentation
2. Fit of the individual contributions to each other
3. Relevance of the panel within the conference topic

## Deadline and Notification

Deadline for all submissions: 30 June 2022

Notification for acceptance until: 20 July 2022

Contact: Dr. Mario Anastasiadis ([anastasiadis@uni-bonn.de](mailto:anastasiadis@uni-bonn.de)) or  
Yannik Peters, M.A. ([y.peters@uni-bonn.de](mailto:y.peters@uni-bonn.de))

Fees: The conference is free of charge.

More information: [www.quovadisdigitaldemocracy.com](http://www.quovadisdigitaldemocracy.com)