

## Call for Papers

3<sup>rd</sup> Weizenbaum Conference

**“Democracy in Flux**

**Order, Dynamics and Voices in Digital Public Spheres”**

4 – 5 June 2020; Urania Berlin | Germany

### Introduction

The Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society is organizing its 2020 annual conference on the subject of “Democracy in Flux – Order, Dynamics and Voices in Digital Public Spheres” and invites interested scholars to submit abstracts and papers for presentation on Thursday, 4 June and Friday, 5 June 2020 at the Urania in Berlin.

The spread of digital technologies has contributed to a multi-faceted change of democratic orders, actors, and practices. At the intersection of long-term evolution of democracies and the emergence of social media, we observe a profound redistribution of communication and political power. Traditional mass media are losing their privileged position as gatekeepers of the public sphere; social networks are establishing new norms of social relevance and simultaneously give voice to ideas, opinions and actors, which used to be marginalized. This development seems full of ambivalences. Thus, the changing conditions of communication have spawned a situation of democracy in a state of permanent flux.

The debate on how digital technologies have changed public spheres and impacted democracy has been scattered across different scientific disciplines, political arenas, and civil society. The 2020 Annual Weizenbaum Conference aims to bring together these various perspectives and seeks to initiate an interdisciplinary exchange on the linkages between digital public spheres and democracy.

The conference seeks to organize panel discussions along three tracks of panels:

- (1) The first track on creating and opposing social orders addresses the *structural dimension of democracy in flux*. It centers on digital technologies as a source of power and asks questions about the potential implications for democratic concepts and norms.
- (2) The second track deals with the *dynamics and processes* of the use of digital technologies and discusses the interlinkages of digital affordances with power relations, information flows, political mobilization, and their consequences.
- (3) The third track on *voices and agency* examines the question of how far technologies have become actors in their own right to shape public discourse and influence citizenship, democratic processes and practice.

**Track 1**  
Creating and  
Opposing Orders

For the first track of the conference, we invite contributions that discuss the relationship between digital technologies and social orders with a strong focus on structures and their democratic implications.

*Panel 1 on **rulemaking by digital technologies*** focuses on socio-technical orders and their democratic implications as digital technologies enable the re-definition of democratic concepts.

*Panel 2 on the **regulation of technologies*** deals with rules such as privacy, fairness and accountability that shape digital technologies, as in constitutions, laws, standards and principles.

*Panel 3 on **(de)institutionalization*** discusses how organizations such as political parties, social movements or media institutions are challenged in their structure and agency through the advent of digital communication and digital analytics.

**Track 2**  
Dynamics and  
Processes

For the second track of the conference, we invite studies that highlight how digital technologies impose on the dynamics of public spheres, the flow political information and their consequences for political power.

*Panel 4 on **power and information flows*** in digital media environments explores models and approaches about how digital affordances disperse communicative power on the one hand and how the concentration of information on digital platforms create centralization on the other hand.

*Panel 5 on **scaling political information in election campaigns*** invites fresh insights on how political parties and candidates are adapting to the dynamics of network media logic and on citizens' use of digital media for electoral information.

*Panel 6 on **fragmentation in digital public spheres*** invites papers on diffusion processes and information sharing in digital platforms such as the spread of false and misleading messages or the promotion of functional public discourses through fact checking.

**Track 3:**  
Voices and Agencies

For the third track of the conference we invite papers on the effect of social media platforms on opinion expression, political discourse, and collective action. The panels deal with the role and linkages of actors beyond established institutions in the politics, media and civil society.

*Panel 7* is devoted to studies on the **role of intermediaries** and how they interact with democratic will formation. What are the consequences of public monitoring and political targeting for democratic orders and practice?

*Panel 8* invites contributions that highlight changing **notions of digital citizenship** and their relations with norms and values. It also discusses lay perceptions of digital citizenship in the light of online activism and online commenting.

*Panel 9* seeks to stimulate discussions on how technology enables interactive modes and therefore allows for **novel linkages and networks between and across actors** from politics, media and the economic sector.

**Structure of the  
Conference  
(Overview)**

<b>Track 1: Creating and Opposing Orders</b>	<b>Track 2: Dynamic and Processes</b>	<b>Track 3: Voices and Agency</b>
<i>Panel 1:</i> Regulation/rulemaking by technologies	<i>Panel 4:</i> Power and Information Flows	<i>Panel 7:</i> The role of Intermediaries in democracy
<i>Panel 2:</i> Regulation of technologies	<i>Panel 5:</i> Scaling political information in election campaigns	<i>Panel 8:</i> Notions of Digital Citizenship
<i>Panel 3:</i> (De-) Institutionalization	<i>Panel 6:</i> Fragmentation in digital public spheres	<i>Panel 9:</i> Networks across and between actors from politics, economy and media

## Call for Papers

We call for papers that shed light on the outlined topics in theoretical or empirical studies in different areas of inquiry. We insist that aspects of digital public spheres are explicitly linked to democracy or vice versa. The conference organizers are keen to select the papers which stimulate discussion among panelists. In each panel there will be scholars by invitation who give their outlook about the state of the art in the specific area.

## Procedures

**STEP 1:** Please submit a short abstract (500 words max) by 15 January 2020 per email at: [weizenbaum-conference@wzb.eu](mailto:weizenbaum-conference@wzb.eu). The abstract should indicate the track and the panel number as well as the main argument, the empirical basis of the study and how it relates to the conference theme.

**STEP 2:** Submissions will be reviewed by peer scholars and decisions of acceptance will be issued by 5 March 2020. Since there are limited slots in the panel sessions, authors might be invited to present their work as a poster.

**STEP 3:** Authors of accepted papers should upload their paper and presentation via the submission system from xxxx. Papers will be published in the conference proceedings or in the newly launched Weizenbaum journal in fall 2020.

The Weizenbaum Institute is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research Germany and was founded in 2017. It is operated by a Berlin-Brandenburg consortium coordinated by the [Berlin Social Science Center \(WZB\)](#) and also includes four Berlin universities: [Freie Universität Berlin](#), [Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin](#), [Technische Universität Berlin](#), and the [Berlin University of the Arts](#) as well as the [University of Potsdam](#) and the [Fraunhofer Institute for Open Communication Systems \(FOKUS\)](#).