MA New Media and Society in Europe

Internet Censorship, Control and Governance

Term:
Fall 2022

Course convener:
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Course description:
In 1996 John Barlow wrote his Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace. The Internet would not be controlled by governments or the industry, it would be governed by the Internet community itself. That multistakeholder aspiration remains, but seems far off now.

Governments regulate and control the Internet in different policy fields and have started to question the suitability of early rules passed in the 2000s in today’s online environment. In a policy environment that seems to evolve from data leaks and security threats to disinformation and health emergencies, tech companies have been requested and have taken on an active role in moderating content, impacting our opportunities for expression on a daily basis.

This bears the question: what is Internet governance, which principles guide policy and tech development, who has effective control, and what role should the Internet community play?

This course introduces students to Internet censorship, control and governance. It gives an overview of select international institutions governing the Internet and focuses on current policy debates in Internet governance, related to content moderation in particular. It discusses select central themes, such as digital sovereignty, censorship, and freedom of expression, disinformation and distrust, artificial intelligence and tech regulation, cyber diplomacy and norms.

After taking this course, students should demonstrate a critical understanding of:

- Founding guiding principles, state of affairs and discussions on the future of Internet governance
- Role, functioning of and challenges facing institutions involved in Internet governance
• Interactions between government, industry and civil society and principles guiding international policy debates related to Internet governance

Course time: Wednesday, 09:00-11:00

Course location: D2.10

Please always check the VUB timetable and the Canvas course announcements in advance, as this is subject to change.

Please take note in the course schedule below that the sessions might still swap weeks. Canvas modules will list the up-to-date order of topics.

Course schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Additional information / invited speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21 Sep</td>
<td>No class</td>
<td>VUB welcome week</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28 Sep</td>
<td>Introduction. Theorizing Internet governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>05 Oct</td>
<td>Internet governance institutions</td>
<td>Orsolya Gulyás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12 Oct</td>
<td>Disinformation and distrust</td>
<td>Samuel Cipers</td>
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</table>
| 5    | 19 Oct   | Trustworthiness of Artificial Intelligence         | Submit group paper topic and question on Canvas (19/10, 23:59)
|      |          |                                                   | Carlos Entrena Serrano and Ana Fernandez Inguanzo |
| 6    | 26 Oct   | Online censorship                                 | Leo Van Audenhove                        |
| 7    | 02 Nov   | No class                                          | Work on group paper                      |
| 8    | 09 Nov   | Digital sovereignty                               | Orsolya Gulyás and Jamal Shahin          |
| 9    | 16 Nov   | Group paper presentations                         | Submit group presentation on Canvas (15/11, 23:59), present in class (16/11) |
| 10   | 23 Nov   | Platform governance                               | Nathalie Van Raemdonck                   |
| 11   | 28 Nov-02 Dec | Internet Governance Forum                  | Register in advance and attend at least 2 sessions (online) |
| 12   | 7 Dec    | Cyber diplomacy and norms                         | Michael Van Aendenhof                    |
| 13   | 14 Dec   | Sustainable development goals and digital governance | Nadia Tjahja                          |
| 14   | 21 Dec   | Conclusion. Future of Internet governance         | Submit group paper on Canvas (21/12, 23:59) |

Compulsory course readings (per week):

Introduction. Theorizing Internet governance


**Internet governance institutions**
- LACNIC and ICANN (2014) *What You Need to Know About IANA*. Available at: [https://youtu.be/Lk5j25nmZKY (watch)](https://youtu.be/Lk5j25nmZKY)

**Disinformation and distrust**

**Trustworthiness of Artificial Intelligence**

**Censorship**

**Digital sovereignty**

**Platform governance**

**Cyber diplomacy and norms**

**Sustainable development goals and digital governance**
- Global SDG Indicator Platform. https://sdg.tracking-progress.org/ (browse 4.4.1 Proportion of Youths and Adults with Information and Communications Technology skills; 5.b.1 Mobile Telephone Ownership (female); 17.6.2 Fixed Internet Broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants; 17.8.1 Individuals using the internet)

**Conclusion. Future of Internet governance**
Recommended course readings:

These readings are a carefully curated list of highly relevant insights, specific to each week’s topic. They will be helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of Internet censorship, control and governance as well as being a gateway for the research paper assignment.

- West, S. (2018) Searching for the Public in Internet Governance: Examining Infrastructures of Participation at NETmundial. *Policy & Internet* 10 (1) 22–42. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.143
Course assessment:

The final grade will be based on a combination of a group presentation and paper in class (25%) and an individual oral exam (75%).

The group assignment (25%) consists of a literature review and a case study on a research topic related to Internet Censorship, Control and Governance. Students form groups of 3 students and submit their topic + question by Wednesday 19 October, 23:59 (Week 5). Students will present their work in class on Wednesday 16 November, 09:00-11:00 (Week 9) and finally submit their paper by Wednesday 21 December, 23:59 (Week 14). The presentation and the paper are both worth 12.5% of the final grade. The group is assessed collectively, with feedback provided on the research topic, presentation and paper.

The individual oral exam (75%) consists of two initial exam questions with related follow-up questions. Students are allowed to briefly prepare their responses to the initial exam questions at the start of the exam. For the oral exam, students need to process all course material (reading material, slides, lecture notes) – from Week 1 through Week 14. Knowledge and insights gained from attending IGF sessions are complementary, not compulsory for the oral exam.