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DISINFO AND ELECTIONS IN THE GLOBAL MAJORITY

A Workshop Organized by the PONTIFICAL CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY DE RIO DE JANEIRO & the GLOTECH LAB - UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

Rio de Janeiro, November 27-28, 2023

ORGANIZERS
Dr Marcelo Alves dos Santos Junior
Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong
Jose Mari Lanuza
Dr Caroline Pecoraro

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WELCOME

Welcome to PUC - the Pontifical Catholic University de Rio de Janeiro, host of the **Disinfo and Elections in the Global Majority International Workshop**. Our two-day event gathers researchers, journalists, and civil society leaders in the disinformation and democracy space from over seven countries to discuss lessons from past elections, exchange best practices, and identify opportunities for transnational collaboration. Our event's focus on lessons from the Global Majority highlight the need to support original democratic innovations "from the South" rather than replicating the same tools and advocacies from the Global North. With pivotal elections in the United States, India, Indonesia, Moldova, and South Africa in 2024, we aim to take stock of lessons from leaders of election integrity coalitions in Brazil , and the Philippines during this event.

This event previews a forthcoming study "Lessons Learned from Brazil and Philippines Anti-Disinformation Coalitions" that evaluates the range of legal responses, political organizing strategies, and platform accountability measures from both countries. With expert commentary from the Brazilian government minister and leading disinformation researchers, our discussion will become a starting point for comparative thinking and transnational organizing for forthcoming electoral interventions. Over two days, we offer anti-disinfo advocates opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange, methods training, research mentoring, and transnational coalition work in pursuit of transformational social impact as well as solidarity and healing. This is a bilingual event with Portuguese and English speakers. Translation services will be provided.

We are grateful to event hosts and sponsors, particularly the Department of Communication at Pontifical Catholic University de Rio de Janeiro, the GloTech Lab at University of Massachusetts - Amherst, Tide Setubal Foundation, and Luminate.

INTENTION SETTING

We respect all participants and work from our highest intentions. We want everyone to do well and be themselves. It's okay to present positions and methodologies that are new and experimental. It's also okay to disagree with others' ideas insofar as our disagreement does not invalidate others' specific experiences.

We are mindful of our own positionality and acknowledge our biases and limitations. We engage other disciplines, methodologies, and genres of knowledge production with openness and curiosity.

We are generous when citing other colleagues' work (including those not in the workshop) and amplifying less-heard voices and perspectives.

We expect presenters and panelists to be mindful of their time on stage and invite questions and conversation from our high-level expert audience.

We don't have a blanket policy for posting/publicizing the event on social media so we simply encourage folks to be extra-mindful about social media etiquette. Some presenters have open-access reports they wish to be widely used and cited, while others may want to keep sensitive information to those in the room. It's always good to ask for consent before posting and sharing!

If you experience any issues over the next days, please email Marcelo Alves (marcelo_alves@puc-rio.br) or Jonathan Corpus Ong (jcong@umass.edu).

SCHEDULE

Day 1, Monday, November 27.

Main Venue: RDC Auditorium.

9-930AM: REGISTRATION AND COFFEE

930-1005AM: WELCOME AND INTENTION SETTING
Opening Remarks by Dr Marcelo Alves (PUC, INCT/DSI)
Welcome to the University by administrators of Pontifical Catholic University de Rio de Janeiro
Intention Setting and Program Rundown by Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong (UMass Amherst)

1005-11AM: BUILDING SOUTH-TO-SOUTH KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE - COMPARING BRAZIL AND PHILIPPINES DISINFO COALITIONS
Background of research by Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong and Dr Rafael Grohmann (U of Toronto, INCT/DSI)
Highlights of Brazil report by Dr Marcelo Alves
Presentation of Brazil-Philippines Comparison by Jose Mari Lanuza (UMass Amherst), Raquel Recuero (Federal University of Pelotas, INCT/DSI) and Camilla Alves (Federal University of Maranhão, INCT/DSI)
Three Experts' Responses to the Study by João Brant (Federal Govt of Brazil), Ethan Zuckerman (UMass Amherst) and Dr Sahana Udupa (LMU-Munich)

11AM-1245PM: THE BRAZIL EXPERIENCE: WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T
Roundtable Panel:
João Brant (Secretary of Digital Policy, Federal Government of Brazil)
Jose Fernando Chuy (Supreme Electoral Court of Brazil)
Nina Santos (Desinformante: Media literacy and advocacy)
Fabiano Garrido (Democracia em Xeque)
Natalia Viana (Agencia Pública)
Humberto Ribeiro (Sleeping Giants)
MODERATOR: Natasha Felizi (Serraphilera)

1245-215PM: LUNCH BREAK (Venue: Kitchen Cafe)

215-315PM: CONTEXT MATTERS 1: ANTI-DISINFO STRATEGIES IN SOUTH AFRICA, INDONESIA AND MOLDOVA
Roundtable Panel:
Sherylle Daas (Legal Resources Centre, South Africa)
Amelinda Kusumaningtyas (Center for Digital Society, Indonesia)
Valeriu Pasha (Watchdog.MD, Moldova)
MODERATOR: Meetali Jain (Open Society Foundations)

315-335PM: COFFEE BREAK

335-435PM: CONTEXT MATTERS 2: ANTI-DISINFO STRATEGIES IN INDIA AND THE USA
Roundtable Panel:
Inayat Sabikhi (India Civil Watch International, India)
Partha Chakrabarty (India Civil Watch International, India)
Samantha Lai (Carnegie Corporation of New York, USA)
MODERATOR: Francisco Vera, Open Society Foundations

435-6PM: NETWORKING AND DRINKS RECEPTION (VENUE: Science and Technology Center Rooftop)

6-8PM: DINNER (VENUE: Kitchen Cafe)

Day 2, Tuesday, November 28

Morning Venue: IAG Business School Auditorium. Afternoon Venue: Classrooms, 6th Floor, Department of Communication.

915-930AM: COFFEE

930-1100AM: BUILDING TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITIES IN THE DISINFO AND DEMOCRACY SPACE

Roundtable Panel:
Sahana Udupa (LMU-Munich)
Ethan Zuckerman (UMass Amherst)
Victoire Rio (What to Fix / MTAN)
Alexandra Pardal (Digital Action)
Rose Marie Santini (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
MODERATOR: Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong (UMass Amherst)

11AM-12NN: GENERATIVE AI AS THREAT AND TOOL
Panelists:
Sam Gregory (WITNESS)
Tai Nalon (Aos Fatos)
MODERATOR: Amil Khan (Valent Projects)

12-130PM: LUNCH BREAK (VENUE: Kitchen Cafe)

130-250PM: BREAKOUT DISCUSSION GROUPS 1 (VENUE: Department of Communication 6th floor)

A (venue: K611) - How to Cost Influencer Marketing by Fatima Gaw (Northwestern U)

B (venue: K613)- Understanding Audiences of Disinformation by Dani Madrid-Morales (U of Sheffield)

C (venue: K615)- Mitigating Misinfo on Whatsapp by Angie Waller (Digital Witness Lab)

D (venue: K618)- Building Relationships with Funders by Francisco Vera (Open Society Foundations)

E (venue: K616)- Digital Investigations by Jean Le Roux (Atlantic Council / DFR Labs)

250-310: COFFEE BREAK (VENUE: 6th floor)

3:10-430PM - BREAKOUT DISCUSSION GROUPS 2 (VENUE: Communication Department, 6th floor)

F (venue: K611) - Mitigating Digital and Legal Harassment of Journalists and Academics by Ivar Hartmann (Insper Law School)

G (venue: K613)- Matching Interventions to Disinformers by Victoire Rio (What to Fix / MTAN)

H (venue: K615) - Tracking Diaspora Misinformation by Jinxia Niu (Chinese for Affirmative Action) and Jane Yeahin Pyo (UMass Amherst)

I (venue: K618) - Digital Methods by João Guilherme dos Santos (Democracia em Xeque)

430-6PM: DRINKS RECEPTION (VENUE: Science and Technology Center Rooftop)

6-8PM: DINNER (VENUE: Kitchen Cafe)

SESSIONS AND BREAKOUT PANELS INFORMATION

A. BUILDING SOUTH-TO-SOUTH KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE - COMPARING BRAZIL AND PHILIPPINES DISINFO COALITIONS

Descriptions of disinformation's challenge to democracy and responses to it often privilege assumptions from the Global North. But legal remedies, regulatory approaches, and civil society activities designed for the Global North can be ineffective or detrimental in Global Majority countries. Our report applies comparative analysis of Brazil and the Philippines–two countries that underwent presidential elections in 2022–to map out a helpful blueprint that can guide anti-disinformation programming for civil society and media freedom coalitions around the world. In this preliminary discussion, we center two global South countries: Brazil and the Philippines.

Both countries share a history of colonialism and dictatorship and, in the present, immense attention to the effects of disinformation on their democracies. However, they are also tremendously different–not only culturally and geographically, but politically. Coming from different flavors of populist governance that relied on disinformation for much of their administration, both Brazil and the Philippines held a general election which saw different outcomes in 2022. We center these countries in our analysis to draw critical attention to international trends in influence operations driven by authoritarian nostalgia and democratic ambivalences, as well as the acute challenges faced by pro-democracy actors in addressing disinformation and other influence operations. We shed light on disinformation innovations (perpetrators, platforms, narratives) that other countries with upcoming elections may anticipate. We also discuss achievements and challenges of civil society coalitions, including in areas of cutting-edge scholarship and investigations, media literacy campaigns, campaign regulation and monitoring, and platform accountability.

Some of our main findings are as follows:

- When we look at the form and content of disinformation operations, we find that disinformation often goes against the grain of democratic institutions, operationally sowing doubt and discrediting processes of power-checking. In Brazil, this meant attacking the automated nature of the elections and the ballot box, delegitimizing the Electoral Court, and overall fostering narratives of electoral fraud. In the Philippines, this manifested as an attack on formal institutions of knowledge like the academe and legacy media and a shift towards hyperpartisan and alternative media for more controlled interactivity. Persistent "dumb voter" tropes continued to sow divisions among the electorate, and calls of electoral fraud were also consistently raised.

We find that there is a great overlap in disinformation narratives, all rooted in democratic deficits. Disinformation finds salience in heuristics that are grounded on these deficits, and in Global South contexts states find incentives to leave these deficits unaddressed - the institutional weaknesses enable structures of disinformation-for-hire operations.

- That said, while both countries come from illiberal regimes prior to the 2022 elections, having a progressive government institution contributed to the difference in efforts against influence operations. The Brazilian Electoral Court was an important ally in regulating disinformation content and pressuring platforms, and no equivalent exists in the Philippines. Filipino civil society organizations find this kind of strong interventionist institution alluring against local influence operations, but at the same time observers do express concerns about the overreach potential of the electoral court in Brazil. In contexts where elite capture is more the norm, there is a need to re-imagine potential institutional counterparts that can perform similar crucial functions.

- There is an unevenness to how platforms respond to coalition demands across the Global South. There is also a difference in what coalitions can demand by leveraging whatever advantages are present/absent in each of the Brazilian and Philippine contexts. Thus while partners in Brazil were able to pressure platforms to ban particular content during the campaign period, partners in the Philippines found themselves exasperated with repetitive flagging, waiting for platforms to take down content or accounts. While coalitions in both Brazil and the Philippines find it necessary to hold platforms accountable and experience lethargic platform responses, there is an unevenness in what outcomes they can hope for.

  There is also an unevenness in how platforms approach political institutions for partnerships. On one hand, organizations in the Philippines found it frustrating to work with platforms, who also partnered with government offices for electoral information drives even without addressing platform complicity in the problematic information environment. On the other hand, organizations in Brazil found it challenging when platforms allied with certain rightwing legislators to avoid policies that can regulate what platforms can and cannot publish. While limited, partnerships between platforms and governments can be expected in the Global South context - but these partnerships have less to do with actually addressing influence operations, and more with ensuring good quality platform image and operations.

- Coalitions in both Brazil and the Philippines have matured from years of anti-disinformation operation experience, but there seems to be an unevenness in pace and direction. While Brazilian and Philippine coalitions have developed

locally-informed and bespoke best practices over time, differences in organizational structures and approaches to coalition work have led to different extents of influence over the anti-disinformation space. Resources are also insufficient and unevenly distributed, with more established partners receiving more help. Thus, while there is less need for international funders to parachute and provide enabling services, there remains a need to diversify support towards more marginalized organizations that can offer more distinct community-based programs with more apparent impact.

Paper Authors:
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Three Experts' Responses to the Study by João Brant (Federal Govt of Brazil), Ethan Zuckerman (UMass Amherst), and Dr Sahana Udupa (LMU-Munich)

B. THE BRAZIL EXPERIENCE: WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T

In Brazil, media outlets and civil society organizations of many different stripes came together in a large coalition to overcome election disinformation. They did so in partnership with the Brazilian Superior Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*, or TSE) - an institution without an equivalent in many countries. This provided both increased reach for CSO efforts but also the power of government pressure on social media companies to take more vigorous action against election disinformation.

1. What made the Court such a powerful ally in Brazil, and what factors might make similar approaches more or less effective in other countries? Is this a desirable model for other contexts? Are there risks to consider when empowering judicial actors in this way?
2. How did the size and diversity of Brazilian counter-disinformation coalitions affect their approaches and success? What were the essential ingredients of keeping these coalitions organized and reducing conflict between partners? How do coalitions maintain their independence from political parties, or not?
3. As Brazil formulates its own regulatory and legislative responses to disinformation, what is it learning from abroad? How does local context affect the prospects for commonly proposed tech policy reforms?

Roundtable Panel:
João Brant (Secretary of Digital Policy, Federal Government of Brazil)
Jose Fernando Chuy (Supreme Electoral Court of Brazil)
Nina Santos (Desinformante: Media literacy and advocacy)
Fabiano Garrido (Democracia em Xeque)
Natalia Viana (Agencia Pública)
Humberto Ribeiro (Sleeping Giants)
MODERATOR: Natasha Felizi (Serraphilera)

C. CONTEXT MATTERS 1: ANTI-DISINFORMATION STRATEGIES IN SOUTH AFRICA, INDONESIA AND MOLDOVA

In this session, we will hear from practitioners in South Africa, Indonesia, and Moldova about social, political, and technological forces shaping their information environments, and the ways they are preparing for their upcoming elections.

1. What worked best for tackling disinformation in your perspective? What would you like others to learn from this? What didn't work?
2. How did you build societal alliances beyond the traditional disinformation space? What are the upcoming trends you see across the information ecosystem?
3. How do factors like your country's history, politics, and culture distinguish efforts to counter influence operations from those elsewhere? How might common organizational practices within national civil society coalitions affect their ability to scale up and work together?

Roundtable Panel:
Sherylle Daas (Legal Resources Centre, South Africa)
Amelinda Kusumaningtyas (Center for Digital Society, Indonesia)
Valeriu Pasha (Watchdog.MD, Moldova)
MODERATOR: Meetali Jain (Open Society Foundations)

D. CONTEXT MATTERS 2: ANTI-DISINFORMATION STRATEGIES IN INDIA AND THE USA

In this session, we will hear from practitioners in India and the USA about the ways in which local context is critically important for protecting electoral integrity from influence operations. To be maximally effective, commonly recommended approaches like fact-checking and narrative counter-messaging must take into account local media consumption practices, history, culture, and political trends. Common tech policy proposals may even backfire if implemented in the wrong environment.

1. What worked best for tackling disinformation in your perspective? What would you like others to learn from this? What didn't work?

2. How do factors like your country's history, politics, and culture distinguish efforts to counter influence operations from those elsewhere?

3. How does the experience of countering influence operations in the United States contrast with other environments–for example, the increasingly regulated European Union, Global South countries which receive fewer resources and attention, or settings which may not experience the same extreme levels of polarization?

4. Are all solutions to influence operations equally important, and if not, what should take priority? Is there too much focus in a specific area like tech policy or countering malign foreign influence?

Roundtable Panel:
Inayat Sabikhi (India Civil Watch International, India)
Partha Chakrabarty (India Civil Watch International, India)
Samantha Lai (Carnegie Corporation of New York, USA)
MODERATOR: Francisco Vera, Open Society Foundations

E.   BUILDING TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITIES IN THE DISINFO AND DEMOCRACY SPACE

At the global level, public and academic discussions of influence operations and democracy overwhelmingly focus on countries in the Global North. Those countries also receive a greater share of time, attention, and resources from the election integrity efforts of major technology companies. But policies and interventions designed for the United States or Europe cannot be imported wholesale into other contexts: for example, legal or regulatory restrictions on platforms can have unintended consequences for free speech under illiberal or semi-authoritarian governments. Expanding South-South and North-South dialogue is essential to addressing imbalances that continue to challenge advocates in the Global South.

1. How can we expand the space for transnational discussion and reduce the dominance of Global-North focused viewpoints? How can global North experts be useful to advocates in the South?

2. What are the most important types of similarities and differences between countries that should be considered when designing interventions?

3. How can funding streams for countering influence operations be more diverse and effective in the Global Majority?

4. What are effective advocacy tools to influence platform policy and engagement? How can we join up Global Majority organizing with US-based efforts?

5. What are helpful ways of understanding power dynamics within platforms themselves? How can we best identify allies (if any) within platforms?

Roundtable Panel:
Sahana Udupa (LMU-Munich)
Ethan Zuckerman (UMass Amherst)

Victoire Rio (What to Fix / MTAN)
Alexandra Pardal (Digital Action)
Rose Marie Santini (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
MODERATOR: Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong (UMass Amherst)

<u>BREAKOUT DISCUSSION GROUPS</u>

<u>ROUND 1</u>
GROUP A (venue: COMM Dep. K611) - How to Cost Influencer Marketing by Fatima Gaw (Northwestern U)

The discussion group introduces an interdisciplinary framework to estimate the cost of running an influence operation piloted in the Philippines. It focuses on commissioned social media influencers as a starting point to trace political-economic relations and transactions in running disinformation or propaganda campaigns. It involves participants doing two activities: first is appropriating the model to other country contexts, and second is augmenting the model with more grounded measures and creative data collection strategies when expanding it to other components of manipulative campaigns (i.e., trolls).

- What are the components of the political-economy of influence operations?
- What are the proxy measures we can use to estimate cost?
- How do we build a model that accounts cost/profit from other sources, i.e., platform monetization and unpaid labor?

GROUP B (venue: COMM Dep. K613)- Understanding Audiences of Disinformation by Dani Madrid-Morales (U of Sheffield)
- What draws news consumers to sources of disinformation?
- How can journalists and advocates reach audiences who are motivated to consume content from disinformation sources?

GROUP C (venue: COMM Dep. K615)- Mitigating Misinfo on Whatsapp by Angie Waller (Digital Witness Lab)
- What are the unique challenges of combatting misinformation on private messaging applications?
- What approaches can researchers, advocates, policymakers, and technology companies take to mitigate this challenge?

GROUP D (venue: COMM Dep. K618)- Building Relationships with Funders by Francisco Vera (Open Society Foundations)
- What are the primary types of funders in this space, and what do they look for in a solid proposal?
- What are the main obstacles faced by advocates looking to fundraise?

GROUP E (venue: COMM Dep. K616)- Digital Investigations by Jean Le Roux (Atlantic Council / DFR Labs)

- What are the basic skills and practices required to investigate online influence operations?
- How has this field changed over the last 5-10 years, as the political and media landscapes have shifted?

ROUND 2

GROUP F (venue: COMM Dep. K611) - Mitigating Digital and Legal Harassment of Journalists and Academics by Ivar Hartmann (Insper Law School)

- What is the nature of threats to journalists and academics today? How has it changed over the last few election cycles?
- What steps can advocates, funders, and other stakeholders take to help protect them (and persuade big tech to do the same)?

GROUP G (venue: COMM Dep. K613)- Matching Interventions to Disinformers by Victoire Rio (What to Fix / MTAN)

- What are the diverse incentives driving disinformation? And associated archetypes of disinformers?
- How can we make better informed diagnosis around disinformers?
- How can understanding disinformers and their underlying incentive structures help design better response interventions? And mitigate the risk of interventions backfiring?

GROUP H (venue: COMM Dep. K615) - Tracking Diaspora Misinformation by Jinxia Niu (Chinese for Affirmative Action) and Jane Yeahin Pyo (UMass Amherst)

- How can disinformation be used to divide immigrant communities?
- In what ways do information flows in diaspora communities differ from the rest of the population?
- What anti-democratic beliefs and attitudes might get triggered or reinforced in the immigrant experience?
- What are specific platforms that we need to monitor for diaspora misinformation?
- Do we expect a "red wave" among immigrant populations in the upcoming United States election?

GROUP I (venue: COMM Dep. K618) - Digital Methods by João Guilherme dos Santos (Democracia em Xeque)

- What are the current trends in the social media space and how are they changing influence operations?
- What are the newest tools and techniques for studying and analyzing content on social media today?

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation
Aaron Rodericks	Independent Tech Expert
Afonso de Albuquerque	Professor, Fluminense Federal University, INCT/DSI
Alexandra Pardal	Campaigns Director, Digital Action
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Ivar Hartmann	Associate Professor, Insper Law School
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Natasha Felizi	Serrapiheira Institute
Neel Madhav	Independent Journalist and researcher
Nina Santos	Coordinator, Desinformante / Director, Aláfia Lab
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Raquel Recuero	Professor, Federal University of Pelotas
Sahana Udupa	Professor, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich
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Samantha Lai	Senior Research Analyst, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

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Valeriu Pasha	Chairman, WatchDog.MD Community
Victoire Rio	Executive Director, WHAT TO FIX / Chief Strategist, MTAN

BACKGROUND INFO: COUNTRY PROFILES

As background information for workshop participants, we summarize key features of elections past and future that we will discuss during the event. We aim to learn lessons from Brazil, the Philippines and Kenya, and prepare for upcoming elections in India, Indonesia, Moldova, South Africa, and the United States. These country profiles were helpfully prepared by Vivian Mannheimer, researcher in the Department of Communication at PUC.

LOOKING BACK

BRAZIL

The largest country in Latin America, Brazil held its latest general election in October 2022, defeating the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro, who was trying to be elected for a second run. The Workers Party candidate Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, who had previously ruled Brazil between 2003 and 2010, won Bolsonaro in a tight result, with 50.9% of the vote compared to 49.1% for his opponent. Bolsonaro and his supporters had made several allegations of electoral fraud.

According to data released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), internet use in Brazil reached 87.2% of the population in 2022. The 2022 Reuters Institute Digital News Report indicates that 64% of Brazilians get their news from social networks. YouTube has overtaken Facebook as the most popular social network for news consumption, while messaging apps WhatsApp and Telegram remain important ways to discuss and share the news.

During the 2022 elections, violence, disinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories, and dissemination of hate speech took an unprecedented proportion, involving topics such as the safety of electronic ballot boxes, attacks on the separation of power, Supreme Court (STF) ministers, and the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE). Towards the end of the campaign, the most circulated narrative was that Lula would persecute Christian values and close churches in a kind of Christophobia.

PHILIPPINES

In the latest general elections, Filipinos went to the polls on May 9th, 2022, to vote for the president to succeed Rodrigo Duterte, who led a government known for anti-drug policies resulting in human rights violations through thousands of extrajudicial killings and political disinformation as a tool against critics and progressive forces. In this election, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. - son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., ousted in the People Power Revolution of 1986 - won by historic margins, along with his incoming Vice President, Rodrigo Duterte's daughter, Sara Duterte. With their victory, the Marcos-Duterte administration appears poised to continue many of Duterte's nondemocratic policies.

The 2016 elections saw the centering of media manipulation in elections, which became a blueprint for other countries like the US. In the 2019 and 2022 Philippine elections, the presence of networks of information manipulators, intermediaries, and their supporters drove the exponential growth of disinformation. During the latest electoral campaign, Twitter suspended thousands of accounts associated with the Marcos campaign for spreading misinformation. The pair benefited from false narratives that denied facts about human rights violations and censorship during the martial law years from 1972 to 1986.

As happened in other countries, fact-checking emerged as a journalistic subfield. Social media companies have also taken a proactive approach to combating online misinformation and disinformation during this election cycle. In January, Twitter allowed users to flag tweets that contain misleading information, and in April, Meta suspended more than 400 accounts, pages, and groups for "coordinated inauthentic behavior." However, critics believe these corporations are not doing enough to prevent the flow of disinformation.

KENYA

The Republic of Kenya is a country in East Africa with more than 55 million people as per the latest United Nations data. Kenya is a presidential democratic republic with the president acting as both the head of state and head of government. It also has a bicameral parliament and a judiciary branch, but the three branches are not co-equal, with the

executive having the most power and the two other branches having limited powers to check the executive.

Kenya just concluded its presidential elections in 2022, with reports of fake polls, fake news, deepfakes, and overall networked disinformation being observed. There were also attempts to dissuade voters through false claims of wild animals on the loose, of the elections already being concluded, and of vote-padding. This is important not only because disinformation is problematic, but because of the specificities of the Kenyan context. Electoral violence is common in the country, and false claims of electoral fraud have historically resulted in post-election violence and displacement.

It does not help that studies show Kenyans have a wide exposure to "fake news" but maintain high trust in legacy media news - there is lower trust for social media content - while having difficulties distinguishing between real and fake news online. Kenya has an internet penetration rate of 85% according to the Reuters Institute, though television still remains the most popular medium.

LOOKING FORWARD

INDIA

The most populous country, according to the demographic data released in June 2023 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India is a parliamentary republic with a multi-party system. Its current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, first elected in 2014 as part of an alliance between the center-right and right-wing parties, is known for the promotion of Hindu nationalism and is accused of suppressing religious freedom. The latest report of the Sweden-based V-Dem Institute classifies the country as an electoral autocracy: regular elections are held, while other essential standards for democracy fail, such as fairness in the electoral process or democratic institutions adhering to authoritarian methods.

Fake news was very prevalent during the 2019 Indian general election, called by some "India's first WhatsApp elections." Disinformation campaigns ranged from manipulated content against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), such as those insinuating that the students of Aligarh Muslim University were raising anti-Hindu slogans, to fake news related to Kashmir, such as messages anti-Pakistan.

The next Indian general election will be held between April and May 2024. Modi and his ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are campaigning to be re-elected for a third five-year term.

INDONESIA

The world's largest archipelagic state, with over 17,000 islands, Indonesia is the most populous Muslim-majority country. The current president, Joko Widodo (popularly referred to as Jokowi) from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, is regarded as a "polite populist."

The 2019 presidential campaign in Indonesia was flooded by disinformation. It also had the active participation of "buzzers," individuals or groups known as paid to produce and disseminate content on social media platforms, amidst growing concern that they are polarising opinion and posing a threat to democracy. In 2020, the Indonesian government implemented legal sanctions and regulations on disinformation based on Germany's Network Enforcement Act, sometimes called the "Facebook Act."

In February 2024, Indonesia will hold the world's largest single-day election to elect a president and representatives to national, provincial, and district parliaments. Presidential elections will be disputed between three main candidates: Prabowo Subianto, a military man turned politician; Ganjar Pranowo, a former governor of Central Java; and Anies Baswedan, previously governor of Jakarta. According to a survey published in October, Prabowo, associated with Suharto's military regime, which ruled for 32 years, leads with about 36% approval.

MOLDOVA

Moldova was part of the Soviet Union and became independent in 1991 after the block's dissolution. It is a Parliamentary democracy and is politically divided, mainly between pro-Europe Union and pro-Russia aspirations. It is one of the countries most affected by the war in Ukraine due to the energy crisis and the refugee flows. President Maia Sandu was elected by direct universal suffrage in November 2020, with aspirations toward the European Union, and won a large parliamentary majority in the snap parliamentary elections held in July 2021, nominating Dorin Recean as prime minister.

The proliferation of Russian propaganda and disinformation marked recent elections in Moldova. Facebook was the most popular social media platform during the campaign of the 2021 parliamentary elections, according to the Swedish IDEA Institute. Telegram and Odnoklassniki, social network services used mainly in Russia and former Soviet Republics, were also popular, and the narratives promoted in groups on social media reflected the existing polarisation of Moldovan society between pro-and anti-Western sentiments.

The next Moldavan Presidential elections will be held in the autumn of 2024. Maya Sandu will probably run for re-election. Other potential candidates are Igor Dodonn, former president from 2016 to 2020 and the head of Moldova's pro-Russian opposition, Irina Vlah, Governor of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, and journalist Natalia Morari.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is home to various languages and ethnocultural groups, frequently identified by their mother tongue. The two most dominant are the Zulu and Xhosa. The country is a parliamentary representative democratic republic, wherein the President, elected by Parliament, is the head of government.

According to the World Bank's data, in 2021, 72% of the population used to access the Internet. Research by the Carter Center indicates that in the 2019 elections, although more South Africans used Facebook than Twitter, they perceived Twitter as the predominant platform for political discourse. The French media The Observers reported disinformation content during August 2019 xenophobic episodes, such as that a South African man wanted to kill a Congolese baby.

South Africa's politics have been dominated by the African National Congress Party (ANC) since the first post-apartheid election, which resulted in the victory of Nelson Mandela. The incumbent South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, is also from the ANC party. General elections will be held in South Africa in 2024 to elect a new National Assembly and the provincial legislature in each province. As in past elections, the main dispute should be between the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (DA), the country's main opposition party.

UNITED STATES

Concerning Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns, the 2016 presidential election in the United States has shown a clear change in expectations regarding the impacts

on democracy of digital communication technologies. In 2016, when Trump was first elected, he made extensive use of his Twitter account. Also, he utilized targeted advertising on the social media site Facebook by hiring political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, which later revealed that the users' personal data had been illegally used, leading to a big scandal.

In the 2020 United States presidential election, incumbent President Donald Trump and Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden's campaigns employed digital-first advertising strategies, prioritizing digital advertising over print advertising in the wake of the pandemic. After Joe Biden won the 2020 United States presidential election, Trump pursued an unprecedented effort to overturn the election, with support of the so-called MAGA base. These efforts culminated in the January United States Capitol attack by Trump supporters, which was widely described as an attempted coup d'état.

The next presidential election is scheduled for Tuesday, November 5, 2024. Leading the field of Republican presidential candidates is former President Donald Trump, who faces a battery of federal and state criminal charges related to his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss. Biden, the incumbent president, is the presumptive Democratic nominee, and he will be 81 when the election is held, making him the oldest American to win a presidential election should he secure a second term.

TUDO BEM! TIPS FOR VISITORS

TIPS BEFORE ARRIVAL

Megan O'Neil and Caroline Pecoraro have been helping most of our visitors with their flights and hotels. Please continue to direct your travel-related questions to Megan O'Neil (mmoneil@umass.edu) or Caroline Pecoraro (carolpecoraro@gmail.com)

November is typically a hot month leading up to Summer, which starts in December. However, in the past few days we have been experiencing a strong heatwave that is averaging unusually high temperatures of 40º celsius (104 F) during the day. We suggest wearing summer attire, light fabrics (i,e., cotton and linen). Make sure you have sunblock and bottled water ready (We advise bottled water rather than drinking from the tap).

Electronics: Slideshow equipment will be provided by the university. Make sure you bring a travel adapter for types C and N: https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/guidance/advice-for-you/when-travelling/travel-adaptor-for-brazil/.

Participants are billeted in two hotels: the Ritz and the Palladium, both within 5 minutes from each other and 10 minutes from the venue.

WHILE IN RIO

The organization committee is setting up roundtrip transportation from the official hotels (Ritz and Palladium) to the university. The event will be held at **Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro**. The university is located at **225 Marquês de São Vicente St**, in the beautiful neighborhood of Gávea.

The first day of the event is scheduled for the **RDC Auditorium**, which is located on the second floor of the "Rio Data Centro" building. We are going to lunch and dine at the **Kitchen Cafe**, a restaurant within the campus and have a lovely cocktail at the **rooftop of the Technology and Science Center**.

The second day is going to be held at a different location. The morning session will be located at the **IAG Building, third floor of the Business School**. During the afternoon, the event moves to five breakout sessions. We will be directed to five classrooms of the **Communication Department, located in the Kennedy Building**.

Lunch, dinner and cocktails are scheduled in the same locations for both days.

[Virtual map of the University](#)

Sites of interest, numbers in the information box:
- Entrance = 1
- RDC Auditorium = 18
- IAG Business School Auditorium = 12
- Kitchen Cafe = Gray space, left of 11
- Communication Department = 5, (Ala Kennedy Elevator to 6th floor)
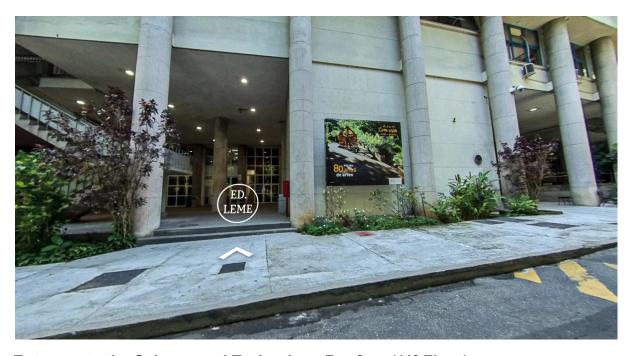
Pictures of the venues

Day 1 Rio Data Center (RDC) Auditorium (2nd floor)

Day 2 IAG Business School entrance to the Auditorium (3rd floor)

Kitchen Cafe (Lunch and Dinner)

Entrance to the Science and Technology Rooftop (11º Floor)