

Digital Political Geographies

In political geography, we study how connections between spaces produce and sustain politics, power, and hierarchies. In the study of digital political geography, we trace space not only in traditional territories but also in virtual/ digital territories, which include (among others) digital platforms, social media, surveillance, biometrics, immigration/border controls, as well as in big-tech, big data (AI), blockchain, and machine learning spaces.

The thesis will trace the ubiquity, impacts, and power of digital geographies to unpack where they are produced, how they are disseminated, and what effects they create in private and political lives globally or in specific spatial contexts. The thesis will pay particular attention to how and why digital geographies change or become entangled with traditional political geographies of states, borders, territories, migration, and diverse political systems — from democracies to authoritarian regimes; and from national elections to military coups.

A master's thesis on digital political geography may work with single or multiple case studies, and engage with feminist and critical concepts in digital and political geographies. A thesis may, but is not limited, to focus on certain sub-themes:

1. **Social media political geographies:** The thesis may explore the extent to which social media changed political landscapes in specific sites. Research questions can investigate the relationship between digital media and political mobilization; the dual edges of control and spiralling-out-of-control in political misinformation; the dominance of silicon Billionaires and 'Metaverse' like social media companies in fragile political geographies; and the impacts of social media on elections globally. Case studies on Asia are particularly encouraged, but the student may choose to work on cases of their choice. For an example: "*WhatsApp Nationalism: Exploring the geographies of digital Hindutva in India.*"; or "Facebook's role in Myanmar's Rohingya citizenship crisis/military coup"; or "exploring information and misinformation on Ukraine's invasion"; 'Social (media) movements' are possible topics.
2. **Geographies of data mining, surveillance, and migrant controls:** Theses focusing on this will locate how the virtual expansions of algorithms, machine learning, surveillance capitalism, biometrics, and big data both defy and come to intersect with traditional political geographies of sovereign space, state, borders, bodies, and territories. For example, students can research how Chinese biometrics hardware is used



in all of the border control and ‘Frontex’ infrastructure; as well as how biometrics and surveillance technologies are changing and controlling migrant flows (for example in the Middle East or in the US-Mexico Borders).

Research Methods:

Fieldwork (largely interview style and ethnographic work) on the sites where these technologies are produced and disseminated (Silicon Valley with focus on specific apps, services, or start-ups; fieldwork in Asia, Africa, Middle East, US). Virtual interviews, discourse analysis, or work with large social media data sets will also be supported. Interested students may also come to discuss case studies/themes of their interest on the theme of digital political geography.

Key texts:

- Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. London: Profile Books.
- Amore, L. (2021). The deep border. *Political Geography*, 102547. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102547>
- D’Ignazio, C., & Klein, L. F. (2020). *Data feminism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Language: English

Supervision: Please get in touch with **Jasnea Sarma** (jasnea.sarma@geo.uzh.ch) if you are interested to write a master’s thesis on this topic.