

The University of Chicago Department of Sociology

*The Great Mediation: Perspectives on
Politics and the New Media*

Graduate Student Virtual Conference
May 6th and 7th, 2021
Call for Papers

Keynote Speakers:

Francesca Polletta
Professor of Sociology
University of California, Irvine

Chris Bail
Professor of Sociology and Public Policy
Duke University

Conference Theme

Recent populist movements have heavily relied on online mobilization. While there is a consensus that the new media environment is implicated in their success, theories and especially empirical research into the connections between populism, political affiliation and digital mediation often remain astoundingly superficial. In what ways is the media environment of the 21st century recasting the political? How does digital mediation, as through contemporary social media, transform notions of statehood and political leadership, reconfigure voting blocs and political alliances, and provide new avenues of mobilization and resistance? How, if at all, is the new information environment reshaping the organizational structure through which politics operates, as in parties and movements? And ultimately, how does it shape how people conceive of, relate to and feel about politics and political leadership?

We invite individual papers from graduate students engaged in scholarly projects focused on these questions primarily, but not exclusively, employing qualitative methods. Sociology has attended to such radical transformations through online communication. Most of this research has been conducted within a computational paradigm—often drawing on large data sets and

focused on the online medium itself, such as Facebook or Twitter. While these studies have yielded great insights, we think that qualitative approaches are well-equipped to answer the questions raised above. It is our hope that bringing into conversation theoretically-driven, empirically grounded scholarship across a variety of disciplinary contexts will promote deeper understanding and richer theorization of the social processes undergirding the contemporary populist and authoritarian surge.

We seek paper proposals from graduate students whose research questions the relationship between digital media and political mobilization. Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

- The impact of online media on offline interaction between politicians, political entrepreneurs, and voters
- The use and embeddedness of online media in electoral and other campaigning (elections, protests, political violence, etc.)
- The interaction between spatial and online political mobilization (the importance of local publics etc.)
- Interview-based or ethnographic insight into media, information, and validation practices of online media users
- Stratification and divergences in digital media use (by social class, by age/generation, etc)
- Online/offline studies of information/disinformation/re-information
- The emergence of online (political) communities and networks (groups, fora, etc.) centering users' perspectives
- The offline embedding of political mobilizations substantially based on digital media, such as recent anti-containment measure mobilizations
- The online/offline operations of campaigns trying to combat and control consequences of online political mobilization
- New epistemologies and the emergence of knowledge and interpretative communities

Conference Format

The conference will be held on May 6th and 7th over two days of conversation. Each day will feature two moderated student panel discussions and a keynote speaker. Panels will consist of 2-4 student presentations, with a UChicago faculty member serving as a discussant. Presenters will be given as 15-minutes each, followed by Q&A.

Submissions and Selection

Graduate students are invited to submit an extended abstract of 1000 words, along with their CV. All abstracts and CVs should be submitted to thegreatmediation.conference@gmail.com by March 7th, 2021. Proposals will be selected based on their quality and connection with the conference theme. Approved presenters will be notified by March 19th, 2021. All selected participants must submit their final papers by April 19th, so that they can be shared with the other panel members and discussants for feedback.

Contact

Please feel free to direct any question or comment to:

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Organizers

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*Sponsors: The University of Chicago Department of Sociology, The Society for Social Research (SSR),
The Chicago Center on Democracy*