Call for Papers

Media, Technology, and Democracy in Historical Context
A Media & Democracy Workshop
New York City  |  December 13–14, 2018

INTRODUCTION

If you consult recent headlines, the news media is in crisis, and the problems are manifold: disruptive changes to media technology, the spread of misleading news, and anonymous harassment of public figures are causing serious concerns about the quality and trajectory of our democracy and the place of the news media in it. At the same time, these phenomena are not new; disruptions, falsehoods, and harassment have been topics of public concern at various moments throughout the history of media and democracy.

How does the current moment, dominated by concerns over the rise of social media, the prevalence of online harassment, the commercial viability of the print press, and the loss of local journalism, compare to previous moments of crisis? Which developments have echoes in the past, and which concerns are truly novel or unprecedented?

WORKSHOP THEME

To encourage historically informed research on the impact of recent technological changes on both media and democracy, the Media & Democracy program at the Social Science Research Council is proud to announce an open call for papers for a research workshop to be held in New York City on December 13–14, 2018.

This workshop will convene social scientists and humanities scholars whose work on the relationship between media and democracy is informed by historical comparisons and can speak—directly or indirectly—to current concerns in this area. Journalists and other practitioners working on in-depth treatments of these questions are also welcome to apply. Substantive research themes may include but are not limited to the following topics:

Disruptive technological changes in historical perspective:

• Which features of the current decline in the viability of print media and local journalism have parallels in history? How are changes in the viability, reach, and virality of news similar to or different from the past? What are the implications for democracy today?
Fake news and information wars in historical context:

- Current concerns over “fake news” and misinformation can be usefully placed in the context of a more long-standing concern among social scientists: that most citizens of mass democracies are not deeply informed about public affairs. What, if anything, should we be newly concerned about when it comes to contemporary disinformation campaigns? What policy solutions can we derive from better understanding the causes and consequences of prominent disinformation campaigns?

Trust in the media and a “shared reality”:

- Trust in the traditional news media has dropped and is now divided by political party. Compared to the recent past, to what extent do Americans still live in a “shared reality”? Are so-called media bubbles more defined than they were in the past? What are the consequences for democratic discourse?

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

The workshop will be held in New York City on December 13–14, 2018. Applications are due August 10, 2018. All travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the organizers. Accepted participants will be notified of decisions no later than September 10, 2018, and will be expected to provide draft manuscripts for circulation to other attendees by November 30, 2018.

The workshop will focus on providing each participant with in-depth peer review and an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with like-minded scholars. All attendees will be expected to read conference materials ahead of time; presentation time will be very limited and sessions will focus on in-depth discussions of the submitted manuscripts.

We welcome applications from scholars across disciplines, including but not limited to history, sociology, communications studies, political science, and economics. Both junior and senior scholars are welcome to apply. In addition, we welcome applications from journalists and other practitioners working on in-depth treatments of these questions.

TO APPLY

To apply, please send the following materials to mdn@ssrc.org by August 10, 2018. Please include “Application for media, technology, and democracy workshop” in the subject line.

- Current C.V.
- An abstract of 250–500 words, describing your proposed paper submission