

ID: MSCA-19-Severs01

Discipline: Political Science

Title: Ocular democracy - how politicians and citizens talk (past each other)

Abstract: Since the publication of Bernard Manin's (1997) *The Principles of Representative Government*, political scientists routinely conceive of the people as an audience which responds to (rather than shapes) the terms that have been presented at the political stage. High levels of citizens' protest, however, invalidate assumptions regarding the passivity of its audience. In recent years, a new body of literature has also sought to demonstrate how processes of watching, listening, and commenting may foster, shape and improve democratic politics. Jeffrey Green (2010), most notably, contends that audiences can exercise an empowered gaze, exerting a disciplinary force over politicians and promoting more "authentic" forms of representation. Social media is believed to be beneficial to such a renewed style of representation: it horizontalizes the voice of politicians and citizens and weakens rigid divisions between producers (of representative claims) and audiences. At the same time, however, the pressure of being watched and monitored may promote the production of half-truths, fake smiles and hypocrisy (Ryan & Flinders 2018, 139-40). I welcome qualitative research that seeks to produce further insights into the ways in which contemporary communication technologies are affecting how citizens and politicians relate to each other, the type of interactions these technologies facilitate and how they affect the overall quality of representative democracy (in terms of, among others, transparency, responsiveness, accountability). I also welcome theoretical work on how the emphasis on political voice and the amplification of voice via social media is affecting the dialogical qualities of democracy; in particular, our ability for listening and responding (cf. Dobson 2014; Bickford 1996).

Supervisors: Eline Severs, eline.severs@vub.ac.be

Website: <https://www.vub.ac.be/en/departement/poli/research#research>

To apply: <https://www.vub.ac.be/en/european-liaison-office#apply-msca-if>