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Title : (Dis)Information and Governance

The public sphere in contemporary society has shifted dramatically in the past two decades, and these changes have had an impact on the functioning of democracy. Critically, changes in the media landscape have upset the traditional routes of communication between politics and the public: the rise of social media has disrupted the mainstream media's dominance and has allowed politics to communicate directly with the people without journalistic interference. Furthermore, the public gets its information through an ever growing number of channels, reducing the potential for a shared body of information that is available to mass audiences. At the same time, public trust in key institutions – politics and the media – seems to be waning.

It is in this context that several trends are particularly troublesome. Disinformation has proven to be a formidable challenge to contemporary societies, as it has the potential to further disrupt the adequate functioning of democracy in a multitude of ways. As such, governments at all levels have sought to combat disinformation, with varying levels of success. Moreover, the personalisation of communication has resulted in audiences that can 'tune out' of important topics altogether. This hampers the public's ability to make informed choices, particularly with regard to politics and policymaking. Moreover, the lack of information may foster political cynicism, discontent, and a general apathy towards democratic politics.

The Centre on Digitalisation, Democracy and Innovation (D2I) conducts ongoing research into these research themes. Our team has tackled a variety of questions related to the trends outlined above: how do governments address the threat of disinformation? How does disinformation affect the public's political preferences and its trust in institutions? Which actors are more prone to disseminate disinformation? How has citizens' level of political knowledge evolved over time, and how does this relate to shifts in trust, cynicism and democratic satisfaction?

The D2I centre is well embedded in both national and international networks that work on these topics: amongst others, it is part of the VUB's EDGE (Evaluating Democratic Governance in Europe) network, the Eutopia network, and collaborates in the RepResent (Representation and Democratic Resentment) project. This allows the D2I centre researchers access to prominent networks that bring together leading scholars working on these themes. Therefore, the centre warmly invites researchers that work on one or more of these topics. We welcome a variety of methodological approaches, as the researchers in the centre embrace both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

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Research Group: <https://www.researchcenterdesire.eu/>

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