

Politics, Power and Participation

(Coordinator: Sarah Chiumbu and Suzy Graham)

Each new wave of technology has increased access to knowledge and possibilities for deliberation. The advent of internet and social media was widely hailed as creating new opportunities to spread democracy and increase opportunities for political and civic participation. However, a more insidious threat to the freedom afforded by social media has emerged. The recent developments regarding how big data firms that are misusing data to influence electoral outcomes and other political decisions bring attention to the risks of technology in shaping discourses and participatory democracy. This shows that the way digital technology is developed, distributed, and capitalized reflects power dynamics and ongoing patterns of privilege and marginalization. Data management and search algorithms are monopolized and controlled by corporations based in the global north. As we enter another technological revolution, an analysis of who holds the power and whose interests are promoted becomes important. What issues does the fourth industrial revolution raise for politics, participation and democracy in countries of the global south? How will 4IR and related technologies be employed, or exploited, by competitive political parties in vibrant democracies? How will the mainstream powers' structure in international political economy: knowledge, production, finance and security, be informed by or lead in the discourse of politics and the fourth industrial revolution?