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Private Voting, Public Opinion and Political Uncertainty in the Age of Social Media

Privater Wahlakt, öffentliche Meinung und politische Unsicherheit im Zeitalter Sozialer Medien

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Abstract: Before the advent of social media and big data analytics, the right to vote under conditions of ballot secrecy ensured a complementary relationship between the privacy of the voting act and political self-observation as a second-order observation in democratic political systems. Key to this relationship is the notion of public opinion. This notion and its relevance for professional political actors in dealing with political uncertainty are at stake in the age of social media. The privacy of the voting act becomes a problem once it is believed to be subject to the overriding influence of algorithmic recommendation and targeted advertising.

Keywords: Big Data; Democracy; Elections; Political Campaigning; Privacy; Public Opinion; Social Media.

Zusammenfassung: Vor der Verbreitung von Sozialen Medien und Big-Data-Analysen sorgte das allgemeine Wahlrecht in Verbindung mit dem Wahlgeheimnis in demokratischen politischen Systemen für eine komplementäre Beziehung zwischen der Privatheit des Wahlaktes und der politischen Selbstbeobachtung als Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung. Der Schlüssel für diese Beziehung ist die Idee der öffentlichen Meinung. Diese Idee und ihre Bedeutung für professionelle politische Akteure, die mit politischer Unsicherheit umgehen müssen, stehen im Zeitalter der Sozialen Medien in Frage. Die Privatheit des Wahlaktes wird zum Problem, wenn sich der Glaube verbreitet, dass algorithmenbasierte Empfehlungen und gezielte Werbung das Wahlverhalten entscheidend beeinflussen.

Schlüsselwörter: Big Data; Demokratie; öffentliche Meinung; politische Kampagnen; Privatheit; Soziale Medien.

1 Introduction

Political communication has changed and continues to change with the spread of social media.[1] It is said to be taking place in filter bubbles (Pariser 2011) and echo chambers (Jamieson & Cappella 2010) and to be increasingly polarized and deliberately misleading (Spohr 2017). Empirical research has started to question many of these claims (Barberá et al. 2015; Eady et al. 2019; Nelson & Webster 2017).

While extremely valuable for understanding the impact of social media on politics, this type of research does not usually take into account the fact that its objects of investigation have become familiar themes of political communication themselves, linked to anxieties about the future of democracy (Persily & Tucker 2020). 'Filter bubbles' and 'fake news' provide explanations for what seems to be wrong with political communication, or at least different from the times before social media, and political actors can draw on those explanations for orientation. Empirical evidence indicating that such explanations lack overall plausibility does not necessarily translate into less concern or interest on the part of politicians and parties trying to make sense of the impact of social media on their own political communication. This reflexivity suggests that social media may impact political communication and democracy not only through their possible effects

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1 The paper uses the term 'political communication' as shorthand for communications that address a political topic and/or are attributed to a political actor. Such communications occur both in the political system and the media system, but are selected and concatenated based on a different set of logic in each (see Japp & Kusche 2004).

on users but also through the notions that professional political actors have about users as audiences and about how they are influenced by social media.

The reflexive relationship between political audiences, on the one hand, and the understanding that professional political actors have of these audiences, on the other hand, has been a key element of systems-theoretical descriptions of democratic politics and the role of public opinion in it. Systems theory has emphasized the function of public opinion for the self-observation of professional political actors. It has linked this function to the political uncertainty created by democratic elections and the secrecy of the ballot (Luhmann 1983, 1990); however, it has almost exclusively focused on mass media as the conduit of public opinion. Expanding this perspective towards including social media and the role of big data in shaping these media offers an alternative to focusing on isolated concepts like the filter bubble or general comparisons between mass media and social media (van Dijck & Poell 2013).

Accepting the supposition that the widespread use of social media has important consequences for political communication and thus the political system itself, a focus on the notion of public opinion highlights that these consequences are not the direct result of inherent features of social media platforms. The consequences depend on how professional political actors observe the affordances of social media platforms and how they adjust their political communication according to the social media effects they *expect*. What we therefore need to explore is how established ideas within the political system regarding the political public and public opinion are destabilized by ideas about what social media can do. That means focusing on how the affordances of social media are *observed politically* and how the observation of the political public or public opinion is challenged or even undermined as a result. Importantly, this focus on public opinion does not amount to restating the problem as one of differences between the opinions visible on social media and 'real' public opinion (Papakyriakopoulos et al. 2020). Instead, it assumes that public opinion has always been an internal construct of the political system, which is why distinctions like real/biased miss the crucial question, namely whether this construct can maintain its former plausibility and usefulness within the political system once political communication takes place in social media to a significant degree.

The article draws on systems-theoretical thinking to make two points regarding a link between political uncertainty about (re-)election, political communication and media, both related to the distinction between privacy and publicness. The first is the interdependence of social media and big data analytics, which is structurally different from the entanglement of mass media coverage and opinion surveys that was typical for the observation of public opinion in the age of mass media (2.). The second, related point is that the knowledge derived from such big data promises insights into individual opinions and preferences, which would have been considered deeply private before the advent of social media, to platforms and their advertising clients. In the context of politics, the secrecy of the ballot, i. e. the privacy of individual political preferences, is a prerequisite for the necessity to observe and care about what we call public opinion (3.). The combination of social media and big data thus affects the political construct of public opinion in two ways: On the one hand, it may reduce opportunities for political self-observation by displacing or weakening the role of mass media, offering professional political actors the opportunity to employ microtargeting and opaque political communication (4.). On the other hand, it may reduce the political demand for such self-observation by altering political beliefs about how the electorate can be understood (5.).

2 Between Publicness and Privacy: Voting, Polling, Tracking

The use of opinion polls and statistics to gauge the preferences and priorities of the electorate has been a standard instrument in the planning of political campaigns for many decades (Delli Carpini 2011). It reduces the uncertainty about a party's or candidate's chances for (re-)election. What may be less obvious at first sight is that mass media have always mediated this function of opinion polls. Firstly, mass media commission opinion polls of their own and report their results (Firmstone & Corner 2017; Ismach 1984). Although they may use different pollsters and aim for newsworthy findings instead of ways to secure political power, such polls are in principle very similar to the polls used by parties and politicians. Secondly, the questions with which respondents are presented in polls have to make sense to the respondents in order to lead to meaningful responses. The methodological assumption that this is the case is plausible because such questions predominantly refer to topics and personalities known from the political coverage of mass media. Thirdly, the knowledge that political actors draw from opinion polls informs their performance in and for mass media, in terms of both content and mode of presentation (Kusche 2008: 137–166).

The use of opinion polls in electoral campaigns is thus an instance of how the distinction between public and

private underlies the process of selecting people for political office in democracies. The electoral procedure itself intricately balances the public and the private. On the one hand, most of the steps involved are required to be public, as the German Federal Constitutional Court underlined in its decision on electronic voting machines (BVerfG 2009). The court highlighted that the publicness of elections is a precondition for the democratic formation of the political will, ensuring that the electoral procedure is transparent and comprehensible to the electorate. On the other hand, there is a crucial exemption from this requirement for publicness and transparency, namely the act of casting the ballot itself. It is an emphatically private act, and this privacy is a prerequisite of democratic elections in the same way in which the publicness of all other steps of the electoral procedure is.

For scholars focusing on concepts of privacy, the secret ballot is an example of the societal, as opposed to the purely individual, value of privacy (Westin 1967; Regan 1995; Raab 2012). Privacy in this context means control of access to personal information (Rössler 2012: 103), i. e. information privacy (Raab 2012). The societal value of the secret ballot as an instantiation of privacy lies in the constitutive function that the private casting of the vote plays in establishing the voter as a separate political role, complementing the role of politician. While the role of politician, which entails the intent of taking political office, is not restricted to liberal democracies, the complementary lay role of the voter, who decides on the occupants of political office, is only relevant in and indispensable for democratic political systems (Stichweh 1988). Luhmann (1983) offers a detailed account of the link between ballot secrecy, the role of the voter, and the differentiation of the political system. The privacy of the voting act has the function to safeguard the autonomy of both voters and political decision-makers. In functional terms, voting is the action linked to a specific role, the role of voter. Ballot secrecy ensures that this role is fulfilled independently from obligations linked to other societal roles (Luhmann 1983: 159–160). It means that voters cannot be held accountable by anyone for their choice at the ballot box. This autonomy on the part of the voters is in turn the precondition for the corresponding autonomy of the politicians selected for office (Luhmann 1983: 162–164). Due to the privacy of the voting act, a government cannot deduce from the election result who has voted for them and for which reasons. Consequently, politicians in government cannot base their decisions on direct knowledge of the implications that these decisions will have for future chances of getting re-elected. Concurrently, the government can count on generalized support, even when specific support for concrete decisions is low, since the procedure of general elections legitimates decisions of the elected government (Luhmann 1983). To the extent to which this generalization of support is successful, decision-making in the political system is relatively autonomous with regard to particular interests.[2]

Opinion polls mimic the privacy of the ballot by avoiding the collection of information that could render individuals identifiable and by assuring participants that their responses will be recorded and processed in anonymous form only. Even if it were possible to include personal information about respondents, it would not be desirable for pollsters to do so since it would make the political opinion poll more dissimilar to elections. The whole idea of sampling is based on the assumption that the distribution of answers in the aggregate of respondents in a poll should ideally be the same as the distribution if the whole electorate had participated in that poll. Opinion polls obviously ask for much more information than a ballot. Not only do they elicit statements about future voting intentions but they also ask respondents about their opinions on various political issues, politicians and parties. In other words, they aim to provide information that makes it possible to connect vote choice with motives for vote choice, looking for precisely the kind of links between the role of the voter and other social roles that ballot secrecy renders invisible in the election itself. The results of opinion polls vary in terms of publicness; some may be restricted to a narrow circle of campaign strategists (Jacobs & Shapiro 1994), while others may be distributed among all members of a party. In any case, the regular use of political opinion polls by media outlets ensures in parallel that the kind of information generated by polls is part of the mass media coverage of politics (Holtz-Bacha & Strömbäck 2012).

In the context of social media and their use in political campaigning, privacy and publicness relate to each other in a completely different manner. The business model of all current major internet platforms is based on tracking user behavior and creating as much individual-level data as possible. The eventual goal is to sell paying customers the opportunity to target those users with their advertising who are most likely to be responsive to it, including adver-

2 In a similar vein, although not explicitly referring to the example of politics, Rössler (2012) demonstrates how social roles and the requirements that go with them also include role-specific requirements regarding information that is (not) shared with others. Nissenbaum's (2010) argument about varying normative expectations regarding privacy, depending on the social context, is also compatible with Luhmann's emphasis on the importance of ballot secrecy for establishing and preserving one such context.

tising with political content (Zuboff 2019). Machine-learning algorithms render it feasible to make inferences about deeply personal characteristics and preferences, even when users have never explicitly stated this information online (Kosinski et al. 2013). The inferences made from so-called big data, amassed as part of the normal operation of social media platforms and other online services, are not necessarily correct, but no matter whether they are, they are used to determine which advertisements and which news stories and posts users see online (Stark 2018).

The feasibility of tracking user behavior online has implications for privacy in general, which are usually viewed through one of two lenses. The first focuses on the potentials and limits of regulation in protecting the individual right to privacy in times of big data analytics. Governmental data protection experts (e. g. the European Data Protection Supervisor) as well as non-governmental activists and organizations (e. g. NOYB, Future of Privacy Forum, AlgorithmWatch) have criticized the opacity of data mining and the inferences made from it (Veale et al. 2018; Wachter 2019). They have demanded more transparency for individual users and insisted on the individual right to decide which personal data companies may use. In the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which entered into force in May 2018, is an important step in this direction. However, it frames privacy issues as a matter of individual rights and their possible violation, not taking into account that privacy may also have societal value (Nissenbaum 2010; Rössler 2012).

The second lens focuses on the wider implications that the large-scale use of personal data has for society (e. g. Zuboff 2019). Surveillance and algorithmic governmentality (Aradau & Blanke 2017; Lyon 2014; Rouvroy & Berns 2013) are prominent theoretical notions employed to grasp the impact that the use of big data for targeting products and messages to individuals has on macro patterns of communication and subjectivation. These notions tend to sidestep the question of privacy as a right, implicitly treating it as inconsequential in the face of the overwhelming power that existing assemblages for monitoring and prediction seemingly have over individual behavior online and offline. Concurrently, proposals to understand privacy not only as an individual right but also as a societal value have gained traction (Nissenbaum 2010, 2019; Rössler 2012).

The Facebook/Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018 (Cadwalladr 2019) drew broader public attention to the societal impact that the business model of internet platforms potentially has, namely its political dimension. On the face of it, the scandal was about a massive data breach at Facebook, from which the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica had harvested the data of 87 million user profiles without authorization. However, public concern was triggered because Cambridge Analytica claimed to be able to combine Facebook data with psychological models and create individual user profiles for targeted political advertising. Due to connections with both the Trump campaign in the US and the campaigns in favor of Brexit in the UK, the possibility that big data analytics of user behavior on social media might impact elections and referendums seemed to amount to a fundamental threat to democracy (House of Commons 2018).

Although subsequent enquiries, especially in the UK, concluded that the claims of Cambridge Analytica regarding their targeting capabilities had been hugely exaggerated, the implications of the scandal remain relevant. It highlighted that it makes no difference for the business model of internet platforms whether the content of the advertising it enables is related to a political issue or a pair of shoes, but that the inclusion of political content in the business model could have serious negative implications for the democratic process (ICO 2018).

This poses a theoretical challenge, namely the need to be more specific with regard to the impact of social media and big data on democratic politics. Both Nissenbaum's (2010) notion of privacy in social contexts and Rössler's (2012) observations on the value of information privacy to enable different types of social relations suggest treating privacy not just from the point of view of the individual. However, both researchers seem less interested in the role of privacy in the political realm, possibly because they assume that normative democratic theory is sufficiently equipped to cover it. Yet, the precise implications of democratic norms remain unclear when it is not (only) the state that potentially infringes privacy but rather internet companies selling advertising opportunities and when the consequences potentially affect the democratic foundation of that state.

Systems theory offers a perspective on both ballot secrecy in conjunction with the autonomy of democratic politics (Luhmann 1983) and fundamental rights (Luhmann 1986). It suggests that a promising way to discuss the kind of privacy afforded and not afforded by social media platforms and the consequences for democratic politics is to reflect on the *function* of the right to privacy for the autonomy of societal subsystems, politics among them.

From this point of view, the right to privacy is one instance of fundamental rights, commonly understood as safeguards for individuals, but also protecting the functional differentiation of society that corresponds with individual freedoms. Individuals move between different

spheres of meaning and play different roles depending on whether they engage in economic transactions, accept or are involved in decisions backed by a state apparatus and its coercive power, or learn or teach in schools or universities. Concomitantly, the differentiation of specialized spheres of meaning and communication, such as the economy, politics or the system of education, is dependent on the ability of individuals to switch between roles and increasingly different rules and rationalities attached to them (Luhmann 1986; Verschraegen 2002).

Functional differentiation is neither deterministic nor inevitable. It is only maintained as long as no function system dominates and intrudes on the operations of others. Luhmann (1986: 23–24) sees the political system, and more specifically the state, as the main potential trigger of de-differentiation and fundamental rights as the safeguards against it. In contrast, Graber and Teubner (1998) point out that other spheres, for example the economy or science, can also be the origin of totalizing tendencies. Their early warning against "Silicon Valley, the symbol for a close symbiosis between economic profit and scientific truth" (Graber & Teubner 1998: 69) has only gained in plausibility with the advent of big data and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019).

Luhmann (1986: 53–83) interprets the right to privacy as a derivative of the fundamental rights to freedom and dignity and identifies their common societal function as safeguarding the individualized presentation of self. A presentation of self that attributes actions to free choices and is relatively consistent over time is, according to Luhmann (1986: 61–63, 71), a prerequisite for personal identities that can both substantiate and bridge expectations linked to the divergent roles that individuals take on in a functionally differentiated society. Drawing on Goffman (1971, 1972), Luhmann (1986: 67) sees the consistent presentation of self as constantly threatened by slips and missteps that provide contradicting and therefore embarrassing information about the individual. Considering this, the right to dignity implies the right to informational privacy in the sense of a backstage (Goffman 1971) to which others do not have access since such access could discredit the public presentation of self.

According to Rössler (2012), distinctive arrangements regarding the information that is considered backstage as opposed to frontstage are also part of the expectations attached to specific roles. The question of privacy versus publicness in connection with social media is likely to be dismissed too easily if this link to role definitions is ignored. There is no indication that social media undermine the basis for an individualized presentation of self; in many ways, they even encourage it (Suler 2017). The ubiquity of social media certainly poses new questions regarding the presentation of self (Hogan 2010), especially related to the risk of oversharing private information (Persson 2012) and the consequences of public shaming (Ronson 2016). These questions may be especially pertinent if the information shared concerns political views and preferences. Yet, the decision to (not) share information on social media rests with the individual.

Safeguarding the individualized presentation of self against eavesdropping on social media conversations that users intend to keep private is not much of a problem, either. In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook (now Meta), the company also owning Instagram and WhatsApp and thus currently the major player in social media, even announced "a privacy-focused vision for social networking" (Facebook 2019), promising to extend end-to-end encryption from WhatsApp to private interactions on its other social networking platforms. This measure speaks directly to Luhmann's (1986: 53–83) original concern about maintaining a distinction between frontstage and backstage. The privacy focus outlined by Facebook offers improved protection against state surveillance and thus corresponds with the assumption that the major potential for de-differentiation originates in totalizing tendencies of the political system.

Yet the privacy-related aspect of the Cambridge Analytica scandal did not only concern the distinction between frontstage and backstage in everyday life but specifically the privacy of political preferences and thus voting intentions and motives. What is at stake with regard to democratic politics is the link between the role of the voter and the privacy that this role requires in some respects (Nissenbaum 2019: 249). It is potentially endangered, not by being dragged to the frontstage of publicness, but by the harvesting and analysis of user data, especially metadata not affected by end-to-end encryption, on an unprecedented scale and by using the data to target users with political advertising customized according to inferred preferences. The distinction relevant for understanding the political implications of tracking is therefore not privacy versus publicness in general. What is relevant is the distinction between a specific form of publicness, concomitant with the privacy of the voting act, and the opacity that social media platforms afford to political communication and to the political actors communicating there.

3 Public Opinion, the Political Public and Political Self-Observation

Although the Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018 did not involve an infringement on the privacy of the voting act as such, initial reactions to it suggested that this privacy could become meaningless once the analysis of big data collected from users' activities on social media is used to make inferences about political preferences and voting intentions possible (ICO 2018). Although ballot secrecy never precluded making inferences about likely partisans and supporters and the likely effects of political decisions on future votes, there are two possible reasons why the privacy of the voting act could become inconsequential in the wake of big data analytics. The first reason would be unprecedented degrees of accuracy and granularity of inferences. Many of the concerns about big data analytics in politics revolve around this possibility (Bennett 2015; Bartlett et al. 2018), but it is far from clear how accurate and granular the inferences used in political campaigns actually are (Hersh 2015; Baldwin-Philippi 2019). Social media platforms selling opportunities for targeted advertising and big data analysts selling their services to perfect such targeting are prone to overstating what they can achieve in terms of precision and impact. In the following, the paper leaves this controversial issue aside, assuming that at least for now, inferences about political preferences based on big data are not accurate enough to allow predictions about individual vote choice with certainty and thus render ballot secrecy inconsequential.

However, there is a second possible reason why such predictions might render ballot secrecy inconsequential. It only comes into view when considering the link between ballot secrecy, the role of the voter, and the differentiation of the political system. The privacy of the voting act may become inconsequential if its link to a specific type of publicness, which ballot secrecy previously implied for political communication, is severed, namely the link to a continuous self-observation of the political system based on the notion of public opinion.

The electorate only communicates on Election Day, and because of ballot secrecy, this communication can only be observed in an aggregate form, which invites its interpretation as the communication of a collectivity that remains elusive between elections. In the age of mass media, the notions of a political public and public opinion served as a proxy for political parties and politicians to gauge their chances for (re-)election and make decisions that might affect these chances. One extreme position in research would simply equate public opinion with the results of opinion polls. At the other extreme, Luhmann (1990, 2000) hardly pays any attention to the role of opinion polls in reducing the uncertainty of political decision-making and posits that public opinion is an internal construct of the political system, the construction of which is mainly based on observing mass media. Disagreement is not restricted to the social sciences. Political actors themselves understand public opinion in a variety of ways, ranging from polls, representations by interest groups and mass media coverage to feedback from individual voters as part of constituency work (Herbst 1998).

Similar disagreement exists with regard to the related notion of the public, which sometimes is taken to mean a totality of people, for example a country's citizens and sometimes a concrete audience in a visible space. Between these understandings would be publics that only come into being in relation to communications addressed to them as strangers whose only commonality is their attentiveness to those communications (Warner 2002: 49–51). As Warner (2002) points out, these meanings overlap in practice, and the overlap is part of the phenomenon. Luhmann (1990, 2000) follows the same intuition when he focuses on the role of mass media in the construction of public opinion as a stand-in for the electorate. The mass media are a system in which communications circulate that are addressed to an unspecified public, which is assumed to be interested in new information and attentive to it. The electorate is the collectivity of citizens to which electoral results are attributed.

Against this backdrop, Luhmann (1990, 2000) stresses a crucial aspect of public opinion, understood in this way, namely that it primarily enables the mutual observation of political competitors. The observation is public in the sense that it takes place assuming the presence of an audience that is attentive to the issues raised and the positions taken by political competitors. Yet, the communications observing each other and reacting to one another are those of professional political actors. This mirroring or self-observation function of public opinion is linked to the secrecy of the ballot (Luhmann 1983). Political actors have to focus on what political competitors communicate and do, because the will of the electorate, as it is constituted at the ballot box, is opaque, and in an attempt to reduce uncertainty about future chances of (re-)election, expectations about voters' expectations need to find orientation elsewhere. While Bourdieu (2001) makes a similar point in his analysis of the political field, what Luhmann emphasizes is the part that mass media play in the observation of political competitors.

When parties and politicians observe themselves in relation to the issues that other parties and politicians attempt to put on the political agenda and to others' contributions to political debates, the effect amounts to continuous self-observation of politics. This self-observation concerns potential issues for political decision-making as well as the reputation or image that political parties and politicians have or seek with regard to dealing with these issues (Kusche 2008: 144–149). On the one hand, it is a second-order observation that takes place within the political system and only involves professional political actors. Yet on the other hand, it presumes "that results of communication (knowledge, preferences, self-appraisals and appraisal of others, etc.) determine the attitudes of an audience (which remains indeterminate in detail) and thereby form the basis of further communication." (Luhmann 2000: 286; translation by author) This assumption and thus the publicness of political self-observation depends on the role of mass media in reporting on political news and position-taking by political actors for an audience of viewers, listeners and readers, who may turn to mass media also or even primarily for entertainment but for whom a minimal exposure to political coverage can be expected.[3]

This political public, whose opinions are supposed to be influenced by political competitors' communications, is a construct of the political system. It links second-order observation through the observation of mass media coverage to the electorate as it manifests on Election Day. As a construct, it gives orientation to political communications. The assumption of a political public, i. e. the specific publicness of political communication that is concomitant with ballot secrecy, has a disciplining effect. It implies the need to avoid suspicions of particularistic motives for taking certain positions and pushing certain topics (Luhmann 2000: 291). Political competitors as well as critical journalists could otherwise denounce communications as serving special interests. The anticipation that a broad audience will be exposed to political news facilitates an understanding of public opinion as something different from individual opinion and preference. Either parties appeal to large parts of the electorate with messages deemed sufficiently general to resonate with many voters, or they focus on a specific voter segment with messages that other voters will tend not to like. Both variants convey the idea that the interests of individual voters hardly have a chance of being translated into specific decisions of an elected government, in the first case because these interests are only invoked on a highly generalized level, and in the second case because the existence of diverse and incompatible interests is made explicit.

Although the result is a far cry from a public sphere in the sense of Habermas (1990), second-order observation against the backdrop of an indeterminate but susceptible public evokes and reaffirms disinterestedness or at least compromise as notions that cannot be discarded in political communication. The disciplining effect is even more effective when it comes to outright lies. In sum, the anticipation of being observed by critical others and of possible criticism being witnessed by an indeterminate audience, that is a public, determines what content of political communication is deemed too risky in terms of a possible public backlash that could reduce future chances of (re-) election.

Superficially, the use of social media and big data analytics appears to be an extension or intensification of previous practices. On the one hand, campaigns can use social media as an additional or alternative outlet for political communication. On the other hand, opinion polls are complemented by the use of big data analytics. In retrospect, polling in the context of political campaigning would appear to be a precursor to mining large amounts of data about voters' behavior in various online and offline settings and thus to 'voter surveillance' (Bennett 2015). Similarly, the statistics used to draw conclusions from polling data can be interpreted as a precursor to the use of increasingly sophisticated computer algorithms searching for patterns in big data, both of which a Foucauldian perspective identifies as instances of the predictive orientation of biopolitics and governmentality (Aradau & Blanke 2017; Rouvroy & Berns 2013). Yet, such an assessment ignores the profound implications that the combination of social media and big data analytics has for the notions of the political public and public opinion and, consequently, for political self-observation and the range of feasible content of political communication.

4 How Social Media Can Undermine Political Self-Observation

Three impediments to the mode of political self-observation that is based on the observation of mass media stand out: audience fragmentation, the role of microtargeting

3 In a similar vein, a self-declared discourse-analytical perspective states: "By the public (singular) we mean that wide variety of people (plural) whose relationship with news and politics is important not because of a specific position that they occupy within society, but because of their membership of a group which is 'imagined', in ways variously underpinned by legislation, as the national, civic collective." (Firmstone & Corner 2017: 176)

and dark ads in political campaigns, and the extent of the so-called dark social online. I will turn to them consecutively and explore how they may undermine the construct of public opinion, and the continuous political self-observation based on it, by shifting the balance between privacy and publicness. What all three have in common is that there is nothing deterministic about their effects. On the one hand, the extent of social media use varies between different demographic groups and most importantly, between countries (Newman et al. 2021). On the other hand, effects are not deterministic *because* public opinion is an internal construct of the political system. As long as political actors continue to focus their attention on mass media and treat social media simply as an additional outlet for content intended for the same general audience, the notion of public opinion retains its well-established plausibility. However, the affordances of the combination between social media and big data analytics go beyond this status quo, and there are political actors who have started making use of them.

4.1 Dynamic Audience Fragmentation

Second-order observation of political actors via mass media reduces political uncertainty because it accommodates the assumption of an indeterminate and susceptible audience that is influenced by political communication and can be taken for the collectivity constituted at the ballot box. Shifts in media consumption from mass media to social media weaken this assumption although only to the extent to which political actors become aware of or believe in such shifts.

At first sight, the shifts do not seem very different from those triggered by the introduction of private television channels in established media systems, which happened in many countries in the 1980s. According to various accounts, the following decades saw a decrease in political coverage in mass media as well as a fragmentation in audiences (Donsbach & Büttner 2005; Holtz-Bacha 1997). However, in the case of social media, audience fragmentation is not an effect of competing broadcasters but of personalized content. Such content may even be predominantly political for some users since a plethora of new sources of political information emerges with the digitalization of media. Yet, the result is not simply a multiplication of publics, paying attention to different communications and constituted as publics by their attentiveness to these communications. The notional and the empirical aspect (Warner 2002: 50–52) of social media publics diverge. Addressed and included by communications on social media are not all those who are (or would be) attentive to their content. Instead of self-organizing publics in Warner's sense, they are calculated publics (Gillespie 2014). Social media users can only be attentive to those communications that an algorithm places in their personalized feed. By definition, personalization aims at fitting the individual as best as possible; it thus runs contrary to the notion of a public as a self-organized relation between strangers that is only constituted by their common attentiveness to certain communications (Warner 2002).

The second aspect of audience fragmentation that is new concerns the way in which access to journalistic news coverage via social media – as well as search engines – is granular as opposed to packaged (Schweiger 2017: 81–85). Readers of newspapers, viewers of TV news, and users of news websites get curated collections of news, many or at least some of which they would not have sought out themselves. These collections entail a prioritization of news that is contingent but based on assumptions about what a broad audience, that is a public, might be interested in and should know about. By contrast, the news feed on social media as well as the results of a search engine query show isolated news items. They are selected by algorithms, which factor in personal user history and interests ascribed to similar users.

Content personalization is thus not devoid of references to groups. The algorithms analyzing user data draw inferences not by observing individuals in isolation but by identifying groups of users that are deemed similar in relevant respects. However, the groups into which individuals are placed by algorithms change constantly since they are the result of algorithmic calculations that take into account new digital traces all the time (Soffer 2019). Audience fragmentation is consequently dynamic and more radical than in the age of private television. The extent to which such fragmentation leads to 'echo chambers', where individuals would only encounter communications confirming their views, is disputed (Dubois & Blank 2018). Yet, as a common narrative about the detrimental effects of social media on politics, the fear of echo chambers highlights the increased uncertainty deriving from the dynamic fragmentation for political communication, which was previously based on the assumption of an indeterminate audience for such communication.

The third aspect of audience fragmentation is that the distinction between professional news items and political news of dubious or purely lay origin becomes blurred when all items are shown in personalized feeds. Again, it is far from clear what effects distorted or completely made-up stories about political events have on users seeing them. It is similarly unclear whether the interest in and the will-

ingness to share what is commonly called 'fake news' are due to confusion regarding reliable and unreliable sources of political information[4]. Be that as it may, suggestions on how to counter the spread of misinformation and disinformation online focus on fact-checking tools and media literacy (Graves & Mantzarlis 2020; Hameleers 2020). In other words, the negligent design of social media in conjunction with their incompetent use are framed as the main factors that alter the characteristics of the audience relevant for politics. At least parts of this audience, indeterminate in size but potentially huge, are no longer expected to be influenced by the political communication resulting from second-order observation between political competitors. This raises the question of what may influence them instead, with one answer pointing to sinister dark ads.

4.2 Dark Ads and Microtargeting

As long as political communication can and must assume an indeterminate audience, any statement in favor of narrow interests runs the risk of being exposed as particularistic by a second-order observation. In contrast, communication on social media is largely unaffected by such disciplining effects because of dynamic audience fragmentation. The audience for any particular message, whether it is political news or advertising, is determined by inferences that algorithms make about users' interests. Obviously, algorithms do not necessarily get it right; their model of an audience is as much a construct as a public opinion based on the observation of mass media is (Hersh 2015). Yet, the fundamental assumption of algorithmic models is not an indeterminate audience but an audience that can be segmented at will according to a myriad of criteria, such as age, gender, geolocation, issue interests, media consumption patterns, political profiles, or hobbies (Chester & Montgomery 2017; Kim et al. 2018). The promise of social media in conjunction with big data is to show any member of the audience only the content they are interested in and, correspondingly, to reach any determinate audience required. This audience may well be a political audience, assumed to be susceptible to political content. However, the characteristics and size of such an audience are circumscribed by the intended targeting, which aims to match particularistic audiences with particularistic messages. Political communications can now evade second-order observation in view of an indeterminate audience and count on audiences pre-defined by (the right) algorithms. They can thus address extremely narrow interests and opt for outright lies as long as those communications remain confined to the determinate audience deemed susceptible to their content in particular. The targeted political ad on social media, making full use of targeted advertising as the business model of all major internet platforms, epitomizes this potential for non-public political communications.

The term 'dark ad' (Revell 2017) stresses its opacity, which persists as long as the ad is not also made public on a website accessible to an indeterminate audience. People outside the target group do not know about such an ad; people within the target group see the ad but do not know who else was exposed to it. The latter group may even mistake it for a communication addressed to an indeterminate and unlimited audience. Yet even if members of the target group realize they are being targeted, the information available to them as to why they are is too unspecific for them to infer the particular characteristics attributed to them by the social media platform.

Of course, non-public communication has always played a role in politics. A notorious example is lobbying, which uses, though not exclusively, non-public communication to influence political decisions of political actors in government and parliament (Scott 2018). A type of non-public communication to which voters are regularly exposed in election campaigns (although extent and intensity vary between and within countries) is door-to-door canvassing by candidates, party members, volunteers or paid campaign workers (Beck & Heidemann 2014; Johnston et al. 2012). What distinguishes dark ads from canvassing is their potentially massive reach in combination with the manifold possibilities to both standardize and customize messages (Bodó et al. 2017). What distinguishes dark ads from lobbying is their focus on the lay role in the political system, the voter. Different from professional political roles (Stichweh 1988), the role of the voter revolves around a single, secret, yet in the aggregate, very consequential political decision, namely the vote choice on Election Day. The idea of microtargeted political advertising is to influence either the willingness to take on this role or the choice made in fulfilling it.

The non-public character of lobbying communication has always been a concern, and in recent years, many countries have introduced legislation to make at least some of its parameters accessible to the public (Holman & Luneburg 2012) and thus to second-order observation. Yet even without lobbying registers and other transpar-

4 A recent study on the psychological motivations behind spreading 'fake news' on Twitter focused on the U.S and found no support for the hypothesis that this is done out of ignorance; instead, it suggests partisan motivations (Osmundsen et al. 2021).

ency measures, the *decisions* potentially influenced by lobbying are nevertheless public or can become public. In other words, in the end, these decisions have to stand the test of second-order observation so that the publicness of parliament ensures. In the case of dark ads, this is completely different, and necessarily so, since they target the lay role and its particular political decision-making task. The voting act needs to be private to safeguard the autonomy of both voters and political decision-makers. Yet in the age of social media and big data, the privacy of the vote is an inroad for political communication that defies second-order observation by political opponents because it does not need to be public to reach an audience.

It is against this backdrop that major internet platforms introduced partial transparency for targeted political advertising in the form of ad archives in the aftermath of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Edelson et al. 2019). The archives are freely accessible online; political parties and candidates as well as journalists can check ads for inconsistencies, contradictions or outright lies and respond to them in their own campaign communication and campaign coverage, respectively. Provided such scrutiny seems feasible in practice, anticipation of these possibilities would introduce the logic of second-order observation into targeted political advertising. Advertising decisions would then reflect the anticipated observation of social media by mass media and political opponents.

The extent to which ad archives actually facilitate second-order observation is an empirical question (Medina Serrano et al. 2020), and findings are likely to differ from country to country. Nevertheless, a few general points can be made. Firstly, the more sophisticated the use of targeting is, the more sophisticated the tools need to be to reconstruct it from ad archives. A second-order observation that is not limited to an arbitrary selection of keywords but aims at observing the agenda-setting and position-taking of a campaign in the context of other campaigns is either extremely time-consuming or requires automated access through application programming interfaces (APIs) and thus intermediation by experts (Leerssen et al. 2019).

Secondly, the information provided by archives is highly selective and especially vague regarding the origins of the money that paid for an ad campaign. In the absence of legal regulation for political advertising online, the availability of money to spend directly translates into the ability to become a political actor by addressing significant parts of the electorate with political messages. This is unprecedented at least in European democracies, where political advertising on television in particular is regulated, and the extent to which more money could buy more access to voters' living rooms is limited (Holtz-Bacha 2014). In contrast, the reach and sophistication of a microtargeted ad campaign is a question of sufficient financial resources. The implied multiplication of potential political actors is a challenge for second-order observation, which previously found orientation in party labels and high-profile politicians (Aldrich 1995).

Thirdly, no degree of transparency with regard to targeted campaign communication can change the opacity of the decision it is supposed to influence, namely the individual choice at the ballot box. Microtargeting invites the suspicion that sophisticated algorithms could open a privileged inroad into the psyches of voters and change their behavior on Election Day. Firms specializing in data analytics and trying to sell their services naturally encourage such beliefs (Beer 2018). Of course, critics have warned against the manipulative effects of advertising since the business was invented (Pollay 1986). Yet the belief in the unprecedented potential of data-driven, microtargeted political campaigns has been fostered since the first, still enthusiastic reports about the Obama campaign (Scherer 2012). It was consolidated by the publicity around the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the public enquiries following it (ICO 2018). Independent of the actual impact that microtargeted campaigns have on individual voters, this belief implies heightened uncertainty about influences on political audiences that remain invisible to second-order observation. The *option* to microtarget disrupts the established balance between privacy and publicness in relation to electoral campaigns and voting by introducing opacity where there was publicness before, namely in the political communication that is aimed at influencing the behavior of the electorate.

4.3 The Dark Social

Campaigning on social media has an additional dimension which further hampers second-order observation. Users who like a political ad or a news item do not only use features such as Facebook's Like button to signal this but can also share it with friends (Dommett & Temple 2018: 191). In fact, so-called organic content, i. e. non-sponsored posts as opposed to paid advertising, is often deemed superior in terms of expected effects on potential voters. By targeting users with a strong interest in politics, campaigns hope to reach many more people whose weak interest in politics makes them more susceptible to listening to friends than to direct campaign information (Lilleker & Jackson 2017: 298; Scammell 2014: 30–31). However, content sharing on social media cannot be limited to official campaign material. Unaffiliated supporters of a campaign or a cause may

contribute messages with uncertain effects of their own (Dommett & Temple 2018: 192–193).

Campaigns need web analytics, based on metadata linked to content, in order to track these dynamics and feed them back into decisions about campaign communication. Yet, even this technology-based second-order observation has its limits. First of all, campaigns need to know what they are looking for and may notice trending content too late to react to it in an effective way. More importantly though, closed Facebook groups, messaging apps like WhatsApp as well as e-mail function as 'dark social media', in which the spread of political messages is completely opaque (Swart et al. 2018). Dark social media are those that do not add metadata about the site or application from where a user clicks a link, which renders the tracking of sharing patterns difficult (Madrigal 2012; Swart et al. 2018). On the one hand, this seems to imply that the phenomenon now described as dark social precedes even the term 'social media': an e-mail sharing a link falls under its definition. On the other hand, before the advent of social media platforms, an e-mail was just a faster version of a letter. Nobody would have considered its invisibility to second-order observation a problem. The dark social becomes a problem once the suspicion gains ground that it encompasses a great many communications that are not public and yet capable of reaching huge audiences. Political campaigns that manage to access the dark social can use it to spread messages below the radar of public scrutiny. These messages remain opaque because they lack exposure to second-order observation and may therefore affect voters in ways to which political opponents cannot react. The more people abandon relatively open social media in favor of more closed or, in conventional terms, more private ones, the more the self-observation of the political system is thus undermined.

A recent example is the 2018 presidential campaign in Brazil, during which the campaign of the eventually successful far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro benefited from the microtargeting of WhatsApp chat groups with disinformation (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 14). Here, audience segmentation was the result of a bottom-up grouping of WhatsApp users according to common interests. Many groups could be found via links that were published on websites or public social media sites, with marketing firms specializing in collecting such information and offering targeted messaging based on it.

In an attempt to address this problem, Facebook introduced a "report" button for WhatsApp, which allows users to flag messages as violating the platform's terms of service. Hitting the button forwards the message perceived as problematic to Facebook for assessment, along with the four previous messages. The WhatsApp moderators have to choose whether to do nothing, mark the account from which the message came for further scrutiny, or ban it from the platform (Elkind et al. 2021). However, even if the spread of disinformation is slowed down in this way, it will be almost impossible to stop or effectively counter it with other messages to the same user groups[5], i. e. the same audience. Concurrently, the option to flag messages comes at the expense of relativizing Facebook's "privacy-focused vision for social networking" (Facebook 2019) since it means that parts of WhatsApp's end-to-end-encrypted content is made accessible to a third party nonetheless (Elkind et al. 2021). The trade-off highlights again how social media, particularly when used for political communication, unsettle a balance between privacy and publicness that was once taken for granted.

5 Controllable and Uncontrollable Audiences

The age of social media and big data analytics has not done away with mass media. Television, radio and newspapers continue to exist. They all form a part of an 'ecosystem of information flows' that combines old and new media logics (Chadwick 2017). As the previous section has shown, this 'ecosystem' poses a number of challenges to the political system by undermining publicness and thus political self-observation. Examples from the US and Brazil indicate that political actors opt for the opacity that social media afford campaigns. The situation elsewhere suggests that political actors may also be reluctant or even dismissive with regard to specific strategies for political communication on social media (e. g. Veneti et al. 2022).

However, *if* political actors believe in the superior capabilities of datafied, microtargeted political communication, their basic understanding of political audiences will likely change accordingly, possibly reducing or even eliminating the political demand for political self-observation as a second-order observation. An exploration of these implications cannot avoid being speculative to some extent since there is a lack of current empirical research

5 The barriers to second-order observation are even higher when significant parts of the electorate effectively lack access to alternative sources of information. As Evangelista and Bruno (2019: 14) point out, this was the case in Brazil due to the design of pre-paid plans offered by telecommunication companies. These plans permit continued free use of WhatsApp after users have used up their data volume and can no longer access the internet.

about how political actors in various countries understand public opinion in the age of social media. Yet, such speculation is reined in by the theoretical arguments presented in the previous sections.

Both democratic electoral procedures and second-order observation of political communication assume and confirm the plausibility of political audiences that are indeterminate in terms of size, preferences and interests, but not indifferent to politics (Luhmann 1983, 1990, 2000; Warner 2002). By contrast, data analytics companies, the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the political reactions to the scandal have nurtured the belief that the political audience is no longer indeterminate but in fact controllable with the help of sophisticated algorithms that continuously parse audiences according to varying criteria. Microtargeted campaigns on social media aim to personalize political communication in terms of interests addressed or emotions triggered (Kusche 2020). They *treat* the political audience as fluid but determinable with the help of dynamically updated big data and algorithms finding patterns within it. Concurrently, they do not treat the political audience as a *political* audience by default. Big data analytics do not assume that audiences for political communication have actual political preferences. Any pattern found in the available data is valuable as long as it suggests some correlation with vote choice. At first sight, this seems to resemble the previous use of polls for voter models, which could also include variables related to consumption, for example. Yet, it is fundamentally different since it introduces the possibility of a myriad of non-political influences on vote choice into political communication and thus may change the notion that political actors have about who the people are that come to the ballot box every few years.

The fears that sophisticated algorithms enable the manipulation of users' behavior as voters seem exaggerated from the analytical eye of researchers looking for such effects (Hersh 2015; Baldwin-Philippi 2019). However, the expression of such fears has itself become a topic of political communication (ICO 2018) and impacts what political actors expect and do not expect from political communication on social media. Consequently, the notion of a controllable audience is entangled with its opposite, the notion of an audience that is uncontrollable as it is no longer interested in or susceptible to conventional political communication by professional political actors. Political communication as second-order observation of agenda-setting efforts and position-taking by political opponents has to assume and imagine an audience that cares about issues and opinions regarding these issues. Mass media coverage of politics continuously affirms this assumption. In contrast, the dynamic audience fragmentation in social media implies that members of the audience are exposed to different bits and pieces of political news which algorithms have selected based on inferred interests. Moreover, the originators of such news may be non-conventional political actors, ranging from political activists to trolls who enjoy disruption for its own sake. Concurrently, the granularity of news items on social media as opposed to their packaging in mass media implies that parts of the political audience are no longer exposed to the kind of second-order observation that political opponents routinely perform in mass media. Rising political concerns about disinformation and hateful messages on social media platforms, which lead to attempts at the legal regulation of platform obligations in terms of content moderation and deletion, such as the *Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz*, indicate the worries about audiences made uncontrollable by social media.

Against this backdrop, the established construct of public opinion, which links the electorate that manifests itself at the ballot box and the continuous self-observation of the political system, loses plausibility. Opinions are still assumed, but political communications that make full use of the claimed capabilities of big data analytics and microtargeting attempt to conceive them as individualized correlates of specific combinations of user characteristics and user experiences on social media. The possibility that such communications are exposed to second-order observation is not only increasingly slim but would also be increasingly irrelevant. Being freed from considering the effects of second-order observation, political communication gains license to venture into the territory of attention-grabbing provocation, unrealizable promises or outright lies. In other words, notions about what it means to be a politician and what it means to be a voter are in transition as the privacy of the voting act no longer has the same societal value for establishing politics as a specialized sphere of meaning and communication. Of course, the freedom to base vote choice on idiosyncrasies and affects as much as on policy preferences or an assessment of candidates' competences is implied in ballot secrecy (Luhmann 1983), and so is the possibility that parts of the electorate do not care about the policies and politics of elected representatives. However, political coverage in mass media has afforded political communication the ability to ignore this possibility and concurrently directed its focus towards issues and competences.

Social media and big data analytics are different in this respect. They construct audiences for political communication that disrupt the notion of a public opinion and consequently the self-observation of the political system.

Currently, there is no functional equivalent in sight. Data analysts would naturally claim that they do provide it. Yet reducing political uncertainty about (re-)election with the help of big data does nothing to bridge the gap between the individual concerns and impulses that may inform the private voting act and the logic of a political system that revolves around agenda-setting and position-taking. Political communication based on social media and big data analytics aims at creating and reaching out to ephemeral networks of users whose interests and preferences need only be aligned momentarily and remain opaque to everyone who does not have access to the inferences made from the data.

This obviously does not preclude political communication on social media addressing a general audience and counting on mass media coverage of social media posts, foregoing some of the affordances of social media. Yet, the promise and vision of big data analytics in service of political communication is something else. It comes close to what Baecker (2018) sees as the dominant structure of the emerging "next society", superseding the functionally differentiated society, namely the temporary networking of heterogeneous actors, enabled and necessitated by digitalization. De-differentiation, against which theorists of function differentiation see fundamental rights such as privacy as a safeguard (Luhmann 1986; Graber & Teubner 1998), would not be an indicator of decline or regression from this perspective, but simply an implication of society reacting to a new formation of media.

The problem with this view is the same as the problem with accepting data analysts' and social media platforms' claims of superiority when it comes to knowing users. This view suggests inevitability where there is in fact contingency. Unsettling the established balance between privacy and publicness in the context of political communication, the spread of social media does not predetermine what the outcome of attempts to deal with the resulting uncertainty will look like. The previous sections suggest that the outcome will not only depend on the actual capabilities of big data analytics but also, and more immediately, on what political actors believe these capabilities to be in terms of controlling the audiences they are interested in.

6 Conclusion

Social media platforms have moved from ignoring the issue of privacy to framing it as a matter of safely encrypted messages, seemingly strengthening the distinction between private and public communication. This framing ignores the centrality of the relationship between privacy and publicness for the political system, where the private voting act and the construct of public opinion were entwined in the age of mass media. While voting and polling are similar with regard to what is required to be private and what is made publicly accessible, the tracking of user behavior online and the analysis of the data gained from it relate privacy and publicness in the political realm in a very different way. Data analysts and social media platforms claim to be able to identify political preferences and interests that users have never made public and offer opportunities for non-public political communication on a massive scale. To the extent to which political actors believe these claims and adjust their political communication accordingly, the privacy of the voting act is no longer the foundation for the publicness of political communication that results in second-order observation and its disciplining effects. Importantly, this change does not arise at some future point in time when big data analytics might actually predict every individual desire and intention with unfailing precision. Once the availability and seeming superiority of big data analytics suggest that the electorate, or significant parts of it, can be parsed at the level of individuals, the established construct of public opinion, based on second-order observation of political competitors, is weakened. The publicness of political communication that this construct necessitates is undermined by opacity, which facilitates and encourages political communication not interested in what an indeterminate audience would make of it. This new mode of political communication depends on assumed effects on a determinate audience identified with the help of algorithms. Anything that fosters the belief in the feasibility and superiority of data-driven, targeted political communication on social media thus contributes to undermining the construct of public opinion. For example, proposals to replace a focus on data protection regulation with personal property rights for individuals' data (Westin 1967; Kerry & Morris, 2019) ignore this effect and thus the societal value that privacy, in particular related to vote choice, used to have.

In terms of theory, the availability of social media and big data analytics makes it necessary to revise the systems-theoretical description of public opinion as constructed by the observation of mass media. The description was always a simplification since it ignored any role that opinion polls might play in the construct of public opinion, yet it was an acceptable simplification due to the entanglement of mass media coverage and polls. The arrival of social media and big data introduces the possibility of tracking individual behavior online, ascribing opinions to individuals based on the data generated and

addressing individuals with political communication tailored to these opinions. The advantage of conceptualizing these changes within a systems-theoretical framework lies in its emphasis on the role of observation and expectations. Political communication does not only change when filter bubbles actually exist, microtargeting actually works and the dark social is completely opaque. It already changes when political actors *expect* the existence of filter bubbles, the superiority of microtargeted campaigns and the potential of the dark social and adjust their political communication accordingly.

This proposal to use systems theory to understand the implications of social media and big data for political communication is skeptical with regard to sweeping claims about a next society, no longer characterized by functional differentiation but by temporary network structures which also draw on elements of systems theory (Baecker 2018). Such claims seem to underestimate the contingency that stems from the role that expectations play in shaping, for example, political communication. This contingency indicates a need for empirical research, not only about the existence of filter bubbles and the effectiveness of microtargeting, but also about the understanding that political actors have of these phenomena and the changes linked to them. Contingency also means that decisions politicians and parties make for their own campaigns, either separately or in a coordinated manner by way of legal regulation, matter. The extent to which they wish to use the combination of social media and big data analytics and enable such use will make a difference for how sober or provocative, how matter-of-factly or outrageous future political communication will be.

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