

Internet freedom and democracy

Faculty Member: [Ivana Katic](#)

Proposal Description:

In the wake of the Federal Communications Commission's decision to repeal "net neutrality," the U.S. federal rule mandating non-preferential treatment of data packets on the Internet, regulation of the Internet and its consequences are once again a subject of vigorous public debate. In this project, I plan to empirically address the potential consequences of Internet freedom on democracy around the world.

Unrestricted use of the Internet, much like freedom of the press, may increase a country's democracy levels through a variety of mechanisms. Perhaps most saliently, citizens may use social media to coordinate protests aimed at their government. They may also use the Internet to share information, which may impact voting patterns. Individuals may also engage online with their political representatives, weighing in on policy decisions. A less free Internet, on the other hand, may give preferential treatment to data from resource-rich actors, disrupting the free flow of information online and, consequently, the existing democracy-boosting mechanisms.

To examine the relationship between Internet freedom and democracy, I plan to focus on the outcomes of net neutrality regulations worldwide. Specifically, I ask the question: How does the presence of net neutrality protections impact democracy levels?

In order to answer this question, the Tobin research assistant(s) will be tasked with the creation of a unique database of existing net neutrality rules around the world. In other words, the RA(s) will be asked to create a database containing the exact dates of passing/repealing net neutrality rules and regulations for all 195 countries in the world. For many countries, the data has already been compiled and is easily accessible, whereas for others, you would be asked to do some primary research (mostly through Googling/reading news stories). For most countries, this will entail finding out a single date when a net neutrality rule was passed, which should be a simple and quick task.

Given the task at hand, this RAship is well-suited for any research skill level. Once the database is completed, the RA(s) will have an opportunity to, with my guidance, try their hand at running statistical analyses for the project (in Stata). Overall, this project may be of interest to students with an economics, history, sociology, psychology, political science (or other social science) background, as it will provide them with experience in archival data collection, dataset creation, and (hopefully) econometric analysis.

Requisite Skills and Qualifications:

Basic research skills, Stata familiarity welcome but not required

Award: Michael Borger
Skakel McCooley
Olivia Thomas

Tobin Application Link: [Tobin Application](#)

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