Digital Surveillance and Democracy

Rethinking national security, secrecy and intelligence governance

Panel Discussion

Monday, May 13, 2019, Room A 300, 6.30 p.m.

The integration of digital technologies into almost every aspect of social interaction has rendered the communication and participation of citizens traceable for companies and governmental bodies. The revelations by Edward Snowden in 2013 and subsequent inquiries have highlighted how Western intelligence agencies use the potential of digital surveillance. Agencies like the US-American NSA, the British GCHQ or the German BND are part of transnational intelligence networks that collect and exchange data on a massive scale – with and without the support of tech companies. Within these agencies, tech savvy security professionals use algorithmic analytics to make sense of the large data sets, for example to determine who is a citizen or a non-citizen, and what counts as suspicious behavior. Under the mantle of national security and "third party" rules, oversight of intelligence agencies and their collaboration have traditionally been limited. Since the last two decades, the use of digital technologies and increased intelligence sharing have deepened the gap between complex, transnational surveillance on the one hand and resource-poor, national oversight on the other.

In the light of large-scale, algorithmic and transnationally connected surveillance by intelligence agencies, the question arises if we need to re-interpret the relations of categories underpinning modern democracies such as national security, civil liberties, oversight, separation of powers, and rule of law. Concerns over technologically advanced surveillance often translate into dystopian visions of our democratic fate. Examples are references to totalitarianism in the manner of George Orwell's 1984, to the idea of "post-democracy", or warnings against a rising "algogracy". But has the perceived responsibility to protect democratic societies through surveillance already turned into an existential threat to democracy, or do we need a more nuanced approach? Can social scientists offer alternative problematizations of secret, digital surveillance in order to understand the challenges that arise for democratic societies? What are existing or possible counteractions that limit power asymmetries caused by digital surveillance? How can democratic societies adapt and expand their repertoire of democratic oversight? For example, should intelligence governance be transnationalized? We invite you to discuss these questions together with:

- **Prof. Dr. Claudia Aradau,** Professor of International Politics and Co-chair of the Research Centre in International Relations at King's College**.** Her research interests include global security practices and their political effects, the mediation of security through data, algorithmic practices, and the transformation of knowledge through practices of digital (in)security.
- **Prof. Dr. Didier Bigo,** MCU Research Professor at Sciences-Po Paris/CERI, and Professor at King's College London/Department of War studies. His research interests include transnational practices of security professionals, democratic boundaries and data politics, freedom and surveillance in the digital age, and the sociology of border controls.
- **Prof. Dr. Jeanette Hofmann,** Professor of Internet policy at the FU Berlin, head of the research groups "Politics of digitalisation" at the WZB and at the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society, director of the HIIG. Her research interests include governance theory, transnational regulation, democracy and digitalisation, and science and technology studies.
- **Dr. Thorsten Wetzling,** Project Director "Digital basic rights, surveillance and transparency" at the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung (SNV) and director of the European Intelligence Oversight Network. His research interests include surveillance and democratic governance, intelligence agencies, and rule of law.

The panel will be moderated by **Prof. Dr. Jeanette Hofmann**, WZB. The discussion will be held in English.

Contact: Ronja Kniep (ronja.kniep@wzb.eu), please register until May 9, 2019.

Our event location is wheelchair-accessible. If you need support, please e-mail: veranstaltungen@wzb.eu