**PhD Scholarship Opportunity in Digital Authoritarianism**

Expressions of Interest are invited for a PhD scholarship associated with Australian Research Council DECRA Project ‘**Digital Authoritarian Practices and the 21st Century Autocrat’** at the University of Melbourne. The position is full time and the successful applicant will pursue an independent PhD research project to commence at the start of Semester 1 2023, aligned with the larger ARC project. The project will be supervised by the DECRA project fellow [Dr Dara Conduit](https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/profile/634284-dara-conduit), with a relevant secondary supervisor to be appointed depending on the proposed research topic. The Successful Candidate will be enrolled in the School of Social and Political Sciences in the Faculty of Arts.

**The PhD Project**

In 2016, Russia attempted to use social media to influence the US presidential election, drawing the digital strategies of authoritarian regimes into sharp focus. With China since employing smartphone data to calculate citizen ‘social credit’ ratings and the United Arab Emirates releasing the ToTok private messaging app to track millions of UAE and foreign nationals around the world, there is growing concern that digital technology has provided a windfall to autocrats (Gunitsky 2015; Feldstein 2019; Freedom House 2018). Indeed, while sophisticated tools were once required to attack domestic and international foes separately, digital advances have enabled the deployment of cost- effective and widely available technologies such as social media or off-the-shelf malware to simultaneously target domestic opponents and foreign governments/citizens. By 2020, electoral processes and public debate in states ranging from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Israel, Italy, Taiwan and the UK have been targeted in online campaigns waged by autocrats, while the domestic and diaspora populations of authoritarian regimes face ever-growing online surveillance and attacks. Understanding and responding to these actions, which have come to be known as digital authoritarianism, is one of the major challenges of our times.

We are seeking a highly motivated candidate to devise their own PhD project within the parameters of this ARC project, and thereby make an important contribution to the understanding of digital authoritarianism. Research questions of particular interest could include (but are not limited to):

* State-based online disinformation campaigns
* Single or two/three qualitative case studies (including case studies outside the Middle East) of either authoritarian states or their activities in other jurisdictions
* Big data social media analysis
* Digital authoritarianism practices undertaken by non-state actors
* Opposition responses to digital authoritarianism
* Extra-territorial digital repression
* Sophisticated (Morgenbesser 2020) digital authoritarian practices
* Technical projects examining digital authoritarian techniques

Projects may be interdisciplinary and draw on research methods that could include (but are not limited to) qualitative or computational social science/computer science approaches, although candidates must have primary academic qualifications in the social sciences, particularly political science, international relations or sociology. Candidates undertaking case studies will be expected to have language proficiency in the primary language of their chosen states.

**Scholarship Benefits**

The scholarship benefits include:

* Full fee offset for up to four years
* A stipend of $34,400 per year pro rata (2023 full time study rate) for up to 3.5 years.
* Benefits as per the [Graduate Research Scholarship Terms and Conditions](https://gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/scholarships/graduate-research-scholarship-terms-and-conditions#benefits)

**Eligibility**

Applicants for this scholarship must meet the entry requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Arts (full details can be found on the [Doctor of Philosophy - Arts](https://study.unimelb.edu.au/find/courses/graduate/doctor-of-philosophy-arts/) web pages) and have received a minimum result of first-class Honours or equivalent in their undergraduate degree and/or demonstrated a similarly high level of performance in a graduate degree. It is essential that the candidate meets the University's English language requirements.

**Applications**

Please submit an expression of interest form to Dr Dara Conduit by the 5 September 2022, alongside the following material:

* A cover letter that sets out why your skills, background and interests make you a strong candidate for this position (no more than two pages).
* 2,500-word research proposal,including problem statement, brief literature review, methodology and methods (no more than two pages).
* A 5,000-word writing sample
* A current CV outlining your all complete and incomplete academic qualifications and work experience, details of any research publications (if relevant), and listing three referees (no more than five pages).
* Academic transcripts.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview prior to the final selection being made.

Enquiries

Please contact Dr Dara Conduit by email with any enquiries.