

## A New Era

# Contemporary Challenges in Digital Societies

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### Editorial

Contemporary societies are undergoing continuous transformation and, it may be argued, this places strain on the categories through which we conventionally understand the state, power, and law. Technological acceleration, the reorganisation of markets, the intensification of social conflict, and the mass circulation of information have reshaped citizens' expectations of legitimacy, effectiveness, and institutional justice. In this context, Law and Political Science are called upon to engage in a more precise dialogue and with a renewed sense of public responsibility.

Political Science reminds us that institutional stability should not be understood as a fixed end state. Rather, it is a historical construction, dependent on incentives, rules of the game, practices, and shared beliefs. When channels of representation erode or mediation becomes fragile, political competition tends to shift into settings of high uncertainty and weak commitment to procedural constraints. Such deterioration may be gradual and, for that very reason, difficult to detect in time unless it is examined through fine-grained analytical lenses and with close attention to mechanisms of oversight and accountability (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

In recent years, moreover, a structural tension has intensified between expanding social demands and uneven institutional capacities to process them. Where polarisation narrows the scope for agreement, institutions tend to operate reactively. Contingency is privileged over planning, and symbolic contestation over public deliberation. In this framework, legitimacy no longer depends solely on outcomes; it also comes to depend on the quality of the rules, the predictability of decisions, and the perceived impartiality of the exercise of power. For this reason, the question of institutional arrangements and how they are conceived is not merely a technical one. It is (and indeed has always been) a question

about the limits of political conflict and the conditions that make democratic coexistence possible.

Law, for its part, functions as the institutional grammar of public life. It provides predictability and establishes the conditions under which the exercise of power is compatible with guarantees. The rule of law is sustained, in part, by normative texts. Yet it also depends on institutional practices, interpretive coherence, and a culture of legality that allows law to be applied independently and without arbitrariness. When procedures are trivialised or exceptionalism becomes normalised, law may preserve its form while losing its function; public trust is thereby weakened, and inequalities in access to justice widen (Tamanaha, 2004).

At this point, contemporary conditions demand an additional degree of conceptual vigilance. Many current controversies are presented as normative debates when, in fact, they conceal disputes over facts, diagnoses, and evidence. Academic work must therefore insist on distinguishing levels of analysis, making assumptions explicit, and recognising limitations. The value of a scientific contribution, of course, does not lie solely in its conclusion. It also lies in the clarity with which it demonstrates how that conclusion was reached. In our time, method thus becomes a form of responsibility.

At present, a cross-cutting issue for both Political Science and Law is the digital dimension of public life. The expansion of platforms and data systems promises new state capacities and new forms of social interaction, while simultaneously reorganising power and the incentives that structure political communication. The public sphere becomes faster, more fragmented, and more vulnerable to dynamics of manipulation, disinformation, and affective polarisation. These transformations are, on one level, technical. On another, they reconfigure the production of legitimacy, the relationship between citizens and institutions, and the costs of democratic deliberation (Castells, 2010). To this must be added the intensive use of data and the consolidation of economic models based on the extraction and processing of personal information, with direct consequences for privacy, autonomy, and social control. This compels us to reassess the scope of legal guarantees and the new configurations of power emerging from digital infrastructure (Zuboff, 2019).

With this issue, *PRIUS* enters a renewed phase. A new Editorial Team assumes responsibility for the journal at the same time as it adopts an annual publication schedule, having originally been published on a semi-annual basis. This decision responds to the need to concentrate efforts, strengthen peer review and editorial processes, and offer readers a volume of greater academic and editorial coherence.

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