

## How is social media changing political communication?

# Outlooks



Social media has ushered in a 'new era' of political communication. For a long time, direct personal communication between politicians and the electorate, for example at rallies, was the norm. Then came mass media like newspapers and television. Today, social media is becoming ever more important. It allows political actors to convey a different, customised narrative to each voter group using targeted language and advertising. Of course, rallies and traditional mass media still exist, but through social media political communication is becoming increasingly individualised.

In general, it is difficult to demonstrate either empirically or experimentally how political communication affects voter behaviour. What we do know is that people have always chosen which media to consume according to their political views, and that they like to surround themselves with like-minded people. So they have always lived in an opinion or filter bubble, even before social media existed. There is, however, considerable evidence that social media contributes to a hardening of stances in political debates, because people come together on these platforms who would otherwise not have met and who hold very different views. Unfortunately, it seems likely that this polarisation will only tighten its grip on political culture and society as a whole in the future, with debates becoming more gridlocked, people being less willing to compromise and ultimately the formation of governments becoming increasingly difficult, too.

**Prof. Dr  
Marius Sältzer**

Digital Social Science