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Book Review: Researching Internet Governance: Methods, Frameworks, Futures. Laura DeNardis, Derrick Cogburn, Nanette S. Levinson, and Francesca Musiani (eds.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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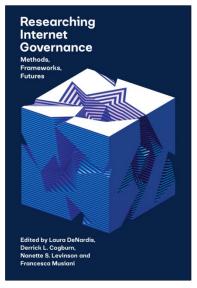## Recommended Citation

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In January 2021, pro-Trump protesters forced their way into the U.S. Capitol building, inspired by White supremacist and conspiracy theories spread on Twitter, Facebook, 4chan, TheDonald.win, Parler, 8kun, Telegram, and far-right message boards (Harwell, Stanley-Becker, Nakhlawi, & Timberg, 2021). Twitter and Facebook belatedly banned thousands of accounts, including the sitting president's accounts, sparking an ongoing debate about the limits of free speech, tech companies' power, the responsibility to regulate hateful and violent rhetoric, and how the Internet should governed and by whom.

One month later, Facebook withdrew all news links (and some official websites) from its platform in a dispute over the Australian News Bargaining Code introduced by the Australian government to ensure news providers are paid for links to their content. While a deal was eventually reached between the parties, it is likely other states will further review whether social media platforms and search engines should compensate publishers and learn from Australia's example.

Among myriad other Internet governance issues, these recent events reiterate the critical importance of Internet governance for how governments, institutions, businesses, and societies function in the 21st century. Accordingly, it is vital to understand Internet governance, as it affects all aspects of the global economy, political institutions, and states, down to the information individuals consume on a daily basis.

Fortunately, Laura DeNardis, Derrick L. Cogburn, Nanette S. Levinson, and Francesca Musiani, the editors of *Researching Internet Governance: Methods, Frameworks, Futures*, have produced an excellent, comprehensive, and prescient volume that provides scholars with a thorough overview of research concepts, methods, and frameworks to understand the nature of Internet governance and its wide-ranging implications.

The book is aimed at a broad audience of scholars interested in conducting Internet governance research. Rather than exploring a single method or approach, the volume aims to establish broad parameters for research in this space, including defining the scope of inquiry, what is to be studied, the epistemological approaches to the subject, how evidence is collected, what methodological tools are used, and how to make sense of disciplinary boundaries in an inherently interdisciplinary field.

As DeNardis notes in the introduction, in contrast to previously published work, the book's "defining and original feature" is that it focuses on "research concepts, methods, and frameworks" (p. 2) as the object of inquiry. The end result is a book that provides an excellent overview of Internet governance research, providing both depth in its constituent parts and also showcasing the tremendous breadth of the field. Further, throughout the edited volume, the book illustrates how scholars can overcome the complexities of the field to produce theoretical and empirical scholarship that is both methodologically rigorous and extremely policy relevant.

The book is structured in 13 chapters, produced by a variety of different contributors with a range of experiences and disciplinary backgrounds. However, the book can be summarized as being constructed of two halves. The first half (chapters 1–6) places the current state of Internet governance research in context, including within different disciplinary traditions, while the second half (chapters 7–12) illustrates the variety of different epistemological, methodological, and topical applications to Internet governance research, before a concluding chapter (chapter 13) presents several areas for future research to address regarding policy learning.

The book begins with an introduction (chapter 1) by Laura DeNardis that provides an excellent overview of Internet governance as an area of inquiry, framing the field as being distinguished by five features that define the complexity of the research program at the intersection of technology, the tension between national governments and the cross-national infrastructure of the Internet, public policy, private-sector leadership, national security, and power. De Nardis also identifies a series of complex challenges for scholars in this area, establishing the platform for subsequent chapters to illustrate different approaches to dealing with these issues. Sandra Braman (chapter 2) provides further context for the chapters that follow, defining the parameters of Internet governance, but also noting that the multifaceted and decentralized nature of Internet governance might overwhelm our collective ability to govern it.

In chapter 3, Milton L. Mueller and Farzaneh Badiei use Google Search terms to chart the development of "Internet governance" in three ways: as a label, as an area of inquiry in academia, and as a place of contestation among actors with different objectives. Through the analysis of Internet searches and academic journal articles over time, they illustrate the increasingly frequent use of "Internet governance" as a term—but they raise important questions about the concept losing its conceptual value as it becomes a catch-all term for a broad range of issues. Francesca Musiani (chapter 4) provides an overview of Internet politics from the science and technology perspective, describing prevailing approaches within that framework before outlining how the study of controversies and exploring nonhuman actors and infrastructure can help build our understanding of Internet governance.

Rolf H. Weber (chapter 5) provides an overview of the legal approach to Internet governance, especially highlighting the disconnect between the national scope of most legal frameworks and the global nature of the Internet, and the prospects of addressing legitimacy, regulation, technical standardization, and accountability in legal scholarship. Wendy Hall, Aastha Madaan, and Kieron O'Hara (chapter 6) outline the Web Observatory as a means to ethical and secure data gathering and sharing practices for Internet governance research, while also highlighting a series of ethical, legal, and technological issues for such initiatives.

The second half of the book then introduces how Internet governance research functions in practice with a range of different empirical applications. Eric Jardine (chapter 7) begins these applications with a chapter that demonstrates the importance of paying close attention to the metrics used in Internet governance research. Examining the case of cybersecurity, Jardine illustrates the fact that the use of count data can lead to misleading conclusions regarding the prevalence of attacks and breaches. Rikke Frank Jørgensen (chapter 8) reflects on her research experiences focused on Google and Facebook to outline some lessons for researchers to consider, describing the challenges of gaining access to staff, the process of conducting interviews, and how to analyze this data.

Derrick L. Cogburn (chapter 9) explores the potential of big data analytics to analyze unstructured text in Internet governance scholarship through analysis of transcripts from the UN Internet Governance Forum. This analysis shows the durability of human rights and freedom of expression as key themes throughout the 12 years studied. Niels ten Oever, Stefania Milan, and Davide Beraldo (chapter 10) describe how discourse analysis can be conducted through the analysis of mailing lists through tools like BigBang, before highlighting some of the ethical dilemmas involved and some of the opportunities for this research to promote accountability.

Ronald J. Deibert (chapter 11) discusses the biases of information security research—namely how disciplines can provide barriers to alternative ways of thinking, and how economic and political biases shape the study of information security, including what questions are asked and what answers are found. Through developing an understanding of narratives and imaginaries surrounding the adoption of multistakeholder arrangements, Jeanette Hofmann (chapter 12) explores how these policies frequently underperform expectations, despite their reputation. Hofmann suggests that more attention should be paid to the discourses surrounding policies around Internet governance to understand how popular ideas and policies are constructed.

Finally, Nanette S. Levinson (chapter 13) concludes the book with a discussion about the gaps in the collective understanding about policy learning in Internet governance and some insight into how scholars could address this gap in the future. As Levinson notes, this is an area with future promise, especially as states become increasingly willing to confront large multinational corporations when considered necessary.

Collectively, the edited volume provides an excellent overview of Internet governance scholarship, including the challenges and opportunities for scholars working in this area. In particular, the book does not shy away from the ethical dilemmas of research in this field, the challenges of multidisciplinary inquiry, and the complexity of Internet governance research—issues that will continue to pose dilemmas for scholars in this area.

As just one single volume with a wide range of theoretical approached and empirical applications across disciplines, it cannot be comprehensive, and it does not claim to be. However, for the diversity of perspectives and applications of Internet governance research discussed in the book, it is remarkably cohesive.

Overall, the book provides a superb foundation for scholars interested in Internet governance research. The next generation of scholars should consult this volume as a foundation for their own research to advance our understanding of this critically important field in the future.

Reference

Harwell, D., Stanley-Becker, I., Nakhlawi, R., & Timberg, C. (2021, January 13). QAnon reshaped Trump's party and radicalized believers. The Capitol siege may just be the start. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/13/qanon-capitol-siege-trump/