

Job description

The Ethics Institute of Utrecht University's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies seeks a researcher for a 4-year, full-time PhD project "Electoral Technologies and Democracy in Global Perspective," as part of the inter-university Gravitation consortium "Ethics of Socially Disruptive Technology".

- Deadline for application: August 29, 2020
- Intended starting date: January 1, 2021

Aims of the PhD Project:

Genuine democracy presupposes well-founded trust in the electoral process, regarding electoral procedures and the formation of electoral choice. It requires securing the secrecy as well as the transparency of the vote. Traditionally, the democratic credentials of elections are based on physical arrangements regarding electoral procedures (printed ballots, isolated voting booths) and the formation of electoral choice (via public information and journalism).

However, these arrangements (and their normative legitimation) are being disrupted by the spread of new electoral technologies, especially in new democracies of the Global South. Paper-based election systems have increasingly been supplanted by electronic election systems (e.g. biometric voter identification, ballot scanners, internet voting). And as political campaigns have become increasingly complex, datafied, and sophisticated, new technological coping strategies have emerged in response (e.g. voting advice applications, fake-news detectors, and filtered or bubble-bursting news feeds). Despite potential gains in efficiency, reliability, and convenience, such technologies raise concerns about the inclusivity, reliability, manipulability, and verifiability of these electoral technologies.

In light of these concerns, the project seeks to investigate to what extent new electoral technologies necessitate rethinking normative assumptions about the legitimate basis for confidence in electoral outcomes and trust in democratic institutions, particularly in light of two (potentially) disruptive effects of these technologies. On the one hand, they challenge received normative criteria for democratic credibility by introducing new options and difficulties regarding how to realize (1) secrecy/anonymity, (2) transparency/accountability, and (3) the appropriate balance between (1) and (2). On the other hand, they are being implemented in contexts of power and domination, both domestically and transnationally, that may be transformed or further entrenched as a consequence of their implementation. This, in turn, requires rethinking related concepts political equality, inclusion, freedom, and vulnerability. Particular emphasis will be placed on the context of power in which such technologies are promoted in the Global South.

Research Setting

This PhD position will be part of the Ethics of Socially Disruptive Technologies programme, a new ten-year research programme of seven academic institutions in the Netherlands that has started in January 2020. This programme has a combined

budget of € 27 million and is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (in the Gravitation funding scheme for excellent research), and by matching funds from the participating institutions. The duration is from January 2020 to December 2029. More about the ESDT research programme and its four research lines can be found [here](#).

This position is situated within the research line “The Future of a Free and Fair Society”. The successful candidate will work under the supervision of Joel Anderson, Dorothea Gädeke, and Ingrid Robeyns. You are expected to play an active role in the project described above and to participate actively in the workshops, public events, courses and other activities of the Ethics of Socially Disruptive Technologies programme more generally and the “Free and Fair” research line in particular. The position is based at [the Ethics Institute](#), which is part of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Utrecht University. It provides a stimulating and internationally oriented research environment.

Please note that there are other vacancies in the Ethics of Socially Disruptive Technologies programme at different participating universities. In case several are of interest to you, we would like to encourage you to apply to them simultaneously. For example, Utrecht University is currently also advertising the following PhD position within the same project: "[The Ethics of Humanoid Robots](#)"

Your Qualifications

- You will have completed, prior to appointment, a Master’s degree or equivalent degree in Philosophy or Political Theory. Other Master’s degrees will also be considered if you have a demonstrable expertise in analytical/conceptual problems and approaches to normative justification, in close connection with the themes of the research project.
- You have a strong interest in normative political philosophy, democratic theory, and normative issues related of technology.
- Knowledge is welcome in a field relevant to the project (especially theories of power, electoral studies, development ethics, democracy promotion, global philosophy, comparative politics or political sociology); also welcome is relevant practical experience with the implementation of electoral (or related) technologies.
- You have an excellent track record and research skills, relative to experience; and excellent academic writing and presentation skills.
- We are particularly interested in candidates with research interests, practical experience, and theoretical knowledge related to perspectives and practical concerns centred outside OECD countries.
- You have the ability to work both independently and as part of a team.
- You have an active interest in interdisciplinary work which connects philosophical analysis to other relevant disciplines and societal challenges.
- You have a high level of proficiency in English.

Offer

We offer a position (1.0 FTE) for a period of 18 months. In case of good performance and a positive evaluation, the contract will be extended for the remaining period of 30

months (4 years in total). The gross salary ranges between €2,395 and €3,061 (scale P according to the Collective Labour Agreement Dutch Universities) per month for a full-time employment. Salaries are supplemented with a holiday bonus of 8% and a year-end bonus of 8.3% per year. In addition, Utrecht University offers excellent secondary conditions, including an attractive retirement scheme, (partly paid) parental leave and [flexible employment conditions](#) (multiple choice model). More information about working at Utrecht University can be found [here](#).

Additional information

For more information about the project or the requirements for application, please contact [Dr. Joel Anderson](mailto:j.h.anderson@uu.nl) (j.h.anderson@uu.nl) or [Dr. Dorothea Gädeke](mailto:d.g.gadeke@uu.nl) (d.g.gadeke@uu.nl). PhD students are encouraged to spend a semester abroad. A budget is available to cover expenses. Additionally, a generous (conference) travel budget is available for this position. Interviews (via video conference) will be held in the week of September 28. Preferred starting date: 1 January 2021.

Apply

Everyone deserves to feel at home at our university. We welcome employees with a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives. To apply, please send your application via the 'apply' button below, including the following documents:

1. a one-page letter of motivation;
2. a curriculum vitae of maximum 3 pages, including the names and contact details of two references who can be contacted;
3. a one-page research note, setting out your ideas about how you propose to carry out the project described above;
4. a writing sample of maximum 20 pages;
5. academic grade transcripts from all relevant degree programmes.

N.B. Before applying, please read the [full description of the project](#) and review [the description of the ESDT programme](#).

You can apply via [the job listing on the website of Utrecht University](#). The application deadline is 29 August 2020.