## Technical and Professional Communication in the Global Election Supercycle

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By the end of 2024, approximately 3.7 billion people–about half the world’s population–in as many as 72 countries across five continents will have experienced a national election ([United Nations Development Program, 2024](https://www.undp.org/super-year-elections)). High-stakes races in the United States, Taiwan, Russia, Ghana, India, and many more nations arguably make 2024 the most consequential global election cycle in modern history ([Ewe, 2023](https://time.com/6550920/world-elections-2024/); [Plackett, 2024](https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-01712-2)). Different types of technologies were deployed to manage many elections during the pandemic ([Mumuni et al, 2024](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-42771-8)); and in several contexts, 2024 is the first major wave of elections after a global health catastrophe–combining “traditional” campaign and election strategies with new and old technologies. National elections in the U.S. have taken an outsized share of media attention, where the outcome has the potential to determine geopolitical order for decades to come ([Darnal et al., 2024](https://www.stimson.org/2024/the-impact-of-the-us-presidential-election-on-the-future-of-the-international-order/); [Kay, 2024](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-67949560)). However, billions of folks outside the U.S. have voted or will vote for new parliaments, old dictators, and fresh leaders in the most technologically generated, facilitated, and mediated elections in human history.

Results on every continent will have both regional and global ramifications ([John & Sen, 2024](https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-ELECTIONS2024/gdvzmkejkpw/); [Young, 2024](https://www.henleyglobal.com/publications/centi-millionaire-report-2024/election-supercycle-underpins-millionaire-migration-trends)). Earlier this year, the 2024 election supercycle delivered trans-continental far-right election gains in the European Union and power-shifting parliamentary snap contests in the United Kingdom and France. Some countries will have an opportunity to make firsts, like the possibility that the U.S. and Namibia will join Mexico this year in electing women for the first time to their respective presidencies; others are bellwethers in the global conflict between democracy and authoritarianism, such as in Georgia, Moldova, Senegal, and Tunisia. Some elections will be shocking, such as the first far right victory in a German state since World War II, while others *may or may not* occur on the heels of recent coups such as in Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali.

The evolution of TPC as a discipline has taken many turns to get from an understanding of technical writing as objective and instrumental to embracing technical communication as a vehicle for driving social change. Miller’s ([1979](http://www.jstor.org/stable/375964)) humanistic perspective gave scholars a permission structure and the encouragement to break free from instrumentalist constraints and foci that too often come at the expense of the people behind the documents. From the humanistic perspective came the cultural turn ([Agboka, 2012](https://doi.org/10.2190/TW.42.2.e); [Longo, 1998](https://doi.org/10.1080/10572259809364617); [Longo, 2000](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Spurious_Coin/ea8Hd6REUVIC?hl=en&gbpv=0); [Scott, Longo, & Wills, 1993](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Critical_Power_Tools/rRJQELy1-sQC?hl=en&gbpv=0); [Scott & Longo, 2006](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427625tcq1501_2)), empowering TPC scholars to investigate the field’s contributions to violent systems of kyriarchal oppression ([Fiorenza, 2021, p. 45](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Congress_of_Wo_men/wEcmEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)).

TPC has always been about more than critique, which is why technical communication cultural critics have transitioned into the social justice turn ([Agboka, 2013](https://www.academia.edu/download/87723633/1-1-full1.pdf%22%20%5Cl%20%22page%3D35); [Agboka, 2014](https://doi.org/10.2190/TW.44.3.e); [Jones, 2016](https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2016.1224655); [Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429198748); [Walton & Agboka, 2021](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Equipping_Technical_Communicators_for_So/2CEsEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)). The social justice turn has been used by TPC scholars to explore and make contributions to political topics such as abortion ([Frost, 2016](https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651915602295)), sex work ([Itchuaqiyaq, Edenfield, & Grant-Davie, 2022](https://doi.org/10.1177/10506519211044190)), environmental policy ([Sackey, 2018](https://doi.org/10.7330/9781607327585.c006)), and immigration ([Veeramoothoo, 2022](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281620953377)). Politically oriented scholarship in TPC has continued to proliferate over the last decade, including a recent trend of TPC scholars investigating and addressing liberal democratic themes of citizenship, civic/public engagement, and elections.

In the wake of the 2016 ATTW conference: Citizenship and Advocacy in Technical Communication, co-chairs Godwin Agboka and Natalia Matveeva called on the field to “search for better ways to promote active citizenship beyond the traditional classroom to respond to various social, economic, and environmental issues” ([Agboka & Matveeva, 2016, para. 3](https://attwblog.wordpress.com/2016/03/09/from-the-conference-co-chairs/)). Responding to this call, there has been an upsurge in TPC research on the practice of politics and the use of electoral technology ([Cheek, 2021](https://doi.org/10.1145/3431932.3431933); [Dorpenyo & Agboka, 2018](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27301552); [Dorpenyo, 2024](https://doi.org/10.1177/10506519231199471); [Jones & Williams, 2018](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27301555); [Sano-Franchini, 2018](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27301556); [Sánchez, 2022](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27301554)). We may not consider ourselves “politicians” in the traditional sense, but TPC scholars have effectively demonstrated that political decisions and power are both communicated through and constituted by technical rhetorics, practices, and pedagogies.

The 2025 ATTW hybrid conference will take place on **June 14-15, 2025** **virtually online and in person at Missouri University of Science and Technology**. We invite 500-word (exclusive of references) abstracts proposing either a virtual or an in-person presentation examining technical communication in the global election supercycle of 2024 and its aftermath. As participatory citizens in democracies, technical communicators have a vital responsibility to ensure elections and their processes are equitable and understandable for all ([Cheek, 2023](https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2022.2079726); [Dorpenyo, 2016](https://digitalcommons.mtu.edu/etdr/125); [Whitney, 2013](https://doi.org/10.2190/TW.43.4.f)). Living up to that responsibility has become much more difficult in a world flooded by artificial intelligence-boosted mis/disinformation campaigns paired with immense data surveillance technologies. We welcome submissions that critically analyze the roles played by technologies, genres, and information processes in shaping democratic discourse, voter participation, electoral integrity, political messaging, and more. Employing [Rude’s (2009)](https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651908329562) overlapping domains of TPC research questions (disciplinarity, pedagogy, practice, and social change), we offer the following research questions as starting points for discussion:

### Disciplinarity

“Disciplinarity: How shall we know ourselves? What are our definitions, history, status, possible future, and research methods?” (Rude, 2009, p. 176)

* What role does/can technical communication play in combating misinformation and disinformation during elections?
* What is the history of technical and professional communication (TPC) in electoral politics?
* How has the role of technical and professional communicators in elections of fragile democracies in countries like South Africa and Pakistan evolved?
* How should technical communication define its future role in fast-digitizing democracies such as Mexico and Rwanda?
* What technical communication methods were employed in the 2024 elections?
* What is the role of technical communication in a politically polarized society?
* What can technical communication scholars learn from interdisciplinary research on political technology and election systems in cross-border electoral frameworks like the European Union (EU) parliamentary and African Union Commission elections?
* When and where does technical communication make an impact on the election process?
* How is technical communication used in the electoral processes of countries with authoritarian leaders?
* What contributions could technical communication research make to promoting electoral integrity and transparency in regions facing political unrest, such as Ethiopia and Mozambique?

### Pedagogy

“Pedagogy: What should be the content of our courses and curriculum? How shall we teach students best practices, history, and possibilities? How shall we negotiate competing claims for content and pedagogical methods and compete for academic resources?” (Rude, 2009, p. 176)

* Why should technical communication students care about the processes and results of the 2024 elections?
* What instructional materials best prepare students for careers in political technical communication in countries with rapidly evolving election technology, such as India and South Korea?
* What strategies can help us teach politically engaged citizenship?
* How can TPC educators incorporate lessons learned from the 2024 elections?
* What role does/should TPC play in teaching civic literacy, responsibility, and engagement?
* What are effective classroom activities that integrate lessons from diverse electoral technologies and challenges in countries like El Salvador and Ghana to teach global technical communication?
* What are effective methods for teaching students about the ethical implications of electoral technologies in countries with contested election results?
* How can instructors encourage students to think about the global implications of TPC practices in the electoral systems of democracies like the U.S. and autocratic regimes like the Russian Federation?
* How can students be taught to critically analyze election-related misinformation and design inoculation strategies in countries facing significant political polarization?
* What pedagogical strategies are most effective for teaching students about the intersection of social justice, electoral technology, and political communication in countries with high social inequality, like South Africa and Mexico?

### Practice

“Practice: How should texts be constructed to work effectively and ethically? What design practices include international users and users with disabilities? What are best practices of text development and design? How can content be managed for reuse?” (Rude, 2009, p. 176)

* What technical communication practices can be identified in the 2024 elections?
* How did ballot design in different countries contribute to the enfranchisement or disenfranchisement of people with disabilities?
* Has the global trend toward digital ballots and online voting negatively impacted public perception of and trust in elections?
* What are the ethical implications of generative AI in political communication?
* How might the study of electoral communication during elections in the European Union and India, where multiple languages and cultural contexts are involved, inform the translation practices of technical communicators?
* Where was content management and reuse best used in 2024 political campaigns?
* How does technical rhetoric influence a voter’s understanding of political campaign issues?
* What are the differences and similarities between the design of political websites in X country’s national elections vs. Y countries national elections?
* How can TPC practices enhance transparency and fairness in electoral processes in emerging democracies?
* In what ways can technical communicators facilitate dialogue and understanding between polarized political groups?

### Social Change

“Social Change: How do texts function as agents of knowledge-making, action, and change?” (Rude, 2009, p. 176)

* What TPC interventions are the most effective for voter education and outreach?
* How can TPC strategies and techniques combat misinformation and restore public trust in elections?
* How do gender and race influence official and unofficial electoral communications?
* What TPC interventions are the most effective for enhancing electoral integrity and public trust in electoral outcomes?
* In what ways can TPC support the inclusion of traditionally disenfranchised and underrepresented groups in democratic governance?
* How might technical communicators aid in designing and implementing accessible election technologies for people with disabilities?
* How do texts mediate voter understanding of complex policy issues during election campaigns in countries with diverse electorates?
* What are TPC strategies that could address voter suppression tactics in countries with a history of electoral violence and intimidation like the United States?
* How are digital platforms and social media shaping voter perceptions and behaviors in global elections?
* How can technical communicators aid in expanding ballot access for marginalized and disenfranchised populations?

**Please submit your abstracts to** **attwcon@gmail.com** **by December 31st, 2024**. Teachers, scholars, researchers, and practitioners working at secondary schools, community two-year colleges, public and private universities, for-profit corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies are encouraged to submit. All submissions that are received by the deadline will be fully considered for inclusion in the conference whether or not the submission is connected to the conference theme. **For planning purposes and to take full advantage of the virtual medium, authors must specify if they intend to present online or in-person at the time of submission**. We expect to return decisions to authors by February 15th and publish a draft of the schedule by March 15th. If you have any questions, please reach out to co-conference Chair and site host Dr. Ryan Cheek (ryancheek@mst.edu), ATTW Vice President and co-conference Chair Dr. Isidore Dorpenyo (idorpenyo@gmu.edu), or ATTW President Dr. Laura Gonzales (gonzalesl@ufl.edu).

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