

Holthaus, Leonie

Article — Published Version

Disinformation and Incremental Change in European Union Election Observation: A Field Theoretical Perspective

JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies

Provided in Cooperation with:

John Wiley & Sons

Suggested Citation: Holthaus, Leonie (2025) : Disinformation and Incremental Change in European Union Election Observation: A Field Theoretical Perspective, JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, ISSN 1468-5965, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, Vol. 63, Iss. 6, pp. 1805-1821, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13713>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/335535>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Disinformation and Incremental Change in European Union Election Observation: A Field Theoretical Perspective

LEONIE HOLTHAUS 

Technical University of Darmstadt, Darmstadt

Abstract

This article addresses the puzzle of why there is at best incremental change in European Union (EU) democracy promotion and theorises an instance of such change by examining responses to (online) disinformation in EU electoral observation. It develops a field theoretical approach for the explanation of incremental change, as evident in social media monitoring, in EU election observation. Field theory furthers consideration of the position of actors, social interactions and characteristics of the particular field. On the basis of this theory, conceptualisation of a heterogeneous democracy assistance and electoral observation field and an in-depth study of EU election observation in Tunisia (2019), I argue the EU has responded to disinformation through the imitation of practices and epistemic negotiation. The responses and the incremental changes in EU election observation that evolved reflect the central but contested position of the EU in the field.

Keywords: change; democracy promotion; election observation; political sociology

Introduction

A growing literature on continuity and change in European Union (EU) democracy promotion in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region after the democratic protests of 2010/2011 includes pessimistic conclusions (Schumacher and Bouris, 2017).¹ Although scholars agree that EU democracy promotion is too moderate and inconsistently applied, they have not seen paradigmatic change and rather have witnessed more or less the same policy (Bicchi, 2014; Bremberg, 2016; Dandashly, 2018; Del Sarto, 2016; Mouhib, 2014; Natorski, 2016) and continuing ‘malpractices’ (Achraimer and Pace, 2024).² Much of this literature is inspired by the practice turn in International Relations (IR) and explains policy continuity through references to distance between powerful policy-makers and their critics (Achraimer and Pace, 2024), temporal gaps between the EU’s policy cycle and quickly developing dynamics in MENA states (Bicchi, 2014), the habitual reproduction of organisational scripts (Mouhib, 2014) and lack of reflection on practice-informing background knowledge (Achraimer and Pace, 2024).

Practice theorists’ diagnosis of policy continuity may come as a surprise. They share social constructivist commitments but cultivate interest in detailed inquiries and the practices from which policies evolve. Practice theorists are positioned to recognise change,

¹ Apart from the new focus, much of the democracy promotion literature poses the efficiency question.

² Definitions of democracy assistance usually include positive and negative conditionality, civil society assistance, diplomatic aid and socialisation via functional cooperation or twinning projects, bringing together EU and local parliamentarians. Some definitions exclude EU electoral observation, even though EU electoral observation makes up a large part of EU democracy assistance; the EU deployed over 160 missions in 60 states, with funding from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights since the 2000s (Freyburg et al., 2009; Panchuk et al., 2017).

even if incremental, and some practice theorists see change, even if this is the exception, rather than the rule. Bremberg (2016), for example, observes the temporal widening of the available democracy promotion repertoire, yet he stops short of explaining this change to different practice theorists and a wider audience interested in change and continuity in EU democracy promotion and other EU policies.

In this article, I address the puzzle of why there is at best incremental change in EU democracy promotion by identifying and theorising one instance of incremental change in EU election observation. The change occurred in EU election observation in Tunisia (2019) and is evident in emerging responses to (online) disinformation.³ Two mechanisms, imitations of practice and epistemic negotiation, explain it. By identifying these mechanisms, I seek to further practice theoretical theorisations of change and continuity in EU democracy promotion and other EU policies.⁴

The mechanisms I introduce are best understood as abstract conceptualisations of socially embedded and presumably transformative practices. Imitations of practice can be defined as duplications of practices created by other actors and that were recognised as intelligent in the field. During EU election observations in Tunisia, imitations of practice have been evident in the inclusion of newly invented means, such as social media monitoring. Though the EU incorporated practices invented by other actors and external expertise, defence of a central field position is evident in epistemic negotiation.⁵ Epistemic negotiation can be defined as the bringing together and framing of knowledge on disinformation. The wide acceptance of the importance of EU election reports and other actors' strife for the publication of their findings in these reports eased EU epistemic negotiation, though intimate knowledge of the rules of election observation and the Tunisian context were needed for this practice.

I develop my theorisation of incremental change with Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. In practice theory and practice theoretical studies of EU policies, field theory is well established (Mérand, 2010). Field theory contributes to the study of how related actors with different positions reproduce, vary and experiment with practices in striving for field specific capital. It connects explanations of change to the traits of fields and positions and strategies of important actors (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In the case of my study, field theory allowed seeing struggles for the interpretation of 'good election observation' and 'disinformation' and how EU interest in the defence of a central position conditioned imitations of practice and epistemic negotiation.

In analysing EU election observation in Tunisia in 2019, this article examines an important case for the study of incremental change. This situation was one of the first instances in which the EU covered (online) disinformation prior to and during elections,

³Disinformation is different from misinformation, which is false but is not created to cause harm, and from malinformation, which includes evidence and is used to discredit a person, institution or country (Turcilo and Obtmovic, 2020).

⁴There is a wide and sophisticated debate on continuity and change in practice theory, yet the debate tends to focus on the added value of practice theory in comparison to other approaches and the possibility of reflexive agency. Most contributions to it eschew the identification of mechanisms, though this may broaden the audience of practice theoretical explanations (Hopf, 2018).

⁵In comparison to scholars of normative power in Europe interested in the theorisation of EU agency, field theorists do not presume a particular kind of agency and adopt a relational view on questions of agency. From their perspective, agency is created through the performance of socially recognised practices and defences of particular positions in fields. The perspective appreciates empirical and inductive insights on how actors, such as the EU, steadily remake their agency in multiple ways (Bueger, 2016).

and in such instances, routines are not yet developed and experimentation and change are likely. The EU started paying attention to disinformation in electoral contexts around 2015 and formulated standards to defend and safeguard democracy from disinformation in the ‘Action Plan against Disinformation’ in 2018 (EEAS, 2019). The EU has defined disinformation ‘as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm’ (EEAS, 2019, p. 1). The EU recognises disinformation strategies ‘target not only Member States but also partner countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood as well as in the Southern Neighbourhood, Middle East and Africa’ (EEAS, 2019, p. 3). EU electoral observation missions (EU EOMs) first covered the existence and degree of (online) disinformation during the elections in Nigeria (2019) and Tunisia (2019).

Tunisia also occupies a critical place in EU democracy assistance. Since 2011, EU democracy assistance to Tunisia has been substantial, and Tunisia received more EU EOMs than any other state in the MENA region.⁶ Though Tunisia has been ranked as a democracy since 2014, there has been a period of democratic decline following the elections in 2019. Then, presidential candidate and political newcomer Kais Saïd attained the sympathies of voters, including progressives, despite a conservative profile, because he distinguished himself from the political establishment. Enduring corruption, including within the governing parties, *Nidaa Tounes* and *Ennahda*, had persisted. As president of Tunisia, Saïd suspended the Assembly of the People’s Representatives, labelled the situation (2021–) as an emergency, started ruling by decree and initiated a referendum that abolished Tunisia’s democratic constitution. Hence, the elections (2019) that brought Saïd to power can be seen as a turning point in the democratic development of Tunisia.

The article is structured as follows: In Section I, I introduce field theory and my methodology. Section II is focused on incremental change and imitations of practice and epistemic negotiation in EU electoral observation in Tunisia in 2019. In the conclusion, I summarise my insights and call for further analysis and theorisation of change in EU democracy promotion and other EU policies.

I. Field Theoretical Perspectives on Democracy Assistance and Electoral Observation

The IR practice turn (Bueger and Gadinger, 2014) has inspired likeminded research in EU studies (Adler-Nissen, 2016), studies of EU democracy promotion in the MENA region and other regions (Khakee and Wolff, 2022) and studies of other EU policies (Ekengren, 2018). All of these inquiries share an interest in practices, defined as socially meaningful performances, and strong empirical commitments, yet IR practice theorists

⁶EU EOM observed the general elections and constitution of a constituent assembly entrusted with legislative competencies in 2011, presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014, municipal elections in 2018 and presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019. The observation of municipal elections shows the importance attributed to Tunisian democratisation. The EU only observes municipal elections if presidential and parliamentary elections have been observed previously in the country and when renewed deployment of EU EOM are expected to contribute considerably to democratic transformation. The EU EOM, similar other international observation missions, ranked all elections as free, fair and in accordance with international law, contributing to conceptions of Tunisia as a consolidated democracy; however, the legitimacy of EU democracy assistance and electoral observation has been contested by domestic actors. For example, with regard to EU electoral observation in post-revolutionary Tunisia, it has been shown that EU electoral observation has less domestic credibility than often assumed Tunisian citizens question EU observers’ familiarities with the local context and prefer election observers from other Arab or African states (Bush and Prather, 2018; Sarto and Tholens, 2020).

work with different theories of practice, and these theories offer distinct terminologies and support different reasons for change (Adler and Pouliot, 2011).⁷

For example, the practice theories of Schatzki and, particularly, Wenger focus on change in the form of learning in communities of practice (CoP), defined as groups of likeminded individuals working in a common domain. Reasons for learning range from reflections on background knowledge to interaction with other CoPs (Wenger, 2003).⁸ The practice theory of Bourdieu, in turn, is oriented towards a greater unit of analysis – fields, which may contain different CoPs (Farnsworth et al., 2016) – and whilst it is open to different forms of change, it suggests competitions and strives for (field-specific) capital as a driver of change (Guiraudon, 2003). The traits of fields and positions of actors, however, become conditions of the ability of capital to create change.

Though IR scholars (Adler et al., 2024) have developed the CoP approach, which has been influenced by Bourdieu's field theory and remains compatible with it, I work mainly with Bourdieu's classical field theory in this article. Field theory offers nuanced language to analyse the historical evolution and traits of the socio-economic context in which practices change and allows for identification of the reasons for and mechanisms of change (Guiraudon, 2003; Pouliot, 2020). In the following, I introduce field theory's assumptions and concepts and my methodological choices.

Fields can be defined as units of collective action, constituted by the empirically observable social relations of actors. For a field to exist, there need to be social relations and interactions and practical logics emerging from these interactions (Hamm et al., 2022). In addition, Bourdieusian field theory suggests that all fields witness the emergence of field-specific capital and that actors strive for this form of capital and recognition in the field. From a Bourdieusian perspective, strivings for capital and struggle always exist amongst actors with different positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Martin-Mazé, 2017). Actors with central positions, or incumbents, possess field-specific capital or the power to define 'the right way of doing things', but their definitions can be called into question by challengers (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

Bourdieuian field theory invites the study of struggle and identification of field-specific capital. Though Bourdieu (1986) provided general definitions of other forms of (economic, social, cultural or symbolic) capital, the unique traits of field-specific capital imply field-specific capital can only be identified inductively. Scholars need to be already familiar with a field to see what is at stake and to define field-specific capital. For example, democracy assistance scholars have argued that possession of field-specific capital are evident in the capacity to define 'good' or different sorts of (political or developmental) democracy assistance (Holthaus and Christensen, 2022). Reflecting these insights, I claim that possession of field-specific capital can also be evident in the capacity to define good election observation and the adequate and realistic identification of disinformation within established procedures.

⁷Boltanski's practice theory focuses on reflexive agency as a cause of emancipatory change, whilst IR scholars following Foucault emphasise the contested and unstable nature of any practice (Hansen, 2011).

⁸It is possible to combine Bourdieusian theory and the CoP approach, for example, by showing that CoP members with social capital have the power to define competence or by analysing how CoPs entertain different standards of competence within one field. However, Bourdieusian field theory places more emphasis on striving for recognition and capital as a driver of change.

Recent developments of Bourdieusian field theory have focused on varying distributions of capital in fields and the specific traits of fields (Krause, 2018). In some fields, few actors possess field-specific capital and defend their possessions in sometimes intense struggles in fields organised around a narrowly defined objective. In these cases, one may categorise agents and speak of incumbents and challengers (Pouliot, 2020, p. 748). Yet, in other fields, we may observe rather equal distributions of capital and less intense struggles. In the case of this article, we can see a heterogenous fields that is constituted by actors focused on different but related tasks, such as democracy assistance and election observation, even if occasional contacts and epistemic exchanges, also with human right activists and development co-operation practitioners, occur (Carothers and Gramont, 2013).⁹ Furthermore, whilst disinformation is recognised as a new problem, few actors possess a position that allows them to forward finite definitions of disinformation and how to identify it.

In the heterogenous democracy assistance and electoral observation field, strivings for (field-specific) capital interact with the emergent inclusion of the monitoring of (online) disinformation into the established routines of election observation. Election observation norms,¹⁰ standards, routines and practices were outlined by different actors, including the United Nations, Organization for Democracy and Security in Europe (OSCE), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), long before disinformation was identified as a problem (Gawrich, 2015; Ludwig, 2004).¹¹ EU funding supported the development of the standards in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. The EU adapted the declaration in 2005, and the European Parliament, which has been active in EU election observation since 1994, endorsed it in 2007. The declaration outlines common understandings of genuine elections and creditable methodologies to observe them, with a focus on in-person observations of election day; commits the signing parties to co-operation; and details behavioural norms for international observers, for example, prohibiting interference in election or expressions of personal views in media interviews (OSCE, 2005). The EU has based its election observation patterns on the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and steadily revised the methodology in line with the institutional changes that came with the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). However, whereas EU revisions were oriented towards the identification of the mandates and responsibilities of the European Parliament, the European External Action Service (EEAS), created in 2011, and the increasingly important EU delegations

⁹Insights from my case study and the professional relations of EU practitioners show the fluid boundaries between democracy assistance and election observation. For example, Michael Gahler, who headed the EU EOM to Tunisia in 2011, is on the Board of Governors of the European Endowment of Democracy, implementing civil society assistance in affiliation with the EU, and, as a member of the Conservative parts in Germany, entertains contacts with the office of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (one of Germany's political foundations active in democracy assistance) in Tunisia (Interview, 14 October 2021). He also assumed tasks for the European Parliament's subcommittee on human rights, with regard to the human rights situation in Tunisia (Delegation of the European Union to Tunisia, 2022).

¹⁰IR field theorists often build on constructivist research on norms (defined as intersubjectively shared understandings about appropriate behaviour for a common identity) but shift the focus from norms as causes of behaviour to explorations of how norms and ideas are steadily redefined in the processes and social interactions in particular fields (Saurugger, 2013).

¹¹IDEA is an intergovernmental organisation focused on knowledge creation for democracy assistance and electoral observation and assistance. The NDI is a North American foundation specialising in electoral observation, similar to the International Foundation of Electoral Systems and Carter Center, though the latter does not receive state funding.

(EODS, 2016),¹² some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who had already acquired some recognition in the field, identified disinformation as a new and pressing problem, originally in view of the electoral victory of Donald Trump. For example, Democracy Reporting International (DRI) was in a position to translate the newly recognised problem into the electoral observation context.¹³ Other organisations prompted the definition of new practical tasks, such as fact checking, increasing media literacy and critical thinking and monitoring social media in electoral contexts.¹⁴

As I show in my case study, the EU followed the impulses coming mostly from NGOs and prepared the monitoring of (online) disinformation in addition to ‘traditional’ election monitoring. In comparison to other intergovernmental organisation conducting election observation, such as the OSCE, the EU has done so rather quickly and saved its recognition and position in the field. Still, EU election observation expertise can be contested. For example, some NGOs doubt that the EU has the technical capacities to properly identify (online) disinformation. The EU has substantial funding mechanisms but is known for recognising problems others have identified, rather than the identification and solving of new problems (Juncos, 2018). Hence, the EU does not possess symbolic capital or the capacity to forward definitions and concepts of (online) disinformation other actors take for granted (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 27).

Methodological Considerations

I have developed my argument in a research process that involved field research, expert interviews and theoretical and conceptual considerations.¹⁵ My review of field research between 2017 and 2019 and accidental conversations with Tunisian citizens, who most often disputed the legitimacy of the elections held after 2015, raised my interest in elections, and during an excursion on democracy promotion and electoral observation around the Tunisian elections in 2019, an interest in the question of how the EU responds to disinformation in its election observation developed. When I visited the EU delegation in Tunis (2019), together with my students, a diplomat mentioned the EU’s work with ‘local experts analyzing disinformation in social media’. The excursion allowed me to conduct,

¹² According to the current methodology, revised in 2016, the EEAS and Democracy and Election Observation Division make the decision to deploy an EU EOM. The European Parliament needs to consent to the prioritisation of states in which EU EOM may be deployed to complement other EU democracy assistance efforts. The chief observer is also a member of the European Parliament. They possess the authority to issue press releases on behalf of the EU EOM and in cooperation with EU bodies in Brussels. The organisation of the preparation and deployment, in cooperation with the hosting government, is in the hands of the EU delegations. EU EOM involve the cooperation and practical exchanges between EU institutions, and following the impetus of professionalisation in electoral observation, the EU organises trainings and projects with the help of other organisations, such as the IDEA and IFES. The Building Resources in Democracy, Governance, and Elections project has been conducted together with IDEA, IFES and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to train observers and other stakeholders who support electoral processes and to further a culture of information sharing (Lyngue-Mangueira, 2012).

¹³ Some actors entered into new coalitions on the basis of the problem identification, as the Design 4 Democracy Coalition shows. It includes democracy assistance organisations, news- and fact-checking organisations and technical partners, such as the Design 4 Democracy Coalition.

¹⁴ These tasks relate to standing interests in media assistance and electoral observation, and practitioners working on the new tasks steadily negotiate their positions and the importance of old and new democracy assistance tasks.

¹⁵ Methodologically, field theory emphasises a need for access to the respective field and the practice evolving within it. Although participant observation is favoured, it is often hard to negotiate access to transnational fields popularised by international organisations, such as the EU. Semi-structured expert interviews with practitioners or experts possessing special knowledge about practices, follow up conversations with practitioners, analysis of policy documents and documents revealing codes of conduct are alternatives to participant observation (Holthaus and Wolff, 2024).

with students present and contributing questions, seven interviews with members of the EU or organisations supporting electoral observation. Apart from one instance, all interviews took place in the organisations' offices in Tunis, and questions concerned the practical organisation of election observation and organisations' estimation of the political situation in Tunisia. During the interviews, I noted that many practitioners identified intransparent electoral campaigning on social media as the most severe threat to fair and credible presidential and parliamentary elections.

In the second phase, I relied on expert interviews and (ongoing) conversations with practitioners to learn more on how practitioners monitored social media as a part of electoral observation. My contacts helped me to get in touch with experts I had not interviewed, and when I reached out on my own, all attempts were successful, and I interviewed additional members of the EU and organisations supporting electoral observation in Tunisia in nine interviews via phone or video calls in 2022. My question centred on the conduct of electoral observation, understandings of disinformation and relations with other actors. Whilst I offered my interview partners anonymisation of their input, I can say that I interviewed practitioners with key positions in the (EU's) electoral observation in Tunisia. During the interviews, I took notes, and these notes, together with a close reading of documents, such as handbooks, the reports of the EU election observations missions and press releases, form the data with which I developed my theoretical argument.

Finally, in a third phase, I reconsidered the material and my theoretical choices and developed and my theoretical argument. Though I had worked with field theory before, I asked about the plausibility of field theory's antagonistic assumptions in view of the practitioners' identification with the shared enterprise of countering disinformation and considered the CoP approach, which was becoming increasingly popular in my research network. Empirical observations, however, convinced me to stick to a field theoretical perspective. In my subsequent research, I learned election observation organisations compete in defining 'good election observation' and disinformation and strive for recognition, dynamics that are best grasped in the field theoretical vocabulary.

Bourdieu (1992, p. 224) disputes distinctions between methodological considerations and theorisation; hence, I include my choice of field theory and conceptualisation of an heterogeneous democracy promotion and electoral assistance field in this section. I developed this conceptualisation with the material gathered in interviews and conversations and analysis of the secondary literature and documents and refined my theorisation of incremental change in the last phase of my research.

II. EU Election Observation and Disinformation in Tunisia (2019)

In this section, I adopt a field theoretical perspective to analyse how the EU has responded to disinformation in its election observation in Tunisia in 2019. Scholars with field theoretical perspectives have advanced analysis of incremental change and the homogenisation of conduct in policy fields. My observation of one mechanism – imitation of practice – relates to this body of literature, even if it is important to see that imitations of practice pre-empt organisations' adoption of similar institutional forms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2009). Imitations of practices are about the duplication of practices that other actors have created, for example, through experimentation,

and that were then recognised as useful within a particular field. Though imitation of practice means the EU, as an actor, relies on external inventions, another mechanism indicates that the EU occupies and defends a central position in election observation. EU responses to disinformation in Tunisia include epistemic negotiation: the bringing together and framing of knowledge of and data on disinformation (Bueger, 2016, 2021). Interactions with various actors, such as DRI, and other actors striving for EU recognition enabled EU epistemic negation. In what follows, I introduce the insights of my case study, whilst distinguishing analytically between EU responses to disinformation.

EU Election Observation and Imitation of Practice

In 2019, Tunisian elections¹⁶ were catalysed by the sudden death of President Essebsi, and the electoral process was accelerated because the constitution demanded the election of a new president within 90 days. Before and during the elections, political debates centred on corruption and socio-economic concerns. The preventive detention of presidential candidate Nabil Karoui 10 days before the first round of elections due to investigations of money laundering also dominated the public debates.

In this context, the EU and other actors attributed new importance to social media monitoring, even if the EU had steadily moved towards this new task. In 2011, the EU EOM had occasionally monitored social media and found that online messaging lost importance as compared to the times of the revolution (EU, 2011, p. 29).¹⁷ In 2014/2015, the EU EOM was mostly concerned with monitoring traditional media (EU, 2014). In Tunisia, a new institution, the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication, had started to regulate the audiovisual landscape and ensure conditions of fair campaigning in 2013. The EU EOM praised the impartial work of the HAICA and the formulation of new rules for media coverage during the electoral process. In 2019, the EU EOM referred to electoral campaigns and disinformation on social media and asked for the further regulation of electoral campaigning on social media in its final report (EU, 2019).¹⁸

In 2019, the EU EOM to Tunisia was headed by chief observer Fabio Massimo Castaldo. Castaldo served as vice president of the European Parliament and had led the EU EOM on the municipal elections in Tunisia in 2018 (Quillen, 2019). His position was critical; the EU methodology ascribes importance to the chief observer and knowledge exchange amongst chief observers is furthered through institutionalised meetings in the EU (EODS, 2022). The chief observer heads a core team, consisting of about seven analysts, long-term observers, short-term observers and locally recruited short-term observers. The chief observer is responsible for the mission, organisation of press conferences and the writing of the final report of the EU EOM. Yet, as working members of parliament, chief observers do not stay in the hosting state for the entire duration of the mission but visit several times.¹⁹ After his arrival, the chief observer and experts working

¹⁶Presidential elections took place on 15 September and parliamentary elections on 13 October 2019.

¹⁷The report is available only in French, as you will see in the literature.

¹⁸For example, the recommendations of the EU EOM 2014/2015 were concerned with the composition of the Independent High Electoral Authority (ISIE), reforms of the electoral law and promotion of female candidates. The EU EOM did not observe the elections abroad or monitored social media and relied on external expertise when it equally noted a need to ease the complexity of a system that allows the Tunisian diaspora, counting over a million Tunisian citizens, to vote from abroad.

¹⁹For example, Michael Gahler, who headed the EU EOM to Tunisia in 2011, visited Tunisia three times, starting 1 month before the 2011 election (Interview, 11 November 2019).

for the EU EOM held informational meetings with other election observers and reached out to democracy assistance organisations entertaining permanent offices in Tunis (Interview, 30 June 2022). Short-term observers for the EU EOM were recruited from the EU diplomatic community. This option was created in 2016 (Interview, 11 November 2019). The EU EOM 2019 thus included diplomats and staff working for the embassies of EU member states and EU delegations.²⁰

Other actors observing the Tunisian elections and social media activities before and during the elections included several international organisations such as the OSCE, the Carter Center, the NDI, IFES and a range domestic organisations, such as I Watch and the Association Tunisienne pour l'Intégrité et la Démocratie des Elections (ATIDE).²¹ IFES positioned itself as the most important partner of ISIE, even if many domestic organisations objected to IFES because of its affiliations with the US government.²² I Watch is a well-known domestic organisation that offers training for domestic observers, has experimented with social media monitoring and has become a partner of the NDI (Interview, 18 July 2022). ATIDE was founded on 25 March 2011 and steadily broadened its mandate to participate in electoral observation in other Arab states and further local and participatory governance in Tunisia (EU, 2011a, p. 31). ATIDE gained the recognition of transnational and domestic actors, received funding from a German political foundation, the Friedrich Nauman Stiftung, and became a partner of DRI.²³ DRI is a NGO that has worked on election observation since 2006 and, as indicated, disinformation in the context of elections since 2015. The constellation of actors and the relations between transnational and domestic actors are common and reflect positions within the transnational electoral observation field. The NDI and DRI have acquired and defended central positions in the field and work with domestic organisations around the world. The Carter Center is keen to gain recognition and field-specific capital through the identification of new digital threats to democracy. As compared to the EU EOM, many international organisations conducting election observation arrived earlier or claimed to entertain closer relations with local actors.

Members of the EU EOM and other election observers agreed on the importance of Facebook in Tunisia, the importance of electoral campaigns taking place online and the possibility of disinformation (Elsawah and Howard, 2020). They argued of Tunisia's population of 11 million, about nine million Tunisian citizens' have Facebook profiles and many use the site daily. A small number of Tunisian elite communicates with international actors through Twitter. Before the elections, ISIE asked all presidential candidates and

²⁰For many of these observers, election day was the first or one of the rare occasions where they left the shielded embassies to travel to rural places and perform practices that broke with diplomatic routines. They worked with experienced election observers and were introduced to strategies for answering about 100 questions about the country context, opening and closing of the polling stations and so forth (Interview, 21 November 2019).

²¹In 2014, Tunisian parliamentarians had already pointed out that electoral campaigns were largely conveyed on social media (Interview, 5 July 2022). And in 2019, and next to the EU, several central democracy assistance and electoral observation organisations seized on their domestic partners' references (Interview, 8 July 2022).

²²Domestic organisations were not aware that IFES work in Tunisia is largely funded by EU member states. The organisation entertains a permanent office in Tunis and is also active in the promotion of free media.

²³Another local organisation active in election observation is Mourakiboun. It trained about 4000 national observers in 2011 and in 2014 and became a local partner of the NDI. In comparison to the international observers, Mourakiboun criticised the 2011 elections, and these views were reported in the EU EOM's final report; however, Mourakiboun has not been working on disinformation.

political parties to declare their official Facebook pages; but not all candidates reported their accounts, and numerous profiles with unclear authorship emerged before the elections.

Despite agreement about its importance, many practitioners characterised social media monitoring in the context of the Tunisian elections as experimental.²⁴ Precise procedures for social media monitoring have not yet been defined, and the credo at work may be summed as ‘same standards, different means’ (Interview, 18 July 2022). Some election observers noted differences between traditional approaches to election observation and social media monitoring. Accordingly, ‘traditional’ election observation approaches include filling out forms, whereas social media monitoring is about the steady invention and revision of strategies.²⁵ Some organisations, such as DRI, had developed methodologies for social media monitoring in their headquarters from 2015 onwards, yet these methodologies were not applicable in Tunisia because of a lack of information and Facebook’s reluctance to ensure safety and offer data. IDEA also ran an experimental project on the identification and definition of disinformation.²⁶ It was the second time that the EU monitored social media during electoral observation, and given the differences between the socio-political contexts of Nigeria and Tunisia, previous experiences could not be duplicated.

Growing interest in disinformation enhanced the recognition and position of domestic organisations. International organisations mostly provided funding and assistance in the writing of the final report. Social media monitoring was in the hands of local organisations, such as I Watch or ATIDE, or local experts hired to conduct social media monitoring. Local organisations and experts were also in key positions to identify the problems and, thus, the categories on which data were gathered.²⁷ The projects were often run by about six and no more than 20 individuals, who scrolled through Facebook, making observations, creating categories inductively and gathering and coding data manually (DRI and ATIDE, 2019). In the Tunisian context, some domestic experts were working for or with various transnational organisations, such as IDEA or DRI, or were engaged in digital rights activism, for example, in the advocacy organisation Access Now. The DRI states:

[E]lection observation missions planning to survey what happens on social media should start preparatory work long in advance to build up a picture of the political landscape on social media. This work, necessarily conducted by nationals of the country with a good understanding of local politics, allows for an understanding of which channels are used and how, who the main actors are [...] what metaphors are used that would be immediately understandable to a local voter but not to an outside observer and that cannot be captured properly by any automated tool. (DRI and ATIDE, 2019, p. 5)

²⁴A recently published handbook of the OSCE confirms that social media monitoring is (still) experimental (OSCE, 2021).

²⁵Historical institutionalists would call this form of incremental change layering. Layering is evident when new institutions or procedures are introduced in addition to and without changing established ones. Some argue that layering can lead to fragmentation (Hanrieder, 2014).

²⁶To be perceived by others as ‘competent’, organisations need to run projects on the new policy construct of disinformation, and practitioners need to show their abilities to distinguish neatly between misinformation and disinformation.

²⁷Most international election observers doing social media monitoring are highly aware of their own roles as knowledge creators – ‘If you look for hate speech, you will find hate speech’ (Interview, 18 July 2022) – and dependence on domestic experts’ familiarity with the socio-political contexts and domestic legitimacy of international election observation, linguistic skills and competence to interpret disinformation.

The EU recognised the position of domestic actors and imitated practices that other international organisations previously invented in their experimentation. The expert working for the EU EOM on social media monitoring met with ATIDE after his arrival in early September (Interview, 25 July 2022),²⁸ and the EU consulted local experts on social media monitoring. Reflecting the methodologies that other organisations introduced for social media monitoring, the EU also increased social media monitoring as a part of its election observation. For example, the EU observed paid election advertisements, the Facebook pages of the presidential candidates and Facebook groups emerging in favour of presidential candidate Said. What evolved was not a division of labour in social media monitoring and election observation and more the performance of increasingly similar practices. The incremental changes in EU election observation point in this direction, at the relatively spontaneous character of the imitations and at the lack of well-defined strategies for media monitoring and the tracing of disinformation.

EU Election Observation and Epistemic Negotiation

Imitation of practice enables, rather than constrains, epistemic negotiation, and actors imitating the practices of others can occupy central positions in fields. In the present case, the EU imitated recognised – though experimental – practices, as competent strategies leading to reliable information about disinformation prior and during the Tunisian elections. Knowledge about who is being able to conduct social media monitoring for possible disinformation and being recognised by others in the field as a competent and committed actor is a precondition to epistemic negotiation. As indicated, I define epistemic negotiation as the bringing together and framing of knowledge and data on, in this case, disinformation. Only recognised actors who are in central positions, entertain various relations and have the competency to identify what will be accepted as the most important and valid knowledge can perform epistemic negotiation.

The observation that international and domestic organisations observing the elections can contest EU expertise should not be taken as an argument against the central position of the EU. Some international organisations and internal critics of election observation have argued EU EOMs arrived late and relied on the information of others.²⁹ As one interview partner explained, disinformation is a ‘24/7 problem’ (Interview, 18 July 2022), and its dimension cannot be estimated through the (post hoc) monitoring of the electoral campaigns shortly before the elections.³⁰ This criticism shows that organisations strive for the best identification of disinformation and that they are keen to position the added value of their expertise. They not only commit themselves to the field-specific norm of information sharing.

Epistemic negotiation took place at different sides and stages of the election observation process, though it became increasingly important towards the end of the elections. As indicated, the chief observer and EU EOM members held informational meetings with other practitioners to exchange information. Other democracy assistance and election

²⁸ Analysis of the tweets of the EU and Ben Graham Jones.

²⁹ Some election observation and digital rights organisations questioned the ability of the ISIE and HAICA with regard to the regulation of online campaigning.

³⁰ Domestic organisations often claim special knowledge about otherwise unnoted electoral fraud but do so also to show their competency to acquire funding for future election observation.

observing organisations were also invited to EU EOM's press conferences. As compared to other missions, EU EOMs are well funded and big, and their statements usually receive a lot of attention. Hence, election observers are interested in EU press conferences and publication and, where possible, in contributing to the knowledge that is likely to become authoritative after publication beyond the election observation field.

Chief observers and practitioners drafting EU press releases or working on the final reports often conceive of these writing processes as periods of intense, time-pressured negotiations amongst multiple actors. Possibilities for citations and wordings are part of the intense social experiences. Hence, members of the EU EOM framing the problems and possibility of disinformation as similar to other actors in the field implies less reliance on external expertise than on the competent selection of the information considered most important by recognised actors in the field. The chief observer and the core team of the EU EOM to Tunisia were recognised as 'excellent' in the EU (Interview, 9 September 2022) and were recognised beyond the EU.

Epistemic negotiation preceded the publication of the EU EOM's final report, which included recommendations for the new Tunisian government. The content was negotiated with multiple EU institutions and election observers, and the insights of EU social media monitoring were presented alongside with the insights of other organisations, such as the DRI. The EU EOM's final report points to cases of false information published by the online media, the creation of large networks of social media accounts and networks supporting presidential candidate Said and the spread of images and videos supporting the candidate.³¹ Consideration of these points implies that the electoral process leading to the election of Said was flawed at least in part.

For the first time, the recommendations formulated for the new Tunisian government have demonstrated a need to further regulate online campaigning and social media activities. Though the importance of the recommendations is disputed within the EU – Members of the European Parliament tend to attribute greater importance to them than diplomats working for the EEAS – many practitioners have conceived of the recommendations ending the final report 'as our most important democracy assistance tool' (Interview, 24 October 2022; see also (Costello, 2021)).³² The recommendations often inspire work of the EU delegations, and they can be used as a basis for electoral and democracy assistance projects in the states (EEAS, 2018). The EU EOM's recommendations, formulated after intense processes of negotiation, pointed to a need to strengthen transparency of social networks, specifically about funding for political advertisement and the location of the account administrators. They show the importance the EU attributed to disinformation on social media during the Tunisian elections in 2019. In addition,

³¹With regard to the electoral campaigns on Facebook and their effects, election observation organisation monitoring social media and practitioners defend different positions. DRI and ATIDE found disinformation was a feature though not on a large scale during the presidential elections (DRI and ATIDE, 2019). Others emphasise malinformation because a new actor – social media networks supporting Said as 'a digital army' (Interview, 30 June 2022) – spread images and rumours discrediting other candidates, for example, by mentioning illegitimate children. Others have warned against overdue diagnoses of disinformation because of new interest in this phenomenon and 'smoking gun argumentation' (Interview, 18 July 2022), which links the existence of intransparent accounts, disinformation and the surprising electoral victory of President Said.

³²The democracy assistance literature has not noted the importance of the recommendations yet. For an exception, see Seeberg (2009).

they included specific comments on the most critical aspects of electoral and democratic transformation processes³³ and noted the pending institutionalisation of a constitutional court and necessary improvement to guarantee a free media in Tunisia.

Though the chief observer has returned to Tunisia to discuss the newly elected governments' responses to the recommendations, they have not initiated high-level conversations on the identified need to reform, mostly due to Said's clear objection to take international recommendations into account. Said conceived of them as 'lecturing' (Interview, 9 September 2022), and only informal discussions with cabinet members developed. Within the EU, this is regretted because consideration of the recommendations, backed by further international pressure, could have prevented the following dedemocratisation in Tunisia. Even before the elections, Said positioned himself as an open critic of Tunisia's electoral system, and in 2021, he initiated a controversial referendum that ended in the abolishment of the electoral system as defined in Tunisia's first democratic constitution.

Conclusion

In this article, I addressed why there is so little and at most incremental change in EU election observation and theorised an instance of such change through (1) an analysis of the election observation field in which the EU is active and (2) the identification of two mechanisms, imitations of practice and epistemic negotiation. The analysis showed the election observation field has traits that benefit incremental change. The election observation field is a heterogenous field that interacts with other fields and hosts actors with relatively equal positions and not too intense struggles over capital.³⁴ The field's traits enable the EU's imitations of practice and epistemic negotiation, and I hope that the mechanisms are useful to different practice theorists and scholars interested in incremental change in EU democracy promotion and other EU policies.

I developed these insights with a field theoretical approach perspective of how the EU has changed its election observation in view of (online) disinformation. In the democracy assistance and election observation field, attempts of established NGOs and foundations, including DRI and the Carter Center, to redefine 'good' election observation in view of new challenges furthered the recognition of disinformation as a threat to electoral integrity. The EU included this development rather quickly, as compared to other international organisations, such as the OSCE. My field theoretical perspective suggests that problem and policy constructions travel through (informal) interactions, furthers considerations of the relations between responses to disinformation and positions in fields and allows for the use of new mechanisms in explanations of incremental change.

In view of EU election observation in Tunisia in 2019, I have shown that the EU included responses to disinformation in its repertoire of action through imitation of practice and epistemic negotiation. Imitation of practice precedes institutional isomorphism and is evident in the duplication of experimental but recognised conduct or, for example, the EU's inception of social media monitoring. Currently, EU EOMs include experts with a

³³The recommendations ask for further transparency on social media but do not detail the needed changes to realise this. Currently, Facebook is not legally committed to the provision of data in Tunisia (Elsawah and Howard, 2020).

³⁴On the other side, a field that, for example, strongly depends on other fields and/or hosts an actor possessing a central position and symbolic capital shows traits that can benefit more radical forms of change.

mandate to do social media monitoring, and they do so in interaction with other actors in the field. Imitation of practice and knowledge about socially accepted identifications of disinformation hence enable epistemic negotiation, or the bringing together of knowledge on disinformation, yet epistemic negotiation should not be equated with reliance on external expertise. Only actors with the competency to select the most important information through social interactions and central field positions can perform this practice; NGOs are also keen to be cited in the EU EOMs final report. The observation that the EU performed epistemic negotiation indicates that it defends a central position and that its social and epistemic power lies in its capacity to bring together collectively produced insights; however, EU expertise can be contested, and the EU did not invent the terms other actors took for granted in their estimation of disinformation. Thus, the EU occupies a central position but does not possess symbolic power in the Bourdieusian sense.

The field theoretical twist of my theorisation is particularly evident in the second mechanism. I conceive of competition amongst varying organisations and the EU's interest in the defence of a central position as conditions of the EU's epistemic negotiation. Though it is possible to conceive of election observation NGOs and EU EOMs as CoPs with different standards of competence operating in one field – the former put more emphasis on the need of long-term observations than the latter – the CoP approach, up to date, is less well equipped to explain competition amongst CoPs and why one actor is in a position to perform certain practices, such as epistemic negotiation, and whilst others are not. In cases where striving for recognition and position is less intense, however, further explanations of incremental change using field theory and the CoP approach might be developed.

The main intention of my article is to further practice theorisations of incremental change in EU democracy promotion and other EU policies. Practice theories are well equipped to find and theorise incremental change, be it positive or negative. In view of growing formulations of policy challenges and power shifts amongst supporters and opponents of democracy promotion within the EU, variations in the EU democracy promotion repertoire and demises of established practices and creation of new practices are likely and through the common theorisation of these or other forms of change, practice theorists may gain more nuanced understandings of their theories and of EU democracy promotion, which remains, despite all of its well-known pitfalls, a possible tool for the furtherance of emancipation.

Acknowledgements

Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Correspondence:

Leonie Holthaus, Technical University of Darmstadt, Darmstadt, Germany.
email: holthaus@pg.tu-darmstadt.de

References

- Achrainer, C. and Pace, M. (2024) 'Non-Learning Within a Constellation of Communities of Practice: The Case of the EU and Its Democracy Support in the Arab World'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13629>.

- Adler, E., Bremberg, N. and Sonderjee, M. (2024) 'Communities of Practice in World Politics: Advancing a Research Agenda'. *Global Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, ksad070.
- Adler, E. and Pouliot, V. (2011) 'International Practices: Introduction and Framework'. In Adler, E. and Pouliot, V. (eds) *International Practices* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 3–36.
- Adler-Nissen, R. (2016) 'Towards a Practice Turn in EU Studies: The Everyday of European Integration'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 87–103.
- Bicchi, F. (2014) 'The Politics of Foreign Aid and the European Neighbourhood Policy Post-Arab Spring: 'More for More' or Less of the Same?' *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 318–332.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital'. In Richardson, J. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Greenwood), pp. 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Bremberg, N. (2016) 'Making Sense of the EU's Response to the Arab Uprisings: Foreign Policy Practice at Times of Crisis'. *European Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 423–441.
- Bueger, C. (2016) 'Doing Europe: Agency and the European Union in the Field of Counter-Piracy Practice'. *European Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 407–422.
- Bueger, C. (2021) 'Styles of Theorizing International Practice'. In Hellmann, G. and Steffek, J. (eds) *Praxis as a Perspective on International Relations* (Bristol University Press).
- Bueger, C. and Gadinger, F. (2014) *International Practice Theory. New Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Bush, S.S. and Prather, L. (2018) 'Who's There? Election Observer Identity and the Local Credibility of Elections'. *International Organization*, Vol. 72, No. 3, pp. 659–692.
- Carothers, T. and Gramont, D. (2013) *Development Aid Confronts Politics. The Almost Revolution* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).
- Costello, P. (2021) 'Votes and Ballots Podcast Ep. 4: EU EOMs in 2021 With Patrick Costello' [Interview]. Available from: <https://podtail.com/en/podcast/votes-ballots/votes-and-ballots-podcast-ep-4-eu-eoms-in-2021-wit>
- Dandashly, A. (2018) 'EU Democracy Promotion and the Dominance of the Security–Stability Nexus'. *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 62–82.
- Del Sarto, R.A. (2016) 'Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, Its Borderlands, and the 'Arab Spring''. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, pp. 215–232.
- Delegation of the European Union to Tunisia. (2022) 'Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights Visit to Tunisia'. Available from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/parliament%E2%80%99s-subcommittee-human-rights-visit-tunisia_en?s=126 [Accessed 24th July 2023].
- DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. (1983) 'Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields'. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 147–160.
- Dingwerth, K. and Pattberg, P. (2009) 'World Politics and Organizational Fields: The Case of Transnational Sustainability Governance'. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 707–743.
- DRI and ATIDE. (2019) 'Monitoring of Electoral Campaigning on Social Media Tunisia'. Available from: <https://democracyreporting.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/images/2764DRI-SMM-Report-EN-Web.pdf> [Accessed 24th July 2022].
- EEAS. (2019) 'EU Electoral Observation Missions: An Unshakeable Witness Watching Over Democracy Worldwide'. Available from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-electoral-observation-missions-unshakeable-witness-watching-over-democracy-worldwide_fr?s=82 [Accessed 24th July 2023].

- Ekengren, M. (2018) *Explaining the European Union's Foreign Policy: A Practice Theory of Translocal Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University).
- Elsawah, M. and Howard, P.N. (2020) *The Challenges of Monitoring Social Media in the Arab World: The Case of the 2019 Tunisian Elections* (Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda).
- EODS. (2016) 'Handbook for European Union Election Observation'. Available from: https://www.eods.eu/library/EUEOM_Handbook_2016.pdf [Accessed 12th July 2022].
- EODS. (2022) 'Annual Meeting of EU EOM Deputy Chief Observers and Project Managers Held in Brussels'. Available from: <https://www.eods.eu/posts/annual-meeting-of-eu-eom-deputy-chief-observers-and-project-managers-held-in-brussels> [Accessed 24th July 2023].
- EEAS. (2018) 'EU and Election Observation'. Available from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-election-observation-0_en [Accessed 22nd July 2022].
- EU: Mission d'observation électorale de l'Union européenne. (2011) 'Rapport final'. Available from: https://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20TUNISIA%202011_fr.pdf [Accessed 24th July 2023].
- EU: Mission d'observation électorale de l'Union européenne. (2014) 'Rapport final'. Available from: https://www.eods.eu/library/150313-rapport-final-moeue-tunisie-2014_fr.pdf [Accessed 24th July 2023].
- EU: Mission d'observation électorale de l'Union européenne. (2019) 'Rapport final'. Available from: https://www.eods.eu/library/moe_ue_tunisie_rapport_final_decembre_2019.pdf [Accessed 24th July 2023].
- Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I. and Wenger-Trayner, E. (2016) 'Communities of Practice as a Social Theory of Learning: A Conversation With Etienne Wenger'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 139–160.
- Fligstein, N. and McAdam, D. (2012) *A Theory of Fields* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Freyburg, T., Lavenex, S., Schimmelfennig, F., Skripka, T. and Wetzel, A. (2009) 'EU Promotion of Democratic Governance in the Neighbourhood'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 6, pp. 916–934.
- Gawrich, A. (2015) 'The European Parliament in International Election Observation Missions (IEOMs): Division of Labour or Decreased Influence?' In Stavridis, S. and Irrera, D. (eds) *The European Parliament and its International Relations* (Routledge), pp. 121–141.
- Guiraudon, V. (2003) 'The Constitution of a European Immigration Policy Domain: A Political Sociology Approach'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 263–282.
- Hamm, M., Mérand, F. and Obendiek, A. S. (2022) 'Field Theory: From Social Interaction to the Analysis of Power'. ISA Annual Conception, Nashville.
- Hanrieder, T. (2014) 'Gradual Change in International Organisations: Agency Theory and Historical Institutionalism'. *Politics*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 324–333.
- Hansen, L. (2011) 'Performing Practices: A Poststructuralist Analysis of the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis'. In Adler, E. and Pouliot, V. (eds) *International Practices* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 280–309.
- Holthaus, L. and Christensen, M. (2022) 'The Production of North American and German Democracy Promotion Expertise: A Practice Theoretical Analysis'. *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 271–289.
- Holthaus, L. and Wolff, J. (2024) 'Practices of Policy Orientation: A Study of the Heterogeneous Field of Democracy Promotion Research'. *International Studies Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 1–25.
- Hopf, T. (2018) 'Change in International Practices'. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 687–711.
- Juncos, A.E. (2018) 'Resilience in Peacebuilding: Contesting Uncertainty, Ambiguity, and Complexity'. *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 559–574.

- Khakee, A. and Wolff, S. (2022) 'EU Democracy Projection in the Southern Mediterranean: A Practice Analysis'. *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 419–434.
- Krause, M. (2018) 'How Fields Vary'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 69, No. 1, pp. 3–22.
- Ludwig, R. (2004) 'The UN's Electoral Assistance: Challenges, Accomplishments, Prospects'. In Newman, E. and Rich, P. (eds) *The UN Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideals and Reality* (United Nations Press), pp. 169–187.
- Lynge-Manguiera, H. (2012) 'Why 'Professionalizing' International Election Observation Might Not be Enough to Ensure Effective Election Observation'. IDEA. Available from: <https://ideadev.insomnation.com/sites/default/files/publications/why-professionalizing-international-election-observation-might-not-be-enough.pdf> [Accessed 24th June 2022].
- Martin-Mazé, M. (2017) 'Returning Struggles to the Practice Turn: How Were Bourdieu and Boltanski Lost in (Some) Translations and What to Do About It?' *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 203–220.
- Mérand, F. (2010) 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Birth of European Defense'. *Security Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 342–374.
- Mouhib, L. (2014) 'EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia and Morocco: Between Contextual Changes and Structural Continuity'. *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 351–372.
- Natorski, M. (2016) 'Epistemic (Un)certainty in Times of Crisis: The Role of Coherence as a Social Convention in the European Neighbourhood Policy After the Arab Spring'. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 646–670.
- OSCE. (2005) 'Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation'. Available from: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/c/215556.pdf> [Accessed 19th July 2022].
- OSCE. (2021) 'Guidelines for Observation of Election Campaigns on Social Networks'. Available from: https://www.osce.org/Observing_elections_on_Social_Networks.
- Panchuk, D., Bossuyt, F. and Orbie, J. (2017) 'The Substance of EU Democratic Governance Promotion via Transgovernmental Cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood'. *Democratization*, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 1044–1065.
- Pouliot, V. (2020) 'Historical Institutionalism Meets Practice Theory: Renewing the Selection Process of the United Nations Secretary-General'. *International Organization*, Vol. 74, No. 4, pp. 742–772.
- Quillen, S. (2019) 'Dozens of EU Observers to Monitor Tunisian Elections'. *The Arab Weekly*. Available from: <https://the arabweekly.com/dozens-eu-observers-monitor-tunisian-elections> [Accessed 19th July 2022].
- Sarto, R.A. and Tholens, S. (eds) (2020) *Resisting Europe: Practices of Contestation in the Mediterranean Middle East* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press).
- Saurugger, S. (2013) 'Constructivism and Public Policy Approaches in the EU: From Ideas to Power Games'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 6, pp. 888–906.
- Schumacher, T. and Bouris, D. (2017) 'The 2011 Revised European Neighbourhood Policy: Continuity and Change in EU Foreign Policy'. In Schumacher, T. and Bouris, D. (eds) *The Revised European Neighbourhood Policy* (Palgrave MacMillan).
- Seeberg, P. (2009) 'The EU as a Realist Actor in Normative Clothes: EU Democracy Promotion in Lebanon and the European Neighbourhood Policy'. *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 81–99.
- Turcilo, L. and Obtrnovic, M. (2020) 'Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation: Causes, Trends, and Their Influence on Democracy'. Heinrich Böll Foundation. Available from: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2020-08/200825_E-Paper3_ENG.pdf [Accessed 30th October 2024].
- Wenger, E. (2003) 'Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems'. In Nicolini, D., Gheradi, S. and Yanow, D. (eds) *Knowing in Organizations: A Practice-Based Approach* (M. E. Sharpe), pp. 76–99.