Full Program, Summer School 2018
(Descriptions of each session follow below the program.)

Monday, 2 July
- 8:30: Arrival, registration, coffee/tea
- 9:00: Welcome – Dr. Floris Mansvelt Beck and Dr. Rebekah Tromble, program directors
- 9:30: Conceptualizing “Fake News” – Dr. Tromble
- 10:30: Coffee/tea break
- 12:00: Lunch break
- 13:00: Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Data – Dr. Mansvelt Beck
- 14:30: Coffee/tea break
- 14:45: Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Data, continued
- 16:00: Welcome drinks

Tuesday, 3 July
- 8:30: Arrival, coffee/tea
- 9:00: Understanding Public Opinion – Prof. Dr. Joop van Holsteyn
- 10:30: Coffee/tea break
- 10:45: Understanding Public Opinion, continued
- 12:00: Lunch break
- 13:00: Data in Representative Democracy – Dr. Tom Louwerse
- 14:30: Coffee/tea break
- 14:45: Data in Representative Democracy, continued

Wednesday, 4 July
- 8:30: Arrival, coffee/tea
- 9:00: The Political Psychology of Fake News I – Dr. Tromble
- 10:30: Coffee/tea break
- 10:45: The Political Psychology of Fake News I, continued
- 12:00: Lunch break
- 13:00: Keynote address (TBA)
- 15:00: Walking tour of Leiden
- 18:00: Group dinner
Thursday, 5 July
- 8:30: Arrival, coffee/tea
- 9:00: The Political Psychology of Fake News II – Dr. Michael Meffert
- 10:30: Coffee/tea break
- 10:45: The Political Psychology of Fake News II, continued
- 12:00: Lunch break (participants free to find their own)
- 13:00: Critical Approaches to Data and Quantification – Prof. Dr. Petr Kopecký and Dr. Frank de Zwart
- 14:30: Coffee/tea break
- 14:45: Critical Approaches to Data and Quantification, continued

Friday, 6 July
- 8:30: Arrival, coffee/tea
- 9:00: “Hackathon” (The hackathon will make use of a variety of skills and insights from all participants. Programming skills are not required.)
- 12:00: Lunch break
- 13:00: Hackathon, continued
- 16:00: Presentation of ideas and findings

Session Descriptions:

Conceptualizing “Fake News” (Dr. Rebekah Tromble):
Careful conceptualization is fundamental to social scientific research. Before we begin our work, we need to have a clearly-defined and theoretically-grounded understanding of what we are trying to capture in our data. Deciding how to define and then operationalize a concept is rarely easy, but with a concept like “fake news,” this process can be particularly difficult—and potentially even harmful. If, for example, we define and operationalize the concept too broadly, we risk capturing news that serves legitimate democratic functions and, in turn, both increasing people’s skepticism toward the news and silencing voices within the public sphere. This session will therefore use a hands-on exercise to help participants understand how social scientists approach conceptualization, as well as how we might more fruitfully define and measure the notion of “fake news” itself.
Democracy, Data, and the Rule of Law (Dr. Floris Mansvelt Beck):
In essence, democracy is an algorithm, processing information, turning individual preferences into collective decisions through the application of a number of protocols. Over centuries, protocols such as the secret ballot, “one person, one vote”, representation, parliamentary debate, majority decision making, bicameralism, among others, have been developed to enhance both the quality of democratic decisions and the legitimacy of democratic procedures. In the age of big data, the development of new protocols for processing information that was previously inaccessible to voters and decision-makers promises to benefit democratic procedures and outcomes. At the same time, new technologies tend to disrupt existing practices. Data technology may also be used to subvert democracy. In order to assess whether an application of data technology will be either beneficial or detrimental to the functioning and legitimacy of a democratic system, it is necessary to have an adequate understanding of democracy’s central protocols. Therefore, this session will provide a brief outline of the most important protocols and values enshrined in democratic procedures and the Rule of Law.

Understanding Public Opinion (Prof. Dr. Joop van Holsteyn):
In any democratic system the will of the people and public opinion play, at least in principle, an important role. Governments may take public opinion into account before proposing certain policies. Intermediate organizations such as the media, corporations, political parties, and interest groups react to and attempt to influence public opinion. Finally, individual citizens take what they see as public opinion into account when expressing their own opinions or as an influence on their (political) behavior. Public opinion is omnipresent in the contemporary political process. At the same time, however, it is unclear just what is meant by the term and how it can or should be operationalized and measured. This leads to the key question in this session: What is public opinion? How did the concept of public opinion develop, and how does public opinion manifest itself?

Data in Representative Democracy (Dr. Tom Louwerse):
The relationship between politicians and citizens is at the core of representative democracy, but any number of organizations desire some form of representative relationship between themselves and their participants, clients, etc. In the political realm, researchers are using various data sources to study the representative relationship, for example voter studies, elite surveys, text analysis, and data and online tools are increasingly used to strengthen the representative relationship. Voting Advice Applications, for example, use data on party policy positions to present voters with advice on who to vote for. This session will look into the models of what the representative relationship can and should look like, and how data can be used to study and improve this relationship.
The Political Psychology of “Fake News” I (Dr. Rebekah Tromble):  
The news media have a variety of important effects on democratic citizens. They impact what issues people think are important. They shape the way we think about various topics and events. They provide information and knowledge crucial for an informed democratic public. But what happens when a specific news source provides inaccurate or misleading information? And what if multiple news sources get it wrong? This session will explore what political and social psychology tell us about the potential effects of “fake news” and other types of misinformation on people’s learning processes and knowledge, as well as their trust in political information and democratic institutions more broadly.

The Political Psychology of “Fake News” II (Dr. Michael Meffert):  
Even if accurate and relevant data is available and reported, citizens do not necessarily perceive and accept it as such, and rather consider such information to be (the equivalent of) “fake news”. Existing research shows that in particular those with strong political preferences tend to engage in motivated reasoning: They perceive information they disagree with as “hostile” to their position. They engage in selective exposure by focusing on information that supports their position while avoiding information that challenges them, and they end up with even stronger and more polarized opinions. This session will investigate these psychological biases and address the challenges of “correcting” misperceptions and misinformation.

Critical Approaches to Democracy (Prof. Dr. Petr Kopecký and Dr. Frank de Zwaart):  
The state is the basic political unit within which modern democracy is organized, and the state is unthinkable without the gathering of data: the term statistics actually refers to the analysis of data about the state. However, the collection and use of data by states entails an unresolved dilemma: on the one hand, many of the good things that the state has brought about – equality before the law, redistribution, welfare, and even, to some extent, democracy – demand the use of statistics and quantifiable simplifications of social reality. On the other hand, the state’s command of huge data banks, often used with the best intentions in mind, produces unintended consequences that can undermine efficiency, justice, and even the very basis of democracy. The application of statistical methods by governmental bodies is also associated with homogenization and destruction of vernacular knowledge. This session aims to explore this dilemma and will illustrate and substantiate it with research-based examples.