Images are ubiquitous in contemporary politics. From television coverage of campaigns and elections to visual memes and images of leaders circulated on social media, visual portrayals shape perceptions of the political world. As efficient carriers of social and symbolic information, they are quickly assessed, rapidly judged, and readily remembered—even when manipulated or released as deepfakes. When used strategically, visual portrayals hold the capacity to frame issues, candidates, and causes in a particular light and affect the acceptance or rejection of social policies. Images and audiovisual content are also ubiquitous on social media and digital platforms, and they tend to spread more easily and quickly than text-only content. Despite growing potential for and evidence of influence, visuals remain understudied within media politics. This preconference brings together visual scholars from different research traditions and international perspectives to present state of the art studies of image production, perception, and influence in the contemporary political landscape.

Political visuals are potent in part because they do not require conventional literacy to apprehend and operate at both an individual and cultural level. From an information processing perspective, political images are highly efficient carriers of social and symbolic information that is quickly assessed, rapidly judged, and readily remembered. In news coverage, candidate portrayals and event depictions may crystallize sentiment among the viewing public and alternately inspire increased involvement or disenchantment with politics. Culturally, images can act as icons of social solidarity or political isolation, serving to mainstream or marginalize individuals, groups, and causes. On social media, images are one of the key ingredients of political memes that convey complex messages often laden with irony and emotions. The polysemic quality of images opens them to diverse interpretation, depending on the viewer’s orientation.

The aim of this preconference is twofold: to map and coalesce the growing, but as-yet disorganized, area of research on visuals and politics; and, to foster conversations across methodological and disciplinary divides. This represents a big task because the field is so diverse in terms of methods, emphasis, and approach. We therefore welcome
the broadest range of submissions, both quantitative and qualitative, to highlight new possibilities for theory development, methodological innovation, and cross-national approaches to advance the study of visual political communication. We also welcome international and comparative contributions that can broaden our understanding of these topics outside of Western liberal democracies.

POSSIBLE SUBMISSION TOPICS

- The influence of political images in digital campaigns, including comparisons between online messaging, social media strategies, and more traditional forms of political advertising
- The role of visual messaging in disinformation efforts, whether used to confuse, mislead, incite resentment, or demotivate potential voter or citizen involvement
- Computational analysis of large-scale visual datasets to detect patterns of coverage or behavior not evident in smaller, hand-coded projects
- Integrated or comparative analysis of multimodal cues in political messages and their synergistic or differential impacts on viewer perceptions
- Visual analysis of protest and collection action, including visual framing of activism or demonstrations as well as visual memes circulated on social media
- Cross-national comparisons of visual news framing of politics or protest and its reception by audiences
- Viewer reception of newer visual technologies such as 360-degree video cameras to depict campaign events, demonstrations, marches, or other forms of collective action
- Visual depictions of populist and fringe political actors, including signature gestures and nonverbal displays, expressive range, or performative repertoires, and their role in conveying relevant policy and identity signals
- Effects of nonverbal aggression, norm violations, and other transgressive candidate behavior on viewers of audiovisual political content
- Visual measures of negative advertising, incivility, “in your face”-style of candidate interaction, or other normatively fraught political communication styles
- Visual analysis of hate speech and white nationalism, including identifiable signs and symbols as identified by the Anti-Defamation League and other watchdogs
- The role of viewer orientations (e.g., ideology, partisanship, political interest, age cohort, moral outlook, geographical situatedness, issue attitudes) in shaping political image interpretations and message efficacy
- The role of visual content in explaining patterns of news sharing and engagement on social media
- The use of visuals in emerging genres of political campaign communication, whether mini-documentaries, mash-up advertising, candidate-generated videos, memes, or political selfies.
SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please submit your abstracts for 15-minute paper presentations through this Google Form (http://bit.ly/VisualPoliticsICA2020) no later than 14 February 2020. Abstracts are limited to a maximum of 4,000 characters including spaces (approximately 500 words).

Contributors to the preconference will be selected by a panel review process and will be notified of decisions by 21 February 2020. Authors of accepted abstracts are expected to write full papers based on their abstracts (submission deadline 11 May 2020) and attend the preconference and present in person. All participants, whether presenting or not, must register for the preconference and pay the associated fee. Registration costs for the preconference will be approximately $50 USD and will include coffee breaks and lunch. To register, participants should visit www.icahdq.org and register as part of their main ICA conference registration, or as a stand-alone registration. As space is limited, priority will be given to those accepted for presentation.

KEY DATES

- 14 February 2020: Deadline for abstract submission
- 21 February 2020: Corresponding authors notified of decisions
- 1 May 2020: Conference registration closes
- 11 May 2020: Submission of completed papers
- 21 May 2020: Visual Politics Preconference held at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, Broadbeach, Australia

CONTACTS

Erik Bucy: erik.bucy@ttu.edu
Cristian Vaccari: c.vaccari@lboro.ac.uk