

The purpose of this methodological appendix is to provide a transparent and structured description of the approach our team adopted from the earliest stages of the project onward. It details our group's collaborative process and the theoretical framework that informed our analytical choices. Lastly, references used throughout the project are listed at the end of this appendix.

After initial contact, the team agreed to review all necessary documents individually before upcoming meetings. During our first group discussion, we took time to get to know each other, clarify expectations, and began coordinating suitable meeting times with our supervisor, Nadia Ma. Despite differing schedules and time zones, we collaborated effectively to identify options that accommodated everyone. Through clear communication, we successfully established meeting times both with the supervisor and internally, ensuring full team participation.

During the first meeting with the supervisor, we received an overview of the expectations for the final deliverables as well as guidance on refining our project's scope and approach. A key point of emphasis was the need to narrow our focus. The supervisor encouraged us to identify a specific case or topic and determine which aspects and stakeholders we wanted to focus on. Following the discussion, the group collectively agreed that before the next internal meeting, each member would independently generate potential topic ideas for the project.

After carrying out our individual tasks, we met again to review and compare our proposed topics. Several potential directions were considered, including examining voting behavior in Hungary, investigating AI algorithms and EU regulatory responses, and exploring transparency issues surrounding Meta's algorithmic practices. Each idea was evaluated collectively in terms of feasibility, data availability, relevance to the course, and the group's genuine interest. Ideas involving AI algorithms were ultimately set aside due to limited accessible data and difficulties linking them directly to polarization.

One idea that generated particular interest was TikTok's political influence on youth. Although there was initial disagreement regarding the most appropriate analytical angle and structure for the paper, the group engaged in open and constructive discussion. Members presented their viewpoint, others listened actively, and differing perspectives were considered carefully. Through collaboration, the group was able to reach consensus and move forward unitively. The meeting concluded with the formulation of an initial research question: "How is TikTok polarizing youth voting patterns?". The group then collaboratively drafted a set of questions to raise with the supervisor at the next meeting. In addition, we prepared a brief proposal outlining the chosen topic and a preliminary structure to obtain targeted feedback. The meeting concluded with an agreement to await the supervisor's input to confirm that the research question was sufficiently narrow and methodologically appropriate for proceeding to the next stages of the project.

In the third meeting with the supervisor, we presented our progress and asked our prepared questions. After reviewing our brief, the supervisor emphasized the need to refine our problem statement. She advised shifting from a theory-driven to a problem-driven approach, centring the problem on changes in youth voting behavior rather than on polarization itself. The supervisor also noted that the problem should reflect how specific features of TikTok may shape voting behavior and that the final policy recommendations must address the broader EU context.

The research process for the policy paper started by conducting a structured review of scholarship on affective polarisation, algorithmic curation, youth political socialisation, and digital engagement. These sources clarified how political impressions form within emotionally optimised feeds and provided the theoretical grounding for understanding democratic vulnerability in digital environments. The team analysed the Digital Services Act, the European Democracy Action Plan, the Code of Practice on Disinformation, and the work of EDMO. This mapping revealed that while the EU's governance framework is strong, its protections are largely invisible to young users. This insight into regulatory opacity became the central problem to address.

We evaluated several pathways: expanding regulation, algorithmic redesign, stricter moderation, and communication-focused strategies. Options involving additional regulatory obligations were rejected due to limited effectiveness, feasibility concerns, and the risk of amplifying external narratives portraying the EU as restrictive. A communication- and empowerment-oriented approach emerged as the most proportionate and impactful. The final three-pillar framework was designed to correspond directly to the diagnosed root causes.

During the writing process, responsibilities were shared across team members based on interest and individual strengths. Drafts underwent multiple rounds of revision to strengthen coherence, remove redundancy, refine transitions, and reinforce causal logic. Internal discussions ensured alignment with assignment requirements and the clarity expected in a professional policy paper.

Overall, our collaboration was characterised by a high degree of flexibility and autonomy. This allowed us to work efficiently despite differing exam schedules and personal obligations. From the very beginning of the collaboration, we balanced independent work with teamwork to stay aligned and achieve the best possible results. Between every supervisor meeting, we made an effort to tackle challenges on our own and document any uncertainties so that supervisor sessions were focused on targeted questions and constructive feedback. This proactive approach not only strengthened our teamwork but also demonstrated our ability to adapt and coordinate the project throughout the entire process.

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