

Call for Applications

Two Doctoral Scholarships

in the DAAD Graduate School Scholarship Programme

“Contentious Politics in the Digital Age” (CoPoDi)

at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS)

The Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS) invites applications for two scholarships for international doctoral researchers in its Graduate School Scholarship Programme “Contentious Politics in the Digital Age” (CoPoDi), funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). BIGSSS is an international inter-university graduate school in the social sciences, located at the University of Bremen and Constructor University Bremen, Germany.

Scholarship and benefits

Successful applicants will receive from the DAAD:

- a PhD scholarship of 1.300 €/month for up to 48 months.
- a travel allowance;
- payments towards health, accident and personal liability insurance cover;
- a research allowance of currently € 460 per year (for scholarship holders from countries listed in the DAC List of ODA recipients), or € 260 per year (for scholarship holders from other countries).

Depending on their personal situation, grant holders may receive some of the additional benefits listed below. This is decided by the DAAD:

- monthly rent subsidy (calculated individually, usually about € 50 to 125 per month);
- monthly allowance for accompanying family members (about € 200 child allowance per child and about € 275 marriage allowance);
- in the case of a disability or chronic illness: subsidy for additional costs which result from the disability or chronic illness and are not covered by other funding providers;
- a preparatory German language course (if available, applicable and feasible, taking into account the starting date of the scholarship).

All benefits and allowances are administered by the DAAD and are negotiated by the scholarship holders themselves.

Programme focus

The programme’s primary aim is to investigate how digital technology and media influence political activism, social movements, and socio-political conflicts. A secondary objective focuses on assessing the value of new digital data sources and computational methods for analyzing the dynamics of political protest and activism. Additionally, the programme places particular emphasis on the Global South, where the potential of digital data is especially significant due to media restrictions and risks faced by informants, although this is not its sole geographical focus. Importantly, these three objectives are distinct, and PhD dissertations may focus exclusively on any one of these areas.

Potential dissertation projects may address one/more of the following topics:

1. Social Media and Protest Dynamics: PhD research in this area focuses on the influence of social media in shaping protest movements. Key topics may include:

- Exploring how social media platforms aid in mobilizing, organizing, and spreading protest movements.
- Analyzing communication patterns, sentiment, framing, and the spread of protest-related content on social media.
- Investigating government responses to online protests in non-democratic or authoritarian regimes, and the outcomes of such actions.
- Examining if social media usage in political activism enhances the representation of marginalized groups.

2. Text-Based Analysis of Political Discourse: This area involves scrutinizing political discourse and its significance in contentious politics using text-as-data approaches, utilizing both digital and traditional media. Research could explore:

- Tracing the framing and evolution of contentious issues in protests using digital media.
- Identifying linguistic features and sentiments in the online communication of various political actors in protest movements.

3. Audiovisual Communication in Activism: Research here delves into the impact of audiovisual content in political activism, particularly its role in mobilization and engagement. Potential topics are:

- Assessing how activists employ audiovisual content on new social media platforms for political messaging and support mobilization.
- Investigating the use of both online and offline media by activists, their interaction across different channels, and the resultant effects on political activities.
- Exploring the integration of traditional methods and digital tracking to study media usage beyond text.

4. Agent-Based Modeling of Protest Dynamics: Proposed PhD projects in this field aim to create and test agent-based models for simulating and predicting protest dynamics. Research themes could include:

- Identifying key factors and mechanisms influencing the success or failure of protests and applying these models to real-world scenarios.
- Utilizing agent-based simulations to understand the effects of government or policy interventions on protests, particularly in authoritarian settings with political risks for researchers and subjects.

The English-language doctoral programme includes a structured curriculum and close guidance by experienced researchers while at the same time fostering early academic independence and creativity by providing support for conducting, presenting, and publishing the PhD fellows' self-chosen research projects. The programme is characterized by interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers from Sociology, Political Science, and Communication and Media Studies. While the research questions addressed in dissertation projects are envisioned to broadly correspond to supervisors' research interests, the successful applicants shall formulate specific research topics.

Requirements

- We invite applications from exceptional international candidates with strong academic abilities and a Master's degree (or equivalent) in Sociology, Political Science or Communication and Media Studies. Potential candidates with a degree in related disciplines are also welcome.
- Applicants have to demonstrate a broad thematic fit between the dissertation proposal and the corresponding supervisor's outlined research interests.
- Previous exposure to and expertise in computational methods in social research is a plus, but not a requirement.
- All accepted researchers will be asked to move to Bremen for the duration of the programme, as presence at the institution is required.

Eligibility

- You are an international applicant, proficient in English language (speaking & writing, proof of C1-level English language skills or equivalent).
- You must not have resided in Germany any time after December 1, 2024.
- Your MA degree must be completed and the validation of the degree must be available by January 1, 2026, which means you may apply before having finished your MA degree.
- As a rule, applicants should not have graduated any longer than six years before the time of nomination.
- You have an excellent MA degree (or national equivalents) in Sociology, Political Science, Communication and Media Studies or related social science disciplines, e.g., Law, Economics or Psychology.
- Your dissertation project is in the field "Contentious Politics in the Digital Age" and aligns with the research focus of one or several of our program supervisors.
- You must not have completed a PhD previously.

Application and further information

Applications must be submitted via email (application@bigsss-bremen.de) **until October 27, 2025 (11:59pm CET)**. The interviews will take place online.

Please note: By submitting your application, you consent to have your dissertation proposal checked for plagiarism and inappropriate use of generative AI.

General information on the programme and the faculty, a list of required application materials, and how to apply can be found at: <https://www.bigsss-bremen.de/academic-program/daad-graduate-school-scholarship-program>

For additional inquiries, please check the programme's website and feel free to contact our Admissions Officer, Noha Mahmoud, at admissions-officer@bigsss-bremen.de.

You can find additional information for DAAD scholarship applicants [here](#) and about the DAAD GSSP programme line [here](#).

The official start of the programme is scheduled for September 1, 2026.

We particularly encourage applications from the Global South. As equal opportunity employers, both universities follow an equal opportunity and diversity strategy. They strive to increase the number of women in academia and strongly encourage applications from suitably qualified female candidates. Disabled persons with the same professional and personal qualifications will be given preference.