

Digital Political Ethics: Aligning Principles with Practice | CITAP Digital Politics

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This report is the fruit of a bipartisan report to identify areas of agreement among key stakeholders concerning ethical principles and best practices in the conduct of digital campaigning in the United States. Although many have raised concerns about the potential for digital technologies to weaken or undermine democracy, the voices of digital political practitioners are largely absent from this discussion. To fill this gap, we asked those who work for traditional political campaigns and consultancies, as well as platforms like Facebook and Twitter, what they think about these issues and what ethical standards they believe are required for a well-functioning democratic system. This report summarizes expert views expressed in a series of interviews with these professionals and over the course of a two-day workshop on digital political ethics. From these conversations, four broad ethical principles emerged: prioritizing democratic participation, protecting election integrity, increasing transparency, and ensuring fairness and consistency in the application of rules governing digital advertising. After discussing the areas of agreement and disagreement around these four principles, this report covers a set of recommendations to better align digital campaign practices with shared ethical principles. These recommendations cut across all four ethical principles, focusing on what can and should be done by both platforms and practitioners, and the role that government regulation can play in holding these groups accountable.

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