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# THE COERCIVE POWER OF TECH: FROM AI SURVEILLANCE TO DRONES

11.13.25

THURSDAY  
NOV. 13

LOCATION  
ROCKY 200

TIME  
5:00 PM

STEVE FELDSTEIN



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Democracy, Conflict, and  
Governance Program

Advanced technologies serve as a key measure of power both internally and externally. Internally, advanced technologies enable leaders to counter dissent and maintain political control. The expanding use of digital tools reflects a simple calculus: leaders seek new ways to suppress challengers and hold onto power. The manner in which both autocratic governments and democracies are incorporating AI tools into their governance strategies—from expanding surveillance to data centralization—merits scrutiny. In the international arena, countries are increasingly leveraging technology to secure strategic advantage over competitors. The proliferation of drones illustrates this paradigm. Almost every conflict today incorporates drones on the battlefield. Drone technology has not only enabled smaller nations to resist larger military forces—as demonstrated in the Ukraine war—but it has also enhanced the geopolitical influence of middle power suppliers like Iran, Israel, and Türkiye. This presentation examines how technology is driving these shifts and its prospective impact on political structures and international relations.

Steve Feldstein's research focuses on technology, national security, the global context for democracy, and U.S. foreign policy. His new book, *Bytes and Bullets: Global Rivalry, Private Tech, and the New Shape of Modern Warfare*, will be published in 2026 by St. Martin's Press. In a political science seminar this semester, Vassar students read his global survey of states' digital combativeness against their populations, *The Rise of Digital Repression*.

Feldstein has published research on digital technology's impact on war, how AI is reshaping repression, the global demand for drones, China's digital authoritarianism, and new patterns of internet shutdowns.

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