

Mass Media and Electoral Politics (Democracy)

GOV 355M

Spring 2023

Professor

Michael E. Shepherd, PhD.

Email: Michael.shepherd@austin.utexas.edu

Office Hours: T|TH 2:00-3:30PM

Office Location: Batts 3.126

Class

T|TH 8:00-9:30AM

PAR 103

Course Description

This course evaluates the degree to which Americans' political opinions and behaviors are influenced by the media and the extent to which elections and political outcomes are affected by the media. Topics to be covered include recent trends in media usage and ownership, theories of media effects, the potential political/campaign effects of changes in media (e.g. the rise of the Internet and social media; decline of local news, etc.), the ways in which the media shape the public opinion, how politicians communicate with the public during campaigns and otherwise, and the broader role of the media in protecting democracy.

Readings and Materials

No textbooks are required. All materials will be made available on Canvas.

Course Objectives

After successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the political implications of major trends and changes in media usage, ownership, and content.
2. Recognize the role the media plays in shaping political attitudes and evaluations of politicians.
3. Identify how politicians and campaigns utilize the media to influence political attitudes and vote choices.
4. Evaluate the degree to which the media shapes the behaviors of politicians and government actions.

Assignments and Grading

- **Class Participation and Attendance (25% of final grade)**

This class is participation heavy. You will be expected to attend class regularly, contribute to course discussions, and be active in course activities. In pursuit of

these goals, you are allowed three “no-questions-asked” “no-reasons needed” absences. To be clear, you may miss class up to three times without documentation for, seeking clearance from, or notifying me. After this, you will be docked points from your final course grade. There are two exceptions to this policy: you may not miss the midterm or the final group project presentations. **YOU MUST BE IN ATTENDANCE ON THESE DAYS.**

- **Assignments (25% of final grade)**

1. **Media Consumption Report**

- a. The aim of the media consumption report is to systematically monitor your personal media use for one week. This includes both news and non-news (e.g., entertainment, sports) media.
- b. Carefully record how you used all media during each day: radio, television, newspapers, magazines, movies, podcasts, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and so on.
- c. Write not only when and how long you read/listened/watched (e.g., “Thursday, February 20, 7-8:45 a.m.”) but also what you read, listened to, or watched.
- d. You will use these data for the other assignments, so collect carefully.

2. **Analyzing Your Filter Bubble/Echo Chamber**

- a. The aim for this assignment is for us to try to actually measure our own media bubbles. Using original data collected for the media consumption report, you will be asked to code the content and “slant” of each listing. Either as “Very Liberal,” “Liberal,” “Moderate/No Politics,” “Conservative,” or “Very Conservative.”
- b. Further instructions will be given during class.

3. **Busting Your Bubble**

- a. The aim for the assignment is for you to “follow” or actively consume political information that is “opposite” of your own filter bubble.
- b. Create a new Media Consumption Report detailing how you’ve replaced or at least equalized your political news coverage with news from the “other side.”

4. **Reporting Your Results**

- a. Here you prepare a 1-2 page report that tells us what you learned about your political news consumption activities. What was similar between the types of news you consumed? What was different? What did you learn?

- **Midterm Exam (25% of final grade; March 9th)**

- **Group Project (25% of final grade; April 20th)**

For the final project, as a small group, you will produce a short news segment (5-10 minutes) that covers an approved political issue or election campaign. Further instructions will be given after the midterm.

Grading Policy

Overall semester averages will earn the following letter grades. Grades will be assigned strictly according to this scale without automatic rounding.

A 94.0-100
A- 90.0-93.9
B+ 87.0-89.9
B 84.0-86.9

B- 80.0-83.9
C+ 77.0-79.9
C 74.0-76.9
C- 70.0-73.9

D+ 67.0-69.9
D 64.0-66.9
D- 60.0-63.9
F 0-59

Academic Integrity

“Using someone else’s work in your own writing without giving proper credit is considered plagiarism, a serious form of academic dishonesty that can result in severe penalties. Copying someone else’s work, buying a paper and submitting it as your own, copying and pasting text (even with changes), or borrowing images from an online source, are some examples of plagiarism. Even if you plagiarize accidentally, you can be held responsible and penalized.

Learning to cite sources appropriately is an important part of becoming a professional. When you are unsure about citation, you are encouraged to **ask your instructor** (who is already an expert in the discipline) what is appropriate in the context of your assignment. Consultants at The University Writing Center can also help you determine whether you are citing sources correctly—and they have helpful guides online for using direct quotations and paraphrasing. Reviewing those skills will help you feel confident that you are handling sources professionally in your writing.

You can read the University’s definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in Sec. 11–402 of the Student Conduct Code. For more information, visit the Dean of Students’ site.¹

Plagiarism Detection Software

“All assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student’s original work. Regardless of the results of any TurnItIn submission, the faculty member will make the final determination as to whether or not a paper has been plagiarized.”²

Inclusivity

¹ <https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/faculty-resources/teaching/syllabus>

² <https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/faculty-resources/teaching/syllabus>

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions and work to make our classroom a positive learning environment for all.

Accommodations

The University of Texas provides, upon request, appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Please contact Services for Students with Disabilities for more information (diversity.utexas.edu). If you are uncertain about your needs, please do not hesitate to speak with me.

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: Introductions, Course Overview, What is Media? What Media do People Consume?

Week 2: Historical Evolution and Trends in Mass Media

REQUIRED:

- Fallows, James. 2011. "[Learning to Love the \(Shallow, Divisive, Unreliable\) New Media.](#)" *The Atlantic*.
- Lutz, Ashely. 2012. "[These 6 Corporations Control 90% of the Media in America.](#)" *Business Insider*.
- Forman-Katz Naomi and Katerina Eva Matsa. 2022. "[News Platform Fact Sheet.](#)" *Pew Research Center*.

RECOMMENDED:

- Gentzkow, Matthew and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2008. "Competition and Truth in the Market for News." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 22: 133-154.
- Gilens, Martin, and Craig Hertzman. "Corporate ownership and news bias: Newspaper coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act." *Journal of Politics* 62.2 (2000): 369-386.
- Archer, Allison M., and Joshua Clinton. "Changing owners, changing content: Does who owns the news matter for the news?." *Political Communication* 35.3 (2018): 353-370.

Week 3: Theories of Media Effects and Traditional News Media.

REQUIRED:

- Walker, Mason. 2021. "[US Newsroom Employment Has Fallen 26% Since 2008.](#)" *Pew Research Center*.
- Ladd, Jonathan. 2005. *Why Americans Hate the Media and Why It Matters*. Selected Chapters.

RECOMMENDED:

- Scheufele, Dietram A., and David Tewksbury. 2007. "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models." *Journal of Communication* 57 (1):9-20.
- Bennett, W. Lance and Shanto Iyengar. 2008. "A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication." *Journal of Communication* 58(4): 707-731.

Week 4: Social Media Consumption, Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, Soft News

REQUIRED:

- Matsa, Katerina Eva. 2022. ["More Americans Are Getting News on TikTok, bucking the trend on other social media sites."](#) *Pew Research Center*.
- Stocking, Galen, Mitchell, Amy, Matsa, Katerina Eva, Widjaya, Regina, Jurkowitz, Mark, Ghosh, Shreenita, Smith, Aaron, Naseer, Sarah, and Christopher St. Aubin. ["The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment."](#) *Pew Research Center*.
- Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 298-320.

RECOMMENDED:

- Prior, M. (2005). "News vs. entertainment: How increasing media choice widens gaps in political knowledge and turnout." *American Journal of Political Science*, 49, 577-592.
- Xenos, Michael A. and Amy B. Becker. "Moments of Zen: Effects of The Daily Show on Information Seeking and Political Learning." *Political Communication* 26:3: 317-332.
- Settle, J. E. (2018). "The END framework of political interaction on social media." In *Frenemies: How social media polarizes America* (pp. 50-77). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 5: Partisan Media and Media Biases

REQUIRED:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/cable-news/>
- Gramlich, John. 2020. ["5 Facts about Fox News."](#) *Pew Research Center*.
- Broockman, David and Joshua Kalla (2022). "The impacts of selective partisan media exposure: A field experiment with Fox News viewers"
- Perspectives on Politics Review Symposium: Does the U.S. Media Have a Liberal Bias? September 2012. 10(3):767-785

RECOMMENDED:

- Baum, Matthew A. and Phil Gussin. 2007. "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Information Shortcuts Shape Individual Perceptions of Bias in the Media." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. 3:1: 1-31.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Hahn, Kyu S. 2009. Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use. *Journal of Communication* 59: 19-39.
- Druckman, J. N., Levendusky, M. S., & McLain, A. (2018). "No need to watch: How the effects of partisan media can spread via interpersonal discussions." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Archer, Allison MN. "Political advantage, disadvantage, and the demand for partisan news." *The Journal of Politics* 80.3 (2018): 845-859

- Levendusky, M.S., 2013. "Why do partisan media polarize viewers?" *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), pp.611-623.

Week 6 (Part 1): Public Opinion Formation and the Media

REQUIRED:

- Zaller. *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. 1992. Selected Chapters.
- Chang, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 103–126.

RECOMMENDED:

- Iyengar, Shanto & Kinder, Donald. 1987. *News That Matters*
- Lodge and Taber. *The Rationalizing Voter*.
- Achen and Bartels. *Democracy for Realists*.
- Lenz, Gabriel S. 2009. "Learning and Opinion Change, Not Priming: Reconsidering the Priming Hypothesis." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (4): 821-837.

Week 6 (Part 2): Campaign Advertising and Campaign Effects

REQUIRED:

- Gerber, A. S., Gimpel, J. G., Green, D. P., & Shaw, D. R. (2011). "How large and long-lasting are the persuasive effects of televised campaign ads? Results from a randomized field experiment." *American Political Science Review*, 105, 135–150. doi: 10.1017/S00030554100004
- Sides, John, Lynn Vavreck, and Christopher Warshaw. "The effect of television advertising in united states elections." *American Political Science Review* 116.2 (2022): 702-718.
- Jacobson, G. C. (2015). "How do campaigns matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18, 31–47.

RECOMMENDED:

- Huber, G. A., & Arceneaux, K. (2007). "Identifying the persuasive effects of presidential advertising." *American Journal of Political Science*, 51, 957–977.
- Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2018). "The minimal persuasive effects of campaign contact in general elections: Evidence from 49 field experiments." *American Political Science Review*, 112, 148–166.
- Bartels, Larry M. "Remembering to forget: A note on the duration of campaign advertising effects." *Political Communication* 31.4 (2014): 532-544.
- Mendelberg, Tali. 2001. *The Race Card*.
- Stephens-Dougan, LaFleur. *Race to the Bottom: How Racial Appeals Work in American Politics*.

- Brader, Ted. "Striking a responsive chord: How political ads motivate and persuade voters by appealing to emotions." *American Journal of Political Science* 49.2 (2005): 388-405.
- Valentino, Nicholas A., Vincent L. Hutchings, and Ismail K. White. 2002. "Cues That Matter: How Political Ads Prime Racial Attitudes During Campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 96 (01):75-90.
- Velez, Y.R. and Newman, B.J., 2019. "Tuning In, Not Turning Out: Evaluating the Impact of Ethnic Television on Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Week 7 (and W6 continued): How the News Media Cover and Influence Elections

REQUIRED:

- Sides, John. 2012. Do Presidential Debates Really Matter? *Washington Monthly* (September/October 2012)
- Stray, Jonathan. 2016. "How much influence does the media really have over elections? Digging into the data" *Nieman Lab* (1/11/16).
<http://www.niemanlab.org/2016/01/how-much-influence-does-the-media-really-have-over-elections-digging-into-the-data/>
- Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck. "The Daily Donald Show." Identity Crisis.

RECOMMENDED:

- Druckman, James N. 2000. "The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited." *Journal of Politics* 65(May): 559-71
- Westwood, Sean Jeremy, Solomon Messing, and Yphtach Lelkes. "Projecting confidence: How the probabilistic horse race confuses and demobilizes the public." *The Journal of Politics* 82.4 (2020): 1530-1544.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn. "Consumer demand for election news: The horserace sells." *The Journal of Politics* 66.1 (2004): 157-175.
- DellaVigna, Stefano, and Ethan Kaplan. 2007. "The Fox News effect: Media bias and voting." 2007. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122 (3): 1187-1234.

Week 8: Midterm Review (March 7) and Midterm Exam (March 9)

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: Introduction to Group Projects and Media, Policy, and Electoral Accountability Part I

Week 11: Media, Policy, and Electoral Accountability Part II

REQUIRED:

- Hayes and Lawless. *News Hole*. Selected Chapters. 2021.
- Hetherington, Marc J. "The media's role in forming voters' national economic evaluations in 1992." *American Journal of Political Science* (1996): 372-395

RECOMMENDED:

- Soroka and Wlezien 2022. *Information and Democracy*.
- Snyder, James M. Jr. and David Stromberg (2010). "Press Coverage and Political Accountability", *Journal of Political Economy* 118(2): 355-408.
- Darr, Joshua P., Matthew P. Hitt, and Johanna L. Dunaway. "Newspaper closures polarize voting behavior." *Journal of Communication* 68.6 (2018): 1007-1028.

Week 12: "Fake news" and Misinformation

REQUIRED:

- Flynn, D.J., Nyhan, B. and Reifler, J., 2017. "The nature and origins of misperceptions: Understanding false and unsupported beliefs about politics." *Political Psychology*, 38, pp.127-150
- Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). "Social media and fake news in the 2016 election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31, 211-236.

RECOMMENDED:

- Allen, Jennifer et al. 2020. "Evaluating the fake news problem at the scale of the information ecosystem." *Science Advances*.
- Nyhan, Brendan, 2020. "Facts and Myths about Misperceptions." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.
- Garrett, R. K. (2019). "Social media's contribution to political misperceptions in U.S. presidential elections." *PLoS ONE*, 14(3), e0213500

Week 13: Media, Collective Action, and Preserving Democracy

REQUIRED:

- Wasow, Omar. 2020. "Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting." *American Political Science Review*, pp. 1-22.
- King, G., Pan, J. and Roberts, M.E., 2013. "How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression." *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), pp.326-343.
- Van Aelst, Peter, Jesper Stromberg, Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Claes De Vreese, Jörg Matthes, David Hopmann et al. "Political communication in a high-choice

media environment: a challenge for democracy?." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 41, no. 1 (2017): 3-27.

RECOMMEDED:

- King, Gary, Pan, Jennifer and Margaret E. Roberts. 2017. "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument." *American Political Science Review* 111(3): 484-501. 2017.
- Adena, Maja, Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, Veronica Santarosa and Ekaterina Zhuravska. 2015. "Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130(4): 1885-1939.
- Christensen, D. and Garfias, F., 2018. "Can you hear me now? How communication technology affects protest and repression." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 13(1), p.89
- Pierskalla, Jan H., and Florian M. Hollenbach. 2013. "Technology and Collective Action: The Effect of Cell Phone Coverage on Political Violence in Africa." *American Political Science Review*, 107(2): 207-224.

Week 14: Wrap-up and Group Project Presentations (April 20)