

GOV 2070
Mass Media in American Politics
 Fall 2021

WF 11:40am-1:05pm Location: Sills 117

Instructor: Michael Franz Email: mfranz@bowdoin.edu Phone: 207-798-4318 (office) Office: 200 Hubbard Hall	<u>Office Hours:</u> Tuesday, 9-11am Thursday, 1-2pm Book an appointment in Blackboard; Or email about a different time as needed
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This course examines the role of the mass media in American politics. *This is not a course on how to be a journalist or how to cover the news.* It is a political science course that investigates and analyzes the media in American political life. The course is split into four main sections. **First**, we consider the media as an institution, as the so-called “fourth branch” of government. We ask: how has the media changed over the course of American political development, and specifically with the rise of the Internet? **Second**, we look at contemporary controversies in media politics. Is the media biased? How important and prevalent is fake news? How has the rise of partisan media influenced/enhanced polarization? **Third**, we examine the relationship between media and elites. How do candidates engage with the media when running for office, for example? **Finally**, we investigate media effects. What are the effects of media coverage on citizens—more specifically on citizens’ trust in government and voting behavior? How do citizens respond politically to the nature of news coverage? Throughout the course we will spend considerable time discussing the impact of different media forms—for example, social media, cable news, mainstream print and television news.

Learning Goals

At the end of this course students should be able to:

	The following parts of the course will address this outcome
Explain and evaluate the changing role of the news media in the U.S.	Part 1 (Media as an Institution)
Understand and explain contemporary controversies in media politics, including declining trust in the media and fears about the spread of misinformation	Part 2
Analyze the interaction of the news media and politicians/campaigners	Part 3
Understand and explain the effects of the news media on the public	Parts 2 and 4
Evaluate the scientific methods of researching/studying media politics	Throughout the course, along with the class project

Course Requirements

There are six major components to your grade:

1. **Three reading reactions** (6 points; each worth 2 points)—these are short reactions of about 2 pages (double-spaced). I will evaluate these based on how well you react to the readings (namely, originality of thought and conciseness). There are no right or wrong answers, but I will challenge you to think logically. These papers are due **by the start of class** on Wednesday or Friday, and they should focus on the readings for that day. Because there are only three of them, you can choose when to complete them. **To hand in a reaction paper, see the “Assignments” link on the left-side menu of our Blackboard page. I will grade and return the papers to you via Blackboard.** You can only do one reaction paper per class. So plan ahead!
 - 1a. **Revision paper** (2 points)—For one of these papers you will revise the paper down to one page. In other words, you will look again at one of your submitted papers (2-pages long) and decide how to trim the length to 1-page. Keep the same margins and font as the first version. In submitting this, upload the “tracked changes” version of the paper on Blackboard. **The “revision” link is available in the “Assignments” section on the left-side menu of our Blackboard page.** You must complete this before the end of class on December 10, and you can revise any one of your completed reaction papers.
2. **Participation** (10 points)—this includes attendance AND class participation. Attendance is REQUIRED, and I will take regular note of who is and who is not in class. I understand that people get sick, have doctor’s appointments, and so on, but I only grant excused absences in rare circumstances. Be advised, simple attendance is not sufficient.
3. **Weekly Quizzes** (10 points)—there is a possibility of a quiz on any class day that will deal with the readings for that specific day. It will consist of 2-3 very short questions on the readings.
 - *You are exempt from the quiz if you do a reading reaction on that day.
4. **Midterm Exam** (25 points)—scheduled for **Friday, October 15th**. There will be no class that day, but you can complete the exam at any time between Thursday 10/14 and Saturday 10/16. The exam is open book and open note. The format will be short answers and essays, and both will be derived from readings and lectures. The exam will be posted to Blackboard, and you will have a specific time (two hours) and page limit (seven total pages—double spaced, 12-point font).
 - *The seven-page limit will be strictly enforced. I will not read past Page 7.
 - **You are NOT allowed to work with another student on the exam. ANY evidence of collaboration is grounds for failure of the class.
5. **Final Exam** (25 points)—a take home exam that is NOT cumulative; it is on the lectures and readings for all classes after the mid-term. The parameters of the exam are the same as the mid-term. The exam will be available on December 15th, and you will have until December 20th to access and complete it.
6. **Class Project and Presentation** (22 points)—See the details at the end of the syllabus. This will involve weekly data collection of media coverage on an assigned issue/topic and an end-of-semester presentation that will be done as a group of ~5-6 students.

Readings

There are two books for this course, and several outside articles. Both books are available through the campus e-bookstore, and all of the outside readings can be accessed through Blackboard.

1. Shanto Iyengar. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. 2nd Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
2. Kevin Arceneaux and Martin Johnson. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels? Partisan News in an Age of Choice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at: <https://www.bowdoin.edu/dean-of-students/ccs/community-standards/the-codes.html>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult a reference librarian or me.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all the work for the class.
3. Cite your sources in submitted papers. Talk with me about proper citation if you have any questions. I'm open to any approach you take, so long as it is consistent and generally well-regarded. Consider [the Chicago Style](#), as I'm partial to that one.
4. It is possible (maybe even likely) that you might need to miss a class this semester because of illness or a quarantine related to COVID-19. If that happens, I will schedule a time to meet with you via Zoom to review the missed course work and establish a plan for completing the work.
5. I am allowing the use of laptops during class time, especially since we will have weekly opportunities to record data for the on-going class project. I strongly recommend, however, that you resist using your laptop for checking email or sending/reading messages.

Part 1—Media as an Institution

September 1—Introductions and Expectations

- Charles Blow, "As the Press Weakens, So Does Democracy," *The New York Times*, July 19, 2021, p.A19

September 3—The Early American Press

- Jonathan Ladd, *Why Americans Hate the Media and How it Matters*, Chapters 2-3
- [Discussion of Class Project]

September 8 — The Modern American Media

- Jonathan Ladd, *Why Americans Hate the Media and How it Matters*, Chapter 4
- [Discussion of Class Project]

September 10— American Media in Comparative Perspective

- Iyengar, Chapters 1-2

September 15— The Media Marketplace

- Iyengar, Chapters 3-4

September 17— New Media

- Iyengar, Chapter 5

Part 2—Controversies in Media Politics

September 22— (Revisiting) Media Trust

- “Distrust of the News Media as a Symptom and a Further Cause of Polarization,” by Jonathan Ladd and Alexander Podkul, in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2nd edition, 2019, New York: Routledge

September 24— Partisan media

- Arceneaux and Johnson, Chapters 1-3

September 29— Partisan media, cont.

- Arceneaux and Johnson, Chapters 4-5

October 1— Partisan media, cont.

- Arceneaux and Johnson, Chapters 6-8

October 6— Partisan media, cont.

- “Persuading the Enemy: Estimating the Persuasive Effects of Partisan Media with the Preference-Incorporating Choice and Assignment Design,” 2019, by Justin De Benedictis-Kessner, Matthew A. Baum, Adam J. Berinsky, Teppei Yamamoto, *American Political Science Review*. 113(4): 902-916

October 8— Biased Media

- “There Is No Liberal Media Bias in Which News Stories Political Journalists Choose to Cover,” 2020, Hans Hassell, John Holbein, Matthew Miles, *Science Advances*

October 13— Fake News and Misinformation

- “The Spread of True and False News Online,” 2018, by Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, Sinan Aral, *Science* 359: 1146-1151
- “Evaluating the Fake News Problem at the Scale of The Information Ecosystem,” 2020, by Jennifer Allen, Baird Howland, Markus Mobius, David Rothschild, Duncan J. Watts, *Science Advances*

October 15— Mid-Term Exam

October 20— Fake News and Misinformation, cont.

- “You Are Fake News: Political Bias in Perceptions Of Fake News,” 2020, by Sander van der Linden, Costas Panagopoulos, Jon Roozenbeek, *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3) 460–470

October 22— Fake News and Misinformation, cont.

- “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election,” 2017, by Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(2): 211–236

Part 3—Media and Elites

October 27— Media and Campaigns

- Iyengar, Chapter 6

October 29— Media and Campaigns, cont.

- “Campaigns Go Social: Are Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter Changing Elections?” by Young Mie Kim, Richard James Heinrich, Soo Yun Kim, and Robyn Baragwanath in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2nd edition, 2019, New York: Routledge
- “Do the Media Give Women Candidates a Fair Shake?” by Regina Lawrence in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2nd edition, 2019, New York: Routledge
- “Seeing Double: Race, Gender, and Coverage of Minority Women’s Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives,” 2016, Orlanda Ward, *Politics & Gender* 12: 317-343

November 3— Media and Governing

- Iyengar, Chapters 9 and 10

Part 4—Media Effects

November 5— Identifying Media Effects

- Iyengar, Chapters 7 and 8

November 10—Agenda-setting

- “How The News Media Activate Public Expression and Influence National Agendas,” 2017, by Gary King, Benjamin Schneer Ariel White, *Science* 358: 776–780

November 12— Framing

- “Political Dynamics of Framing,” S.R. Gubitz, Samara Klar, Joshua Robison, and James Druckman, in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2nd edition, 2019, New York: Routledge

November 17—Framing, cont.

- “Dynamic Public Opinion: Communication Effects over Time,” 2010, by Dennis Chong and James Druckman, *American Political Science Review*, 104(4): 663-680

November 19—Framing, cont.

- “A Source of Bias in Public Opinion Stability,” 2012, by James Druckman, Jordan Fein, and Thomas Leeper, *American Political Science Review*, 106(2): 430-454

November 24 and 26— No class (Thanksgiving)

December 1— Media Effects of Local news

- “Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior,” 2018, by Joshua Darr, Matthew Hitt, and Johanna Dunaway, *Journal of Communication*, 68: 1007-1028

December 3—Media Effects of Local news, cont.

- “As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections,” 2015, by Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, *Journal of Politics*, 77(2): 447-462

December 8— Presentations

December 10—Presentations

Final Exam: b/w December 15th and 20th

Outline of Class Project

This project will ask you to collect weekly data on the coverage of an issue or topic in a selected media source. Students will be assigned a group and topic. Within each group each student will select a media source to track. Every week, each student will complete an online form asking about the media coverage of that issue/topic in their media source over the course of the last week. I will provide a short amount of time at the beginning of class on each Friday for students to complete the weekly data entry, but I expect students to make time outside of class to review/assess the media coverage. I suspect that the data entry will often take fewer than 10 minutes, but on occasion it may take longer.

At the end of the semester, the students sharing an issue or topic will meet to discuss and plan a presentation to the class that outlines the nature of the issue coverage over the semester and across the media sources. I will provide the class with the weekly tracking data submitted by students over the course of the semester, and you can discuss/plan the best way to present the results. Presentations will take place in the last week of the semester. Each group will provide Professor Franz a copy of any slides used in the presentation. There is no paper or write-up associated with the presentation. Each presentation can last 20 minutes, with time for questions from the class.

Topics

There are so many important and interesting topics to potentially track. We will cover the below seven, if only because they are likely to be in the news somewhat consistently.

- Trump
- Immigration
- COVID (including Delta variant and vaccine boosters)
- Taliban
- 2022 Midterm elections
- Voter fraud (including election laws and voting bills)
- Climate change

Some of the tracking of these topics/issues will require keyword searching in some online databases (more than below). Searching on a topic like immigration or the Taliban will not be a challenge, but voter fraud might require some consideration of how to search on the topic (i.e., to include stories that do not use the words “voter fraud” specifically but that discuss GOP-led election reform legislation). Still, none of these topics or issues will be as challenging as tracking coverage of even more nebulous topics such as political polarization or economic change.

Media sources

- *New York Times*: You can search on keywords in the Nexis Uni database, which is accessible from the Databases link on the Bowdoin Library site. We will review how to conduct searches in this database in class.
- *LA Times*: same as above
- A local newspaper: Many local newspapers require a subscription, so I am encouraging one student in the group to volunteer to pay for a subscription to their hometown paper, if it’s offered online. For example, a subscription to Brunswick’s *Times-Record* is \$15/month. Paying for

access for the semester would be about \$45. This is voluntary and if no one in the group wants to do this, I will work with the group to make a local paper available online.

- Twitter: One student in each group will create a new, free Twitter account and follow nine other Twitter accounts. This should include three well-known journalists, three politicians, and three politically active celebrities or athletes.
- Cable news shows: pick one of the following, the Fox News Network, or one MSNBC host (Rachel Maddow or Chris Hayes). MSNBC provides online transcripts of their cable shows, and you can keyword search for the topics each week. Fox News does not do this as easily, but Nexus Uni allows for keyword searches of all Fox News programming. We will review how to conduct searches like this in class.
- Major network news, such as ABC's World News Tonight and NBC's Nightly News. The Vanderbilt News Archives allows for keyword searches of these programs. We will review how to conduct searches in this database in class.

For groups of five students, only the NYT or LA Times should be tracked. In all groups, the student tracking the cable news show can choose one program/network to track from the cable networks listed above.

How will you be graded?

Your grade will be comprised of two sources: 1) the weekly data collection and 2) the group presentation. Each will constitute half (11 points) of the 22 points associated with this project. I will provide feedback during the semester on your progress/performance in the data collection. Each student will receive a separate grade for their own data collection. I will grade the presentation at the end of the semester based on how comprehensive and clear it is. Did the group make full use of the data collected? Did you make comparisons in coverage across the tracked media sources? Did you consider the broader implications of your results in terms of the concepts we discussed this semester? The presentation will be graded in total, meaning each student in the group will receive the same grade for the presentation.