

GOV 2070
Mass Media in American Politics
 Fall 2023

TR
 8:30am-9:55am
 Location: Searles 213

Instructor: Michael Franz Email: mfranz@bowdoin.edu Phone: 207-798-4318 (office) Office: 200 Hubbard Hall	<u>Office Hours:</u> Monday, 2:30-4:30pm Friday, 10am-12pm 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. **Four reading reactions*** (8 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 Tuesday or Thursday, 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 Canvas page. I will grade and return the papers to you via Canvas. You can only do one reaction paper per class. So plan ahead!
**You may substitute one reaction paper for attendance at a Department-sponsored event on 10/16. We are hosting a Forum on the 2023 ballot initiative known as the “Pine Tree Power” referendum. This takes place on Monday, October 16, in Kresge at 7pm. Attending that event will take the place of a reaction paper. You will receive 2 of 2 points for attending.*
- 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 Canvas. The “revision” link is available in the “Assignments” section on the left-side menu of our Canvas page. You must complete this before the end of class on December 7, and you can revise any one of your completed reaction papers.
2. **Participation** (8 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*** (8 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** (26 points)—scheduled for **Thursday, October 19th**. There will be no class that day, but you can complete the exam at any time between Wednesday 10/18 and Saturday 10/21. 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 Canvas, 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** (26 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 13th, and you will have until December 18th 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 ~4-5 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 Canvas.

1. Shanto Iyengar. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. 5th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
2. Alexander Coppock. *Persuasion in Parallel: How Information Changes Minds about Politics*. 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 reaction 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. I am allowing the use of laptops during class time. I strongly recommend, however, that you resist using your laptop for checking email or sending/reading messages.
5. Generative AI websites, such as ChatGPT, are not needed for this class. You should not use them to answer exam questions or to "edit" your papers.

Part 1—Media as an Institution

August 31—Introductions and Expectations

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

September 5—The Early American Press

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

September 7 — The Modern American Media

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

September 12— American Media in Comparative Perspective

- Iyengar, Chapters 1-2

September 14— The Media Marketplace

- Iyengar, Chapters 3-4

September 19— New Media

- Iyengar, Chapter 5

Part 2—Controversies in Media Politics

September 21— (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 26—Messages and Persuasion

- Coppock, Chapters 1, 3, and 5

September 28— Messages and Persuasion, cont.

- Coppock, Chapters 6-8

October 3— Messages and Persuasion, cont.

- “Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization.” 2018, by Christopher Bail, et al. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(37): 9216–21.
- “Durably Reducing Transphobia: A Field Experiment on Door-to-Door Canvassing,” by David Broockman and Joshua Kalla, 2016, *Science*. 352(6282): 220-224.

October 5— Partisan media

- “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 10— No class (Fall Break!)

October 12— 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 17— 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 19— Mid-Term Exam

October 24— 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 26— 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 31— Media and Campaigns

- Iyengar, Chapter 6

November 2— Media and Campaigns, cont.

- Readings TBD

November 7— Media and Governing

- Iyengar, Chapters 9 and 10

Part 4—Media Effects

November 9— Identifying Media Effects

- Iyengar, Chapters 7 and 8

November 14—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 16— 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 21—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 23— No class (Thanksgiving)

November 28—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 30— 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
- “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 5— Presentations

December 7— Presentations

Final Exam: b/w December 13th and 18th

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 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 20 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. Then you will organize a presentation about the results (about 15 minutes), which you will record and share with the class. The video is due by December 1. My recommendation is to record the presentation as a Zoom meeting of the group, which can then be uploaded to Bowdoin's server and shared as a link. We will discuss this in more detail later in the semester.

We will watch these presentations *before* the designated class sessions (December 5 and 7), and during class we will discuss the results. Students in each group will answer any questions from classmates and from Professor Franz.

Topics

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

- Abortion
- Inflation
- Immigration (try also “border”)
- Hunter Biden (search hunter AND Biden, to avoid false positives)
- Health care (beware health care commercials on national nightly news broadcasts)
- Trump (all coverage, to include the 2024 election and his indictments)
- Artificial intelligence
- Ukraine

The tracking of these topics/issues will require keyword searching in online databases (more that below). Searching on a topic like “immigration” or the “inflation” will not pose too much of a challenge, but other topics like “health care” might require some consideration of how to search on the topic. 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, but there may be some work-arounds. One option is to pay for a subscription to a 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 option 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. For example, one alternative is to look for papers covered by Nexis Uni. I can also consult with a member of each group on even more options.
- **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, but my experience is that the searching function is not always accurate (or archived as quickly as we need). Instead, you should consider using the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/tv>). The search interface is clunky, but serviceable. We will review how to conduct searches in this database in class. Another alternative is Westlaw (see Canvas for the link), which has daily transcripts for the three major news broadcasts.
- **Cable news shows:** Nexis Uni allows for keyword searches of all Fox News programming (not specific Fox shows), which is an option. The Internet Archive allows for searching on such cable programs as "Fox and Friends," "Hannity," "Jesse Waters Primetime," "Morning Joe," and "All In with Chris Hayes." One challenge with the Internet Archive is that it also records the commercials during the broadcasts, so it is important to do the searches weekly to make the sifting through the search results a lot more manageable. We will review how to conduct searches like this in class. CNN also provides transcripts for its shows at: <https://transcripts.cnn.com/>.

A word on social media: It used to be "easy" to pull bulks of tweets from Twitter's API, which allowed us to track Tweets from a host of journalists, celebrities, and news accounts. Twitter now restricts this kind of access, making complete tracking of Twitter accounts much harder. Other social media platforms, such as Instagram and Tik Tok, are equally opaque. As such, it is hard to systematically follow "digital media" platforms (until, at least, sites like Nexis Uni work out a plan to archive social media posts).

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.