

COMM 102S: Political Communication and Social Media
TTH 2:15-3:30 PM
Chaffee Seminar Room (Building 120, Room 452)

THIS SYLLABUS WILL CHANGE. CHECK [HERE](#) FOR UPDATES.

Instructor: Solomon Messing

Email: [\[lastname\]@stanford.edu](mailto:[lastname]@stanford.edu)

Web: www.stanford.edu/~messing

Office: Building 120 (McClatchy Hall) Room 444

Office Hours: TH 12:00-2:00, and by appointment.



Summary: This course examines the role of social technologies in modern politics and electoral campaigns. We will examine the social science literature surrounding media and politics, then formulate arguments about how the social web, mobile technologies, and large scale (“big data”) analytics change the nature of political communication and representation. We will strive to answer the following questions: which theorized cause-and-effect relationships do these technologies “disrupt?” Which relationships still hold? Why? First, we will explore the structure of costs and benefits for ordinary citizens, candidates, and activists in politics and campaigns, and think about how the use of these technologies changes the incentives and strategic possibilities for each of these actors. We will use the 2008 and 2012 elections as case studies of digital campaign strategy and voter behavior. We will then examine the role of social media in connecting constituents to their representatives, ask how voters respond to such campaigns, and close by discussing what social media means for measuring public opinion. The course will culminate with a final project designed to strengthen your data analysis skills and writing portfolio.

Course Objectives: By the end of this course you will be able to (1) inform substantive theoretical questions with data analysis (labs and problem sets); (2) be able to collect and analyze social media data to answer questions about politics (final project); and (3) comment on *how* social technologies should be expected to change the conduct of both American and international politics, if at all.

Course Outline:

Introduction & Social Science Review	Week 1
Campaigns: Data, Social Media, & Mobile	
The Media Campaign	Week 2
Questioning the Media Campaign	Week 2
Problem Set 1 Due	Week 2
Back to the Future? Campaign Machinery in the Digital Age	Week 3
Campaigns of the Future: Data, Social Science, & Social Media	Week 3
Representatives & Constituent Communication	
Theories of Representation & Constituent Communication	Week 4
Representation & Constituent Communication on Twitter	Week 4
Problem Set 2 Due	Week 4
The Public, the Media, & the Social/Mobile Web	
The Media Agenda	Week 5
What is “New Media”?	Week 5
Project Proposals Due	Week 5
The Reasoning Voter?	Week 6
Selective Exposure to Media and Campaigns	Week 6
Polarization	Week 7
Social Media and the Pulse of the Nation	
Public opinion and the democratic process	Week 8
Does social media reflect public opinion? Define it?	Week 8
Final Project Due	Week 8

Prerequisites: I will assume introductory social science knowledge, including a familiarity with problems related to measuring social phenomena, correlation versus causation, and an understanding of statistics (e.g., STATS 60; plus one or more of PSYCH 252, POLISCI 350A&B, EDUC 260X/STATS 209). I will also assume programming experience equivalent to CS 106 and CS 109. If you are not sure that you meet these prerequisites do not hesitate to contact me.

Course Requirements and Grading: Your grade will be based on responses to the readings (10%) due each week, participation in class and in the online discussion boards (10%), problem sets (20%), your project proposal due at the end of week 5 (20%), and your final project (40%). The final project should address the role of a particular social technology in campaigns, representation, political behavior, or activism. It should (1) summarize what is known about the issue, (2) identify an open question, and (3) then present relevant evidence (quantitative data) that sheds new light on that issue. The deadline to submit a paper proposal is the end of week 5, but I strongly suggest you start *much* earlier.

	What	Weight	When
Class Participation/Online Discussion		10%	–
Reading Responses		10%	–
Problem Sets		20%	End of Weeks 2 and 4
Project Proposal		20%	End of Week 5
Final Project		40%	End of Week 8

Class Participation: Our class meetings should be highly interactive, so attendance and participation are mandatory for every class meeting. Please come prepared to discuss the readings and participate in the labs.

Labs: We will have periodic data analysis labs. I strongly recommend you use R for this lab so that you can take advantage of the starter code I provide and R's capabilities. If you prefer, you may use Python. An introduction to R for the beginner is available [here](#).

Weekly Responses: Readings consist of a mix of formal social science academic journal articles, excerpts from book chapters, media coverage and video clips. After engaging with these materials, submit a brief writeup linking the work in the labs or problem sets to the readings. These will be due by 9am each Thursday of class. Responses will be graded as +2 (Outstanding, offer particularly novel insights), +1 (Satisfactory, indicates you've done the readings and labs, and have applied some thought to them) or +0 (Unsatisfactory).

Please compose your weekly responses in a Google Doc, and submit them via [this form](#). Remember to give them a thorough edit before submitting so you get maximum points.

How to Prepare for Reading Responses/Participation in Class: First read the abstract, then read the discussion/conclusion you have an idea of the argument or the statements and concepts the author is using. Then attempt to determine what evidence the author is using to back these claims—the meat of the paper. Are the authors making an argument that merely describes the world or are they making a causal claim? If it's a causal claim, what exactly is the claim? And what is the research design—observational, experimental, qualitative/case study research? Think about whether the concepts the authors outline are consistent with the empirical evidence the authors present. What might confound the results? How could the study be improved? Reading by attempting to answer these questions, while carefully evaluating the authors' evidence should prepare you to achieve an A in this course. It will help prepare you for success outside of this course as well.

Final Project: There is no final exam for this class. Rather, the final project will allow you to explore open questions in the field and get experience working with data. You'll need to identify a specific research question addressing some aspect of how candidates use social media to campaign, or how representatives and constituents communicate using social media. You can (1) use data to describe how these processes work, or (2) formulate expectations/hypotheses about patterns in the data we would expect if your hypothesis is true, and test it using actual data. You will be graded based on the quality of your work, not whether you successfully confirm your hypotheses. I recommend you use the Twitter data set that I've put together for this class, though you may use other data sources as well—please speak with me if you'd like to use additional data or do something completely different. **The goal for the final project is to strengthen your data**

analysis skills and your writing portfolio (and so hopefully your applications to top-tier graduate or undergraduate university research programs).

Project Proposal: You'll need to propose a research project by **Week 5**. This proposal will consist of all sections that will comprise the final write-up (Introduction, Proposed Methods, Expected Results, Discussion). Proposals are expected to be 4-5 double-spaced pages. This is meant to form the basis of your final project and to make sure you are not distributing the work unevenly. Ideally, you should be able to plug in a few figures, turn your "Expected Results" section into a "Results" section, modify your discussion a bit, then hand in your final paper. [How-to hand-out for writing the proposal available here](#).

Final Project Deliverables: The final project will extend your proposal and present actual results. This proposal will consist of the following sections: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion. It should be anywhere from 10-20 pages (double-spaced), the majority of which should consist of results.

How to Do Well on the Final Project: Get feedback from me and other students early and often. Make sure to read over and edit both your proposal and your final project a number of times before you submit. Papers edited multiple times generally address questions that are framed to be more relevant to your readers, have more refined arguments, clearer evidence, and ultimately higher grades. This will also improve your writing skills, which will be useful far beyond this course.

Examples of papers from past students:

[Social Media: Emerging Leaders or Followers?](#)

[The Newspaper Editorial Endorsement](#)

[Sarah Palin and Gender](#)

Websites: The most current version of the syllabus (this document) will be maintained [here](#). All required readings not available on the internet will be made available on [coursework](#). We will use the [piazza](#) forum as a discussion platform. Finally, we will use [zotero](#) for bibliography/citation management. On the first day of class, please sign up for piazza and zotero accounts, and request to join the zotero group "StanfordComm." There is a hot folder in the group library called "SocialMediaPolitics," which we will use to build up a citation database for papers that are relevant to your final projects.

Extra Help: Do not hesitate to come to my office during office hours or by appointment to discuss the readings, your final paper, or any aspect of the course. For extra help finding or analyzing data, check out the [Social Science Data and Software \(SSDS\)](#), which provides services and support to Stanford faculty, staff and students in the acquisition of social science data and the selection and use of quantitative (statistical) and qualitative analysis software. For advice regarding data analysis, check out [Department of Statistics drop-in consulting service](#). Also, be aware of [StackOverflow](#), a well-implemented and widely used programming question-and-answer site, and [CrossValidated](#), an analogous site for questions related to statistics. I have been using and teaching R for a long time and am happy to help you figure out what you need to know for the final project if you decide to use R.

Students with Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the

impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 650-723-1066, URL: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae>).

Honor Code: I take the Honor Code seriously. I assign writing projects because I think that they have the most pedagogical value. Because of the nature of these projects, it will be near impossible for anyone to cheat on them, but not impossible to plagiarize. I do not tolerate plagiarism in any form—if you are using someone else’s idea, cite it; if you are borrowing someone’s specific words quote and cite them. I will pursue honor code violations to the maximum penalty allowed by Stanford rules.

Readings and Labs

Introduction & Social Science Review

Required:

Kahneman, Daniel (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. CHAPTER 1 ONLY AND MSR TALK: <http://bit.ly/10SQAXd>.

R lab: [Replicating Kahneman and Tversky’s Asian Disease Experiment](#).

Further reading:

Shadish, William R., Cook, Thomas D., & Campbell, Donald T. (2002). *Experiments and Generalized Causal Inference*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company. URL <http://bit.ly/11ZAKLx>. CHAPTER 1 ONLY (Causal Inference).

Ross, Lee & Nisbett, Richard E. (1991). *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology*. New York: McGraw Hill. URL TBD. CHAPTERS 1-2.

Campaigns: Data, Social Media, & Mobile

The Media Campaign

Required:

Polsby, Nelson (1983). *Consequences of Party Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. URL <http://stanford.io/13Atx6H>.

Iyengar, Shanto & Petrocik, John R. (2000). ‘Basic Rule’ Voting: The Impact of Campaigns on Party- and Approval-Based Voting. In *Crowded Airwaves: Campaign Advertising in Elections*, p. 113–148. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. URL <http://stanford.io/14UZBTu>.

Further reading:

Simon, Adam F. (2002). Duck or Punch? Dialogue in a California Gubernatorial Election. In *The Winning Message, Communication, Society and Politics*. Cambridge University Press. URL <http://bit.ly/149sPPw>.

Questioning the Media Campaign

Required:

Karol, David, Noel, Hans, Zaller, John, & Cohen, Marty (2003). Polls or Pols? The real driving force behind presidential nominations. URL <http://bit.ly/104G4P8>.

Kreiss, Daniel (2012). Acting in the Public Sphere: The 2008 Obama Campaign's Strategic Use of New Media to Shape Narratives of the Presidential Race. *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 33:195–223. URL <http://bit.ly/144C1Fb>.

Further reading:

Gerber, Alan S., Gimpel, James G., Green, Donald P., & Shaw, Daron 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(01):135–150. URL <http://bit.ly/VZVVL8>.

Back to the Future? The Importance of Campaign Machinery in the Digital Age

Required:

Hindman, Matthew (2005). The Real Lessons of Howard Dean: Reflections on the First Digital Campaign. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(1):121–128. URL <http://bit.ly/17oM46r>.

Kreiss, Daniel & Howard, Philip (2010). New Challenges to Political Privacy: Lessons from the First US Presidential Race in the Web 2.0 Era. *International Journal of Communication*, 4:1032–1050. URL <http://bit.ly/15i2mOP>.

Further reading:

Harfoush, Rahaf (2009). *Yes We Did! An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand*. New Riders. Ch 6-13. Ch. 6-13

The Future of Campaigns: Data, Social Science, & Social Media

Required:

Cillizza, Chris (2007). Romney's Data Cruncher. *The Washington Post*. URL <http://wapo.st/10KfWVD>.

Issenberg, Sasha (2010). How Behavioral Science is Remaking Politics. *The New York Times*. URL <http://nyti.ms/Wr0MYa>.

Issenberg, Sasha (2012). Obama Does It Better. *Slate*. URL <http://slate.me/12oLaXT>.

Further reading:

Issenberg, Sasha (2012). The Death of the Hunch. *Slate*. URL <http://slate.me/11PIqA3>.

Kittur, Aniket (2010). Crowdsourcing, collaboration and creativity. *XRDS*, 17(2):22–26. URL <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1869086.1869096>.

Representation & Constituent Communication

Theories of Representation & Constituent Communication

Required:

Butler, Daniel M. (2011). Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 6(1):55–83. URL <http://bit.ly/YKfAv9>.

Grimmer, Justin, Messing, Solomon, & Westwood, Sean J. (2012). How Words and Money Cultivate a Personal Vote: The Effect of Legislator Credit Claiming on Constituent Credit Allocation. *American Political Science Review*, 106(04):703–719. URL <http://bit.ly/XOuZi1>.

R lab: What Constituents say to their Congressional Representatives on Twitter and Basic Text Analysis.

Further reading:

Mansbridge, Jane (2003). Rethinking Representation. *The American Political Science Review*, 97(4):515–528. URL <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593021>.

Butler, Daniel M. & Broockman, David E. (2011). Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(3):463–477. URL <http://bit.ly/XPeAKm>.

Representation & Constituent Communication on Twitter

Required:

Hemphill, Libby, Otterbacher, Jahna, & Shapiro, Matthew (2013). What’s Congress Doing on Twitter? In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work*, CSCW ’13, p. 877–886. New York, NY, USA: ACM. URL <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2441876>.

Livne, Avishay, Simmons, Matthew, Gong, W., Adar, Eytan, & Adamic, Lada (2011). Networks and Language in the 2010 Election. *2011*. URL <http://bit.ly/114FoXk>.

Further reading:

Tumasjan, Andranik, Sprenger, Timm O., Sandner, Philipp G., & Welp, Isabell M. (2010). Predicting elections with twitter: What 140 characters reveal about political sentiment. In *Proceedings of the fourth international AAAI conference on weblogs and social media*, p. 178–185. URL <http://bit.ly/110E5rq>.

Roback, Andrew & Hemphill, Libby (2013). “I’d Have to Vote Against You”: Issue Campaigning via Twitter. In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work companion*, CSCW ’13, p. 259–262. New York, NY, USA: ACM. URL <http://bit.ly/153FlyZ>.

The Public, the Media, & the Social/Mobile Web

The Reasoning Voter?

Required:

Popkin, Samuel L. (1994). *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1st edition. URL <http://stanford.io/16NL22H>. CHAPTER 3 ONLY.

R lab: The Relationship between Party ID and Vote Choice in ANES data.

Further reading:

Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper. URL <http://bit.ly/14eBNe5>. CHAPTERS 1 & 3.

The Information Environment

Required:

Katz, Elihu (1957). The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 21(1):61–78. URL <http://bit.ly/Xt54wr>.

Bakshy, Eytan, Rosenn, Itamar, Marlow, Cameron, & Adamic, Lada (2012). The Role of Social Networks in Information Diffusion. *arXiv*, 1201.4145. URL <http://bit.ly/16TokV0>.

Further reading:

Hindman, Matthew, Tsioutsoulis, Kostas, & Johnson, Judy A. (2003). Googlearchy: How a few heavily-linked sites dominate politics on the web. In *annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association*, volume 4, p. 1–33. URL <http://bit.ly/149ucxA>.

The Media Agenda and Owned Issues

Required:

Behr, Roy L. & Iyengar, Shanto (1985). Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 49(1):38–57. URL <http://stanford.io/ZKQ5Sa>.

Petrocik, John R (1996). Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(3):825–850.

Further reading:

Gilliam, Franklin D., Iyengar, Shanto, Simon, Adam, & Wright, Oliver (1996). Crime in Black and White: The violent, scary world of local news. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1(3):6–23.

What is “New Media”?

Required:

Bennett, W. Lance & Iyengar, Shanto (2008). A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4):707–731. URL <http://bit.ly/Y8MSnS>.

Shirky, Clay (2011). The Political Power of Social Media. *Foreign Affairs*, (January/February 2011). URL <http://bit.ly/15oLaHL>.

R lab: The Difference between the Traditional Media Agenda and What People Share, a Re-Analysis of Berger and Milkman’s (2012) New York Times Data.

Further reading:

Messing, Solomon & Westwood, Sean J. (2012). Friends that Matter: How Social Distance Affects Selection and Evaluation of Content in Social Media. In *Proceedings of the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting*. Chicago. URL <http://bit.ly/10SRJ14>.

Bennett, W. Lance (2012). The Personalization of Politics Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 644(1):20–39. URL <http://bit.ly/YIX7Ed>.

Mutz, Diana C & Young, Lori (2011). Communication and Public Opinion Plus Ca Change? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75(5):1018–1044. URL <http://bit.ly/120YhkX>.

Selective Exposure to Media and Campaigns

Required:

Iyengar, Shanto, Hahn, K. S, Krosnick, J. A, & Walker, J. (2008). Selective exposure to campaign communication: The role of anticipated agreement and issue public membership. *The Journal of Politics*, 70(01):186–200.

Messing, Solomon & Westwood, Sean J. (2012). Selective Exposure in the Age of Social Media: Endorsements Trump Partisan Source Affiliation when Selecting Online News Media. *Communication Research*, forthcoming. URL <http://bit.ly/VuTIZ9>.

R lab: Re-analyzing Messing and Westwood (2012) and the importance of the independence assumption.

Further reading:

Iyengar, Shanto & Hahn, Kyu S. (2009). Red media, blue media: Evidence of ideological selectivity in media use. *Journal of Communication*, 59(1):19–39. URL <http://stanford.io/ZNJdfB>.

Polarization

Required:

Layman, G. C., Carsey, T. M., & Horowitz, J. M. (2006). Party polarization in American politics: Characteristics, causes, and consequences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9:83–110. URL <http://bit.ly/XlwvbX>.

Mutz, Diana C. (2002). Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice. *American Political Science Review*, 96(1):112–126. URL <http://bit.ly/154Aaz8>.

Further reading:

Druckman, James N., Fein, Jordan, & Leeper, Thomas J. (2012). A Source of Bias in Public Opinion Stability. *American Political Science Review*, 106(02):430–454. URL <http://bit.ly/YJGhQC>.

Conover, Michael D., Ratkiewicz, Jacob, Francisco, Matthew, Goncalves, Bruno, Menczer, Filippo, & Flammini, Alessandro (2011). Political Polarization on Twitter. In *Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. URL <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM11/paper/view/2847>.

Social Media and the Pulse of the Nation

Herbst, Susan (1995). *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics*. University Of Chicago Press. URL TBD. CHAPTER 3.

Kohut, Andrew (2009). But What Do the Polls Show? URL <http://bit.ly/16Su6Gm>.

Choi, Hyunyoung & Varian, Hal (2012). Predicting the present with google trends. *Economic Record*, 88(s1):2–9. URL <http://bit.ly/ZkH5wV>.

Further reading:

O'Connor, Brendan, Balasubramanyan, Ramnath, Routledge, Bryan R., & Smith, Noah A. (2010). From tweets to polls: Linking text sentiment to public opinion time series. In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, p. 122–129. URL <http://bit.ly/ZnJWUZ>.

Van Dongen, Rachel (2012). Facebook primary: Mitt Romney, Ron Paul in the lead. URL <http://bit.ly/110E5rq>.

Chang, Jonathan (2010). How voters turned out on Facebook. URL <http://on.fb.me/XNC041>.

Messing, Solomon, Marlow, Cameron, & Bakshy, Eytan (2012). Election Day 2012 Through the Facebook Lens. URL <http://on.fb.me/Vmkovb>.

The New Activists: Spectacle, Digital Culture, & Hacktivism

The New Activism

Required:

Gladwell, Malcolm (2010). Small Change. *The New Yorker*. URL <http://nyr.kr/Xhlpod>.

Howard, Philip N. & Hussain, Muzammil M. (2011). The Role of Digital Media. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(3):35–48. URL <http://bit.ly/16JzNs0>.

Further reading:

Bennett, W. Lance & Segerberg, Alexandra (2012). The Logic of Connective Action. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5):739–768. URL <http://bit.ly/14TfQAp>.

Bakshy, Eytan (2013). Showing Support for Marriage Equality on Facebook. URL <http://on.fb.me/ZHlhSm>.

Digital Protest

Required:

Tufekci, Zeynep & Wilson, Christopher (2012). Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2):363–379. URL <http://bit.ly/XRAGvD>.

(2011). How FaceBook Changed The World The Arab Spring [1/4]. URL http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnPR90dJ3Gk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Further reading:

Coleman, E. Gabriella (2012). Phreaks, Hackers, and Trolls: The Politics of Transgression and Spectacle. In *The Social Media Reader*, pp. 99–119. New York: New York University Press. URL <http://bit.ly/XwMgv6>.

Lim, Merlyna (2012). Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2):231–248. URL <http://bit.ly/WHQhdH>.

Hacktivism

Required:

Ludlow, Peter (2013). Hacktivists as Gadflies. *New York Times*. URL <http://nyti.ms/15aNCRT>.

Further reading:

Knappenberger, Brian (2012). We Are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists. URL <http://bit.ly/Yd6lcw>.

Youmans, William Lafi & York, Jillian C. (2012). Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2):315–329. URL <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01636.x/abstract>.