**Capstone Political Science: Media Politics Theme**

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This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a research project that seeks to investigate the role and impact of the media on political and social outcomes. The mass media is the primary means by which citizens learn about political issues, events, and actors. It is therefore important to understand how and to what extent the mass media shape, influence, and reflect political attitudes and political behaviour. Students can engage with a broad range of topics in political communication and media politics that can form the basis for a research project.

Students are free to choose and develop their own research project in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student’s choosing, again in consultation with the theme instructor. The module will discuss questions of research design and the advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological approaches as relevant to the media politics literature to guide students throughout the course and as they work on their project.

There are several substantive topics from the media politics literature to consider. A research question related to any of these topics could form the basis for a Capstone project. If you are interested in any of these topics, then you should consider a project within this theme.

The first topic concerns how media content is produced and how, and under what conditions, structural factors may influence it. How does the practice and routines of journalism affect news? Do media outlets have a left wing or right wing bias? If there is bias, where does it come from? How do journalists’ political beliefs and identities influence this? What are the impacts of organisational pressures? Does media ownership matter? If so, how and when do owners influence content? Alternatively, do media outlets simply give audiences what they want? How do media audiences’ preferences influence media content?

Second, you could consider the effects of the media on public opinion and political behaviour. If the media influences the public then how? Does the media persuade people to vote a particular way? Does the media tell the public what to think about by setting the agenda? Does it instead tell the public how to think about issues by how it frames them? What explains patterns of framing and agenda setting?

Third, there is a variety of contemporary political issues where many commentators argue that media coverage matters both at home in Ireland and elsewhere. These include the rise of populism, the impact of traditional and digital media in contentious elections, immigration, climate change, terrorism, welfare policy, and issues of representation and social identity. Projects could consider how the media coverage of these issues is shaped as well as the potential effects of this coverage on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the citizens who consume it.

Finally, many would argue that technological innovation and the rise of online/social media has revolutionised the mass media landscape to the extent that our understanding of political communication has fundamentally changed. Projects could engage with questions arising from critical changes to the media taking place today such as the rise of soft news, eroding trust in media and journalism, social media and polarisation, and the rise (and meaning) of fake news and the online information wars.