

# PLSC ????: Media, Social Media & Politics

**Fall 2019**

Wednesday 2:30–5:30

Graduate Seminar  
Penn State University

## **Instructor**

Professor: Kevin Munger

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Office hours: Schedule by email (usually Tuesdays)

## **Course Overview**

This seminar covers recent and classic empirical research on the relationship between “the media” (broadly understood) and politics. The modern study of mass media influence originated in the 1940s and spans several social science disciplines. As we will see, the paradigms developed in the early years of that research program continue to influence scholars today — as well as to be debated and critiqued. Some of the canonical questions we will explore include the power of media messages to persuade; the extent to which media outlets are ideologically slanted, and how to objectively evaluate claims of bias; how censorship and propaganda work; and the role of new information technologies and social media on societal pathologies such as mass polarization.

It would be impossible to adequately cover all aspects of media research even in a comprehensive survey course. As such, this seminar will focus on relatively recent work that is quantitative in nature (although not exclusively so), but we will also strive to remain grounded in foundational works. Some important pieces are left off under the assumption that Political Science students have been exposed to them in other courses.

## **Prerequisites**

Many of the readings will be difficult for those who have not taken at least one semester of statistics.

## Course Components and Grading

- **Participation:** You will be expected to complete the readings before class having thought about them and their relation to each other. Please be prepared to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. Active participation is critical to the seminar format! (20%)
- **Discussion facilitator:** In (at least) one class, you will lead discussion of that week's readings. You should focus on both issues of research design and substantive findings, noting important context and related debates. *Consult with me the week before so that we can discuss your plan.* (15%)
- **Literature review:** You will submit a roughly 10-page review of literature on a specific topic. It should critically summarize the state of the empirical research in a specific area and could potentially be useful in the development of your final paper. (25%)
- **Research paper:** Your 25-page final paper may involve original data collection, a replication and extension of previous work, or analysis of existing data. All topics must be cleared with me in advance. Papers should follow APSA style guidelines. (40%)

## Books

The following books contain helpful background material and may be useful if you haven't encountered this topic before.

- Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. 2019. *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact. 10th Edition.* Chapter 8.
- Shapiro, Robert Y. and Lawrence R. Jacobs, eds. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

We will read multiple chapters of the following books:

- Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels? Partisan News in an Age of Choice.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Settle, Jaime. 2018. *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Additionally, these books are (or will be) fairly foundational and may be useful to have in your library:

- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hamilton, James. 2004. *All the News that's Fit to Sell: How the market transforms information into news.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ladd, Jonathan. 2005. *Why Americans Hate the Media and Why It Matters.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## Schedule

NOTE: The first scheduled meeting for the course is during APSA, and I'll be out of town. I wouldn't generally assign reading before the first class, but in this case it makes sense.

### September 4: Preliminaries, Minimal Effects, and the Two-Step Flow

Excerpt from Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (1944). Available at [this link](#).

Katz, Elihu. 1987. "Communications Research Since Lazarsfeld." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51(2): S25–S45.

Druckman, James N., Matthew S. Levendusky, and Audrey McLain. 2018. "No Need to Watch: How the Effects of Partisan Media Can Spread via Interpersonal Discussions." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(1): 99–112.

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.

### September 11: Media Effects I

Hovland, Carl I., Arthur A. Lumsdaine, and Fred D. Sheffield. 1949. *Experiments on Mass Communication*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction, Chapter 2.

Blair, Graeme, Rebecca Littman, and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2019. "Motivating the adoption of new community-minded behaviors: An empirical test in Nigeria." *Science Advances*, forthcoming. URL: <https://graemeblair.com/papers/nollywood.pdf>

Albertson, Bethany and Adria Lawrence. 2009. "After the Credits Roll: The Long-Term Effects of Educational Television on Public Knowledge and Attitudes." *American Politics Research* 37(2): 275–300.

Martin, Gregory J. and Ali Yurukoglu. 2017. "Bias in Cable News: Persuasion and Polarization." *American Economic Review* 107(9): 2565–2599.

### September 18: Media Effects II

Iyengar and Kinder chapters 2–3.

Arceneaux and Johnson chapters 1–4, 6.

Feezell, Jessica T. 2018. "Agenda Setting through Social Media: The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Era." *Political Research Quarterly* 71(2): 482–494.

## September 25: Campaigns and Framing

Chong, Dennis, and Druckman, James N. 2007. "Framing Public Opinion in Competitive Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 101(4): 637–655.

Gerber, Alan S., Gimpel, James G., Green, Donald P., and 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(1): 135–150.

Cacciatore, Michael A., Dietram A. Scheufele, and Shanto Iyengar. 2016. "The End of Framing as we Know it ... and the Future of Media Effects." *Mass Communication and Society* 19(1): 7–23.

Petrova, Maria, Ananya Sen, and Pinar Yildirim. 2017. "Social Media and Political Donations: New Technology and Incumbency Advantage in the United States." Available at SSRN: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2836323](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2836323)

## October 2: Media Bias and Slant

Groseclose, Tim and Jeffrey Milyo. 2005. "A Measure of Media Bias." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120(4): 1191–1237.

- Perspectives on Politics Review Symposium: Does the U.S. Media Have a Liberal Bias? September 2012. 10(3):767-785. Read the pieces by Nyhan and McCarty, skim the rest. (Links here: <http://themonkeycage.org/2012/09/symposium-on-timothy-grosecloses-arguments-about-liberal-bias/>)

Gentzkow, M., and Jesse Shapiro. 2010. "What drives media slant? Evidence from US daily newspapers." *Econometrica* 78(1): 35–71.

Peisakhin, Leonid and Arturas Rozenas. 2018. "Electoral Effects of Biased Media: Russian Television in Ukraine." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(3): 535–550.

## October 7: Polarization and Civility

Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16:101–127.

Westwood, Sean, Shanto Iyengar, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, and Neil Malhotra. 2018. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science*, forthcoming.

Mutz, Diana, and Reeves, Byron. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 1–15.

Conroy-Krutz, Jeffrey and Devra C. Moehler. 2015. "Moderation from Bias: A Field Experiment on Partisan Media in a New Democracy." *The Journal of Politics* 77(2): 575–587.

## October 16: Media Consumption and Selective Exposure

Messing, Solomon and Sean J. Westwood. 2012. “Selective Exposure in the Age of Social Media: Endorsements Trump Partisan Source Affiliation When Selecting News Online.” *Communication Research* 41(8): 1042–1063.

Guess, Andrew M. 2018. “(Almost) Everything in Moderation: New Evidence on Americans’ Online Media Diets.” Working paper available here: [https://webpace.princeton.edu/users/aguess/Guess\\_OnlineMediaDiets.pdf](https://webpace.princeton.edu/users/aguess/Guess_OnlineMediaDiets.pdf)

Barberá, P., Jost, J. T., Nagler, J., Tucker, J. A., and Bonneau, R. 2015. “Tweeting From Left to Right: Is Online Political Communication More Than an Echo Chamber?” *Psychological Science* 26(10): 1531–1542.

Sood, Gaurav and Yphtach Lelkes. 2018. “Don’t Expose Yourself: Discretionary Exposure to Political Information.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Available here: <http://gsood.com/research/papers/selexp.pdf>

## October 23: Internet and Social Media I: Controversies

Please read the articles as well as the various responses.

Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic. 2015. “Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook.” *Science* 348(6239): 1130–1132.

- Tufekci: <https://medium.com/message/how-facebook-s-algorithm-suppresses-content-diversity-modestly-how-the-newsfeed-rules-the-clicks-b5f8a4bb7bab>
- Hargittai: <http://crookedtimber.org/2015/05/07/why-doesnt-science-publish-important-methods-info-prominently/>
- Sandvig: <http://blogs.harvard.edu/niftyc/archives/1062>
- Response: <https://solomonmg.github.io/blog/2015/exposure-to-ideologically-diverse-response/>

Westwood, Sean J., Solomon Messing, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2018. “Projecting confidence: How the probabilistic horse race confuses and demobilizes the public.” Working paper available here: <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~seanjwestwood/papers/aggregator.pdf>

- Silver: <https://twitter.com/natesilver538/status/960988772723838976>, <https://twitter.com/NateSilver538/status/987905971866492928>, and rest of thread
- Response: <https://solomonmg.github.io/blog/2018/response-to-fivethirtyeights-podcast-about-our-paper-projecting-confidence/>

Matz, S. C., M. Kosinski, G. Nave, and D. J. Stillwell. 2017. “Psychological targeting in digital mass persuasion.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(48): 12714–12719.

1. Eckles, Dean, Brett R. Gordon, and Garrett A. Johnson. 2018. “Field studies of psychologically targeted ads face threats to internal validity.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(23): E5254–E5255.

2. Matz, S. C., M. Kosinski, G. Nave, and D. J. Stillwell. 2018. "Reply to Eckles et al.: Facebook's optimization algorithms are highly unlikely to explain the effects of psychological targeting." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(23): E5256–E5257.
3. Sharp, Byron, Nick Danenberg, and Steven Bellman. 2018. "Psychological targeting." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(34): E7890.
4. Matz, S. C., M. Kosinski, G. Nave, and D. J. Stillwell. 2018. "Reply to Sharp et al.: Psychological targeting produces robust effects." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(34): E7891.

## October 30: Internet and Social Media II: Is Social Media Driving Us Apart?

Settle, Jaime. 2018. *Frenemies* chapters 1-4.

Boxell, Levi, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2017. "Greater Internet use is not associated with faster growth in political polarization among US demographic groups." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(40): 10612–10617. (skim)

Allcott, Hunt, Luca Braghieri, Sarah Eichmeyer, and Matthew Gentzkow. 2019. "The Welfare Effects of Social Media." Working paper available at: <http://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/facebook.pdf>

Bail et al. 2018. "Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(37): 9216–9221.

## November 6: Propaganda and Misinformation

Fall 2018 Comparative Politics Newsletter: [http://comparativenewsletter.com/files/archived\\_newsletters/2018\\_fall.pdf](http://comparativenewsletter.com/files/archived_newsletters/2018_fall.pdf). Read pieces by Barberá, Carter & Carter, and Little.

Flynn, D.J., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2017. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics." *Advances in Political Psychology* 38(S1): 127–150.

Guess, Andrew, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2018. "Fake news consumption and behavior in the 2016 U.S. presidential election." Working paper available on Blackboard.

Grinberg et al. 2019. "Fake news on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election." *Science* 363(6425): 374–378.

## November 13: Media Economics

Hamilton, James. 2004. *All the News that's Fit to Sell: How the market transforms information into news*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-3, 7

Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2010. "What drives media slant? Evidence from US daily newspapers." *Econometrica*.

Munger, Kevin. "All the News that's Fit to Click: The Economics of Clickbait Media." Working paper, draft on my website.

## **November 20: Prejudice and Inequality**

Paluck, Elizabeth Levy. 2009. “Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict using the media: A field experiment in Rwanda.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96(3): 574–587.

Kim, Eunji. 2018. “Entertaining Beliefs in Economic Mobility.” Working paper available at [this link](#).

Munger, Kevin. 2017. “Tweetment Effects on the Tweeted: Experimentally Reducing Racist Harassment.” *Political Behavior* 39(3): 629–649.

Alrababa’h, Ala’, William Marble, Salma Mousa, and Alexandra Siegel. “Can Exposure to Celebrities Reduce Prejudice? The Effect of Mohamed Salah on Islamophobic Behaviors and Attitudes.” Working paper available at [this link](#).

## **November 27: No Class, Thanksgiving**

## **December 4: Non-Political Science Perspectives**

Taibbi, Matt. “It’s official: Russiagate is this generation’s WMD”. Click [this link](#).

Gurri, Martin. 2018. *The Revolt of the Public: And the Crisis of Authority in the New Millennium*. Chapters XXXXX

Vaidhyathan, Siva. 2018. *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*. Chapters XXXXX

## **December 11: Research Presentation**

Academics, and grad students in particular, tend to avoid presenting work before it is extremely polished. This has some advantages, but we neglect to develop our skills at both presenting and discussing work in progress.

This week, each person will give a short presentation based on their working paper, with another person serving as discussant.

## **December 18: Final Papers due to my inbox by 5pm**