

# Political Communication: Course Syllabus

## Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of the role of communication in politics. We will explore research from the fields of communication and political science concerning the content of a variety of “legacy” and “new” forms of political communication. We will discuss the role of traditional print and television news media, entertainment media forms with political relevance, online media, face-to-face interpersonal communication, and various forms of technologically mediated social interactions in politics (e.g., social media, discussion forums, news article comment spaces). Our emphasis will be considering the role these can play — good and bad — in democratic functioning. Although the primary emphasis of this course will be on American politics, we will take the time to consider where the U.S. stands from a broader perspective, and I welcome hearing from students with interests in other specific political systems. This course will expose students to a breadth of scholarship on political communication from both communication and political science (and sometimes, other related fields). Students will become familiar with theoretical, methodological and pragmatic issues in political communication scholarship. Students will learn to evaluate original empirical research and how to chart future directions to advance theory and evidence.

## Required Materials Textbooks and readings

There is no required text for this course. All readings will be made available on Canvas by the weekly discussion leaders.

## Evaluation

This class will use the standard USC grading scheme:

A 95-100

A- 90-94

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

C- 70-73

D+ 65-69

D 60-64

### Graded Assignments

The final grade in the class will tentatively consist of the following:

Assignment	Points (%)
Discussion Leading	400 (40% )
Reading Questions	200 (20%)
Final paper	400 (40% )
Total	1000 (100%)

### Leading Discussion

Each student will sign up to serve as a group discussion leader for two weeks during the course of the semester. **In addition to reading the required readings, discussion leaders will read (and be prepared to discuss) additional work on the same general topic that builds upon, contradicts, or fills gaps in the assigned reading.** To do so they must seek out this additional relevant material, probably in consultation with the instructor. In order to structure the discussion in the class, discussion leaders should develop a number of questions – and for themselves, the answers to those questions. Questions are likely to pertain to some combination of the theory, method, or connections across papers and topics in the assigned readings – including across topics/weeks when relevant.

Tasks:

1. Discussion leaders should post their readings at least one week before class. This includes the additional reading selected by the leaders for the week.
2. Students will submit their questions in response to the discussion board post at least 3 days before class (Sunday at midnight).
3. Discussion leaders should select which questions to use and add their own. Then they should post the class questions to the discussion board at least 24 hours before class so that students can think about them in advance and bring copies to class.

4. Discussion leaders will play a major role in moderating class discussion. I will collect student preferences on which class sessions they would like to lead. I will assign students to weeks to maximize the number of students getting topics ranked high on their lists.

## **Reading Questions**

On the weeks when students are not discussion leaders, they will participate by providing reading questions to the class. In order to structure the discussion in the class, discussion leaders should develop a number of questions of their own and facilitate the collection and distribution of the questions that will be used the class. Questions are likely to pertain to some combination of the theory, method, or connections across papers and topics in the assigned readings — including across topics/weeks when relevant. To receive full credit, students must do the following:

### **Tasks:**

1. Students should consult the discussion board to find the weekly readings at least one week before class. This includes the additional reading selected by the leaders for the week. Read all assigned works and take notes.
2. Students will submit at least one question for each reading in response to the discussion board post at least 1 day before class (Tuesday evening).
3. Students should arrive in class prepared to discuss all the readings.

## **Research Paper**

Each student will produce a conference ready paper by the ends of the semester. For quantitative research, you should do a secondary analysis that does not require IRB approval. You can, upon permission of the instructor, opt to submit an experimental plan plus a full literature review and IRB submission package. More details will be shared in class.

## **Late policy**

Late work may be accepted with full credit under most circumstances. Communication with the instructor is essential for receiving credit on late work. The goal is to be flexible, but not fall behind in the course. This policy may be changed at short notice if students are struggling to keep up without the motivation of late penalties.

### **Faculty feedback and response time**

Allow 10-14 days for grades on major assignments, although sometimes you will receive feedback sooner. In general, expect a response to emails within 24 hours on business days. If you haven't gotten a response after a couple of days, feel free to reach out again.

### **Written assignments**

All written work must be typed and must conform to APA formatting, citing, and referencing guidelines (see <http://www.apastyle.org/> and [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/Links to an external site.](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site.)).

Unless otherwise noted, assignments must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. on the assigned due date.

### **Changing nature of this syllabus**

The assignments, policies, and readings in this syllabus are subject to change at any time. If this occurs, the changes will be announced on Canvas and in class.

### **Weekly Readings**

#### **Week 2 (Jan 22) Foundations**

Jamieson, K. H., & Kenski, K. (2017). Political communication: Then, now and beyond. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 3-12). New York: Oxford University Press.

Schudson, M. (2002). The news media as political institutions. *Annual review of political science*, 5(1), 249–269.

Tsfati, Y.; & Capella, J. (2003). Do people watch what they not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research*, 30 (5), 504–529.

### **Week 3 (Jan 29) Entertainment, soft news, and satire**

Baum, M. A. (2003). Soft news and political knowledge: Evidence of absence or absence of evidence?. *Political communication*, 20(2), 173–190.

Baym, G. (2005) The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism, *Political Communication*, 22:3, 259-276, DOI: 10.1080/10584600591006492

Prior, M. (2003). Any good news in soft news? The impact of soft news preference on political knowledge. *Political communication*, 20(2), 149–171.

Delli Carpini, M. X. (2017). The political effects of entertainment media. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 851-870). New York: Oxford University Press.

LaMarre, H. L., Landreville, K. D., & Beam, M. A. (2009). The Irony of Satire: Political Ideology and the Motivation to See What You Want to See in The Colbert Report. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(2), 212-231.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208330904>

### **Week 4 (Feb 5) Content of Legacy News Media**

Bennett, W. L. (2007). News content: Four information biases that matter. In *News: The politics of illusion* (pp. 32- 72). New York: Pearson.

Soroka, S. N. (2012). The gatekeeping function: Distributions of information in media and the real world. *Journal of Politics*, 74, 514-528.

Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication*, 28, 19-41.

Budak, C., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Fair and balanced? Quantifying media bias through crowdsourced content analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 250-271.

Mutz, D. C., & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, 99(1), 1–15.

### **Week 5 (Feb 12 Political News Selection and Effects Part 1**

*Selectivity and polarization:*

Stroud, N. J. (2017). Selective exposure theories. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 531-547). New York: Oxford University Press.

Garrett, R. K., & Stroud, N. J. (2014). Partisan paths to exposure diversity: Differences in pro- and counterattitudinal news consumption. *Journal of Communication*, 64, 680-701.

Levendusky, M. S. (2013). Why do partisan media polarize viewers? *American Journal of Political Science*, 57, 611- 623.

#### *Framing:*

Framing Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43, 51– 58. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Vreese, C. H. (2005). News framing: Theory and typology. *Information Design Journal*, 13, 51–62. doi: 10.1075/idjdd.13.1.06vre

### **Week 6 (Feb 19) Political News Selection and Effects Part 2**

Jamieson, K. H. (2017). Creating the hybrid field of political communication: A five-decadelong evolution of the concept of effects. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 15- 46). New York: Oxford University Press.

#### *Knowledge:*

Jerit, J., Barabas, J., Bolsen, T. (2006). Citizens, knowledge, and the information environment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 266-282.

Eveland, W. P., Jr. & Garrett, R. K. (2017). Communication modalities and political knowledge. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 517-530). New York: Oxford University Press.

#### *Misinformation:*

Pasquetto, I., Swire-Thompson, B., & Amazeen, M. A. (2020). Tackling misinformation: What researchers could do with social media data. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. doi: 10.37016/mr-2020-49

Garrett, R. K., Long, J. A., & Jeong, M. S. (2019). From partisan media to misperception: Affective polarization as mediator. *Journal of Communication*, 69, 490–517. doi: 10.1093/joc/jqz028

### **Week 7 (Feb 26) Political Networks, Conversation and Deliberation**

Simon, A. F., & Jerit, J. (2007). Toward a theory relating political discourse, media, and public opinion. *Journal of communication*, 57(2), 254–271.

Druckman, J. N., Levendusky, M. S., & McLain, A. (2018). No need to watch: How the effects of partisan media can spread via interpersonal discussions. *American Journal of Political Science*.

Settle, J. E., & Carlson, T. N. (2019). Opting out of political discussions. *Political Communication*, 36, 476-496

Thorson, E. (2014). Beyond opinion leaders: How attempts to persuade foster political awareness and campaign learning. *Communication Research*, 41, 353-374.

Kim, N. (2016). Beyond rationality: The role of anger and information in deliberation. *Communication Research*, 43, 3-24.

## **Week 8 (March 5) Spring Break**

## **Week 9 (March 12) Campaigns and Political advertising**

Bartels, L. M. (2014). Remembering to forget: A note on the duration of campaign advertising effects. *Political Communication*, 31(4), 532–544.

Iyengar, S., & Simon, A. F. (2000). New perspectives and evidence on political communication and campaign effects. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51, 149–159.

Patterson, T. E. (2016). News coverage of the 2016 general election: How the press failed the voters. Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy.

Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2018). The minimal persuasive effects of campaign contact in general elections: Evidence from 49 field experiments. *American Political Science Review*, 112, 148–166. doi: 10.1017/S0003055417000363

LaMarre, H.L. (2024). Blitz of political attack ads in Pennsylvania and other swing states may be doing candidates and voters more harm than good. Retrieve from:

<https://theconversation.com/blitz-of-political-attack-ads-in-pennsylvania-and-other-swing-states-may-be-doing-candidates-and-voters-more-harm-than-good-239034>Links to an external site.

## **Week 10 (March 19) Selecting News Online**

leader: *Alarik*

Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, L. A. (2015). Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. *Science*, 348, 1130-1132.

Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 298-320.

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31, 211-236.

Garrett, R. K. (2019). Social media's contribution to political misperceptions in U.S. presidential elections. *PLoS ONE*, 14(3), e0213500.

## **Week 11 (March 26) Political News Selection and Effects Part 2**

*leaders: Madhab and Yusra*

*Knowledge:*

Jerit, J., Barabas, J., Bolsen, T. (2006). Citizens, knowledge, and the information environment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 266-282.

Eveland, W. P., Jr. & Garrett, R. K. (2017). Communication modalities and political knowledge. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 517-530). New York: Oxford University Press.

*Misinformation:*

Pasquetto, I., Swire-Thompson, B., & Amazeen, M. A. (2020). Tackling misinformation: What researchers could do with social media data. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. doi: 10.37016/mr-2020-49

Garrett, R. K., Long, J. A., & Jeong, M. S. (2019). From partisan media to misperception: Affective polarization as mediator. *Journal of Communication*, 69, 490-517. doi: 10.1093/joc/jqz028

## **Week 12 (April 2) Final Paper workshop Week 2**

No readings. We will continue to work on final paper drafts based on workshop feedback.

**DUE TODAY: a 7-9 page extended draft of your paper including a timeline for remaining tasks on the paper and at least 10 citations you will be using.**

## **Week 13 (April 9) Sharing and Talking Politics Online**

*leaders: Mikias and Cleves*



Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61- million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, 489, 295-298.

Neubaum, G., & Krämer, N. C. (2017). Opinion climates in social media: Blending mass and interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research*.

Settle, J. E. (2018). The END framework of political interaction on social media. In *Frenemies: How social media polarizes America* (pp. 50-77). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5, eaau4586.

### **Week 14 (April 16) Paper Workshop 3**

No readings. We will continue to work on final paper drafts based on workshop feedback.

**DUE TODAY: 2 copies of your working draft. These will be used for in-class peer review.**

### **Week 15 (April 23) Final Paper Drafts Due**

**LAST DAY OF CLASS. Bring 3 copies of your fully revised draft paper (that includes revisions from the prior week workshop) to class for peer review.**

### **Week 15 (April 30)**

Final papers due. Submit via email or Canvas.