Communication 580
Media and Politics
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 2-4
& by appointment

This class considers how various changes in media practices, candidate strategies, and new communication technologies have altered the practice of politics and influenced citizen behaviors.

In any democracy the people surrender power to those whom they elect to govern. Our elected representatives pass the laws under which we live and we are expected to acknowledge their legitimate authority to enforce those laws. These laws cover a full range of human experience including such issues as where we may park our cars, how fast we are permitted to drive, compulsory schooling for our children (and control over the content they are taught), decisions about the substances which we can ingest, demands that we pay taxes, and even committing us to military actions that risk our lives and the lives of our loved ones. By participating in the democratic process — for most Americans this means only casting an occasional vote — we are affirming support for that process and helping to assure its continuance. If a substantial percentage of the citizenry come to doubt the legitimacy of the political system, lose confidence in the integrity of their elected officials, begin to disregard the laws or withhold their taxes, or even if people merely stop turning out to vote, our democracy will eventually unravel. History tells us that in societies where democratic governments fail the result may be anarchy, fascism, or revolution in some other form.

Political campaigns and elections are thus important public rituals that preserve the political system by giving the citizens in a democracy a measure of control and power over their leaders. The campaigns help to maintain the illusion of political equality, and of meaningful citizen participation. By monitoring a campaign, listening to mediated arguments, observing "spot" TV ads, attending a campaign rally or event, but most importantly, by casting one’s vote, participatory democracy (or at least what passes for democracy in the United States) is enacted.

During political campaigns citizens divide themselves into dramatically different and sometimes seemingly incompatible ideological factions, each committed to the election of a candidate who best reflects their particular world-views. Following the election, however, citizens are expected to put aside their differences and to acknowledge the legitimacy of the system and the rightful authority of those who won the elections. People and governments organize and maintain their connections to each other through shared communications, and the conduct and process of democratic rule thus center on the ability to create mutual respect for and commitment to shared values — values that are expressed through public discourse. The study of the messages that shape and express our political choices, of the technologies that carry those
messages to the public, and of the strategies that have guided their creation, gives us great insight into the values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations of our society.

The practices of political campaigning and governance have changed significantly in recent years. Candidates increasingly rely on the media to reach voters, the media landscape has itself been changed in the era of the Internet, political parties have lost influence, and voters are exposed to an ever-increasing barrage of political advertisements. Polls suggest that many Americans have become increasingly distrustful of all politicians, and a cynical and anti-government ideology has become popular.

Students in this class will explore a variety of different theoretical approaches to the study of political campaign communication. We will discuss how campaigns are planned and developed, how strategies are formed, and how the news media comes to shape public opinion. We will also discuss how elected officials use the strategies developed in waging campaigns to govern once they assume office.

Texts:


In addition, there will be a few other assigned readings that I will circulate.

Assignments:

1. Major Paper (40% of final grade). You have many options with this paper. One option is to focus your paper on one or more of the political communication theories that we read about and/or discuss in class. Your objective would be to summarize, critique, and extend or further enrich this theory. You might, for example, discuss how one or more developments in the use of
new communication technologies impacted contemporary political campaigns. A second option is to undertake a case study analysis of a recent campaign. Finally, you might consider proposing a communication-centered plan to rehabilitate the practice and vitality of electoral politics in the U.S. or overseas. Such a paper should demonstrate your understanding of the theories of campaign communication and of the current political conditions.

You should get prior approval for the selection of your topic. The paper should demonstrate your familiarity with the literature on political campaign communication, your knowledge of the subject, and an awareness of political issues and ideologies. All papers should cite research materials from the textbooks and the relevant academic journals. To receive an ‘A’ your paper must make a significant and original contribution to our understanding of your topic. Doctoral student papers should be suitable for submission to an academic conference or journal. The paper is due on April 27. Each student should be prepared to present a brief summary of his or her paper on that day. 20 pages maximum.

2. Media Communication Critique (20% of final grade). This paper should analyze and critique news media coverage of some issue, candidate, or controversy. The paper could focus on a single media story or source, or could be a comparative study of several different media sources. The paper should be a maximum of 5 pages long, and is due on February 23rd.

3. All students should pay careful attention to daily news coverage of political issues. You should read the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times (news and editorial sections) daily. You are encouraged to also examine other leading newspapers, Web sites, and broadcast sources for news and political information. Our goal is to create a “conversational commons” to discuss current political events. We will spend some time in each class period discussing the events of the preceding week.

4. Reaction papers (10% of final grade). Each student should prepare a 1 page reaction paper discussing the readings assigned for that class period and any relevant issues that are developing in the media. Students may use these papers to pose questions, celebrate, or refute the readings. These papers should be emailed to other class participants and to the instructor no later than 3 PM on the day of class.

5. Final Examination (30% of final grade). A 2 hour essay examination will occur on May 11th.

Tentative Daily Schedule:

January 12    Introductions
January 19    Martin Luther King Holiday
January 26    Political Action is Communicative Action
              The Permanent Campaign
              Hollihan, Chapters 1 & 2
              Jamieson, Chapter 1
February 2  Political Socialization
          Hollihan, Chapter 3
          Westen, Chapters 1-5
          Craig, Chapter 3

February 9  Candidate Image
          Hollihan, Chapter 4
          Iyengar, Chapter 1

February 16  President’s Day Holiday

February 23  The Role of the News Media
          Hollihan, Chapter 5
          Schudson, Chapters 1-5
          Iyengar, Chapters 2-4
          Craig, Chapter 7

March 2  Political Advertising
          Hollihan, Chapter 6
          Iyengar, Chapter 6-8
          Jamieson, Chapter 6
          Craig, Chapter 6

March 9  Public Opinion Polling
          Hollihan, Chapter 7
          Craig, Chapter 4
          Iyengar, Chapters 9-10
          Jamieson, Chapter 7

March 16  Spring Break — No Class

March 23  New Technologies and Campaigns
          Hollihan, Chapter 8
          Iyengar, Chapter 5
          Craig, Chapter 8 & 10

March 30  Political Debating
          Hollihan, Chapter 9
          Jamieson, Chapter 4

April 6  Campaign Finance
          Hollihan, Chapter 10
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 13</td>
<td>Drew, pp. 3-85 (on reserve)</td>
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<td>Craig, Chapter 5</td>
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<td>April 13</td>
<td>Campaigning and Governing</td>
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<td>Hollihan, Chapter 11</td>
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<td>Craig, Chapter 12</td>
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<td>April 20</td>
<td>The Crisis in American Democracy &amp; Reinventing Politics</td>
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<td>Hollihan, Chapter 12</td>
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<td>Schudson, Chapters 9-10</td>
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<td>April 27</td>
<td>Students Present Final Papers</td>
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<td>May 11</td>
<td>Final Examination</td>
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