

**Communication 580**  
**Media and Politics**  
**Fall 2018**

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

We are living in interesting times. Across the globe we find governments that have been deeply disrupted by population migrations, rising social and economic inequalities, religious and cultural conflicts, and changes in media systems and practices. This class considers how these various changes have impacted political campaigns and the capability of elected officials to govern.

Political campaigns and elections are important public rituals that nurture and preserve political systems and give 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 campaign rallies or events, but most importantly, by casting a vote, participatory democracy (or at least what passes for democracy) is enacted.

Today our political system in the United States is probably as polarized as it has been since the period immediately before the Civil War. Similarly, it is reported that many other democracies, especially those in Europe, are similarly deeply polarized. It has long been understood that 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. Today, however, it seems that it has become much more difficult to bring ideologically divided citizens together to create a unified people to support common initiatives. 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. In this class we will seek to understand why politics has become so polarized and what steps might be taken to remedy the problem.

Candidates and elected officials rely on the media to communicate with citizens, but in this era of increasingly partisan media and democratized social media many have become distrustful of politicians and the media alike. A cynical and paralyzing anti-government ideology

is now common, and in many nations, it threatens the very vitality of democratic regimes.

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. We will try to understand, critique, and hopefully change the world! No modest ambitions in this class.

### **Texts:**

Hollihan, Thomas A. (2009). *Uncivil wars: Political campaigns in a media age*, 2d. ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Scammel, Margaret (2014). *Consumer democracy: The marketing of politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, Milton & Taber, Charles S. (2013). *The Rationalizing Voter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levendusky, Matthew (2013). *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Arceneaux, Kevin & Johnson, Martin (2013). *Changing minds or changing channels? Partisan news in an age of choice*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Lee, Michael J. (2014). *Creating conservatism: Postwar words that made an American movement*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Isikoff, Michael & Corn, David (2018). *Russian roulette: The inside story of Putin's war on America and the election of Donald Trump*. New York: Twelve Publisher.

Iyengar, Shanto (2011). *Media politics: A citizen's guide*, 2d. ed. New York: Norton.

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

### **Assignments:**

1. Major Paper (50% 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 or ongoing 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 December 5. Each student should be prepared to present a brief summary of his or her paper on November 28.** 25 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 **November 7**.

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. Midterm Examination (20% of final grade). An essay examination will occur on October 17th.

#### **Tentative Daily Schedule:**

August 22	Introductions
August 29	Politics is Communication and the Permanent Campaign Hollihan, Chapters 1 & 2 Scammel, Chapters 1 & 2
September 5	Political Socialization Hollihan, Chapter 3

Lodge & Taber, Chapters 1-3

- September 12 Candidate Image and Branding  
Hollihan, Chapter 4  
Scammell, Chapters 3 & 4  
Lodge & Taber, Chapters 4-7
- September 19 Political News and Politics  
Hollihan, Chapter 5  
Iyengar, Chapters 2 - 3 (handout)  
Arcenaux & Johnson, Chapters 1 & 2
- September 26 Partisanship and News  
Arcenaux & Johnson, Chapters 3 & 4  
Levendusky, Chapters 1-4
- October 3 Political Advertising  
Hollihan, Chapter 7  
Iyengar, Chapters 9 & 10
- October 10 Creating Conservatism  
Lee, Chapters 1-7
- October 17 Midterm Exam
- October 24 New Technologies and Campaigns  
Hollihan, Chapter 8  
Iyengar, Chapter 5  
Handouts
- October 31 The Green and Growing Edge of New Media  
Handouts
- November 7 Midterm Election Post-Mortem  
You should read everything you can get your hands on to explain the outcomes
- November 14 The Information Wars & Fake News  
Isikoff & Corn
- November 21 Campaigning and Governing  
Hollihan, Chapter 11  
handouts
- November 28 Reinventing Politics

Hollihan, Chapter 12  
Iyengar, Chapter 11  
Presentation of Student Papers

December 5 Final Paper Due