Instructor : Elio DI PAOLANTONIO

Class type : Lecture
Title : *Politics, Media & the Public*
Language of Instruction : English

Program : DU English Track
Mutualized : 2A
Year : 2026-2027 Winter Term (S2)

In-class hours: 20
ECTS : 5 ECTS

Syllabus

Sciences Po Toulouse

2A/DU Anglophone

Politics, Media & the Public

COURSE SUMMARY:

The relationship between politics and the media has changed considerably over the past several decades, particularly in the United States, where political life has become increasingly dependent on media exposure. Politicians must compete for public attention in an environment where the way an issue is presented can matter as much as the issue itself. Understanding contemporary American politics therefore requires an understanding of how the media operate and how political actors have adapted to them.

This course looks at how that relationship has developed and what it means for the exercise of political power. We will examine the influence of television on American political life, the professionalization of campaign communication, and the ways in which political actors seek to influence public opinion. We will also consider how the development of the Internet and social media has altered political communication, often challenging the role of journalism in the process.

Beyond election campaigns, the course addresses a broader question: what are the consequences of this dependence on the media for American democracy ? Particular attention will be paid to the formation of public opinion and the difficulties citizens face in navigating an increasingly fragmented information environment. Although our main focus will be the United States, we will also draw comparisons with other democracies to put the American experience into perspective.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

→ Describe the evolving relationship between U.S. political institutions, the media, and the public.
→ Examine distinctive features of the American media and political communication systems, drawing comparisons with other democracies where relevant.
→ Examine political strategies that use both traditional and digital media to influence voters during election campaigns, but also in between election cycles.
→ Explore the role of the Internet and social media in shaping public perception of political issues and engagement in the political process.
→ Introduce key concepts in media literacy to critically analyze the communication techniques used in political campaigns, policy debates, and news reporting.
→ Foster critical thinking on how media and political communication practices influence democratic participation and public trust.
→ Reflect on the pervasive role of advertising and its cultural and political implications in U.S. media and politics, beyond just election campaigns.

GRADING AND EVALUATION:

FINAL EXAM

STUDENTS WILL SIT FOR A **2-HOUR EXAM** DURING THE EXAM PERIOD*. THIS WILL CONSIST OF A COMBINATION OF **ONE SHORT WRITTEN ESSAY** AND **20 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**.

COURSE MATERIALS:

ALL MATERIALS IN CONNECTION WITH THE COURSE WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE ON THE SCIENCES PO TOULOUSE **MOODLE PLATFORM -** THIS INCLUDES **SLIDES** AND **READINGS**

CALENDAR:

CLASSES WILL BE HELD DURING THE WINTER TERM ON **FRIDAYS** FROM **10h-12h** in **amphitheater MB1 (10-WEEK PERIOD** with **2-HOUR LECTURES)**

COURSE STRUCTURE:

PART I - MEDIA-BASED POLITICS
DEPENDENCE OF U.S. POLITICAL LIFE ON MEDIA VISIBILITY, FRAMING, AND NARRATIVE.

PART II - CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGY
USE OF MEDIA TOOLS TO PERSUADE, MOBILIZE, AND CONTROL THE MESSAGE.

PART III - DEMOCRACY AND THE PUBLIC
EFFECTS OF MEDIA-DRIVEN POLITICS ON TRUST, POLARIZATION, AND DEBATE IN THE DIGITAL AGE.

RECOMMENDED LEARNING RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY:

THIS LIST IS INTENDED FOR THOSE WISHING TO DO A "DEEPER DIVE" INTO THE SUBJECT MATTER.

BAIL, C. (2021). Breaking the Social Media Prism: How to Make Our Platforms Less Polarizing. Princeton University Press.

BENNETT, W. L., & LIVINGSTON, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. European Journal of Communication, 33(2), 122–139.

BERNAYS, E. (1928). Propaganda. Horace Liveright.

CHADWICK, A. (2017). The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

DEBORD, G. (1994). The Society of the Spectacle (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Zone Books. (Original work published 1967.)

GURRI, M. (2018). The Revolt of the Public and the Crisis of Authority in the New Millennium (updated ed.). Stripe Press.

HERMAN, E. S., & CHOMSKY, N. (1988). Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. Pantheon Books.

KLEIN, N. (1999). No Logo. Knopf Canada.

KREISS, D. (2016). Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy. Oxford University Press.

LIPPMANN, W. (1922). Public Opinion. Harcourt, Brace and Company.

PERSILY, N., & TUCKER, J. A. (Eds.). (2020). Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform. Cambridge University Press.

REUTERS INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF JOURNALISM. (2026). Digital News Report 2026. University of Oxford. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2026

TUFEKCI, Z. (2017). Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest. Yale University Press.

** Exam date for domestic students is not the same as for international students*