

POL410/2391

Topics in Comparative Politics III: Media & Politics

Date/Time: Wednesday, 2PM-4PM

Location: UC 175

Instructor: Prof. Eric Merkley

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Office: Room 3121, Sidney Smith Hall

Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30pm and by appointment

1. Overview and Objectives

News media have long played an enormous role in democratic politics by shaping the behaviour of citizens and political elites alike. Technological changes over the past several decades have radically transformed the way politics is reported by journalists and discussed by citizens. This course will introduce students to important debates at the intersection of media and politics in Canada and other Western democracies. Topics include the historical development of news media, framing and priming effects, agenda setting, the rise of social media and the changing media landscape, echo chambers and partisan media, media bias, and problems of misinformation.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify key changes in the news media environment over the 20th and 21st centuries in Canada, the U.S., and other western democracies, and their consequences.
- Understand key debates surrounding the relationship between soft news, media effects, media biases, social media, partisan media, and misinformation and democratic politics.
- Identify gaps in understanding in current literature and generate research questions on topics related to media & politics
- Synthesize existing research on media & politics and/or craft research designs that can shed light on existing debates in media & politics.

2. Course Format

The class is conducted in a seminar format on Wednesdays from 2-4pm. Attendance is mandatory. Class participation and in-class presentations together constitute a sizable amount of your grade. Seminars will be conducted in-person. The format of the course, however, is subject to change depending on evolving COVID-19 public health guidelines.

3. Required Texts and Materials:

- **Readings.** As listed below in the detailed syllabus, most required readings for the course are electronically available through the library. Readings that are not available online through the library are indicated with a (*) and will be available to download through Quercus.
- **Course webpage and emails.** There is a course webpage on Quercus. I will use this page to post important course documents (readings, syllabus, assessment instructions, etc.), post announcements and send emails to you throughout the term. It is your responsibility to regularly check Quercus for updates.
- **Google account.** I will be using Google Docs in a Google Drive folder for presenters to post their discussion questions

4. Grading and Assessed Coursework

Assignment	Date/Due Date	Percentage of Overall Grade
In-class participation	Assessed during each class	15%
Online participation	Assessed during week of class (Monday-Sunday)	10%
Summary and reaction documents	Due weekly at 11:59pm Tuesday night before class	30%
Presentation and seminar lead	During your assigned class	15%
Final paper outline	October 26, 11:59pm	5%
Final paper	December 8, 11:59pm	25%

4.1 In-class participation (15%)

The success of a seminar course depends on the active and thoughtful participation of all students. There is significant weight placed on this aspect of your work. I will not only, or even mostly, judge this grade based on the quantity of speaking that you do, but rather the quality of your comments. I will be looking for evidence that you are thoughtfully and respectfully engaging with the course readings **and** the comments made by your classmates. Failing to attend seminar will guarantee a grade of zero for a particular session unless prior accommodation is made.

4.2 Summary and reaction documents (30%)

Starting in week 2 you will be required to submit weekly summary and reaction documents (SRDs). These documents take the place of an exam. They will provide evidence of engagement with the readings to help stimulate class discussion. In this document, for each reading, you will briefly state:

1) the author's research question in 1 sentence; 2) the main argument or findings of the author in 2-3 sentences; and 3) the methodology (if applicable) in 1-2 sentences. You will then *briefly* provide your initial thoughts on the reading, which can include questions for clarification. This document should not be in essay form. You can use headings for each component per reading. You should use headings to divide up responses to the readings and sub-headings to divide each reading by the 4 tasks from above. Feel free to use bullet points as well. Marks will be deducted for going over length. Be as concise and precise as possible!

Your response to each reading will be graded out of 5: 2 points for the summary (tasks 1-3), 3 points for the reaction (task 4). Your grade for a given week's SRD will represent an average of your grades for N-2 of the readings. For example, if there are six readings, I will count your best 4 responses.

SRDs for a given week are due the day before class (Tuesdays at 11:59pm on Quercus). For graduate students, I will count your best 8 SRDs towards your grade (3.75% X 8). For undergraduate students, I will count your best 5 SRDs towards your grade (6% X 5). You are welcome to submit more than 8 (for graduate students) or 5 (for undergraduate students) SRDs if you wish to improve your grade further, but it is not necessary. I strongly recommend completing an SRD on the week you have a presentation (more on this below).

Note: late SRDs will not be graded for a given week.

4.3 Presentation and seminar lead (15%)

Approximately two students will lead off discussion in each class with a short 8-10 minute presentation about the week's readings. You will sign up for a week to give a presentation in our first class and I will split the readings between the listed presenters.

The presentation should accomplish three tasks: 1) *briefly* remind students of the research questions and main arguments/findings for each reading (1-2 minutes); 2) discuss how the weekly readings speak to one another in their perspectives/findings (and/or to other readings in the course – 2-3 minutes); and 3) give your take on the readings (3-5 minutes). For the final component, you may talk about what you think the implications of the author's argument/findings are for politics and democracy, and the extent to which you agree with their analysis (which shouldn't be confused with excessive or unfounded criticism!).

You will be graded on the accuracy of your summaries, your ability to connect readings to one another, the quality of your analysis, and the clarity of your presentation. You are expected to stay within the time limit. Marks will be docked for going over time and I will end the presentation at the 12 minute mark. Be concise!

On the Monday (6pm EST) in advance of a presentation, presenters will post discussion questions related to their assigned readings (3-4 questions each) in a Google document that I will set up in advance of the class. These can include clarification questions. Graduate students will lead seminar discussion using these questions (and others they prepare) after their assigned presentation for a minimum of 20-30 minutes. Undergraduate students do not need to lead seminar discussion, but they do need to post their discussion questions on the Monday in advance of their presentation.

4.4 Online participation (10%)

You are expected to comment on the discussion questions posted by presenters on the Monday in advance of class using the comment and reply features in Google docs. You will be graded on the quantity and especially quality of your comments much like with in-class participation. The purpose of this component is to allow for non-oral participation and to set the stage for in-class discussion. It is the responsibility of students to ensure their name can be associated with specific comments in the document. The comment period will be closed for grading purposes for a given week by Sunday at 11:59pm *after* the related class.

4.5 Final paper and preliminary outline (35%)

You are responsible for completing a final paper. Graduate students have a choice of one of two options:

- 1) **Literature review:** this will be a paper that synthesizes the existing research on a topic related to course content. What does the research find? What are its limitations? What are unanswered questions? What are possible new directions for research on this topic?
- 2) **Research proposal:** this will be a proposal for an *empirical* research project on a specific topic related to course content. What is your research question? What does existing research tell us about this question? What data will you use or collect? What are your key concepts and how will you measure them? What are your hypotheses? How will you test your hypotheses? What are the implications of an affirmative (or null) result?

Both of these options require engagement with existing research, though the amount of secondary research and the depth of engagement with these sources will necessarily be greater in a literature review paper than the research proposal. The objective of this assignment is to have all students leave this class with material that can allow them to prepare for comprehensive exams at the graduate level or with an actionable research proposal that can be turned into a peer-reviewed publication upon completion.

Undergraduate students are expected to complete a literature review unless they gain explicit approval from me in advance of key deadlines (see below) to do a research proposal.

This paper will be completed in two stages. The first stage is to provide an outline of your literature review or research proposal. The outline can consist of detailed bullet points, but it must be properly sourced. It should be 3-4 pages long. This is due on Quercus at 11:59PM on October 26th. It is worth 5% of your grade. The purpose of this task is to allow me to provide formal feedback on your project. The research outline for undergraduate students will be graded as pass or fail (100% or 0%). Without documentation, late outlines will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends.

The second stage is to provide your final paper. You will be expected to address the comments I provide in your outline. The final paper should be between 15 and 20 pages (without references), or approximately 4500-6000 words. This is an approximate range. Well-crafted research proposals will likely be on the lower end of this range. The final paper is due on Quercus at 11:59PM on December 8th. Without documentation, late essays will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends. More details on the final paper can be found in a handout on Quercus.

5. Course Schedule and Readings

Topic 1 (September 14) – Foundations

Readings:

- Course Syllabus
- Lippman, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. Ch. 1, 21-24. (*)
- Bennett, W. L. (2003). *News: The politics of illusion*, 5th ed. New York: Longman, Ch. 1 (*)
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory*. New York: Routledge, Part 1.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106924594406196.
- Stromback, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *The International Journal of Press/politics*, 13(3), 228–246.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>.
- Zaller, J. (2003). A new standard of news quality: Burglar alarms for the monitorial citizen. *Political Communication*, 20, 109–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390211136>.
 - Rejoinder: Bennet, W. L. (2003). The burglar alarm that just keeps on ringing: A response to Zaller. *Political Communication*, 20, 131-138.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390211145>.

Recommended:

- Zaller, J. (1991). Information, values, and opinion. *American Political Science Review*, 85(4), 1215-1237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1963943>.
- Shoemaker, P., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: a media sociology perspective*. New York: Routledge, Ch. 1.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106942062906196.

September 21 – No class

Topic 2 (September 28) – The Changing Media Environment

Readings:

- Schudson, M. (1976). *Discovering the News: A social history of American newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, Ch. 1. (*)
- Ladd, J. L. (2012). *Why Americans hate the media and how it matters*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Ch. 2-3.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106228768006196.

- Bennett, L.W., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects: The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 707–731.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x>.
 - Rejoinder: Holbert, R. L., Garrett, R. K., & Gleason, L. S. (2010). A new era of minimal effects? A response to Bennett and Iyengar. *Journal of Communication*, 60(1), 15–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01470.x>
- Waddell, C. (2020). Digital journalism: The Canadian media’s struggle for relevance. In Small, T. A. & Jansen, H. J., eds. *Digital politics in Canada : promises and realities*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106981085006196.

Recommended:

- Ladd, J. L. (2012). *Why Americans hate the media and how it matters*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Ch. 4.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106228768006196.
- Abernathy, P. M. *The expanding local news desert*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: UNC Press, pp. 5-58.
https://www.cislm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Expanding-News-Desert-10_14-Web.pdf

Topic 3 (October 5) – Entertainment Media and Soft News

Readings:

- Prior, M. (2007). Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections. Ch. 1, 4, 7.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_as_kewsholts_vlebooks_9781139878425.
- Baum, M. A., & Jamison, A. S. (2006). The Oprah effect: How soft news helps inattentive citizens vote consistently. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(4), 946–959.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00482.x>.
- Prior, M. (2003). Any good news in soft news? The impact of soft news preference on political knowledge. *Political Communication*, 20(2), 149–171.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390211172>.
 - Rejoinder: Baum, M. A. (2003). Soft news and political knowledge: Evidence of absence or absence of evidence? *Political Communication*, 20(2), 173–190.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390211181>.
- Feldman, L., & Young, D. G. (2008). Late-night comedy as a gateway to traditional news: An analysis of time trends in news attention among late-night comedy viewers during the 2004 presidential primaries. *Political Communication*, 25(4), 401–422.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600802427013>.

Recommended:

- Prior, M. (2007). Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections. Ch. 5.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_as_kewsholts_vlebooks_9781139878425.
- Baum, M. A. (2005). Talking the vote: What happens when presidential candidates hit the talk show circuit? *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(2), 213-234.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2005.t01-1-00119.x>.

Topic 4 (October 12) – Media Systems, Regulation and Public Broadcasting

Readings:

- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 2-4.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106904718006196.
- Kerbel, M. R., Apee, S., & Ross, M. H. (2000). PBS ain't so different: Public broadcasting, election frames, and democratic empowerment. *Harvard International Journal of Press/politics*, 5(4), 8–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X00005004002>.
- Aalberg, T., van Aelst, P., & Curran, J. (2010). Media systems and the political information environment: A cross-national comparison. *The International Journal of Press/politics*, 15(3), 255–271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161210367422>.
- Soroka, S., Andrew, B., Aalberg, T., Iyengar, S., Curran, J., Coen, S., Hayashi, K., Jones, P., Mazzoleni, G., Woong Rhee, J., Rowe, D., & Tiffen, R. (2013). Auntie knows best? Public broadcasters and current affairs knowledge. *British Journal of Political Science*, 43(4), 719–739.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000555>.

Recommended:

- Graber, D., & Dunaway, J., *Mass media and American politics*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press, Ch. 2, “Ownership, Regulation, and Guidance of Media.” (*)
- Debrett, M. (2009). Riding the wave: public service television in the multi-platform era. *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(5), 807–827. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443709339466>.

Topic 5 (October 19) – Media Effects: Agenda-Setting and Priming

Readings:

- Boydston, A. (2013). *Making the news: Politics, the media, and agenda-setting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ch. 1-3. (*)
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. (1987). *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ch. 7 (*)

- Mendelberg, T. (1997). Executing Hortons: Racial crime in the 1988 presidential campaign. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61(1), 134–157. <https://doi.org/10.1086/297790>.
- Lenz, G. S. (2009). Learning and opinion change, not priming: Reconsidering the priming hypothesis. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 821–837. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00403.x>.
- Gidengil, E. (2014). “Setting the Agenda? A Case Study of Newspaper Coverage of the 2006 Canadian Election Campaign.” In Giasson, T., Marland, A. J., & Small, T. A., eds. *Political Communication in Canada : Meet the Press and Tweet the Rest*. Vancouver: UBC Press. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106963708006196.

Recommended:

- Soroka, S. N. (2002). Issue attributes and agenda-setting: Media, the public, and policymakers in Canada. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 14(3), 264–285. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/14.3.264>.
- Johnston, R. (1992). *Letting the people decide dynamics of a Canadian election*. McGill-Queen’s University Press. Prologue, Ch. 8. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106930499006196.

Topic 6 (October 26) – Media Effects: Framing

Readings:

- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), 103–126. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>.
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ch. 2, 4. (*)
- Tolley, E. (2015). *Framed: media and the coverage of race in Canadian politics*. Vancouver: UBC Press, Ch. 1-2. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106924067006196.
- Mahone, A., Lawlor, A., & Soroka, S.N. (2014). The mass media and welfare policy framing: A study in policy definition. In Giasson, T., Marland, A. J., & Small, T. A., eds. *Political Communication in Canada : Meet the Press and Tweet the Rest*. Vancouver: UBC Press. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106963708006196.
- Bechtel, M. M., Hainmueller, J., Hangartner, D., & Helbling, M. (2015). Reality bites: The limits of framing effects for salient and contested policy issues. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 3(3), 683–695. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2014.39>.

Recommended:

- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing public opinion in competitive democracies. *The American Political Science Review*, 101(4), 637–655. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055407070554>.
- Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ch. 5. (*)

Topic 7 (November 2) – Media Bias: Commercial and Organizational

Readings:

- Bennett, W. L. (2003). *News: The politics of illusion*, 5th ed. New York: Longman, Ch. 2. (*)
- Bennett, W. L. (1990). Toward a theory of press-state relations in the United States. *Journal of Communication*, 40(2), 103–127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1990.tb02265.x>.
- Munger, K. (2020). All the news that's fit to click: The economics of clickbait media. *Political Communication*, 37(3), 376-397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1687626>.
- Merkley, E. (2020). Are experts (news)worthy? Balance, conflict, and mass media coverage of expert consensus. *Political Communication*, 37(4), 530–549. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1713269>.
- Soroka, S. (2014). *Negativity in democratic politics: Causes and consequences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 5. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106890496606196.
- Trussler, M., & Soroka, S. (2014). Consumer demand for cynical and negative news frames. *The International Journal of Press/politics*, 19(3), 360–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214524832>.

Recommended:

- Soroka, S. (2014). *Negativity in democratic politics: Causes and consequences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 2, 6. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106890496606196.
- Graber, D, & Dunaway, J., *Mass media and American politics*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press, Ch. 5, “News Making and News Reporting Routines” (*)

Topic 8 (November 16) – Media Bias: Corporate and Ideological

Readings:

- Schiffer, A. (2017). *Evaluating media bias*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Ch. 2-3. (*)
- Bailard, Catie Snow. (2016). Corporate ownership and news bias revisited: Newspaper coverage of the Supreme Court's citizens united ruling. *Political Communication* 33(4): 583-604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1142489>.

- Martin, G. J., & McCrain, J. (2019). Local news and national politics. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2), 372–384. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055418000965>.
- Hassell, H. J. G., Holbein, J. B., & Miles, M. R. (2020). There is no liberal media bias in which news stories political journalists choose to cover. *Science Advances*, 6(14). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aay9344>
- Dunaway, J., & Lawrence, R. G. (2015). What Predicts the Game Frame? Media Ownership, Electoral Context, and Campaign News. *Political Communication*, 32(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.880975>.
- Thibault, S., Bastien, F., Gosselin, T., Brin, C., & Scott, C. (2020). Is there a distinct Quebec media subsystem in Canada? Evidence of ideological and political orientations among Canadian news media organizations. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 53(3), 638–657. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423920000189>. **(and Appendix)**

Recommended:

- Groseclose, T., & Milyo, J. (2005). A measure of media bias. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120(4), 1191–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1162/003355305775097542>.
- Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. M. (2010). What drives media slant? Evidence from U.S. daily newspapers. *Econometrica*, 78(1), 35–71. <https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA7195>
- Dunaway, J. (2008). Markets, ownership, and the quality of campaign news coverage. *The Journal of Politics*, 70(4), 1193–1202. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381608081140>

Fall Reading Week: No class on November 9 (and no office hours)

Topic 9 (November 23) – Partisan Media, Selective Exposure and Echo Chambers

Readings:

- Iyengar, S., & Hahn, K. (2009). Red media, blue media: Evidence of ideological selectivity in media use. *Journal of Communication*, 59(1), 19–39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01402.x>.
- Levendusky, M. *How partisan media polarize America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ch. 3-4. (*)
- Garrett, R. K. (2009). Politically motivated reinforcement seeking: Reframing the selective exposure debate. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4), 676–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01452.x>
- Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication*, 28(1), 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.542360>.

- Guess, A.M. (2021). (Almost) everything in moderation: New evidence on Americans' online media diets. *American Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12589>.
- Bridgman, A., Gorwa, R., Loewen, P. J., MacLellan, S., Merkley, E., Owen, T., Ruths, D., Zhilin, O. (2020). Lessons in resilience: Canada's digital media ecosystem and the 2019 election. Digital Democracy Project Report. Ottawa: Public Policy Forum, Ch. 2.1, 2.5 <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DDP-LessonsInResilience-MAY2020-EN.pdf>.

Recommended:

- Stroud, N. (2010). Polarization and partisan selective exposure. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 556–576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01497.x>.
- Pinna, M., Picard L., Goessmann, C. (2021). Cable news and COVID-19 vaccine compliance. *Center for Law & Economics Working Paper Series 9*. [Link](#)

Topic 10 (November 30) – Social Media

Readings:

- Bode, L. (2012). Facebooking it to the polls: A study in online social networking and political behavior. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 9, 352-369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2012.709045>.
- 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(7415), 295–298. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11421>.
- Settle, J. E. (2018). *Frenemies: How social media polarizes America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 3-4. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106937896106196.
- Bail, C. A., Argyle, L. P., Brown, T. W., Bumpus, J. P., Chen, H., Fallin Hunzaker, M. , Lee, J., Mann, M., Merhout, F., & Volfovsky, A. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(37), 9216–9221. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115>
- Harell, A., Stolle, D., Duguay, P., & Mahéo, V. (2020). Young people: Politics and digital technologies. In Small, T. A. & Jansen, H. J., eds. *Digital politics in Canada : promises and realities*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106981085006196.
- McGregor, S. C. (2019). Social media as public opinion: How journalists use social media to represent public opinion. *Journalism*, 20(8), 1070–1086. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919845458>

Recommended:

- Settle, J. E. (2018). *Frenemies: How social media polarizes America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 7. https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106937896106196.
- Bode, L. (2016). Political news in the news feed: Learning politics from social media. *Mass Communication & Society*, 19(1), 24–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1045149>.

Topic 11 (December 7) – Fake News and Misinformation

Readings:

- Flynn, D., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2017). The nature and origins of misperceptions: understanding false and unsupported beliefs about politics. *Political Psychology*, 38, 127–150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12394>.
- Pennycook, G., & Rand, D.G. (2021). The psychology of fake news. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 25(5), 388–402. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2021.02.007>.
- Guess, A.M., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>.
- Osmundsen, M., Bor, A., Vahlstrup, P. B., Bechmann, A., & Petersen, M. (2021). Partisan polarization is the primary psychological motivation behind political fake news sharing on Twitter. *American Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000290>
- Bridgman, A., Merkley, E., Zhilin, O., Loewen, P.J., Owen, T., & Ruths, D. (2021). Infodemic pathways: evaluating the role that traditional and social media play in cross-national information transfer. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.648646>.

Recommended:

- Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2019). Lazy, not biased: Susceptibility to partisan fake news is better explained by lack of reasoning than by motivated reasoning. *Cognition*, 188, 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.06.011>
- Wood, T., & Porter, E. (2019). The elusive backfire effect: Mass attitudes' steadfast factual adherence. *Political Behavior*, 41(1), 135–163. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9443-y>.
- Uscinski, J. E., & Butler, R. W. (2013). The epistemology of fact checking. *Critical Review*, 25(2), 162-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2013.843872>.

6. Course Policies

6.1 Contacting Course Instructor

I strongly recommend asking substantive questions about course content and requirements during class (for the benefit of everyone) or in my scheduled office hours. Email should be reserved strictly for time sensitive questions or quick points of clarification. I will try to respond within 24 hours, but emails received during the weekend will be answered on Monday. I will not respond to emails related to assessments on their due date.

6.2 Possible Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make adjustments to the course syllabus depending on evolving COVID-19 policies set by the University of Toronto. I will give notice to students in the event of any changes, and amended syllabi will be posted on Quercus.

6.3 Missing Class and Late Assignments

Attendance and participation is required at all class sessions due to the intensive nature of this course. Missed in-class and online participation for a given week will only be excused when accommodation is made **in advance** of class for a documented serious illness or personal emergency (see section on Accommodation below). I will only reschedule missed presentations when accommodation is made **in advance** of class for a documented serious illness or personal emergency (see section on Accommodation below). Late outlines and final papers will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends, except in the event of a documented serious illness or personal emergency (see section on Accommodation below). Late SRDs **will not be accepted or graded**.

6.4 Accommodation for Emergency Situations

Students who need additional time for their outline or final paper, or who will miss a lecture and presentation for a medical or serious personal reason, must contact me **before** the due date or lecture date and as soon as the problem arises. All requests for accommodation must be made to me in writing, via email.

Some documentation, such as a doctor's note, will usually be required to make accommodation. For the 2022-23 year, students who are absent from academic participation for any reason (e.g., COVID, cold, flu and other illness or injury, family situation) and who require consideration for missed academic work are to record their absence through the ACORN online absence declaration. Note that I do not receive updates from ACORN. **You must also contact me in advance of a deadline or lecture date.**

Please note that accommodations will not be made for foreseeable circumstances, such as having multiple papers due in the same week. Accommodations are reserved for unforeseeable events that are outside a student's control (e.g., illness, a death in the family).

Requests for accommodation **made on or after an assignment's due date, or after the missed lecture will not be considered**. Due date extensions will not usually be granted for work lost due to computer crashes or the loss of a computer file. There are simple and free ways of regularly and automatically backing up your work. Students are strongly advised to backup copies of their essays and assignments before submitting. These backups should be kept until the marked assignments have been returned.

6.5 Other Accommodations

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

The University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University's courses and programs.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Accessibility Services office](#).

The University provides reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays. Students have a responsibility to alert members of the teaching staff in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences and instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations or other compulsory activities at these times. Please reach out to me as early as possible to communicate any anticipated absences related to religious observances, and to discuss any possible related implications for course work.

6.6 Equity and Harassment

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

6.7 Academic Integrity and Responsibility

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The [University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor in all relevant courses
- Making up sources or facts
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment

On tests and exams:

- Using or possessing unauthorized aids
- Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test
- Misrepresenting your identity

In academic work:

- Falsifying institutional documents or grades
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources (for example, the [University of Toronto website on Academic Integrity](#)).

6.8 Plagiarism Detection

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>)