

SPS-REMUN-MED-24: Media, Social Media & Politics

Spring 2025

Tuesday 15:00–17:00

SPS Research Seminar
European University Institute

Instructor

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Course Overview

This seminar covers recent and classic empirical research on the relationship between “the media” (broadly understood) and politics. The modern study of mass media influence originated in the 1940s and spans several social science disciplines. As we will see, the paradigms developed in the early years of that research program continue to influence scholars today — as well as to be debated and critiqued. Some of the canonical questions we will explore include the power of media messages to persuade; the extent to which media diets are ideologically slanted; and the role of new information technologies and social media on societal pathologies such as mass polarization.

It would be impossible to adequately cover all aspects of media research even in a comprehensive survey course. As such, this seminar will focus on relatively recent work that is quantitative in nature (although not exclusively so), but we will also strive to remain grounded in foundational works. Some important pieces are left off under the assumption that Political Science students have been exposed to them in other courses.

The main output of the course will be a research proposal. This is an advanced, optional seminar; the goal is not to demonstrate static mastery of a body of knowledge but rather the capacity to intervene in an ongoing conversation. The primary deliverable for the course will take the form a “Registered Report” – the front half of an academic paper, everything that comes before the results section. Crucially, for the study of media and politics, the theory and analysis need to be correct – and they need to fit together correctly. Students are encouraged to think both big and small – smaller is harder, when we’re constrained by research budgets and feasibility.

Course Policies:

- **General (for auditors as well as enrolled students)**

- Please come to class meetings each week **already having read** assigned material.
- Please bring **written notes** to class summarizing each assigned reading and be prepared to discuss every assigned reading.
- Research shows that **taking notes by hand** promotes learning. Please consider taking notes on the readings by hand. It will improve your mastery of the material.
- If you are auditing the course, please inform Sofia, who can give you access to course materials on Brightspace.

- **Credit and Grades**

- In order to receive credit for the course, you must attend at least 8 of the 10 course meetings and submit the research proposal.
- The research proposal must be submitted on the due date.
- Your final grade will be calculated on the basis of 25 percent for classroom participation, 75 percent for the research proposal.
- Course grades will be assigned using the standard U.S. graduate seminar grading scheme. This scheme is as follows:
 - * A excellent
 - * A- very good
 - * B+ good
 - * B adequate
 - * B- inadequate

Ethics: All work you do will be held to the highest ethical and professional standards. You are encouraged to discuss readings amongst yourselves, but you must write your final project alone. Using AI is only unethical insofar as you do it poorly. Ethical violations will be reported to appropriate departmental and university authorities.

Schedule

January 7: The Medium is the Message

Karl Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* ch 1-2,
5-8.

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* ch 1-3

McLuhan on Deutsch

Munger, Kevin and Andy Guess and Eszter Hargittai, 2021. Quantitative Description of Digital Media: A Modest Proposal to Disrupt Academic Publishing

January 14: Time

Bennett, W. Lance and Shanto Iyengar. 2008. “A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication.”

Kevin Munger. 2019. The Limited Value of Non-Replicable Field Experiments in Contexts With Low Temporal Validity.

Kevin Munger. 2023. Temporal Validity as Meta-Science.

David Karpf. 2012. Social Science Research Methods In Internet Time

David Karpf, 2019. Two provocations for the study of digital politics in time

January 21: Positivism, Media Effects

Hovland, Carl I., Arthur A. Lumsdaine, and Fred D. Sheffield. 1949. *Experiments on Mass Communication*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction, Chapter 2.

Asimovic et al. 2021. Testing the effects of Facebook usage in an ethnically polarized setting

Sides, Vavreck, Warshaw. The Effect of Television Advertising in United States Elections.

Coppock, Hill, Vavreck, 2020. The small effects of political advertising are small regardless of context, message, sender, or receiver: Evidence from 59 real-time randomized experiments.

January 28: Media Consumption and Selective Exposure

Sood, Gaurav and Yphtach Lelkes. 2018. “Don’t Expose Yourself: Discretionary Exposure to Political Information.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Available here: <http://gsood.com/research/papers/selexp.pdf>

Nyhan et al 2023. Like-minded sources on Facebook are prevalent but not polarizing

González-Bailón et al 2023. Asymmetric ideological segregation in exposure to political news on Facebook

Bail et al. 2018. “Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(37): 9216–9221.

February 4: Digital Prejudice

Paluck, Elizabeth Levy. 2009. “Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict using the media: A field experiment in Rwanda.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96(3): 574–587.

Matias, J. Nathan. 2019. Preventing harassment and increasing group participation through social norms in 2,190 online science discussions.

Lajevardi, Nazita, 2021. The media matters: Muslim American portrayals and the effects on mass attitudes

Siegel, Alexandra et al. 2021. Trumping Hate on Twitter? Online Hate Speech in the 2016 US Election Campaign and its Aftermath

February 11: Is Social Media Driving Us Apart?

Settle, Jaime. 2018. *Frenemies* chapters 1-4.

Boxell, Levi, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2017. “Greater Internet use is not associated with faster growth in political polarization among US demographic groups.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(40): 10612–10617. (skim)

Allcott et al 2024. The effects of Facebook and Instagram on the 2020 election: A deactivation experiment

February 18: Quantitative Description, YouTube

Guess, Andrew, Kevin Aslett, Joshua Tucker, Rich Bonneau and Jonathan Nagler. 2021. Crack-ing Open the News Feed: Exploring What U.S. Facebook Users See and Share with Large-Scale Platform Data

Hosseinmardi et al, 2021. Examining the consumption of radical content on YouTube

****OPTIONAL: Munger 2024. The YouTube Apparatus.

February 25: Media Economics

Hamilton, James. 2004. *All the News that’s Fit to Sell: How the market transforms information into news*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1, 7

Hindman, Matthew. 2018. *The Internet Trap: How the Digital Economy Builds Monopolies and Undermines Democracy* Chapters 1-4,8.

Gravino et al 2023 The supply and demand of news during COVID-19 and assessment of question-able sources production

****OPTIONAL: Munger, Kevin, 2020. All the News that's Fit to Click: The Economics of Clickbait Media.

March 4: Emerging Platforms, Influencers

Harff and Schmuck, 2024. Prevalence, Presentation, and Popularity of Political Topics in Social Media Influencers' Content Across Two Countries

[2 more papers to be added – as cutting edge as possible]

Guinadeau, Munger and Votta, 2021. Fifteen Seconds of Fame: TikTok and the Supply Side of Social Video.

****OPTIONAL Asbury-Kimmel et al, 2021. The Effect of Streaming Chat on Perceptions of Political Debates

March 11: Protests

Freelon, Dean et al, 2016. Quantifying the power and consequences of social media protest

Pan, Jennifer and Alexandra Siegel 2020. How Saudi Crackdowns Fail to Silence Online Dissent

Zeynep Tufekci, Twitter and Tear Gas ch 1, 5, 8

Shugars et al, 2021. Pandemics, Protests, and Publics: Demographic Activity and Engagement on Twitter in 2020