



Media & Democracy

Welcome to the course Media & Democracy. I have designed this syllabus to help you understand which topic and important questions we will consider in each week's class. I recommend that you use this document each week prior to undertaking the readings.

Information

Class:	Media & Democracy
Term:	Summer Semester 2023 (SoSe2023)
Seminar:	Wednesdays 11:00–13:00 Room: CP 18
Office Hours:	Virtual (Zoom), by appointment, email to arrange.
Me:	Dr. Mike Cowburn (he/him)
Email:	cowburn@europa-uni.de
TA:	Felix Trojan (trojan@europa-uni.de)
You:	Who you are isn't defined by records or bureaucracies, so if you prefer a name or a pronoun other than the one listed, please let me know.

Communication

For short questions, email is the best way to contact me. I endeavor to respond to all emails within twenty-four hours Monday to Friday, I will respond to most emails considerably quicker than this. If I haven't responded within twenty-four hours, please feel free to email again.

If you wish to get help on term papers, go over material covered in class, talk about connections between class material and other ideas, and so on, I will be happy to schedule time in my virtual office hours. Please email me to arrange. These discussions are generally student-led but I can help you formulate questions and point you in the direction of additional material for your term papers based on my sense of your strengths and interests. I really encourage you to take advantage of this time.

I also encourage students to take advantage of my office hours to ask questions or discuss issues related to the course, the discipline of political science, or academia more generally. If you have any comments about or problems with the course itself, I encourage you to share them in my office hours.



Content

The course examines the impact of media on democracy in international comparison. Digital media in particular play an increasingly important role in politics. Be it political communication, the coverage of politics in the news, campaigning, public discourse, or collective action, various political fields are changing due to digital media. At the same time, many democracies are said to be in ‘crisis’ or of experiencing ‘democratic backsliding’. This makes it paramount to identify, assess, and understand the role of media on the functioning of democracies in the twenty-first century. In particular, the rise of partisanship, polarization, and right-wing movements has provided scholars with new questions about political identities, institutions, norms, and values. For this reason, our understanding of ‘media’ in this course will be deliberately broad, encompassing institutional and extra-institutional actors, events, processes, cultures, and technologies that contribute to the practice of democracy.

Throughout the course, students will be introduced to different approaches in conceptualizing and measuring the effects of media on politics in various democracies. In this, we will focus on the role of media in helping political actors fulfill specific tasks in their work, such as gaining representation in the political information space, reaching people, convincing and mobilizing people, coordination, organizing, and measuring and evaluating the impact of their actions.

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

This course will provide you with an advanced-level understanding of the role of media in the performance of democracies in the modern era. We will focus on a set of theoretical and empirical academic works that frequently speak to each other, meaning that by the end of this course you will understand the divergent positions of notable authors in this field. This course strives to spark interest and curiosity in the topic by considering the role of (digital) media in relation to events we observe both historically and in the news today. The course has been designed to deeply engage students in the topic within political science and political communication while considering implications beyond these disciplines.

Following the successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Conceptualize different notions of media and democratic performance.
- Understand the functioning of democracy in a comparative perspective.
- Connect theories about media to current trends of democratic performance.



- Understand how the changing media environment impacts other actors in the political system.
- Make normative arguments about the role of (digital) media in modern democracies.

Course Requirements

Students can take this class either for partial (3 ECTS) or full (9 ECTS) credit. All students will contribute work during the semester, those students who want full credit for the class will also write a term paper.

Attendance, participation, and preparedness are important to your success in this course (and, I find, in life generally). Therefore, it is expected that you will come to each class prepared, having read, and thought about the course material, and ready to engage in discussion. You should be prepared to discuss the topic and make thoughtful arguments from multiple points of view, including the authors' and your own. Essentially, **you are expected to have something to say about the readings.**

Students can choose to take this class for partial or full credit, the requirements for each are as follows. Students taking the class for full credit will also complete requirements for partial credit.

Partial Credit

All students should come to each class able to contribute something to our discussion **having actively read the texts each week.** For each text you should be able to articulate the following prior to the week's class.

- What problem or gap is this work addressing?
- What is the research question? What method(s) does the author use to answer the research question?
- What is the theoretical argument? What is the empirical finding?
- How does this text relate to other readings in our class?

I encourage you to bring not only your ideas about but also your struggles with the readings to class. If something in a reading doesn't make sense to you then I encourage you to raise this during class so we can investigate together. If you don't understand something, there are likely many other students in the class who are also struggling on the same point!

All students will select **two weeks where they serve on a discussion panel** of two or three students. The role of the discussion panel is to advance our understanding of the



assigned texts during our in-class sessions. Though I expect everyone to do the reading every week, students should prepare particularly thoroughly for their discussion panel weeks. Students in the discussion panel will be expected to provide further clarification, commentary, and explanations of the texts. In addition, the discussion panel should expect to be called on to answer questions. When class discussions are lively, the additional workloads on discussants should be minimal, providing an incentive for everyone to participate actively throughout the semester. Discussants may wish to meet outside of class during their discussion week to further their understanding of their texts. If discussion panels have areas of their texts that they would like us to focus on, they should let me know prior to class. If discussion panels wish to meet with me outside of our regularly scheduled class, I am very willing to do that. Discussion panels do not need to give a presentation of the readings but should come prepared with a detailed knowledge of all the texts in their week.

Please indicate your preferred weeks to be on the discussion panel by following this link: <https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NRXnOzz1Bi37e3gjm6q>. You are expected to sign up for at least two sessions by our second session (Wednesday 26th April). If you wish to remain in the class beyond this date and have not signed up for two discussion panels you will be assigned to two discussion panels.

Finally, all students will **write a proposal for a conference paper**, we will discuss the requirements of this proposal during our first session. Those of you taking the class for partial credit only will not write the paper, only the proposal. For those of you taking the class for full credit (see below) it likely makes sense to write a proposal for your anticipated term paper, but this can change later.

Full Credit

All requirements for active participation plus **a final term paper** (5,000 words or more). **Final papers are due on September 27th**, and late papers will not be accepted without agreement prior to this date. **Term papers should be sent to me via email.**

Term papers can be written on any topic that we engage with during our course. You are unlimited in regional scope, meaning you may write about parties in any country or geography of your choosing. Your term paper must be connected to the concept of political parties in the digital era, but beyond this you are free to choose your own research question and to follow your own research design. Term papers may use quantitative or qualitative methods and may be empirical or theoretical in nature. In short you are free to conduct your



study using whichever tools and methods with which you are familiar, with no restrictions other than it must relate to the topics or themes discussed during our class. Many of these themes will focus on political parties in democratic countries, you may choose to focus on political parties in non-democratic countries provided you consider about how the topics we discuss apply differently given the systemic constraints.

Term papers should be submitted using a consistent and recognized citation style of your choosing, citation management software will make this easier (see below). You must cite all sources of information, quotations or ideas which are not your own. Do not copy and paste text from the internet into your papers and attempt to pass it off as your own writing. You may not turn in a paper that someone else has written or that you have bought or downloaded. Use of automated text language models such as ChatGPT must be declared.

Grading Schema

Grades will be calculated using the following metrics.

Partial Credit (3 ECTS):

- In person contributions (discussion panel & oral participation in class): **50%**
- Conference paper proposal: **50%**

Full Credit (9 ECTS):

- In person contributions (discussion panel & oral participation in class): **15%**
- Conference paper proposal: **15%**
- Term paper: **70%**

Civility Policy

In accordance with the philosophy of an institution for higher learning, the classroom should be a place where diverse ideas can be explored with respect to promote learning and growth. We each come from a variety of backgrounds and bring with us different experiences to the classroom. Regardless of whether we share similar opinions and beliefs, I expect us to remain respectful of each other as we explore ideas. I encourage and expect you to express yourself with reason, clarity, courtesy, and compassion. This ensures that we may be comfortable learning and growing without fear of judgment, ridicule, or intimidation. I welcome each of you as worthy contributors in the classroom. **Student conduct that disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated.** Similarly, if any student feels unsafe or discriminated against during in the class, please contact me immediately. While academic discourse should be



intellectually challenging, it should never be discriminatory, and **it is my responsibility to ensure everyone feels safe and able to participate in the class.**

In the same spirit, we should adopt inclusive language both in our discussions and written work. In line with recent style guide changes from the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and others, students should capitalize “Black” when describing this group in their written work. “White” should also have a capital letter, in line with recommendations of the National Association of Black Journalists, except when it is an adjective (white nationalism etc.). Similarly, we should use terms that acknowledge the humanity of people we are discussing, recognizing that individuals are not defined by their conditions or circumstances; for example, “enslaved people,” not “slaves.” Gender neutral terms should be used both in discussions and written work, so “member of Congress” not “congressman.” **Racist, sexist, homophobic, or any other offensive terms will not be tolerated in the classroom, regardless of the context in which they are used.** More generally, we should reflect upon our positionality as researchers in our contributions. If students have specific feedback on any of these points that they wish to discuss I welcome these conversations either directly or as part of our wider class discussions.

Prior Knowledge & Resources

Though there are no formal prerequisites for this course, this is an MA level course meaning some familiarity with the study of politics and political science as a discipline is expected. In addition, this is not a methods class, meaning we will not engage in the process of *how* to produce academic work in political science. I appreciate some students may have backgrounds in other disciplines and so have the following recommendations for students with concerns in any of these areas. **These resources are all free of charge to access:**

- If you have questions about the research process and writing academic papers, I recommend Leanne C. Powner’s *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student’s Practical Guide*. The book provides a detailed walkthrough of each step in the research process and serves as an excellent guide for writing a research paper.
- Many of the texts we will read in this class use regression analysis, a basic familiarity with regression and statistical reasoning will help you read these papers. For an introduction to the subject, I recommend the YouTube video series by [zedstatistics](#) on regression. For a more in-depth understanding of statistical analysis and econometrics, I recommend Nick Huntington-Klein’s *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality*, available for [free online](#).

- If you are unsure about language and style for your term paper please refer to the most recent [APSA Style Manual for Political Science](#) from page 10 onwards.
- Citation management: I **strongly** recommend downloading and installing citation management software at the start of the course to manage the readings and your notes as this will make citation for your term paper much easier. Multiple free resources are available, I recommend [Zotero](#), but [citavi](#) and [Mendeley](#) are popular alternatives. You should also install the browser plug-in with your chosen citation management tool for ease of adding resources to your library. **I promise this will make your life easier!**

Course Structure

Below is our schedule for the semester, depending on our progress through the course we may choose to expand or reduce certain sections. In such a scenario I will inform you of any changes sufficiently in advance. Each week we have one ninety-minute session, though I will bring some content and a framework within which to discuss ideas, these sessions are seminars rather than lectures so the ideas we will be discussing will be yours rather than mine. I am keen to hear your thoughts on the texts we will read with my role being to facilitate these discussions.

Each week has two mandatory readings. All literature will be uploaded to Moodle at the start of the semester.

Wednesday 19th April 2023 – Introduction (Virtual)

Expectations

Discussion of Syllabus

This session will take place virtually over Zoom due to the transport issues between Berlin and Frankfurt:

<https://europa-uni-de.zoom.us/j/88028614748?pwd=VWIFeGk3OVN4eHRMT3k2ZmZZRXdnQ09>

Wednesday 26th April 2023 – Discussion Panel Signup Deadline

<https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NRXnOzz1Bi37e3gjm6q>

Wednesday 26th April 2023 – Mass & Digital Media

- Ansolabehere, S., Behr S. & Iyengar, S. (1991). Mass Media and Elections: An Overview. *American Politics Quarterly*, 19(1), 109-139.
- Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(1), 298-320.

Wednesday 3rd May 2023 – Democratic Institutions & Political Elites

- 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.
- Van Aelst, P., & Walgrave, S. (2016). Information and Arena: The Dual Function of the News Media for Political Elites. *Journal of Communication*, 66(3), 496–518.

Wednesday 10th May 2023 – Media & Power

- Kilgo, D. K., & Harlow, S. (2019). Protests, Media Coverage, and a Hierarchy of Social Struggle. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 24(4), 508-530
- Jungherr, A., Posegga, O., & An, J. (2019). Discursive Power in Contemporary Media Systems: A Comparative Framework. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*.

Wednesday 17th May 2023 – The Public

- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. *Social Text*, (25/26), 56-80
- Fenton, N. (2018). Fake Democracy: The Limits of Public Sphere Theory. *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*. 25(1/2), 28-34.

Wednesday 24th May 2023 – Political & Media Systems

- Nir, L. (2012). Cross-National Differences in Political Discussion: Can Political Systems Narrow Deliberation Gaps? *Journal of Communication*, 62, 553-570.
- Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini Revisited: Four Empirical Types of Western Media Systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64, 1037-1065.

Wednesday 31st May 2023 – Democratic Backsliding & the Role of Media

- Över, D. (2021). Democratic backsliding and the Media: the Convergence of News Narratives in Turkey. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(2), 343–358.
- Bennett, W.D. & Pfetsch, B. (2018). Rethinking Political Communication in a Time of Disrupted Public Spheres. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 243–253.

Wednesday 7th June 2023 – Reading Week, Virtual Q & A

Half way through our course, we will have a reading week. In our usual class time I will host a Q&A session over Zoom for you to collectively ask questions about the course, the assignments, and the weeks ahead.

<https://europa-uni-de.zoom.us/j/84503986337?pwd=YUgyLzRvWERQejFFFT2dYbjdETTFFWQT09>

Wednesday 14th June – Conference Abstracts Due

Wednesday 14th June 2023 – Digital Campaigning

- Jungherr, A. (2023). Digital Campaigning: How Digital Media Change the Work of Parties and Campaign Organizations and Impact Elections. In J. Skopek (Ed.), *Research Handbook Digital Sociology*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
<https://files.osf.io/v1/resources/u94yj/providers/osfstorage/63af224d202f170500a6bf52?action=download&direct&version=1>
- Dommett, K. (2019). Data-Driven Political Campaigns in Practice: Understanding and Regulating Diverse Data-Driven Campaigns. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4).

Wednesday 21st June 2023 – Political Conversations

- Druckman, J. N., Levendusky, M. S., & McLain, A. (2018). No Need to Watch: How the Effects of Partisan Media can Spread via Interpersonal Discussions. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Settle, J. E., & Carlson, T. N. (2019). Opting out of Political Discussions. *Political Communication*, 36: 476-496.

Wednesday 28th June 2023 – The Fall of The Gatekeepers?

- Williams, B. A., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2004). Monica and Bill all the Time and Everywhere: The Collapse of Gatekeeping and Agenda Setting in the New Media Environment. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(9), 1208–1230.
- Ali, S. R., & Fahmy, S. (2013). Gatekeeping and Citizen Journalism: The Use of Social Media During the Recent Uprisings in Iran, Egypt, and Libya. *Media, War & Conflict*, 6(1), 55–69.

Wednesday 5th July 2023 – News vs Entertainment?

- Prior, M. (2005). News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49, 577-592.
- Rittenberg, J., Tewksbury, D., & Casey, S. (2012). Media Preferences and Democracy: Refining the “Relative Entertainment Preference” Hypothesis. *Mass Communication and Society*, 15(6), 921-942.

Wednesday 12th July 2023 – Fake News

- Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less Than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5.
- Egelhofer, L. J., & Lecheler, S. (2019) Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 43(2), 97-116.



Wednesday 19th July 2023 – Far Right Media Networks

- Heft, A., Knüpfer, C. B., Reinhardt, S., & Mayerhöffer, E. (2020). Toward a Transnational Information Ecology on the Right? Hyperlink Networking Among Right-Wing Digital News Sites in Europe and the United States. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(2), 484-504.
- Scrivens, R., Gaudette, T., Conway, M., & Holt, T.J. (2022). Right-Wing Extremists' Use of the Internet: Emerging Trends in the Empirical Literature. In: Perry, B., Gruenewald, J., Scrivens, R. (eds) *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada and the United States*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99804-2_14

Wednesday 26th July 2023 – Remedies & Solutions

- Nyhan, B., Porter, E., Reifler, J., & Wood, T. J. (2020). Taking Fact-Checks Literally but not Seriously? The Effects of Journalistic Fact-Checking on Factual Beliefs and Candidate Favorability. *Political Behavior*, 42, 939–960.
- Kuehn, K. M., & Salter, L. A. (2020). Assessing Digital Threats to Democracy, and Workable Solutions: A Review of the Recent Literature. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 22.

Wednesday 27th September – Final Term Papers Due