

Course Overview and Goals

The media are an essential part of American politics. News organizations are often considered the “fourth branch” of government, and political observers from the earliest days of the republic have noted the indispensable role of the mass media in a democratic society. Even before the signing of the Constitution, the seminal debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists took place in newspapers. News outlets, moreover, have a long tradition as agents of partisan warfare, promoting and perpetuating party loyalties and voter turnout in the 19th and early 20th centuries – and now again in the 21st. In 2016, the media were central to debates over the rise of Donald Trump. It is impossible to understand American politics without understanding the media.

This course provides an overview of the media’s role in American political life. In doing so, we will focus on several broad themes: the relationship between the media and government; changes to the media environment in the last two decades (Twitter! Fake news!); the process of newsmaking and how it shapes the content of political news; and the effects of the media on public opinion and voting behavior. We will devote many of our class discussions and readings to scholarship in political science and communication. But we will also pay special attention to the news we encounter every day, especially with respect to the relationship between the media and the new president.

In the end, the course has four goals:

- To help you understand the development of the mass media and its role in American politics
- To help you understand how the interaction among journalists, politicians, and citizens shapes contemporary American politics
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about media and politics – and to ask and answer one yourself in a research paper
- To help you become a savvy consumer of political news, in this class and beyond

Readings

Most of the required readings—mostly journal articles and book chapters—are available for download through our course’s Blackboard page (<http://blackboard.gwu.edu>). Here, you’ll find PDF versions of the readings. It will be your responsibility to download the items as they are assigned. It might be worthwhile to print the readings early in the semester, which will keep you from having to do this every week.

The remaining readings are available online, with the URLs in the course schedule below.

It should come as no surprise that you are also expected to keep up with the news. Our discussions during lecture frequently will touch on current events, so it is critical that you keep apprised of major political goings-on. Reading a major newspaper is perhaps the best way to do this, although there are of course many other news sources with ample political coverage.

In addition, you may be interested in [The Monkey Cage](#), a *Washington Post* blog about politics and political science of which I’m an editor. We regularly feature posts related to media and politics.

Evaluation

Your grade will be based on in-class quizzes, a research paper, and a final exam.

- *Quizzes.* There will be 12 quizzes over the course of semester, each one with 10 questions worth one point each. The quizzes will cover material from assigned readings, previous lectures, and current events. The schedule below displays the quiz dates and the readings and lectures that each quiz will cover.

At the end of the semester, I will drop your two lowest quiz scores and add up your top 10. That score will constitute 40% of your grade. Because of these two get-out-of-jail-free cards, there will be no makeups (other than for religious observances or relevant GW athletic or other events).

Why have frequent quizzes? Good question. There is evidence that periodic quizzes improve students' learning significantly. For example, in [one recent study](#) in a large introductory class in psychology, instituting quizzes appeared to improve students' performance. Students taking that class also did better in their other courses that semester, and in the classes they took the next semester. This suggests that regular assessment helps students develop study habits that are beneficial in other courses, not just the course that assigns quizzes. Frequent quizzes also help me ascertain how well certain concepts are understood, so that we can adjust the content of lectures accordingly.

Date	Readings	Lectures
1/25 (W)	Lippmann, Baker, Bell, Fallows, Uberti	1/23
2/6 (M)	Sanford and Kirtley, Freedom House, Chotiner, Risen	1/25, 1/30, 2/1
2/15 (W)	Neuendorf, Mitchell et al., Prior, Herrman, Lawrence et al., Nyhan	2/6, 2/8, 2/13
2/27 (M)	Ladd, Vallone et al., Taub	2/15, 2/22
3/8 (M)	Hamilton, Iyengar et al., Somaiya, Farhi	2/27, 3/6
3/22 (W)	Bennett, Hayes and Guardino, Cillizza, Boykoff, Hayes	3/8, 3/20
3/29 (W)	Bosso, Lawrence, Patterson Folkenflik, Sides and Leetaru	3/22, 3/27
4/5 (W)	Graber and Dunaway, Nyhan	3/29, 4/3
4/12 (W)	Zaller, Hayes and Guardino, Iyengar, Gilens	4/5, 4/10
4/19 (W)	Mutz, Levendusky, Arceneaux and Johnson	4/12, 4/17
4/26 (W)	Shaker, Jerit et al., Bond et al.	4/19, 4/24
5/3 (W)	TBA	4/26, 5/1

- *Research Paper.* On **April 17**, you will turn in a 10-12-page research paper. Your paper will involve an original “content analysis” of media coverage of the Trump Administration. The specific topic will be up to you. For instance, you could compare coverage of Trump to coverage of Obama and George W. Bush during the first months of their presidency. You could analyze the way that different media outlets cover Trump. You could examine coverage of Trump across different issue areas, like health care and foreign policy. There are many possibilities. I will give you guidelines for the paper within the first weeks of the semester, and we will talk more about content analysis – which involves quantitative analysis

of mass media content – as the semester proceeds. The research paper will account for 35% of your grade.

- *Final Exam.* At the end of the semester, you will take an exam that will assess whether you have acquired a basic knowledge of the role of the media in American politics. The final will consist of essay questions. It will be cumulative—that is, you will be asked to draw on material from the entire semester. This will be a take-home and will be worth 25% of your grade.

Thus, the components of your final grade will be:

- Quizzes: 40%
- Research paper: 35%
- Final exam: 25%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), and F (0-59).

Credit Hour Policy

According to the University, in a 15-week semester, students in a 3-credit course like this one are expected to engage in a total of 112.5 hours of work. We will spend about 38 hours in class together, which means you should expect to spend at least 75 hours (or an average of 5 hours per week) on outside work related to the course. That will include reading, writing, research, and thinking deep thoughts.

University Policy on Religious Holidays

- Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.
- Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.
- Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

Support for Students Outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information: <https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>.

Mental Health Services

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information, go to counselingcenter.gwu.edu/ or call 202-994-5300.

Academic Integrity Code

Thinking of cheating? Don't do it. Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including

misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the University's Academic Integrity Code, available here: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity.

Academic Freedom

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

Should There Be an Alien Invasion or Some Such

If we experience an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave the classroom, we will meet in front of Tompkins Hall on 23rd Street to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University's operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

Technology

You must bring a wi-fi-enabled device to every class session that we have a quiz. You will be taking the quizzes through Blackboard. But that is the only time you are permitted to use it. As great is technology is – how else would we get the cat videos? – the fact is that laptops, smart phones, and other devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. Not only that, but [research](#) has shown that we learn more when we take notes by hand.

So other than for the quizzes, you may not use electronic devices in class. If you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please contact me.

Course Schedule (*Note: This is subject to change as we proceed through the semester.*)

January 18: Introduction

Part 1: The Media and Democratic Politics in 2017

January 23, 25: Media, Democracy, and Donald Trump

- Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press. Chapter 1 (“The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads”).
- Baker, C. Edwin. 2002. *Media, Markets, and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 6 (“Different Democracies and Their Media”), pp. 129-153.

- Bell, Emily. 2017. [“Donald Trump is a Media Organization.”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, January 10.
- Fallows, James. 2016. [“How to Deal with the Lies of Donald Trump: Guidelines for the Media.”](#) *The Atlantic*, November 28.
- Uberti, David. 2016. [“The Real History of Fake News.”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, December 15.

January 30, February 1, February 6: The First Amendment and Media Freedom

- Sanford, Bruce W. and Jane E. Kirtley. 2005. “The First Amendment Tradition and Its Critics.” In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 263-276.
- Freedom House. 2016. [“Report on Freedom of the Press in the United States.”](#) (You might find it useful to also browse other reports to get a sense of how the United States differs other nations.)
- Chotiner, Isaac. 2016. [“Would President Trump Kill Freedom of the Press?”](#) *Slate*, March 14.
- Risen, James. 2016. [“If Donald Trump Targets Journalists, Thank Obama.”](#) *New York Times*, December 30.

February 8: Interlude: A Content Analysis Workshop (bring your laptop)

- Neuendorf, Kimberly A. 2002. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications. Chapter 1 (“Defining Content Analysis”), pp. 1-25.

February 13, 15: The Changing Landscape: Mainstream News, Partisan News, Fake News

- Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Michael Barthel, and Elisa Shearer. 2016 [“The Modern News Consumer.”](#) (click on “Complete Report PDF” and read pp. 1-25). Pew Research Center, July 7.
- Prior, Markus. 2011. “Audience Fragmentation and Political Inequality in the Post-Broadcast Media Environment.” In Doris A. Graber (ed.), *Media Power in Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 153-164.
- Herrman, John. 2016. [“Inside Facebook’s \(Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan\) Political-Media Machine.”](#) *New York Times*, August 24.
- Lawrence, Eric, John Sides, and Henry Farrell. 2010. “Self-Segregation or Deliberation? Blog Readership, Participation, and Polarization in American Politics.” *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1): 141-157.
- Nyhan, Brendan. 2016. [“Relatively Few Americans Live in Partisan Media Bubbles, but They’re Influential.”](#) *New York Times*, September 7.

February 20: No class (President’s Day)

February 22, 27: The Changing Landscape: Trust in the Media

- Ladd, Jonathan M. 2014. "The Era of Media Distrust and Its Consequences for Perceptions of Political Reality." In Travis N. Ridout (ed.), *New Directions in Media and Politics*. New York: Routledge. pp. 24-44.
- Vallone, Robert P., Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1985. "The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49(3): 577-585.
- Taub, Amanda. 2017. ["The Real Story about Fake News is Partisanship."](#) New York Times, January 11.

March 1: Research paper consultation day

Part 2: How Economics, Values, and Norms Shape the News

March 6, 8: Cash Rules Everything Around Me: Economics and the News

- Hamilton, James T. 2004. *All the News That's Fit to Sell*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 6 ("The Changing Nature of the Network Evening News Program").
- Iyengar, Shanto, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn. 2004. "Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horse Race Sells." *Journal of Politics* 66(1): 157-175.
- Somaiya, Ravi. 2014. ["How Facebook is Changing the Way Its Users Consume Journalism."](#) *New York Times*, October 26.
- Farhi, Paul. 2016. ["One Billion Dollars Profit? Yes, the Campaign Has Been a Gusher for CNN."](#) *Washington Post*, October 27.

March 13, 15: No class (Spring break!)

March 20, 22: Media Norms: Objectivity, Balance, and the Dominance of Officialdom

- Bennett, W. Lance. 1996. "An Introduction to Journalism Norms and Representations of Politics." *Political Communication* 13(4): 373-384.
- Hayes, Danny and Matt Guardino. 2013. *Influence from Abroad: Foreign Voices, the Media, and U.S. Public Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2 (pp. 17-49).
- Cillizza, Chris. 2016. ["A Media Critic Called My Sort of Journalism 'Pathetic.' Then We Had an Email Conversation about It."](#) *Washington Post*, September 16.
- Boykoff, Mawell T. 2008. "Lost in Translation? United States Television News Coverage of Anthropogenic Climate Change." *Climatic Change* 86(1-2): 1-11.
- Hayes, Danny. 2013. ["Obama Is Wrong. Traditional Journalism Isn't Dead."](#) *Washington Post, Wonkblog*, August 4.

March 27, 29: Media Norms: Novelty, Conflict, and the Game of Politics

- Bosso, Christopher. 1989. "Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and the Discovery of Famine in Ethiopia." In Michael Margolis and Gary A. Mauser (eds.), *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing. pp. 153-174.
- Lawrence, Regina G. 2000. "Game-Framing the Issues: Tracking the Strategy Frame in Public Policy News." *Political Communication* 17: 93-114.
- Patterson, Thomas E. 1994. *Out of Order*. New York: Vintage. Prologue and Chapter 1 ("Truth and Falsehood on the Campaign Trail," "The Miscast Institution"), pp. 3-52.
- Folkenflik, David. 2016. ["Weary Press Corps Can Celebrate Election's End, Then Survey the Wreckage."](#) National Public Radio, November 8.
- Sides, John and Kalev Leetaru. 2016. ["A Deep Dive into the News Media's Role in the Rise of Donald J. Trump"](#). *The Monkey Cage*, June 24.

April 3, 5: Covering the President

- Graber, Doris A. and Johanna Dunaway. 2015. *Mass Media and American Politics*, 9th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Chapter 7 ("The Struggle for Control: News from the Presidency and Congress").
- Nyhan, Brendan. 2017. ["Trump Shows How to Smother a Scandal: With a Bigger Story."](#) *New York Times*, January 12.

Part 3: Media Effects on Political Attitudes and Behavior

April 10, 12: Media and Public Opinion

- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 6-28.
- Hayes, Danny and Matt Guardino. 2013. *Influence from Abroad: Foreign Voices, the Media, and U.S. Public Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4 (pp. 85-128).
- Iyengar, Shanto. 2011. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*, 2nd Edition. New York: Norton. Chapter 8 ("News and Public Opinion"), pp. 229-271.
- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago. pp. 133-153 (Chapter 6, "Media Distortions: Causes and Consequences").

April 17, 19: Are the Media Ruining Democracy?

- Mutz, Diana C. and Byron Reeves. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 1-15.
- Levendusky, Matt. 2013. *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 4 ("Can Partisan Media Polarize?"), pp. 66-93.

- Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels? Partisan News in an Age of Choice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 4 (“Partisan News and Mass Polarization”), pp. 70-90.

April 24, 26: The Media and Political Engagement

- Shaker, Lee. 2014. “Dead Newspapers and Citizens’ Civic Engagement.” *Political Communication* 31(1): 131-148.
- Jerit, Jennifer, Jason Barabas, and Toby Bolsen. 2006. “Citizens, Knowledge, and the Information Environment.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 266-282.
- Bond, Robert M., Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, Adam D. I. Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jamie E. Settle, and James H. Fowler. 2012. “A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization.” *Nature* 489(7415): 295-298.

May 1, 3: What Kind of Media Does Democracy Need?

- Readings TBA