

Political Communication

POS3250 Fall 2025, 3 credit hours

Thursday 3-4:15pm Merwin Hall 103/hybrid asynchronous

Instructor: Dr. Sean Ewing, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3:30pm (Merwin 183)

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of the role of communication in politics. We will explore research from the fields of communication and political science concerning the content of a variety of “legacy” and “new” forms of political communication. We will discuss the role of traditional print and television news media, online media, campaign communication, and various forms of technologically mediated social interactions in politics (such as social media). Our emphasis will be considering the role these can play — good and bad — in democratic functioning.

This course will expose students to a breadth of scholarship on political communication from both communication and political science.. Students will become familiar with theoretical, methodological and pragmatic issues in political communication scholarship. Students will learn to evaluate original empirical research and will be challenged to think about some of the big questions and concerns facing political communication and the news media.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Explain and compare key theories and concepts in political communication from both political science and communication scholarship.
- Analyze the content and framing of political information across a variety of media platforms, including legacy news, online outlets, social media, and campaign advertising.
- Evaluate empirical research in political communication, identifying research questions, main arguments, and evidence used.
- Apply political communication theories to real-world political events, campaigns, and policy debates.
- Assess the implications of different media environments for democratic functioning, including effects on political knowledge, polarization, and participation.
Develop and defend evidence-based arguments in written form, integrating course readings with independent analysis.
- Engage in informed and constructive discussion about the role of media in politics, demonstrating thoughtful listening and response to peers’ ideas.

Required Texts

Johanna Dunaway and Doris A. Graber. 2023. Mass Media and American Politics, 11th Edition. CQ Press.

Core FGCU Policies

<https://www.fgcu.edu/about/leadership/officeoftheprovoost/core-syllabus-policy-statements>

Please review these core policies and let me know if you have any questions!

Grade Breakdown

Weekly Reading Memos: 20%
Attendance/Discussion/Participation: 20%
News Media Paper: 15%
Campaign Ad Paper: 15%
Final Project: 30%

Weekly Reading Memos:

Each week, students are expected to write a 1-2 page reaction memo to the assigned readings.. This assignment should briefly summarize the key points from the reading, make connections between real world events and/or other class concepts, and propose at least one critical question. These memos should cover all assigned readings for the week. You are not required to dive deep into the research methods of any individual paper; it is better to focus on the research question or puzzle that the author is trying to solve and the conclusion that the author ultimately makes based on the evidence they evaluate.

Attendance/Discussion/Participation:

Discussion is a critical part of this class, and in person attendance is required when we meet each week. Due to the hybrid nature of the course, there is little room to fall behind. If you are unable to attend a class, please let me know ASAP so we can brainstorm ways for you to make up the participation points.

Discussion will be evaluated based on a number of factors including the thoughtfulness and substance of a student's contribution. It's much more important to share thoughtful, meaningful insights than to speak frequently for the sake of participation

News Media Paper:

This will be a 2-3 page paper assignment that will be due on Thursday, October 9th. Students will be required to watch three different kinds of media sources and analyze the way that each source presents

information, and come to a conclusion on how that may affect information transmission and political learning. More details will be provided in a handout that will be given on Thursday, October 2nd.

Campaign Ad Paper:

This will be a 2-3 page paper assignment that will be due on Thursday, November 13th. Students will be required to find polling data and use that information to create a campaign ad for a presidential candidate. Students will not be required to create the ad itself but rather a “storyboard” of information about the ad including what images, sounds, and words appear in the ad. More details will be provided in a handout that will be given on Thursday, November 6th.

Final Project

The final assignment will be a project that will require each student to research a local political issue and write a letter to the editor on that issue. For more details, see the final assignment on Canvas.

Grading

All assignments are due the day listed on this syllabus. Late work will be deducted by a letter grade. If you have an exceptional situation that you believe qualifies you for an extension, please email me *prior* to the due date.

Communication/Office Hours

The best way to reach me is via email. I check my email fairly regularly, but please allow me 24 hours to respond to emails. If I do not respond within 24 hours, feel free to email me again or swing by my office!

My office hours and location are listed above. If those times do not work for you, please email me and we can schedule an alternate time to meet.

Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence Tools

All assignments and exams are expected to be completed at the highest standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are taken very seriously and will not be tolerated. This includes the use of ChatGPT or other Artificial Intelligence tools- while there may be appropriate ways to use these tools in an academic setting in some cases, taking phrases or sentences directly from AI is considered plagiarism and will be treated as such.

For the purposes of this class, students are permitted to use ChatGPT or other Artificial Intelligence to check their own work for spelling, grammar, or clarity/flow. You are welcome to ask AI for suggestions on your writing, **but you should never ask AI to generate ideas or write directly for you.** This is not only a violation of academic integrity but also a poor way to approach learning at the university level. Relying on artificial intelligence tools will not serve you well in the long run and will deprive you of the

opportunity to engage meaningfully with studying politics and government.

Course Schedule

TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS (due by Thursday at class time of each week)
8/21 Introduction	Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 1	None
8/28 The Economics of the News Media	- Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 2 - Hamilton, James T. 2003 <i>All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News</i>. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1 ("Economic Theories of News")	Weekly Reading Memo #1 Due
9/4 Introduction to Research in Political Communication	- Moskowitz, Daniel J. 2021. "Local News, Information, and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 115(1): 114–129. - Ewing, Sean. 2025. "Profit over Public Good: The Impact of Investment Firm Ownership on Local News and Political Behavior." Working Paper - Druckman, J. N., Fein, J., & Leeper, T. J. 2012. A Source of Bias in Public Opinion Stability. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 106(2), 430–454.	Weekly Reading Memo #2 Due
9/11 News Making, Reporting, and Career Journalism NO LIVE CLASS	- Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 3 - Bennett, W. L. 2007. News content: Four information biases that matter. In <i>News: The politics of illusion</i> (pp. 32- 72). New York: Pearson. - Lecheler, S., & de Vreese, C. H. 2011. Getting real: The duration of framing effects. <i>Journal of Communication</i>, 61, 959–983	Weekly Reading Memo #3 Due

9/18 The Media Revolution and Changes in the News Industry NO LIVE CLASS	• Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 4 • Prior, Markus. 2002. "Liberated Viewers, Polarized Voters. The Implications of Increased Media Choice for Democratic Politics." <i>The Good Society</i> 11(3):10-16. • Ladd, J. M. (2012). <i>Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters</i>. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 4.	Weekly Reading Memo #4 Due
9/25 The Decline of Local News	• Hayes, D., & Lawless, J. L. 2021. <i>News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement</i>. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-5 • Hayes, D. 2025. The Local News Crisis and Political Scandal. <i>Political Communication</i>, 1–23	Weekly Reading Memo #5 Due
10/2 Partisan Media, Echo Chambers, and Bias	• Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 12 • Levendusky, M. 2013. Why do partisan media polarize viewers? <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>, 57, 611- 623. • Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. 2016. Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>, 80(S1), 298-320.	Weekly Reading Memo #6 Due
10/9 Social Media, Information, and Disinformation	• Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. 2017. Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 31, 211-236. • Edgerly, S., Mourão, R. R., Thorson, E., & Tham, S. M. 2020. When do audiences verify? How perceptions about message and source influence audience verification of news headlines. <i>Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly</i>, 97, 52–71 • 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. <i>Political Behavior</i>, 42, 939–960.	Weekly Reading Memo #7 Due News Media Paper Due
10/16 Media and the	• Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 5	Weekly Reading Memo #8 Due

Presidency	Farnsworth, S. J. 2018. <i>Presidential communication and character: White House news management from Clinton and cable to Twitter and Trump</i>. Routledge. Chapters 1, 4-6	
10/23 Coverage of Congress and the Courts	- Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 6 - Vinson, C. D. 2017. <i>Congress and the media: Beyond institutional power</i>. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1-4.	Weekly Reading Memo #9 Due
10/30 Coverage of Campaigns and Elections	- Azari, Julia R. 2016. How the News Media Helped to Nominate Trump. <i>Political Communication</i>, 33(4), 677–680. - Sides, J., Tesler, M., & Vavreck, L. 2018. <i>Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America</i>. Princeton University Press. Chapters 4 and 7. - Ewing, Sean and Azari, Julia R. " 2024. From the Podium to the Press: Coverage of Kamala Harris's 2024 Convention Address" <i>The Forum</i>, vol. 22, no. 2-3, pp. 309-324.	Weekly Reading Memo #10 Due
11/6 Campaigns and Advertising	- Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. <i>The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns</i>. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-5. - Sides, John, Vavreck, Lynn, and Warshaw, Christopher. 2022. "The Effect of Television Advertising in United States Elections." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 116(2): 702–18.	Weekly Reading Memo #11 Due
11/13 Media Effects	- Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 13 - Druckman, J. N. 2003. The power of television images: The first Kennedy-Nixon debate revisited. <i>Journal of Politics</i>, 65(2), 559-571. - King, G., Schneer, B, & White, A. 2017. How the news media activate public expression and influence national agendas. <i>Science</i>, 358(6364), 776–780.	Weekly Reading Memo #12 Due Campaign Ad Paper Due
11/20 The Future of the News Media and Final Takeaways	Watch the move <i>The Insider</i> (1999), and come prepared to discuss the movie and the overall themes from the course! Please note there will be a brief quiz on the movie at the beginning of class.	None

11/27 NO CLASS	• Thanksgiving (No class or readings! Enjoy the day off!)	None
12/4 Final Exam	• Study for Final Exam	None