

Propaganda and Information Control in Contemporary Politics

Contact Information

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Office hours: On Zoom, Tuesday 3:00-5:00

Course Overview

This course will adopt a comparative approach to examine the role of propaganda, persuasive communication, and information control in contemporary politics. Communication technologies have rapidly evolved in the past two decades, especially with the rise of the internet and social media. This has upended the way that people around the world learn about and engage with politics and has provided new ways for elites to spread their messaging. At the same time, more “traditional” media, such as television and radio, continue to play an important role in informing the public about politics and continue to be central means through which propaganda is transmitted. In this class, we will discuss how political elites use these old and new media to communicate with, persuade and, sometimes, manipulate the public. We will also discuss the effects of political communication and how ordinary people navigate the media landscape. We will consider the role of propaganda and information control in both democracies and authoritarian countries, as well as propaganda that flows across borders. Each week, we will focus on a specific topic related to propaganda. We will cover such topics as how the rise of the internet and social media has affected the spread and effects of propaganda, the role of propaganda in the rise of global populism and democratic decay, the use of modern technology by oppressive dictatorships, and the impact of elite messaging on recent cases of political violence. Students will then draw on some of this literature in writing their own research papers on a topic of their choosing.

Course Objectives

- Develop a greater understanding of the role of political communication, propaganda, and information control in contemporary politics.
- Learn how scholars in the social sciences develop theories and test those theories using data.
- Practice completing a research project, including coming up with a research question, gathering and analyzing sources, developing a thesis, and outlining, drafting, revising, and presenting your work.

Research Projects

The main basis of evaluation in this course will be a research paper. You will choose a topic related to political propaganda and/or censorship that interests you and write a paper about it. You may want to start by thinking about a country that interests you and how the governing regime in that country uses propaganda and control over information to influence how people think about a specific event, group of people, or topic etc. The topic of the paper is left open and you should choose based on your own interests—with a few caveats. We will be focusing in this class on contemporary politics, and therefore all projects need to be about events that occurred in the past 25 years. Projects focused on events in the past

5 years are even better. Your paper must be about *political* propaganda and information control (not just advertising etc.). Although your paper will focus on a particular case, it is expected that you will draw on theories and evidence pertaining to cases other than the one you are studying. You will be required to use at least two sources focused on a country other than the country about which you are writing. It is expected that the paper will draw on both course material and outside sources. Papers should be 9-12 pages long, double-spaced (plus a full bibliography).

Writing will be heavily emphasized in this class and the quality of writing will factor substantially into the evaluation of final projects. To ensure that everyone is set up to do well on the final project, there will be various intermediary project deadlines. You should submit a short paragraph by the end of Week 2 about the topic you plan to write about. This will not be graded, but will give me the chance to give you feedback on the scope of your paper. At the end of week 6, you will have to produce an outline of your paper. At the end of Week 8, you will have to produce a full draft. This draft will then be shared with one or two other students, who will provide you with feedback. In Week 9, you will workshop this draft in class. You will be graded on the quality of the feedback you provide to your peers. At the beginning of Week 10, you have the option of submitting a revised rough draft to me and I will provide some feedback. This is entirely optional and my feedback will be general. You will need to write a paragraph explaining how you have updated the draft based on the comments you received from your peers. This optional revised draft is not graded and is just a chance for you to get feedback from me. I will not accept revised drafts after March 8th. Final projects will be due during exam week.

Outline, Draft and Peer Feedback

Everyone will submit an outline of the final paper at the end of week 6 and a rough draft in week 8. Each of you will then be assigned to another student with whom you will exchange outlines/papers and provide each other with feedback. The outline and draft will be graded based on effort and satisfactory and on-time completion. The further along you are in your project when you submit the outline and draft, the more useful the feedback will be. In the outline, you should make clear what your thesis is, what the relevant background/historical information is, and what evidence you are drawing upon to support your thesis. If there is information that you do not have yet but want to include, describe it. It is okay at this point for there to be some holes. If you have particular areas where you have questions or want feedback, include those questions with the outline. For the rough draft, you should already be pretty far along in your project. Your paper should be close to the full length, have a clear intro (with a thesis) and supporting body paragraphs. It might be helpful to leave comments in the paper or added at the end about sections of the paper that are concerning you or on which you want feedback.

Providing feedback to your peers will not only help the recipients of your advice, but also help you to develop as a writer. When providing feedback on the outline, you should focus on the substantive content. Think about the paper's scope, argument, and evidence. Is the thesis clear? Is it supported by evidence? Are sources used effectively? Are there other relevant sources or theories that should be incorporated? When you give feedback, you should leave comments on the outline text and write a paragraph of feedback at the end. For the rough draft, you will focus on both content and writing. Think about the persuasiveness of the argument, the quality of the evidence, the paper's organization, and the clarity of the writing. Also note grammatical errors and sentences that do not make sense. You should leave comments and notes in the text and write a paragraph at the end.

You will be graded on the quality of the feedback you provide to you peers. All feedback will need to be submitted on the course website.

Reading Memos

Each week, the lectures and readings will focus on a different topic related to propaganda. You will be required to write two memos, each of which will pertain to all the readings assigned for a given week. You may choose any two weeks from Week 2 through Week 8 to submit your memo. You should choose which weeks you want to do based on your topic interests and personal schedule. In each memo, **briefly**

summarize each reading for the week, explaining the main argument and, if applicable, supporting evidence. Then, offer additional commentary or analysis on the readings. You may offer critiques, connect the readings to other topics from the course, connect the readings to current events or explain where you think research on this topic should go next. Readings from the Washington Post, NY Times etc. are often abbreviated versions of longer academic papers. If one of these is assigned your week, take a look at the longer paper and discuss it. Memos should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced. You should submit your memo on the course website **by 5 p.m. on Monday of the week that you choose**. For example, if you choose to write your memo for Week 2, your memo will be due by January 10 at 5 p.m. I encourage you to share the ideas you discuss in your memos during class as part of your class participation. Please do not choose to submit one of your memos in a week that you know you will be absent from class.

Attendance and Participation

Participation will be a critical part of this course. In addition to your grades on assignments, 25 percent of your grade will also be based on your participation. The primary way that students will participate will be through classroom discussions. Attendance in class will be necessary but not sufficient to earn full participation points. In order to earn full participation points, you are also expected to be actively engaged in class discussions. You will need to come to class prepared, having done the readings and taken some time to think about each one. Come with questions that you would like to discuss.

For those who feel more comfortable participating in writing rather than in class discussions, I encourage you to actively use the discussion forum on the course website to discuss the readings and the lectures. Using the online discussion forum is not required, but it is available as another option for participating.

If you need to miss class because of illness/quarantine, a family emergency, or because you are participating in an official university event, please email me to discuss it as soon as you can. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I understand that students may not always be able to attend class in-person. If you need to miss class for an excused reason, I will ask you to complete a writing assignment about the readings for the missed class to make up for lost participation points. If you know that you will need to miss class in advance, please do not choose that week for submitting one of your memos. If you have an unplanned absence for the week you are planning to submit one of your memos, I may ask you to submit a written assignment for a different week. Please email me to discuss it. If you have a planned excused absence, plan to submit your written assignment by the time of the missed class. If you have an unplanned absence, try to submit your written assignment by the Monday after the missed class, if you can.

Quizzes

In order to encourage everyone to keep up with the readings, before each class session for which readings have been assigned, you will be asked to complete a short reading quiz online. Once you open the quiz, you will only have 10 minutes to complete it. You should, therefore, plan to complete the readings before opening the quiz. These quizzes will focus on the main ideas of the texts and are not intended to be difficult. There will not be questions on the quizzes about complex statistics or economic models that appear in some readings. However, you will need to have done the reading to expect to do well on the quizzes. There will be 16 quizzes total during the quarter. You will not have the opportunity to make up quizzes if you miss one. However, your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. Each of the 14 counted quizzes is worth 0.5 percent of your final grade.

Course Modality and COVID-19

This class is scheduled to take place in person and we will plan to meet in person when the university allows for in-person instruction. Per university policy, this class will be taught on Zoom during the first two weeks. As of now, the plan is to then return to in-person instruction in Week 3. During times when class will be online, we will plan to meet at the regularly scheduled course time on Zoom. Because participation is so central to this class, the course cannot be conducted asynchronously. Whenever possible, please try to keep your cameras on when we are having class discussions. During the lecture portion of the class, cameras are less important but still suggested.

Course Evaluation

Course grades will be based on the project, quizzes, memos and participation as follows:

Research Project: 50%

Outline: 3%

Outline peer feedback: 3%

Rough Draft: 4%

Rough draft peer feedback: 4%

Presentation: 6%

Final Draft: 30%

Quizzes: 7%

Memos: 18%

Participation: 25%

My general grading policy for this class will be to grade major assignments and class participation on a scale from 50 to 100. What this means is that you get half of the points for free. However, the rest of the points you will have to earn. To earn a top grade on an assignment, you will need to produce superior work that goes above and beyond expectations.

Late submissions on the final project and memo will be marked down one third of a grade per 24-hour period after the deadline. Lateness on the outline, draft and comments to peers will be punished more severely: 1 letter grade per day. **If you anticipate a problem meeting a deadline, especially on the draft/outline and peer-to-peer feedback, please tell me as soon as possible.** Quizzes cannot be made up.

If you believe you have been graded incorrectly, you may write a memo describing why your grade ought to be revised and submit it to me. Please limit this memo to one-page, double-spaced. Please be aware that requesting a re-grade may result in an increase or decrease in your grade.

The following grading scale will be used to convert numeric grades to letter grades:

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 F: 60 and below

To avoid any confusion, note that a grade of 89.50 is an A-. A grade of 89.49 is a B+.

Important Dates and Deadlines

2/10 (Thurs.) Outline due (by class)

2/15 (Tues.) Outline comments due (by class)

2/24 (Thurs.) Rough draft due (by class)

3/1 (Thurs.) Rough draft comments due (by class)

3/8 (Tues.) Optional revised draft due to me (by class)

3/17 (Thurs.) Final draft due 11:59 pm

Plagiarism, Citing Sources, and Collaboration

Plagiarism and cheating will absolutely not be tolerated in this class. All written assignments will be submitted through plagiarism-detection software. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit Academic Integrity at DePaul University (<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu>) for further details.

To avoid violating the university's academic integrity policy, it is critical that you **properly cite all your sources and use quotation marks when using another writer's words**. Citing Wikipedia is less embarrassing than plagiarizing Wikipedia and not citing it. Note that direct quotations should only be used in relatively rare circumstances. It is often better to paraphrase. Any written assignment should be primarily your own words, with quotes used sparingly. When you paraphrase another person's ideas, you still need to use a citation. You should also cite any information you reference in your writing that is not common knowledge.

All projects must be each student's own, original work. However, it is okay in this class for you to exchange papers with one another for feedback and proofreading. In fact, I actively encourage you all to help each other, so long as it does not cross the line to joint projects. If you do decide to get feedback from another student, please describe that feedback when submitting your project. If you have questions about what is acceptable in this regard, you may email me.

Resources and Other Notes

- **Office Hours and Email:** Please come to me with your questions and concerns about the course. You can ask questions during class or come to my office hours. You may also email me (ablum1@depaul.edu). I will try to answer emails within 24 hours but this cannot be guaranteed, especially on weekends. If you have substantive questions about the course material, I prefer to have a discussion either in person or on Zoom when possible rather than over email. If you have class or another commitment during my office hours, please email me if you need to arrange another time to meet.
- **Writing Center:** This is a writing-intensive course. I strongly recommend you make use of the Writing Center during this course and throughout your time at DePaul. The Writing Center provides free peer writing tutoring for DePaul students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Writing Center tutors work with writers at all stages of the writing process, from invention to revision, and they are trained to identify recurring issues in your writing as well as address any specific questions or areas that you want to talk about. Visit www.depaul.edu/writing to learn more about the online appointment options the UCWbL is offering.
- **Library Resources:** The DePaul University Library (<https://library.depaul.edu>) provides access to authoritative information sources and online research tools which you can access using your Campus Connect login. Research help is available daily via text, chat, phone, email or video. You may also make an appointment with a librarian to discuss your research projects. For the latest information about library access and services in Winter Quarter 2022, see <https://libguides.depaul.edu/covid19>.
- **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:** Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) by emailing csd@depaul.edu and/or visiting one of the locations below.
- **Course Withdrawal:** Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system (campusconnect.depaul.edu). Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.

- **Course Website:** You should plan to regularly check the course website, where I will post the readings, quizzes and other information related to the course. I may occasionally post links to videos, articles, and websites that relate to the concepts we are discussing on the course website. If you come across interesting articles or useful resources related to the course, feel free to send them to me and I may post them.
- **Academic Advising:** DePaul students that have general academic concerns can contact the academic advising office for help. More information is available at: <https://offices.depaul.edu/academic-advising-support/Pages/default.aspx>.
- **Counseling:** DePaul students who want to learn about counseling services at the university can find more information at <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/ucs.aspx>.
- **Preferred Pronouns:** I value each student's right to be referenced by their gender pronoun and their preferred name. If your name and pronoun in Campus Connect don't reflect what you'd like me to use, please let me know.

Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332

- **Harassment, Sexual Violence and Title IX:** Academic relationships are based on communication, trust and respect, and as a DePaul community, we share a commitment to take care of one another. Sometimes, material raised in class may bring up issues for students related to sexual and relationship violence or other trauma. In other instances, students may reach out to faculty as a potential source of help and support. It is important for students to know that faculty are required to report information reported to them about experiences with sexual or relationship violence to DePaul's Title IX Coordinator. Students should also know that disclosing experiences with sexual or relationship violence in course assignments or discussion does not, in itself, constitute a formal report to the University and will not begin the process of DePaul providing a response.

Those seeking to report an incident of sexual or relationship violence to DePaul should:

- a) Visit https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?DePaulUniv&layout_id=4
- b) contact the Title IX Coordinator (312-362-8066 or titleixcoordinator@depaul.edu) or
- c) contact Public Safety (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7777; Loop: 312-362-8400)

Students seeking to speak confidentially about issues related to sexual and relationship violence should contact a Survivor Support Advocate in the Office of Health Promotion & Wellness for information and resources (773-325-7129 or hpw@depaul.edu). More information is available at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/hpw/shvp.html>. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these services and to seek help around sexual and relationship violence for themselves as well as their peers who may be in need of support.

Weekly Readings

Each class (with some exceptions), there will be readings related to a particular theme. The readings include a mix of textbook chapters, scholarly papers and articles from the popular press. I recognize that some of these papers involve complex statistics and models that are beyond the scope of this class. We will discuss in class how to approach these difficult papers (including portions that you can probably skip).

Week 1: Intro to Propaganda and persuasive messaging

Note: Class will be online this week

Tuesday, Jan. 4

- Propaganda and Persuasion. Ch. 1. "What Is Propaganda, and How Does It Differ from Persuasion?" (skim/skip "subpropaganda" 26- top of 28, section on Rhetoric p.37-top of 41)

Thursday, Jan. 6

- Propaganda and Persuasion. Ch. 4. "Propaganda and Persuasion Examined." (Skim 177-193)
- Propaganda and Persuasion. Ch. 6. "How to Analyze Propaganda."

Week 2: The Changing Technology of Propaganda and the Implications for Democracy

Note: Class will be online this week

Tuesday, Jan. 11

- Jungherr, Andreas, et. al. 2020. *Retooling politics: How Digital Media are Shaping Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 1.
- Banjo, Shelley. 2020. "How Digital Disinformation Sows Hate, Hurts Democracy: QuickTake." Bloomberg.
- Bond et. al. "A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization." Nature.

Thursday, Jan. 13

- Tucker, Joshua, et. al. 2018 "Social Media, Political Polarization and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature." Focus on Section 2, subsections B, C, D.

Week 3: Propaganda and populism

Tuesday, Jan. 18

- Waisbord, Silvio. 2019. "Populism as Media and Communication Phenomenon." Routledge Handbook of Global Populism.
- Engesser et. al. 2017. "Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology." Information, Communication and Society.

Thursday, Jan. 20

- Schmuck, Mathes. 2017. "Effects of Economic and Symbolic Threat Appeals in Right-Wing Populist Advertising on Anti-Immigrant Attitudes: The Impact of Textual and Visual Appeals"
- Benkler, Yochai et al., 2018. "Ch. 4: Islamophobia and Immigration: Breitbart and the Trump Party." Network Propaganda.

Week 4: Democratic Backsliding and Decay

Tuesday, Jan. 25

- Berlinsky Nicholas, et. al. "The effects of unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud on confidence in elections." Journal of Experimental Political Science.

- Clayton, Katherine et. al. "Elite rhetoric can undermine democratic norms." PNAS.

Thursday, Jan. 27

- Beauchamp, Zack. 2018. "It happened there: How Democracy Died in Hungary." Vox.
- Hunt, Lank. 2018. "Duterte's Media War in the Philippines." The Diplomat.

Week 5: Dictatorships in the information age: Part 1

Tuesday, Feb. 1

- Chenoweth, Erica. 2016. "How social media helps dictators." Foreign Policy.
- Gunitsky, Seva. 2015. "Social media helps dictators, not just protesters." Washington Post.
- *Optional* Gunitsky, Seva. 2015. "Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability." Perspectives on Politics.

Thursday, Feb. 3

- Guriev and Treisman. 2015. "The New Dictators Rule by Velvet Fists." The New York Times.
- Roberts, Molly. 2018. *Censored*. Chapters TBD.

Week 6: Dictatorships in the information age: Part 2

Tuesday, Feb. 8

- Lipman et. al. 2018. "Media in Russia: Between Modernization and Monopoly." *The New Autocracy*.
- The Economist. "Russian propaganda is state-of-the-art again."
- Frye, Tim. 2020. "Media Manipulation at Home." *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*.

Thursday, Feb. 10

- King et. al. 2016. "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument." American Political Science Review.
- The Economist. "Propaganda 2.0."
- Auerbach and Castronovo. 2013. "Ch. 9: 'Thought-Work' and Propaganda: Chinese Public Diplomacy and Public Relations After Tiananmen Square." Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies.
- OUTLINE DUE ONLINE

Week 7: Propaganda and violence

Tuesday, Feb. 15

- Della Vigna et. al. 2014. "Cross-Border Media and Nationalism: Evidence from Serbian Radio in Croatia." American Economic Journal: Applied Economics. (skim stats in II, skip III).
- Petrova and Yanagizawa-Drott. "2016: Media Persuasion, Ethnic Hatred, And Mass Violence: a Brief Overview of Recent Research Advances." Economics of Genocide, Mass Killing, and Their Prevention (skim/skip 12.2)
- Yanagizawa-Drott. 2014: "Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide." The Quarterly Journal of Economics. (read I, II, III, skim IV, V, VI, read VII).
- Luft and Solomon. 2018. "How dangerous is it when Trump calls some immigrants 'animals'? The Monkey Cage.
- OUTLINE COMMENTS DUE

Thursday, Feb. 17

- Brooking, Emerson and P.W. Singer. 2016. "War Goes Viral: How Social Media is Being Weaponized Across the World." The Atlantic.
- Awan, Imran. "Cyber-Extremism: ISIS and the Power of Social Media." Social Science and Public Policy.

Week 8: Propaganda crossing borders

Tuesday, Feb. 22

- Morgan, Susan. "Fake news, disinformation, manipulation and online tactics to undermine democracy." Journal of Cyber Policy. (interview)
- Rozenas, Arturas and Leonid Peisakhin. "When does Russian propaganda work — and when does it backfire? Here's what we found."
- *Optional* Rozenas and Peisakhin. 2018. "Electoral Effects of Biased Media: Russian Television in Ukraine." American Journal of Political Science.

Thursday, Feb. 24

- Benkler, Yochai et al., 2018. "Ch. 8: Are the Russians Coming?" Network Propaganda.
- Hall, Jamieson, Kathleen. 2018. Cyberwar. Chapters TBD.
- ROUGH DRAFT DUE

Week 9: Writing Workshop Day + Misinformation and its Correction

Tuesday, Mar. 1

- Peer Rough Drafts (2) - review and write detailed comments. Be prepared to discuss with your classmates.

Thursday, Mar. 3

- Lazer, David. 2018. "The Science of Fake News." Science.
- Christenson, Dino et. al. 2020. "When Twitter Fact-Checks Trump's Tweets, It Polarizes Americans Even More." The Monkey Cage. Washington Post.
- Berinsky, Adam. 2017. "This is how you stop fake news." The Monkey Cage. Washington Post.
- Pennycook, Gordon and David Rand. 2020. "The Right Way to Fight Fake News." The New York Times.

Week 10: Student Presentations

Tuesday, Mar. 8

- Prepare presentations and work on papers
- OPTIONAL: Submit revised rough draft.

Thursday, Mar. 10

- Prepare presentations and work on papers