

Social Media and Politics

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. EST, or by appointment. I will use skype ([evgenypolitolog](#)) for office hours and appointments.

Course Description

The history of the most popular social networking site in the world, Facebook, has started almost 14 years ago. In the beginning, it had a goal of connecting students within and, later, across campuses in the U.S. Back then, it was almost impossible to predict how profound will be Facebook's impact on almost all areas of contemporary politics in democracies and autocracies alike. Facebook's success was followed by development of local social networks that mostly target audiences of specific countries, microblogging networks like Twitter and photo-sharing networks like Instagram. 14 years after the launch of Facebook, we can hardly imagine our lives without social media.

The main goal of this course is to introduce you to a quickly growing field of research in political science: analysis of the impact of social media on various components of political reality. You will read the most interesting and innovative papers in this research subfield with the goal of critically evaluating arguments presented in them and developing your own ideas. The big question that this course aims to tackle is how did social media change behavior of key political actors (e.g. parties, candidates, and voters). To this end, the course is organized around several topics; each topic refers to the relationship between social media and specific component of politics (e.g. elections, protest).

Coursework will primarily consist of 3 forms of activity: a) reading academic papers, newspaper articles and watching documentaries, b) writing posts on MyCourses discussion page, and c) writing final research design paper. At the end of the course, you will have a good understanding of where research of social media's influence on politics is headed and will gain an appreciation of how intellectually rich and interdisciplinary this research area is.

Learning Outcomes for General Education Requirements

This course fulfills three general education requirements - “G”, “N”, and “C”. Below I list learning outcomes for these requirements.

G - Global Interdependencies

Students in G courses will demonstrate knowledge of how two or more distinctive world regions have influenced and interacted with one another and how such interactions have been informed by their respective cultures or civilizations.

N - Social Sciences

Students in N courses will demonstrate:

1. Knowledge of major concepts, models, and issues (and their interrelationships) of at least one of the social sciences: anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, or sociology.
2. An understanding of the methods used by social scientists to explore social phenomena, including, when appropriate to the discipline, observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and analysis by mathematics or other interpretive frameworks.

C - Composition

C courses satisfy the following requirements:

1. At least 20 pages of formal expository writing, which must count for at least 50 percent of the course grade.
2. A longer paper of at least 7 pages or at least two papers of at least 5 pages.
3. One paper of at least 5 pages must undergo a substantial revision process based on instructor feedback (not just peer feedback).

Deadlines

Since the course is fast-paced, there will be no make-up assignments, except for the students with disabilities and special circumstances.

Reading Day	the first day of each module
Discussion Post I	11:59 a.m. EST of the second day of each module
Discussion Post II	11:59 p.m. EST of the second day of each module
Responses to Discussion Posts	11:59 a.m. EST of the third day of each module
Replies to Response Posts	11:59 p.m. EST of the third day of each module
Review Paper	11:59 p.m. EST on January 2, 2018
Final Paper Draft	11:59 p.m. EST on January 6, 2018
Final Paper	11:59 p.m. EST on January 12, 2018

Grading

- All assignments will be graded using 100 point scale. At the end of the course, I will convert them into percentages of the final grade in accordance with the weight of each assignment.
- Grading rules are as follows: 93 - 100 = A; 90 - 92 = A-; 87 - 89 = B+; 83 - 86 = B; 80 - 82 = B-; 77 - 79 = C+; 73 - 76 = C; 70 - 72 = C-; 60 - 69 = D; 0 - 59 = F.

Readings

Each module of the course, except the introductory module, has a list of *required* and *recommended* materials. While you are expected to read (or watch if it is documentary) all required materials, recommended materials are optional. Recommended materials serve as additional sources for your research ideas; you can also use them while preparing your discussion, response and reply posts. Finally, you can select an article for your Review Paper from either recommended or required materials.

All required and recommended materials, except for videos, will be posted in the appropriate folders in the content section on MyCourses. Links to videos are provided in the syllabus.

Note that for the introductory module (18 - 19 of December) you are required to read all materials posted on MyCourses since these readings outline the course procedures and rules.

Assignment Description

Introductory module has its own rules - see Course Modules section of the Syllabus.

I. Discussion Posts: 350 - 400 words, 2 for each module (15 % of the final grade)

- The main goal of this assignment is critical evaluation of the material. Thereby, simple summary of the readings won't earn you a lot of points.
- Generally speaking, there are two types of posts that can fit into the "critical evaluation" description: a) posts that disentangle the argument in detail and provide analysis why the argument is reasonable/erroneous; b) posts that provide their own view of the phenomenon of interest in the form of theoretical argument and testable propositions. For example, when we will be talking about social media and protest behavior, you can try to theorize how authoritarian governments will respond to the social media's role in facilitating protest collective action.

II. Response posts: 150 - 200 words, 2 for each module (10 % of the final grade)

- The idea is to provide thoughtful critique to the discussion posts of your classmates.
- Best responses either build on the original discussion posts and improve them, or make a counter-argument.
- In general, the best responses should bring something new to the discussion and be thought-provoking.
- Discussion should be conducted in a polite and respectful manner. Feel free to make any argument that you think is valid for the discussion, but make it in a way that is respectful towards the opinion of your classmate.
- Read discussion and response posts of your classmates carefully before posting your own in order to avoid repetitiveness.
- You may submit longer response posts if you choose to do so; however, I encourage you to follow hard word limit of 350 words if you choose to post a response that is longer than 200 words. You can also post more than 2 response posts, but be mindful of repetitiveness and try to discuss something that your classmates did not notice/pointed out before.

III. Reply posts: 150 - 200 words, 2 for each module (10 % of the final grade)

- You are required to participate in the discussion of your own posts. To this end, you need to reply to the response posts of your classmates.
- 2 replies is the minimum requirement, so you can submit more posts if you want. However, be mindful of 200 word limit for each reply.

- I will participate in the discussion myself and post replies as well.

IV. Review Paper: 1300 - 1500 words (15 % of the final grade)

- For this assignment, you should select one academic article from those that we cover in class, and write a critical review of this article.
- Your paper should follow the general guidelines outlined below.
- Introduction should take no more than 15 % of your paper. In introduction, you should outline the research question(s) the article addresses, general argument and, if the article has empirical part, findings.
- Critical evaluation should take from 50 to 60 % of your paper. In this part, you should analyze author's argument and assess the soundness of author's analysis. "Usual suspects" that you can target include author's assumptions (e.g. "ideological space is one-dimensional" or "all people vote") and logic. Assumptions often look as particularly appealing target since in many cases they are quite unrealistic, making any conclusion suspicious. However, be careful when criticizing assumptions solely on the grounds of realism since sometimes realism should be sacrificed in favor of analytical power of the model. For details, see Friedman, Milton. 1953. "The Methodology of Positive Economics". When targeting author's logic, try to trace whether author's conclusions sensibly follow from premises, and whether there are any erroneous "leaps".
- Suggestions should take 20 % of your paper. Here, you should provide recommendations for the author that, you think, can improve the article.
- Conclusion should take from 5 to 15 % of your paper.
- Review paper should be submitted to the Turnitin link at the content section on MyCourses no later than the specified deadline. Late submissions will be penalized.

V. Final Paper Draft: 1500 - 2000 words (10 % of the final grade)

- The main goal of this assignment is to start developing your final paper early on and to have a chance to improve it based on my comments.
- The draft should include a thorough introduction where you clearly state your research question (e.g. "are politicians that have social network accounts and actively use them more successful electorally" or "do individuals that follow certain pages on Facebook

more likely to participate in protest”). You are encouraged to start thinking about research questions early on and talk to me about them BEFORE you submit the draft.

- The draft should also include review of the relevant literature on the topic you are interested in. Google Scholar is one of the best engines for finding academic papers; you can also use your BU Account to access on-line resources of the library.
- Every paper that you cite must be cited in accordance with [APSA citation manual](#).
- Finally, your draft should include outline of your theoretical argument. For example, you can argue something like this “social networks allow politicians to directly reach bigger number of voters, thereby leading to greater popularity and electoral success of politicians who have and actively update social network accounts”.
- Final Paper Draft should be submitted to the Turnitin link at the content section on MyCourses no later than the specified deadline. Late submissions will be penalized.

VI. Final Paper: 4000 - 4500 words (40 % of the final grade)

- Your final paper should follow the guidelines outlined in Caltech Rules for Writing Papers (posted on MyCourses).
- Your paper should include introduction where you outline your research question and how your project advances the current research on this question. Your paper should also include literature review with appropriate references to the papers that are relevant for your topic of interest. These sections will be largely based on the final paper draft.
- Theoretical argument. In this section, you will elaborate your logic: why do you think phenomena that you are analysing are related, and what direction of the relationship do you expect to see. This is the main part of your paper, so you should focus on carefully elaborating the logic behind your argument and assumptions.
- Empirical evaluation. While you are not required to conduct data analysis, you should outline how your argument can be tested against empirical evidence. You are encouraged to include charts / tables that provide some preliminary evidence in favor or against your argument.
- Conclusion. In this part, you provide brief summary of the paper: your argument, findings (if there is any preliminary evidence for / against the argument) and next steps in the development of the paper.

- Final paper should be submitted to the Turnitin link at the content section on MyCourses no later than the specified deadline. Late submissions will be penalized.

Academic Honesty

Students should review university guidelines regarding academic honesty and ensure that the work they complete for this course is theirs and theirs alone. Cases of academic dishonesty will be taken very seriously and may result in a failing grade for the course in addition to any penalty imposed by the university. If you have any doubt about what constitutes plagiarism or a violation of academic honesty, please consult the university code and/or contact the instructor.

[Information on Plagiarism.](#)

[Tutorials on Academic Honesty.](#)

Any source that you use in preparation of discussions posts and response posts should be cited properly. See [APSA citation manual](#) for details.

Communication

- I will serve as discussion moderator for each module. I will be commenting on your discussion posts and responses in order to facilitate positive and constructive flow of the discussion.
- I will hold office hours three times a week. During office hours, I will be on-line in skype so you can call and talk to me. Outside office hours, you should contact me by e-mail and schedule an appointment.
- Any important course information will be announced on MyCourses.
- I will contact you personally by e-mail when necessary.
- You are required to check the course page every day and read posts and responses.
- MyCourses tracks time you spent at the course page and whether you read the posts. Make you sure you pay sufficient amount of attention to what is going on at the course page.

Grade Appeals

If you wish to appeal a grade you have received, you must submit a one-page computer-edited (e.g. in Word) statement to me at least 24 hours after receiving the grade. The statement must clearly and thoroughly explain the reasons why your work deserved a higher grade. Your assignment will then be re-graded, taking your statement into consideration. **The revised grade may be higher, lower, or the same as the initial grade.**

Disability-Related Equal Access Accommodations

Students wishing to request academic accommodations to insure their equitable access and participation in this course should notify the instructor by the second module of the class. Authorizations from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are generally required. Please contact SSD at (607)777-2686 to schedule an appointment with the Director or Learning Disabilities Specialist. [Their website](#) includes information regarding their Disability Documentation Guidelines. The office is located in UU-119.

Course Modules

Introduction (12/18 - 12/19)

- Introduce yourself to me and your classmates. Here, we don't have any graded assignments, but you will need to post a short information about yourself using the following guidelines: a) your name and surname, b) where are you from, c) you favorite book and movie, d) politics-related things that you find exciting, e) your expectations from this course (e.g. what do you expect to learn, why did you decide to take the course etc.), and f) your social network account(s).
- Questions regarding course format. You must read the syllabus and contact me if you find any part of it confusing/requiring clarification.
- You also must read the course technical manual posted on MyCourses in the Introduction folder (content section).
- You should read the following post: [Reading a Regression Table: A Guide for Students](#). Since almost all papers we are going to read perform various kinds of quantitative

analysis, knowledge of how to interpret it is essential for understanding what is going on. This post provides intuitive and simple overview of how to interpret regression - one of the most frequently used techniques we will encounter.

- Finally, you should read Caltech Rules for Writing Papers (Introduction folder, content section on MyCourses).

The Age of Social Media (12/20 - 12/22)

Required Materials:

- Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly. *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge: London and New York, 2 edition, 2009, Chapter 1
- [How Facebook changed the World: the Story of Arab Spring. Episode 1.](#)
- [How Facebook changed the World: the Story of Arab Spring. Episode 2.](#)
- Tracy Packiam Alloway and Ross Geoffrey Alloway. The Impact of Engagement with Social Networking Sites (SNSs) on Cognitive Skills. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5):1748–1754, 2012
- [Russian-bought Advertisements on Facebook during 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign](#)
- [The Dark Side of the Digital Revolution](#)

Recommended Materials:

- Clay Shirky. The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(1):28–41, 2011
- Robert Bond, Christopher Fariss, Jason Jones, Adam Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jaime Settle, and James Fowler. A 61-million-person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization. *Nature*, 489:295–298, 2012
- Arthur Lupia and Tasha Philpot. Views from Inside the Net: How Websites Affect Young Adults' Political Interest. *The Journal of Politics*, 67(4):1122–1142, 2005
- Gergely Palla, Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, and Tamas Vicsek. Quantifying Social Group Evolution. *Nature*, 446:664–667, 2007

Social Media and Electoral Campaigns (12/23, 01/02 - 01/03)

Required Materials:

- Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow. Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2):211–235, 2017
- Bruce Bimber. Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 11(2):130–150, 2014
- Anders Larsson and Hallward Moe. Studying Political Microblogging: Twitter Users in the 2010 Swedish Election Campaign. *New Media and Society*, 14(5):729–747, 2011
- Frank Marcinkowski and Julia Metag. Why Do Candidates Use Online Media in Constituency Campaigning? An Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 11(2):151–168, 2014
- Javier Lorenzo Rodriguez and Amuitz Garmendia Madariaga. Going Public Against Institutional Constraints? Analyzing the Online Presence Intensity of 2014 European Parliament Election Candidates. *European Union Politics*, 17(2):303–323, 2016

Recommended Materials:

- Anders Larsson and Bente Kalsnes. “Of Course We Are on Facebook”: Use and Non-use of Social Media Among Swedish and Norwegian Politicians. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(6):653–667, 2014
- Girish Gulati and Christine Williams. Social Media and Campaign 2012: Developments and Trends for Facebook Adoption. *Social Science Computer Review*, 31(5):577–588, 2013
- Maurice Vergeer and Liesbeth Hermans. Campaigning on Twitter: Microblogging and Online Social Networking as Campaign Tools in the 2010 General Elections in the Netherlands. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(4):399–419, 2013
- Michael Cameron, Patrick Barrett, and Bob Stewardson. Can Social Media Predict Election Results? Evidence from New Zealand. *Working paper*, 2013
- Pablo Barbera, Richard Bonneau, Patrick Egan, John T. Jost, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua Tucker. Leaders or Followers? Measuring Political Responsiveness in the U.S. Congress Using Social Media Data. *Prepared for APSA 2014 Annual Meeting*, 2014

- Filipe Campante, Ruben Durante, and Francesco Sobbrío. Politics 2.0: The Multi-faceted Effect of Broadband Internet on Political Participation. *NBER working paper*, 2013
- Panagiotis Metaxas and Eni Mustafaraj. Social Media and the Elections. *Science*, 338:472–473, 2012
- Sounman Hong and Daniel Nadler. Which Candidates Do the Public Discuss Online in an Election Campaign? The Use of Social Media by 2012 Presidential Candidates and its Impact on Candidate Salience. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(4):455–461, 2012

Social Media and Protest (01/04 - 01/06)

Required Materials:

- Merlyna Lim. Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2):231–248, 2012
- Sebastian Valenzuela, Arturo Arriagada, and Andres Scherman. The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The Case of Chile. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2):299–314, 2012
- Ora Reuter and David Szakonyi. Online Social Media and Political Awareness in Authoritarian Regimes. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(1):29–51, 2015
- Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson. Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations from Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2):363–379, 2012
- Kevin Munger, Richard Bonneau, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua A. Tucker. Elites Tweet to get Feet of the Streets: Measuring Regime Social Media Strategies During Protest. *Accepted in Political Science Research and Methods*, 2017

Recommended Materials:

- Andrew Little. Communication Technology and Protest. *Journal of Politics*, 78(1):152–166, 2016
- Dmitry Dagaev, Natalia Lamberova, Anton Sobolev, and Konstantin Sonin. Recurrent Revolutions. *Working paper*, 2017

- Weiwu Zhang, Thomas Johnson, Trent Seltzer, and Shannon Bichard. The Revolution Will be Networked. The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Political Attitudes and Behavior. *Social Science Computer Review*, 28(1):75–92, 2010
- Ruben Enikolopov, Alexey Makarin, and Maria Petrova. Social Media and Protest Participation: Evidence from Russia. *Working paper*, 2016
- Sebastian Valenzuela. Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behavior: The Roles of Information, Opinion Expression, and Activism. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(7):920–942, 2013

Social Media and Political Accountability (01/07 - 01/09)

Required Materials:

- Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts. How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2):1–18, 2013
- Seva Gunitsky. Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(1):42–54, 2015
- Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, and Konstantin Sonin. Social Media and Corruption. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 10(1):1–27, 2018
- Andrea Ceron, Luigi Curini, and Stefano Iacus. Every Tweet Counts? How Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Can Improve Our Knowledge of Citizens' Political Preferences with an Application to Italy and France. *New Media and Society*, 16(2):340–358, 2014
- John Bertot, Paul Jaeger, and Justin Grimes. Using ICTs to Create a Culture of Transparency: E-government and Social Media as Openness and Anti-corruption Tools for Societies. *Government Information Quarterly*, 27(3):264–271, 2010

Recommended Materials:

- Enrique Bonson, Lourdes Torres, Sonia Royo, and Francisco Flores. Local E-government 2.0: Social Media and Corporate Transparency in Municipalities. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(2):123–132, 2012
- Marc Lynch. Aftē Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2):301–310, 2011

- Bei Qin, David Stromberg, and Yanhui Wu. The Political Economy of Social Media in China. *Working Paper*, 2015
- Peter Lorentzen. China's Strategic Censorship. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(2):402–414, 2014
- Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts. How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument. *American Political Science Review*, 111(3):484–501, 2017

Social Media and Polarization (01/10 - 06/12)

Required Materials:

- Jae Kook Lee, Jihyang Choi, Cheonsoo Kim, and Yonghwan Kim. Social Media, Network Heterogeneity, and Opinion Polarization. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4):702–722, 2014
- Eytan Bakshy, Solomon Messing, and Lada Adamic. Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook. *Science*, 348:1130–1132, 2015
- Levi Boxell, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse Shapiro. Is Internet Causing Political Polarization? Evidence from Demographics. *NBER working paper*, 2017
- Pablo Barbera. How Social Media Reduces Mass Political Polarization. Evidence from Germany, Spain, and the U.S. *Prepared for APSA 2015 Annual Meeting*, 2015

Recommended Materials:

- Michael Conover, Jacob Ratkiewicz, Matthew Francisco, Bruno Goncalves, Alessandro Flammini, and Filippo Menczer. Political Polarization on Twitter. *Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2011
- Kevin Munger. Tweetment Effects on the Tweeted: Experimentally Reducing Racist Harassment. *Political Behavior*, 39(3):629–649, 2017
- Yosh Halberstam and Brian Knight. Homophily, Group Size, and the Diffusion of Political Information in Social Networks: Evidence from Twitter. *Journal of Public Economics*, 143:73–188, 2016
- Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse Shapiro. Ideological Segregation Online and Offline. *NBER working paper*, 2010