POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Department of Political Science
Central European University
Winter 2015
4 credits, Master Level

Mondays, 09:00 – 10:40, Faculty Tower, room 908
Wednesdays, 09:00 – 10:40, Faculty Tower, room 908

Instructor: Oana Lup (vislup@ceu.edu)
Office hours: Mondays 14:00-16:00 and Wednesdays 11:00-13:00, Faculty Tower, room 806.
To sign up for consultations please use oanalup.youcanbook.me

Course objectives

This MA-level course provides an overview of the main topics, approaches, and methodolo-
gies in the study of political communication. It explores the range of actors involved in polit-
ical communication and how the information flows between them matter for democratic poli-
tics.

We critically examine key concepts such as democratic performance of the media, media log-
ic, mediatization, public sphere, media system characteristics, pluralism, polarization, frag-
mentation, information quality, political bias, accuracy, media effects, agenda setting, prim-
ing, framing, gatekeeping.

For each topic we disentangle the interactions between citizens, mass media, and political
actors in the production, transmission, and reception of political messages. We look at how
these interactions depend on the characteristics of each of the three, and on contextual, socie-
tal and political differences. We will reflect on how these issues travel to the new internet en-
vironment and how the changes brought by the internet link up to the fundamental questions
of how citizens can make sense of politics and relate to democratic political processes.

The course provides students with a postgraduate-level understanding of:
• selected concepts and research methods in political communication, political market-
ing, and election campaign studies;
• current techniques used by political and social actors in traditional media as well as
  online political communication; and
• critical perspectives on and issues in political communication, political marketing,
  and election campaigns.

Learning outcomes
• A basic understanding and critical review of the social science literature in the field of
  political communication.
• Conceptual frames and research skills for the analysis of political communication in
  contemporary political systems.
• Skills to identify and analyze media framing and agenda setting as well as campaign
  and information effects on public opinion
**Course format**
The course will alternate lecturing with applied exercises and will link big theoretical and normative questions with real world examples. Class participation is essential as interactivity and learning from each other are at the core of what should be an enjoyable and not just useful experience. Active participation involves comments and questions based on the required literature, the lecture, and the seminar presentation(s).

**Course requirements and assessment**
Attendance is mandatory for this course. If you are unable to attend a class, please inform the instructor *in advance* via email. More than two unexcused absences results in a reduction of the participation grade and more than three unexcused absences results in failure of the course.

**30 % - presentations**
Students need to give two presentations based on the required readings. Clear guidelines for preparing and delivering these presentations will be discussed in the first class of the course.

**15% - In class exercises (and participation)**
Group and/or individual exercises will be assigned; the aim of the exercises is to apply key concepts from readings and cases presented in class to similar examples and real-life problems that students should be able to critically analyze. Detailed instruction for exercises will be given prior to the tasks.
Grading will also take into consideration the active (and meaningful) participation of students in class discussions.

**20% - Mid-term exam, closed-book**

**35% Final paper or closed book final exam**
Writing a final paper is particularly recommended for students whose thesis topic is closely connected to the material covered in this class.
An outline of the final paper should be submitted in week 8. The outline follows the structure of a research proposal, in that it should serve to:
- identify the context of the research problem
- present a preliminary account of the literature on the topic, including its gaps and limitations
- identify the research question(s)
- provide (preliminary) examples, cases, data for analysis
- show the intended contribution of the paper to the existing scholarship on the topic

Following consultation with the course instructor on the outline, students can decide whether to submit a final paper or to sit for a closed book final exam, covering the entire course material.

Length of the paper: 2500 - 3000 words, depending on the topic. The final paper is based on the submitted outline and on the feedback received on the outline. Further guidelines for the
final paper will be provided in due time. The deadline for the final paper will be agreed upon in class.

**Final exam, closed-book**
The exam will include 1) a few questions that require very brief answers on definitions or basic concepts and 2) one analytical question that refers to more than one concept. You will have a choice between two options for the analytical question and your answer is supposed to be a concise, well written essay (you can use examples in the essay that are not only based on the assigned readings). Your answers will have to incorporate a tight argument while evaluating different positions from the scholarly literature.
The exam is a closed book test. Course-related materials, reading notes and the like will not be admitted.
The final exam will take place in week 12.
Course-related books on library reserve:


**Recommended online readings**

These are all short, easy to read articles meant to give you a flavor of political communication questions and approaches; they are meant to be read throughout the course but it would be useful to go through as many as you can and especially the first three for the first week. They also give you an idea of interesting online sources for debates relevant to this the field, not necessarily academic ones. The list will be updated as the course progresses.

[http://voices.ansa-eap.net/2010/12/media-government-accountability-and.html](http://voices.ansa-eap.net/2010/12/media-government-accountability-and.html)


[http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/ideas/tim-de-lisle/can-guardian-survive?page=full](http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/ideas/tim-de-lisle/can-guardian-survive?page=full)
COURSE STRUCTURE AND MANDATORY READINGS

Note:
The mandatory readings may be changed as the course goes along depending on the kind of interests that exist among the students; the order of the topics might also be subject to variations. At all times, students will find the most up-to-date version of the syllabus on the e-learning site.
Recommended readings for specific topics will be provided during the term. They will include scholarly review pieces, classic and state-of-the art scholarly research, theoretically or practically relevant non-academic research, opinion, and discussion pieces as fitting.

WEEK 1: Political Communication. Key issues in a fast changing world


WEEK 2: Media influence. A history lesson with an eye on today


EXERCISE

WEEK 3: Framing. Learning


**WEEK 4: Message and Messenger. Negativity, advertising, information, mobilization**


**EXERCISE**

**WEEK 5: Media roles and structure. History and contemporary challenges**


or


**EXERCISE**

**WEEK 6: Biases. Partisanship, Polarization, Misinformation**

Jennifer Jerit and Jason Barabas. 2012. ‘Partisan Perceptual Bias and the Information Environment’ in *Journal of Politics*, 74, pp. 672-84


**EXERCISE**

**Week 7: ‘Deliberative systems’ of contemporary democracies: deliberation and everyday political talk**


**Week 8: Political discussion networks offline and online. Selective exposure and its complications**

Jennifer Brundidge, 2010. Encountering ‘difference’ in the contemporary public sphere: the contribution of the Internet to the heterogeneity of political discussion networks, in *Journal of Communication* 60, pp. 680-700


**Week 9: Political discussion and media as complementary sources of political influences**


Hardy, Bruce W. and Dietram A. Scheufele. 2009. ‘Presidential Campaign Dynamics and the Ebb and Flow of Talk as a Moderator: Media Exposure, Knowledge, and Political Discussion’ in *Communication Theory*, 19, pp. 89-101

Week 10: “Here comes everybody”… or not. Citizens, mass media and political actors in the digital age


Week 11: Citizens, mass media and political actors in election campaigns. A review of key issues in political communication


or


Or


Week 12: The study of political communication in the era of new information and communication technologies

