UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
Department of Politics and International Relations

Media, Public Opinion, and Politics
Optional subject for the MPhil in Politics
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Course Scope
This course covers the functions, principles, theories, conceptual tools, and methods used for understanding the role of media in politics and policy. It explores the role of mediated communications by political actors, media firms, and individuals in both traditional and digital media, its roles in the development of public opinion, the role of media in images and perceptions of public figures and policies, its use and effects in elections, and how media constrain and compel policy.

Specific Course Aims
The course is intended to sharpen students’ understanding of processes and functions of media in politics and government, elucidate theories and effects of media on public opinion and political processes, develop understanding of the practice and impact of political communication, mature appreciation of factors influencing news provision, advance comprehension of the roles played by media in various political and governmental undertakings, and to critically evaluate media performance in relation to politics and society.

Learning Outcomes
Students who complete this course should be able to:

- Compare and contrast uses and impact of media in politics and political activity in different settings
- Assess application of the range of theories and methodologies in the field of political communication
- Critically evaluate the uses and effects of media on political processes and citizens
- Apply theories and principles to developments and trends involving countries, levels of governance, and issues of interest to them

Course Topics
1. Roles, functions and influences of media on political communications
2. Effects of media on public opinion and political processes
3. Comparative political communication systems
4. Professionalism of media and politics
5. Media, political communications and elections
6. Media, political socialization and political behaviour
7. Media and foreign policy, security and conflict
8. Media, social movements and democratization
Course Delivery
The course will be taught in eight two-hour sessions including lectures, mini-lectures, discussions, and group application exercises.

Students will be required to produce 2 essays of about 2500 words each. One essay will be a reflection about one of the course topics, while the second will be literature review and research proposal investigating media and politics. The second assignment gives students freedom to choose the topic, context, and methods and show mastery of literature and ability to apply theory and principles to contemporary issues.

Assessment
Formal assessment will take place with a three-hour examination.

Relevant Journals
European Journal of Communication
International Journal of Press/Politics
International Journal of Public Opinion Research
Journal of Communication
Media, War & Conflict
Political Communication
Public Opinion Quarterly

Recommended readings for the whole course
McNair, Brian. 2007. An introduction to political communication. 4th ed.. London: Routledge.
Session Topics and Bibliographies

1. Roles, functions and influences of media on political communications
The first session presents an overview roles, functions, and influences of media and main themes and recent research in the study of political communications.

Questions for discussion:
What are the roles and functions of media in society and politics?
What factors influence media and news production (ideological, societal, individual, organization)?
How do media act as gatekeepers?
What are the rationales for media independence and media control?

Essential Readings:

Further Readings:

2. Effects of media on public opinion and political processes
This session explores how media affect and build public opinion about political issues and developments and how choices and portrayals of issues affects the ways they are perceived.

Questions for discussion:
What roles to media play in setting political agendas?
How do media framing affect public perceptions of issues and developments
How does content of media influence cognitive reactions?
To what extent do media influence public opinion?
Are the media as powerful as perceived?

Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


McCombs, Max and Donald Shaw (1972) 'The agenda setting function of the mass media', Public Opinion Quarterly 36: 176-187.


3. Comparative Political Communication Systems
The second session provides a comparative, cross-national overview over media systems in different countries and the roles that media play in the political systems of developed democracies.

Questions for discussion:
How are media similar and different in different systems?
What are the fundamentals of comparative political communications?
How does political parallelism affect communication?
What is the role of media and political professionalism in systems?

Essential Readings:
Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 2012(eds.) Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World. New York: Cambridge University Press.(Ch 1, 13)

Further Readings:
4. Professionalism of Media and Politics
This session explores the increasing role of media in politics in developed democracies and the response of other political actors to that development.

**Questions for discussion:**
What are the characteristics of the relationship between media and politics in post-modern democracies?
How has mediatization affected politics? What are its logics?
How do political image management and spin doctors after media portrayals of politics?
How and why has the focus of politics shifted from parties to political individuals?

**Essential Readings:**

**Further Readings:**
Iyengar, A. (2001) The method is the message: The current state of political communication research. Political communication, 18(2), 225-229
5. Media, Political Communications and Elections
This session focuses on the use of media and other forms of communications and their effects on elections

Questions for discussion:
What is the media logic in coverage of campaigns?
What are the characteristics of election coverage in post-modern democracies?
What roles do campaign communications play in elections?
How does media coverage affecting voting behaviour?

Essential Readings:

Further Readings:
6. Media, Political Socialization and Political Behaviour

This session focuses on how the public experiences and engages with politics and the influences of media on those interactions.

Questions for discussion:

- How do media socialize the public toward politics?
- How do media affect knowledge and interpretation of politics?
- To what extent are trust, cynicism, and participation influenced by media?
- Does the type of news affect public behaviour?

Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


7. Media and the politics of international conflict and foreign policy

Questions for discussion:
What roles to media play in foreign policy and public diplomacy?
What do secrecy, censorship, and propaganda affect coverage and public perceptions?
What are the effects of international broadcasters on foreign policy making, public diplomacy and conflicts?
What are the roles of media and common features of coverage of conflicts?

Essential Readings:


Nohrstedt, Stig A and Ottosen, Rune (2010) Brothers in arms or peace? The Media Images of Swedish and Norwegian Defence- and Military Co-operation In Conflict & Communication online October 2010

Further Readings:


8. Media, social movements and democratization

This session focuses on the roles of media and digital media in populist political movements and democratization processes.

Questions for discussion:
What roles do media and communications play as organizing and mobilization tools?
Does the interactive power of digital media and social networks alter politics?
What is the role of media in transitions to democracy?

Essential Readings:


Further Readings:
