Fall 2021: GOVT 3294, Post Truth Politics

Instructor: Dr. Alexandra Cirone, aec287@cornell.edu

*This is a web version of the syllabus, minus Cornell-specific administrative information; for a full version please email me.

Misinformation is now a feature of modern politics, but to what extent does fake news interfere with our ability to separate fact from fiction? This major seminar will look at the historical antecedents of fake news, and the foundations of modern day free speech, before covering how unprecedented access to information via digital content, the internet, and social media has changed our current news consumption. It will also survey academic studies in political behavior that analyze both how individuals consume political information from social media, and how partisanship and polarization are making the problem worse. It will also cover how fake news works in other parts of the world, in both developing and non-developing regimes. The course will conclude by discussing the nascent policy solutions to combat the spread of fake news. Students will engage these issues using analytical writing, group projects, and structured debates. Through readings, discussions, guest speakers, and written assignments, students will learn how to better evaluate evidence when it comes to misinformation.[1]

20TH CENTURY HEADLINES
REWRITTEN TO GET MORE CLICKS

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[1] Note: "Post-Truth Politics" is the lecture version of the class; this course is sometimes offered as a senior seminar Gov4000: *The Truth About Fake News*

REQUIREMENTS

Generally, students are required to attend all class meetings, to come to seminar having read and thought about the assigned material for the week, and to participate actively in class activities. I will not take formal attendance but consistent attendance is expected, if a student misses more than 3 classes without prior consultation with the professor, the overall class grade will decrease by a third of a grade. (That being said, if there are personal, pandemic, or health issues during the semester, see me right away and we can work out a solution!).

Note that class which involve guest speakers, debates, or documentaries will be held on Zoom. These dates are clearly marked in the syllabus, and (like other class meetings) are mandatory. Masks are required for in-person class, per University policy.

Note: If you have any symptoms or feel ill in any way – <u>DO NOT PHYSICALLY COME TO CLASS.</u> Email me and we will find a solution so you don't get behind; this term, accommodations will always be given for illness and potential illness.

The grade will be composed of the following elements:

20%	**Short Paper I**	**Sept 16**
20%	**Short Paper II**	**Oct 21**
10%	**Debate Prep**	**Nov 4**
20%	**Group Presentation**	**Nov 23**
30%	**Final Paper**	**Dec 20**

Topics for the papers will be posted on Canvas, well in advance of the due date. Papers are due to be submitted electronically <u>by 11:59 pm on the due date.</u>

I will assign groups and topic for the group presentation in class, and assignment instructions will be posted on Canvas. I will grade each group's presentation, and also collect assessments from each student about each member's input, which will factor into the grade. Group presentations must be emailed by <u>10am on Nov 23</u> (the day of the presentations).

Debate Prep is due by <u>11:59pm the day before the debate, so Nov 3.</u>

Schedule

	Date	Topic	Details
Th	Aug 26	Introduction	
T	Aug 31	Foundations	
Th	Sept 2	Fake News in History	
T	Sept 7	Modern Misinformation	
Th	Sept 9	Social Media Platforms	
T	Sept 14	Sharing (And Believing) Fake News I	
Th	Sept 16	Sharing (And Believing) Fake News II	**Short Paper 1 Due**
T	Sept 21	US Election 2016	
Th	Sept 23	US Insurrection 2021	
T	Sept 28	*Documentary [Zoom]*	
Th	Sept 30	*Guest Speaker [Zoom]*	
T	Oct 5	Polarization and Identity Politics	
Th	Oct 7	Fake News and Covid-19	
T	Oct 12	**NO CLASS (Fall Break)**	
Th	Oct 14	Political Behavior I	
T	Oct 19	Political Behavior II	
Th	Oct 21	Free Speech I	**Short Paper 2 Due**
T	Oct 26	Free Speech II	
Th	Oct 28	Conspiracy Theories	
T	Nov 2	**NO CLASS**	
Th	Nov 4	*Rapid Fire Debate [Zoom]*	**Debate Prep Due**
T	Nov 9	Authoritarian Regimes	
Th	Nov 11	*Documentary [Zoom]*	

Schedule (Continued)

	Date	Topic	Details
T	Nov 16	Challenges to Democracy	
Th	Nov 18	#Hashtag Activism	
T	Nov 23	Group Presentations [Zoom]	**Presentations Due**
Th	Nov 25	**NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)**	
T	Nov 30	AI and Deepfakes	
Th	Dec 2	Policy Solutions	
Th	Dec 7	The Way Forward	
	Dec 20	**Final Paper Due**	

Readings

See below for required books (some of which can also be accessed online). All other readings are academic journal articles, newspaper articles, chapters, or reports that will be posted on Canvas.

1. Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey and Brooke Foucault Welles. 2020. *#HashtagActivism*. Networks of Race and Gender Justice. MIT Press.

2. Sunstein, Cass. 2017. *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press.

3. Aral, Sinan. 2020. *The Hype Machine*. Currency Press.

4. Merlan, Anna. 2019. *Republic of Lies.* Metropolitan Books

5. Settle, Jamie. 2018. *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America.* Cambridge University Press.

August 26: Introduction

August 31: Foundations

Lazer, David M. J., Baum, Matthew A., Benkler, Yochai, Berinsky, Adam J., Greenhill, Kelly M., Menczer, Filippo, Metzger, Miriam J., et al. (2018). "The Science of Fake News." *Science,* 359 (6380): 1094–96.

Tucker et al, (2018). "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature." https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social-Media-Political-Polarization-and-Political-Disinformation-Literature-Review.pdf. Pages 1-29.

"How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps", Amelia Hoover Green. https://www.ameliahoovergreen.com/uploads/9/3/0/9/93091546/howtoread.pdf

September 2: Fake News in History

*Lapham's Quarterly Special Issue: A History of Fake News. (*2018). Read Woolf and Plato excerpts.

Tworek, Heidi. (2021). "Disinformation: It's History." https://www.cigionline.org/articles/disinformation-its-history/

Stepman, Jarret. "The History of Fake News in the United States." Daily Signal. Link: https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/01/01/the-history-of-fake-news-in-the-united-states/

September 7: Modern Misinformation

Hype Machine, Chapters 1-3

Jungherr, A., Rivero, G., & Gayo-Avello, D. (2020). "The Flow of Political Information". *In Retooling Politics: How Digital Media Are Shaping Democracy* (pp. 30-68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

September 9: Social Media Platforms

Settle, J. (2018). *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Guess, A., Aslett, K., Tucker, J., Bonneau, R., & Nagler, J. (2021). "Cracking Open the News Feed: Exploring What U.S. Facebook Users See and Share with Large-Scale Platform Data." *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media*, 1.

September 14: Sharing (And Believing) Fake News I

Osmundsen, M., Bor, A., Vahlstrup, P., Bechmann, A., & Petersen, M. (2021). "Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter." *American Political Science Review, 115*(3), 999-1015.

Guess, Andrew, Nagler, Jonathan, and Tucker, Joshua. (2019). "Less Than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook." *Science Advances* 5 (1).

September 16: Sharing (And Believing) Fake News II

Gordon Pennycook, David G. Rand, (2021), "The Psychology of Fake News," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences,* Volume 25, Issue 5, pages 388-402.

Buchanan, T. (2020), "Why do people spread false information online? The effects of message and viewer characteristics on self-reported likelihood of sharing social media disinformation." *PLoS ONE* 15(10).

September 21: US Election 2016

Hype Machine, Chapter 2

Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow. (2017). "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 31, Number 2—Spring 2017—Pages 211–236

Guess, A.M., Nyhan, B. & Reifler, J. (2020). "Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election." *Nature Human Behavior, 4***,** 472–480.

Skim: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fake-news-web-sites-may-not-have-a-major-effect-on-elections/

September 23: US Insurrection 2021

Adam M. Enders, Joseph E. Uscinski, Casey A. Klofstad, Kamal Premaratne, Michelle I. Seelig, Stefan Wuchty, Manohar N. Murthi, John R. Funchion, (2021). The 2020 presidential election and beliefs about fraud: Continuity or change?, *Electoral Studies,* Volume 72,.

Tucker et al, 2018. "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature." Hewlett Foundation. Pages 49-52

September 28: Personalization and Micro-targeting

Hype Machine, Chapter 6

#Republic, Chapter 1

Documentary: The Great Hack [We will start in class]

October 5: Polarization and Identity Politics

Barberá, P. (2020). Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization. In N. Persily & J. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mason, Lilliana. (2016). "A Cross Cutting Calm: How Social Sorting Drives Affective Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly.* Volume 80, Issue S1, 2016, Pages 351–377.

Skim: Mason, L., Wronski, J., & Kane, J. (2021). Activating Animus: The Uniquely Social Roots of Trump Support. A*merican Political Science Review,* 1-9.

#Republic, Chapter 3

October 7: Fake News and Covid-19

Swire-Thompson, B. and Lazer, D. (2020). Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 41:1, 433-451

Gadarian SK, Goodman SW, Pepinsky TB. (2021). "Partisanship, health behavior, and policy attitudes in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic." *PLoS ONE* 16(4).

Kreps, SE and Kriner, DL. (2020). "Model uncertainty, political contestation, and public trust in science: Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic." Science Advances, October 2020: EABD4563

October 12: No Class

October 14: Political Behavior I

Hype Machine, Chapter 4

Flynn, DJ; Nyhan, B, and Reifler, J. (2017). "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics." *Advances in Political Psychology, 38:1.*

October 19: Political Behavior II

Nathan Walter & Nikita A. Salovich, (2021) Unchecked vs. Uncheckable: How Opinion-Based Claims Can Impede Corrections of Misinformation, Mass Communication and Society, 24:4, 500-526.

Nyhan, B. (2021). "Why the backfire effect does not explain the durability of political misperceptions," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Apr 2021, 118 (15).

October 21: Free Speech I

#Republic, Chapters 7-8

October 26: Free Speech II

Warburton, Nigel. (2009). Free Speech: a Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1, 2 and Chapter 5. [Note: the entire book is available online, through Cornell library.]

October 28: Conspiracy Theories

Republic of Lies, Chapters 1-2, 10

Enders, A.M., Uscinski, J.E., Seelig, M.I. et al. (2021). "The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation." *Polit Behav*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09734-6

November 2: No class

November 4: Rapid Fire Debate (no readings)

November 9: Authoritarian Regimes

King, Gary; Jennifer Pan and Margaret Roberts. (2013). "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *Annual Review of Political Science.*

Chapman, H. S. (2021). Shoring Up Autocracy: Participatory Technologies and Regime Support in Putin's Russia. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*(8), 1459–1489.

November 11: Documentary, "Under the Sun"

https://www.npr.org/2016/07/08/484945860/the-making-of-a- propaganda-film-in-under-the-sun

https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/22/asia/north-korea-propaganda/ index.html

November 16: Challenges to Democracy

Tucker, Joshua A., Theocharis, Yannis, Roberts, Margaret E., and Barberá, Pablo. (2017). "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (4): 46–59.

Hype Machine, Chapter 11

November 18: #HashtagActivism

#HashtagActivism: Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 5, Conclusion

November 23: Group Presentations (no readings)

November 30: AI and Deepfakes

Barari, S., Lucas, C., & Munger, K. (2021, January 13). "Political Deepfakes Are As Credible As Other Fake Media And (Sometimes) Real Media." https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/cdfh3

Vaccari, Cristian and Andrew Chadwick. (2020). "*Deepfakes and disinformation: Exploring the impact of synthetic political video on deception, uncertainty, and trust in news.*" Social Media+ Society 6(1).

December 2: Policy Solutions

Readings TBD

December 7: The Way Forward

Readings TBD