

DEMOCRACY AND DISINFORMATION (GLBL SXXX)

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Syllabus

Overview of Course

This course explores the evolution of information warfare as a national security threat to the United States. Beginning with the KGB's use of "active measures" during the Cold War, the course looks at how propaganda and disinformation campaigns became central to the Putin regime and how social media has facilitated their expansion and impact. Using Russia's efforts in the 2016 election as an example, students will examine how the First Amendment places limitations on the U.S.'s ability to counter such operations in the United States and explore how strengthening critical thinking and American social capital might be effective prophylactics against these efforts.

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the history, tactics, and goals of Russian disinformation operations in the United States and worldwide;
2. Analyze the ways in which propaganda and disinformation manipulates consumers' cognitive biases;
3. Recognize self-created vulnerabilities in American society which have been magnified by social media platforms and exploited by Russian intelligence;
4. Develop policy solutions that address the multi-faceted nature of disinformation and its impact on American democracy.

Required Texts (in order of reading for the course)

1. George Orwell, *1984*
2. Amy Chua, *Political Tribes*
3. Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)*
4. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*
5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
6. Clint Watts, *Messing with the Enemy*

In addition to the books above, assigned articles, videos, and selected chapters of other books will be posted on Canvas for the weeks they are assigned.

Course Expectations

I expect you to read the assigned materials and participate in class discussions. Class attendance is mandatory. If you will not be able to attend a class, please let me know in advance by email.

Your grade in this class will be based on four components criteria: (1) class participation; (2) a weekly three-page analysis of how news is presented in various “media bubbles”; (3) one 5-page paper and (4) a final 10 page policy paper offering recommendations to address the impact of disinformation on U.S. democracy.

(1) Class Participation (20% of overall grade)

This class is a seminar with relatively small enrollment. Active participation is necessary to maintain an interesting, lively, and productive discussion. Therefore, your level of class participation will constitute a meaningful percentage of your overall grade. Level of expertise is not the test, but rather, level of interest, engagement, and effort.

(2) Media Bubble Analysis (20% of overall grade)

One of the goals in the class is to understand the different “realities” that Americans inhabit as a result of the news they consume. Using a map of news outlets that fall along various points of the political spectrum (which I will hand out in class, so we are all working off the same thing), you will compare two “zones” to analyze (for example, alt-right, moderate left, centrist, etc.). If you choose a print outlet in your assigned zone you should aim to read 4-6 news articles from that outlet; if you choose a TV outlet you should watch 30 minutes of news. You will provide a summary and analysis of the leading stories, the way they are framed, and whether and how they use disinformation/propaganda techniques in their reporting. We will use these analyses to compare different political bubbles at the beginning of each class session and how they contribute to the disinformation landscape.

(3) Short Paper (30% of overall grade)

This class will look at Russian disinformation and its role in democracy from a number of angles: historical, political, psychological, technological, and legal. Getting a grasp on the nature of the problem is critical in order to develop effective policy solutions. For the midterm, I will post a few general prompts from which you should choose one on which to write a 5-page paper. The purpose of the papers is to synthesize the readings and apply them to the broader policy context.

(4) Final Paper (30% of overall grade)

You will develop a final policy paper that explores how disinformation and social media relates to the social capital and the functioning of a healthy democracy. You will provide policy solutions that might reverse the trends that we will examine in class, taking into account the nature of Russian active measures, the psychology of disinformation, and the limits on regulation imposed by the First Amendment.

NOTE ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Please familiarize yourself with the University's policy on cheating, plagiarism, and documentation. It is your responsibility to understand and abide by this policy. If you do not understand or are uncertain about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please ask. Any cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported directly to the appropriate dean, and documented plagiarism will result in a complete loss of credit on the assignment.

Reading Assignments (Additional Video Lectures TBD after editing)

Week 1. Active Measures by the KGB in the Cold War

Class 1: What Are Active Measures and Why Are They a Threat?

- **Video:** Yuri Bezmenov, Psychological Warfare Subversion & Control of Western Society
- *Bowling Alone* Ch. 1

Class 2: Psychological Warfare and the Cold War

- House Intelligence Committee Hearings on Soviet Active Measures, p. 1-56
- Russian Reflexive Control

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS DUE

Week 2. Active Measures in Putin's Russia

Class 3: Putin and the Gerasimov Doctrine

- PBS Frontline: *Putin's Revenge*, Parts 1 and 2
- Gerasimov Doctrine
- Selected articles on Canvas

Class 4: Russia and the 2016 Election

- Movie: *Active Measures*
- Indictments by DOJ Special Counsel against Russian entities
- Guest Speaker: (Malcolm Nance, author of *The Plot to Destroy Democracy*)

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS DUE

Week 3. The Psychology of Propaganda

Class 5

- *1984*
- *Political Tribes*, Ch. 5
- Selected articles on Canvas

Class 6

- Video: Can U.S. Democracy Survive Disinformation?
- *Mistakes Were Made*, Ch 1-3, 8
- Guest Speaker (Caroline Orr, Behavior Psychologist)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE

Week 4. Social Media and Social Capital

Class 7: Civic Engagement and the Development of Social Capital

- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 1-8
- *Democracy in America*, Selected Chapters

Class 8: Social Media, Tribalism, and Echo Chambers

- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 9-15
- *Messing with the Enemy*, Ch. 4-7, Ch. 9

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS DUE

Week 5. Disinformation and Democracy

Class 9 (Nov. 14): Propaganda, Transparency, and the First Amendment

- Transcripts from hearings on Freedom Academy
- *Messing With the Enemy*, Ch. 8
- Selected articles on Canvas

Class 10: Can Social Media Promote Bridging and Civic Engagement?

- *Political Tribes*, Ch. 7-8
- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 21-24
- Schoolhouse Rock videos

FINAL PAPERS DUE