

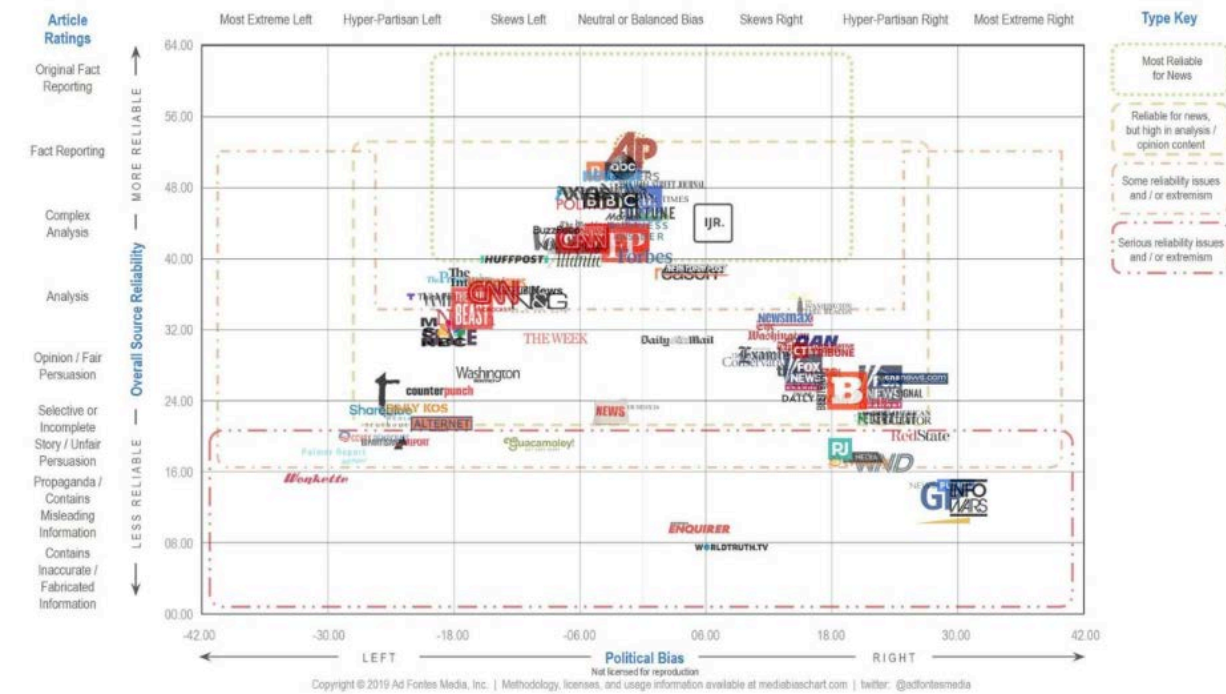
DEMOCRACY AND DISINFORMATION (GLBL S343E)

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Yale Jackson Institute for Global Affairs

Summer 2021

Syllabus



You can access the latest version of the Media Bias Chart [here \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

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 U.S. elections as an example, students will examine how the First Amendment places limitations on the United States' ability to counter such operations 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. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*
2. Amy Chua, *Political Tribes*
3. Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)*
4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (selected chapters will be posted on Canvas)
5. Clint Watts, *Messing with the Enemy*

You may use the link below to order your books at the Yale Bookstore: [Yale Bookstore ordering site \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

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, watch the pre-recorded lecture videos, 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 analysis of how various "media bubbles" employ techniques to exploit basic cognitive processes to push or defend distinct political agendas; (3) one mid-term paper and (4) a final policy paper offering recommendations to address the impact of disinformation on U.S. democracy.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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 \(Links to an external site.\)](#). 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 and reading assignments available under Modules. Please complete the readings and view the video lectures prior to each class.

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

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

- *Bowling Alone* Ch. 1
- Video: Yuri Bezmenov - Soviet subversion doctrine
- Video: NYTimes—Russia Disinformation Fake News
- Video: NYTimes—The Worldwide War on Truth
- Video: NYTimes—The Seven Commandments of Fake News

Class 2: Psychological Warfare and the Cold War

- *Hearings on Soviet Active Measures* (House Intelligence Committee), p. 1-56
- *Joint Publication 3-13.4: Military Deception*
- "Russian Reflexive Control" (Thomas, Journal of Slavic Military Studies)
- "How Barr and Trump Use a Russian Disinformation Tactic" (Rangappa, NYTimes)

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS 1 DUE NLT JUNE 11 AT 17:00

Week 2. Active Measures in Putin's Russia

Class 3: Putin and the Gerasimov Doctrine

- *GEC Special Report: Russia's Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda* (State Department)
- "Putin's Real Long Game" (McKew, POLITICO Magazine)
- "Gerasimov Doctrine" (McKew, POLITICO Magazine)
- "The Value of Science is in the Foresight" (Gerasimov, Military Review)
- "Russia's Active Measures Architecture: Task and Purpose" (Watts, Alliance for Securing Democracy)
- Movie: PBS Frontline—*Putin's Revenge*, Parts 1 and 2

Class 4: Russia and US Elections

- Podcast: Lawfare—*The Mueller Report, Episode II*
- *Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 Election, Vol. II: Russia's Use of Social Media with Additional Views* (SSCI, US Senate)
- Criminal Complaint, Khusyaynova
- *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections* (National Intelligence Council)
- Movie: *Active Measures* (available in "Course Reserves" tab on Canvas)

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS 2 DUE NLT JUNE 18 AT 17:00

Week 3. The Psychology of Disinformation

Class 5

- "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions" (Flynn, Nyhan, Reifler)
- *Mistakes Were Made*, Ch 1-3, 8
- *Political Tribes*, Ch. 5
- Movie: *The Brainwashing of My Dad* (available in "Course Reserves" tab on Canvas)

Class 6

- "Moral Outrage in the Digital Age" (Crockett)
- "Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks" (Brady, Willis, Jost, Tucker and Van Bavel)
- "What Emotion on Twitter Goes Viral the Fastest?" (Shaer, Smithsonian Magazine)
- "Even If It's 'Bonkers,' Poll Finds Many Believe QAnon And Other Conspiracy Theories" (NPR)
- "What is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?" (Roose, NYTimes)
- "Racism Makes Me Question Everything. I Got the Vaccine Anyway" (Young, NYTimes)
- Guest speaker: Ali Soufan

MIDTERM PAPER DUE NLT JUNE 25 AT 17:00

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
- "Russian Influence Campaign Sought To Exploit Americans' Trust In Local News" (Mak and Berry, NPR)
- "How to Put Out Democracy's Dumpster Fire" (Applebaum and Pomerantsev, The Atlantic)

Class 8: Social Media, Tribalism, and Echo Chambers

- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 9-15
- *Messing with the Enemy*, Ch. 4-7, Ch. 9
- "Split Screen: How Different Are Americans' Facebook Feeds?" (NYTimes)
- "A Close-Up Picture of Partisan Segregation, Among 180 Million Voters" (NYTimes)
- "The Pandemic Has Erased Entire Categories of Friendship" (The Atlantic)

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS 3 DUE NLT JULY 2 AT 17:00

Week 5. Disinformation and Democracy

Class 9: Propaganda, Transparency, and the First Amendment

- *The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA): A Legal Overview* (Brown, CRS)
- "U.S.-based Russian news outlet registers as foreign agent" (Layne, Reuters)
- "How Facebook Changed the Spy Game" (Rangappa, POLITICO Magazine)
- Movie: *The Social Dilemma* (available in "Course Reserves" tab on Canvas)

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

- *Political Tribes*, Ch. 7-8
- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 21-24
- "A Republic of Front Porches" (Deneen, Front Porch Republic)
- "Self-Interest Well-Understood: A Doctrine in Need of Revival" (Weil, *The World Mind*)
- Schoolhouse Rock videos
- "A Conversation with FBI Director Wray and National Security Lawyers on Civic Education as a National Security Imperative" (CSIS)

FINAL PAPERS DUE JULY 9 NLT 11:59 PM