DISINFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY (GLBL S343E)
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Yale Jackson Institute for Global Affairs
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DRAFT SYLLABUS

Section I: 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. We will examine the psychology of disinformation, and how media "bubbles" and micro-targeting using aggregated data exacerbate cognitive biases and political polarization in the United States. Using Russia's efforts in the 2016 election as an example, students will explore potential policy solutions in the realm of Internet regulation, civic education, media literacy, and strengthening American "social capital."

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. Assess the potential effects of disinformation on democratic institutions and social trust; and
5. 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. Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation*
2. Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone
3. Renee DiResta, *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies Into Reality*
4. Amy Chua*, Political Tribes*
5. Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)*

You may use the link below to order your books at the Yale Bookstore: Yale Bookstore ordering siteLinks 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.

Additional/Recommended Readings

The following books are not required for this course, but may be useful as research for your final paper or if you'd like to expand your knowledge of the subject beyond this course. (I will continue to add to this reading list throughout the course.)

1. David Shimer, *Rigged: America, Russia, and 100 years of Covert Electoral Interference*
2. Tim Weiner, *The Folly and the Glory: America, Russia, and Political Warfare 1945-2020*
3. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*
4. Cindy Otis, *True or False: A CIA Analyst's Guide to Spotting Fake News*
5. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
6. Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works*
7. Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*
8. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*
9. Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Let Them Eat Tweets*
10. Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue for President*
11. Peter Strzok, *Counterintelligence and the Threat of Donald Trump*
12. Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*
13. Kapil Komareddi, *Malevolent Republic*
14. Jim Sciutto, *The Shadow War: Inside Russia and China's Secret Operations to Defeat America*
15. Seth G. Jones, *Three Dangerous Men: Russia, China, Iran, and the Rise of Irregular Warfare*
16. Gordon Corera, *Russians Among Us*
17. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*
18. Jeffrey Toobin, *Homegrown: Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Nationalism*
19. David Satter, *The Less You Know the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin*

You may also be interested in the following movies and series (some of which are just tangentially related to Russia or intelligence and tradecraft):

1. *Chernobyl* (HBO)
2. *Putin's Kiss* (Netflix)
3. *Icarus* (Netflix)
4. *The Dictator's Playbook* (PBS)
5. *The Americans* (Netflix)
6. *TURN: Washington's Spies* (Netflix)
7. *After Truth* (HBO)
8. *Divide and Conquer: The Story of Roger Ailes* (Amazon)
9. *How to Become a Tyrant* (Netflix)
10. *The Kingmaker* (Amazon)

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 <u>meaningful </u>percentage of your overall grade. Level of expertise is not the test, but rather, level of interest, engagement, and effort. In addition to general discussion with the full class, there will be other avenues for participation. At the beginning of each class, students will join breakout rooms to discuss the day's readings/videos, guided by the focus questions for that day. Reporting on your group's discussion could be a way to participate. In addition, you will be asked to summarize one of your media bubble analyses during the course.

- **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 the following class session and how they contribute to the disinformation landscape. Response length should be 1-2 pages.

- **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.

Office Hours
Office hours are available by appointment at the links below. To accommodate those of you based in other time zones, appointments also available by request—just email us.

NOTE ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Please familiarize yourself with the <u>University's policy on cheating, plagiarism, and documentation</u>. 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. *Collaboration with ChatGPT or other AI composition software is not permitted in this course.* **Any cases of suspected collaboration with ChatGPT or other AI software will result in a complete loss of credit on the assignment.**

Section II: Reading Assignments
Additional video lectures and reading assignments available under Modules. Please complete the readings and view the video lectures prior to each class.

<u>**Week I. Active Measures by the KGB in the Cold War**</u>
Class 1: What Are Active Measures and Why Are They a Threat?
- *Active Measures*, Intro, Ch. 22
- *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
- *Active Measures*, Ch. 4-6, 9-10
- *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)
- Was modern art a weapon of the CIA?" (Sooke, *BBC*)
- "Unpopular Front: American Art and the Cold War" (Menand, *The New Yorker*)
- "How Barr and Trump Use a Russian Disinformation Tactic" (Rangappa, NYTimes)

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS 1 DUE NLT MAY 30 AT 17:00 ET

Week 2. Active Measures in Putin's Russia

Class 3: Putin and the Gerasimov Doctrine
- *Active Measures,* Ch. 24-27
- *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
- *Active Measures*, Ch. 28-30
- *Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 Election, Vol. II: Russia's Use of Social Media with Additional Views* (SSCI, US Senate)
- Mueller IRA Indictment
- DOJ Criminal Complaint, *U.S. v. Khusyaynova*
- "Inside the Russian Troll Factory: Zombies and a Breakneck Pace" (Neil MacFarquhar, *NYTimes*)
- *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections* (National Intelligence Council)
- DOJ Criminal Complaints, U.S. v. Kalashnikov and Afanasyeva, U.S. v. Certain Domains
- *Lawfare* Podcast, *The Report*, Episodes 1 and 2

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS 2 DUE NLT JUNE 6 AT 17:00 ET

Week 3: Social Media and Social Trust
Class 5: Civic Engagement and the Development of Social Capital
- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 2-8
- *Democracy in America*, selected chapters
- "The Pandemic Has Erased Entire Categories of Friendship" (*The Atlantic*)

Class 6: Disinformation and the Marketplace of Ideas

- *Invisible Rulers*, Ch. TBA
- "The Propaganda Feedback Loop" (Benkler and Roberts, *Oxford Scholarship Online*)
- "The False Dream of a Neutral Facebook" (Madrigal, *The Atlantic*)
- "Split Screen: How Different Are Americans' Facebook Feeds?" (*The Markup*)
- "Facebook is an Authoritarian State" (La France, *The Atlantic*)
- Movie: *Tik Tok Boom* (PBS)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE NLT JUNE 13 AT 17:00 ET

Week 4. The Psychology of Disinformation

Class 7: The Psychology of Propaganda

- "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 8: The Psychology of Propaganda cont'd
- "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)
- "Facebook Tried to Make Its Platform a Healthier Place. It Got Angrier Instead." (Hagey and Horowitz, *The Wall Street Journal*)
- "Five points for anger, one for a 'like': How Facebook's formula fostered rage and misinformation" (Merrill and Oremus, *The Washington Post*)
- "Facebook Papers: 'History Will Not Judge Us Kindly'" (LaFrance, *The Atlantic*)
- Movie: *The Social Dilemma (Netflix)*

MEDIA BUBBLE ANALYSIS 3 DUE NLT JUNE 20 AT 17:00 ET

Week 5. Disinformation and Democracy

Class 9: Technology and Social Capital
- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 9-15
- "Is Facebook making Us Lonely?" (Marche, *The Atlantic*)

Class 10: Can Social Media Promote Bridging and Civic Engagement?
- *Political Tribes*, Ch. 7-8
- *Bowling Alone*, Ch. 21-24
- "How to Put Out Democracy's Dumpster Fire" (Applebaum and Pomerantsev, *The Atlantic*)
- "A Republic of Front Porches" (Deneen, Front Porch Republic)
- "Is the Partisan Divide Too Big to Be Bridged?" (Weisman, NYT)
- "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)
- Movie: *Join or Die* (Netflix)

FINAL PAPERS DUE JUNE 27 NLT 11:59 PM ET