



Seminar “Political Behavior and Digital Media”

University of Zurich, Fall, 2021

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Karsten Donnay (donnay@ipz.uzh.ch)

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course number: 615e539a Seminar

Overview and Objectives

This seminar introduces students to the study of political behavior on digital media in preparation for the research seminar in the spring term. The assigned readings cover topics ranging from relevant foundational work, for example, related to automated data extraction or social network analysis, to the current state-of-the-art of quantitative approaches for the study of political behavior online, including observational and experimental studies. Throughout the seminar, we critically discuss the strengths and limitations of different kinds of approaches. We will focus, in particular, on whether and how they can be leveraged to better understand the implications of online political behavior for (offline) social processes.

Course Objectives and Key Skills

- Students will develop a good understanding of the conceptual and methodological foundations and the current state of (quantitative) research on political behavior on digital media.
- They will familiarize themselves with state-of-the-art quantitative approaches, be able to evaluate their strengths and limitations and appropriately select suitable methods for their own research.

Course Times

The course takes place every Monday 14:00 – 15:45 starting on Sep. 20, 2021; the last session of the class is on Dec. 20, 2021. Note that the course is currently planned for in-person teaching but future restrictions due to COVID-19 may make it necessary again that the course moves to an online-only teaching format.

Course Assessment

The seminar is reading-based, i.e., 3-4 papers will be assigned to be read per session. Students are required to prepare three response papers throughout the term that analyze the readings of a given week in more detail. A full list of readings is provided in the course outline below.

- Response papers should be short discussion papers (max. 2 pages) that summarize the main arguments of the week’s readings, critically evaluate them and put them into context. These papers are due Friday (end of day) before each of the respective session.
- Students are encouraged to prepare these papers together – either working remotely or meeting in person – with other students assigned to the same week (if applicable) but each student is expected to hand in their own response paper.
- Students are then expected to be able to summarize the main arguments verbally and lead the in-class discussion for their session. A few slides may be used to support the in-class discussion but this is not required.



Students are further expected to prepare a detailed (quantitative) research design for a project to be carried out in the research seminar during the spring term. The deadline to submit the research design is on Thursday Dec. 23, 2021 (midnight). The proposed research should make an empirical contribution to a question in the domain of political behavior and digital media leveraging the questions, theoretical insights, quantitative methods and data discussed in class.

- There will be sessions dedicated to presenting and discussing initial research ideas and designs in weeks 10 and 11 of the term. This will leave enough time to finalize the research design before the end of the class.
- The idea for the research design has to already be formalized in a short research design note to be submitted prior to those sessions. This note will not be graded but serves as the basis for discussion of the idea for the paper; details on what is expected for the short research design note will be given in class.
- Students are expected, in addition to presenting their own idea, to also discuss the idea of one of their fellow students in the sessions in week 10 and 11 of the term and provide detailed feedback on their ideas and empirical strategies.
- The final research design is expected to expand on the initial short research design note and already cover the full motivation, prior work (i.e., a literature review), derivation of the research gap/question/hypotheses and a detailed description of the empirical strategy. Further details will be provided in class.

The course grade is then based on the response papers (with in-class presentation) (20%) and the final research design they submit at the end of the class (80%).

Communication

Email addresses of the instructors and all participants in the course are to be treated confidentially. The (virtual) classroom is the best place to raise questions which are relevant for everybody in the class. The best time to ask short questions that might not be relevant for everybody is after class. The office hours should be dedicated to discuss more in-depth questions. I strongly discourage emails about class content that could be solved in class, after class or during office hours. I would like to encourage you to contact me via email or during office hours if there is something that makes you feel uncomfortable in class or about the course.

Course Outline and Readings (* indicates additional, non-mandatory readings)

Week 1 (Sep. 20). Introduction

Farrell, Henry. (2012). "The Consequences of the Internet for Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15(1): 35–52.

Lazer, David, Alex Pentland, Lada Adamic, Sinan Aral, Albert-László Barabasi, Devon Brewer, Nicholas Christakis, Noshir Contractor, James Fowler, et al. (2009). "Computational Social Science." *Science* 323: 721–723.

Lazer, David M., Alex Pentland, Duncan J Watts, Sinan Aral, Susan Athey, Noshir Contractor, Deen Freelon, et al. (2020). "Computational Social Science: Obstacles and Opportunities." *Science* 369(6507): 1060–1062.

*Ledford, Heidi. (2020). "How Facebook, Twitter and Other Data Troves are Revolutionizing Social Science." *Nature* 582(7812): 328–330.



Part 1 – Conceptual Foundations

Week 2 (Sep. 27). Social Influence & Polarization

- Wood, Wendy. (2000). "Attitude Change: Persuasion and Social Influence." *Annual Review of Psychology* 51(1): 539–570.
- DellaPosta, Daniel, Yongren Shi & Michael Macy. (2015). "Why Do Liberals Drink Lattes?" *American Journal of Sociology* 120(5): 1473–1511.
- Bond, Robert M., Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, Adam D. I. Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jaime E. Settle & James H. Fowler. (2012). "A 61-million-person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization." *Nature* 489(7415): 295–298.
- Sunstein, Cass R. (2002). "The Law of Group Polarization." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10(2):175–195.

Week 3 (Oct. 4). Polarization & Politics

- Abramowitz, Alan I. & Kyle L. Saunders. (2008). "Is Polarization a Myth?" *The Journal of Politics* 70(2): 542–555.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra & Sean J. Westwood. (2019). "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1): 129–146.
- Martin, Gregory J. & Ali Yurukoglu. (2017). "Bias in Cable News: Persuasion and Polarization." *American Economic Review* 107(9): 2565–2599.
- Barnidge, Matthew. (2017). "Exposure to Political Disagreement in Social Media Versus Face-to-Face and Anonymous Online Settings." *Political Communication* 34(2): 302–321.

Week 4 (Oct. 11). Online Echo Chambers

- Flaxman, Seth, Sharad Goel & Justin M. Rao. (2016). "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(S1): 298–320.
- Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing & Lada Adamic. (2015). "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook." *Science* 348(6239): 1130–1132.
- Eady, Gregory, Jonathan Nagler, Andrew Guess, Jan Zilinsky & Joshua A. Tucker. (2019). "How Many People Live in Political Bubbles on Social Media? Evidence from Linked Survey and Twitter Data." *SAGE Open* 9(1): 1–21.
- Boulianne, Shelley, Karolina Koc-Michalska & Bruce Bimber. (2020). "Right-Wing Populism, Social Media and Echo Chambers in Western Democracies." *New Media & Society* 22(4): 683–699.
- *Vaccari, Cristian, Augusto Valeriani, Pablo Barberá, John T. Jost, Jonathan Nagler & Joshua A. Tucker. (2016). "Of Echo Chambers and Contrarian Clubs: Exposure to Political Disagreement Among German and Italian Users of Twitter." *Social Media + Society* 2(3): 1–24.



Week 5 (Oct. 18). Influence of (Social) Networks

- McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin & James M. Cook. (2001). "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1): 415–444.
- Mutz, Diana C. (2002). "The Consequences of Cross-Cutting Networks for Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4): 838–855.
- Fletcher, Richard & Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. (2018). "Are People Incidentally Exposed to News on Social Media? A Comparative Analysis." *New Media & Society* 20(7): 2450–2468.
- Scharkow, Michael, Frank Mangold, Sebastian Stier & Johannes Breuer. (2020). "How Social Network Sites and Other Online Intermediaries Increase Exposure to News." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117(6): 2761–2763.
- *Lazer, David, Brian Rubineau, Carol Chetkovich, Nancy Katz & Michael Neblo. (2010). "The Coevolution of Networks and Political Attitudes." *Political Communication* 27(3): 248–274.

Part 2 – Data and Methods

Week 6 (Oct. 25). Digital Media Data

- Ruths, Derek & Jürgen Pfeffer. (2014). "Social Media for Large Studies of Behavior." *Science* 192: 59–60.
- Lazer, David, Alex Pentland, Duncan Watts, Sinan Aral, Susan Athey, Noshir Contractor, Deen Freelon, Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon, Gary King, Helen Margetts, Alondra Nelson, Matthew J. Salganik, Markus Strohmaier, Alessandro Vespignani & Claudia Wagner. (2020). "Computational Social Science: Obstacles and Opportunities." *Science* 369: 1060–1062.
- Jungherr, Andreas & Yannis Theocharis. (2017). "The Empiricist's Challenge: Asking Meaningful Questions in Political Science in the Age of Big Data." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 14(2): 97–109.
- Zubiaga, Arkaitz. (2018). "A Longitudinal Assessment of the Persistence of Twitter Datasets." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 69(8): 974–984.
- *Bruns, Axel & Katrin Weller. (2016). "Twitter as a First Draft of the Present – and the Challenges of Preserving it for the Future." *WebSci '16: Proceedings of the 8th ACM Conference on Web Science*. New York, NY: ACM Press, p. 183–189.

Week 7 (Nov. 1). Text as Data

- Earl, Jennifer, Andrew Martin, John McCarthy & Sarah Soule. (2004). "The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30(1): 65–80.
- Grimmer, Justin & Brandon M. Stewart. (2013). "Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts." *Political Analysis* 21(3): 267–297.
- Barberá, Pablo, Amber E. Boydstun, Suzanna Linn, Ryan McMahon & Jonathan Nagler. (2021). "Automated Text Classification of News Articles: A Practical Guide." *Political Analysis* 29(1): 19–42.
- *Kozlowski, Austin, Matt Taddy & James A. Evans. (2019). "The Geometry of Culture: Analyzing the Meanings of Class through Word Embeddings." *American Sociological Review* 84(5): 905–949.



Week 8 (Nov. 8). Online Surveys & Experiments

Guess, Andrew, Kevin Munger, Jonathan Nagler & Joshua Tucker. (2019). "How Accurate Are Survey Responses on Social Media and Politics?" *Political Communication* 36(2): 241–258.

Boas, Taylor C., Dino P. Christenson & David M. Glick. (2020). "Recruiting Large Online Samples in the United States and India: Facebook, Mechanical Turk, and Qualtrics." *Political Science Research and Methods* 8(2): 232–250.

Guess, Andrew. (2015). "Measure for Measure: An Experimental Test of Online Political Media Exposure." *Political Analysis* 23(1): 59–75.

Stier, Sebastian, Nora Kirkizh, Caterina Froio & Ralph Schroeder. (2020). "Populist Attitudes and Selective Exposure to Online News: A Cross-Country Analysis Combining Web Tracking and Surveys." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25(3): 426–446.

Week 9 (Nov. 15). Networks & Measurements

Conover, Michael D., Jacob Ratkiewicz, Matthew Francisco, Bruno Goncalves, Alessandro Flammini and Filippo Menczer. (2011). "Political Polarization on Twitter." *Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. Palo Alto, CA; AAAI, p. 89–96.

Barberá, Pablo. (2015). "Birds of the Same Feather Tweet Together: Bayesian Ideal Point Estimation Using Twitter Data." *Political Analysis* 23(1): 76–91.

Larson, Jennifer M., Jonathan Nagler, Jonathan Ronen & Joshua A. Tucker. (2019). "Social Networks and Protest Participation: Evidence from 130 Million Twitter Users." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(3): 690–705.

Steinert-Threlkeld, Zachary C. (2017). "Spontaneous Collective Action: Peripheral Mobilization During the Arab Spring." *American Political Science Review* 111(2): 379–403.

Student Presentations

Week 10 (Nov. 22). Presentation of Research Designs

Week 11 (Nov. 29). Presentation of Research Designs



Part 3: Current Research Trends

Week 12 (Dec. 6). Misinformation

Del Vicario, Michela, Alessandro Bessi, Fabiana Zollo, Fabio Petroni, Antonio Scala, Guido Caldarelli, H. Eugene Stanley and Walter Quattrociocchi. (2016). "The Spreading of Misinformation Online." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(3): 554–559.

Allcott, Hunt, Matthew Gentzkow & Chuan Yu. (2019). "Trends in the Diffusion of Misinformation on Social Media." *Research & Politics* 6(2): 1–9.

Schulz, Anne, Werner Wirth and Philipp Müller. (2018). "We Are the People and You Are Fake News: A Social Identity Approach to Populist Citizens' False Consensus and Hostile Media Perceptions." *Communication Research* 47(2): 201–226.

Guess, Andrew, Jonathan Nagler & Joshua Tucker. (2019). "Less Than you Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook." *Science Advances* 5: eaau4586.

Week 13 (Dec. 13). Online Interventions

Coppock, Alexander, Andrew Guess and John Ternovski. (2016). "When Treatments are Tweets: A Network Mobilization Experiment over Twitter." *Political Behavior* 38(1): 105–128.

Guess, Andrew, Michael Lerner, Benjamin Lyons, Jacob M. Montgomery, Brendan Nyhan, Jason Reifler & Neelanjan Sircar. (2020). "A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment Between Mainstream and False News in the United States and India." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117(27): 15536–15545.

Bail, Christopher A., Lisa P. Argyle, Taylor W. Brown, John P. Bumpus, Hoahan Chen, M.B. Fallin Hunzaker, Jaemin Lee, Marcus Mann, Friedolin Merhout & Alexander Volfovsky. (2018). "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media can Increase Political Polarization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(37): 9216–9221.

Margolin, Drew B., Aniko Hannak & Ingmar Weber. (2018). "Political Fact-Checking on Twitter: When Do Corrections Have an Effect?" *Political Communication* 35(2): 196–219.

Week 14 (Dec. 20). Media & Politics

Barberá, Pablo and Thomas Zeitzoff. (2017). "The New Public Address System: Why Do World Leaders Adopt Social Media?" *International Studies Quarterly* 62(1): 121–130.

Barberá, Pablo, Andreu Casas, Jonathan Nagler, Patrick J. Egan, Richard Bonneau, John T. Jost & Joshua A. Tucker. (2019). "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data." *American Political Science Review* 113(4): 883–901.

Peterson, Erik & Shanto Iyengar. (2021). "Partisan Gaps in Political Information and Information-Seeking Behavior: Motivated Reasoning or Cheerleading?" *American Journal of Political Science* 65(1): 133–147.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan & Margaret E. Roberts. (2017). "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument." *American Political Science Review* 111(3): 484–501.