



Media Politics under Authoritarianism (POL36250)

Level 3 Module; Autumn Trimester 2025

Time: Tuesdays 15:00 to 17:00
Location: Lecture Room, Planning
and Environmental Policy Building
Credits: 10

Module Coordinator: Ben Tonra
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Office hours: By appointment

Module Overview

The study of media and power is dominated by research on developed democracies, where the press operates fairly freely. However, this is where only a third of the world's population lives, according to the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute. Given that 70 percent of humanity reside in authoritarian states, there is an urgent need to rethink our understanding of media politics. This module introduces students to interdisciplinary research on media in non-Western and non-liberal contexts. Students will read and critically discuss contemporary scholarship, analyzing specific cases of media control and societal responses to such control.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module, you should be able to:

- Understand the role of media and information in society
- Compare media politics across contexts
- Analyse fundamental issues surrounding the relationship between media and power
- Identify and assess media control strategies and societal responses to such control
- Evaluate future threats and challenges to journalism

Module Requirements and Structure

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings before each class and to contribute to class discussion. This module runs over twelve teaching weeks, with a reading week in Week 8. Each session comprises a mix of lectures, class discussion, and exercises in which we critically examine and apply the ideas introduced in the readings. The session is typically split in two parts. Generally, the first half is lecture-driven, covering a specific type of state control over the media, while the second half is more interactive, with class discussions and exercises that focus on media politics in a particular geography.

Module Materials and Communication

Required journal articles and news articles are linked from this syllabus. I will use Brightspace to send official announcements to the class and to provide access to assigned readings that are not available online. You should submit your work to me via Brightspace. For all other concerns or questions, please talk to me before or after class, book a time to see me, or email me so we can communicate directly.

I reserve the right to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time. This may include adjustments to the reading list, and changes to the content of specific sessions. If I make adjustments, I will email all module participants and upload the revised syllabus to Brightspace.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – copying someone else's text without acknowledgement or beyond “fair use” quantities – is not allowed. Please carefully refer to the [UCD guidelines concerning plagiarism](#). Arguing that you “didn’t know” will not be a valid excuse when we find evidence of plagiarism – if it not really clear what is expected of you in this regard, ask.

Large Language Model Policy (e.g., ChatGPT)

The use of generative AI to support literature discovery and understanding concepts is permitted, but the verbatim submission of AI-generated text as your own work is plagiarism and constitutes an academic integrity violation. Please remember that generative AI can often provide citations, sources, and information that do not exist or are inaccurate. You are ultimately responsible for the work you submit, including verifying that it is correct and accurate. In line with [UCD’s academic integrity policy](#), if you choose to use generative AI in your assignments, you must acknowledge each use of generative AI with an in-text citation and a reference list entry. See here for details: <https://libguides.ucd.ie/harvardstyle/harvardgenAI>

Assignments and Assessment

Grading will be based on the components described below. All work is due at the time specified in the Schedule below, otherwise noted. Late work will not be accepted without prior permission.

1. Mid-term Quiz (25%): There will be an in-class multiple choice quiz with 30 questions on **07-Oct**. Content for the quiz will come from lectures, discussions, and the required readings in Weeks 1 to 4.
2. Response Paper (25%): Students will submit a response paper for one required reading of their choosing, chosen from Weeks 3, 4, 6, and 7. The paper should be 800 to 1,000 words in length. Each paper can include a brief paragraph summarizing the reading, but the bulk of the content should focus on engaging with the aspects of the reading’s arguments and/or findings that fascinate you. You can choose to offer a critique, explore a particular variable, or explore the extent to which the theory presented is generalizable beyond the specific country case discussed. You are encouraged to reflect on the connections between the reading, relevant class discussions, and concepts covered in

the lectures. Proper referencing is essential. If you are unsure about how to correctly approach referencing, refer to the following [guide](#) from UCD Library. You may use any referencing style as long as it is consistently applied throughout the paper. **Due: 04-Nov, 09:00, via Brightspace.**

3. Final Exam (50%): There will be a 2-hour final exam at end of semester containing multiple-choice, short answer and brief essay questions. Content for the exam will be drawn from lectures, discussions, and the required readings. **Time and date TBD.**

Grading Criteria

To receive a passing grade overall, the weighted letter grade must be D- at least. Grading reflects the extent to which an answer displays features of each of these elements:

- Comprehension of concepts presented in class
- Application and citation of readings
- Writing proficiency: organisation + quality of expression
- Originality

Rubric for response paper and brief essay questions	
A	Excellent writing that shows mastery of concepts covered, appropriate use of readings, as well as insights beyond what was presented in class. To receive an “A”, you must show original thought. A+ (≥90%), A (≥80%), A- (≥70%)
B	Very good writing that shows mastery of concepts covered, with appropriate use of readings. B+ (≥66.67%), B (≥63.33%), B- (≥60%)
C	Good writing that demonstrates comprehension of concepts, but with minor factual and/or analytical errors/omissions, and weak attempts to apply readings. C+ (≥56.67%), C (≥53.33%), C- (≥50%)
D	Writing that demonstrates poor comprehension of concepts, with major factual and/or errors/ omissions and limited use of readings. “D” work might show recognition of module concepts but lack depth and/or display substantial misunderstanding. D+ (≥46.67%), D (≥43.33%), D- (≥40%)
E/F/G	Inability to display familiarity with module material.
NG	No work was submitted by the student or work submitted did not merit a grade.

Schedule (Indicative) and Readings

Readings that can be chosen for the response paper assignment are indicated in bold text below. If you find academic writing difficult to understand, I recommend consulting guides such as “[How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps](#)” by Amanda Hoover Green, which present approaches to help you identify the most important elements in a study.

Introduction	
1 (a) Thinking Critically about Media and Power (b) Roles of the Media: Gatekeepers, Watchdogs, and more	09-Sep
<u>Required:</u> - Schudson, M. (2002). "The News Media as Political Institutions." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 5(1), 249-269. - Hanitzsch, T. (2011). "Populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents and opportunist facilitators: Professional milieus, the journalistic field and autonomy in 18 countries." <i>International Communication Gazette</i>, 73(6), 477-494. <u>Optional:</u> - King, G., Schneer, B., & White, A. (2017). "How the news media activate public expression and influence national agendas." <i>Science</i>, 358(6364), 776-780.	
2 (a) Media, Journalism and Free Speech in Authoritarian Societies (b) Guidelines for the Response Essay	16-Sep
<u>Required:</u> - Dragomir, M. (2019, December 23). "Authoritarian Societies and Journalism". <i>Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication</i>. Retrieved 19 Mar. 2025. - George, C. (2020). "Journalism and Authoritarian Resilience." In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.). <i>The Handbook Of Journalism Studies</i> (2nd ed.). (pp. 537-553). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. [Chapter 34] <u>Optional:</u> - Guriev, S., & Treisman, D. (2019). "Informational Autocrats." <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 33(4), 100-127. - Stern, R. E., & Hassid, J. (2012). "Amplifying Silence: Uncertainty and Control Parables in Contemporary China". <i>Comparative Political Studies</i>, 45(10), 1230-1254. - Gallagher, M., & Miller, B. (2021). "Who Not What: The Logic of China's Information Control Strategy". <i>The China Quarterly</i>, 248(1), 1011-1036.	
State Controls on Media and Information	
3 (a) Censorship (b) Geographical Spotlight: China	23-Sep
<u>Required:</u> - King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression". <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 107(2), 326-343. - Tiffert, G. D. (2019). "Peering down the Memory Hole: Censorship, Digitization, and the Fragility of Our Knowledge Base". <i>The American Historical Review</i>, 124(2), 550-568. <u>Optional:</u> - Yang, E., & Roberts, M. E. (2023). "The Authoritarian Data Problem". <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 34(4), 141-150.	

4 (a) Propaganda (b) Geographical Spotlight: Russia	30-Sep
<u>Required:</u> - Carter, E. B., & Carter, B. L. (2023). <i>Propaganda in Autocracies: Institutions, Information, and the Politics of Belief</i>. Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 1] - Krishnarajan, S., & Tolstrup, J. (2023). “Pre-war experimental evidence that Putin’s propaganda elicited strong support for military invasion among Russians”. <i>Science Advances</i>, 9(45), eadg1199. <u>Optional:</u> - Rosenfeld, B., & Wallace, J. (2024). “Information Politics and Propaganda in Authoritarian Societies.” <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 27(1), 263-281. - Golovchenko, Y., Buntain, C., Eady, G., Brown, M. A., & Tucker, J. A. (2020). “Cross-Platform State Propaganda: Russian Trolls on Twitter and YouTube during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election.” <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>, 25(3), 357–389.	
5 (a) Backsliding Democracies and Autocratising Nations in Europe (b) Mid-term Quiz (In-class)	07-Oct
<u>Required:</u> - Anderson, N., Commins, A., & Whitten-Woodring, J. (2023). “Fostering Bottom-Up Censorship From the Top-Down: Nationalism and Media Restrictions.” <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>, 29(4), 869-890. - Fierens, M., Le Cam, F., Domingo, D., & Benazzo, S. (2023). “SLAPPs against journalists in Europe: Exploring the role of self-regulatory bodies.” <i>European Journal of Communication</i>, 39(2), 161-176. <u>Optional:</u> - Buzogány, A., & Spöri, T. (2024). “Cities against democratic backsliding: democratic resilience through urban resistance in the Visegrád 4 capitals.” <i>Contemporary Politics</i>, 1–24.	
6 (a) Attacks on Journalists (b) Geographical Spotlight: the Americas	14-Oct
<u>Required:</u> - Gohdes, A. R., & Carey, S. C. (2017). “Canaries in a coal-mine? What the killings of journalists tell us about future repression.” <i>Journal of Peace Research</i>, 54(2), 157–174. - Wright, K., Scott, M., & Bunce, M. (2024). <i>Capturing News, Capturing Democracy: Trump and the Voice of America</i>. Oxford University Press. [Chapter 4] [Brightspace] <u>Optional:</u> - Waisbord, S. (2023). “Mob Censorship Revisited: Questions, Findings, and Challenges.” <i>Digital Journalism</i>, 11(10), 1761–1768.	

7 (a) Exiled Media and Dissidents (b) Geographical Spotlight: the Middle East	21-Oct
<u>Required:</u> - Adamson, F., & Tsourapas, G. (2020). "At home and abroad: Coercion-by-proxy as a tool of transnational repression." Freedom House. - Dornschneider, S. (2023). "Exit, Voice, Loyalty ... or Deliberate Obstruction? Non-Collective Everyday Resistance under Oppression." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i>, 21(1), 126–141. <u>Optional:</u> - Esberg, J., & Siegel, A. A. (2022). "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela." <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 1–18. - Michaelsen, M. (2016). "Exit and voice in a digital age: Iran's exiled activists and the authoritarian state." <i>Globalizations</i>, 15(2), 248–264.	
8 Reading Week	28-Oct
*** Response Paper due 04-Nov, 09:00, via Brightspace ***	
9 (a) Obstruction and Harassment of Journalists (b) Geographical Spotlight: Southeast Asia	04-Nov
<u>Required:</u> - Dukalskis, A. (2021). <i>Making the World Safe for Dictatorship</i>. Oxford University Press. [Chapter 5] - Carson, A., & Gibbons, A. (2023). The Big Chill? How Journalists and Sources Perceive and Respond to Fake News Laws in Indonesia and Singapore. <i>Journalism Studies</i>, 24(14), 1819–1838. <u>Optional:</u> - DeButts, M., & Pan, J. (2024). "Reporting after removal: The effects of journalist expulsion on foreign news coverage." <i>Journal of Communication</i>, jqae015. - Bhat, P., & Chadha, K. (2022). "The Mob, the State and Harassment of Journalists via Twitter in India". <i>Digital Journalism</i>, 11(10), 1788–1808.	
10 (a) Media Capture (b) Geographical Spotlight: Africa	11-Nov
<u>Required:</u> - Schiffrin, A. (2017). "Introduction to Special Issue on media capture". <i>Journalism</i>, 19(8), 1033-1042. - Moon, R. (2022). "Preparing to publish: How journalists negotiate content restrictions in semi-authoritarian states". <i>International Communication Gazette</i>, 0(0), Online First. <u>Optional:</u> - Ferreira, R. R. (2024). "“It Forces You to Publish Some Shit”: Toward a Taxonomy of De-Democratizing Journalistic Practices." <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>, 0(0).	

Other Threats to the Media	
11 (a) Funding Challenges (b) News Avoidance and Selective Exposure	18-Nov
<u>Required:</u> - Neff, T., & Pickard, V. (2021). "Funding Democracy: Public Media and Democratic Health in 33 Countries." <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>, 29(3), 601-627. - Aalberg, T., Blekesaune, A., & Elvestad, E. (2013). "Media Choice and Informed Democracy: Toward Increasing News Consumption Gaps in Europe?" <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>, 18(3), 281-303. <u>Optional:</u> - Dragomir, M. (2017). "Control the money, control the media: How government uses funding to keep media in line." <i>Journalism</i>, 19(8), 1131-1148. - Wang, C., & Westwood, S. J. (2024). "What Chinese Internet Users “Like” to Read: Selective Exposure in a Restricted Information Environment." <i>The China Quarterly</i>, 1-16. - Toff, B., and Kalogeropoulos, A. "All the News That’s Fit to Ignore: How the Information Environment Does and Does Not Shape News Avoidance." <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>, Volume 84, Issue S1, 2020, Pages 366–390.	
12 (a) Algorithms and Regulation without Infringing Free Speech (b) Final Exam Q&A Session	25-Nov
<u>Required:</u> - Usher, N. (2021). "From Media Capture To Platform Capture." In A. Schiffrin (Ed.), <i>Media Capture: How Money, Digital Platforms, and Governments Control the News</i> (pp. 30–45). Columbia University Press. - Reuters Institute. (2021, February 19). "How to respond to disinformation while protecting free speech." <u>Optional:</u> - Guess, et al. (2023). "How do social media feed algorithms affect attitudes and behavior in an election campaign?" <i>Science</i>, 381,398-404(2023). - A. Kozyreva, S.M. Herzog, S. Lewandowsky, R. Hertwig, P. Lorenz-Spreen, M. Leiser, & J. Reifler, "Resolving content moderation dilemmas between free speech and harmful misinformation." <i>Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.</i> 120 (7) e2210666120. - NBC News. (2024, October 31). "How Elon Musk turned X into a pro-Trump echo chamber."	
*** Final Exam / time and date TBD. The date of the Final Exam will fall within UCD’s official exam period. You have a responsibility to be in UCD during that period. ***	