In this course we examine the effect of social media on political participation. Social media is defined as any sort of internet-based two-way communication, often referred to as Web 2.0. The most well-known examples of social media are Facebook and Twitter, but includes a host of other platforms including Google+, Weibo, You-Tube, Tumblr, Instagram, Wordpress, etc. Political participation is defined any activity taken by ordinary citizens (i.e., not “elite” political actors such as politicians) in the political realm. These action range from low-cost (e.g., signing a petition in a democracy on the Internet) to medium-cost (e.g., voting in an election) to high-cost (e.g., participating in a protest where there is significant threat to life or liberty). In this course, we will investigate the affect of social media on political participation at both the macro – or societal - level (e.g., does a higher proportion of people using Twitter in a country make protest more likely?) and at micro – or individual – level (does using Facebook make an individual more likely to vote in an election?). The course is divided into two sections: the first half is an introduction to the study of comparative political behavior (primarily political science); the second an introduction to the newly emerging literature on social media. The course culminates in a research project proposal that unites the two. The course is highly recommended for students interested in working with the NYU Social Media and Political Participation (smapp.nyu.edu) laboratory.

Requirements

The course weekly on Tuesdays from 4:00 – 5:50 on Tuesdays in Room 435, 19 West 4th Street.

Grading is based on class participation (20%) response papers and presentations during the semester (20%) and a term paper (60%).

Class Participation: This is a graduate seminar, and all students will be expected to have done the required reading before each week’s seminar and to contribute to the class discussion. You are not required to read the articles and books listed under the heading of “Recommended”; this is provided for your interest only.

Response Papers and Class Presentations: Each week, two students will make presentations to the class on the readings. The students should coordinate to make sure that between the two of them, they cover all of the readings. These presentations should focus on (1) the purpose of the reading and how it relates to that week’s theme (2) the findings/conclusions of the reading and (3) your critique/assessment of the reading and (4) what questions the readings you have covered raise for us to discuss. The presentations should be between 10-15 minutes, and I will enforce a
hard limit at 15 minutes. The weeks that you are *not* making a presentation, you will be required to hand in a 1-2 page (maximum!) response paper on a reading of your choice. The response paper can engage with any aspect of the reading, but should provide a brief summary of the main argument and evidence. Therefore, each week you will either be making one of two presentations or writing a response paper.

I will set up a Google Doc signup sheet for presentations and response papers. When possible, it would be better if people write response papers on different readings (so we have “experts” on each paper). The two presenters, however, *must* coordinate to make sure each paper is covered by at least one person — you are of course both welcome to comment on the same papers as long as each paper is covered by at least one presentation.

All response papers must be submitted to me on Drop Box by the end of the day Monday.

**Term Paper:** Each student is required to write a term paper for this course that will take the form of a research proposal for a paper utilizing SMaPP lab data. Once you have decided upon a topic, you are encouraged to begin actually collecting the data you will need for the project, either on your own (you can use StreamR, developed by Pablo Barberá) or through the SMaPP lab if need be. A research proposal will look like an empirical journal article, only without the actual analysis. Thus it will include a statement of a research question or puzzle, a review of the literature related to the topic, theoretical arguments that can be used to provide an answer to the question, hypotheses drawn from these theories that can be tested empirically, and a description of what empirical evidence and methods will be used to test these hypotheses (including how the hypotheses could be falsified); it can of course also contain some initial analysis of the data. Writing a research proposal gives you a chance to really explore the important questions in writing a paper (a good question, relationship to the literature, research design, appropriate and available data) without the pressure of also having to complete the data analysis. Research proposals will be between 18-20 pages. Everyone should meet with me individually within first 4 weeks of course to discuss ideas for the research proposal.

In an ideal world, you will then all be able to work over the spring and summer — with the assistance of the SMaPP lab — into a publishable paper that can be sent out to a journal. This is of course not a requirement of the course — you can walk away from your paper when the class is done if you want - but should be seen as a potential additional benefit of the course.

Papers are due Friday, Thursday, December 22nd by 5:00 PM.

**Oral Presentation of Term Paper:** This will take place the last two weeks of the course (although what we will most likely do is meet twice the final week and not meet at all the penultimate week, so everyone gets to go during the second week). The idea here is to mimic giving a conference presentation on your own research. So there will be 15 minutes for the presentation, and 15 minutes for question and answer after each presentation.
Books

In most cases, we are only reading a couple chapters from books that are scheduled for this course. However, we will read a substantial number of chapters from the following books:

Ackland, Robert. 2013. *Web Social Science* (Sage)


What you purchase is of course up to you, but I will say that Campbell, Cox, and Zaller are all political behavior classics, and the Ackland is a nice reference to a lot of literature.

Office Hours

I will hold office hours (Room 430 in 19 West 4th Street) on Wednesdays from 10:45 – 12:15.

SMaPP Lab Meetings

The SMaPP lab meets on Mondays from 4-6 PM in the 8th Floor of 12 Waverly Place. Attending these meetings is recommended although not required for this course. If you would like to attend meetings, please let me know and I’ll make sure you are added to the email list. Please also note the SMaPP Global Conference will be held October 14-15 – please plan on attending as much of this as you can.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Note: I am still in the process of modifying the readings for the second half of the course, as this is a fast moving field. I am also happy to take suggestions from you as to what we should be reading those weeks. I will distribute an updated syllabus before we start the second part of the course.

**Week 1, September 6th: Introduction and Logistics** (no readings assigned)
Week 2, September 13th: Partisanship

The Michigan School

Campbell et al. 1960, Chapters 6-7


The Rational Revisionists


Social Identity Theory


Effects of Partisanship


Recommended:

The Michigan School:


The Rational Revisionists


Fiorina, Morris. 1981. Retrospective Voting in American National Elections. Yale Univ. Press. Ch.4 (skim to p.47 and then start there) and Ch.5.


Achen, Christopher. 1989. “Prospective Voting and the Theory of Party Identification.” Unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago. (I’ll email or post this if anyone wants it)

Other:


Week 3, September 20th: Voting: Michigan School / Sociological Approaches

Campbell, Angus, Phillip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley., Chapters 1, 2, 12, 13 (you can skim these chapters, but try to get the main idea of what they were doing here)


McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2006, Ch.3, “Income Polarization and the Electorate,” p.71-113


Recommended:


NOTE: WE WILL NOT MEET SEPT 27th, and instead will meet the final week of the semester.

Week 4, October 4th: Strategic Voting (NEED TO RESCHEDULE)

Cox, Gary W., (1997) *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*, Chapters 1-2, 4, 7 (p.3-36, 69-98, 139-150)


Recommended:

Week 5 October 11: Turnout

Franklin, Mark N. 2004. *Voter turnout and the dynamics of electoral competition in established democracies since 1945*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press. (Chapters 1-2)


*Recommended:*


**NOTE:** October 14-15 is SMaPP Global conference. Please plan on attending as much as possible.

Week 6: October 18: Public Opinion Formation


**Recommended:**


**Week 7, October 25 Protest**


**Week 8, November 1: What is Social Media, Who is Using it, and Can we Use it to Measure Public Opinion?**

**Readings:**


Anduzia et al., *Digital Media*. Chapters 1 (Digital Media and Citizenship),


Recommended:

Anduzia et al., Digital Media. 2 (Internet and Democratic Engagement in Britain and the US), 4 (Online Political Participation in the US and Spain), 11 (Digital Media in China)


Social Media Update 2013: Pew Research Center
Week 9: November 8: Online and Offline Political Participation

Ackland, Web Social Science, Preface and Chapter 7


Recommended:

Atwan, Adel Bari. 2015. Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate. Introduction and Chapter 1, p.9-31

Vacarri et al. 2014. “Social Media and Political Discussion: A survey of Twitter political users during the 2013 Italian general elections campaign”. Italian Political Science Review
Week 10: November 15: The Use of Social Media by Politicians and Political Elites (may need to reschedule later in the week – can everyone do Thursday?)

Ackland, Web Social Science, Chapter 8 (Except Section 8.2.1 – read for next week on protest day)

Cormack, Lindsey. "Gender and Vote Revelation Strategy in Congress"


Barberá et al. 2013. Is There Anybody Out There? The Effects of Legislators' Communication with their Constituents

Recommended:


Week 11: November 22: Protest and Social Media


Recommended:

Howard and Hussain. 2013. *Democracy’s Fourth Wave*.


**Week 12: November 29: Social Media and Regime Responses**


**Recommended**

**Week 13: December 6: Student Presentations** (note: we will most likely cancel this class and reschedule for the following week).

**Week 14: December 13: Student Presentations** (can everyone stay until 7:00?)

**Friday, December 22nd:** Final papers due by 5:00 PM.