

Communication Studies 462

Seminar in Media Effects:

Feeling Political? Affect, Emotion, and Personality in Political Communication



Syllabus, Winter 2018

Instructor: Prof. Stuart Soroka, Office Rm. 5388 North Quad, ssoroka@umich.edu.

Outline: There is a growing body of work in political communication that emphasizes the importance of affect, emotion and personality in politics. Our sensitivity to threat or disgust; our reactions of fear, or anger, or happiness; our tendency to focus more on negative than on positive information - each of these can impact the way we feel about candidates, and our positions on a wide range of domestic and foreign issues. Of course, many of these feelings are in reaction to mass-mediated information; and changing media technologies likely increases the volume of affective or emotional content reaching the public. This course reviews recent, path-breaking work on these themes, drawn from both media psychology and political communication.

Course Design: This capstone course is intended to provide a forum for soon-to-graduate students to develop and apply what they've learned in their time here. Leadership of the capstone course is shared by students, and I act as a facilitator guiding students towards interesting discussions and projects on issues of current concern in political communication.

The small-class design means that students are able to take part in conversation easily; the class is a good venue to practice public speaking, and debate. It also offers a glimpse of what coursework is like in graduate school; and our readings are not drawn from textbooks – they are for the most part empirically-oriented research articles from academic journals. Most of our time will be taken with collective discussion and analysis of the assigned readings, and debate about the issues therein.

For the first half of the term, all classes revolve around the assigned readings, which students are required to read in preparation for each class, with an eye toward identifying themes and generating questions and comments for discussion. Be prepared -- you will need to read a lot.

Most of the readings for the first half of the term focus on methods and theory. These are the tools we need to think seriously about the role of personality, emotion and affect in political communication. The second half of term focuses on applying these methods and theories. We spend most of March covering 'applied topics,' selected by the class. How can we use these ideas to better understand social media use, or racism in media content, or the impact of foreign affairs coverage? These are some examples of questions we can cover in March, although we will decide which topics to cover in class, and I will add readings to the syllabus accordingly. In April, we then shift to student presentations, aimed at developing research papers on applied topics, due at the end of term.

There will be times when, as a class, we want to use online resources in seminar; otherwise, laptops and cell phones are not allowed in class.

Reading Material: Almost all course readings will be made available on Canvas – this way everything is easily accessible, and reading is easily completed before every class. Unless stated

otherwise, all readings must be read before every class. Additional readings will be added to the list as the course progresses; this material, too, will be made available on Canvas.

Anthony Damasio's *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* is also available through Canvas. You will read this small book, in its entirety, in the first full week of term. If you've registered for this class, I recommend ordering a hard copy of this (inexpensive) book.

Course Requirements: Grades are based on the following:

Class participation (40%): A small seminar class is highly dependent on student participation. You are expected to come to class with readings completed, and with some ideas about those readings. Each class will begin with a few students' thoughts on the day's readings – be prepared. At least two students will have to speak briefly about the readings each day, and they can be selected by the instructor at any time. You must be ready to talk about readings *every class*. Your participation in class discussion, and in particular your understanding of and insights on weekly readings, are the focus of this grade.

Project presentations (20%): The main objective our work over the term is to for you to develop a project on a theme related to affect, emotion, and/or personality in political communication. This occurs in several steps. First, you will have a chance to workshop some ideas with a small group in class. The ideas you get from that group will inform your project presentation - a 15-minute presentation of your ideas to the entire class. The aim here is to get even more good advice as you prepare the final project, described below.

Final projects (40%): All students have to submit a 15- to 20-page research paper at the end of term. The project should be on a topic that is related to the course theme, and that is of interest to you. This will for the most part not be original research, but rather a review of a subfield, or an argument based on existing literatures. We will of course talk in class in detail about what exactly should be included in these projects. The main goal is to use the skills you have learned in your time at Michigan to develop a paper on a theme that you find interesting.

This syllabus is subject to change, based on student interest and course progress. Click here for a Statement on Students with Disabilities, Statement on Academic Misconduct, or Statement on Sexual Misconduct.

Outline: The schedule that follows is flexible, since the number of sessions we will require for discussion of presentations at the end will vary based on class size. We may make adjustments partway through the term, then. For the time being, the plan is as follows.

Jan 4. **Introduction**

Jan 9 **Background: Emotion vs Rationality, Part I**

Anthony Damasio. 1994. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Avon Books. Part I.

Jan 11 **Background: Emotion vs Rationality, Part II**

Anthony Damasio. 1994. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Avon Books. Parts II and III.

Jan 16 **Research Methods: Surveys and Lab Experiments**

Glenn G. Sparks. 2013. *Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview*, 4th ed. Boston MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. Chapter 1.

Sara Prot and Craig A. Anderson. 2013. "Research Methods, Design, and Statistics in Media Psychology." Pp 109-136 in Karen E. Dill, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

George E. Marcus, Michael MacKuen, Jennifer Wolak, and Luke Keele. 2006. "The Measure and Mismeasure of Emotion." In David Redlawsk, ed., *Feeling Politics: Emotion in Political Information Processing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jan 18 **Research Methods: Content Analytic Methods**

Klaus Krippendorff. 1989. "Content analysis." Pp. 403-7 in the *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, Erik Barnouw et al., eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

H. Andrew Schwartz and Lyle H. Unger. 2015. "Data-Driven Content Analysis of Social Media: A Systematic Overview of Automated Methods." *American Academic of Political and Social Science* 659: 78-94.

Stuart Soroka, Lori Young and Meital Balmas. 2015. "Bad News or Mad News? Sentiment Scoring of Negativity, Fear, and Anger in News Content." *AAPSS* 659(1): 108-121.

Jan 23 **Research Methods: Psychophysiological Research Methods**

Bruce D. Bartholow and Paul Bolls. 2013. "Media Psychophysiology: The Brain and Beyond." Pp 186-211 in Karen E. Dill, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stuart Soroka. N.d. "Skin Conductance in the Study of Politics and Media Effects," forthcoming in Gigi Foster, ed., *Biophysical Measurement in Experimental Social Science Research: Theory and Practice* (Elsevier).

Jan 25 **Theory: Personality & Politics**

Jeffrey J. Mondak and Matthew V. Hibbing. 2016. "Personality and Public Opinion." In Adam Berinsky, ed. *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

Jeffrey J. Mondak. 2010. *Personality and the Foundations of Political Behavior*. New York: Cambridge. Chapter 4: Personality and Political Information.

Jan 30 **Theory: Emotions and Political Communication**

Elly A. Konijn. 2013. "The Role of Emotion in Media Use and Effects." Pp 186-211 in Karen E. Dill, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ted Brader and George E. Marcus. 2013. "Emotions and Political Psychology." In Leonie Huddy, David Sears, and Jack Levy, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Feb 1 **Theory: Affective Intelligence**

George E. Marcus, W. Russell Neuman and Michael B. MacKuen. 2000. *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-6.

Feb 6 **Theory: The Negativity Bias**

Roy F. Baumeister et al. 2001. "Bad is Stronger than Good." *Review of General Psychology* 5(4): 323-370.

Stuart Soroka and Stephen McAdams. 2015. "News, Politics and Negativity," *Political Communication* 32: 1-22.

Marc Trussler and Stuart Soroka. 2014. "Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames," *International Journal of Press and Politics* 19(3): 360-379.

Feb 8 **Theory: Discrete Emotions**

Ted Brader and Carly Wayne. 2016. "The Emotional Foundations of Democratic Citizenship." In Adam Berinsky, ed. *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

Robin L. Nabi. 1999. "A Cognitive-Functional Model for the Effects of Discrete Negative Emotions on Information Processing, Attitude Change, and Recall." *Communication Theory* 9(3): 292-320.

Feb 13 **Theory: Evolutionary Psychology**

Jim Sidanius and Robert Kurzban. 2013. "Towards an Evolutionarily Informed Political Psychology." In Leonie Huddy, David Sears, and Jack Levy, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Petersen, Michael Bang. 2010. "Distinct emotions, distinct domains: Anger, anxiety and perceptions of intentionality." *The Journal of Politics* 72(2): 357-365.

Petersen, Michael Bang, Daniel Sznycer, Aaron Sell, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby. 2013. "The ancestral logic of politics upper-body strength regulates men's assertion of self-interest over economic redistribution." *Psychological Science* 24(7): 1098-1103.

Feb 15 **Theory: Biopolitics**

Frank J. Gonzalez, Kevin B. Smith and John R. Hibbing. 2016. "No Longer 'Beyond our Scope': The Biological and Non-Conscious Underpinnings of Public Opinion." In Adam Berinsky, ed. *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

John R. Alford, Carolyn L. Funk, and John R. Hibbing. 2005. "Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?" *American Political Science Review* 99(2): 153-67.

Jame H. Fowler, Laura A. Baker, and Christopher T. Dawes. 2008. "Genetic Variation in Political Participation." *American Political Science Review* 102(2): 233-248.

Feb 20 **Planning:** Small-group project discussions (no readings)

Feb 22 **Planning:** 2nd-half course planning (lots of readings)

March 6-22 **Applied Topics:** Here are some suggestions, to get things started: Personality & New Media, Emotion and Affect in Political Advertising, Emotion in US Elections, Emotion and Affect in Social Media.

Mar 27,29 **Presentations:** No class, preparations for presentations

April 3-17 **Presentations:** Student presentations