Media Systems in the Post-Truth Political Age

INTL 190, Section Code F00, Section ID 14374

Monday 1pm – 3:50pm PST (online)
https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/91092991550
Meeting ID: 910 9299 1550
(class sessions will be recorded and made available to students asynchronously)

Syllabus
(***please note that this syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class and unfolding situation with coronavirus***)

Professor: Olga Lazitski (okovalev@ucsd.edu, olgalazitskaya@gmail.com)
Preferred pronouns: she/her/hers
Office hours: Monday after synchronous meetings (same link) and by appointment
Email communication: I will normally respond within 24 hours, except on weekends

Dear International Studies Program student,

These are unprecedented times. COVID-19 has taken a toll on everyone. Here are a few items from a recent study that examined its impact on college students:

- Two-thirds of students report their financial situation has become more stressful
- Roughly one-third of students report that their living situation changed as a result of the pandemic
- 60% of students indicate that the pandemic has made it more difficult to access mental health care
- 65% of students report being very or extremely concerned about how long the pandemic will last
- 64% report being very or extremely concerned about people they care about contracting COVID-19
- 86% report concerns about their personal safety and security
- 6% report experiencing race-based discrimination as a result of the pandemic, while 41% report witnessing race-based discrimination (online or in person)

None of us is really ok.
What’s this got to do with class?
If you tell me you’re having trouble, I’m not going to judge you or think less of you. I hope you’ll extend me the same grace.

So, let’s lay out some ground rules:
- You never owe me personal information about your health (mental or physical) or anything else
- You are always welcome to talk to me about things that you’re going through, however
- If I can’t help you, I usually know somebody who can
- If you need extra help, or you need to miss class, or you need more time with something, just ask. I will work with you.

With that said…

Welcome to INTL 190 “Media Systems in the Post-Truth Political Age”!

The very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. Lies will pass into history.
—George Orwell

“It has become deeply problematic for us, post-moderns, to forge a single overarching concept of Truth. As far as we can see, no new general answer to the question of what Truth is can be offered, not at least one that would outlast the year of its conception.”
—Agnes Heller, “Is Truth Historical?”

"Behold! human beings living in a sort of underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all across the den; they have been here from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them; for the chains are arranged in such a manner as to prevent them from turning round their heads. At a distance above and behind them the light of a fire is blazing, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have before them, over which they show the puppets… [The prisoners] see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave. How could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads? And if they were able to talk with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?"
— The Republic of Plato, Book Seven. (Jowett Translation.) // From Lippmann (1922)

1 If you’ve never taken an online class before, check out this resource to help you. Also consider reading this article on how to declutter your digital world.
**Course Description**

We experience media manipulation in many different contexts and styles today -- from sophisticated lies by the Kremlin and Trump’s cries of ‘fake news’ (even as his own statements often do not stand up to scrutiny) to the global COVID-19 surge of misinformation known as an “infodemic” that has a direct influence on our health and well-being.

This seminar explores media manipulation practices of the new political age of “post-truth” that we live in today and their problematic relationship with truth: Is there such a thing as truth? How do I know it's really there and not just a projection of my consciousness? Is there a way to understand what’s “really” happening in the world without being influenced to think a certain way?

In 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries chose “post-truth” the word of the year. This adjective was defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Spanish word “posverdad,” Chinese word “hòu zhēnxiàng,” Russian word “пост-правда,” German word “postfaktisch” captured the same meaning and became widespread within the discourses of the national public spheres.

We will begin the course by examining the concepts of the “post-truth” era and “post-factual” age. We unpack their key components, exploring the following questions in philosophy: What is truth? What is fact? What is evidence? What is knowledge? We will look closely at the emergence of “post-truth” and the role of ideology and lies in different political regimes (such as neo-liberal Western regimes, authoritarian regimes of Russia and China, and Latin American populist regimes). We will explore the “post-truth” implications in both politics and media in different parts of the world.

We will learn the concepts of communicative abundance, filter bubble, confirmation and cognitive biases, framing, belief, opinion and try to understand their relationships with the concepts of fact, truth and evidence. Using case studies from the U.S., Russia, China, and Latin America, we will analyze how journalism has been reimagined in a “post-truth” world and how journalists within different media systems are dealing with the challenges of the post-factual age.

What can you expect from me?

I will treat you with dignity and respect, especially in cases where a difference of opinion arises. Communication can be tricky though, particularly as I have mannerisms and humor from another part of the world, so sometimes signals get crossed. Also, keep in mind that some discomfort is inevitable because the goals of higher education include exposing you to new ideas, having you question beliefs you have taken for granted and grappling with problems you have never considered. You are welcome to disagree with me and/or your classmates, but everyone is expected to participate respectfully. My goal is to help you learn the content of the course, as well as develop the skills of critical thinking, critical writing and reading. In order to do this, I
will challenge you to dig deep and we won’t always agree and that’s ok. Please do not hesitate to talk to me about any issues that arise.

You should know that I am committed to your success (however differently we may conceptualize success). I value cooperative and collaborative learning, knowing that you have much to contribute. I also value your best effort but recognize that no one can bring their best effort to every assignment or to every day. You can expect me to bring my best effort also. This means I will be prepared to facilitate your learning, listen to you and talk to you (rather than at you). But just like you, it is unlikely that I can bring my best to every single interaction (though I shall try my best).

P.S.: Please call me Olga and use she/her when speaking about me.

Requirements and Assignments

This course will be run as a seminar. Seminars work only when participants show up having done the reading, thought about the issues suggested by the text, and are prepared to discuss both the details and underlying arguments. Students are responsible for doing all of the reading on the syllabus and participating actively in discussion.

A Word About Academic and Human Discourse: Going Beyond Civility:

This is a class that raises existential questions related to the human experience. It necessarily probes issues that are sometimes thorny, don’t always have clear answers and includes ones in which people can have strong differences of opinion. One way to think of the class is to see it as a big conversation about big issues. Optimal participation comes from the ability to be fully engaged: observant, reflective, and imaginative as we enter into conversation. In order for us to have a successful class, we need to have a sustained conversation in which members are humble, respectful, thoughtfully engaged, and still free to critique (offer friendly push-back). There should be room for articulation of individual perspectives, while leaving room for disagreement and friendly critique. All of us should respectfully listen to the author’s views as well as each other’s, without becoming dismissive or defensive, a common default when disagreement is detected; and after listening, we need to be able to converse about what we hear. As these ideals are upheld we hope to create an environment where we all sense that, fundamentally, we are in this together in spite of our differences.

Attendance: In the current remote settings, UCSD allows both synchronous and asynchronous participation. However, regular synchronous attendance is encouraged. I will keep a running record of your presence in the discussion zoom meetings. I recognize that things come up that may cause you to miss class but let me know in advance wherever possible. Consideration of students on the borderline between grades will favor those who have been present in class.

Participation: This class is a seminar, which means that the professor will NOT lecture for the most part, but rather will lead an active thoughtful discussion. Thus, participation is key. Students should come to class prepared, having done the reading, and ready for fruitful exchange. A relaxed, yet vigorous atmosphere will be our goal. Students are expected to
regularly contribute to classroom discussions. Participation will be measured by verbal contribution in class as well as interaction via online discussion in Canvas. Regarding online Discussion, the instructor will monitor and note both the frequency of comments and the quality of engagement. A worthy goal would be to initiate a discussion, comment on a discussion, or pose questions weekly in the Discussion forum in Canvas. Further participation could include making connections between class readings and your observations in culture, politic and media. In-class discussions will sometimes be led by the instructor, sometimes by class members, sometimes by the collective class. Each class member should come to class ready to contribute every week, and not merely to listen. Here is the collaborative document where we are all going to write short in-class assignments (aka 5-minute papers). Class participation is 20% of the grade.

**Presentation of reading:** Each student is required to give at least one presentation on the assigned reading during the quarter. In those presentations, students are asked to introduce the reading with a summary of the main points contained in the reading. Every presentation must answer the following three questions: What is the author’s argument/thesis? How does the author try to prove his/her argument? Do you buy it? You may decide to focus merely on these three questions for your presentation, but you can also address any of the questions stated in the description above, and/or other issues that interest you. You’ll sign up for this assignment during the first week of the quarter. Use this document to sign up. This assignment is 15% of the grade.

**Discussion leading:** Once during the course, each student will be responsible for helping lead seminar discussions on issues, themes, questions, and puzzles that you think are particularly interesting and important from all the texts assigned for the meeting. Your job is not to tell us about the content of the texts, but ask at least 5 thought provoking discussion questions. You’ll sign up for this assignment during the first week of the quarter. Each discussion leader should post discussion questions on Canvas under “Discussions” at the designated discussion forum by 11am PST on the day of discussion leading. Use this document to sign up. Discussion leader responsibilities will count for a total of 15% of the grade.

**Research presentation:** This is a research seminar for which each of you is required to choose a topic based on your particular interest. Your project must adhere to the concepts covered during the course. Depending on your personal research interests and goals, you will conduct a study of a case of your choice and produce a research paper based on your results. During weeks 7-10, you will also have the opportunity to present your research for feedback. Project presentations serve at least five purposes: (1) they enable us to better understand each other’s research interests; (2) we gain practice in presenting our research ideas; (3) they provide an opportunity for feedback prior to turning in final projects. An assignment prompt with all details and guidelines will be distributed later. Research presentations will count for 10% of the final grade.

**Final paper:** Students are also responsible for writing one longer paper (15-20 pages, double-spaced) on the results of their case studies. The paper should deal with a minimum of three different texts covered in class, but need not involve any sources beyond those on the syllabus. However, if you would like to use sources that are not on the syllabus in addition to the three required texts from the syllabus, you can do it. Writing will be the culmination of our reading
and conversation. An assignment prompt with all details and guidelines will be distributed later. Final paper is due 12/17 @11pm PST. It is 40% of the grade.

**Grading**

Grades will be based on the following:

- Class participation - 20%
- Presentation of reading - 15%
- Discussion leading – 15%
- Research presentation - 10%
- Final paper - 40%

**Student Support Resources**

- Library Help, eReserves and research tools
- Writing Hub
- Supplemental Instruction
- Tutoring
- Mental Health Services
- Community Centers: Learn about the different ways UC San Diego explores, supports, and celebrates the many cultures that make up our diverse community.
- Accessibility: Students needing accommodations due to a disability should provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Please present AFA letters both to me and the OSD Liaison for International Studies as soon as possible so that accommodations may be arranged. OSD contact for further information: [https://disabilities.ucsd.edu/](https://disabilities.ucsd.edu/); [osd@ucsd.edu](mailto:osd@ucsd.edu) | 858. 534.4382

**Inclusive Classroom**

I am fully committed to creating a learning environment that supports diversity of thought, perspectives, experiences, and identities. I urge each of you to contribute your unique perspectives to seminar discussion each week so that we can learn from them, and from each other. If you should ever feel excluded, or unable to fully participate in class for any reason, please let me know.

Additional resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond, may be found here: Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: 858.822.3542 | [diversity@ucsd.edu](mailto:diversity@ucsd.edu) | [https://diversity.ucsd.edu/](https://diversity.ucsd.edu/) [https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html](https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html) [https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html](https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html)
**UCSD Academic Regulations and Policies**

**Academic Integrity**: Each student is expected to abide by UCSD’s policy on Integrity of Scholarship and to excel with integrity in our course. Students are expected to do their own work, as outlined in the UCSD Policy on Academic Integrity and published in the UCSD General Catalog. Academic Integrity is expected of everyone at UC San Diego. This means that you must be honest, fair, responsible, respectful, and trustworthy in all of your actions. Lying, cheating, or any other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated because they undermine learning and the University’s ability to certify students’ knowledge and abilities. Thus, any attempt to get, or help another get, a grade by cheating, lying or dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office and will result in sanctions. Sanctions can include an F in the class and suspension or dismissal from the University. So, think carefully before you act. Before you act, ask yourself the following questions: a: is my action honest, fair, respectful, responsible, and trustworthy, and b) is my action authorized by the instructor? If you are unsure, don’t ask a friend, ask your instructor, instructional assistant, or the Academic Integrity Office. You can learn more about academic integrity [here](#). Violations will be subject to disciplinary measures as outlined by the University. If you have any questions regarding this policy, please let me know, or feel free to reach out to UCSD’s Academic Integrity office directly: [aio@ucsd.edu](mailto:aio@ucsd.edu).

Please consider taking the **UCSD Integrity Pledge**. You can do it [here](#). Also, watch [this video](#) to better understand what plagiarism is and how avoid it.

Finally, please also abide by UCSD’s **Principles of Community** and the **Student Code of Conduct** to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom.

**Course Texts:**

All of the texts are available either online (the links are attached to the course schedule) or as PDF files uploaded on Canvas. If you experience difficulties accessing course readings, please email me, and I will email you PDF files assigned for a week.
Course Schedule – Reading Assignments and Due Dates

Week 1: 10/05 - Introduction: discussion of themes and aims of the course.

- No readings due

Week 2: 10/12 – Bullshit and lie

“When a thousand people believe some made-up story for one month, that’s fake news. When a billion people believe it for a thousand years, that’s a religion, and we are admonished not to call it fake news in order not to hurt the feelings of the faithful. . .”—Yuval Harari, “Humans are a Post-Truth Species”

- Readings due (readings always should be done before class):


COVID-19 CASE (very short articles):


Key concepts: bullshit, lie, falsehood, post-truth, truthfulness, “truthiness”, “infodemic”
Week 3: 10/19 – Truth and kinds of truth

“[T]he modern political lies are so big that they require a complete rearrangement of the whole factual texture—the making of another reality, as it were, into which they will fit without seam, crack, or fissure, exactly as the facts fitted into their original context.”—Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics”


Recommended:
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/072551369102900103

Key concepts: factual truth, ideological truth, experience, belief, opinion, objectivity, subjectivity, fact, knowledge

Week 4: 10/26 – Post-truth

“Even though there have always been liars, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame, at least some sheepishness. Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth. We live in a post-truth era. Post-truthfulness exists in an ethical twilight zone. It allows us to dissemble without considering ourselves dishonest.”—Ralph Keyes, The Post-Truth Era


Op-Ed:


Key concepts: emotion, evidence, evidence-informed judgment, trust, trustworthiness, communicative abundance, filter bubble, confirmation and cognitive biases

Week 5: 11/02 - Post-factual politics: ideology and political regimes

“If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living in truth.”—Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*


Key concepts: ideology, hegemony, liberalism, neo-liberalism, liberal democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, socialism, populism, hybrid regimes

Week 6: 11/09 – Media systems in the post-truth society

“Journalism has never been better, thanks to these last few decades of disruption. So why does it seem to matter so little? … The media scandal of 2016 isn’t so much about what reporters failed to tell the American public; it’s about what they did report on, and the fact that it didn’t seem to matter.”—Susan Glasser, “Covering politics in a “post-truth” America”
https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/x059c798d


https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7C9781440854767&v=2.1&u=ucsandiego&it=etoc&p=GVRL&sw=w

Op-Eds:
- Susan Glasser (December 2016). “Covering politics in a “post-truth” America”.

Key concepts: communication in politics, media systems, professionalization, public service, ethical norms, fake news, framing, alternative facts, agenda-setting

**Week 7: 11/16 – Media in the U.S.**

- Reece Peck (2019). *Fox Populism. Branding conservatism as working class*. Cambridge University Press. (pp. 85-104; 151-154; 232-244)

Recommended:
- Watch The Great Hack (2019, Karim Amer, Jehane Noujaim dir.). [on Netflix]

Key concepts: media populism, trumpian populism, anti-elitism, media regulation, paradigms of the U.S. journalism, computational propaganda

Week 8: 11/23 – Media in Russia

“It took a while for those working at RT to sense that something was not quite right, that the ‘Russian point of view’ could easily mean ‘the Kremlin point of view,’ and that ‘there is no such thing as objective reporting’ meant the Kremlin had complete control over the truth.”—Peter Pomerantsev, Nothing is True and Everything is Possible


Peter Pomerantsev (2019). This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality. New York: PublicAffairs. (pp. 1-29; 118-140).


Key concepts: media politics, authoritarian model, Russian media system, propaganda

Week 9: 11/30 – Media in China and Latin America


Key concepts: watchdog role, infotainment, Venezuelan media, denouncers, crime beat, Chinese media system, critical journalism

**Week 10: 12/07 - Fighting post-truth**


Key concepts: fact-checking, media literacy, objective reporting, “non-fake news”, democracy and truth

**Final paper is due 12/17 @11pm PST.**
Cheers! 😊

Let's Build Up Our Immune System 🍓🥗🍗💀