MEDIA AND POLITICS

Professor: **Tatiana COUTTO**
Session: **June 2024**
Language of instruction: **English**
Number of hours of class: **36h**

ON CAMPUS

Objective of the Course

The goal of this course is to provide participants with a good working knowledge of the role of media in contemporary politics from theoretical as well as empirical perspectives. Throughout the course, you will develop a solid conceptual grasp of this relationship (based on the existing literature) and apply it to 'concrete' cases such as elections, coverage of a wide variety of policy issues in different countries and framing of political actors, to name a few. The course also introduces and discusses the most relevant qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches that will allow you to analyze media discourse systematically and critically. On top of that, students will have the opportunity to work in groups and individually on a sub-topic of your own, and to practice presentation skills. The methods section will moreover devote some time to introduce techniques of textual data analysis in R open-source software, which students may use in their final project.

Summary

The media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. The world will look different to different people" (Cohen 1963).

We take this quotation as a starting point for exploring the relationship between media and politics, as it opens several perspectives that we will try to tackle in this course.

I.   The media tells us something about the world. The issue is not simply whether news stories are "objective", "(un)biased" or "true", but how they come about, and how individuals (try to) make sense of them. This process involves political competition among different narratives and ideologies, but other determinants such as technological development as well as market and legal constraints also play a critical

role. Such constructed and shared narratives evolve over time, and may also vary according to the economic, politico-institutional and social context.

II.   American writer Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) argued that people do not know the world based mainly on their personal experiences, but only as a "picture in their heads", and as a consequence, responded to a "pseudo-environment" in their political judgments. In other words, people - as individuals or as a part of a larger social group - receive something from the media that influences what they know about the world and how they think about it. On most issues, the media are our main or only source of information. That raises a central question that will be addressed in the course: when and under what conditions will information lead people to prioritize certain issues, to change their mind or even to act?

III.   Finally, we want to know how the media influence the real world. There are – at least – two major perspectives on this topic:
•   First, as noted above, there may be an indirect influence as the media may change viewers' and readers' perceptions
•   Second, there may also be a more direct link as policymakers try to anticipate voters' reactions on issues and act accordingly

By evaluating these perspectives, we will try to address some transversal questions regarding the evolution of the media landscape, the quality of information, ethical issues and the relation to democracy. The goal is to better understand the role of the media in politics in its several dimensions, over time and across countries and media platforms. The methods section of this class will moreover devote some time to text mining techniques. We will rely on the statistical software R and related packages. Previous knowledge of R is useful but not absolutely necessary. Installing R and R Studio before class is highly recommended if you want to become acquainted with the language.

Organization of the course

The program covers topics such as sociology of news production, elections and campaign coverage, and the impact of social media on political communication. A brief introduction to analysis of textual data is provided.

The course consists of daily three-hour sessions: the first half of the session consists of lectures and discussions of the theoretical and empirical content, while the second half will be devoted to hands-on coursework covering methods (including group work), analysis and personal projects. This is an interactive course; students are therefore required to do the readings ahead of class, and are encouraged to take active part in the class debates. Complementary materials such as multi-media resources and pre-recorded videos will also be made available in advance so we can make the most of the face-to-face sessions.

Professor's Biography

Tatiana Coutto joined the Centre d'Etudes Européennes (CEE/Sciences Po) in 2019 as a Marie Curie fellow following a five-year period at the University of Warwick (UK). Her work focuses on how different media vehicles report European integration, and how this may influence public attitudes towards the EU. Dr Coutto currently works at the Vienna School of International Studies, where she carries out a project about how EU institutions communicate with journalists and the general public. Her research interests include the analysis of textual data, R programming language, media framing/framing effects, impact of populist leaders on EU foreign policy, and EU policy-making processes. She occasionally comments on European and Brazilian politics on Brazilian and British radio and press.