

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 8375**  
**CYBERPOLITICS**



**SPRING 2010**

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**Office Hours: Monday 1-3 p.m.**

**OVERVIEW**

For more than two generations, television has been the primary medium of political communication. What we know about politics and policy has been filtered through the medium's unblinking eye, from Eisenhower's rudimentary commercial advertising campaign to the Kennedy-Nixon Debates, from the Vietnam War to Watergate and Clinton's impeachment and countless other political scandals, from Reagan's prime-time presidency to Bush's "Mission Accomplished" moment to candidate Obama's outsized crowds. During this period, campaigning and governance has become candidate-centered at the expense of political party organizations, political narratives have come to focus on power dynamics rather than policy choices, and, for reasons sometimes attributed to television, civic engagement has diminished as cynicism has increased.

Then, in the first years of the new millennium, a different type of political activity began to arise on the Internet. Sometimes vulgar and amateurish, self-selected "bloggers" writing on Internet weblogs took advantage of the growing availability of high speed Internet access to make political arguments to any and all willing to read and respond. At first few people did, but in a relatively short period of time a vital public space emerged online, divided in ideological terms into a left or progressive "blogosphere" and its conservative counterpart. In 2003, when Howard Dean's unlikely presidential campaign earned unprecedented sums of money online, the Internet became more than a curiosity to political practitioners. With the election of Barack Obama on the strength of Internet organizing and fundraising techniques, it has become impossible to ignore. The Internet now poses a credible challenge to television's place at the center of the political communication universe.

What can we make of this emerging phenomenon? How does the political promise of the Internet compare historically with the introduction of

other new media, like television, radio, the telegraph and inexpensive printing? How are the left and right blogospheres structured, and what do their different structures tell us about how suited they are to take advantage of the decentralized structure of the web? How does the decentralized nature of cyberspace distinguish the fragmented Internet from the mass medium of television, and what does this imply for our politics? How can we assess the effectiveness of online political activists on the matters they seek to influence: election and policy outcomes; media narratives; and building virtual and real communities? We will address these questions in this course.

### **TEXTS**

The literature in this field is emerging along with the Internet; much of what was written just a few years ago is already out of date, while new research (owing to the deliberate nature of scholarship) is slow to develop. I will draw on that portion of the literature that is both timely and substantive in an effort to provide a sound understanding of cyberpolitics.

The following books are required for the course. All items are available at the bookstore. There are also a number of readings that will be available on a non-circulating basis in the reserve room and on electronic reserve (available through the WebCT homepage for PSC 8375 and denoted by an [R] in the syllabus). The books are:

- Chadwick, Andrew. *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communications Technologies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Kerbel, Matthew R. *Netroots: Online Progressives and the Transformation of American Politics*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009.
- Patterson, Thomas E. *Out of Order*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- Trippi, Joe. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, the Internet, and the Overthrow of Everything*. New York: Regan Books, 2004.

### **GRADING**

You will be graded on the caliber and extent of your course participation, and on a term paper due the final day of class, Monday April 26. The paper may be on any topic of interest to you that pertains to the study of cyberpolitics. It may be a research paper or a theoretical essay. Please clear the topic with me before you begin your work, which you may do at any time but no later than Spring Break, and be sure that there is sufficient literature available to support your work. Remember, this is an emerging field, and finding relevant literature can be difficult.

There will be no final exam.

## TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### WEEK #1 (January 11)

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Assignment:

- None

### WEEK #2 (January 18)

#### MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

### WEEK #3 (January 25)

#### THE BLOGOSPHERE: MYTH AND REALITY

##### Assignment:

- Kerbel. *Netroots*, ch. 1
- Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, ch. 1 and 3

##### In-Class Objectives:

- Understand the layout of political cyberspace: the left and right blogospheres
- Discuss the history and development of the political blogosphere

### WEEK #4 (February 1)

#### TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICAL CHANGE I: THE BLOGOSPHERE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

##### Assignment:

- Kerbel. *Netroots*, ch. 2 (pp. 15-30)
- Shaw, "At the Crossroads: Change and Continuity in American Press News, 1820-1860," *Journalism History* 8:2 (Summer 1981): 38-50 [R]
- Cardwine, "Abraham Lincoln and the Fourth Estate: The White House and the Press during the American Civil War," *American Nineteenth-Century History* 7:1 (March 2006): 1-27 [R]
- Ryfe, "Franklin Roosevelt and the Fireside Chats," *Journal of Communication* 49:1 (1999): 80-103 [R]

##### Recommended Reading:

- Keller, *America's Three Regimes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Background on the Jackson regime (ch. 4), Lincoln (ch.6), and FDR (ch. 10, pp. 207-218). [On reserve in the library, not on electronic reserve]

##### In-Class Objectives:

- Consider how the introduction of communications technologies have been related to political transformations, with particular attention to:
  - The introduction of inexpensive printing and the Jackson transformation
  - The introduction of the telegraph and Lincoln's message control operation
  - Radio and the New Deal transformation

## WEEK #5 (February 8)

### TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICAL CHANGE II: THE BLOGOSPHERE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

#### Assignment:

- Kerbel. *Netroots*, ch. 2 (pp. 30-38)
- Lang and Lang, "The Television Personality in Politics: Some Considerations," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 20:1 (Spring 1956): 103-112 [R]
- Alger, "Television, Perceptions of Reality and the Presidential Election of '84," *PS* 20:1 (Winter 1987): 49-57 [R]
- Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, ch. 4

#### Recommended Reading:

- McGinniss, *The Selling of the President, 1968*. New York: Trident Press, 1969. Skim or read selectively. [On reserve in the library, not on electronic reserve]

#### In-Class Objectives:

- Continue the discussion from last week, with particular attention to:
  - The introduction of television and the "invention" of a "New Nixon"
  - The introduction of the Internet and . . . ?
- What is the significance of the "Digital Divide"?

## WEEK #6 (February 15)

### POLITICS IN THE AGE OF TELEVISION

#### Assignment:

- Patterson, *Out of Order*, Prologue and ch 1-4
- Cappella and Jamieson, "News Frames, Political Cynicism, and Media Cynicism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 546 (July 1996): 71-84 [R]

#### In-Class Objectives:

- Why does Patterson say television is miscast in the center of our politics?
- How are political campaigns and governance portrayed on television?
- What is the relationship between television politics and cynicism?

## WEEK #7 (February 22)

### TIPPING POINT: THE DEAN CAMPAIGN

#### Assignment:

- Trippi, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Introduction and ch. 1-7, 9-10
- Kerbel and Bloom, "Blog for America and Civic Involvement," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10:4 (2005): 3-27 [R]

#### In-Class Objectives:

- How did the Internet "discover" the Dean campaign?
- What kinds of social and political activism transpired as a result of Internet politics during Howard Dean's run for president?
- How did the Dean campaign differ from what we were used to seeing during the age of television politics?

- In what ways did the Dean campaign foreshadow the age of the Internet?
- Why does Dean campaign manager Joe Trippi believe the Internet Age will be the "age of empowerment"?

**WEEK #8 (March 1)**

SPRING BREAK

**WEEK #9 (March 8)**

CONFERENCE DAY

**WEEK #10 (March 15)**

OPEN SOURCE: UNLOCKING THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE INTERNET

Assignment:

- Kerbel, *Netroots*, ch. 3
- Trippi, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, ch. 8, 11, 12
- Blumenthal, "Toward an Open-Source Methodology: What We Can Learn from the Blogosphere," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69:5 (2005): 655-669 [R]
- Streeter and Teachout, "Theories: Technology, the Grassroots, and Network Generativity," in Teachout, Streeter, et al., *Mousepads, Shoe Leather, and Hope* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), ch. 3 [R]

In-Class Objectives:

- What is "open source" and how does it apply to the Internet?
- How does the open source structure of the Internet contribute to the generation of social networks?

**WEEK #11 (March 22)**

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BLOGOSPHERE AND OPEN SOURCE POLITICS: LEFT VS. RIGHT

THE PROGRESSIVE BLOGOSPHERE AS AN EMERGING ELITE

Assignment:

- Kerbel, *Netroots*, ch. 3
- Bowers and Stoller, "Emergence of the Progressive Blogosphere: A New Force in American Politics," New Politics Institute, August 10 2005 [R]
- Chait, "The Left's New Machine," *New Republic* (May 7, 2007): 18-26 [R]
- Drezner and Farrell, "The Power and Politics of Blogs," paper presented at the 2004 meeting of the American Political Science Association [R]

In-Class Objectives:

- What are the key structural differences between the left and right blogosphere?
- How is the left blogosphere structured to take advantage of the Internet's open source architecture?
- Why could netroots activists be regarded as a "bourgeois elite"?

**WEEK #12 (March 29)**

POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS: DOES CYBERACTIVITY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Assignment:

- Kerbel, *Netroots*, ch. 4
- Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, ch. 6

- Stromer-Galley, "On-Line Interaction and Why Candidates Avoid It," *Journal of Communication* 50:4 (Autumn 2000): 111-132 [R]
- Sey and Castells, "From Media Politics to Networked Politics," in Teachout, Streeter, et al., *Mousepads, Shoe Leather, and Hope*, ch. 18 [R]

In-Class Objectives:

- How effective have netroots activists been in raising money, recruiting candidates and shaping election outcomes?

**WEEK #13 (April 5)**

**EASTER BREAK**

**WEEK #14 (April 12)**

**SHAPING MEDIA NARRATIVES: IS BLOGGING JOURNALISM?**

Assignment:

- Kerbel, *Netroots*, ch. 5
- Gaye Tuchman. "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity." *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (1972), pp. 660-679 [R]
- Klam, "Fear and Laptops on the Campaign Trail," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 26, 2004 [R]

In-Class Objectives:

- How does objectivity work to protect mainstream journalists?
- What is the relationship between netroots activists and mainstream journalists?
- Why is blogging a form of 18<sup>th</sup> century politics using 21<sup>st</sup> century technology?
- How effective have netroots activists been in framing mainstream media narratives?
- Is blogging journalism?

**WEEK #15 (April 19)**

**BUILDING VIRTUAL AND REAL COMMUNITIES**

Assignment:

- Kerbel, *Netroots*, ch. 6
- Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, ch. 5
- Putnam, "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." *PS* 28:4 (December 1995): 664-682 [R]
- Cornfield, "Adding in the Net: Making Citizenship Count in the Digital Age," in David M. Anderson and Michael Cornfield, eds., *The Civic Web: Online Politics and Democratic Values* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 97-112 [R]
- Uslaner, "Trust, Civic Engagement, and the Internet," *Political Communication* 21:2 (April-June 2004): 223-242 [R]
- Cappella, "Cynicism and Social Trust in the New Media Environment," *Journal of Communication* (March 2002): 229-241 [R]
- Tedesco, "Web Interactivity and Young Adult Political Efficacy," in Andrew Paul Williams and John C. Tedesco, eds., *The Internet Election* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 187-202 [R]

In-Class Objectives:

- What is social capital, and why did it diminish during the television age?
- Can cyberpolitics generate political efficacy?
- Are virtual communities equivalent to real-world communities?
- Can real-world communities develop from virtual communities?

**WEEK #16 (April 26) \*\*TERM PAPER DUE\*\***

**CONCLUSIONS: OPEN SOURCE POLITICS IN THE OBAMA ERA**

Assignment:

- Kerbel, *Netroots*, ch. 7
- Kerbel, "Netroots vs. the Obama Administration: The Case of Healthcare Reform," TBD [R]

In-Class Objectives:

- What was the relationship between netroots activists and the Obama campaign?
- What is the relationship between netroots activists and the Obama administration?
- What are the prospects for an Internet-based political transformation along the lines of the political changes associated with the introduction of previous media of communication?