



GOVT 399: International Relations Policy Task Force

(Dis?)Information's Global and Local Effects on Politics and Culture

Fall 2023 (August 21 - December 13)

Mondays, 4:30 - 7:10pm, Horizon Hall 2017

Professor Eric McGlinchey
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Office Hours Mondays and Wednesdays 1:00 - 3:00pm and by appointment
Office Hours Signup [Link](#)

7 November 2023 Draft (See Draft Modification Notes at End of Syllabus)

Course Description

Participants in the 2023-2024 IR Policy Task Force will become expert on and develop policy responses to the causes and consequences of competing information narratives at the global and local levels. IRTF learning community members will research the history of these competing narratives and investigate if and how new communication platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and Telegram advance the speed and effectiveness of competing narratives. Empowered with a heightened understanding of (dis)information campaigns, IRTF members will then assess the role competing information narratives play in specific domains, for example, in armed conflict, migration, the rise of extremist groups, and backlashes against equal rights. Throughout we will ask if we can definitively identify disinformation or if our own worldviews preclude efforts to disentangle fact from fiction.

IRTF participants will have the opportunity to explore the causes and consequences of competing information narratives first-hand during an *elective* 2024 spring-break trip to Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. El Paso and Juárez, home to 2.5 million people, is an urban community that straddles the US-Mexico border. It is also a community that figures prominently in narratives about migration in the Americas. IRTF students who elect to participate in the spring-break trip will explore the formation of migration narratives, the extent to which these narratives are empirically grounded, and how the symbolism of local places shape national and, indeed, global understandings of migration

During the spring 2024 three-credit (GOVT 444) offering of the IR Policy Task Force, students will apply their expertise in research design and case study analysis—expertise developed in the fall 2023 semester—to researching a (dis)information challenge of their own choosing as well as to crafting policy responses to this challenge.

The fall IRTF offering introduces students to:

- subject matter and policy experts working on competing information narratives
- contested information narratives' role in global and local challenges
 - armed conflict
 - authoritarianism
 - democratic erosion
 - governments' and local populations' receptivity to migrants and asylum seekers
 - extremism and militancy
 - campaigns against racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities
 - backlashes against gender rights
- research design and the methodology of Case Study Analysis (CSA)
- successful and flawed policy responses to disinformation campaigns

Course Learning Outcomes

By the close of this course:

1. Students will be able to apply research design and case study analysis to the identification and analysis of competing information campaigns.
2. Students will be able to apply social science theory to assess what drives the emergence of information campaigns.
3. Students will be able to assess the effects (dis)information campaigns have in the areas of democratic erosion, autocratic continuity, armed conflict, migration, extremism, militancy, campaigns against racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and backlashes against gender rights.

Enrollment

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Registrar calendar: <https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/>

Course Readings

- All readings will be available through the Blackboard Course Reading Packet

Instructor-Student Communication

I will respond to emails within 48 hours. If I will be away from email for more than one day, I will post an announcement on the Blackboard course homepage.

Before sending an email with a class logistics question, do see if your question is addressed in one of the following (available on your Blackboard course menu):

1. Syllabus
2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
3. Blackboard tutorials
4. Blackboard Q&A, and
5. Technology Requirements

Mason EMAIL

- Mason requires that university email be used for all course communication. I will be sending messages to your Mason email and you are responsible for making sure you have access to these messages.
- Please include GOVT 399 in your email subject heading to alert course instructors that your message relates to our class. Please sign your email with your full name.

Course Logistics

This course will meet in person and use Blackboard to facilitate learning outside of class sessions. In a typical week:

- you will read 100-150 pages
- complete précis of readings
- prepare for and participate in seminar discussions

You can anticipate devoting 10 hours or more to coursework each week.

To Access Blackboard

1. Go to <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>
2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Select on the “Courses” tab.
4. Select **GOVT 399 - (Dis?)Information and Its Effects on Global and Local Politics and Culture (Fall 2023)** under course listings

Technical Help

- If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITS Support Center at support@gmu.edu or 703.993.8870.
- If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu.

Course Requirements

The following requirements are designed to promote an optimal learning environment. This syllabus is a contract. Your continued enrollment in this class constitutes your acceptance of these requirements.

1. Students are required to read the syllabus and complete the syllabus quiz. The syllabus quiz is due Friday, September 1, by 11:59pm. The quiz is available through Blackboard.
2. Students are expected to complete assigned readings. Students should anticipate approximately 100-150 pages of reading every week.
3. Students will complete weekly précis. Précis will serve as the foundation of class discussion.
4. Students will complete one 5-page case study. This case study will incorporate 2-3 additional sources beyond a selected week's readings so as to provide further causal insight into the drivers behind the disinformation challenge/opportunity under review.
5. Students will submit a 10-page policy paper proposal. This proposal may serve as a foundation for students' spring 2024 IRTF policy projects. Rough drafts of the policy paper proposal are due November 20. Final drafts of the policy paper proposal are due December 8.
6. Students will deliver a poster presentation of their proposals during our last seminar meeting on November 27.
7. Accommodation for missed or late assignments may be granted only following office hours discussion with the instructor. Students can schedule office hours appointments through the instructor's [MS Bookings](#) link. An accommodation may be extended only if students have proper documentation that can be verified. If you anticipate you will have a conflict due to medical / health care, religious holidays or travel, please inform me the first week of class. In the absence of proper documentation, late work will be assessed a 1/3 of total grade penalty for each day the assignment is late.

Student Responsibilities

Honor Code: Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. The GMU Honor Code states: “Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee.” Students are encouraged to read the full Honor Code: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/> and to remain vigilant against any violation of the Code in their own work. Any cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be pursued according to the guidelines detailed in the University Catalog.

Time Conflict: George Mason University is committed to creating a welcoming, respectful and inclusive educational environment that values diversity. Students should review the syllabus at the beginning of the term to determine if there are any conflicts between class time and religious observance. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of these conflicts within the first week of the semester. <https://ulife.gmu.edu/religious-holiday-calendar/>.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See: <https://ds.gmu.edu/>

Student Services

Counselling and Psychological Services: The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. See <https://caps.gmu.edu>.

Grading, Assignment Description, and Deadlines

Assignment	Points	Description	Deadline
Syllabus Quiz	10	Open book quiz based on course syllabus	September 1
Case Study	50	One case study that explores, in depth, the origins and consequences of disinformation in a particular domain	Week of student's choosing
Oral Presentation of Case Studies	10	Seminar presentation of case study	Same weeks as written case study
Weekly Reading Notes	100	Weekly précis on readings using précis template (Graded P/F based on completion)	Weekly
Policy Paper Proposal	100	10-page policy paper proposal	December 8
Poster Presentation	20	Poster presentation of proposal in seminar	November 27
Class Participation	10	Seminar discussion of the week's readings	Weekly

Grading Scale

A+: 294-300	A: 276-293	A-: 270-275
B+: 264-269	B: 246-264	B-: 240-246
C+: 234-240	C: 216-234	C-: 210-216
D: 180-209	F: 0 - 179	

Class total scores are rounded to the nearest whole number. A score of 269.49 rounds to 269, a B+. A score of 269.50 rounds to 270, an A-.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (August 21 - 25): Welcome to the 2023-2024 IR Policy Task Force Learning Community

- **IRTF Member Introductions**
- **Overview of the IRTF**
 - The 2023-2024 IRTF Theme: Disinformation's Global and Local Effects on Politics and Culture
 - The art of research design, analysis, and policy making
 - Review of fall syllabus
- **Introductory Reading**
 - Amanda Taub and Max Fisher, "Where Countries Are Tinderboxes and Facebook Is a Match," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2018. *Course Reader*
 - Joseph Bernstein, "Bad News: Selling the Story of Disinformation," *Harper's Magazine*, August 8, 2023. *Course Reader*
 - Nina Jankowicz, "I Shouldn't Have to Accept Being in Deepfake Porn," *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2023. *Course Reader*

Week 2 (August 28 - September 1): Disinformation In Historical and Contemporary Context

- **Methodology Reading – What Are Case Studies?**

- Ruffa, Chiara. 2020. “Case Study Methods: Case Selection and Case Analysis.” In Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*. (Ch. 59, pp. 1133 - 1147). *Course Reader*
- **Disinformation in Historical and Contemporary Context Readings**
 - Soll, Jacob. 2016. “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News,” *POLITICO Magazine*. (Pages 1-9). *Course Reader*
 - O’Shaughnessy, Nicholas. 2020. “From Disinformation to Fake News: Forwards into the Past.” In Paul Baines, ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda*. (Ch. 4, pp. 1-23) *Course Reader*
 - Onwuachi-Willig, Angela. 2018. “From Emmett Till To Trayvon Martin: The Persistence of White Womanhood and the Preservation of White Manhood.” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, v. 15, no. 2, pp. 257–94. *Course Reader*
- **Syllabus quiz due by 11:59pm, September 1st**

Week (September 4 - 8): Labor Day – University Closed September 4

Week 3 (September 11 - 15): Contested Narratives in the Age of Social Media and Private Messaging

- **Methods Reading–Asking Questions**
 - Clark, William Roberts. 2020. “Asking Interesting Questions.” In Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*. (Ch. 1, pp. 7-25). *Course Reader*
- **Disinformation in the Age of Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and Telegram**
 - Stokel-Walker, Chris. 2022. “Twitter Changed Science — What Happens Now It’s in Turmoil?” *Nature* 613(7942): 19–21. *Course Reader*
 - Rossini, Patrícia, Jennifer Stromer-Galley, Erica Anita Baptista, and Vanessa Veiga de Oliveira. 2021. “Dysfunctional Information Sharing on WhatsApp and Facebook: The Role of Political Talk, Cross-Cutting Exposure and Social Corrections.” *New Media & Society* 23(8). SAGE Publications: 2430–2451. *Course Reader*
 - Serrano, Juan Carlos Medina, Orestis Papakyriakopoulos, and Simon Hegelich. 2020. “Dancing to the Partisan Beat: A First Analysis of Political Communication on TikTok”. In 12th ACM Conference on Web Science Pp. 257–266. *Course Reader*
 - * [YouTube video based on paper](#)

Week 4 (September 18 - 22): Information, Disinformation and Migration

- **Methods Reading–Cases and Causality**
 - Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Ch. 1, “Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories: A User’s Guide,” pp. 7-48. *Course Reader*
- **Migration Readings**
 - Hopkins, Daniel J., John Sides, and Jack Citrin. 2019. “The Muted Consequences of Correct Information about Immigration.” *The Journal of Politics* 81(1): 315–320. *Course Reader*
 - Bennett, W Lance, and Steven Livingston. 2018. “The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions.” *European Journal of Communication* 33(2): 122–139. *Course Reader*
 - Dekker, Rianne, Godfried Engbersen, Jeanine Klaver, and Hanna Vonk. 2018. “Smart Refugees: How Syrian Asylum Migrants Use Social Media Information in Migration Decision-Making.” *Social Media + Society* 4(1): 1-10. *Course Reader*
- **Guest Speaker: Professor Ilya Somin**
 - “Immigration and Voter Ignorance”

Week 5 (September 25 - 29): LGBTQ+ Rights

- **Methods Reading–Conducting Case Studies**
 - Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Ch. 2, “What Are Case Studies? How Should They Be Performed,” pp. 49-88. *Course Reader*
- **LGBTQ+ Rights Readings**
 - Lewis, Sophie. 2019. “How British Feminism Became Anti-Trans.” *The New York Times*. *Course Reader*

- Worthen, Meredith G. F. 2022. “This Is My TERF! Lesbian Feminists and the Stigmatization of Trans Women.” *Sexuality & Culture* 26(5): 1782–1803. *Course Reader*
- Awondo, Patrick, Peter Geschiere, and Graeme Reid. 2012. “Homophobic Africa? Toward A More Nuanced View.” *African Studies Review* 55(3): 145–168. *Course Reader*
- Recommended: Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2000. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. Basic books. Chapter 1, “Dueling Dualisms,” pp. 1-29.

Week 6 (October 2 - 6): Disinformation and Armed Conflict

- **Methods Reading–Case Selection**
 - Weller, Nicholas, and Jeb Barnes. 2016. “Pathway Analysis and the Search for Causal Mechanisms.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 45(3): 424–57. *Course Reader*
- **Disinformation and Armed Conflict Readings**
 - Fink, Christina. 2018. “Dangerous Speech, Anti-Muslim Violence, and Facebook in Myanmar.” *Journal of International Affairs* 71(1.5): 43–52. *Course Reader*
 - Patton, Desmond Upton, Robert D. Eschmann, Caitlin Elsaesser, and Eddie Bocanegra. 2016. “Sticks, Stones and Facebook Accounts: What Violence Outreach Workers Know about Social Media and Urban-Based Gang Violence in Chicago.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 65: 591–600. *Course Reader*

Week 7 (October 10 - 13): Disinformation, Militancy, and War

- **Note:** We meet on Tuesday this week. Tuesday classes do not meet.
- **Methods Readings–Process Tracing**
 - Ricks, Jacob I., and Amy H. Liu. 2018. “Process-Tracing Research Designs: A Practical Guide.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51(4): 842–46. *Course Reader*
 - George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies And Theory Development In The Social Sciences*. MIT Press. Ch. 10, “Process Tracing and Historical Explanation,” pp. 205-232. *Course Reader*
- **Disinformation, Militancy, and War Readings**
 - Johansen, Morgen S., and Mark R. Joslyn. 2008. “Political Persuasion during Times of Crisis: The Effects of Education and News Media on Citizens’ Factual Information about Iraq.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85(3): 591–608. *Course Reader*
 - Chatfield, Akemi Takeoka, Christopher G. Reddick, and Uuf Brajawidagda. 2015. “Tweeting Propaganda, Radicalization and Recruitment: Islamic State Supporters Multi-Sided Twitter Networks.” In *Proceedings of the 16th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research*: 239–249. *Course Reader*

Week 8 (October 16 - 20): Russia and the Information Wars

- **Methods Reading–Counterfactual Analysis**
 - Mahoney, James, and Rodrigo Barrenechea. 2019. “The Logic of Counterfactual Analysis in Case-Study Explanation.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 70(1): 306–38. *Course Reader*
- **Russia and the Information Wars**
 - Erlich, Aaron, and Calvin Garner. 2023. “Is Pro-Kremlin Disinformation Effective? Evidence from Ukraine.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28(1): 5–28. *Course Reader*
 - McKay, Spencer, and Chris Tenove. 2021. “Disinformation as a Threat to Deliberative Democracy.” *Political Research Quarterly* 74(3): 703–717. *Course Reader*

Week 9 (October 23 - 27): China and the Information Wars

- **Methods Reading–Typological Theorizing**
 - George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies And Theory Development In The Social Sciences*. MIT Press. Ch. 11, “Integrating Comparative and Within-Case Analysis: Typological Theory,” pp. 233-262. *Course Reader*
- **China and the Information Wars**
 - United Nations. 2022. *OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China*. *Course Reader*

- Hvistendahl, Mara, David A. Fahrenthold, Lynsey Chutel, and Ishaan Jhaveri. 2023. “A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a U.S. Tech Mogul.” *The New York Times*, August 5. *Course Reader*
- Hartig, Falk. 2015. “Communicating China to the World: Confucius Institutes and China’s Strategic Narratives.” *Politics* 35(3–4): 245–258. *Course Reader*
- **Guest Speaker: Shairbek Dzhuraev**
 - “A new tool in the “Great Game”? Disinformation and the geopolitics of Central Asia”

Week 10 (October 30 - November 3): The US and the Information Wars Abroad

- **Methods Readings–Ethnography**
 - Schatz, E. (2009). “Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics.” In Schatz, E. ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. University of Chicago Press. (Ch. 1, pp. 1-22). *Course Reader*
 - Brodtkin, Evelyn Z. 2017. “The Ethnographic Turn in Political Science: Reflections on the State of the Art.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(1): 131–34. *Course Reader*
- **The US and the Information Wars**
 - Cull, Nicholas J. 2013. “The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Internet in US Public Diplomacy.” *International Studies Review* 15(1): 123–139. *Course Reader*
 - Dylan, Huw, and Thomas J. Maguire. “2022 Secret Intelligence and Public Diplomacy in the Ukraine War.” *Survival*, 64(4): 33–74. *Course Reader*

Week 11 (November 6 - 10): The Information Wars at Home (I)

- **Methods Reading–Ethics**
 - Pacheco-Vega, Raul, and Kate Parizeau. 2018. “Doubly Engaged Ethnography: Opportunities and Challenges When Working With Vulnerable Communities.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 17(1), pp. 1 - 13. *Course Reader*
- **The Information Wars at Home (I)**
 - Kenny, Maureen C., Claire Helpingstine, and Tracy Borelus. “Conspiracy Theories of Human Trafficking: Knowledge and Perceptions Among a Diverse College Population.” *Journal of Human Trafficking* (2023): 1–15. *Course Reader*
 - Sellnow, Timothy L., Adam Parrish, and Lauren Semenas. “From Hoax As Crisis to Crisis As Hoax: Fake News and Information Disorder As Disruptions to The Discourse of Renewal.” *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research* 2, no. 1 (January 2019): 121–42. *Course Reader*

Week 12 (November 13 - 17): The Information Wars at Home (II)

- **Methods Reading**
 - George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies And Theory Development In The Social Sciences*. MIT Press. Ch. 12, “Case Studies and Policy-Relevant Theory,” pp. 263-285. *Course Reader*
- **The Information Wars at Home (II)**
 - Feldman, Lauren, Edward W. Maibach, Connie Roser-Renouf, and Anthony Leiserowitz. “Climate on Cable: The Nature and Impact of Global Warming Coverage on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 3–31. *Course Reader*
 - Serrano-Puche, Javier. “Digital Disinformation and Emotions: Exploring the Social Risks of Affective Polarization.” *International Review of Sociology* 31, no. 2 (May 4, 2021): 231–45. *Course Reader*

Week 13 (November 20 - 21): Individual Meetings to Discuss Draft Proposals

- No readings this week.
- Schedule an individual meeting with me using the Office Hours link on Blackboard
- **Please submit your draft proposals by 11:59pm, Monday, November 20**

Week 14 (November 27 - December 1): Poster Presentations of Policy Paper Proposals

- No readings this week.
- Poster presentation of policy paper proposals

December 8–Policy Paper Proposals Are Due

Syllabus Draft Modification Notes

- **Future Edits Will Appear Here**
 - 2023-09-01: Minor formatting edits
 - 2023-10-11: Added Shairbek Dzhuraev guest lecture to week 9
 - 2023-11-02: Readings added to week 11
 - 2023-11-07: Readings added to week 12