

GOV 97  
Week 11 Lesson Plan  
**Democracy and New Technologies**

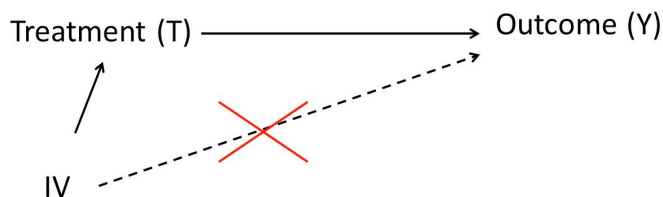
**INTRO**

Last week Professor Baum presented us with two different visions of the relationship between media technology and democracy. On the one hand, the theory of democratic peace seems to suggest that in democratic societies, more engaged populations could lead to a more peaceful world. In this world, the *audience costs* would be increased because more citizens would be aware of politics and could hold their leaders accountable. On the other hand, Professor Baum's description of “*drones and phones*” highlights the degree to which technology can be used to monitor populations and kill in secret, perhaps subverting the democratic process or helping authoritarian regimes stay in power. In this world, more information doesn't just empower the people---it also empowers regimes. This week we continue to discuss this tension. Does new media make the world more like an Athenian democracy, or more like Orwell's *1984*?

**TO THE READINGS!**

**Enikolopov et al** examine the existence of media effects in Russia. Get students to explain the following:

- *Q: What are Enikolopov et al studying?*
  - A: Whether or not having access to independent TV (NTV) had an effect on the 1999 Russian election outcomes.
- *Q: What do Enikolopov et al find?*
  - A: That access to NTV is associated with a decrease of 8.9 percentage points in the vote share of the government party, 6.3 pp increase in the vote share for the opposition, 3.8 pp decrease in turnout.
- *Q: Tell me more about this “NTV” station. How might it have influenced voters in Russia?*
  - A: NTV was independent (until bought by Gazprom in 2001), unlike all of the other stations available. Relative to the state-controlled stations ORT and RTR, NTV spent less time devoted to covering the pro-govt party (“Unity”) and spent more time covering the centrist opposition (OVR) and the liberal opposition (SPS and Yabloko). NTV also covered the pro-govt party (“Unity”) more critically while the state-controlled stations (ORT and RTR) covered the pro-govt party less critically.
- *Q: Why might we expect to see larger media effects in a country like Russia compared to, say, the United States or England?*
  - A: Authors argue that the political parties in Russia weren't well known (Unity was created only a few months before the elections). When there aren't political parties with well-known platforms the media has a lot more room to show voters only some of their options. Charisma might matter more without other sources of information. In a low-information environment, media might have more room to sway voters' views.
- *Q: The authors go to great lengths to convince us that NTV is causing this effect, not other background factors. What are some alternative explanations?*
  - A: Stories include: Maybe the places that get NTV are already more liberal. Maybe the places that get NTV are more wealthy and so the viewers are more opposed to the government (which has not respected things that the wealthy tend to care about like private property rights). Maybe other media like radio and newspapers provided the opposition viewpoints?
- *Q: Did the authors manage to convince you that it was actually NTV that is causing these effects? (How?)*
  - A: NTV used an old Soviet transmitter system, not necessarily related to areas that were more liberal. It **was** associated with areas that were more populated and had higher average wage and were more urban, but the researchers could take these factors into account. (*Are there other factors they missed?*) So the authors argue that “**conditional on observables**” it was as-if random that individuals got NTV signal.
  - If time, maybe discuss the idea of instrumental variables and the exclusion restriction:



- *Q: What is the instrument?* NTV's signal
- *Q: What is the treatment?* The treatment is actually watching NTV – being exposed to oppositional rhetoric.
- *Q: What is the outcome?* Who won the election, whether or not people turned out to vote.
- *Q: Are there obvious violations of the exclusion restriction?* Probably not, seems okay, but maybe getting the signal is correlated with getting other kinds of media (newspapers, radio) that are also more liberal? Can think about this a little bit.
- *Q: Why do the authors do a “placebo test” on 1995?*
  - A: A placebo test checks to see if there is a relationship between NTV access and votes during a time when NTV didn't exist (and shouldn't have any influence). This is a good way of checking to see if there are other factors that are correlated with these locations.
  - Do the students find the design convincing? If they seem to like this topic we can go back to their papers and think about possible instrumental variables that could have helped Brownlee et al...

**King, Pan, and Roberts** study online censorship in China. Get the students to explain the following:

- *Q: King, Pan, and Roberts (KP&R) say that they are distinguishing between the “state critique” and “collective action potential” theories of censorship. What is the “state critique” theory? What is the “collective action potential” theory? Which do KP&R find evidence for?*
  - A: State critique theory: State will censor critical discussion so that remaining news will favor govt → others will be less moved to take action against govt
  - A: Collective action potential theory: State will censor action that is associated with events that have “collective action potential” and ignore other (potentially critical) discussion.
  - Talk about **collective action**. What is it? Group activity for a cause → results benefit all members, but there are incentives to just let others deal with it (free riding). Communication matters.
  - A: KP&R find more evidence for the collective action potential theory of censorship.
- *Q: Why do you think that China is so concerned about “collective action potential?”*
  - A: Answers about how talk doesn't usually topple regimes etc... Why collective action is a possible breakpoint in the system.
  - A: Chinese censorship removes ANY posts (both supporting and criticizing the state) that are about collective action. (Why do both?)
- *Q: What are the different ways that China censors information?*
  - A: Walk through Fig. 1 (Chinese Censorship Decision Tree)
  - A: Difference between automated review and human review.
- *Q: What different techniques did KP&R use to “reverse engineer” Chinese censorship?*
  - Used a randomized experiment to submit different kinds of posts to different websites across China. Observed which ones were censored and when.
  - Built their own social network site to get to implement censorship themselves and see how the process works.
- *Q: What do you think about the future of social media in China? Will it be a force for democracy or will it allow the regime to maintain control?*

**Can the NSA be controlled? (David Cole)** Writes about the USA Freedom Act and whether it will actually limit the NSA—didn't actually pass the Senate, so didn't become law! Also includes some descriptions of what the NSA does etc..

- *Q: What was the USA Freedom Act?*
  - A: Under the USA Freedom Act, the NSA would be prohibited from collecting phone data en masse. Instead, such records would remain with the telephone companies, and the NSA would only be authorized to approach those companies on an individual, case-by-case basis, and only when it could first satisfy the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court that there was reasonable suspicion that a “specific selection term”—for example, a name, phone number, or address—is linked to an international terrorist or a representative of a foreign government or political organization.
- *Q: What is “metadata?”*

- A: Information about who contacts who, when, but not the exact content. Article notes that former director of the NSA and the CIA says that “We kill people based on metadata.”
- *Q: Are you worried about the NSA's activities? Why do you think that there hasn't been more done to restrict the NSA?*

**Online Ads** – two pieces by Professor Sweeney explore how different groups might be exposed to different kinds of advertising.

- *Q: In “Online Ads Roll the Dice” Latanya Sweeney notes that there are protected classes in the United States. What are these protected classes and what is the source of their protection?*
  - A: Protected classes in the United States described the features of individuals that are illegal to use for discriminating purposes. This is usually a matter of federal law, but states can also make protected classes. Federally, race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability status, and sex are all characteristics of “protected classes.” It is therefore, illegal to discriminate between people on the basis of things like race.
- Walk through “Online Ads Roll the Dice”
- *Q: How does Sweeney show that certain websites have exclusive audiences?*
  - A: Looks at comScore data (tracks internet use) and calculates the degree to which websites are accessed exclusively by individuals who identify as white, black, latino or asian. Sweeney finds many sites that have racially distinct audiences (though relatively few have distinctly white audiences...why might this be?) What do students think of these racially distinct websites?
- *Q: In “Discrimination in Online Ad Delivery” Sweeney finds that on Reuters.com, a host of Google AdSense ads, a black-identifying name was 25% more likely to get an ad suggestive of an arrest record. Why do these differences potentially matter?*
  - A: Well, racism. Go back to the idea of a democracy as not just about elections, but also about rights and outcomes (Shklar, Dworkin). What kinds of outcomes might we be worried about? What kinds of rights are violated?

**Conclusion:** Some bigger-picture questions!

- Does new media make the world more like an Athenian democracy, or more like Orwell's 1984?
- What role do you think social media will play in the 2016 Presidential election? (Possible activity: have students read WaPo blog post about Hillary and social media: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/04/13/hillary-clintons-launch-saw-huge-numbers-on-twitter-and-other-useless-social-media-factoids/>)
- How do political parties need to adapt to the realities of the digital age?
- How might the relationship between new media and democracy vary across different states?
- What definitions of democracy are these scholars using? Do you think they see democracy as dependent or detached? Just about competitive elections? About rights?
- How much privacy should citizens be willing to give up to protect their security?
- Slacktivism--is it a problem? <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/unicef-tells-slacktivism-give-money-not-facebook-likes/275429/>
- Does social media have different implications for democracy than other forms of new technology? Is social media different from, say, phones or the fax machine? (There's an argument by Asmolov and Livingston that the movement away from nation states towards a more networked world has changed some of the informational paradigms we thought were permanent: <http://www.tandfonline.com/epz-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2010.503024#.VTVQ1FzR8bk>)