Call for Papers

News Coverage of US Elections
A Media & Democracy Workshop

Brooklyn, NY | April 23–24, 2020

OVERVIEW

In recent decades, the news industry has undergone fundamental changes, reshaping where and how citizens get information about candidates for public office in our democracy. Historically, the choices voters made about candidates were informed primarily by the news media, shaping the conventional and scholarly wisdom about the kinds of candidates and appeals likely to succeed. How have the rise of social and digital media and the decline—or evolution—of traditional news media reshaped coverage of US elections? Do these changes force us to rethink traditional models of media and politics?

To encourage new research on the evolving nature of US election coverage, the Media & Democracy program at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) is proud to announce an open call for papers for an interdisciplinary research development workshop to be held in Brooklyn, NY, on April 23–24, 2020. This workshop will be co-chaired by Professor Julia Azari (Marquette University) and Professor Michael Wagner (University of Wisconsin–Madison).

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

This research development workshop will give participants the opportunity to receive in-depth feedback from their peers on in-progress research, to give feedback to other workshop participants, and to meet fellow scholars who work on similar topics.

The workshop will be geared toward scholars who have previously completed research on this or related topics. Early-career scholars are particularly encouraged to apply. We encourage applications from all relevant social science and humanities fields, including political science, history, sociology, communication, journalism, and others.

Applications are due November 4, 2019. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the organizers. All accepted participants will be expected to circulate a working paper (10–15 pages) by March 29, 2020, and to read and prepare feedback on the manuscripts submitted by other participants prior to the workshop on April 23. A selection of participants will be invited to submit full manuscripts to be considered for inclusion in a symposium on election coverage in an outlet for public scholarship.

WORKSHOP THEMES

We welcome proposals for research that will address how changes in media, technology, and politics are shaping the way that elections are covered. Substantive research themes may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

Political Economy of News Coverage: What effect does increasing media consolidation and/or changes to local media have on election coverage? Has the decline of local media changed the role of national media organizations in the coverage of US elections? What kinds of information outlets have emerged to compensate for the voids left by declining local media coverage of politics and the increasing tendency of national media to frame politics as a strategic game?
Sociology of Journalism: Do new professional pressures, such as the perceived necessity of having an active presence on social media, detract time/attention from other journalistic functions? Do these cross pressures affect how journalists (local or national) cover elections in the age of social media?

Do media notions about “electability” reinforce existing hierarchies by giving certain candidates advantages over others? How do journalists’ ideological, racial, and gender identities shape how they cover candidates who are in one or more of their in-groups or out-groups?

Do journalists conceive of themselves as simply reporting on what happens in the campaign, or do they understand (and acknowledge) their agency in affecting what happens? How does journalists’ use of contemporary tools like social media, poll aggregation, and analytics affect their perceptions of and reporting about public opinion?

Campaign Communications: Do candidates alter messages when communicating to voters through non-traditional media? How do differences in how candidates allocate their advertising spending across traditional and social media affect their support? How does a changing communication environment shape the racial and gender dynamics of campaigns?

Campaign Finance: Do small and online donors differ in their donation patterns when compared to traditional donors? If this difference exists, how is it connected to media sources for these demographics? What is the relationship between campaign finance metrics and media narratives surrounding candidates?

Electoral Institutions: How does the presidential primary schedule impact media coverage of candidates/campaigns? How have changes in the media environment shaped the decline of traditional party organizations and norms?

Media Audiences: How have social media changed how people consume election information? How, and with what consequences, do media use habits vary in “swing states?” How do traditionally underrepresented voters use various news and social media platforms when learning about candidates and making decisions about who to vote for? How do perceptions of the media audience and/or the voting public affect perceptions of electability, the accuracy of electoral predictions, or perceptions of media bias?

TO APPLY

Please send the following materials to mdapplications@ssrc.org by November 4, 2019. Please include “Application for US Election Coverage workshop” in the subject line.

• Current C.V. of the author who will attend the workshop (maximum two pages).
• An abstract of up to 500 words. The abstract should clearly outline the main theoretical and/or empirical contribution of the paper.
• A short statement (up to 300 words) detailing your interest in participating in the workshop and how it will advance your research agenda. If you have publications or projects that are related to the research detailed in your abstract, please feel free to list up to three citations in this document.