



DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION
& JOURNALISM

C&J Spring Colloquium

April 12, 2019 Friday from 12pm to 1:30pm @ CJ building Room 119

A battle of identities: Mass media and the rural-urban divide in American politics



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Americans are increasingly divided along the lines of significant social identities, such as party affiliation, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and identities connected to place. Social identities become ways in which citizens organize themselves in in-groups and out-groups (Green, Palmquist & Schickler, 2004; Mason, 2015). These acute divisions in American society have profound implications for political tolerance and social cohesion. For example, citizens increasingly tend to dislike people who hold different points of views (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) and tend to live in politically and socially homogenous neighborhoods (Hill, 2005). An emerging divide in American politics is the one between urban and rural areas. Urban areas tend to be increasingly liberal and vote for Democratic candidates, while rural areas tend to be conservative and vote for Republican candidates (McKee, 2008). This divide was more evident than ever in the 2016 Presidential election. In this election, rural counties across the nation overwhelmingly supported the Republican candidate Donald Trump (Badger, Bui & Pierce, 2016). My talk will present preliminary data from a project that has two main sections: a content analysis of the media coverage of rural and urban areas and a survey of the American population. Specifically, I will discuss the relationship between identities connected to place, mass media coverage and consumption and political attitudes.