

Political Science 290: Polarization in American Politics

Dickinson College, Spring 2019
MR 1:30 - 2:45, Denny Hall - Room 021

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Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:30; Thursday 3:00-4:30; and by appointment

Course Description

American politics is contentious. Many people believe this country is more political, socially, and culturally divided than it has been at any time since the Civil War. But, is this true? Are there two Americas – a red American and a blue America? In this course, we will examine the nature of political divisions in American society and their partisan roots. We will ask questions about the definition of political polarization and how to measure it. We will also examine the causes and consequences of political polarization. In doing so, we will spend time thinking about racial, economic, and other schisms in American society. Additionally, we will read classic and contemporary work considering the role of institutions in creating, perpetuating, or alleviating political polarization, including political parties, campaign finance rules, and innate human characteristics.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to...

- Understand some of the causes of, consequences of, and solutions to political polarization in the U.S.
- Analyze how current events are affected by or contribute to polarization
- Speak and write critically about polarization
- Consider viewpoints different from their own and articulate how those viewpoints affect our understanding of polarization

Course Materials

There are two required books for the course (available at the bookstore):

- Bishop, Bill. 2008. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart*. New York, NY: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. (Big Sort)
- Persily, Nathaniel. 2015. *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. (Solutions)

Additional readings are available on Moodle, via the Dickinson College library, or online as specified in the syllabus.

Finally, as a student of American politics, you should be keeping up with the news regularly. In addition to following reputable news sources such as (but not limited to) *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, and NPR, there are several blogs

edited by, and/or contributed to by political scientists that you will likely find interesting and relevant to course content:

- “The Monkey Cage” hosted by *The Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/>)
- “Mischiefs of Faction” hosted by *Vox.com* (<https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction>)
- “Politics” hosted by *Fivethirtyeight.com* (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/>)

Requirements and Grading

In order to succeed in the class, your consistent attendance and regular participation in class discussions is essential. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences; if you miss more than two course meetings, your attendance at participation grade will begin to be adversely affected. If something arises in your life that affects your ability to come to class and/or complete assignments in a timely manner, I encourage you to speak with me and/or your College Dean as soon as you are able so we can discuss potential accommodations.

Class participation involves regular, high-quality contributions to class discussion. Quality is more important than quantity, but during class meetings, I expect everyone to participate meaningfully in the discussion. High-quality comments are only possible when you have read carefully and prepared for the class session. For some, speaking up in class is an especially difficult challenge. If this is true for you, please come see me so we can talk about alternative ways to participate in the course.

Beyond participation, your grade will be based on two midterm exams, a series of response papers, and a final paper. The relative weight and due dates of each component are as follows:

Attendance and Participation	10%	
Response Papers	20%	January 28, 31, February 4, or 7 February 11, 14, 18, or 21 February 28, March 4, or 7 April 1, 4, 8, or 11
Midterm #1	20%	February 25
Midterm #2	20%	March 28
Final Paper	30%	March – Check in #1 April – Check in #2 May 7 at 5:00 p.m.

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D = 60-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	F = 0-59
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

How to calculate your own grade

Attendance and Participation = Graded out of 10 points

Response Papers = Graded out of 20 points each (divide your points by 4 on each paper)

Midterm #1 = Graded out of 100 points (multiply your points by 0.20)

Midterm #2 = Graded out of 100 points (multiply your points by 0.20)

Final Paper =

- Complete Two Check-Ins = Each graded pass/fail (total of 5 points between the two)
- Final Draft = Graded out of 100 points (multiply your points by 0.25)

Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College's Community Standards... "Respect for ideas—our own and others'—is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors.

Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors."

https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/access, email access@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ADS in the Lower Level of Old West, Room 5.

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet soon to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your Blue Form. If you will need test proctoring from ADS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

Technology in the Classroom

A recent study conducted by psychologists Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer shows that students who take notes on a computer do less well answering conceptual questions than do students who take notes by hand (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>). However, I know that many students have become accustomed to using laptops and/or tablets for note-taking. I leave the decision to you as to what works best for you. As such, I do permit students to use technology in the classroom. In fact, there might be a few days I will explicitly encourage you to use online resources during class.

With respect to audio recording, Pennsylvania is a "two-party consent" state, meaning that it is a crime to "intercept or record a telephone call or conversation **unless all parties to the**

conversation consent” (<http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-recording-law>). Practically, what this means is that you should not be using any device to record class lectures or discussions. If a student with an accommodation from ADS is permitted to record class, all members of the class will be informed; students with ADS accommodations agree to strict guidelines with respect to how they use the class recordings.

Outline of the Course

January 21 – Introductions and Expectations

Unit 1: What is Polarization and How Did We Get Here?

January 24 –

- Fiorina, Chapter 2 of Culture War (pages 11-32) (on Moodle)
- Abramowitz and Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?” (on Moodle)
- Optional: Solutions, Chapter 3 (pages 3-14)

People

January 28 –

- Big Sort, Chapter 1 (pages 19-40)
- Mason, Chapter 5 of Uncivil Agreement (pages 61-77) (on Moodle)

January 31 –

- Big Sort, Chapters 3-4 (pages 58-104)

February 4 –

- Big Sort, Chapters 5-6 (pages 105-155)

Monday, February 4 at 7:00 pm in ATS – “Why People Believe Conspiracy Theories” Clarke Forum Talk by Joanne Miller, University of Delaware

History, Elites, and Institutions

February 7 –

- Pildes, Section 3 of “Why the Center Does Not Hold,” (pages 287-297) (on Moodle)
- Frymer, “Debating the Causes of Party Polarization in America” (on Moodle)

February 11 –

- Levendusky, Chapter 2 of The Partisan Sort (pages 12-37) (on Moodle)
- Grossman and Hopkins, “Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats: The Asymmetry of American Party Politics” (on Moodle)

February 14 –

- Levendusky, Chapter 4 of How Partisan Media Polarize America (pages 66-91) (on Moodle)
- Swanson, “These Political Scientists May Have Just Discovered Why U.S. Politics Are A Disaster” (Available online at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/07/these-political-scientists-may-have-discovered-the-real-reason-u-s-politics-are-a-disaster/?utm_term=.1e16571ead25) (Link also on Moodle)

February 18 -

- Ingraham, “This is the Best Explanation of Gerrymandering You Will Ever See” (Available online at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/03/01/this-is-the-best-explanation-of-gerrymandering-you-will-ever-see/?utm_term=.cfa631da0993) (Link also on Moodle)
- McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, “Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?” (on Moodle)

February 21 –

- Gerber and Morton, “Primary Election Systems and Representation” (on Moodle)
- Hirano, Snyder, Ansolabehere, and Hansen, “Primary Elections and Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Congress” (on Moodle)

February 25 – **Midterm #1**

Unit 2: Consequences of Polarization

Governance

February 28 –

- APSA, “Part I. The Need for Greater Party Responsibility” (on Moodle)
- Lee, “How Party Polarization Affects Governance” (on Moodle)

March 4 –

- Mann and Ornstein, Chapter 1 of *It’s Even Worse Than It Was* (pages 3-30) (on Moodle)
- Sinclair, “Spoiling the Sausages? How a Polarized Congress Deliberates and Legislates” (pages 55-87 on Moodle)

Extremism

March 7 –

- Iyengar and Westwood, “Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization” (on Moodle)
- PEW, Overview of “Political Polarization in the American Public” (pages 6-17) (on Moodle)

March 11 & 14

- *SPRING BREAK*

How We Live

March 18 –

- Big Sort, Chapter 7, 8, **or** 9 (pages 159-181, 182-195, or 196-217)

Wednesday, March 20 at 7:00 p.m. in ATS – “Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity,” Clarke Forum Talk by Lilliana Mason, University of Maryland, College Park

Political Implications

March 21 –

- Big Sort, Chapters 10 and 11 (pages 221-275)

March 25 –

- Big Sort, Chapter 12 and Afterward (pages 276-310)

March 28 –

- **Midterm #2**

Unit 3: Solutions to Political Polarization

Reforming the Electoral System

April 1 –

- Solutions, Chapters 5-6 (pages 83-103)

April 4 –

- Solutions, Chapters 4 & 7 (pages 73-82 & 104-120)

Strengthening Political Parties

April 8 –

- Solutions, Chapters 8-9 (pages 123-145)

April 11 –

- Solutions, Chapters 10-11 (pages 146-164)

Empowering and Informing Moderate Voters

April 15 –

- Solutions, Chapters 12-13 (pages 167-194)

Lowering Barriers to Policy Making

April 18 –

- Solutions, Chapters 14-15 (pages 197-217)

April 22 –

- Solutions, Chapters 16-17 (pages 218-239)

April 25 –

- Solutions, Chapter 18 (pages 240-261)

April 29 –

- Solutions, Chapters 19-20 (pages 262-284)

Wrap-Up

May 2 –

- Bermeo, “Reflections: Can American Democracy Still be Saved?” (on Moodle)
- Mason, Chapter 8 of Uncivil Agreement (pages 127-141) (on Moodle)

Tuesday, May 7, at 5:00 p.m. – Final Papers Due (may be submitted via email)