

Wright State University

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Dates: June 20, 2016 - July 28, 2016
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Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

One of the most common themes in current political discussion is polarization. Political polarization has been blamed for legislative gridlock, political incivility, the rise of extremist groups, and even the 2016 primary results. But is polarization as bad, and as abnormal, as casual pundits make it out to be? In this course, we will examine the causes and consequences of political polarization and evaluate evidence related to this phenomena.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

As a result of the class, students will be able to:

- Assess the various perspectives on why and how voters are polarized.
- Evaluate evidence and arguments related to political polarization.
- Develop skills to assess the current state of American politics
- Identify the underlying ideological and cultural perspectives that fuel political disagreement.
- Distinguish between political punditry and political science and use the scientific method to test arguments.
- Develop a survey to improve our understanding of polarization.

READING MATERIALS (Required):

- Hopkins, Daniel J. and John Sides. 2015. *Political Polarization in American Politics*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Additional readings will be available online, posted on Pilot, or available through the Wright State University library.

Late Work Policy: Assignments turned in late will be penalized 5% per day.

Methods for Learning and Teaching: This online course provides a mix of video lectures and interactive assignments. Your professor is on campus and widely available in person and online.

Expectations

Design of the Course: It is likely that many of you selected an online course because you need the flexibility of an online course for your schedule. This course is designed to give you maximum flexibility. However, it is also important that we move through the material synchronously. I expect this course to be comparable to an on-campus course, therefore you will have assignments spread out over the entire 6 week period. The course will be laid out with 6 units, 1 unit per week. The course material for the week will be posted on Saturday and will be due on the following Tuesday, so you will have nine days to complete the assignments in that unit. This also means that two units will overlap for a few days. So you should consider your own schedule and plan accordingly. You can neither knock out the entire course during the first week of the term nor can you blow off this course for five weeks and try to complete everything at the end. If you cannot fit this course into your schedule on a weekly basis, then you should not take this course.

Academic Honesty: All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Please consult the [Code of Student Conduct](#) for academic integrity.

Be Flexible: While the syllabus represents an agreement between us, I reserve the right to revise and modify it throughout the course if it is necessary to achieve our goals. Situations beyond either of our control can also emerge that require changes to the course. I will notify you of any changes made throughout the course.

Disability

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated. It is your responsibility to notify me during the first week of the semester if such accommodations are needed. If you have questions about this, contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) at 937-775-5680 or disability_services@wright.edu.

Assignments

Homework Assignments (60% of final grade) You will complete 6 homework assignments over the term. These assignments draw on the lectures, readings, and supplementary materials to synthesize the course material. You will have one assignment per week of material.

Podcast Responses (20% of final grade) You will listen to two podcasts during the term. A response essay prompt will be posted the week these go online.

Annotated Survey (20% of final grade) We will spend a lot of time in this course focusing on public opinion. Public opinion is most often measured by surveys. You will be asked to develop a survey that implements the best practices in survey design. This will include questions along with in-text notes about why you selected this question (supported by evidence). The prompt for this assignment will be posted during the third week.

Grading

Below I list each assignment, the due date (also marked on course calendar), and the weight it receives in the final calculation of your grade:

Assignment	Due Date	% of Grade
Homework 1	June 28	10%
Homework 2	July 5	10%
Homework 3	July 12	10%
Homework 4	July 19	10%
Podcast Response 1	July 19	10%
Homework 5	July 26	10%
Podcast Response 2	July 27	10%
Homework 6	July 28	10%

CLASS SCHEDULE:¹

Unit I - Defining and Understanding Polarization, Ideologies, and the Culture Wars

Materials for Unit I will be available on Monday, June 20. Assignments from Unit I are due on Tuesday, June 28 at 11:59 PM EST.

Readings

McCarty, Nolan. [“What we know and don’t know about our polarized politics.”](#) (Ch.1 of Hopkins and Sides book)

Matthews, Dylan. 2014. [“This poll proves that millennials have totally incoherent political views.”](#) July 14, 2014, *Vox*.

[“Is there a Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life.”](#), The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007.

Broockman, David. [“Are politicians and activists reliably “more extreme” than voters? A skeptical perspective.”](#) (Ch. 7 of Hopkins and Sides book)

Video Lectures

Lecture 1: [Introduction to Polarization in American Politics](#)

Lecture 2: [Political Ideologies](#)

Lecture 3: [Culture Wars](#)

[Assignment 1]

¹Students are responsible for knowing both university and course schedules.

The academic calendar is available at: <https://www.wright.edu/registrar/academic-calendar>.

Unit II - How Are We Polarized? Part 1: Ideological Purists, Moderates, and Partisan Sorting

Materials for Unit II will be available on Saturday, June 25. Assignments from Unit II are due on Tuesday, July 5 at 11:59 PM EST.

Readings

Theriault, Sean. "[Partisan warfare is the problem.](#)" Ch. 2 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Carsey, Thomas and Geoffrey Layman. "[Our politics is polarized on more issues than ever before.](#)" Ch. 4 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Hare, Christopher and Keith T. Poole. "[How politically moderate are Americans? Less than it seems.](#)" Ch. 5 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Fiorina, Morris P. and Samuel Abrams. "[Americans are not polarized, just better sorted.](#)" Ch. 6 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Video Lectures

Lecture 4: [Party Conflict in Congress](#)

Lecture 5: [Party Sorting](#)

Additional Resources

Morris Fiorina Podcast on Polarization - [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)

[\[Assignment 2\]](#)

Unit III - How Are We Polarized? Part 2: Social and Issues Polarization, Regional and State-level Polarization

Materials for Unit II will be available on Saturday, July 2. Assignments from Unit III are due on Tuesday, July 12 at 11:59 PM EST.

Readings

Mason, Lilliana. "[Party polarization is making us more prejudiced.](#)" Ch. 8 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Gelman, Andrew. 2016. "[An important part of political polarization is just in your head.](#)" April 5, 2016, *The Washington Post*

Sides, John and Andrew Gelman. 2016. "[Can Trump re-draw the electoral map? There's one big problem.](#)" May 10, 2016, *The Washington Post*.

Enten, Harry and Nate Silver. 2014. "[Migration isn't turning red states blue.](#)" August 29, 2014, *FiveThirtyEight*.

Shor, Boris. "[How US state legislatures are polarized and getting more polarized.](#)"

Video Lectures

Lecture 6a: [Social and Issue Polarization](#)

Take the [Partisan Bias Test](#) referenced in the lecture.

Lecture 6b: [Social and Issue Polarization Part 2](#)

Lecture 7: [Geographic Polarization](#)

[[Assignment 3](#)]

Unit IV - Why Are We Polarized? Part 1: Role of Government, Income Inequality, Race, and Religion

Materials for Unit IV will be available on Saturday, July 9. Assignments from Unit IV are due on Tuesday, July 19 at 11:59 PM EST.

Readings

Stonewall, Jeff. "[The two key factors behind our polarized politics.](#)" Ch. 10 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Lee, Frances E. "[American politics is more competitive than ever. That's making partisanship worse.](#)" Ch. 11 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Swanson, Ana. 2015. "[These political scientists may have just discovered why U.S. politics are a disaster.](#)" October 7, 2015, *The Washington Post*.

Drutman, Lee. 2016. "[American politics has reached peak polarization.](#)" March 24, 2016, *Vox*.

Abramowitz, Alan I. "[How race and religion have polarized American voters.](#)" Ch. 12 of Hopkins and Sides book.

[[Assignment 4](#)]

Podcast - [Socialization and Polarization](#) with Christopher Ojeda, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Research Associate at Stanford University.

[[Podcast Response 1](#)]

Unit V - Why Are We Polarized? Part 2: Activists, Education, and the Media

Materials for Unit V will be available on Saturday, July 16. Assignments from Unit V are due on Tuesday, July 26 at 11:59 PM EST.

Readings

Noel, Hans. "[How ideological activists constructed our polarized parties.](#)" Ch. 13 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Gelman, Andrew. "[How better educated whites are driving polarization.](#)" Ch. 14 of Hopkins and Sides book.

Gross, Neal. 2016. "[Why Are the Highly Educated So Liberal?.](#)" May 13, 2016, *The New York Times*.

Levendusky, Matthew. "[Are Fox and NBC polarizing America?](#)" Ch. 15 in Hopkins and Sides book.

Arceneaux, Kevin. "[Why you should not blame polarization on partisan news.](#)" Ch. 16 in Hopkins and Sides book.

Levendusky, Matthew and Neil Malhotra. "[The media make us think we are more polarized than we really are.](#)" Ch. 17 in Hopkins and Sides book.

Miller, Claire Cain. 2014. "[Social Media Deepens Partisan Divides. But Not Always.](#)" November 20, 2014, *The New York Times*.

Somaiya, Ravi. 2014. "[How Facebook is Changing the Way Its Users Consume Journalism.](#)" October 26, 2014, *The New York Times*.

Douthat, Ross. 2016. "[Facebook's Subtle Empire.](#)" May 21, 2016, *The New York Times*.

Video Lectures

Lecture 8: [The Two Party System and Party Activists](#)

[\[Assignment 5\]](#)

Podcast - [The Media and Polarization](#) with Dr. Amanda Parks, Adjunct Instructor at Penn State University.

[\[Podcast Response 2\]](#)

Unit VI - Is Polarization a Problem? If So, What Can Be Done?

Materials for Unit VI will be available on Thursday, July 21. Assignments from Unit V are due on Thursday, July 28 at 11:59 PM EST.

Readings

Brady, David W. and Hahrie Han. "[Polarization is nothing new.](#)" Ch. 21 in Hopkins and Sides book.

Fiorina, Morris. "[Gridlock is bad. The alternative is worse.](#)" Ch. 26 in Hopkins and Sides book.

Drutman, Lee. 2015. "[Giving the parties even more money will not solve polarization.](#)" November 20, 2015, *Vox*

Berman, Russell. 2016. "[What's the Answer to Political Polarization in the US?](#)" March 8, 2016, *The Atlantic*.

Alfa, Sean. 2006. "[The Lonely States of America.](#)" June 28, 2006, *CBS News*.

Lewis, Matt K. 2016. "[Go bowling alone? Then you probably prefer Trump.](#)" April 4, 2016, *The Daily Caller*.

Brooks, David. 2016. "[Let's have a better culture war](#)", *The New York Times* June 7, 2016.

Video Lectures

Lecture 9: [Social Connectedness and Polarization](#)

[\[Assignment 6\]](#)