

**“Topics in Civic Engagement:
Partisanship and Polarization in American Politics:
Origins and Remedies”**
Winter Quarter 2018

Instructors: Helen Shapiro, John Lawrence

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Instructor

John Lawrence has a Ph.D. in American History from the University of California (Berkeley), and an undergraduate history degree from Oberlin College. He is the author of *The Class of '74: Congress After Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship* (March 1, 2018, Johns Hopkins University Press). Dr. Lawrence served as a senior staff person in Congress for nearly four decades, the last eight as Chief of Staff to Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and also was staff director of two full committees and a chief of staff in the office of Congressman George Miller (D-CA). He has taught at UCDC since 2013 and has lectured widely. He blogs on congressional politics at **DOMEocracy** (johnlawrence.wordpress.com)

Description

American politics and voters are currently at the highest stage of polarization since the Civil War. As a result of the heightened state of the partisan divide, conflict between -- as well as within -- the branches of our government, including within the political parties themselves, has resulted in near gridlock on all but the most urgent of legislative issues. Meanwhile, the resolution of many policies on which there is broad public consensus -- from gun policy to entitlement reform to campaign finance reform to comprehensive immigration policy -- remains seemingly gridlocked. Not surprisingly, public confidence in our political leaders and our political institutions remains at historically low levels.

What is the origin of this bitter and seemingly irreconcilable divide? What are the historical antecedents for the emergence of deep partisan disagreements? What issues, developments or actions fueled the growth in polarization and all importantly, what can we as a nation do to find the common ground necessary to address longstanding challenges? The class will explore a multiplicity of explanations behind the emergence of our current divided society: the ramifications of civil rights movement and resulting changes in Southern politics; the rise of a newly competitive, conservative movement of the 1970s and 1980s; changes in the press, media and other forms of mass communications, including social media; the inadvertent results of efforts to reform political system including campaign finance, among other issues. And the class will explore credible steps we might take to restore a greater sense of comity, community and collaboration to our national politics.

Goals and Objectives

This class will explore the historical origins of contemporary polarization and partisanship, reaching back over 200 years to the concept and design of the United States government, and following through decades of political, cultural, technological and legal changes that have resulted in our current combative political environment. Readings will provide class participants with essential background for the discussions.

Class Meetings and Assignments

Class will meet weekly for 90 minutes. Students should schedule other activities, including those related to your internship, so as not to interfere with class meetings. Any request for an absence must be approved by the instructor in advance. Students should speak with their internship directors to ensure work assignments do not interfere with class attendance.

Students will be required to complete weekly readings and will be assigned the responsibility of leading a portion of each class' discussion on the weekly topic. There will be two essays (5-6 pages) in which students will be called upon to summarize and synthesize key reading and discussion topics.

Grading

Grading will focus on the three written assignments, the quality of the student's leadership of class discussions, overall participation in discussions, and attendance.

- Two Essays 30% each, for a total of 60%
- Class Attendance 15%
- Class Participation 25%

Deadlines

Assignments are due at **11:59pm on the day noted** and should be posted on the Turnitin page as well as emailed using Word to the instructor at JAL221B@gmail.com

Please note: Assignments arriving late will receive a reduction in grades. No extensions will be granted without *prior* approval of the instructor. Incompletes must be arranged in accordance with UC policy, before the end of the quarter/semester.

Policy on Original Work and Use of Sources

UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonesty. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. Ignorance of these behaviors is not an adequate defense.

Classroom Conduct

Electronic devices of any type may not be used during this class unless specifically approved by the instructor.

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates this policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence.

Students who wish to speak confidentially about an incident of misconduct should contact UCDC's Counseling Services at UCDCCounseling@gmail.com. To report misconduct or ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding misconduct, please contact the UCDC Title IX administrator, Josh Brimmeier (202-974-6214 or josh.brimmeier@ucdc.edu). Because the University of California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed.

Accommodations for Students with Special Needs

If you require accommodations for class, please confidentially inform the instructor at the first meeting (if not earlier) so the necessary arrangements can be made. In compliance with the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Public Law 93- 112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336), University of California policy prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, services, and activities.

Office Hours

Office hours will be available on Tuesdays from 4:PM to 5:00 pm in 336 or by appointment. Students should schedule appointments with the instructor either in person or through email at: jal221B@gmail.com. All students are encouraged to meet with the instructor.

Reading Assignments

Reading assignments are available in Dropbox and online (as noted).

Week 1. "Polarization in American Politics"

Reading:

- Nolan McCarthy, “What We Know and Don’t Know about Our Polarized Politics,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/08/what-we-know-and-don-t-know-about-our-polarized-politics>.
- Geoffrey Layman, Thomas Carsey and Juliana Horowitz, “Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006) 83-110.
- Pew Research, “Political Polarization in the American Public” <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public> (June 12, 2014)
- Alan Abramowitz, “The New American Electorate: Partisan, Sorted and Polarized,” <http://www.american.edu/spa/ccps/upload/ABROMOWITZThe-New-American-Electorate.pdf>
- Julian Zelizer, “How America Got Polarized” (CNN) (8/3/15) <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/03/opinions/zelizer-buckley-vidal-debates-polarized/>

Week 2 Is Polarization Exaggerated?

Reading:

- Samuel J. Abrams and Morris Fiorina, “The Foundations of Polarized Politics,” Chapter 5 in James Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka, eds., *American Gridlock*, 113-129.
- Molly Ball, “5 False Assumptions Political Pundits Make All the Time” *The Atlantic* (February 27, 2013) <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/02/5-false-assumptions-political-pundits-make-all-the-time/273544/>
- Alan Abramowitz, “What If the Pundits Are Right After All? A Reply on Polarization and Sorting” *The Atlantic* (March 4, 2013)
- Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?” *The Journal of Politics* 70(2), 543-555.
- James M. Curry and Frances Lee “Congress Is Far More Bipartisan Than Headlines Suggest,” *Washington Post* (December 20, 2016) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/20/congress-is-far-more-bipartisan-than-headlines-suggest/>

Week 3. Race and Nationality as Drivers of Polarization

Reading:

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “My President Was Black,” *The Atlantic* (January-February, 2017) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/my-president-was-black/508793/>
- Michael Tesler, “The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care: How President Obama Polarized Public Opinion by Racial Attitudes and Race,” *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 56, #3 (July, 2012)
- Bradley Jones, “Americans’ Views of Immigrants Marked By Widening Partisan, Generational Divides,” Pew Research Center (April 15, 2016)

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/15/americans-views-of-immigrants-marked-by-widening-partisan-generational-divides/>

Week 4. Causes: Clash of Cultures

Reading:

- Andrew Hartman, “Taking God’s Country Back,” in *A War for the Soul of America*, 71-101.
- Bruce J. Schulman, “Introduction: The Sixties and the Postwar Legacy” 1-20.

Week 5. Causes: The New Conservatism

Reading:

- Sean Theriault, “The Gingrich Senators, the Tea Party Senators, and Their Effect on the US Senate,” Frisch and Kelly, *Politics to the Extreme*, 23-46.
- Ben McGrath, “The Movement: The Rise of Tea Party Activism.” *New Yorker* (February 1, 2010) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/02/01/the-movement>
- Donald Critchlow, “When Republicans Become Revolutionaries: Conservatives in Congress” in Zelizer, *The American Congress*, 703-726.
- Thomas E Mann, “Asymmetrical Polarization Undermined: Thoughts on the New Pew Research Center’s Report on Polarization,” June 13, 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2014/06/13/asymmetrical-polarization-undermined-thoughts-on-the-new-pew-research-centers-report-on-political-polarization/>
- Geoffrey Kabaservice, Chapter 12, “Slouching Toward Bethlehem,” in *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party from Eisenhower to the Tea Party* 363-389.
- Mike Lofgren, “Goodbye to All That” <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/3079:goodbye-to-all-that-reflections-of-a-gop-operative-who-left-the-cult>

Week 6. Causes: Changes in Media and Messaging

Reading:

- Matthew Levendusky, Ch. 1, “The New Partisan Media Environment” in *How Partisan Media Polarize America*, pp 1-23. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TcoRAAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Levendusky+media+polarization&ots=jGaWmTeFVK&sig=pUdr01-3V7TFIStTODBCno6j6O0#v=onepage&q=Levendusky%20media%20polarization&f=false>
- Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, Hal Roberts, and Ethan Zuckerman, “Breitbart-led Right-Wing Media Ecosystem Altered Broader Media Agenda” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 3, 2017 <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/breitbart-media-trump-harvard-study.php>; <http://news.wgbh.org/2017/03/15/politics-government/major-new-study-shows-political-polarization-mainly-right-wing>

- Douglas Harris, “Let’s Play Hardball: Congressional Partisanship in the Television Age” in Frisch and Kelly, *Politics to the Extreme*, 93-115.

Week 7. Causes: Competition for Political Power

Reading

- Frances E. Lee, Chapter 2, “A Protracted Era of Partisan Parity” pp. 18-40, and Chapter 4, “Emerging Strategies of Confrontation 1976-1994” pp. 71-111 in *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* (University of Chicago, 2016)

Week 8. Causes: Income Inequality and Polarization

Reading:

- Anna Swanson, “These Political Scientists May Have Just Discovered Why U.S. Politics Are A Disaster” *Washington Post* (October 7, 2015)
<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/>
- Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, Ch. 7, “Where Have You Gone, Mr. Sam?” in *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, pp. 191-203

Week 9. Polarization and Congress

Reading:

- John Sides, “Gerrymandering Is Not What’s Wrong With American Politics,” *Washington Post* (February 3, 2013)
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/02/03/gerrymandering-is-not-whats-wrong-with-american-politics/>
- Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, "Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?" *American Journal of Political Science*, 53 (July, 2009) 666-680.
- Joel H. Sibley, “Congress in a Partisan Political Era,” in Zelizer, ed., Pp. 139-152.
- Geoffrey W. Buhl, Scott Frisch and Sean Kelly, “Appropriations to the Extreme: Partisanship and the Power of the Purse,” in Frisch and Kelly, *Politics to the Extreme*, 3-21.
- David C.W. Parker and Matthew, “The Weaponization of Congressional Oversight,” in Frisch and Kelly, *Congress to the Extreme*.
- Elaine Kamarck, Alexander Podjul and Nicholas Zeppos, “Political Polarization and the 2016 Congressional Primaries,” Brookings (Jan 18. 2017)
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/primaries-paper-i2.pdf>
- “Is The Primary System To Blame For Partisanship?,” NPR 12/18/13.
<https://www.npr.org/2013/12/18/255185863/is-the-primary-system-to-blame-for-partisanship>

Week: 10. Remedies: Collaboration of Conflict?

Reading

- Ariana Figoroa, Can Teaching Civics Save Democracy?

- http://www.npr.org/2017/09/22/552665068/can-teaching-civics-save-democracy?utm_source=npr_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20171001&utm_campaign&utm_term
- Robert Y. Shapiro, “The Generation Gap and the 2012 Election: Angry Silents, Disengaged Millennials” Pew Research Center (November 3, 2011)
<http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/11-3-11%20Generations%20Release.pdf>
 - Tom Davis, Martin Frost, and Richard Cohen, “The Way Forward” in *The Partisan Divide: Congress in Crisis*, 271-286.
 - Mickey Edwards, Part 6 in *The Parties Versus the People: How to Turn Republicans and Democrats into Americans*, pp. 159-181.