

## Draft Syllabus

*A final version of this syllabus will be available on the first day of class.*

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

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### **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 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 (3-4 pages) in which students will be called upon to summarize and synthesize key reading and discussion topics, and a final essay in which they will be required to identify and explain the most promising ways we can restore civility and bipartisanship to the political system.

## **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 (50%)

Summary Essay (20%)

Class Attendance and Participation (30%)

### **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:

- Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, "Is Polarization a Myth?" *The Journal of Politics* 70(2), 543-555.
- Morris P. Fiorina and Samuel Abrams, "Americans Aren't Polarized, Just Better Sorted" *Washington Post* (January 21, 2014)
- 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/>

- Morris Fiorina, “America’s Polarized Politics: Causes and Solutions” *Perspectives on Politics* 11(3) (2013) 852-859.

### **Week 3. Race and Nationality as Drivers of Polarization**

Reading:

- [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#), “My President Was Black,” *The Atlantic* (January-February, 2017)
- Geoffrey C. Layman and Thomas M. Carsey, “Party Polarization and ‘Conflict Extension’ in the American Electorate” *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 46, #4 (October, 2002)
- 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: The Unintended Consequences of Reform**

Reading:

- David C.W. Parker and Matthew, “The Weaponization of Congressional Oversight,” in Frisch and Kelly, *Congress to the Extreme*.
- David Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Post-Reform House*, Chapter 2, “Reform and Its Consequences.”
- Michael Lind, “This is What the Future of American Politics Looks Like,” *Politico Magazine* (May 22, 2016)  
<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/2016-election-realignment-partisan-political-party-policy-democrats-republicans-politics-213909>

### **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)
- 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, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party from Eisenhower to the Tea Party* [excerpt]

- 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, *How Partisan Media Polarize America* [excerpt]
- [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*, 94-115.
- Jonah Engel Bromwich, “Social Media Is Not Contributing Significantly to Political Polarization, Paper Says” (*New York Times*, April 13, 2017)
- Dan Kahan, “Partisan Media Are Not Destroying America,”  
<http://www.culturalcognition.net/blog/2013/8/8/partisan-media-are-not-destroying-america.html>
- John Sides, “How Fox Made Republicans More Republican and Democrats More Republican, Too) *The Monkey Cage* (October 30, 2013).  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/10/30/how-fox-news-made-republicans-more-republican-and-democrats-more-republican-too/>.

### **Week 7. Causes: Competition for Political Power**

- Frances E. Lee, *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* (University of Chicago, 2016) [excerpt]
- Peter Baker, “Assessing the Balance of Power in an Era of Widespread Mistrust,” *New York Times* (Feb. 25, 2015) <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/26/us/a-back-and-forth-view-of-the-presidents-executive-power.html>

### **Week 8. Causes: Economics**

Reading:

- Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* [excerpt]
- Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in their own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* {excerpt}

### **Week 9. Polarization and Congress**

Reading:

- [John Sides](#), “Gerrymandering Is Not What’s Wrong With American Politics,” *Washington Post* (February 3, 2013)

- [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.

### **Week: 10. Remedies: Collaboration of Conflict?**

#### Reading

- Peter Levine and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, "The Republic is (Still) at Risk—and Civics is Part of the Solution" (Tufts University, 2017)
- [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](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>
- Richard Pildes, "How to Fix Our Polarized Politics? Strengthen Political Parties" in Daniel Hopkins and John Sides, eds., *Political Polarization in American Politics*, 155-160
- Tom Davis, Martin Frost, and Richard Cohen, "The Way Forward" in *The Partisan Divide: Congress in Crisis*, 271-286.