

Polarization in America

POLI 294-03 // Fall 2015 // Carnegie 208 // MWF 2:20-3:20 PM

Professor Philip Chen // pchen@macalester.edu // Carnegie 205

Office Hours: Monday 1:00-2:00 PM, Thursday 1:30-2:30 PM

Course Description

From the 1930s through the 1970s, the most conservative Democrats in the Senate were actually further to the right than the most liberal Republicans. Since that time, the parties slowly but steadily distanced themselves from each other, leading to our current state of politics; One defined not by compromise and conference committees, but rather by obstruction, gridlock, and filibusters. Voters mimic this divide, becoming increasingly hostile and antagonistic to their political opponents.

This course covers major themes surrounding polarization in American politics. First, we examine the role of political parties in a democracy and the recent polarization of these parties. We then turn to polarization in Congress and search for potential explanations. After studying Congress, we look towards voters, searching for evidence and causes of polarization among American citizens. Finally, we take a step back, looking at polarization with a broader view and study the Tea Party as an example of the influence voters exert on the political parties.

Course Objectives

By the end of this semester, you should be able to:

- Identify potential causes of elite polarization and evaluate whether policy changes are necessary to reduce this polarization
- Compare and contrast opposing views on mass polarization and conclude whether American voters are more polarized now than in the past
- Understand and explain the interaction between elite and mass polarization

In addition to these specific learning goals, there are several skills that I believe are especially important for this course. By the end of the semester, you should have:

- Learned the fundamental principles and theories on polarization in America
- Developed writing and oral presentation skills
- Learned to analyze and critically evaluate different arguments and theories

Structure of the Class

I will occasionally lecture on new topics or extensions of the readings. However, I do not plan on lecturing on the readings because a) you are expected to have read them already and b) I'm not witty or interesting enough to lecture all the time.

The majority of the class will be spent on discussion and activities that are designed to help you integrate the readings and materials. Please come to class prepared to discuss the days readings, as this is a key component of this course.

Office Hours and Help

I strive to make this course understandable and accessible for all students. If you have any questions about the content or structure of the course or about specific assignments, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to help if you come to me before assignments or exams are due. Please do not wait to ask for help until after the due date, come talk to me before if you are struggling.

Required Texts

This class will feature mostly academic books with a few articles sprinkled in. The required books are listed below and are available at the college bookstore or from Amazon or other places online. Readings are available on the class Moodle site at:

<https://moodle.macalester.edu/course/view.php?id=489>

Fiorina, Morris with Samuel Abrams and Jeremy Pope. 2011. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*.

Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*.

Nivola, Pietro and David Brady (eds.) 2006. *Red and Blue Nation? Volume One. Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Parties*. **Note: Buy Volume One, NOT Volume Two.** ☺

Sinclair, Barbara. 2006. *Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policymaking*.

OPTIONAL: Hopkins, Daniel and John Sides. 2015. *Political Polarization in American Politics*.

Note: This is a collection of blog posts from themonkeycage.org. We will read many of these during class and if you'd like to have them all bound in a book, you can buy this. All of these readings will be available on Moodle.

Course Structure

The class will be a mixture of class discussion, small group work, and lecture. I am neither interesting nor witty enough to lecture for an entire class, and I'm more interested in what you thought about the readings than in listening to myself talk. Some days will feature more lecture, others will have more discussion, but always be prepared to offer your thoughts on the readings for the day because discussion is the primary form this class will take. Response essays and discussion questions will help guide the class onto topics students found interesting.

Grading

Grades are based on four different components, described in more detail below. 45% of your grade will come from a final literature review (1) on a topic of your choosing. An additional 20% of your grade will come from two response papers (2) written on a specific day's readings. 10% of your grade consists of participation in class (3), both in the structured debates and activities as well as in daily discussion. Finally, 25% of your grade consists of weekly reading quizzes (4).

Response Paper #1	10%
Response Paper #2	10%
Reading Quizzes (Top 8)	25%
Literature Review	
Research Questions	Required (No Grade)
Proposal	Required (No Grade)
First Draft	Required (No Grade)
Second Draft	Required (No Grade)
Third Draft	Required (No Grade)
Final Paper	40%
Presentation	5%
Class Participation	10%

Literature Review (45%) – Each student will write a literature review that identifies a specific research question surrounding polarization in American politics. Many classes at Macalester culminate with a major research paper and you will all be required to do some type of capstone experience before graduation. It is my belief, however, that we as professors often do our students a disservice by treating the literature review portion of these assignments as little more than a formality or a hoop to jump through.

In this class, rather than writing a long final paper, we will spend a good deal of the semester writing and workshopping literature reviews to perfect the art of review and argumentation. A good literature review is neither a summary of prior research nor an all-inclusive list of everything written on a subject. Instead, a literature review begins with a research question and synthesizes relevant literature to make an argument. This may be different than what you have written in the past, but with your dedication to the practice of writing a literature review, the end product will be a concise piece of writing you can be proud of.

As part of this, the last few sessions of class will be devoted to a “mini-conference” where you will present your literature reviews to the class and outside readers.

You'll notice a number of components marked “Required (No Grade).” These pieces of the literature review can be thought of as low stakes requirements. In order to receive a final grade on your literature review, you must turn in all of these components, even though your performance on these assignments does not factor into your grade. Failing to turn in these assignments will lower your final project grade by 2/3 of a letter grade for each missing piece. For instance, if your grade for the entire literature review project was a B+, but you failed to turn

in your research questions, your final grade for the project would be a B-. If you were missing both the research questions and proposal, your B+ would become a C.

Response Essays (20%) – Each student will complete two response essays on the readings for a specific day. You will have an opportunity to pick the class sessions that you would like to write about. Along with the response essay, each student should turn in three discussion questions about the readings for us to talk about.

Response essays and discussion questions are due to me **24 hours before** the class we are to discuss the readings in. For example, if you signed up for the readings on Tuesday, February 17, your questions and essay would be due to me by Monday, February 16.

Each paper should include a brief summary of the arguments in the reading(s) and a critique of the argument, evidence, and conclusions. Papers should be 3-4 pages long, double spaced. I will distribute a separate handout with more information about this assignment.

Weekly Reading Quizzes (25%) – Over the past couple years, I've come to dislike the concept of midterm and final exams because they place a premium on memorization and intense study rather than a cohesive synthesis of the material we read. In essence, finals and midterms seem to encourage students to memorize minutiae instead of substance.

However, the readings for this class were chosen with intention and I believe they are important for students to get the most out of the class. I will not lecture much on the readings, as I believe classroom discussions are both more enjoyable and a better way for students to learn the ability to critique and challenge the works we read. In order for you to be prepared for these discussions, you will need to do the readings.

While I would love to be able to simply ask “did you do the reading?” and grade you on this, it seems unrealistic. On Friday of each week we will have a short, graded reading quiz. These quizzes will consist of a few multiple choice or short answer questions, as well as one or two longer (2-3 paragraph) questions that ask you to synthesize the readings in some way. I understand that sometimes things come up and readings don't get done. Over the course of the semester, there are 11 Fridays when I will administer quizzes. This makes for an odd division of 25% of your grade. Out of these 11 quizzes, I will count the grade for 8 of them. Each quiz, therefore, is worth 3% of your final grade. In addition, the highest quiz grade you receive will be worth 4%, bringing the total for the 8 quizzes to 25%. While no one quiz will make or break your final grade, failing to do any of the readings will severely limit your potential in this class.

At the end of the semester, I will simply take your highest 8 quiz grades and drop the 3 lowest grades. Because you have 3 quizzes that are not counted, you cannot make up quizzes for unexcused absences. However, if you are going to miss a Friday class and let me know ahead of time, we can make arrangements for you to take the quiz at a different time.

Participation (10%) – The participation portion of your grade includes regular attendance in class, completion of in-class activities, participation in class discussions, and asking questions during lectures.

In addition, we will have two major in-class activities, a policy proposal convention and a structured debate. Half of your participation grade comes from your active involvement in these activities.

Grade Scale:

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	<60

Course Schedule:

Days with reading quizzes marked with (RQ)

Week One

September 2	Introduction No Readings
September 4	NO CLASS – PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE

Week Two

September 7	NO CLASS – LABOR DAY
September 9	Parties APSA 1950* Federalist #10*
September 11	Rise of Polarization (RQ) McCarty 2006* McCarty Blog* Brownstein Blog*

Week Three

September 14	Rise of Polarization <i>Red and Blue Nation</i> Ch. 3 Haidt/Hetherington Blog*
September 16	Party Divisions Frisch/Kelly 2013* Brewer/Stonecash Ch. 3*
September 18	Party Divisions (RQ) Brewer/Stonecash Ch. 6*

Week Four

September 21 Library/Research Day
 No Readings
 Research Questions Due

September 23 Polarization Now
 Red and Blue Nation Ch. 1
 Party Wars Ch. 1

September 25 Congress (RQ)
 Party Wars Ch. 2 & 3

Week Five

September 28 Congress
 Red and Blue Nation Ch. 6
 Abramowitz 2006*

September 30 Congress
 Party Wars Ch. 5 & 6

October 2 Courts and Presidency (RQ)
 Party Wars Ch. 7
 Binder 2008*

Week Six

October 5 Fixes?
 McCarty et al 2009*
 Brady/Han Blog*
 Pildes Blog*
 Shapiro Blog*

October 7 Constitutional Convention
 No Readings

October 9 Voter Polarization (RQ)
 Red and Blue Nation Ch. 2
 Hare/Poole Blog*
 Fiorina/Abrams Blog*

Week Ten

November 2 NO CLASS – READING AND RESEARCH DAY

November 4 Culture War?
Culture War? Ch. 7, 8, 10 & Epilogue

November 6 Is Polarization Bad? (RQ)
Levendusky 2010*
Jones 2010*
First Draft Due

Week Eleven

November 9 Debate
No Readings

November 11 Tea Party
Theriault 2013*

November 13 Tea Party (RQ)
Skocpol Intro & Ch. 1

Week Twelve

November 16 Tea Party
Skocpol Ch. 2

November 18 Tea Party
Skocpol Ch. 3

November 20 Tea Party (RQ)
Skocpol Ch. 5

Week Thirteen

November 23 Tea Party
Skocpol Ch. 6

November 25 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 27 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week Fourteen

November 30 Peer Review
 Bring 2 Copies of Revised Draft (Second Draft) to Class

December 2 Can we fix it?
 Mackaman 2013*
 Masket 2013*
 Edwards 2013*

December 4 Can we fix it? (RQ)
 Mann/Ornstein Ch. 4, 5, & 6*
 Revised (Third Draft) Due

Week Fifteen

December 7 NO CLASS – PREPARE FOR CONFERENCE

December 9 Mini-Conference
 No Readings

December 11 Mini-Conference
 No Readings

December 15 Final Exam Period 10:30 am-12:30 pm
 Final Draft Due

Course Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is vital for your success in this course. However, I understand that sometimes circumstances prevent you from coming to class. Missing one class will not destroy your participation grade; missing several will.

Late Work: Assignments are due at the **beginning of class** on the day they are listed as due. Any assignments turned in after this time will be subject to the following late penalty: For each day late, I will deduct a third of a letter grade. So if an assignment is due Friday and you turn it in after class on Friday, a B+ paper would receive a B. If you turn it in Saturday, it would be a B-, Monday would be a C.

Assignments should be turned in using the Moodle system unless otherwise noted.

Grade Changes: Any appeals of a grade must be made at least **24 hours after** I hand back an assignment or exam. If you would like to appeal the grade you got on an assignment, prior to meeting with me you must submit a written statement detailing why you think your grade should be changed. I will then meet with you to discuss your statement and why you think your grade should be changed.

If I make a mistake in totaling your grade for an exam or assignment (e.g. I added the point sup incorrectly) then you do not need to write a statement or wait 24 hours. Just talk to me after class or during office hours and I'll double check and fix the mistake.

Contacting the Professor: I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course, readings, and assignments. In general, quick clarification questions can be handled over email. More in-depth questions are best discussed in person during my office hours, where we can have an actual conversation. If my office hours conflict with your class or work schedule, I am available by appointment as well.

Please allow a full 24 hours for an email response. Often, my responses will be quicker than this, but do not send multiple emails about the same request until 24 hours have passed. I cannot guarantee that if you email me right before an assignment or exam that I will be able to answer your question in time, so please make sure and email me early if you have a time-specific question.

Extra Credit and Retakes: There is no scheduled extra credit in this course. You may not retake quizzes. There may be opportunities for extra credit, however.