POL4710/5710: Polarization in American Politics

Dr. Andrew Garner
Fall 2017
Course Description

This course examines the growing scholarly research on political polarization in American politics. We begin with the extensive debate about whether, and how much, the American public has polarized over the past 20-30 years. We then turn to polarization at the elite level (and particularly in Congress) to understand the multitude of causal factors contributing to elite polarization. Finally, we explore the consequences of political polarization and consider possible ways to reverse the trend.

Contact Information

Class Time: Tuesday/Thursday 1.20-2:35PM
Classroom: EN1044
Office: A&S145
Phone: 307-766-2176
Email: agerner1@uwyo.edu
Office Hours:
Wednesday: 10AM - 11:30AM
Thursday: 10-11:30AM
Other times - by appointment

Prerequisites: 9 hours Political Science
Readings

We will be reading several important scholarly works published in both journal articles as well as books. There are four books that you will need to purchase or otherwise obtain:

The internet has fundamentally changed the ways in which people shop for books. Online stores such as Amazon.com and Half.com provide used copies of these books that are significantly less expensive than you would pay in a bookstore. In addition, there is an ebook version of at least one of these texts and likely by now there are ebook editions for several of them. **IMPORTANT:** You do NOT need to have the most recent edition/version of these texts. You are welcome to purchase older editions that are much cheaper to buy online.
Grades
You can earn an “A” in this course by achieving a 90% or higher on the projects and activities throughout the semester. Lower grades are assigned based on the standard grading scale (80-89% = “B”, 70-79% = “C”, 60-69% = “D”, below 60% = “F”).

Instead of the traditional exams and term papers, we will work on three projects about political polarization in America and abroad. More details about each project will be provided throughout the semester.

• Project I: Mass Polarization: 25%
• Project II: Elite Polarization and Media Coverage: 25%
• Project III: Consequences, Cures, and Conclusion: 20%

The course readings and classroom activities are designed to help you successfully complete these projects. There will be weekly, open-note quizzes on the course readings and in-class activities that are designed to help you develop the skills and experience needed to complete the projects:

• Quizzes: 15%
• Class Participation: 15%

Graduate Students: While you will complete the same three projects as the rest of the class, each project will be 2-3 pages longer and will involve more extensive research than what is required of undergraduate students. In addition, you are expected to perform at a higher level during the class discussions and activities. I will occasionally have you lead portions of the discussion and/or bring examples to stimulate discussion of the material during class.
Commitment

By joining this class, you are making a commitment to one another to attend every class session, to complete the readings, and to contribute your efforts and insights during the class activities and discussions. This commitment means taking the readings and the projects seriously. Failing to live up to this commitment makes it harder on your classmates during the discussions and activities during class and will make it more difficult for you to complete the projects successfully outside of class.

Having said that, life happens. Sometimes unexpected problems arise that may prevent you from making it to a one or two classes or that might require you to come a bit late. Simply let me know in advance, if possible, or at least the day of class so that I can make note of the absence. If it is a university excused absence then bring documentation with you to the next class. Please keep in mind that missing class prevents you from participating in the activities that are crucial to successfully completing the major projects. Put simply, missing a large portion of the lectures and class activities will seriously hamper your ability to do well on the projects.

In setting these high expectations, I am making a commitment to each of you that I will make classes worth attending. The quizzes, activities, and discussions are integrated with the projects to help you develop skills and knowledge necessary for completing them. Put simply, I am making a commitment to eliminate busy work and to avoid wasting your time with meaningless, superficial activities during class. In some instances, I may end class early or cancel a class if we have covered all of the relevant material ahead of time.

Integrity

One of the overarching goals of this course is to learn the scholarly literature on political polarization. Such learning can only occur in a setting of trust and academic integrity where everyone does his or her own work.
This cannot be stated emphatically enough—an academic setting of trust and integrity has zero tolerance for any form of academic dishonesty. Any act of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” grade for the course. In addition, academic dishonesty can also result in the loss of scholarships and suspension or expulsion from the university. You should consult the University Regulation 805 (www.uwyo.edu/legal/Uniregs/ur802.htm) and also the Political Science Department’s policy statement (www.uwyo.edu/Pols/Academic_dishonesty.doc) for more information about academic dishonesty.

Cowboy Up?

Do not be hesitant to ask for help if you are struggling with the material. Some of the readings are very abstract and dense. I expect everyone will have difficulty fully understanding the material at some point during the semester. So long as you put in an honest effort, there is nothing wrong with asking for help or getting some clarification on something that is not clear. I am here to help you learn and apply this material any way that I can. Feel free to drop by my office, email me, see me after class, or call whenever you feel that you do not fully understand something.

In addition, students who have a physical, learning, sensory, or psychological disability and require accommodations need simply contact me after class as soon as possible. All I need is confirmation from the University Disability Support Services (UDSS), and you may register with UDSS in the Student Educational Opportunity offices, Room 330 Knight Hall to provide them with documentation of your disability.
Course Schedule

August 31

Week 1: Introduction
Readings:
Zaller excerpt (optional)

September 4-8

Week 2: Mass Polarization: Myth?

NO CLASS TUESDAY - OUT OF TOWN

Readings (for Thursday):
Fiorina Chapters 1-3 and EITHER Chapter 5 OR Chapter 6

September 11-15

Week 3: Mass Polarization: Fact?

Readings:
Abramowitz and Saunders (2008)
Stoker and Jennings (2008)
Brewer (2005)

September 18-22

Week 4: Mass Polarization: “Sorting” It Out

Readings:
Levendusky (2010) - Tuesday
Garner and Palmer (2010) - Thursday
Garner and Palmer (2016) - Thursday
September 25 - 29

**Week 5: Mass Polarization Wrap-Up**

Readings:
None - work on projects

October 2-6

**Week 6: Media Polarization I**

Readings:
Prior Chapters 1-4

October 9-13

**Week 7: Media Polarization II**

Readings:
Prior Chapters 7-8

October 16-20

**Week 8: Elite Polarization**

Readings:
Theriault Chapters 1-6

October 23-27

**Week 9: Elite Polarization II**

Readings:
Theriault Chapters 7-10
October 30 - November 3

Week 10: Elites and Media Wrap-up
Readings:
None - work on projects

November 6-10

Week 11: Consequences I
Readings:
Ornstein and Mann Chapters 1-4

November 13-17

Week 12: Consequences II
Readings:
Ornstein and Mann Chapters 5-8

November 20 - 24

Week 13: Thanksgiving
No class

November 27 - December 1

Week 14: How Do We Fix It?
Readings:
Fiorina Chapter 10
Fiorina article excerpt
Week 15: Optimism or Fatalism?
Readings:
None - prepare to discuss projects

Final Projects Due