

## GVPT 479P

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Political Polarization

Spring 2018  
M 3:30- 6 p.m.

In this seminar we shall examine political polarization in the United States (and elsewhere) from both an institutional and behavioral perspective. We shall consider the rise of polarization in American institutions, notably the Congress, and ask whether this represents a growth in ideological divergence or more simple partisan conflict. We examine whether this polarization reflects institutional forces (redistricting and legislative rules) or constituency dynamics (conditional party government and the growth of economic inequality).

Is there polarization in the electorate or does the divergence we see reflect only the attentive public? If there is evidence of polarization among the public, is this driven from the top down (elite-driven) or the bottom up (changes in constituency dynamics, sorting of voters into neighborhoods by ideology)? Is polarization driven by the media or by our choice of discussion networks?

Each week at least one seminar member will lead the discussion by examining the major themes in the week's readings. Discussion leaders will prepare at least three questions for class discussion and write a short paper (approximately five pages) that is a critique of the readings. If there are competing ideas in the reading, which do you find most convincing and why? If not, what is the role of the readings in our understanding of polarization? Feel free to criticize the readings and to indicate why you might disagree with any argument, as long as you back up your claim.

The course requirements are: (1) two short papers analyzing the videos we shall watch (15 percent of your grade for each paper); (2) a short paper on Andersen's essay on "fantasyland" (10 percent of your grade); (3) a longer paper (see below, 40 percent of your grade); (4) class participation (10 percent of your grade), and a brief presentation of your paper in class at the end of the semester (April 23, and May 7, worth 10 percent of your grade..

The main requirement for the seminar is a research paper. If you have the background and wish to examine hypotheses of your own choosing, I am happy to work with you on how you can test your hypotheses with available data (you must feel comfortable doing statistical analysis to choose this option). We will have access to a Washington Post survey on polarization (done through the Center for American Politics and Leadership in the GVPT department). This survey asks about polarization, the sources of polarization, and possible remedies. We will discuss this in class on February 5.. If you choose to do a paper using these data, you will get extra credit (an increase of half a grade). You should offer at least three of your own hypotheses drawn from the course readings (and other readings) and test them with the data from the Post survey.

Otherwise, you may choose any other topic relevant to polarization. A suggested approach is to take one of the reforms recommended in the readings for April 18 (or elsewhere) and do a detailed examination of how—and whether—this reform might work. The paper will count for 40 percent of your course grade. **You must hand in a one-page statement of your paper topic by March 5. This paper will not be graded, but if it is not handed in on time, you will lose a full grade on the paper itself.**

Seminar members will present their papers to in class on April 23 and May 7. The presentations should last approximately 10 minutes and will be graded (10 percent of your grade). At that point, you should have a rough draft of your paper. Each student will also prepare a written critique of another student’s paper of approximately five pages. Each seminar member will send the paper draft to the student assigned to critique it *at least one week before the presentation*. The critique should analyze the key arguments in the paper and discuss whether the theoretical argument is sound, as well as giving suggestions for improvements or alternative perspectives. This critique will be graded and count for 10 percent of the grade.

The other assignments are two short papers on the videos we shall watch (see the syllabus). These papers should be approximately five pages long and should focus on the the following questions:

For the video “Cliffhanger”:

Is compromise possible in the current political atmosphere? Is it desirable or is the search for a “common good” in which each party sets its core principles aside an unreachable goal? What goals should each side seek to accomplish?

For the “Trumped” video:

How do you explain the victory of Donald Trump in 2016? Did it reflect a new politics in the United States or was it part of a larger pattern in American history? How lasting is the Trump coalition likely to be?

Each paper on the videos will count for 15 percent of your grade. Each paper must also be based upon the readings as well as the videos to get a good grade.

The paper on “Fantasyland” will count for 10 percent of your grade. You should address the following topic:

To what extent is “Fantasyland” a new development in American politics/society? Or has “Fantasyland” long been a part of “the paranoid style of American politics”? Are “fake news” and “alternative facts” attributable to the candidacy (and victory) of Donald Trump? Or do we see “Fantasyland” on the left as well as on the right: How distinctive are contemporary American politics?

The paper itself will be due no later than 1:30 pm. in my office. Earlier submissions are welcome!

All papers must be turned in on time and with hard copies. I cannot download your papers. And, sorry, I do not discuss grades over e-mail. E-mails requesting your grades or to discuss your grades will not be answered. You can make an appointment by e-mail, but I shall not answer any other grade-related questions by e-mail. If you want to see the comments on any assignment, you must either pick up the assignment directly from me or you must give me a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Please do not send me a paper or final by e-mail –even “just in case” I didn’t receive it. I automatically delete any e-mails with attachments without reading them. If you want to send me something other than an assignment with an attachment, please contact me first. There are absolutely no exceptions to this no e-mail policy, regardless of your reason. Sending me a paper by email will result in two full letter grades off the paper. (An A paper will thus receive a C).

All written work must be your own. Copying the work of others, whether that of fellow students or anyone else, constitutes plagiarism. You need not copy a work in its entirety to plagiarize. The university defines plagiarism as using the works of others without attribution. I also include the use of others' words with attribution **if your use of others' words are excessive**. If you have any questions about what constitutes excessive use of other people's words, please ask me. The paper is an exercise in research, not retyping others' words. Should anyone have **any** questions, please feel free to consult me. **All cases of plagiarism will be referred to the University Honors Court.**

I expect you to take care with your writing. An excessive number of spelling and/or grammatical errors will lead to a reduction in your grade on both the paper and essay questions on examinations.

#### IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE BSOS DEAN’S OFFICE.

These are university policies that you need to know with amendments as noted:.

- The university permits students to present one note per semester for a medical excuse for a regular class session (not classes when assignments are due or tests are given). However, I do not require attendance. However, you can’t do well in participation if you do not come to class.
- Any student with a disability should speak to me as soon as possible. I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Service (DSS) Office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form. Only written DSS documentation of the accommodation will be considered. This form must be presented to me no later than March 6, 2017. I am not able to accommodate students who are not registered with DSS or who provide me with documentation which

has not been reviewed and approved by UM's DSS Office after March 6, 2017.

- The university's policies on illness and religious holidays can be found at: More detail on documenting an illness of a student can be found at <http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/v100g.html>. More detail on excused absences for religious observances and participation in university activities at the request of University authorities can be found below under the "Assessment" heading at this link <http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/atedasse.html>.
- "Students are expected to treat each other with respect. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. Students who are unable to demonstrate civility with one another, the teaching assistants, or me will be subject to referral to the Office of Student Conduct or to the University Campus Police. You are expected to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct."
- Students may bring their laptops to class to take notes only. If a student is found to be using a lap top for any other reason than taking notes, then, that student will lose the privilege of bringing their computer to class. All technological devices, except a laptop computer are prohibited in this class including MP3 devices, smart phones, phones, calculators, gaming devices, etc. If these devices are seen and/or used during the class, the student will be asked to leave the class immediately. If these devices are seen and/or used during an exam, the exam will be collected from the student and the student will no longer be allowed to continue taking the exam. The exam score will be noted as 0".
- **Very critically, the university policy on missed assignments is:** "For a major assignment/exam, I will require a Health Center or medical doctor's health excuse. If you do not inform me or if you do not present me with timely documentation, you will receive an F for the assignment/exam/paper. Note: In the case that you are unable to get a written medical excuse, you may ask your provider for a copy of your medical notes for the specific visit(s) in question. An emergency medical excuse must be a note from a doctor indicating the nature of your problem and stating that you are unable to complete it on time, a time for completing the work, and a statement from the doctor telling me that you are unable to contact me. Do not ask for an exception from this policy.
- Unless you can demonstrate an emergency (with support) late papers will not be accepted.

The topics below are listed roughly by week. The following books should be purchased at any of the local bookstores:

Alan Abramowitz, The Polarized Public

E.J. Dionne, Norman Ornstein, and Thomas Mann, One Nation After Trump

W. Lee Rawls, In Praise of Deadlock

All readings other than the assigned books are available on Canvas.

Topic/Date

1/29 Introductory Meeting

2/12 What Is Polarization and Where Does It Come From? (Part 1)

Washington Post survey on polarization, “Americans are Losing Pride in the US” and “Polarization Poll Detailed”

Gilens, “Policy Consequences of Representational Inequality”

Jacobson, “Partisan Polarization in American Politics”

Discussion leaders: Kahn, Connor, Billings

2/12 Is American Polarization Ideological? (Part 2)

Abramowitz, The Polarized Public, chs. 1-4, 7

Highton, “Sorting the American States into Red and Blue”

Pew Polarization 1994 2017 General Public, Politically Engaged, by Party

Pew, “Partisan Divide Grows Wider”

Fiorina and Abrams, “Political Polarization in the American Public”

Mason, “The Rise of Uncivil Agreement.” American Behavioral Scientist 2013 57: 140-159.

Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes, “Affect Not Ideology,” Public Opinion Quarterly, 76:405-431.

Chen and Rohla, “Politics Gets Personal”

Maheshwari, “Pizza Is Partisan, and Advertisers Are Still Adjusting”

Discussion leaders: Doumbouya, Kabik, Anderle

2/19 Polarization from the Bottom Up? / The Tea Party and Donald Trump

Abramowitz, The Polarized Public, ch. 6

Schickler, “New Deal Liberalism and Racial Liberalism in the Mass Public, 1937-1968”

Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel, “Tea Party Influence: A Story of Activists and Elites,”

American Politics Research.

Barreto *et al.*, “The Tea Party in the Age of Obama: Mainstream Conservatism or

Out-group Anxiety?," Political Power and Social Theory, 22 (2011): 1-29.  
DeSilver, "Freedom Caucus districts look much like other GOP held districts"  
DeSilver, "What is the House Freedom Caucus, and Who's in It?"  
Pew, "Polarization 1994-2017" for General Public, Politically Engaged, and Political Party

Discussion leaders: Heller, Clark, Khetarpal

## 2/26 Institutional and Social Roots of Polarization

Abramowitz, The Polarized Public, ch. 5  
Carson et al., "Redistricting and Party Polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives"  
Wall Street Journal, "Gerrymandering Faces a Reckoning"  
Caughey et al, "Partisan Gerrymandering and the Political Process"  
Bishop, excerpts from The Big Sort, at  
[http://www.thebigsort.com/excerpts\\_full.php#intro](http://www.thebigsort.com/excerpts_full.php#intro), read all excerpts and maps  
Abrams and Fiorina, "'The Big Sort' That Wasn't" A Skeptical Reexamination"  
Brown and Enos, "Partisan Segregation"

Discussion leaders: Liming, Lynch, Marie

## 3/5 Polarization in Congress and the Executive Branch

Freeman, "Mitch McConnell: The Power of 41 Senators" on Canvas  
Curry and Lee, "Non-Party Government" and appendix  
Binder, "Dysfunctional Congress"  
Senator Robert Dole, "Farewell Address" in the United States Senate  
PowerPost, "The GOP Civil War is Bigger than Trump"  
Politico, "Charlie Dent's War"  
Jeff Flake, "My Party is in Denial About Donald Trump"  
Liu and Jacobson, "Republican Candidates' Positions on Donald Trump in the 2016 Congressional Elections: Strategies and Consequences"

Discussion leaders: Andonov, Freed, Fatola

## 3/12 Video: Cliffhanger

## 3/19 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

3/26 Guest Speakers No Labels  
No Labels Powerpoint  
No Labels Process for Problem Solving

Short paper due and discussion of Cliffhanger video and NoLabels discussion

4/2 The Trump Effect and Polarization

Dionne, Ornstein, and Mann, One Nation After Trump, chs. 1, 4, 6  
Drutman, Political Divisions in 2016 and Beyond  
Uslaner, “National Identity and Political Polarization”  
Cramer, “The Views of Populists”  
Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics  
Ball, “On Safari in Trump’s America”  
Packer, “Hillary Clinton and the Populist Revolt”  
Caldwell, “What the Alt-Right Really Means”  
Wall Street Journal, “Democrats Are United Against Trump, Divided on Everything Else”  
Andersen, “How America Went Haywire”

Discussion leaders: J. Smith, Trager

**Short paper on “Fantasyland”**

4/9 Video; “Trumped”

**Short paper on “Trumped”**

4/16 Is Polarization Driven by the Media? (first part of class)

Calmes, “They Don’t Give a Damn About Governing”  
Sykes, “Donald Trump and the Rise of Alt-Reality Media”  
Dionne, Ornstein, and Mann, One Nation After Trump, ch. 2  
Groseclose and Milyo, “A Measure of Media Bias.”  
Nyhan, “Does the US Media Have a Liberal Bias?” PS: Political Science and Politics, 2012.  
Baum and Groeling, “New Media and the Politicization of American Political Discourse,” Political Communication, 25 (2008):345-365.  
Gentzkow, “Political Polarization”

Discussion leaders: Hunter Smith, Wach

4/16 Is Polarization So Bad? And Can It Be Fixed? (second part of class)

Rawls, In Praise of Deadlock, entire  
Dionne, Ornstein, and Mann, One Nation After Trump, chs. 8-11  
Mayhew, “Is Congress the Broken Branch?”

Discussion leaders: Woodward, Klein, Yamson

4/23 Student Presentations of Papers with critiques  
5/7

**Final paper due no later than May 15 at 1:30 p.m.**