

## **Political Science 422 (W): Political Polarization**

Monday/Wednesday 12:40-2:30PM  
145 Natural Sciences Bldg

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### **Course Description**

Are there two Americas, one red and one blue? People often say this country is more politically or culturally divided than ever, but is this true and in what ways? This course will survey the current literature on political polarization with the goal of broadening the student's perspective on its causes and consequences. We will examine evidence for and against polarization at both the mass and the elite level. At the end of this course, you should have a clearer understanding of the extent of political polarization among politicians and the public as well as an understanding as to what factors have contributed toward these conditions. You should also have greater familiarity of current research in the field of American political science.

This course is also a writing course; it meets a Tier II writing level requirement and seeks to enhance your writing abilities through a variety of mechanisms. The main component of this aspect is a question-driven research paper project on a topic related to polarization. The project seeks to improve your written reasoning skills, get you familiarized with the research writing process, further your political science research abilities, and broaden your understanding of polarization in a particular area.

## Course Materials

**Required Materials:** These should be available at student bookstores; Amazon/Borders/Barnes and Noble also have them online. All of these have paperback editions; *when buying used make sure you get Fiorina's 2nd edition.*

- *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. MIT Press.
- *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* Morris P. Fiorina (with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope). 2nd Edition. 2006. Pearson Longman.
- *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy* Diana C. Mutz. 2006. Cambridge University Press.

**Online Materials:** Additional required readings and resources will be available through the course website.

## Course Requirements and Grading

The final grade will be calculated from the following components:

**Reading Quizzes/Written Responses:** 40 Percent. At least 10 short reading quizzes and written responses will be taken; your top 8 grades will each count for 5 percent of your grade.

- Quizzes will assess your completion and understanding of the day's assigned reading material and will be given in class (no makeups).
- Written responses will assess your ability to develop concise (no more than one page), coherent, and well-reasoned thoughts regarding course content. Written response assignments must be handed in at, or electronically submitted before, the beginning of class or they will not be accepted.

**Comprehensive Research Paper:** 50 Percent. You will need to complete a question-driven research paper as described in the section below.

**Class Discussion and Attendance:** 10 Percent. You should actively participate in class discussion to the best of your abilities and, thus, need to attend class; two free skip days (not excusing quizzes or assignments), no excuses accepted otherwise.

**Grading Scale:**

100-95: 4.0	74-70: 1.5
94-89: 3.5	69-65: 1.0
88-84: 3.0	≤64: 0.0
83-79: 2.5	
78-75: 2.0	

**Research Paper Details**

Your final research paper represents a culmination of a four-step process. This process should allow you to produce a edited and well written paper which effectively addresses a substantive theoretical question. The belief is that such a research paper could serve as an appropriate writing sample for graduate school applications. Each step's intended grade weight indicated within parentheses.

1. **Research Project Proposal (10):** You first need to write up a proposed question regarding polarization that you intend to research. The proposal needs to clearly state what research question you intend to study. The proposal also needs to be specific about how you intend to investigate and potentially answer your research question. Data and research resources that will assist you in this task will be introduced during early parts of the course. Possible research questions include:
  - How have public opinions about (Global Warming/War in Iraq/Health Care/Gay Marriage/Other Issue) become more or less polarized? What factors are associated with this change?
  - Have congressional votes on a specific issue become more or less divisive?
  - Is there any evidence of polarization in Michigan or any other state? What is the potential influence of term limits, campaign spending, economic conditions on polarization?

- Are legal or court opinions or decision more or less polarized on a particular issue?
2. **Literature Review (10):** An annotated literature review needs to be handed in on the date indicated. The paper should engage and reference research within a field specific to your topic (political science, law, public policy, communications). The review should list all the written resources you intend to include in your paper. The review should also provide a couple sentences for each work describing its content and contribution to your project.
  3. **Draft Paper (15):** A preliminary draft of the entire paper needs to be handed in on the date indicated. Although not a final submission, the paper should be clearly written, edited for content, and complete. I will then provide comments and suggestions to aid you in completing your final submission.
  4. **Final Paper (15):** Your grade will assess your final paper's improvements relative to your performance in the previous steps.

## Class Schedule

The schedule and reading assignments listed below are expectations; they are always open to change as additional readings may also be assigned.

Aug 25 Introduction and Class Details

Polarization In Congress

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Aug 27	Initial Evidence	MPR Ch. 1
Sep 1	NO CLASS Labor Day	
Sep 3	Polarized Politicians	MPR Ch. 2
Sep 8	cont.	Online Reading
Sep 10	Polarization, People, and Income	MPR Ch. 3
Sep 15	Party Polarization	Online Reading
Sep 17	Polarization in the Court/Media	<i>Research Proposal Due</i>
Sep 22	Immigration and Polarization	MPR Ch. 4
Sep 24	Money and Polarization	MPR Ch. 5
Sep 29	Public Policy Consequences	MPR Ch. 6 (&7)

Is the public polarized?

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Oct 1	Perspectives on Polarization	Fiorina Chs. 1 & 2
Oct 6	Comparing Red and Blue	Fiorina Ch. 3
Oct 8	Polarized or Partisan?	Fiorina Ch. 4
Oct 13	Cultural Issues 1	Fiorina Ch. 5
Oct 15	Cultural Issues 2	Fiorina Ch. 6
Oct 20	Religion and Economics	<i>Literature Review Due</i>
Oct 22	cont.	Fiorina Ch. 7
Oct 27	2004 Election	Fiorina Ch. 8
Oct 29	Elite Polarization	Fiorina Ch. 9
Nov 3	Any Solution?	Fiorina Ch. 10

Nov 5 Election Recap

Why the Divide?

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Nov 10	Deliberation	Mutz 1
Nov 12	Hearing the Other Side	<i>Draft Paper Due</i>
Nov 17	cont.	Mutz 2
Nov 19	Diverse Networks: Benefits	Mutz 3
Nov 24	Diverse Networks: Costs	Mutz 4
Nov 26	Paper Discussions	
Dec 1	Is deliberation good?	Mutz 5
Dec 3	Wrapping Up	

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**Final Paper Due:** Friday, December 12 before 12:45 PM

## A Couple Last Things

### **Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Examples of misconduct include violating rules stated in this syllabus, cheating, plagiarism, dishonesty, and alteration of grades or forms. All of the work you hand in within this course is expected to be your own. Cheating or plagiarism is an insult to me, your peers, and yourself; it is not to be tolerated. Instances of cheating will be handled according to the school's policy on integrity of scholarship and grades. For more information and a complete definition of academic misconduct see your student handbook's *General Student Regulation 1.00* at: <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/>.

### **Special Learning Needs**

Any student who feels he/she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss your specific needs within the first two weeks of class. If you are unsure of whether you have special needs please contact MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (<http://rcpd.msu.edu/>) at 130 Bessey Hall. If you have any questions please feel free to ask me, all information and documentation will be kept confidential.

### **Final Caveat**

This course hopefully will not deviate from what is written above, but I reserve the right to modify anything within it as I see needed to improve your learning experience.