

**Contemporary Issues in American Politics:
Polarization and Inequality
PLAP 4500
University of Virginia
Department of Politics
TH 1:00 – 3:30 p.m.
Nau Hall 242
Fall 2015**

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Office hours: W 1:30-3:30 and by appointment

Overview

This seminar will explore two topics that are at the forefront of American political discourse today: political polarization and inequality. We will address a number of questions about these topics, including:

- What is polarization?
- What is inequality?
- What causes these things and are they getting worse?
- What, if anything, should be done to fix these problems?
- How are polarization and inequality related to one another?

Our approach will be a survey of recent political science books and academic journal articles on these questions. Much of this literature takes a quantitative—and decidedly *statistical*—approach to the subject matter. While the material is advanced, students should be willing to ask questions and engage with the literature to the best of their abilities. At the end of the semester, each student should be able to summarize the state of the literature on each of the above questions, as well as provide their own perspective on these issues.

Policies

Office Hours. I hold weekly office hours. You should think of this as a time to come talk with me about your assignments, this week's readings, the classroom environment, political science, your academic life, professional development, plans for the future, etc. In other words, I am available to enrich your experience in this course and at this university, but it is up to you to avail yourself of this opportunity.

Technology. Please do not use your laptops in class. It is essential that seminar participants focus on the discussion and not hide behind a computer.

Respect. We will discuss many issues that are controversial. While you have every right to your own opinions (and I hope that this course will help you to further refine and shape them!), please be mindful that not everyone will share your perspectives. In light of this, please be respectful of your classmates and their views.

Academic Integrity. A reminder regarding plagiarism, cheating, and other activities of a dubious nature: you've pledged not to do these things, so don't. You are responsible for reading and understanding what is and is not acceptable (<http://www.academicintegrity.org/ica/Integrity-1.php>). Confirmed cases of misconduct will result in failure on the assignment (and possibly the course), as well as referral to the Honor Committee.

Special Accommodations. It is your responsibility to inform me as soon as possible if you require a special accommodation due a disability, religious practice, extracurricular obligations, etc.

Course Grade

Critical thinking and writing are the most important skills you will gain from your undergraduate education; course assignments are designed to help you hone these skills. Course grades will be determined according to the following formula:

Response essays (4 total)	15%
Research presentations	5%
Participation	20%
Research papers (2 x 30%)	60%

Response Essays

You will write four response essays through the course of the semester: two during the first half of the course (political polarization) and two during the second half of the course (inequality). Note that you may not write a response essay on the same date you are presenting the readings. Response essays are due to Collab by midnight on the Wednesday before class.

Research presentation

You will give a 10-minute presentation on one course reading. You will sign up for a presentation date in class. Your presentation should include no more than 5-6 PowerPoint slides and a one-page handout for your classmates. Your presentation should:

- Identify the research question the author(s) poses;
- Describe the argument (theory, hypotheses, etc.);
- Explain the empirical approach (if appropriate);
- Provide specific criticisms of the study (e.g., its theoretical argument, hypotheses, evidence, analysis, etc.); and
- Raise questions about specific theoretical or empirical issues that you did not understand.

Participation

This course is a collective endeavor and your active participation is vital to its success. I expect that you will come to class having completed the readings and thought about the material. Your participation grade will be based upon your active engagement in class. Note that the quality of your participation, not merely the quantity, is taken into account when determining grades. It is not sufficient just to show up.

Since you must be present in order to participate in the seminar, your attendance is required. If you should find yourself in the unfortunate situation of having to miss class due to an emergency or illness, you should send me an email before class indicating that you will be absent.

Research Papers

You may choose one of two options:

- Write two 10-page papers: one relating to polarization and one relating to equality. Paper topics will be handed out well before their respective due dates. I expect that most students will choose this option.
- Write one 20-page paper that addresses a substantive research question of your own choosing. You must turn in 5-page annotated outline at the Paper 1 due date that lays out your plan for the paper as well as the sources you plan to cite. If you choose this option, you should meet with me during office hours early in the semester to discuss your proposal.

Both of these options will require you to conduct outside research related to the paper topics. Before the first paper deadline we will spend time in class discussing techniques for good writing and proper citation. Papers are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for every day they are late.

Readings

There are four required texts for this course:

Page, Benjamin I. and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2009. *Class War? What Americans Really Think About Inequality* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Hopkins, Daniel J. and John Sides (eds). 2015. *Political Polarization in American Politics*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press.

McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The Dance of Political Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

You can purchase the required texts at the UVA Bookstore, as well as any number of online booksellers. All other readings for the course will be made available to students via Collab. In addition, daily reading of a national newspaper such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* is strongly encouraged.

Course Outline

PART I. POLITICAL POLARIZATION

August 27

Course Introduction

What is polarization and why does it matter?

- a. McCarty, Nolan. 2015. "What we Know and what we do not Know about our Polarized Politics." In *Political Polarization and American Politics*. pp. 1-10.
- b. Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science*. 39 (2): 413-448. (Collab)

September 3

NO CLASS. Annual Political Science Association Conference.

September 10

Are elites polarized?

- a. Shor, Boris. 2015. "How US State Legislatures are Polarized and Getting More Polarized." In *Political Polarization and American Politics*. pp. 16-22.
- b. Poole, Keith. 2005. "[The Decline and Rise of Party Polarization in Congress During The Twentieth Century](#)" *Extensions* Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, University of Oklahoma. (Collab)
- c. *Theriault, Sean M., and David W. Rohde. 2011. "The Gingrich Senators and Party Polarization in the U.S. Senate." *Journal of Politics*. 73 (4): 1011- 1024. (Collab)
- d. *Binder, Sarah A. 2006. "Consequences for the Courts: Polarized Politics and the Judicial Branch." In Pietro Nivola and David Brady's *Red and Blue Nation?: Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press. 107-150. (Collab)

September 17

Is the electorate polarized?

- a. *Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams and Jeremy Pope. 2011. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (3rd ed.), New York: Longman. Ch. 2, 5-8. (Collab)
- b. *Evans, John H. 2003 "Have American's Attitudes Become More Polarized? – An Update," *Social Science Quarterly*, 84 (1): 71-90.
- c. Hare, Christopher and Keith T. Poole. 2015. "How Politically Moderate are Americans? Less than it Seems." In *Political Polarization and American Politics*. pp. 32-40.

September 24

What role does the media play in polarization?

- a. Arcenaux, Kevin. 2015. "Why you should not Blame Polarization on Partisan News." In *Political Polarization and American Politics*. pp. 100-105.
- b. Levendusky, Matthew and Neil Malhotra. 2015. "The Media Make us Think we are More Polarized than we really are." In *Political Polarization and American Politics*. pp. 106-114.
- c. Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 16 (1): 101-127. (Collab)
- d. *Levendusky, Matthew S. 2013. "Why do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?" *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 611-623. (Collab)
- e. *Baum, Matthew A., and Tim Groeling. 2008. "New Media and the Polarization of American Political Discourse." *Political Communication* 25(4): 345-365. (Collab)

October 1

Does the primary system cause polarization?

- a. *McGhee, Eric, Seth Masket, Boris Shor, Steven Rogers, and Nolan McCarty. 2014. "A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology" *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 337-351.
- b. *Bullock, Will and Joshua D. Clinton. 2011. "More a Molehill than a Mountain: The Effects of the Blanket Primary on Elected Officials' Behavior from California" *Journal of Politics* 73(3):915-930.
- c. Alvarez, R. Michael and Betsy Sinclair. 2012. "Electoral Institutions and Legislative Behavior: The Effects of Primary Processes" *Political Research Quarterly* 65(3): 544-557.

October 8

What can be done about polarization?

- a. Read entire section "What Can be Done" in *Political Polarization and American Politics*. pp. 137-172.
- b. Bonica, Adam. 2015. "Data Science for the People" in *Solutions to Political Polarization in America* ed. Nathaniel Persily. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 167- 177. (Collab)
- c. Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein. 2012. *It's Even Worse than it Looks*. New York, NY: Basic Books. Chapters 5 -6. (Collab)

Paper 1 Due!!

PART II. INEQUALITY

October 15 **What is *income* inequality?**

- a. Noah, Timothy. Series of *Slate* articles on income inequality. (Collab)
- b. *Bonica, Adam, Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. "Why hasn't Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27(3): 103-124. (Collab)

October 22 **What is *participatory* inequality?**

- a. *Henry E Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman. 1995. Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation. *American Political Science Review*, 89(2): 271-294.
- b. Verba, Sidney. 2001. "Thoughts About Political Equality: What Is It? Why Do We Want It?" Review Paper. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. (Collab)
- c. *Kay Lehman Schlozman, Benjamin I. Page, Sidney Verba, and Morris P. Fiorina, "Inequalities of Political Voice," chapter 2 in *Inequality and American Democracy*. (Collab)
- d. Dargis, Manohla. 2015. "Report Finds Wide Diversity Gap Among 2014's Top Grossing Films." *New York Times*. August 5th. (Collab)

October 29 **Should we really care about inequality?**

- a. Wilkinson, Will. 2009. "[Thinking Clearly About Economic Inequality.](#)" Washington, DC: CATO Institute. (Collab)
- b. Martin Feldstein. 1999. "Reducing Poverty, not Inequality. *Public Interest*, pages 33-41. (Collab)
- c. *Leigh, Andrew, Christopher Jencks, and Timothy M. Smeeding. 2009. "Health and Economic Inequality" in *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Inequality*. Pp. 384-405. (Collab)
- d. Machin, Stephen. 2009 "Education and Inequality" in *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Inequality*. Pp. 406-431. (Collab)

November 5 **What does the public think about inequality?**

- a. *Page, Benjamin I. and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2009. *Class War? What Americans Really Think About Inequality* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

November 12 **What is the submerged state and why does it matter for inequality?**

- a. *Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

November 19 **How does inequality affects institutions?**

- a. *Bartels, Larry. 2008. *Unequal Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 9. (Collab)
- b. Gilens, Martin. 2012. *Affluence and Influence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [selections]
- c. *Kelly, Nathan J., and Christopher Witko. 2012. "Federalism and American inequality." *Journal of Politics* 74 (2): 414-426.

November 26 **NO CLASS. Thanksgiving break.**

PART III. LINKING POLARIZATION AND INEQUALITY

December 3 **How do polarization and inequality affect one another?**

- a. *McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2008. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wednesday, December 9th Paper #2 (paper copy)
DUE to Prof. Potter's office by 5:00 pm.