

Political Polarization in America
GOVT 376
Spring 2015
ANTH 6
Mondays, 1:10-4 p.m.

Professor Logan Dancey

Office: PAC 102

Office hours: Monday 4:05-5 p.m. & Thursday, 10:30 – 12:00 p.m. and by appointment

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Course Overview

In the 1950s, political scientists feared that weak parties in the United States threatened democratic accountability. Today, many political scientists argue strong, ideologically extreme parties distort representation. Undoubtedly, things have changed, but why? Several possible culprits exist, including partisan gerrymandering, primary elections, the ideological realignment of the electorate, and changing congressional procedures. We will cover the possible explanations and try to decipher what explanation, or combination of explanations, is most convincing. While we evaluate the arguments for why polarization has increased we will also debate the merits and drawbacks of strong parties at the elite level. Finally, we will examine to what extent polarization among elected officials and activists reflects polarization in the public.

Course Objectives

By taking this course you will gain a broader understanding of the causes and consequences of political polarization in America. In the process you will learn about historical changes in American politics and enhance your ability to critically analyze contemporary issues and debates. The assignments in this course are geared toward further developing your ability to analyze and critique scholarly arguments and convey your own ideas both orally and in writing.

Course Structure

Course sessions will be almost entirely discussion based. I may do some short lectures at various points during the semester if more background is needed on a topic. Since the course will be mostly discussion based, it is incumbent upon all participants to show up ready and willing to engage in thoughtful discussion of the material. That means students should do the required reading before class and be prepared to analyze the arguments, evidence, strengths, and shortcomings of the pieces we read. I will also post some “questions to ponder” online before each class session so that we can come in with a few pre-set things to discuss, although I want people to feel free to raise other questions and points.

Required Books

None!

Course Website

You can access the course website through moodle.wesleyan.edu. Please check the course website regularly (i.e. at least twice a week).

Assignments

Participation (15%): Seminars operate best when **everyone** participates, so you should be prepared to participate in class discussion each week. It is expected that you will attend every class session and arrive on time. Excessive lateness (10+ minutes) or unexcused absences will hurt your participation grade. Excused absences are reserved for documented medical emergencies, family emergencies, or university events. On March 2 I will give you a midterm assessment of your participation.

Reaction Papers (15%): A short reaction paper covering the readings is **due every class session except May 4 (and the first day of class)**. See the reaction paper guidelines handout for more instructions. Reaction papers are due at the start of class (either hardcopy or uploaded to Moodle). Reaction papers turned in after 1:30 p.m. will not be accepted for credit.

Topic (5%): A brief (1-2 paragraph) statement of the topic for your research paper is due by Feb. 20 at 11:59 p.m. (on Moodle). I may ask students to resubmit this assignment if for some reason their initial topic proposal isn't feasible (e.g., research can't be done in a semester, topic is too broad, etc.)

Literature Review (10%): A draft of the literature review section of your final paper is due April 3 by 11:59 p.m. Each student will meet with Professor Dancey sometime April 9, 10, or 13 to discuss his/her literature review and progress on final paper. More information on what the substance and style of your literature review should look like will come in a separate handout.

Rough Draft/Peer review (15%): A rough draft of your research paper is due Wednesday, April 29 at 11:59 p.m. Students will meet in groups of 3-4 students on May 6 to review one another's work. Students will be responsible for reading the rough drafts of group members and completing a peer review assignment prior to class on May 4.

Final Paper (30%): Your final paper is due by 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, May 13.

Presentation (10%): Students will present the findings from their research during the scheduled final exam time (9 a.m. - noon on Friday, May 15).

Key Dates

Feb. 20: Topic due by 11:59 p.m. on Moodle

April 3: Literature review due by 11:59 p.m.

April 9, 10, or 13: Meet with Professor Dancey to discuss lit review/paper

April 29: Rough draft due by 11:59 p.m.

May 4: Peer review

May 13: Final draft due by 11:59 p.m.

May 15: Presentations

Late Assignments

I will not accept reaction papers for credit after 1:30 p.m. the day they are due. You will also not be able to make up your presentation if you miss the day you are scheduled to present.

Late research paper assignments (i.e., topic, lit review, rough draft, final draft) will lose 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B+ becomes B-) for each day they are late. An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted more than 10 minutes after the stated deadline. The assignment becomes two days late 24 hours after the deadline, 3 days late after 48 hours, 4 days late after 72 hours, and 5 days late after 96 hours. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted for credit.

Contacting the Instructor

I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Dancey in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your research paper are best dealt with in office hours where we can have a more productive conversation than over e-mail. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

Contested Grades

If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate within two weeks of getting the assignment back. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation. This policy is meant to address disagreements with my assessment of your work. It does not pertain to calculation errors on my part. If you believe I have made a mistake adding up points,

converting your points to a percentage, etc. you can let me know immediately, and I will be happy to correct any mistakes.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Technology in the Classroom

You may use laptops or tablets in class for note taking purposes only. Refrain from using these devices for Facebook, instant messenger, e-mail checking, or anything else that may distract you, your fellow students, or me. It is obvious when someone is using his or her laptop for non-class related activities, and I reserve the right to discontinue the use of laptops (unless you contact me about an exception) if they become a distraction. Texting is not permitted during class.

Academic Integrity

I take plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct seriously. Please see this helpful website:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html>

Suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Board. I expect students to follow the Wesleyan honor code, which can be found here:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/honorboard/honorcode.html>

Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 states that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. See

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/inclusion/titleix/titleix.html> for more information.

Course Schedule:¹

Readings noted with an asterisk (*) are from assigned books. The rest of the material can be found on Moodle or by going to the url listed next to the reading.

January 26—Political Parties, Weak and Strong

- APSA. "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee on Political Parties." 1950. *American Political Science Review*. 44(3): 1-14.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 1980. "The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics." *Daedalus* 109(3): 25-45.
- Rae, Nicol C. 2007. "Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* (10): 169-91.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 39: 413-48
- McCarty, Nolan. 2013. "What We Know and Don't Know About Our Polarized Politics." *Washington Post (Monkey Cage Blog)*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/08/what-we-know-and-dont-know-about-our-polarized-politics/>

Feb. 2—A Polarized Public?

- Fiorina, Morris P. And Samuel J. Abrams. 2008. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 563-588.
- Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics*. 70: 542-55.
- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings." *Journal of Politics* 70: 556-60.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2012. "The Electoral Origins of Polarized Politics. Evidence from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study." *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(12) 1612-30.
- Carsey, Thomas and Geoffrey Layman. 2013. "Our Politics is Polarized on More Issues than Ever Before." *Washington Post (Monkey Cage Blog)*, Jan 17: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/17/our-politics-is-polarized-on-more-issues-than-ever-before/>

¹ I reserve the right to make modifications to the course schedule during the semester. If I make changes I will both announce them in class and on the website.

Feb. 9—Psychological Roots of Polarization

- Hetherington, Marc and Jonathan D. Welier. 2009. *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 3, & 7
- Ahler, Douglas J. 2014. "Self-Fulfilling Misperceptions of Public Polarization." *Journal of Politics* 76(3): 607-20.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Sean J. Westwood. 2014. "Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Arceneaux, Kevin and Stephen P. Nicholson. 2012. "Who Wants to Have a Tea Party? The Who, What, and Why of the Tea Party." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4): 700-10.

Feb. 16—Geographic/Demographic Polarization

- Bishop, Bill. 2008. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, pgs. 1-15, 42-57.
- Abramowitz, Alan, Brad Alexander and Matthew Gunning. 2006. "Don't Blame Redistricting for Uncompetitive Elections." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 39: 87-90.
- Abrams, Samuel J. and Morris P. Fiorina. 2012. "'The Big Sort That Wasn't: A Skeptical Reexamination.'" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(2): 203-10.
- Brownstein, Ronald and Scott Bland. 2013. "It's Not Just Partisanship That Divides Congress." *National Journal*, Jan. 10: <http://www.nationaljournal.com/magazine/it-s-not-just-partisanship-that-divides-congress-20130110>.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. 2014. "How Race and Religion Have Polarized American Voters." *Washington Post*, Jan. 20: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/20/how-race-and-religion-have-polarized-american-voters/>.
- Douthat, Ross. 2014. "Republicans, White Voters, and Racial Polarization." *The New York Times*, Aug. 6: <http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/06/republicans-white-voters-and-racial-polarization/>

Feb. 20—Topic due by 11:59 p.m.

Feb. 23—Primaries and Activists

- Bawn, Kathleen et al. 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10(3): 571-97.

- Boatright, Robert. 2013. *Getting Primaried: The Changing Politics of Congressional Primaries*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (excerpt).
- 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): 337-51.
- Layman, Geoffrey C. 2014. "Party Activists" In *CQ Guide to Political Parties*, Hershey, Marjorie R. ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

March 2—Media

- Levendusky, Matthew S. 2013. "Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?" *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 611-23.
- Arceneaux, Kevin, Martin Johnson, and John Cryderman. 2013. "Communication, Persuasion, and the Conditioning Value of Selective Exposure: Like Minds May Unite and Divide but They Mostly Tune Out." *Political Communication* 30(2): 213-31.
- Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 101-27.

March 9—Spring Break!

March 16—Spring Break!

March 23—Why is Congress so Polarized?

- McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, pp. 1-23.
- Lee, Frances. 2014. "American Politics is More Competitive Than Ever. That's Making Partisanship Worse." *Washington Post (Monkey Cage Blog)*, Jan. 9: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/09/american-politics-is-more-competitive-than-ever-thats-making-partisanship-worse/>
- Bafumi, Joseph and Michael C. Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation: A Study of American Voters and Their Members of Congress." *American Political Science Review* 104(3): 519-42.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2013. "Partisan Polarization in American Politics: A Background Paper." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43(4): 688-708.

- Harbridge, Laurel and Neil Malhotra. 2011. "Electoral Incentives and Partisan Conflict in Congress: Evidence from Survey Experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 494-510.

March 30—Polarization and Partisanship Inside Congress

- Watch Frontline documentary: "The Long March of Newt Gingrich."
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newt/view/>
- Theriault, Sean M. 2013. "The Gingrich Senators, the Tea Party Senators, and Their Effect on the U.S. Senate." In Frisch, Scott A. and Sean Q. Kelly. *Politics to the Extreme: American Political Institutions in the Twentieth-First Century*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Smith, Steven S. 2012. "The Senate Syndrome." In *The U.S. Senate: From Deliberation to Dysfunction*, ed. Burdett Loomis. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Dodd, Lawrence C. and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. 2012. "The House in a Time of Crisis: Economic Turmoil and Partisan Upheaval." In Dodd, Lawrence C. and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. *Congress Reconsidered*, 10th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Dancey, Logan. "The Positives of Partisanship: Establishing an Outside Ethics Commission in Congress." Working paper.

April 3—Literature Review Due by 11:59 p.m.

April 6—Governing During Polarization

- Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein. 2013. "Finding the Common Good in an Era of Dysfunctional Governance." *Daedalus* 142(2): 15-24.
- Binder, Sarah. 2014. "Polarized We Govern?" *Brookings Institution*, 1-23.
http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/05/27%20polarized%20we%20govern%20binder/brookingscepm_polarized.pdf
- Lee, Frances E. 2013. "Presidents and Party Teams: The Politics of Debt Limits and Executive Oversight, 2001-2013." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43(4): 775-791.
- Watch Frontline documentary: "Inside Obama's Presidency."
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/inside-obamas-presidency/>

April 13—Mass Response to Elite Polarization

- Levendusky, Matt. 2010. "Clearer Cues, More Consistent Voters: A Benefit of Elite Polarization." *Political Behavior* 32(1): 111-31.
- Dancey, Logan and Geoff Sheagley. 2014. "Inferences Made Easy: Partisan Voting and Constituents' Perceptions of Senators' Votes." Working Paper.

- Druckman, James N., Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation." *American Political Science Review* 107(1): 57-79.
- Rogowski, Jon C. 2013. "Electoral Choice, Ideological Conflict, and Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 479-94.

April 20—Guest Speaker

April 27—Solutions to Polarization?

- Nivola, Pietro S. and William A. Galston. "Toward Depolarization." In *Red and Blue Nation?* Volume II. Also read comments from Polsby, Aberbach, and Diamond.
- Masket, Seth. "Want to Reduce Polarization? You Need to Improve Political Journalism." <http://www.psmag.com/politics-and-law/want-reduce-polarization-improve-journalism-65003>
- Plides, Richard. 2014. "How to Fix Our Polarized Politics? Strengthen Political Parties." *Washington Post*, Feb. 6. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/06/how-to-fix-our-polarized-politics-strengthen-political-parties/>
- Mann and Ornstein. "Want to End Partisan Politics? Here's What Won't Work—and What Will." http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/want-to-end-partisan-politics-heres-what-wont-work--and-what-will/2012/05/17/gIQA5jqcWU_story.html
- Sides, John. 2011. "Mandatory Voting Isn't a Solution to Polarization." *The Monkey Cage Blog*, Nov. 8: <http://themonkeycage.org/2011/11/08/mandatory-voting-isnt-a-solution-to-polarization/>.
- Bipartisan Policy Center. "Governing in a Polarized America: A Bipartisan Blueprint to Strengthen Our Democracy." <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/governing-polarized-america-bipartisan-blueprint-strengthen-our-democracy/>

April 29—Rough Draft Due by 11:59 p.m.

May 4—Peer review sessions

- In-class peer review session followed by course wrap-up

Wednesday, May 13, 11:59 p.m.

- Final papers due

Friday, May 15, 9-a.m. - noon

- Paper Presentations