

Soc 190: Polarization in Context

Fall 2021

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Class: Thur, 4-6, SSB 402

Office Hours: Tue, 1-3, Caffè Strada

Welcome to Polarization in Context!

Polarization defines modern American politics and is a constant subject of both scholarly and popular discussion. But these discussions are often out of touch with one another, and even the scholarly literature is disjointed and frequently disconnected from broader sociological understandings of politics. In this course we will work together to make connections across all these discussions and place polarization in its theoretical and empirical context. We will learn different theories of polarization and how they relate to one another, while also seeing how they connect to other topics in sociology, from inequality to social movements to culture and meaning making. And then we will apply these theories to current events, both critiquing how polarization is covered and developing our own understandings of events. Ultimately, we are asking and attempting to answer three questions: 1) what does “polarization” mean sociologically? 2) why and how does it matter? and 3) how do our answers to the first two questions change our understanding of current events and public discourse?

This course is a capstone seminar for the sociology major, and so we will be working to answer these questions *together* in class discussions, where we will wrestle with difficult concepts, try out new ideas, and build our (collective) understanding class by class. You’ll also be engaging with these questions *individually* in a 15-20 page final paper which you will work on throughout the semester, building an independent project and developing an original argument. This paper will be a real opportunity to apply your sociological skills to an aspect of polarization you care about and say something interesting about it.

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, you will:

- *Know* and *understand* the different definitions of polarization and the theories (e.g. of inequality, social movements, etc.) we use to contextualize those definitions, as well as the evidence for them and the current empirical state of polarization in the US.

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- Be able to *elaborate* the connections between these theories, placing them in relation to one another and seeing how they support, complicate, and expand each other.
 - *Apply* this knowledge to current events and media discourses, both by *identifying* and *critiquing* the theories of polarization being (implicitly) used in the media, and by *interpreting* current events.
 - Bring this knowledge and these abilities together to think in new ways about polarization and its context by *designing* a research question or policy intervention related to polarization.

Expectations

This class is a fundamentally *collective* endeavor: we are working together to try and understand political polarization from a sociological standpoint. While I may know the literature better, this class is not only about relaying information, but about making connections and building understanding together. As such, it relies on your active participation and collaboration. The success of this course is as much about your participation as it is my teaching. We are all in this together.

In practice, this means that I expect you to arrive on time, having thoughtfully done the readings and completed any assignments for that week. I expect that you arrive ready to participate and that you do so respectfully. You will sometimes be working with each others' writing and ideas, and I expect you to take that responsibility seriously and to accomplish it with kindness.

Assignments

- **5 Reading Memos:** you will write five reading responses throughout the semester (for weeks of your choosing). These will be 250-500 word memos in which you identify something interesting from the readings for a given week, summarize the rest of the reading enough to contextualize it, and explain why it's interesting to you. Basically, find something interesting and talk about it. This can be a surprising theoretical idea or empirical finding, a connection across readings, or even a question you were left with.
- **1 Media Memo:** once during the semester (timing determined by sign-up ahead of time), you will write a 500-750 word media memo (and not a reading memo). For this memo, you must find an article in the popular media that week which discusses or relates to polarization, which you will then analyze in three ways:
 - Identify the theories/definitions of polarization the article is most closely drawing on and explain your identification.
 - Evaluate whether the article is accurate to our understanding of polarization. Does it fit with the scholarly work or not? If it makes poorly substantiated claims, what more would we need to know to prove them?
 - Apply the theories we've learned to either present an alternative interpretation, or to elaborate, expand, and complicate the interpretation present in the article, using at least one reading from the week the memo is due.
 - Finally, be prepared to discuss the article and your interpretations in class.

Final Paper

This is the centerpiece of the course, and as such is intended to be both challenging and rewarding. The requirements are fairly flexible, but are nonetheless demanding: you must write a 15-20 page paper on a polarization related topic of your choice (in consultation with me). The paper must *make an argument* and it must be *both* significantly *empirical* and significantly *theoretical*. So, while you don't need to collect your own data, do a totally original analysis, or invent your own theory (though you absolutely can do any of these things), you *do* need to mobilize empirical evidence and apply or synthesize theory. The point isn't a particular kind of paper so much as it is a particular kind of work.

We'll be talking more about what the paper should look like throughout the semester, but, for now, here are a few different kinds of project which could fit the requirements:

- a research paper based on original data you have gathered or an original analysis of previous data (e.g. public survey data), which uses that data to present a new empirical finding.
- a research paper based entirely on secondary empirical evidence (i.e. building an argument on other people's work with data), which uses previous work to make a new theoretical argument.
- a research *proposal* which uses previous literature to motivate a specific new research question, a design to answer it, and any expectations of the answer.
- a policy paper which proposes and argues in favor of a policy intervention related to polarization, explaining the problem it addresses and why the intervention will help.

These requirements are a little wide open, and that's by design. While this is a big and challenging project, it is also an opportunity for you to write about something you care about, to do something *you think is exciting* and create a paper you're proud of by taking a serious look at a topic related to polarization in a way that leverages what we're doing in class along with everything you've done so far here at Berkeley. In this, you'll have the support of both myself and your fellow classmates. In particular, over the course of the semester, there are number of **intermediate assignments** to help you build up to the final paper:

- **Preliminary Topic Memo**, due Sunday, Sep 19: a 250-500 word memo in which you propose *at least one* potential topic for the paper. You should explain *why* you think the topic is interesting and *what* research question (or policy issue) you think your paper will address (or a few potential questions). This memo is a chance for well supported, structured, brainstorming about potential topics, and will serve as the basis for an office hours meeting with me (see the next assignment).
- **Required Office Hour Meeting**, the week of Monday, Sep 20: every student will be required to meet with me in office hours after turning in the preliminary topic memo so that we can talk about your ideas, I can give you feedback, and we can make sure that you feel confident making a decision about your topic and writing up the paper proposal.
- **Paper Proposal**, due Thursday, Oct 7: a 750-1000 word paper proposal, building on the topic memo and my feedback. You will focus on a single topic and research question, explaining what your topic is, why it's interesting and important, what you

plan to do, and also provide a bibliography of at least 5 relevant, scholarly, sources (at least one of which is not on the reading list for the course). The proposals will also be the basis of class discussion for that week. There will not be formal presentations, but you should be prepared to discuss your proposal with the class.

- **Draft Outline/Summary**, due Wednesday, Nov 10: a 1000-1500 word first draft of a summary of your argument. Give a detailed overview of your paper's structure, explain your planned argument, the evidence you will be drawing on, the theories you're mobilizing, and your (potentially tentative) conclusions. As a draft, you are also encouraged to pose any difficulties you're still facing, questions you can't seem to answer, etc., so that my feedback will be as useful as possible.
- **(Optional) Revised Outline/Summary**, due Wednesday, Nov 24: this is an *optional* revision of the draft outline based on my feedback, giving you a chance to get comments on a more polished version of your argument. This will not be graded, but you will get written comments.
- **Final Paper**, due Monday, Dec 13: the final paper itself. 15-20 pages (4500-6000 words), double spaced, Times New Roman, 1" margins.

Note: Fuller guidelines and expectations for all these assignments will be handed out and discussed before they're due and we will be spending some in-class time working on the research and writing skills you'll need for this project.

Evaluation

You will be graded on a combination of in-class participation and the above assignments, broken down as follows:

- Participation ~ 20%¹
- 5 Reading Memos ~ 15% (3% each)
- Media Memo ~ 10%
- Paper Assignments ~ 20%
 - Preliminary Topic Memo ~ 2.5%
 - Required Office Hours ~ 2.5%
 - Paper Proposal ~ 5%
 - Draft Outline ~ 10%
- Final Paper ~ 35%

Email Policy

Substantive questions should be reserved for section or office hours. You may email me regarding urgent issues or simple bureaucratic concerns. I try to respond within 24 hours, except over the weekend, when you should hear back on Monday.

¹If you have trouble speaking up in class, talk to me and we can figure something out.

Other Information

Academic Dishonesty: Do not plagiarize under any circumstances. Plagiarism is the use of intellectual material produced by another person without properly citing its source. If you are unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism, you should immediately consult with me and/or review “Academic Honesty: A Guide for Students” prepared by the Office of Student Life.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented need for special accommodations, please request the DSP office forward me your accommodation letter as soon as possible so I can work out the necessary arrangements. If you believe that you may have a disability which affects your ability to participate fully in class or meet all course requirements, and wish to request academic accommodations, please contact the Disabled Students’ Program (DSP) at 510-642-0518 (V) 510-642-6376 (TTY). More information is available online at <http://dsp.berkeley.edu/>

Other Circumstances: If there are other circumstances in your life which you believe may impact your ability to participate in class, e.g. you are a student athlete, a parent, a caregiver, etc. please let me know so that we can figure something out.

On Mental Health: College can be really stressful, but there are resources available. If you need support, please contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) at the Tang Center (2222 Bancroft Way, 510-642-9494), and the Career Center (<https://career.berkeley.edu>). If you need someone to talk to immediately, call the 24/7 Suicide Prevention and Crisis Hotline (415-499-1100).

Weekly Assignments/Readings

All course materials are available on the bCourses site, except where otherwise noted. Some readings have no page numbers given; these are, at most, equivalent to about 10 pages in length.

- **Week 1: Introductions** (Aug 26)
 - No readings

Part 1: Defining Polarization

- **Week 2: Overview** (Sep 2)
 - Eli J. Finkel et al. “Political Sectarianism in America,” *Science* 370, no. 6516 (2020): 533–536.
 - Yphtach Lelkes “Mass Polarization: Manifestations and Measurements,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80 (2016): 392–410.
 - William H Sewell “Collective Violence and Collective Loyalties in France: Why the French Revolution Made a Difference,” *Politics & Society* 18, no. 4 (1990): 527–552.
 - Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Mary Bernstein “Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements,” *Sociological Theory* 26 (2008): 74–99.

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- **Week 3: Attitudes, but...** (Sep 9)
 - Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, eds. *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics* ([Stanford, Calif.] : Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).
 - * Morris Fiorina, Chapter 2, “Disconnected: The Political Class versus the People”, pp. 49-71
 - * Alan Abramowitz, Comment on Chapter 2, “Disconnected, or Joined at the Hip?”, pp. 72-85
 - Paul DiMaggio, John H. Evans, and Bethany Bryson “Have Americans’ Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?” *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 3 (1996): 690–699, 738–745.
 - Ziad W. Munson *The Making of Pro-Life Activists: How Social Movement Mobilization Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
 - * Chapter 1, “Explaining Mobilization in the American Pro-life Movement”, pp. 1-17
 - * Available online through the library.
 - **Week 4: Affect, but...** (Sep 16)
 - Shanto Iyengar et al. “The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 7 (2019): 1–18.
 - Yphtach Lelkes “Affective Polarization and Ideological Sorting: A Reciprocal, Albeit Weak, Relationship,” *Forum* 16, no. 1 (2018): 67–79.
 - Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza “A Broken Public? Americans’ Responses to the Great Recession,” *American Sociological Review* 78, no. 5 (2013): 727–748.
 - Lilliana Mason, Julie Wronski, and John V. Kane “Activating Animus: The Uniquely Social Roots of Trump Support,” *American Political Science Review* (June 30, 2021): 1–9.
 - **Week 5: Cleavages and Boundaries, but...** (Sep 23)
 - Preliminary Topic Memo Due **Sunday, September 19th**
 - Required Office Hour Meeting
 - Murat Somer and Jennifer McCoy “Transformations Through Polarizations and Global Threats to Democracy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (2019): 8–22.
 - Cedric De Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal “Political Articulation: Parties and the Constitution of Cleavages in the United States, India, and Turkey,” *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (September 2009): 193–219.
 - Austin C. Kozlowski and James P. Murphy “Issue Alignment and Partisanship in the American Public: Revisiting the ‘Partisans Without Constraint’ Thesis,” *Social Science Research* 94 (February 2021): 1–14.
 - **Week 6: Polarization and the Limits of the Political** (Sep 30)
 - Daniel DellaPosta “Pluralistic Collapse: The ‘Oil Spill’ Model of Mass Opinion Polarization,” *American Sociological Review* 85, no. 3 (2020): 507–529.
 - Antoine Hennion “Those Things That Hold Us Together: Taste and Sociology,” *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2007): 97–114.
 - Pamela E Oliver “Repression and Crime Control: Why Social Movement Scholars Should Pay Attention to Mass Incarceration as a Form of Repression,” *Mobilization*

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- 13, no. 1 (2008): 1–24.
 - Tommy Craggs “What’s the Matter with Cultural Politics?” *Mother Jones*, 2020.
 - * Link: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/12/whats-the-matter-with-cultural-politics/>
 - **Week 7: Paper Proposal** (Oct 7)
 - Paper proposal due
 - Informal presentations and discussion

Part 2: Polarization in Context

- **Week 8: Polarization and History** (Oct 14)
 - Paul Pierson and Eric Schickler “Madison’s Constitution Under Stress: A Developmental Analysis of Political Polarization,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (2020): 37–58.
 - Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2006).
 - * Chapter 9, “When Americans Disagreed: Cultural Fragmentation and Conflict”, pp. 212-239
 - * Available online through the library.
 - Roger V. Gould “Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871,” *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 6 (1991): 716–729.
- **Week 9: Polarization, Institutions, and Inequality** (Oct 21)
 - Yannis Stavrakakis “Paradoxes of Polarization: Democracy’s Inherent Division and the (Anti-)Populist Challenge,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (2018): 43–58.
 - Ronald L. Jepperson “Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism,” in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, ed. Walter W Powell and Paul DiMaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 143–163.
 - Adrienne LeBas “Can Polarization Be Positive? Conflict and Institutional Development in Africa,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (2018): 59–74.
 - “Authors Meet Critics” panel on “Let them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality,” by Paul Pierson and Jacob Hacker.
 - * The full panel is 90 minutes, but most important for our purposes is the authors’ presentation and the first round of critiques (about the first 50 minutes).
 - * Link: <https://matrix.berkeley.edu/research-article/video-authors-meet-critics-let-them-eat-tweets/>
 - * Optionally, you may also read the introduction from *Let them Eat Tweets*
- **Week 10: Polarization and Social Media** (Oct 28)
 - Moran Yarchi et al. “Political Polarization on the Digital Sphere: A Cross-Platform, Over-Time Analysis of Interactional, Positional, and Affective Polarization on Social Media,” *Political Communication* (2020): 1–23.
 - * The appendix begins on p. 24 and is interesting, especially methodologically, but is not required reading per se.
 - M D Conover et al. “Political Polarization on Twitter,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth*

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- International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2011, 89–96.
- danah boyd “Agnotology and Epistemological Fragmentation” (Medium, May 10, 2019).
 - * Link: <https://points.datasociety.net/agnotology-and-epistemological-fragmentation-56aa3c509c6b>
 - Angela Xiao Wu “How Not to Know Ourselves” (Medium, July 28, 2020).
 - * Link: <https://points.datasociety.net/how-not-to-know-ourselves-5227c185569>
 - Christopher A. Bail et al. “Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 37 (September 11, 2018): 9216–9221.
 - **Week 11: Polarization and Social Movements** (Nov 4)
 - Doug McAdam and Karina Kloos *Deeply Divided: Racial Politics and Social Movements in Post-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - * Chapter 1, “How Did We Get into This Mess?”, pp. 3-29
 - * Available online through the library.
 - Rory McVeigh, David Cunningham, and Justin Farrell “Political Polarization as a Social Movement Outcome: 1960s Klan Activism and Its Enduring Impact on Political Realignment in Southern Counties, 1960 to 2000,” *American Sociological Review* 79, no. 6 (2014): 1144–1171.
 - Alberto Melucci “The Process of Collective Identity,” in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 41–63.
 - **Week 12: Draft Outline/Summary and Veterans Day** (Nov 11)
 - Draft Outline/Summary due
 - No class
 - **Week 13: Polarization and Meaning Making** (Nov 18)
 - Oliver Hahl, Minjae Kim, and Ezra W. Zuckerman Sivan “The Authentic Appeal of the Lying Demagogue: Proclaiming the Deeper Truth about Political Illegitimacy,” *American Sociological Review* 83, no. 1 (2018): 1–25.
 - Francesca Polletta and Jessica Callahan “Deep Stories, Nostalgia Narratives, and Fake News: Storytelling in the Trump Era,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2017): 392–408.
 - Nina Eliasoph ““Close to Home”: The Work of Avoiding Politics,” *Theory and Society* 26, no. 5 (1997): 605–647.
 - **Week 14: Revised Outline/Summary and Thanksgiving** (Nov 25)
 - (Optional) Revised Outline/Summary due Wednesday, Nov 24
 - No Class
 - **Week 15: Polarization and the Future** (Dec 2)
 - Matthew S. Levendusky “Americans, Not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2017): 59–70.
 - Nancy Bermeo “Reflections: Can American Democracy Still Be Saved?” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (2019): 228–233.
 - Charles Kurzman “Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979,” *American Sociological Review*

61 (1996): 153–170.

– William H. Jr. Sewell “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,” *Theory and Society* 25, no. 6 (1996): 841–881.

– Indi Samarajiva “I Lived Through Collapse. America Is Already There.” (GEN, July 12, 2021).

* Link: <https://gen.medium.com/i-lived-through-collapse-america-is-already-there-ba1e4b54c5fc>

- **Week 16: Reading Week - No Class** (Dec 9)
- **Week 17: Finals Week - No Class**
 - **Final Paper Due Monday, Dec 13**