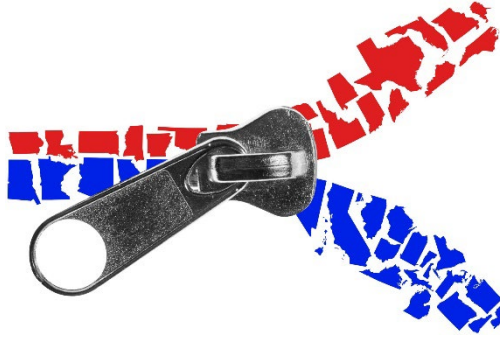


# HIST 485: Political Polarization in Modern America

Spring 2024

Beering 1242

MWF: 10:30-11:20



(Jim Cooke/Los Angeles Times)

Dr. Brownell

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-3 PM and by appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

How polarized is modern America? What are the origins of modern political, cultural, and economic divides? What role do institutions—political parties, media outlets, businesses, think tanks—play in shaping partisan conflict? Are there more durable patterns of consensus overlooked by dominant narratives of a red/blue chasm? This course will explore and debate these questions by historicizing the concept of polarization itself. It will examine the intersections of liberalism and conservatism, the rise of extremism, the growing influence of money and interest groups in electoral campaigns, changes in party politics and governing institutions, the shifting media environment, and suburban/urban/rural divides.

## **READING ASSIGNMENTS:**

All books can be purchased at the University Book Store, Follett's, or through Amazon.

### Required Reading Material:

Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of our Partisan Era*, University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, W.W. Norton, 2020.

Brian Rosenwald, *Talk Radio America: How an Industry Took over a Political Party that Took over the United States*, Harvard University Press 2019.

## FORMAT:

- The course will meet MWF. Most Fridays will focus on a student-led discussion of primary sources material linked to the reading and course materials from that week. This is an upper-level discussion-based course, so attendance is mandatory and expected throughout the semester. See below for the participation expectations and policies.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Details for all assignments are posted on Brightspace.

- **Journal Responses (30%):** There are four journal response papers due throughout the semester. Each response has different prompts and requirements for length posted on Brightspace.
- **Discussion Leader (5%):** On select Fridays, students will serve as discussion leaders and bring in primary sources linked to the week's readings to share with the class. They should consult with me (and one another) in advance and develop questions or an activity designed to encourage a class discussion.
- **Final Paper: (30%):** Due via Brightspace by 5PM on **May 3**.
- **Participation:(35%):** Participation is a vital part of this class. Students are allowed two absences, after which your participation grade will be reduced by a half a grade for every additional absence. You are expected to show up for each class prepared to discuss the reading material and any specific research/discussion assignments for that class as noted in class and on the syllabus. If you miss a class with a discussion assignment without discussing ways to make it up in advance, that absence will lower your grade by 3 points. **If you fail in participation, you will fail the course.**

Late policy: Late papers/projects will be penalized **one-third grade per day** (example: a B paper that is one day late becomes a B-). Note: grades will be posted on Brightspace, but they are not weighted according to the percentages above.

### General notes re: grades:

- Final grades in the course **will** be assessed according to the plus/minus scale.
- Neither exam grades nor final grades in the course will be provided or discussed via email. If you would like to discuss your exams, grades, and/or your coursework in general, please do not hesitate to see me during office hours. I will be happy to go over your grades with you at any point in the semester.
- **You must complete all assignments to pass the course. This includes participation.**

## CLASSROOM POLICIES:

- No computers, tablets, i-Pads, phones, or recording devices are allowed in class. You are expected to take notes with paper only. Cell phones are also not to be used in class at any time. We meet for 50 minutes a day and I expect your attention and focus for all of these 50 minutes.

- Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class or via email, as circumstances allow.
- This class is intended to encourage open, informed discussions and I hope to protect and foster a classroom atmosphere that will encourage an open and enlightened discourse in the class. Ultimately I would hope that you take those ideas and informed discussions with you beyond the classroom. **Respect, open-mindedness and tolerance will be the standard for all classroom discussions.**
- Email will be the preferred mode of contact outside of regular classroom hours and office hours. I will also create a class email list which I will use to send course-related announcements as needed. **For this reason, I expect you to check your Purdue email account at least once a day.**
- In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to changes as necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. Any necessary changes will be announced via email and Brightspace.
- During the last two weeks of the semester, you will be provided an opportunity to evaluate this course and my teaching. You will receive an official email from evaluation administrators with a link to the online evaluation site, and you will have two weeks to complete this evaluation. I consider your feedback vital, as does Purdue University. Your professors have access to these online evaluations only after grades are due.

### **Academic Integrity**

- As a student in this class and at Purdue, you are expected to uphold the standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will be treated as such in this class. You are expected to produce your own work and to accurately cite all necessary materials. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: the use of papers or books not authorized by the instructor during examinations, quizzes, and other written assignments; giving or receiving answers during or in preparation for examinations and quizzes; and failing to cite sources employed for writing assignments. Those who engage in such practices should expect to fail the course and have their behavior referred to the Dean of Students. This is non-negotiable: if I find that you have plagiarized, you will fail the assignment and potentially will fail the entire course—period. Please do not put yourself in this situation.

### **Student with Disabilities:**

- If you need any special accommodations to participate fully in class, please see me as soon as possible. I will keep all discussions confidential as long as the situation permits. Please note that, in order for Purdue University to accommodate your needs, you will need to provide appropriate written documentation and have it on file with Student Services. Students should be aware that Services for Student Disabilities are available at 494-1247 if you need further assistance.

## EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

**If you hear a fire alarm inside, proceed outside. If you hear a siren outside, proceed inside.**

• **Indoor Fire Alarms** mean to stop class or research and immediately **evacuate** the building. Proceed to your Emergency Assembly Area away from building doors. **Remain outside** until police, fire, or other emergency response personnel provide additional guidance or tell you it is safe to leave.

• **All Hazards Outdoor Emergency Warning Sirens** mean to immediately seek shelter (**Shelter in Place**) in a safe location within the closest building. "Shelter in place" means seeking immediate shelter inside a building or University residence. This course of action may need to be taken during a tornado, a civil disturbance including a shooting or release of hazardous materials in the outside air. Once safely inside, find out more details about the emergency\*. **Remain in place** until police, fire, or other emergency response personnel provide additional guidance or tell you it is safe to leave.

*\*In both cases, you should seek additional clarifying information by all means possible...Purdue Home page, email alert, TV, radio, etc...review the Purdue Emergency Warning Notification System multi-communication layers at [http://www.purdue.edu/ehps/emergency\\_preparedness/warning-system.html](http://www.purdue.edu/ehps/emergency_preparedness/warning-system.html)*

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES:

Review the **Emergency Procedures Guidelines**

[https://www.purdue.edu/emergency\\_preparedness/flipchart/index.html](https://www.purdue.edu/emergency_preparedness/flipchart/index.html)

Review the **Building Emergency Plan** (available from the building deputy) for: o evacuation routes, exit points, and emergency assembly area

- when and how to evacuate the building.
- shelter in place procedures and locations
- additional building specific procedures and requirements.

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AWARENESS VIDEOS

"Shots Fired on Campus: When Lightning Strikes," is a 20-minute active shooter awareness video that illustrates what to look for and how to prepare and react to this type of incident. See: <http://www.purdue.edu/securePurdue/news/2010/emergency-preparedness-shots-fired-on-campus-video.cfm> (Link is also located on the EP website)

## MORE INFORMATION

Reference the Emergency Preparedness web site for additional information:

[http://www.purdue.edu/emergency\\_preparedness](http://www.purdue.edu/emergency_preparedness)

## READING AND DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Material posted on Brightspace are denoted with a \*\* and can be found on Brightspace. Unless otherwise noted, reading assignments should be completed **BEFORE the Friday class**, which will center on discussion.

### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

January 8: Course Introduction  
January 10: No Class: Pursue Individual Conversations  
January 12: Discussion: Political Disagreement Today

#### DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENT:

- Sign up as a discussion leader on Brightspace.
- Have a conversation about politics, issues, or current events with someone with whom you disagree politically. It can be a parent, sibling, friend, grandparent, etc. Part of the mission of this class is to engage ideas and issues with which we may not agree in a respectful way and to understand the ideological, cultural, social, or political roots of these differences. Please come to class on **Friday, January 12**, with some observations about this experience. We will repeat this activity at the end of the semester to how the course materials may have changed your perspective or understanding of political differences.

### **Week 2: Disciplinary Approaches to Studying Political Polarization**

January 15: NO CLASS: MLK Jr. Day  
January 17: Theorizing Political Polarization (Discuss Mason)  
January 19: Historicizing Political Polarization (Discuss Zimmer)

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 2018, introduction \*\*
- Thomas Zimmer, "Reflections on the Challenges of Writing a Pre-History of the 'Polarized' Present," *Modern American History*, 2019 \*\*

#### ASSIGNMENT:

- Journal Response #1 due by 9AM on Friday January 19

### **Week 3: Postwar Partisanship and Its Discontents**

January 22: Postwar Political Consensus  
January 24: Chicago '68  
January 26: Discussion

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers*, 1-128

#### **Week 4: New Politics in the 1970s**

January 29: Reforming Elections  
January 31: Reforming Political Institutions  
February 2: Discussion

##### **ASSIGNED READING:**

- Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers*, 129-264

#### **Week 5: A Reagan Revolution?**

February 5: Conservatives in Power  
February 7: Neoliberalism and the New Democrats  
February 9: No Class

##### **ASSIGNED READING:**

- Brent Cebul, Lily Geismer, and Mason Williams, *Shaped By the State*, introduction \*\*

#### **Week 6: Consensus Issues**

February 12: Mass Incarceration  
February 14: Immigration  
February 16: Discussion

##### **ASSIGNED READING:**

- Elizabeth Hinton, “Will We Ever Get Beyond ‘The Fire Next Time’?” *New York Times*, May 21, 2021 \*\*
- Carly Goodman, “Angry that ICE is ripping families apart? Don’t just blame Trump. Blame Clinton, Bush, and Obama, too.” *Washington Post*, June 6, 2018

##### **ASSIGNMENT:**

- Journal Response #2 Due on Brightspace by 9AM on Friday, February 16

#### **Week 7: Religious Divides in American Politics**

February 19: Religion in the Postwar Era  
February 21: The Rise of the Religious Right  
February 23: Discussion

##### **ASSIGNED READING:**

- Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 1-73

### **Week 8: Culture Wars: Part 1**

February 26: Abortion  
February 28: Censorship  
March 1: The AIDS Crisis

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 74-149
- Andrew Hartman, *The War for the Soul of America*, introduction \*\*\*

### **Week 9: Culture Wars: Part 2**

March 4: School Prayer  
March 6: Curriculum Battles  
March 8: No Class

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 150-249

#### ASSIGNMENT:

- Journal Response #3 due via Brightspace at 9AM on Friday, March 8

### **Week 10: NO CLASS- Spring Break**

### **Week 11: Fanning the Fringes**

March 18: The Expanding Cable Dial  
March 20: Newt Gingrich and Politics as War  
March 22: Discussion

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Rosenwald, *Talk Radio America*, 1-78

### **Week 12: The Politics of Obstruction**

March 25: Partisan Media  
March 27: The Outrage Machine  
March 29: Discussion

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Rosenwald, *Talk Radio America*, 79-175

### **Week 13: “The Politics of Personal Destruction”**

April 1: Clarence Thomas Confirmation Hearings  
April 3: The Bill Clinton Impeachment  
April 5: Discussion

#### ASSIGNED READING:

- Excerpts from *Aftermath: The Clinton Impeachment and Presidency in the Age of Political Spectacle* \*\*

## **Week 14: Follow the Money**

April 8: Think Tanks and the “Marketplace of Ideas”  
April 10: PACs and Interest Group Politics  
April 12: Discussion

### ASSIGNED READING:

- Jason Stahl, “Think Tanks in the Age of Reagan,” in *Right Moves*, 2016\*\*
- Emily J. Charnock, “More Than a Score: Interest Group Ratings and Polarized Politics,” *Studies in American Political Development*, 2018

## **Week 15: The Polarized Present?**

April 15: Politics in the Age of Social Media  
April 17: No Class: Pursue Individual Conversations  
April 19: Discussion: Political Divides Today

### ASSIGNED READING:

- Rosenwald, *Talk Radio America*, 177-268
- Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 231-304
- Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers*, 281-293

### DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENT:

- Have a conversation about politics, issues, or current events with someone with whom you disagree politically. It can be the same parent, sibling, friend, grandparent, etc. as before or someone new. As a reminder, part of the mission as a class is to engage ideas and issues that we may not agree in a respectful way and to understand the ideological, cultural, social, or political roots of these differences. Complete the journal assignment reflecting on how the course materials have helped you better understand political differences and be prepared to share your analysis with the class.

### ASSIGNMENT:

- Journal Response #4 due via Brightspace at 9AM on Friday, April 19

## **Week 16: Individual Meetings**

April 24: No Class: Individual Meetings with Dr. Brownell  
April 26: No Class: Individual Meetings with Dr. Brownell  
April 28: No Class: Individual Meetings with Dr. Brownell

### ASSIGNED READING:

**Final paper due via Brightspace on May 3 at 5PM**