

# **POLS 53002: The United States Congress in a Polarized Era (Spring 2018)**

## **Course Information**

Class Time: Tues./Thurs., 3:30pm–4:45pm

Classroom: DeBartolo Hall 336

## **Professor:**

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Office: 2057 Jenkins Nanovic Halls

Office Hours: Tues., 12:30pm–1:30pm

Thurs., 2:00pm–3:00pm

By Appointment

## **Course Description**

Many, if not most, political observers today would argue that our current political era is dominated by partisan warfare, and that many political outcomes are determined not by the contents of policies themselves, but rather whether they are proposed by Democrats or Republicans. Why is this the case? Are we in a uniquely polarized era, or have we seen this before? This course will provide an in-depth analysis of the political and legislative process of the United States Congress, with a major focus on how it is influenced by, and influences, partisan polarization. We will spend significant time discussing recent and historical works on the topic of Congressional polarization. The class will culminate in a (potentially group-written) research project and oral presentation on some aspect of Congressional polarization.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an appreciation for:
  - The role of Congress in lawmaking and society.
  - The goals and constraints shaping legislative behavior.
  - The legislative process, its logic, and the potential implications of reforms.
  - The value of information and the importance of agenda setting in policymaking.
  - The role of political polarization in Congressional politics
- Improve communication and listening skills.
- Improve collaborative skills.
- Improve research skills.

## Books and Course Materials

The following books are required, and many are accessible via the embedded links:

*Opting Out of Congress: Partisan Polarization and the Decline of Moderate Candidates* by Danielle M. Thomsen.

*The Gingrich Senators: The Roots of Partisan Warfare in Congress* by Sean M. Theriault.

*Legislating in the Dark: Information and Power in the House of Representatives* by James M. Curry

*Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate* by Frances E. Lee.

*Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis* by Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph.

*Is Bipartisanship Dead? Policy Agreement and Agenda-Setting in the House of Representatives* by Laurel Harbridge.

*Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* by Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal (Second Edition).

- First edition available [here](#). Note that the second edition has been assigned for class.

*Party Polarization in Congress* by Sean M. Theriault.

If you choose not to purchase these books, they will be available on course reserve in the library. Online copies of all other readings will be posted on Sakai as needed.

## Policy on Plagiarism

As members of the academic community, we each have a responsibility to uphold rigorous standards of integrity. Every student is thus expected to abide by the University of Notre Dame's Academic Code of Honor. [The Code of Honor can be found here](#).

Plagiarism (using the ideas, words, or work of others without attribution) will result in serious consequences. If you have any questions about the Code of Honor, plagiarism, or academic honesty, please contact the instructor or the TA.

## Policy on Disabilities

Any student who has a documented disability and is registered with Disability Services should speak with the instructor as soon as possible regarding accommodations. Students who are not registered should contact the [Office of Disability Services](#).

## Policy on Technology

This course relies heavily on access to computers and the Internet. At some point during the semester you WILL have a problem with technology: your laptop will crash, a file will become corrupted, a server will go down, or something else will occur. These are facts of life, not emergencies. Technology problems will not normally be accepted as excuses for unfinished work. Count on “stuff” happening and protect yourself by doing the following:

- Plan ahead — start early, particularly if scarce resources are required.
- Save work often — at least every ten minutes.
- Make regular backups of files in a different location from the originals.
- Save drafts of work at multiple stages.
- When editing an image, set aside the original and work with a copy.
- Practice safe computing when surfing the web and checking email.
- On your personal computer, install and use software to control viruses and malware.

When submitting any assignment electronically in this course, you are responsible for any technological problems (e.g., internet connection difficulties, corrupted files, etc.). To prevent problems along with the associated lateness penalties, you should submit papers well before the deadline and take proactive steps to ensure that the file was not corrupted (e.g., check it after uploading to Sakai or copy yourself on emails and check the attached file). Again, please do not trust your computer to function correctly at the last minute.

All that said, the access to computers and the Internet should generally be done outside of the classroom. Unless I grant an explicit exception, laptops, cell phones, tablets, and all other electronic devices are not allowed during class *during the lecture portion of the course*, since handwritten note-taking is associated with better comprehension and less distraction (of both the student and those around him/her). *During the simulation, laptops may be used so long as they are used solely for the purpose of the simulation.*

## Grading and Course Requirements

The structure of the course is such that the course is roughly divided into two parts. The portion of the course before the midterm break follows a more standard lecture-based structure, with homework assignments and an in-class midterm examination. The portion of the course after the midterm break will be almost entirely simulation-based.

### Required Assignments

**NOTE:** Unless otherwise specified, all assignments must be turned in to Sakai at or before 3:30pm on the listed due date, and all must comport with the following formatting requirements:

- Double-spaced

- Size 12 font
- One-inch margins
- Standard font (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Helvetica, or something similar)

**Final Project** (60% of grade). The bulk of your grade will be based on your completion of a significant piece of writing. However, you may coauthor this with up to two other people, and the entire project will not be due at once. Instead, I will stagger the timeline for different parts of the project in order to keep you on track as well as to lessen the importance of any particular part of the project.

- *Project Proposal* (10% of grade): By March 8, you need to provide a 3-4 page description of the project you would like to complete by the end of the semester. It should address the following questions:
  - What is your research question?
  - Why have you decided on this question?
  - What other literature is relevant to your question? What might you need to cite in a bibliography?
  - What data or other evidence would you need to answer your question?
  - How might you use the data or other evidence in listed above to answer your question?
- *Annotated Bibliography* (5% of grade): By March 27, you need to provide an annotated bibliography (APA, MLA, or Chicago format) of at least ten references (journal articles or books) that you plan on citing in your final research project. Each reference must include a 150-300 word annotation that includes the following:
  - A brief summary of the work's main argument(s).
  - A brief description of the importance of the work to your larger research project.
- *Rough Draft* (10% of grade): By April 10, you need to provide a 4000-6000 word rough draft of your project.
- *Final Draft* (25% of grade): By May 1, you need to provide a 4000-6000 word final draft of your project.
- *Final Presentation* (10% of grade): On May 1, you or your group will give a 15-20 minute in-class presentation of your research project that includes the following points:
  - Describe your research question.
  - Briefly describe other relevant literature, especially ones you cited.
  - Describe data or other evidence used to answer your question.
  - Describe how you used the data or other evidence to answer your question.
  - Tell us what you found. What are the substantive results?

- Where might you go from here? (If you were to write a follow-up piece, how might you build on this project?)

**Discussion Leadership** (20% of grade). Each week, a student (or students, depending on enrollment) will be responsible for leading discussion on the week's readings. They will be responsible for producing memos (3-4 pages each) summarizing the readings prefaced by a (DL) in the "Course Topics" section. These memos will be distributed to the class and will be useful when writing response memos and writing the final project. They will also be responsible for beginning the first day of each section with a 10-15 minute PowerPoint presentation outlining the main points. Early in the semester, I will schedule sign-ups, and the sign-up sheet will list the relevant due dates. Each student must sign up for at least one week, and if you do multiple weeks your recorded grade will be your highest week-specific grade. Moreover, each week must have one student signed up; if no one has signed up by the date indicated on the sign-up sheet, I will randomly choose someone.

**Response Memo** (10% of grade). Each student will be required to write a (2-3 page) response memo summarizing the contents of one week's discussion. These will also be distributed to the class and will be useful when writing the final project. Early in the semester, I will schedule sign-ups, and the sign-up sheet will list the relevant due dates. Each student must sign up for at least one week, and if you do multiple weeks your recorded grade will be your highest week-specific grade. Moreover, each week must have one student signed up; if no one has signed up by the date indicated on the sign-up sheet, I will randomly choose someone.

**Participation** (10% of grade). Regular attendance and participation are absolutely essential to make a seminar-based course work. Your contributions in class not only provide opportunities for learning and evaluation, they also help other students learn. Accordingly, students will be evaluated based on frequency and quality of in-class participation. Students are expected to attend all classes. Failure to attend class will negatively affect your participation grade unless the absence is excused. If you cannot attend class due to an important family or medical reason, please notify the instructor in advance. You will be responsible for getting notes from a classmate.

### **Extra Credit Opportunities**

There will be one—and only one—opportunity to gain extra credit.

**Course Evaluations:** (Up to an extra 5% of the grade). If at least 90% of the class completes a course evaluation, everyone in the class will receive one extra percentage point on his or her final grade. For each additional percentage point of the class that completes an evaluation, everyone in the class will receive  $\frac{2}{5}$  of an additional bonus point (for example, if 95% of the class completes the course evaluation, then everyone in the class will receive three additional percentage points on the final grade). The total amount of extra credit students may receive from course evaluations is five bonus percentage points. **Note that I am unable to see who fills out evaluations. I am also unable to see the contents of the evaluations until after the semester ends. I am, however, able to see what percentage of the class fills them out.**

## Grading Scale

Below is how your final percentage grade will be mapped into a letter grade. Because of the substantial opportunities for extra credit, there will be no rounding. So if you get an 89.999999% when the semester is over (for example), your final grade will be a B+. **No exceptions.**

Percentage point range	Letter grade
93+	A
90–92.999...	A-
87–89.999...	B+
83–86.999...	B
80–82.999...	B-
77–79.999...	C+
73–76.999...	C
70–72.999...	C-
60–69.999...	D
0–59.999...	F

## Late Assignments

Assignments are due at 3:30pm on the dates indicated on the syllabus. **All papers must be submitted via Sakai; written material must not be submitted in hard copy.** Written material submitted within 24 hours of the deadline will be accepted with a 25% grade reduction, and nothing will be accepted more than 24 hours after the deadline. **Because of the substantial opportunities for extra credit, there will be no exceptions.**

## Grade Appeals

All appeals must be made in writing to the instructor. No grade appeals will be considered within the first 24 hours of a grade being posted on Sakai; those that come in within the first 24 hours will be discarded. All grade appeals must be received within seven calendar days of the grade being posted on Sakai to be considered; those that arrive after this deadline will be discarded. All appeals must contain the following information:

- The name of the assignment in question.
- The reason why you believe your grade should be higher. Be specific and discuss this in the context of the requirements of the assignment.
- Determine whether you believe it is an error of calculation (that is, the instructor/TA incorrectly tabulated points), judgment (the grade received does not reflect the quality of the assignment), or both.

If the instructor determines that an error of calculation is present, then the correct grade will be calculated and the correct grade will be posted. If it is argued by the student that an error of judgment is present, then the student has the option to have the assignment graded *de novo* by the instructor. Because this will be a regrade, there is the possibility that the grade given to the regraded assignment will be lower than that given to the initial submission. Regardless, all decisions by the instructor are final.

## Policy on Email

Any requests to the instructor (e.g., meetings outside of office hours) *must* be made in writing via email so we everyone has a record of the request and decision. **For emails sent between Monday and Thursday, inclusive, please allow the instructor up to 48 hours to respond. For those sent between Friday and Sunday, inclusive, please allow the instructor up to 96 hours to respond.** The instructor endorses the general principles for email communication (for any professional communication via e-mail, not just those for this class) outlined here.

## Course Topics

**Note:** The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. We may not cover all of these topics. Conversely, time permitting, other topics might be covered in this course. Moreover, even if we do not cover something in class, you are still responsible for knowing what is in the readings.

### January 16: Introduction and Overview

### January 18: What is Polarization?

- Barber, Michael and Nolan McCarty. 2013 “Causes and Consequences of Polarization.” In *Negotiating Agreement in Politics*, edited by Jane Mansbridge and Cathie Jo Martin, 19-53. Washington: American Political Science Association.
- Fiorina, Morris P. and Samuel J. Abrams. 2008. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11(1):563–588.
- Layman, Geoffrey C., Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz. 2006. “Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9(1):83–110.
- McCarty, Nolan. 2014. “What we know and don’t know about our polarized politics.” *The Washington Post*.
- **NOTE: Each student will be expected to read either Barber et al., Fiorina et al., or Layman et al. before class.**

### January 23 and 25: Polarization in Congress

- Parker, David C.W. 2013. “The Tangled Roots of Polarization.” *Symposium Magazine*.
- (DL) Theriault, Sean M. 2008. *Party Polarization in Congress*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

### January 30 and February 1: Polarization and Income Inequality

- Makridis, Christos. 2016. “Are soaring levels of income inequality making us a more polarized nation?” *The Conversation*.

- (DL) McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2016. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
  - First edition available [here](#). Note that the second edition has been assigned for class.
- Swanson, Ana. 2015. “These political scientists may have just discovered why U.S. politics are a disaster.” *The Washington Post*.

## February 6: NO CLASS

## February 8 and 13: Polarization and Political Trust

- Butters, Ross and Christopher Hare. 2017. “Three-fourths of Americans regularly talk politics only with members of their own political tribe.” *The Washington Post*.
- Hetherington, Marc J. and Thomas J. Rudolph. 2014. “Why don’t Americans trust the government? Because the other party is in power.” *The Washington Post*.
- (DL) Hetherington, Marc J. and Thomas J. Rudolph. 2015. *Why Washington Won’t Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sides, John. 2015. “Washington doesn’t work. This new book tells us why.” *The Washington Post*.

## February 15 and 20: Polarization and (Re)Districting

- (DL) Carson, Jamie L., Michael H. Crespin, Charles J. Finocchiaro, and David W. Rohde. 2007. “Redistricting and Party Polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives.” *American Politics Research* 35(6): 878–904.
- (DL) Chen, Jowei, and Jonathan Rodden. 2013. “Unintentional Gerrymandering: Political Geography and Electoral Bias in Legislatures.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8(3):239–269.
- Enten, Harry J. 2013. “Why ‘gerrymandering’ doesn’t polarise Congress the way we’re told.” *The Guardian*.
- (DL) Masket, Seth E., Jonathan Winburn, and Gerald C. Wright. 2012. “The Gerrymanderers Are Coming! Legislative Redistricting Won’t Affect Competition or Polarization Much, No Matter Who Does It.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45(1):39–43.
- McCarty, Nolan. 2012. “Hate our polarized politics? Why you can’t blame gerrymandering.” *The Washington Post*.
- (DL) McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2009. “Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?” *American Journal of Political Science* 53(3):666–680.
- Ryan, Josh. 2015. “Evidence shows that the gerrymandering of district boundaries is not necessarily a cause of political polarisation.” *LSEAPP Blog*.

## February 22 and 27: Polarization and the Disappearing Moderates

- Thomsen, Danielle M. 2014. “Political polarization discourages moderate state legislators from running for Congress, making the problem worse.” *LSEAPP Blog*.
- Thomsen, Danielle M. 2017. “This is why Charlie Dent and other moderates are disappearing from Congress.” *The Washington Post*.
- (DL) Thomsen, Danielle M. 2017. *Opting Out of Congress: Partisan Polarization and the Decline of Moderate Candidates*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## March 1 and 6: Ideological Polarization and/or Partisan Polarization?

- (DL) Lee, Frances E. 2009. *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, Frances E. 2014. “American politics is more competitive than ever. That’s making partisanship worse.” *The Washington Post*.

## March 8: Workshop I—Proposal discussion and instructor-led data demonstration

- PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE TO SAKAI BEFORE CLASS.

## March 13 and 15: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

## March 20: NO CLASS

## March 22 and 27: Polarization and Congressional Tactics I

- ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE TO SAKAI BEFORE CLASS ON MARCH 27.
- (DL) Theriault, Sean M. 2013. *The Gingrich Senators: The Roots of Partisan Warfare in Congress*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Theriault, Sean M. 2014. “Polarization we can live with. Partisan warfare is the problem.” *The Washington Post*.

## March 29 and April 3: Polarization and Congressional Tactics II

- Curry, James M. and Frances E. Lee. 2016. “Congress is far more bipartisan than headlines suggest.” *The Washington Post*.
- (DL) Curry, James M. 2015. *Legislating in the Dark: Information and Power in the House of Representatives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Curry, James M. 2017. “Here’s why Senate Republicans are being so secretive with their Obamacare repeal plan.” *Vox.com*.

**April 5: NO CLASS**

**April 10: Workshop II—Peer Discussion of Rough Drafts**

- **ROUGH DRAFT DUE TO SAKAI BEFORE CLASS.**

**April 12 and 17: Maybe It's Not All Bad?**

- (DL) Harbridge, Laurel. 2015. *Is Bipartisanship Dead? Policy Agreement and Agenda-Setting in the House of Representatives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Harbridge-Yong, Laurel. 2015. "Congress is more bipartisan than you think." *The Washington Post*.

**April 19: Conclusion—What Have We Learned?**

**April 24 and 26: Workshops III and IV—Last Minute Concerns**

**May 1: In-Class Presentations**

- **FINAL DRAFT DUE TO SAKAI BEFORE CLASS.**