POLS 4900 Polarization in the United States

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Course Description
One of the defining characteristics of the contemporary political system in the United States is the vast ideological distance between the two major parties and the “Constitutional hardball” associated with it. Such polarization did not always exist. This course will examine the reasons why the parties are so divided. We will also examine the consequences, including a look at the public’s reaction to elite polarization and the dynamics of Congress.

Readings
There are four books we’ll be using in class. In addition, there will periodically be readings from other sources that will be posted on iCollege. The required books are:


Grades
Research paper 40%
Current event project 20%
Memos 20%
Participation 20%

Research Paper
The purpose is to examine some topic, with consultation from me, involving some aspect of political polarization. A handout regarding the paper will give more detailed information.

“Current” Event Project
Analyze some contemporary event in the last 10 years or so through the lens of polarization. For example, a Supreme Court nomination or the public reaction to some recent event. A handout will give more detailed information.

Memos
Each student will write four response memos during the semester. The purpose of these memos is to offer a critical summary of the day’s readings. These should be about two or three pages. One must be done for each of the last four units (starting with “Setting the Stage”).
Topics & Readings

The Big Picture

Week 1  Preliminaries: intro and the nature of American politics
8/27 & 8/29  No class on the 29th
iCollege

Week 2  Defining terms: elites and the mass public; the nature of elections in the 21st century
9/3 & 9/5  iCollege

Setting the Stage

Week 3  Explanations
9/10 & 9/12  McCarty Ch. 1–3

Week 4  Some consequences
9/17 & 9/19  McCarty Ch. 4–7

The Mass Public

Week 5  Red, blue, and purple states—how divided are we?
9/24 & 9/26  Fiorina Ch. 1–4

Week 6  Cultural issues
10/1 & 10/3  Fiorina Ch. 5–7

Week 7  Recent elections and where we might be headed
10/8 & 10/10  Fiorina Ch. 8–Epilogue

Week 8  The role of the media
10/15 & 10/17  iCollege

Week 9  A look at behavioral outcomes and political attitudes
10/22 & 10/24  iCollege

Congress

Week 10  A history of Congressional polarization
10/29 & 10/31  Theriault book Ch. 1–3

Week 11  Electoral explanations
11/5 & 11/7  Theriault book Ch. 4–6

Week 12  Institutional explanations
11/12 & 11/14  Theriault book Ch. 7–10

Where are we now, and where are we going?

Week 13  It's even worse than it looks
11/19 & 11/21  M+O Ch. 1-3

Week 14  It's even worse than it looks continued
12/3 & 12/5  M+O Ch. 4-7

Due dates

“Current” event project 11/22
Research paper 12/13
Class Policies

Make-up Policy
Make-up exams will only be given for university-approved reasons. Written documentation for the excuse is required and I must, barring some extraordinary circumstance, approve your excuse before the exam. If you fail to get my approval before the scheduled time for the exam, you will receive a zero.

Academic Honesty
All work must be your own. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing assignments will receive a zero for the exam or assignment and possibly the course and will be punished in accordance with Georgia State University policies (for details, see the GSU student code of conduct: [http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwdos/codeofconduct.html](http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwdos/codeofconduct.html)).

Drop Date
Be advised that the last day to withdraw from a course with the possibility of receiving a ‘W’ is October 15. If a student withdraws by this date but is failing the course, he/she will receive a ‘WF.’ All students who withdraw after this date will receive a ‘WF.’ Hardship withdrawals are only given if students experience non-academic emergencies beyond the midpoint of the semester which interfere with or prevent the completion of their coursework. Such hardships are usually due to medical, personal or financial emergencies, and are not to be used for academic issues.

Disability Policy
Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services (located in Suite 230 of the New Student Center). Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought. Please advise me (and provide me with a signed copy of your Accommodation Plan) if you have a documented disability that needs to be accommodated.

Grade Scale

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