

POL-UA 395.05: Political Polarization Laboratory
Spring 2022, New York University
Tuesdays 2pm-4:30pm

Prof. Eric Dickson

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Office Hours: by appointment

I am very happy to arrange one-on-one meetings in person or via Zoom whenever you think this might be helpful. Please send me an email and reach out whenever you would like to talk to me!

Office Hours When Held via Zoom:

see ericdickson.net/officehours for instructions

Course Description: Political polarization in the United States is one of the great challenges of our time. Intensifying polarization within the US has become an ever-greater threat to the country's prosperity and political stability. This "laboratory" course is meant to dive deeply into the causes of, and potential solutions for, political polarization. Because political polarization is a clear and present danger, the course focuses on aspects of political polarization that can potentially be addressed in the short-to-medium term, rather than contributing factors that are institutionally locked-in and very unlikely to change anytime soon (e.g., campaign finance laws, gerrymandering, electoral systems, etc.). In particular the course focuses on the psychological and sociological dimensions of polarization.

Course Prerequisites: POL-UA 812 (Introduction to Political Psychology) and the permission of the instructor.

Covid-19 Policies: It is mandatory to follow NYU's guidelines on Covid-19 protocols as these evolve over the course of the semester.

Teaching Modality: The course is offered in-person, and the plan is to stick with this as much as possible. We also have access to Zoom technology if this becomes necessary (e.g., the professor is sick, a significant fraction of the class is sick at the same time, university policies on in-person teaching change as the pandemic progresses, etc.).

Attendance Requirement: Course attendance is mandatory. Three or more *unexcused* absences will normally result in a grade of "F" in the course. Students who feel it impossible to attend a given class session for health, family, personal, or other reasons should email the professor with as much advanced notice as possible before class to request an *excused* absence. In particular, given the Covid-19 pandemic, students who are feeling ill the morning of class should *not* come to campus, and should email the professor before class to receive an excused absence and to make alternative arrangements. When meeting in-person, we will do our best to accommodate remote participation using

NYU's hybrid technology. This is a discussion-based class; to allow for free expression, the class sessions will not be recorded.

Course Requirements: Apart from the above attendance requirement, your course grade will be determined by a combination of the following factors: (1) four short response papers (each of these comprising 7.5% of the overall grade); (2) a final project (40%); (3) class participation (20%); (4) a "writing the syllabus" submission (5%); and (5) completion of NYU's online Human Subjects Training course (5%). There are no exams.

- (1) You will write four short response papers (target length: two pages) over the course of the semester. A response paper will engage a given week's readings and either (1) provide detailed critiques of elements of research design in one or more of the papers or (2) provide a brief summary of a research idea of your own design that somehow engages or contributes to that week's readings. Ideally, at least two of your response papers will do the latter (suggest new ideas). Response papers are due by Monday at 11pm (e.g., the day before we discuss the readings in class), and will be graded on a check-plus / check / check-minus system.
- (2) Your final project will be a much more substantial piece of work. This can take a variety of forms, subject to approval from the instructor. Most students will choose to produce a detailed and thoughtful design of your own research study on political polarization. It is not required actually to carry this study out for full class credit, but I will attempt to get funding from the Dean's Undergraduate Research Fund (DURF) for highly motivated students who wish to actually complete their own study. However, I will consider other kinds of final projects as well if you have other ideas. You may either work on your final project solo, or in a small group with fellow students, subject to prior approval from the instructor. A mandatory part of the final project process is to submit a 2-page memo describing a thoughtful idea for your final project (this is not a binding project; it can change) by March 31 at 5pm.
- (3) Class participation is essential to the learning process in small, discussion-based seminars. Your insights help other students learn; failure to participate in discussions is a failure to contribute to an important common good. Students are expected to keep up with each week's assigned readings, to consider them carefully, and to be prepared to contribute thoughtfully to class conversations.
- (4) To stimulate your interest in self-motivated exploration of academic literature on political polarization, I have left two weeks' worth of the syllabus completely blank. Your challenge is to "Write the Syllabus" by designing a week for the course that you think would be interesting and informative to yourself and to fellow students. Your "Write the Syllabus" memo will list suggested readings for one week of the course, and briefly (couple of paragraphs should be fine) explain why you made the choices that you did. All readings you choose must be freely available to other students (e.g., they cannot rely on books that must be purchased). This assignment will be graded on a check-plus / check / check-minus system. I will choose two "winning" submissions and use them to fill the two blank weeks on the course syllabus. You will probably find scholar.google.com to be useful as you put together your submission.
- (5) You are required to complete NYU's Human Subjects Research Training Course. This course is an internet-based module that teaches you about the history and

rules of contemporary social science research. This module involves some reading and the completion of a brief online exam. Successful completion of this course, and submission of your completion certificate, earns full credit (your specific score on the online exam does not matter as long as you pass). You can begin the process at <https://www.nyu.edu/research/resources-and-support-offices/getting-started-withyourresearch/human-subjects-research/tutorial.html> -- you will be interested in the “Social and Behavioral” program, not the Biomedical one.

Course Books & Readings: Most of the course readings are in the form of academic research articles, available to you for free via NYU’s online library system. These readings will sometimes contain technical material (such as statistical analysis) that goes over your head – that is absolutely fine, and to be expected. The point of these readings is to glean the main ideas and get a window into how political scientists and psychologists study aspects of the social world. Just read these materials and get what you can from them, and you will be fine (and the instructor will talk you through anything that needs to be talked through in class.)

There are however additionally some readings in book form:

Required Books (we will discuss in class)

- Cramer, Katherine. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2013. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*. Vintage.

Recommended Book (they may provide helpful background, but are not required)

- Federico, Christopher M. 2021. *The Psychology of Political Polarization*. Routledge.
- McCarty, Nolan. 2019. *Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford University Press.

Collaboration Policy: Collaboration on the final project is allowed in small groups, subject to permission from the instructor. Collaborative projects can often involve division of labor, but students who work together must understand and be intellectually responsible for all parts of any collaborative project. Further, all students involved in a collaboration must be genuinely engaged and actively productive in the team effort. No collaboration is allowed on other class assignments: response papers, Write the Syllabus, or the NYU Human Subjects exam.

Course Outline

Week 1 (25 January 2022): Introduction

Iyengar, Shanton, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. 2019. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 129-146.

Week 2 (1 February 2022): Face-to-Face Communication and Narratives

Baron, Hannah, Robert Blair, Donghyun Danny Choi, Laura Gamboa, Jessica Gottlieb, Amanda Lea Robinson, Steven Rosenzweig, Megan Turnbull, and Emily A West. 2021. "Can Americans Depolarize? Assessing the Effects of Reciprocal Group Reflection on Partisan Polarization." Open Science Foundation unpublished preprint: <https://osf.io/3x7z8>

Fishkin, James, Alice Siu, Larry Diamond, and Norman Bradburn. 2021. "Is Deliberation an Antidote to Extreme Partisan Polarization? Reflections on 'America in One Room.'" *American Political Science Review* 115(4): 1464 – 1481.

Klar, Samara. 2014. "Partisanship in a Social Setting." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3): 687-704.

Warner, Benjamin R., Haley Kranstuber Horstman, and Cassandra C. Kearney. 2020. "Reducing Political Polarization Through Narrative Writing." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 48: 459-477.

Week 3 (8 February 2022): Attitudinal Inoculation, Media, and Electronic Communication

Levy, Ro'ee. 2021. "Social Media, News Consumption, and Polarization: Evidence from a Field Experiment." *American Economic Review* 111(3): 831-870.

Lewandowsky, Stephan and Sander van der Linden. 2021. "Countering Misinformation and Fake News Through Inoculation and Prebunking." *European Review of Social Psychology* 32: 348-384.

Saleh, Nabil F., Jon Roozenbeek, Fadi A. Makki, William P. McClanahan, and Sander van der Linden. 2021. "Active inoculation boosts attitudinal resistance against extremist persuasion techniques: a novel approach towards the prevention of violent extremism." *Behavioural Public Policy*, First View: 1-24.

Tucker, Joshua Aaron, Andrew Guess, Pablo Barbera, Cristian Vaccari, Alexandra Siegel, Sergey Sanovich, Denis Stukal, and Brendan Nyhan. 2018. "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature (March 19, 2018)." Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3144139> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>

Week 4 (15 February 2022): Personality, Interpersonal Differences, and Partisanship

Aarøe, Lene, Michael Bang Petersen, and Kevin Arceneaux. 2020. "The Behavioral Immune System Shapes Partisan Preferences in Modern Democracies: Disgust Sensitivity Predicts Voting for Socially Conservative Parties." *Political Psychology* 41 (6): 1073-1091.

- Bakker, Bert N., Yphtach Lelkes, and Ariel Malka. 2021. "Reconsidering the Link Between Self-Reported Personality Traits and Political Preferences." *American Political Science Review* 115(4): 1482-1498.
- Bakker, Bert N., Gijs Schumacher, Claire Gothreau, and Kevin Arceneaux. 2020. "Conservatives and Liberals Have Similar Physiological Responses to Threats." *Nature Human Behavior* 4(6): 613-621.
- Bowes, Shauna M., Thomas H. Costello, Caroline Lee, Stacey McElroy-Heltzel, Don E. Davis, and Scott O. Lilienfeld. 2022. "Stepping Outside the Echo Chamber: Is Intellectual Humility Associated With Less Political Myside Bias?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 48(1): 150-164.

Week 5 (22 February 2022): Motivational Accounts

- Effron, Daniel A. 2018. "It Could Have Been True: How Counterfactual Thoughts Reduce Condemnation of Falsehoods and Increase Political Polarization." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 44(5): 729-745.
- Groenendyk, Eric and Yanna Krupnikov. 2021. "What Motivates Reasoning? A Theory of Goal-Dependent Political Evaluation." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(1): 180-196.
- Grubbs, Joshua B., Brandon Warmke, Justin Tosi, and A. Shanti James. 2020. "Moral Grandstanding and Political Polarization: A Multi-Study Consideration." *Journal of Research in Personality* 88: 1-12.
- Westen, Drew, Pavel S. Blagov, Keith Harenski, Clint Kilts, and Stephan Hamann. 2006. "Neural Bases of Motivated Reasoning: an fMRI Study of Emotional Constraints on Partisan Political Judgment in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election." *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 18 (11): 1947-1958.

Week 6 (1 March 2022): Emotions and Group Identities

- Finkel, Eli J., and many other authors. 2020. "Political Sectarianism in America." *Science* 370(6516): 533-536.
- Simas, Elizabeth N., Scott Clifford, and Justin H. Kirkland. 2020. "How Empathic Concern Fuels Political Polarization." *American Political Science Review* 114(1): 258-269.
- Van Bavel, Jay J. and Andrea Pereira. 2018. "The Partisan Brain: An Identity-Based Model of Political Belief." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 22(3): 213-224.

Week 7 (8 March 2022): Doing Political Psychology Part I

- Druckman, James N. and Matthew S. Levendusky. 2019. "What Do We Measure When We Measure Affective Polarization?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 83(1): 114-122.
- In-Class Slide Presentation by the Professor

15 March 2022: No class (Spring Break)

Week 8 (22 March 2022): You Write the Syllabus Part I: Conspiracy Theories, Explanations, and Extremism

- Crawford, Jarret T. and John Ruscio. 2021. "Asking People to Explain Complex Policies Does Not Increase Political Moderation: Three Preregistered Failures to Closely Replicate Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, and Sloman's (2013) Findings." *Psychological Science* 32(4): 611-621.

- Imhoff, Roland, Lea Dieterle, and Pia Lamberty. 2021. "Resolving the Puzzle of Conspiracy Worldview and Political Activism: Belief in Secret Plots Decreases Normative but Increases Nonnormative Political Engagement." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 12(1): 71-79.
- Obaidi, Milan, Jonas Kunst, Simon Ozer, and Sasha Y. Kimel. 2021. "The 'Great Replacement' conspiracy: How the perceived ousting of Whites can evoke violent extremism and Islamophobia." *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684302211028293>
- Voelkel, Jan G., James Chu, Michael N. Stagnaro, Joseph S. Mernyk, Chrystal Redekopp, Sophia L. Pink, James N. Druckman, David G. Rand, and Robb Willer. 2021. "Interventions Reducing Affective Polarization Do Not Improve Anti-Democratic Attitudes." OSF Preprint at <https://osf.io/7evmp/>

Week 9 (29 March 2022): You Write the Syllabus Part II: National and Subnational Identities

- Colussi, Tommaso, Ingo E. Isphording, and Nico Pestel. 2021. "Minority Salience and Political Extremism." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 13 (3): 237-71.
- Levendusky, Matthew S. 2018. "Americans, Not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?" *Journal of Politics* 80(1): 59-70.
- Myrick, Rachel. 2021. "Do External Threats Unite or Divide? Security Crises, Rivalries, and Polarization in American Foreign Policy." *International Organization* 75: 921-958.
- Westwood, Sean J. and Erik Peterson. 2020. "The Inseparability of Race and Partisanship in the United States." *Political Behavior* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09648-9>

Week 10 (5 April 2022): Doing Political Psychology Part II

In-Class Slide Presentation by the Professor

Week 11 (12 April 2022): Moral Structures & Values

Haidt, Jonathan. 2013. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*. Chapters 6-12 and Conclusion (pp 112-318).

Week 12 (19 April 2022): Rural & Conservative Perspectives

- Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chapters 3, 4, and 6.
- Gimpel, J.G., Levin, N, Moy, B., et al. 2020. "The Urban-Rural Gulf in American Political Behavior." *Political Behavior* 42: 1343-1368.
- Maxwell, Rahsaan. 2019. "Cosmopolitan Immigration Attitudes in Large European Cities: Contextual or Compositional Effects?" *American Political Science Review* 113(2): 456-474.

Week 13 (26 April 2022): Colloquium on Student Projects Part I

We'll devote the entire class session to discussing, and giving feedback on, student projects-in-progress.

Week 14 (3 May 2022): Colloquium on Student Projects Part II

We'll devote the entire class session to discussing, and giving feedback on, student projects-in-progress.

All Assignments to be submitted via the Brightspace online system

Write The Syllabus Submission: due Thursday, 3 March, by 5pm

NYU Human Subjects IRB Training: due Thursday, 10 March, by 5pm (screenshot or PDF of training completion certificate)

2-Page Response Memos: due Mondays by 11pm (the day before the relevant class), four times over the course of the semester

2-Page Memo Describing Final Project Idea: due Thursday, 31 March, by 5pm, though if you would like you are encouraged to hand it in and get feedback sooner

Final Project: due Tuesday, 10 May 2022 by 5pm