

# **PS1232: Political Attitudes and Public Opinion**

Summer 2021 | Department of Political Science | University of Pittsburgh

## **General Information**

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<b>Classes:</b>	<b>Office hours:</b>
Mon/Wed/Fri, 11 a.m to 1.15 p.m. ( <i>tentative</i> ) 05/17/2021 to 06/25/2021	Mon/Wed, 3-5 p.m., via Zoom Schedule by e-mail in advance

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## **Course Rationale**

Why do people fight over politics? All over the world, individuals are getting more and more polarized when debating over their favorite party, politician, or policies. We saw that last year during the presidential election. There are multiple examples of hot topics dividing voters in different parts of the planet: Brexit in the UK, lockdowns in Brazil, religion in Lebanon, and so on. In this course, we will dive deeply into public opinion. Our goal is to understand why people hold their political preferences, social identities, and, sometimes, uncivil attitudes toward those who they disagree with. As we get a grasp on the literature, we will move on to practical techniques: developing a survey, running it with a sample of American voters, and analyzing the results. In that process, students will be able to come up with their own questions and investigate whether their own theories explain political polarization in the United States.

## **Course Structure and Technology**

The course's structure is oriented towards helping students to critically assess political events by designing their own research by the end of the term. It is possible due to the course's structure. It is divided into two blocks: (1) Big Topics of Political Behavior, and (2) Political Polarization.

Each week will have synchronous and asynchronous classes. Asynchronous classes will be recorded by the instructor via Panopto and made available at Canvas. Whenever possible, they will consist of relatively short instructional videos (10-15 minutes) and YouTube links and will include open-ended questions to be answered at Canvas. In some cases, they will require students to visit websites and

collect information during the class in order to respond the questions. Answers are always due at 11:59 p.m. of the day of the class.

Synchronous classes will involve workshops where all students are expected to engage with each other. In most cases, these will involve learning how to use different softwares that may be useful for other courses and in the job market. These sessions will take place in the time of class (11 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.) via Zoom. The Zoom link will be made available at Canvas.

The requirements and grading scheme of the course are described below and include participation in all classes, writing an essay (“Newspaper opinion article”) and an academic paper (“Research Design” and “Final paper”). There is also an opportunity for extra points.

To participate in these activities, students are expected to have Internet access and a device that allows accessing Canvas, videos (e.g., YouTube and Panopto), video conferences (i.e., Zoom), PDFs, and MS Word/Excel (or similar editors). Ideally, this device will also allow them to use the statistical software Stata.

## Course Goals

This course provides the analytical knowledge and practical skills to interpret **political attitudes** and public opinion **worldwide**. In this scope, the course will emphasize theoretical and practical aspects of public opinion with an emphasis on **political polarization**. Students will be able to **distinguish** and **use** the main concepts of political behavior, as well as to **examine** their applications by scholars and **practitioners** through the scientific method in the specific context of polarization. In the end of the course, students will be able to **develop** their own research based on data from an online survey conducted in class.

## Grading Scale

97-100	<b>A+</b>	87-89	<b>B+</b>	77-79	<b>C+</b>	60-69	<b>D</b>
93-96	<b>A</b>	83-86	<b>B</b>	73-76	<b>C</b>	<60	<b>F</b>
90-92	<b>A-</b>	80-82	<b>B-</b>	70-72	<b>C-</b>		

## Graded Activities

- **Participation (30%)**

A participation grade is awarded for each class. The final participation grade is the sum of the grade awarded in each class.

During asynchronous classes, the student will be asked to answer questions posted in Canvas. The participation grade will be awarded when the responses are adequate and related to the content of the readings.

During synchronous classes, the student is expected to participate by asking questions, engaging in the discussions by expressing her/his opinion, and relating the content of the readings to the content of the class. Oral participation (rather than participation in the chat) is encouraged.

Bonus points may be distributed throughout the semester based on the quality of participation.

- **Newspaper opinion article (20%)**

The student must select a country of interest before 05/21 and send it to the instructor. This country will be used for this assignment and cannot be the United States.

In this activity, students will write an article that could be published in a blog or newspaper (400-600 words). In this article, the student will analyze an important political event that has taken place in the country of choice recently (last 5 years).

The analysis must include (a) a description of the event, (b) a concept of political behavior studied in this course, (c) a brief discussion of how this concept helps to understand this political event, and (d) a conclusion arguing how this country and/or involved groups could benefit if they relied on the study of political attitudes in this specific context.

This article is due on 05/28 at 11:59 p.m. and must be delivered through Canvas. Please, upload your article using the extensions .DOC or .DOCX (MS Word or compatible software). Detailed instructions will be provided.

- **Final paper**

The student will write a short academic paper (2,000-3,000 words) discussing some of the roots of political polarization in the United States.

Students will be asked (in pairs or alone, depending on the size of the class) to **add a question to a survey** that we will conduct with a sample of American voters at **Mechanical Turk**. The data will be provided to students and they will be responsible for using the theories discussed in class and

basic statistics to analyze how affective polarization varied depending on the answer to their selected survey question.

The paper should have five sections: (1) Introduction, where the student motivates the discussion and summarizes the paper; (2) Theory, where the student relies on the literature to propose one or more hypotheses; (3) Empirical Design, where the student explains how the data was collected and further details the dependent and independent variables; (4) Findings, where the student discusses the results of the survey; and (5) Conclusion, where the findings are related to the existing literature and the students discuss what should be further investigated in the future.

- **Final paper, activity 1: Research design (20%)**

At this stage, the student must write the research design of the paper. This consists of two sections: Theory and Empirical Design. Thus, the student should come up with the survey question (independent variable) that is expected to correlate to affective polarization (dependent variable); and hypothesize why this relationship exists. Ideally, this should have between 1,000 and 2,000 words.

The research design is due on 06/11 at 11:59 p.m. and must be delivered through Canvas. Please, upload your article using the extensions .DOC or .DOCX (MS Word or compatible software). Detailed instructions will be provided.

- **Final paper, activity 2: Final paper (30%)**

Now, the student will receive the data on 06/16 (conditional on submitting the research design until the deadline). Based on the data and its results, the student must write the full paper including the five sections detailed before.

Students will have a one-on-one meeting about the final paper with the instructor on 06/21 and will have the opportunity to collect feedback from other students on 06/23.

This paper is due on 06/25 at 11:59 p.m. and must be delivered through Canvas. Please, upload your article using the extensions .DOC or .DOCX (MS Word or compatible software). Detailed instructions will be provided.

- **Extra: Movie analysis (+5%)**

This is an opportunity for students to supplement their grade.

Students are invited to watch the documentary “Please Vote for Me” (available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KD1QsX2hOnk>). This movie describes the first election for class monitor in a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class in Wuhan, China. Whereas this is not the type of elections traditionally studied in public opinion, it includes several features discussed in class.

A list of open-ended questions will be posted on Canvas at 9:00 a.m. on 06/18. They ask students to relate the movie to the content of the course. Students must submit their answers through Canvas by 11:59 p.m. of that day.

## **Class Policies**

- **Nature of times:**

This course takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic that forced the university to adjust many of its practices. The first change was that this course, originally planned to be face-to-face, will be conducted online.

This does not affect the content of the course. Yet, it is totally understandable that some students may face additional difficulties. If the student believes s/he will face or is facing a challenge that is not covered by this syllabus, s/he is invited to contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss the matter. Whereas some cases may not be solved by the instructor, he will be mindful of the situation and try to provide solutions on a case-by-case analysis.

- **Preparation for class:**

The student must do the readings before the class. For instance, if a chapter from Dahl's "Polyarchy" will be discussed on Monday, the student should have read the chapter prior to this class. There are approximately 70 pages of mandatory reading per week (some more, some less) and since some of these readings are from actual research in public opinion, they will be challenging.

- **Make-up exams:**

If the student has any case of verified emergency or documented medical excuse that forces missing an exam and the student would like to have a make-up exam, the student must send the documented evidence to jog118@pitt.edu at least 72 hours BEFORE the exam. The make-up exam will take place before the official exam. If the emergency occurs in the 72 hours preceding the exam, the student should contact the instructor up to 24 hours after the exam to discuss the situation.

- **Late papers:**

Late papers will be penalized with 5% of the grade per day, including weekends and holidays, except in the case of a verified emergency or documented medical excuse.

- **Re-grading policy:**

You have 7 days after your graded work is returned to request a re-grade. You should submit a written statement of at least 150 words to jog118@pitt.edu explaining why you think your work

deserves to be re-graded. Remember that after re-evaluating your work, your grade may remain unchanged or could be adjusted higher or lower.

▪ **Academic integrity:**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity (<http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>).

▪ **Special provision:**

If the student has a disability for which s/he are or may be requesting an accommodation, s/he is encouraged to contact both me and the Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890/(412) 383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify the student's disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

▪ **Excused absence:**

If the student has any case of verified emergency or documented medical excuse that forces missing one or more classes and the student would like to have her/his absence excused, the student must send the documented evidence to [jog118@pitt.edu](mailto:jog118@pitt.edu).

## **Grading and Deadlines**

Date	Topic	Grade (%)
05/21 (Fri)	Choose a country	-
-	Participation*	30%
05/28 (Fri)	Newspaper opinion article	20%
06/11 (Fri)	Research design	20%
06/18 (Fri)	Extra: Movie Analysis**	+5%
06/25 (Fri)	Final paper	30%

\* Participation grade is based on: (1) correctly answering the questions asked in the asynchronous classes; and (2) engaging in the synchronous classes by asking questions, interacting with peers, and relating the content of the discussion to the readings of the course.

\*\* This is a voluntary opportunity to have extra points. Students will be asked to watch a movie and answer short questions relating the movie to the content of the course.

## Schedule of Classes

N	Date	Topic	Mode*
1	05/17 (Mon)	The study of political attitudes and public opinion	S
2	05/19 (Wed)	Theories of political behavior	A
3	05/21 (Fri)	Workshop: Writing academic papers	S
4	05/24 (Mon)	Political culture	A
5	05/26 (Wed)	Political participation	A
6	05/28 (Fri)	Workshop: Designing an online survey	S
7	05/31 (Mon)	Ideological polarization	A
8	06/02 (Wed)	Social identity and inter-group conflict	A
9	06/04 (Fri)	Workshop: Understanding basic statistics	S
10	06/07 (Mon)	Affective polarization	A
11	06/09 (Wed)	Social sorting	A
12	06/11 (Fri)	No class: Research design is due	A
13	06/14 (Mon)	One-on-one meetings	S
14	06/16 (Wed)	Negative campaigning	A
15	06/18 (Fri)	Extra: Movie Analysis	A
16	06/21 (Mon)	One-on-one meetings	S
17	06/23 (Wed)	What have we learnt from the survey?	S
18	06/25 (Fri)	No class: Final paper is due	A

\* In Mode, “A” means asynchronous (recorded classes) and “S” means synchronous (live classes on Zoom).

## List of Readings

\*Sessions highlighted in gray will be held synchronously via Zoom.

### Week 1

#### **Class 1: The study of political behavior (05/17/2021, Monday)**

Practical relevance of the study of political behavior, key concepts of the discipline, and main theoretical approaches.

#### **Class 2: Theories of political behavior (05/19/2021, Wednesday)**

The three main schools of political behavior: Columbia, Michigan, and Rochester.

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Bartels, Larry M. The Study of Electoral Behavior. In: J. Leighley (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

- ***Recommended readings:***

Baker, Andy, Barry Ames, and Lucio R. Renno. Social context and campaign volatility in new democracies: Networks and neighborhoods in Brazil's 2002 elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 50.2 (2006): 382-399.

Samuels, David J., and Cesar Zucco. Partisans, antipartisans, and nonpartisans: voting behavior in Brazil. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

### **Class 3: Workshop: Writing academic papers (05/21/2021, Friday)**

Workshop on the main elements of academic writing, how to identify relevant papers, the main journals of the field, and how to cite papers (i.e., the use of reference management software).

**Tentative:** Complementary workshop with a representative of the Hillman Library.

- ***Mandatory readings:***

Cochrane, John. Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students. *Mimeo*, 2005.

Weingast, Barry. Caltech rules for writing papers: How to structure your paper and write an introduction. *Mimeo*, 2010.

- ***Recommended software:*** Zotero (freely available at [www.zotero.org](http://www.zotero.org)).

**\*\* COUNTRY SELECTION IS DUE (05/21/2021) \*\***

### **Class 4: Political culture (05/24/2021, Monday)**

Why do countries differ from each other when it comes to political engagement? This class relies on comparative politics to understand political culture and its relationship to democratic and economic development.

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Fuchs, Dieter. The Political Culture Paradigm. In: R. Dalton and H.-D. Klingemann, The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

- ***Recommended readings:***

Putnam, Robert D., and Robert Leonardi. Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Welzel, Christian. Freedom rising. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

## **Class 5: Political participation (05/26/2021, Wednesday)**

There are multiple types of political participation—from voting to protesting, from boycotting a product to posting on social media. What are the determinants of each type of participation?

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Norris, Pippa. The Decline and Fall of Political Activism? In: Democratic Phoenix. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- ***Recommended podcast:***

John B. Holbein's book: "Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Action." At New Books in Political Science, on July 23, 2020. Available at:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/john-b-holbein-making-young-voters-converting-civic/id425414426?i=1000485807432>

- ***Recommended readings:***

Panagopoulos, Costas. The calculus of voting in compulsory voting systems. Political Behavior 30.4 (2008): 455-467.

Dalton, Russell, Alix Van Sickle, and Steven Weldon. The individual-institutional nexus of protest behaviour. British journal of political science (2010): 51-73.

## **Class 6: Workshop: Designing an online survey (05/28/2021, Friday)**

How do we run a survey? In this class, we will learn how to design questions, how to program them using Qualtrics, and how to download the data. Students are encouraged to test this online platform before the class.

- **Recommended software:** Qualtrics (freely available for Pitt students through [my.pitt.edu](https://my.pitt.edu)).

**\*\* NEWSPAPER OPINION ARTICLE IS DUE (05/28/2021) \*\***

## **Class 7: Ideological polarization (05/31/2021, Monday)**

Are Republicans moving to the far right while Democrats become left-wing extremists? In this class, we will study how different authors understand the evolution of American politics.

- **Mandatory reading:**

Abramowitz, Alan. Partisan-Ideological Polarization. In: *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

- **Recommended podcast:**

Morris Fiorina on Polarization, Stability, and the State of the Electorate. At EconTalk, on July 8, 2013. Available at: <https://www.econtalk.org/morris-fiorina-on-polarization-stability-and-the-state-of-the-electorate/>.

- **Recommended readings:**

Fiorina, Morris P., and Samuel J. Abrams. Political polarization in the American public. *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 563-588.

Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel A. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. Polarization in the American public: Misconceptions and misreadings. *Journal of Politics* 70.2 (2008): 556-560.

Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. Is polarization a myth?. *Journal of Politics* 70.2 (2008): 542-555.

## **Class 8: Social identity and inter-group conflict (06/02/2021, Wednesday)**

Partisanship is not the only divide in politics. Individuals identify with certain groups and this affects how they see each other.

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Tajfel, Henri. Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. *Annual Review of Psychology* 33 (1982): 1-39.

- ***Recommended reading:***

Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly* (2000): 224-237.

Akerlof, George A., and Rachel E. Kranton. *Identity economics*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

Peffley, Mark, and Jon Hurwitz. Persuasion and resistance: Race and the death penalty in America. *American Journal of Political Science* 51.4 (2007): 996-1012.

## **Class 9: Workshop: Understanding basic statistics (06/04/2021, Friday)**

In this workshop, we will learn how to analyze survey data using a statistical software (STATA). We will see that with very simple commands, it is possible to learn a lot about individuals.

- ***Recommended software:*** STATA (freely available for Pitt students through [my.pitt.edu](https://my.pitt.edu)).

## **Class 10: Affective polarization (06/07/2021, Monday)**

What happens if partisanship becomes a social identity? In this class, we will discuss whether partisan divides are just about ideological preferences.

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. Affect, not ideology: social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76.3 (2012): 405-431.

- ***Recommended readings:***

Iyengar, Shanto, et al. The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129-146.

Wagner, Markus. Affective polarization in multiparty systems. *Electoral Studies* 69 (2021).

Hobolt, Sara B., Thomas J. Leeper, and James Tilley. Divided by the vote: Affective polarization in the wake of the Brexit referendum. *British Journal of Political Science* (2020): 1-18.

Rose, Richard, and William Mishler. Negative and positive party identification in post-communist countries. *Electoral Studies* 17.2 (1998): 217-234.

### **Class 11: Social sorting (06/09/2021, Wednesday)**

What happens if all social identities aligned around a single partisan divide? Recent research appears to suggest that this may worsen intergroup conflicts.

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Mason, Lilliana. Losing common ground: Social sorting and polarization. *The Forum* 16. 1 (2018): 47-66.

- ***Recommended podcast:***

Liliana Mason on Uncivil Agreement. At EconTalk, on August 20, 2018. Available at: <https://www.econtalk.org/lilliana-mason-on-uncivil-agreement/>.

- ***Recommended reading:***

Mason, Lilliana. "“I disrespectfully agree”": The differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59.1 (2015): 128-145.

Mason, Lilliana. A cross-cutting calm: How social sorting drives affective polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80.S1 (2016): 351-377.

### **Class 12: No class (06/11/2021, Friday)**

**\*\* RESEARCH DESIGN IS DUE (06/11/2021) \*\***

### **Class 13: One-on-one meetings (06/14/2021, Monday)**

Students will meet with the instructor to talk about their research design and program the online questionnaire.

### **Class 14: Negative campaigning (06/16/2021, Wednesday)**

Negative campaigns are not a novelty in politics—candidates blame and shame each other for multiple reasons. What are the outcomes of this campaign strategy?

- ***Mandatory reading:***

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon and Nicholas Valentino. Does attack advertising demobilize the electorate?. *American Political Science Review* 88.4 (1994): 829-838.

- ***Recommended podcast:***

Steven W. Webster's book "American Rage: How Anger Shapes Our Politics." At New Books in Political Science, on December 17, 2020. Available at:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/steven-w-webster-american-rage-how-anger-shapes-our/id425414426?i=1000502676456>

- ***Recommended readings:***

Finkel, Steven E., and John G. Geer. A spot check: Casting doubt on the demobilizing effect of attack advertising. *American Journal of Political Science* (1998): 573-595.

Iyengar, Stephen, and Ansolabehere Shanto. *Going Negative: How Attack Ads Shrink and Polarize The Electorate*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

### **Class 15: No class (06/18/2021, Friday)**

**\*\* MOVIE ANALYSIS IS DUE (06/18/2021) \*\***

### **Class 16: One-on-one meetings (06/21/2021, Monday)**

Students will meet with the instructor to talk about their final paper.

**Class 17: What have we learnt from the survey? (06/23/2021, Wednesday)**

Students will have the opportunity to talk about their theory and findings, and receive feedback from their peers. Come prepared to present your work!

**Class 18: No class (06/25/2021, Friday)**

**\*\* FINAL PAPER IS DUE (05/25/2021) \*\***