

# American Political Divides and Great Debates

[84-309] – Fall 2024

Updated: November 17, 2024

Professor Jonathan Cervas  
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Location: GHC 4211  
Time: Tuesday 2:00p-3:20p Eastern  
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30p-4:30p, Wednesday 2-3p, and by appointment (arrange via email)  
CMU Academic Calendar

**THIS COURSE SYLLABUS IS A WORK IN PROGRESS. THE INSTRUCTOR WILL TAKE NOTE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK AND COURSE SCHEDULE WILL EVOLVE BASED ON STUDENT PREFERENCES**

The most up-to-date version of this [syllabus can be found here](#)

## Course Description

“American Political Divides and Great Debates” dives into the heart of U.S. political polarization, examining its causes, effects, and the systemic inequalities it perpetuates. Engaging with topics like voting rights, healthcare, and racial and economic disparities through critical discussions and debates, this course hones critical thinking, public speaking, and empathy. Ideal for those interested in political science, law, or social justice, it offers deep insights into America’s political landscape and strategies for fostering justice and equity at all societal levels.

The course targets systematic and structural inequalities related to political polarization, focusing on past and present issues such as voting rights, access to healthcare, racial discrimination, environmental inequalities, and economic disparity. It examines how these inequalities influence public policy and political discourse, aiming to uncover their roots and impacts on society. Through this analysis, the course encourages a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding justice and injustice in the American political landscape.

This course is ideal for students with interests in political science, history, law, social justice, and those looking to gain a deeper understanding of the complex political landscape of the United States and its implications for justice and injustice in society.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will have a deepened understanding of the complex forces driving political polarization. They will be equipped to critically analyze media narratives, engage in constructive political discussions, and explore avenues for fostering greater unity within diverse societies.

1. Analyze the historical and contemporary factors contributing to American political polarization.

2. Evaluate the impact of divisive political issues on different communities and societal structures.
3. Develop and articulate informed arguments on contentious political issues from multiple perspectives.
4. Enhance critical thinking, public speaking, and debate skills through active participation in discussions and simulations.
5. Foster empathy and understanding of opposing viewpoints to encourage respectful and constructive political discourse.
6. Propose informed solutions to reduce polarization and address issues of justice and inequality in the United States.

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**Course Relevance:** DC: Perspectives on Justice and Injustice  
**Learning Resources:** All resources will be provided via Canvas  
**Prerequisite Knowledge:** NONE

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## Due Dates

Assignment	Due Date
Reflective Statements	Due Sundays, weekly
Critical Reading Responses	October 13, December 1
AI-Powered Debate Simulation	Five times total, beginning Oct 22
Op-ed, first draft	September 22
Op-ed peer review	September 25
Op-ed final draft	September 29
Group Project	Twice, TBD
Debate	TBD

## Grading

Your grade will mostly reflect your participation in this course. This course is designed to be interactive. That is, your involvement in discussions, participation in debates, and of course having read the material are critical to your success.

Class attendance and participation are important parts of the learning in this course. To account for this, a portion of the final grade is based on your regular attendance and active participation (see grading section). That said, I also recognize that students may need to miss class for a variety of reasons (religious observance, job interview, university-sanctioned event, or illness). For that reason, all students are permitted two class absences without any impact on the final grade. When you must miss class, please notify me (at least 24 hours in advance except for illness/emergency), so that we can discuss alternative arrangements for catching up on class and associated work. If you encounter extenuating circumstances and must miss more than two classes, please come and discuss the issue with me; I would like to find a way to support you.

Students are expected and encouraged to meet all deadlines for assignments. If you are unable to complete the assignment work by the due date, reach out in advance to make alternative arrangements. I typically will not penalize you for turning in your assignment late, so long as it does not hinder completion of other's work (ie, group projects).

## Assessment

The course grade will be a weighted average of the following components:

Category	Percent of Final Grade
<b>Participation and Engagement</b>	10%
<b>Reflective Statements</b>	10%
<b>Critical Reading Responses</b>	20%
<b>Op-ed w/ Peer Review</b>	
Peer Review	10%
Final Paper	10%
<b>AI-Powered Debate Simulation</b>	10%
<b>Debate Participation</b>	10%
<b>Group Project</b>	20%

**Reflective Statements:** Students critically reflect on course readings and discussions, articulating their understanding of the issues and their personal perspectives on justice and injustice. These should include elements of self-evaluation. Due on Sundays. Graded as complete/not-complete. (10 total, one to two paragraphs)

**AI-Powered Debate Simulation:** Utilize Microsoft Co-Pilot to simulate debate scenarios where students can practice their debating skills. The AI will present arguments on various sides of an issue related to the course content. Students will respond in real-time, allowing them to refine their argumentation, critical thinking, and public speaking skills. This assessment will be graded on the complexity of their arguments, the ability to counter AI propositions, and the use of evidence-based reasoning to support their stance. (Five times this semester.)

**Critical Reading Responses:** Write a 3–5 single-spaced page analysis of two books you will read this semester. A reading list is provided in this syllabus. Your analysis should demonstrate a deep comprehension of the material and engage critically with the complex ideas presented. In your response, focus on evaluating the author's arguments, identifying underlying assumptions, and discussing the broader implications of the ideas. Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your analysis. (First book due October 13, 11:59p; Second book due December 1, 11:59p)

**Op-ed w/ peer-review:** Drawing on a topic related to this course, or something political from your own life or experience, write an op-ed that could be published in a newspaper or blog. (First Draft due Sept 22, 11:59p, final draft due Sept 29, 11:59p, peer review due by Sept 25, 11:59p)

**Group Project:** You will work in groups to research and present on a specific topic related to American political divides. Your project should focus on identifying and analyzing key issues that contribute to political polarization in the United States. As a group, you will prepare a presentation that demonstrates your collective research findings, understanding of the topic, and ability to present diverse perspectives. You will also submit an individual reflection related to your work as a team. (Twice during the semester.)

**Debate Participation:** This component assesses students' involvement in live debates and discussions conducted during class.

You will be assigned one of the following roles:

- **Affirmative Initial Debater:** Present the main arguments in favor of the proposal.
- **Affirmative Rebuttal:** Respond to the opposing side's arguments, defending your position and challenging their points.
- **Against Initial Debater:** Present the main arguments against the proposal.

- **Against Rebuttal:** Respond to the affirmative side's arguments, defending your position and challenging their points.

You will be graded on a completion basis (complete/incomplete), and to be completed you will need to demonstrate that you prepared in advanced.

**Participation and Engagement:** This component evaluates the degree to which students actively contribute to the course through various forms of engagement. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Attendance:** Regular attendance is expected. Students may miss up to two classes and receive full marks for attendance.
- **Class Participation:** Active involvement in class discussions is crucial. Students should demonstrate thoughtful contributions, engage with their peers' ideas, and ask insightful questions related to course material.
- **Preparation:** Students are expected to come prepared for each class, having completed the required readings and assignments. This preparation will be assessed through in-class discussions and the quality of participation.
- **Engagement in Course Activities:** Participation in additional course-related activities, such as workshops, guest lectures, or online discussions, will also be considered.
- **Professionalism and Respect:** Demonstrating respect for classmates' viewpoints and maintaining a professional demeanor in all interactions is important. This includes adhering to classroom etiquette and providing constructive feedback to peers.

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You might find this resource useful: <https://polarization.wiki>

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## Course Schedule (Subject to Change as Semester Progresses):

### August 27

- Introduction to the Course; topic selection, draft privacy statement
  - *No Reading*

### August 29

- Declining in Civic Virtue
  - *Reading:* "America's Crisis of Civic Virtue." Journal of Democracy. **Available Online.**

### September 3

- What is Political Polarization?
  - *Reading:* Fiorina, Morris P., and Samuel J. Abrams. "Political polarization in the American public." Annual Review of Political Science 11 (2008). **Available Online.**

- *Reading:* 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(Volume 9, 2006): 83–110. **Available Online**
- \* *Optional:* Hare, Christopher, and Keith T. Poole. “The polarization of contemporary American politics.” *Polity* 46.3 (2014): 411–429.
- \* *Optional:* Wagner, Markus. 2021. “Affective polarization in multiparty systems.” *Electoral Studies* 69: 102199.
- \* *Optional:* Hahm, Hyeonho, David Hilpert, and Thomas König. 2024. “Divided We Unite: The Nature of Partyism and the Role of Coalition Partnership in Europe.” *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 69–87.
- \* *Optional:* Lee, Frances E. 2015. “How Party Polarization Affects Governance.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18(1): 261–282. **Available Online**
- \* *Optional:* Seimel, Armin. 2024. “Elite polarization — The boon and bane of democracy: Evidence from thirty democracies.” *Electoral Studies* 90: 102801.

### September 5

- *Reading:* Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We’re Polarized*. Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster. [**Available Online**]
  - \*Introduction: What Didn’t Happen;
  - Chapter 1: How Democrats Became Liberals and Republicans Became Conservatives\*
  - Chapter 2: The Dixiecrat Dilemma
  - Chapter 3: Your Brain on Groups

### September 10

- *Reading:* Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We’re Polarized*.
  - Chapter 4: The Press Secretary in Your Mind
  - Chapter 5: Demographic Threat
  - Chapter 6: The Media Divide beyond Left-Right

### September 12

- *Reading:* Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We’re Polarized*.
  - Chapter 7: Post-Persuasion Elections
  - Chapter 8: When Bipartisanship Becomes Irrational
  - Chapter 9: The Difference between Democrats and Republicans
  - Chapter 10: Managing Polarization—and Ourselves

### September 17

- Affective Polarization

- *Reading:* Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, et al. 2019. “The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1): 129–146. **Available Online.**

## September 19

- Ideological Polarization
  - *Reading:* Carmines, Edward G., and Nicholas J. D’Amico. 2015. “The New Look in Political Ideology Research.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18(1): 205–216. **Available Online.**

## September 24

- **Guest Speaker** – Perry Grossman (ACLU) *Twitter:* @Perry\_Grossman
  - Perry Grossman is a Supervising Attorney whose work focuses primarily on litigation and advocacy efforts concerning voting rights and election law issues.
  - At the NYCLU, Perry’s cases have included *New York Immigration Coalition v. U.S. Department of Commerce* and *New York Immigration Coalition v. Trump*, the successful challenges to the Trump Administration’s efforts to put a citizenship question on the 2020 Census and to exclude undocumented immigrants from Congressional apportionment, respectively; *NAACP v. East Ramapo Central School District*, a successful racial vote dilution case brought under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act; *Hotze v. Hollins*, a successful intervention to prevent the disenfranchisement of 127,000 voters in Harris County, Texas who cast their ballots using drive-thru voting in the 2020 election; and successful cases protecting equitable access to early voting for voters in Rockland and Rensselaer Counties.
  - Perry was also counsel of record for the ACLU on amicus briefs in *Gill v. Whitford*, a partisan gerrymandering case and *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen*, a Second Amendment challenge to New York’s regulations on carrying concealed handguns. Perry regularly testifies before state and local legislative bodies concerning voting rights and election administration. He also teaches a seminar on voting rights as an adjunct professor at Fordham Law School and is an occasional contributor to *Slate* on legal issues.
- Negative Partisanship
  - *Optional:* Abramowitz, Alan I., and Steven Webster. 2016. “The rise of negative partisanship and the nationalization of U.S. elections in the 21st century.” *Electoral Studies* 41: 12–22. **Available Online.**

## September 26

- **Guest Speaker** Minister Paula Bogantes (Costa Rica) – Class will be held in “The Great Room” in Posner Hall, 3rd floor.
  - Minister of Science, Innovation, Technology and Telecommunications of Costa Rica: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/paula-bogantes-940a3041/recent-activity/all/>
  - “The role of technology as a democratizing force and the critical choices we face regarding its impact on democracy, social equity and economic development will be explored, with a focus on the importance of digital transformation, access and digital identity in shaping more inclusive societies. The ethical implications of the growing influence of technology on global power dynamics and the urgent need to develop digital skills for all will also be addressed.”

## October 1

- Media's Role in Political Polarization

- *Reading:* Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16(1): 101–127. **Available Online.**
- \* *Optional:* Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa. "Political Polarization & Media Habits." Pew Research Center. October 21, 2014. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>
- \* *Optional:* Wlezien, Christopher, and Stuart Soroka. 2023. "Media Reflect! Policy, the Public, and the News." *American Political Science Review*: 1–7. **Available Online.**

- Social Media and Echo Chambers

- *Reading:* Phillips, Samantha C., Kathleen M. Carley, and Kenneth Joseph. 2024. "Why do people think liberals drink lattes? How social media afforded self-presentation can shape subjective social sorting." **Available Online.**
- \* *Optional but important:* Barberá, Pablo. "Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization" in Persily, Nathaniel, and Joshua A. Tucker, eds. 2020. *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. **Available Online.** p. 34–55.
- \* *Optional:* Guess, Andrew M. et al. 2023. "How do social media feed algorithms affect attitudes and behavior in an election campaign?" *Science* 381(6656): 398–404. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abp9364>.
- \* *Optional:* González-Bailón, Sandra et al. 2023. "Asymmetric ideological segregation in exposure to political news on Facebook." *Science* 381(6656): 392–398. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.ade7138>.
- \* *Optional:* Guess, Andrew M. et al. 2023. "Reshares on social media amplify political news but do not detectably affect beliefs or opinions." *Science* 381(6656): 404–408. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.add8424>.
- \* *Optional:* Nyhan, Brendan et al. 2023. "Like-minded sources on Facebook are prevalent but not polarizing." *Nature* 620(7972): 137–144. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10396953/>.
- \* *Optional:* Allcott, Hunt et al. "The effects of Facebook and Instagram on the 2020 election: A deactivation experiment." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 121(21): e2321584121. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11126999/>.
- \* *Optional:* Törnberg, Petter. 2022. "How digital media drive affective polarization through partisan sorting." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(42): e2207159119. <https://pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2207159119>
- \* *Optional:* Waller, Isaac, and Ashton Anderson. 2021. "Quantifying social organization and political polarization in online platforms." *Nature* 600(7888): 264–268. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-04167-x>
- \* *Optional:* Dominic Spohr. 2017. "Fake news and ideological polarization." *Business Information Review* 34(3): 150–160. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/0266382117722446>
- \* *Optional:* Jost, John T., Delia S. Baldassarri, and James N. Druckman. 2022. "Cognitive–motivational mechanisms of political polarization in social-communicative contexts." *Nature Reviews Psychology* 1(10): 560–576. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9342595/>

### October 3

- Eberly Center mid-semester focus group
- Judicial Polarization
  - *Reading:* Hasen, Richard L. 2019. "Polarization and the Judiciary." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1): 261–276. **Available Online.**

### October 8

- Nationalization
  - *Reading:* Amlani, Sharif, and Carlos Algara. 2021. "Partisanship & nationalization in American elections: Evidence from presidential, senatorial, & gubernatorial elections in the U.S. counties, 1872–2020." *Electoral Studies* 73: 102387. **Available Online.**

### October 10

FALL BREAK October 14 through October 18

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### October 22

- No Topic/Readings
  - Evaluate Critical Readings
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### October 24

- **Foreign Policy**
  - The U.S. role in global governance and international organizations
  - Foreign policy challenges: trade, diplomacy, and military interventions
  - The impact of global conflicts on U.S. domestic policy
  - Human rights and ethical considerations in foreign policy decisions

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Group  
Carter  
Jeremy  
Sumukh  
Willy

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**Readings:** – Article #1: Article explores the US Military budget and why we should focus on quantity over quality to create a stronger military. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/focusing-on-quality-over-quantity-in-the-us-military-budget/>



- Article #2: This article explores how the U.S. views the Ukraine War in the context of global deterrence and maintaining the liberal international order. <https://cis.mit.edu/publications/analysis-opinion/2022/what-americas-interest-ukraine-war>
- Article #3: This article explores why U.S. military interventions often fail and suggests alternatives to war. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/us-military-why-force-fails>
- Article #4: This article explores why Americans often distrust military intervention abroad. <https://foreignanalysis.com/from-military-intervention-to-diplomacy-in-american-foreign-policy/>
- Article #5: This article explores the foreign policy differences between Trump and Biden. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/24/us/politics/biden-trump-foreign-policy.html>

**Optional Articles:** These two articles provide different perspectives on American foreign policy and their ethical implications. - <https://www.hoover.org/research/moral-core-us-foreign-policy->

- Makes a case for moral US intervention around the world <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/11/navigating-the-democracy-security-dilemma-in-us-foreign-policy-lessons-from-egypt-india-and-turkey?lang=en>- Criticizes the US cozying up to strongmen around the world to gain geopolitical influence and instead call for pushing for greater democracy abroad.
- Optional Video: This video explores how the 2024 Election can be a critical turning point in regards to America's relationship with the world. <https://www.brookings.edu/projects/election-24-issues-at-stake/national-security-americas-role-in-the-world/>
- Optional: This article offers a comprehensive breakdown of U.S. assistance to Ukraine, including military, economic, and humanitarian aid, and its implications for U.S. policy. - <https://news.usni.org/2024/06/11/report-to-congress-on-u-s-policy-and-the-war-in-ukraine>
- Optional (very comprehensive but also very long!): This article examines the fractures within the global system caused by the Ukraine War and how America's involvement is shaping international relations. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/inevitable-fractures-the-ukraine-war-and-the-global-system>

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October 29

- **Immigration**

- Historical and contemporary immigration policies in the U.S.
- The impact of immigration on the economy, culture, and social dynamics
- Immigration and national security: balancing openness with safety
- The role of immigration in shaping political discourse

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Group

Jaykob  
Christopher  
Jeremy  
Diana  
Kester  
Evren

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October 31

- **Voter Suppression and Shifting Policy Around Voting Rules**

- Historical context and contemporary examples of voter suppression
- The impact of voter ID laws, gerrymandering, and purges on voter access
- Legal battles over voting rights and election integrity
- The role of technology in modern voting systems

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Group

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Carter  
 Claire  
 Cassandra  
 Megha  
 Sydney

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Shelby County v. Holder | Brennan Center for Justice Effects of Shelby County v. Holder on the Voting Rights Act | Brennan Center for Justice: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/10-years-after-scotus-gutted-voting-rights-act-alabama-turnout-gap-worse>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2023/01/Florida-Voting-Rights-for-People-with-Felony-Convictions.pdf>

Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes. The Journal of Politics UChicago <https://dci.mit.edu/voting-on-the-blockchain>

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## November 5

- DEMOCRACY DAY, no class (Register to Vote: <https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/slice/civic-engagement/advocacy/voter/index.html>)

### Democracy Day - November 5, 2024

*Join us for CMU's second Democracy Day, an opportunity to focus on our institutional commitment to civic service and democracy on Election Day. There will be programming and resources available throughout the day for our entire community to engage on the key ideals of democracy.*

*There are no classes on Democracy Day prior to 5 p.m. and the entire CMU community —faculty, staff and students — is encouraged to participate as their schedules allow.*

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## November 7

- Election Conversation (open topics)
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November 12

- **Freedom of Speech**

- The First Amendment and its application in modern society
- The limits of free speech: hate speech, misinformation, and incitement
- Social media and the evolving landscape of free expression
- Case studies: Free speech controversies in schools; what should CMU's policy be regarding speech on campus?

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Group

Sumukh

Sam

Luke

Nita

Evren

Christopher

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New York Times Opinion Piece on Why Free Speech is Important for College Students <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/06/opinion/first-amendment-campus-protest.html>

Scholarly Article on Free Speech [https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2238&context=journal\\_articles](https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2238&context=journal_articles)

Debate on Censorship against Misinfo on Social Media <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/social-media-misinformation-supreme-court-free-speech-60-minutes/>

Conversation about Free Speech and Hate Speech <https://www.uvm.edu/news/story/free-speech-and-hate-speech-conversation-nadine-strossen>

How the First Amendment Came to Life <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/free-speech-century-how-first-amendment-came-life>

Moderating online content: fighting harm or silencing dissent? <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/07/moderating-online-content-fighting-harm-or-silencing-dissent>

We Can Regulate Social Media Without Censorship. Here's How: <https://time.com/6199565/regulate-social-media-platform-reduce-risks/>

Article on How Free Speech is being attacked in the United States: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/experts-say-attacks-on-free-speech-are-rising-across-the-us> Optional Videos: Barack Obama on his opinion on free speech: <https://www.theverge.com/23948871/barack-obama-ai-regulation-free-speech-first-amendment-decoder-interview>

Harvard Professor Lawrence Lessig on free speech and AI: <https://www.theverge.com/23929233/lawrence-lessig-free-speech-first-amendment-ai-content-moderation-decoder-interview>

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November 14

- **Criminal Justice Reform**

- The history and evolution of the U.S. criminal justice system

- Key issues: mass incarceration, racial disparities, and police reform
- Alternatives to incarceration: rehabilitation and restorative justice
- The role of technology in modernizing the criminal justice system

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Group

Claire  
Hannah  
Sydney  
Kester  
Nita

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The Links Between Disability, Incarceration, And Social Exclusion Laurin Bixby, Stacey Bevan, and Courtney Boen <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2022.00495>

Khan, D., & Lucas, M. (2023, July). The impact of technology on the criminal justice system. ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372751132\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_technology\\_on\\_the\\_criminal\\_justice\\_system](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372751132_The_impact_of_technology_on_the_criminal_justice_system)

Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024 | Prison Policy Initiative

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/24/what-the-data-says-about-crime-in-the-us/>

Prison Reform: Reducing Recidivism by Strengthening the Federal Bureau of Prisons: <https://www.justice.gov/archives/prison-reform>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027273581300010X>

Optional: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-trouble-with-crime-statistics>

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November 19

- **Regulation and Ethical Use of AI**

- The role of AI in modern society: benefits and risks
- Ethical considerations in the deployment of AI in various sectors (military, business, healthcare)
- The impact of AI on labor markets and economic inequality
- Regulatory challenges: ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability in AI systems

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Group

Delaney  
Emma  
Cole  
Gwen  
Eddy  
Soum

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- **Intro (if you have little to no knowledge of ML)**

- Optional content:

- \* <https://bounded-regret.ghost.io/future-ml-systems-will-be-qualitatively-different/>
- \* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aircAruvnKk>

- Risks of AI
- an alternate perspective
- (optional but highly suggested, Hinton just won the Nobel)

**Optional content:** – <https://spectrum.ieee.org/united-nations-killer-robots-ban> – Why We Should Care about AI Safety (optional but suggested) – State of AI Regulation (as of February) – [Other (optional) things we found interesting] (<https://www.noemamag.com/the-five-stages-of-ai-grief/>)

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## November 21

- **Educational System**
  - The evolution of public education in the U.S.
  - Equity in education: access, funding, and outcomes
  - The impact of standardized testing and school choice policies
  - The future of education: digital learning and AI in classrooms

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Group

Megha

Emma

Cassandra

Hannah

Jon

Willy

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- Online School Debate
- Charter Schools
- State Education Differences
- Centralization/Decentralization of Education in the US

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## November 26

No class because many people will be missing.

November 28 - THANKSGIVING DAY, no class

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## December 3

- **The Right to Privacy (Legal, Moral, Governmental Surveillance)**
  - The evolution of privacy rights in the digital age
  - Government surveillance vs. individual privacy: balancing security and liberty
  - The role of big tech in collecting and using personal data
  - Legal frameworks for privacy protection in different sectors

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Group

Cole

Delaney

Gwen

Eddy

Luke

Soum

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## December 5 - Final Class

- **Military**
  - The changing role of the U.S. military in a globalized world
  - Civil-military relations and the balance of power
  - Ethical considerations in military technology and warfare
  - The impact of military service on veterans and society
  - Military funding

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Group

Jon

Jaykob

Sam

Hannah

Diana

Willy

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## Student Privacy in Class Discussions

This course will challenge you to think deeply about difficult and potentially provocative questions. You should be prepared to encounter material that may be unsettling or even offensive. If you're not comfortable with the possibility of being offended, you might want to reconsider enrolling. However, if you choose to participate and find yourself disagreeing with something said by a classmate, or me, or with content from the readings, I encourage you to engage in thoughtful debate and present your own perspective. Simply disliking a viewpoint doesn't invalidate it. My hope is that, regardless of how strongly we disagree or how passionately we advocate

for our beliefs, we will always maintain respect and treat each other with dignity as we share and defend our ideas.

In this course, we value the open exchange of ideas and respect the privacy of all students. To create a safe and supportive learning environment, the following guidelines regarding student privacy in class discussions will be strictly observed:

1. **Confidentiality:** Any personal information, opinions, or experiences shared by students during class discussions, whether in-person or online, are to be treated as confidential. Students are prohibited from sharing or discussing this information outside of class without explicit permission from the individuals involved.
2. **Respectful Communication:** Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas freely while remaining respectful of others' privacy. Avoid sharing details about other students' contributions, identities, or personal circumstances outside the classroom setting.
3. **Recording and Sharing:** Recording of class discussions, whether audio, video, or text-based, is strictly prohibited. Anyone caught making an unauthorized recording will automatically fail the course—regardless of any accommodations they may have been granted.
4. **Online Discussions:** For online forums and discussions, similar privacy standards apply. Students should be mindful of the public or semi-public nature of online platforms and refrain from sharing sensitive or personally identifiable information.
5. **Consequences for Breach of Privacy:** Violations of this privacy policy may result in disciplinary action, which could include removal from the course, a formal reprimand, or other consequences as determined by the university's code of conduct.
6. **Principle of Charity:** When engaging in discussions, apply the principle of charity. This means interpreting others' arguments in the most reasonable and positive way before criticizing them. Assume that others are making sincere attempts to contribute meaningfully, and engage with their strongest points, not just the easiest to refute.
7. **Space for Additional Context:** Acknowledge that opinions shared in discussions may be based on limited information or experiences. If a classmate's perspective seems unclear or incomplete, allow them the opportunity to provide additional context. Encourage questions that seek to understand rather than dismiss others' views.

By participating in this course, you agree to uphold these privacy standards and contribute to a respectful, inclusive, and secure learning environment for all.

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## DEI&B - Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, & Belonging

Throughout this course, we will engage with several key themes that intersect and build upon one another to deepen our understanding of the complex social and political landscape in the United States.

### 1. Analyzing Diverse Perspectives and Political Divides

One of the primary themes we will explore is the diverse perspectives and experiences of various marginalized groups within the U.S. We will critically analyze how these perspectives have contributed to a growing political divide, focusing on the ways in which the lived experiences of marginalized communities differ from those of majority groups. This exploration is essential for understanding the roots of political polarization and for developing strategies to bridge these divides.

## 2. The Significance of Diverse Viewpoints in Justice and Injustice

We will delve into the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse viewpoints of marginalized communities. These perspectives often bring to light issues of justice and injustice that are otherwise overlooked or misunderstood by majority groups. By examining these differences, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of how justice is perceived and enacted in society, and how equitable solutions can be pursued in addressing political and social challenges.

## 3. The Role of Systems and Institutions in Perpetuating Inequality

Another critical theme is the examination of how systems and institutions in the U.S. have historically perpetuated privilege and maintained power dynamics that contribute to ongoing inequality. We will explore how these structures shape the experiences of different groups, influence political issues, and reinforce disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and rights. Understanding these systemic forces is key to addressing the root causes of injustice.

## 4. Ethical Obligations to Address Inequality

Throughout the semester, we will reflect on the individual and collective ethical obligations to address inequalities. This includes considering how we can support marginalized voices, advocate for justice, and work towards dismantling oppressive systems. These reflections will challenge us to think critically about our roles in society and the impact of our actions on the broader pursuit of equity and justice.

*These overarching themes will be woven into our discussions, readings, and assignments, guiding us as we critically engage with the material and strive to understand the complexities of American society. By the end of the semester, students will have developed a nuanced perspective on the intersection of identity, power, and politics, and will be equipped to contribute to meaningful change in their communities.*

## Diversity Statement

I am committed to a diversity of representation in readings for this course. If you feel like there is a voice that I have missed, please make a suggestion so I can improve the syllabus and this course for both this semester and future iterations.

**We must treat every individual with respect.** We are diverse in many ways, and this diversity is fundamental to building and maintaining an equitable and inclusive campus community. Diversity can refer to multiple ways that we identify ourselves, including but not limited to race, color, national origin, language, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, ancestry, belief, veteran status, or genetic information. Each of these diverse identities, along with many others not mentioned here, shape the perspectives our students, faculty, and staff bring to our campus. We, at CMU, will work to promote diversity, equity and inclusion not only because diversity fuels excellence and innovation, but because we want to pursue justice. We acknowledge our imperfections while we also fully commit to the work, inside and outside of our classrooms, of building and sustaining a campus community that increasingly embraces these core values.

Each of us is responsible for creating a safer, more inclusive environment.

Unfortunately, incidents of bias or discrimination do occur, whether intentional or unintentional. They contribute to creating an unwelcoming environment for individuals and groups at the university. Therefore, the university encourages anyone who experiences or observes unfair or hostile treatment on the basis of identity to speak out for justice and support, within the moment of the incident or after the incident has passed. Anyone can share these experiences using the following resources:

**Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion:** [csdi@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:csdi@andrew.cmu.edu), (412) 268-2150

**Ethics Reporting Hotline.** Students, faculty, and staff can anonymously file a report by calling 844-587-0793 or visiting [cmu.ethicspoint.com](http://cmu.ethicspoint.com). All reports will be documented and deliberated to determine if there should be any following actions. Regardless of incident type, the university will use all shared experiences to transform our campus climate to be more equitable and just.



## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability and have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at [access@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:access@andrew.cmu.edu).

## Student well-being

The last few years have been challenging. We are all under a lot of stress and uncertainty at this time. I encourage you to find ways to move regularly, eat well, and reach out to your support system or me [cervas@cmu.edu](mailto:cervas@cmu.edu) if you need to. We can all benefit from support in times of stress, and this semester is no exception.

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. CMU services are available, and treatment does work. You can learn more about confidential mental health services available on campus at: <http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/>. Support is always available (24/7) from Counseling and Psychological Services: 412-268-2922.

### • Books for Critical Review

NAME	NAME	Book Entry
Wendy Li	Willy Yeh	Putnam, Robert D., and Shaylyn Romney Garrett. 2021. <i>The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again</i> . Simon & Schuster. O'Brian, Neil A. 2024. <i>The Roots of Polarization: From the Racial Realignment to the Culture Wars</i> . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Fiorina, Morris P., Abrams, Samuel J., Pope, Jeremy. 2011. <i>Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America</i> . United Kingdom: Longman. McCarty, Nolan. 2019. <i>Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know</i> . Oxford University Press. Grossmann, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. 2016. <i>Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats</i> . New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Spinner-Halev, Jeff, and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2024. <i>Respect and Loathing in American Democracy: Polarization, Moralization, and the Undermining of Equality</i> . First Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Grossmann, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. 2024. <i>Polarized by Degrees: How the Diploma Divide and the Culture War Transformed American Politics</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Thurber, James A., and Antoine Yoshinaka, eds. 2016. <i>American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization</i> . Cambridge University Press. Kalmoe, Nathan P., and Lilliana Mason. 2022. <i>Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy</i> . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Jeremy Nichols	Megha Jasti	Levendusky, Matthew. 2013. <i>How Partisan Media Polarize America</i> . University of Chicago Press.
Luke Nalewajk		Levendusky, Matthew. 2023. <i>Our Common Bonds: Using What Americans Share to Help Bridge the Partisan Divide</i> . University of Chicago Press.

NAME	NAME	Book Entry
Sydney Wilczynski		Sunstein, Cass R. 2017. <i>#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media</i> . Princeton University Press.
Cassandra Zhou	Christopher Singer	Mason, Lilliana. 2018. <i>Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity</i> . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Haidt, Jonathan. 2012. <i>The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion</i> . Pantheon. Berry, Jeffrey M., and Sarah Sobieraj. 2014. <i>The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility</i> . Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Diana Voronin		Hetherington, Marc J., and Thomas J. Rudolph. 2015. <i>Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Samuel Merrill III, Bernard Grofman, and Thomas L. Brunell. 2023. <i>How Polarization Begets Polarization: Ideological Extremism in the US Congress</i> . Oxford University Press.
Evren Konuk	Jon Ostheim	Suri, Jeremi. 2022. <i>Civil War by Other Means: America's Long and Unfinished Fight for Democracy</i> . PublicAffairs.
Hannah Romoff	Emma Andrews	Coppock, Alexander. 2023. <i>Persuasion in Parallel: How Information Changes Minds about Politics</i> . University of Chicago Press.
Soum Choudhuri	Cole Christini	Gelman, Andrew. 2010. <i>Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do</i> . Princeton University Press.
Jaykob Williams		Hopkins, David A. 2017. <i>Red Fighting Blue: How Geography and Electoral Rules Polarize American Politics</i> . 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.
Sam Dachman		Mutz, Diana C. 2015. <i>In-Your-Face Politics: The Consequences of Uncivil Media</i> . Princeton University Press.
Carter Musheno		Horn, Trent. 2023. <i>Persuasive Pro Life, 2nd Ed: How to Talk about Our Culture's Toughest Issue</i> . Catholic Answers. Sinclair, Barbara. 2011. <i>Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress</i> . Fourth edition. Washington, D.C: CQ Press.