American Political Divides and Great Debates

Prof. Jonathan Cervas

Updated: November 11, 2025

Professor **Jonathan Cervas**[1]
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Location: POS 145 Time: Tuesday/Thursday 2:00p-3:20p Eastern
Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4p, and by appointment (arrange via email)
CMU Academic Calendar[2]

TA: **Colleen Moosman**
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Office Hours: Thursday 1:00p-2:00p

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

Course Description

This course explores why Americans are so politically divided, how those divisions create and reinforce inequalities, and what we can do to address them. We look at key issues like voting rights, healthcare access, racial and economic disparities, ethical uses of AI, and environmental justice; though the topics will largely be selected by students. Through discussions and debates, you will build critical thinking, public speaking, and empathy skills. If you are interested in political science, law, or social justice, this class will give you a clear understanding of today's U.S. political landscape and ideas for promoting fairness and equity at every level of society.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Explain** the historical and structural factors that contribute to political polarization in the United States.
2. **Describe** how political divisions intersect with and reinforce racial, economic, and social inequalities.
3. **Analyze** key policy issues (e.g., voting rights, healthcare, environmental justice) through the lens of fairness and equity.
4. **Evaluate** different perspectives on contentious political issues with empathy and critical reasoning.
5. **Apply** principles of ethical reasoning to assess the social impacts of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

6. **Demonstrate** improved skills in public speaking, structured debate, and respectful civic discourse.
7. **Synthesize** information from political science, law, and social justice frameworks to form evidence-based arguments.
8. **Reflect** on their own values, biases, and roles as civic participants in a divided society.

Grading

Your grade depends heavily on active engagement. This course is interactive: your preparation (completing the readings), contributions to discussions, and participation in debates are essential to your success.

Assignments & Deadlines You are expected to meet all assignment deadlines. If you anticipate being unable to turn something in on time, contact me before the due date to discuss alternatives. Late work will incur a small penalty[3] provided it does not impede your classmates' progress (for instance, in group projects). Failing to participate or contribute meaningfully, especially in ways that affect others' work, will result in a lower grade.

[3] Typically one percentage point per day

Assessment

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

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade
Participation	**25%**
• *Discussion & In Class Assignments*	*(5%)*
• *Attendance*	*(15%)*
• *Student Led Topics*	*(5%)*
Weekly Reflection Journals	**15%**
Writing Modules (3)	**3%**
Surveys (2)	**2%**
Book Review	**12%**
• *Written Review (3-5 single-spaced pages)*	*(10%)*
• *In class Discussion*	*(2%)*
Op-Ed Project (Rough Draft + Final)	**20%**
AI-Powered Debate Simulation (3)	**9%**
Final Capstone: Group Policy Brief	**14%**

Due Dates

Assignment	Due Date
Weekly Reflection Journals	Due Sundays, weekly
Writing Modules (3)	TBD
Op-ed, first draft	September 22
Op-ed peer review	September 25
Op-ed final draft	September 29
Book Review	October 25
AI-Powered Debate Simulation	Weeks 4, 8, 10
Group Project	December 2/4

Assignment Details

Participation & Discussion (25%)

Purpose: Civic discourse, empathy, critical thinking

Objective Alignment: 4, 6, 8

Participation (5%): Active, respectful involvement in class discussions, including preparedness (e.g., completing readings) and thoughtful contributions.

Attendance (15%) Regular attendance and active involvement form a significant part of your final grade (see grading section). If you do not show up, you will not earn an 'A'. To recognize that occasional absences are sometimes unavoidable (e.g., for religious observance, job interviews, university-sanctioned events, or illness), attendance grades will be calculated using an exponential function. 1–2 absences → mild penalty, 6+ absences → sharp drop (serious consequences).

If you must miss class, please notify me at least 24 hours in advance (unless it is an emergency or sudden illness) so we can arrange a way for you to catch up.[4]

[4] If you need to miss more than two sessions due to extenuating circumstances, let me know as soon as possible so we can discuss how best to support you.

Student Led Topics (5%): Each student will lead one class discussion on a topic of their choice related to the course themes (along with several other students). This includes selecting readings, preparing discussion questions, and facilitating the conversation. The goal is to engage your peers in critical thinking and respectful debate. Topics and readings should be assigned early in the semester.

Weekly Reflection Journals (15%)

Purpose: Personal reflection, connection to course theme
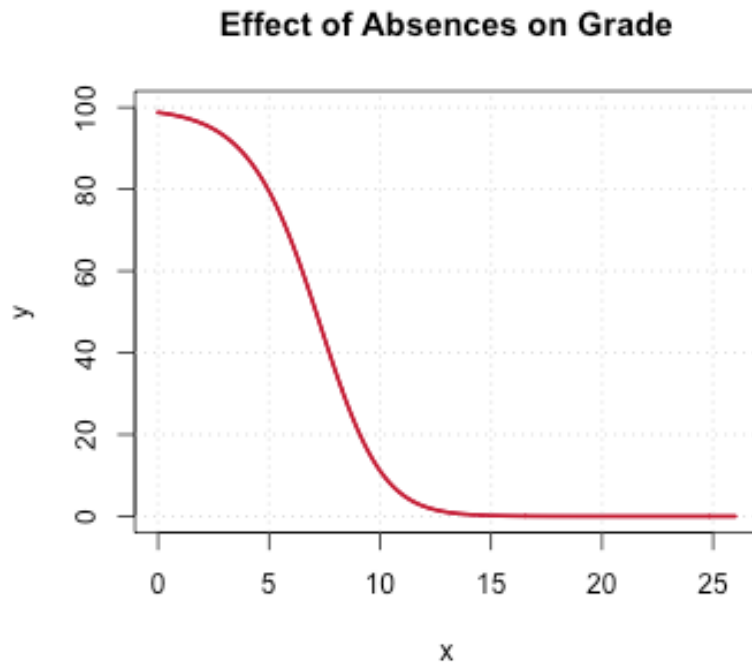
Objective Alignment: 1, 2, 4, 8

- Short (300-500 word) reflections on how class topics connect to current events, reactions to course readings, or evolving viewpoints.
- Graded as complete/incomplete based on effort and engagement.

Writing Modules (3%)

Purpose: Language (vocabulary, tone, social conventions) is appropriate and aligned to audience's needs. Evidence (types, placement,

Effect of Absences on Grade

volume, specificity) is appropriate and aligned to audience's needs
Objective Alignment: 1, 3, 5
Not grade for completion, but for effort and engagement.

- Students complete 1 module per day (may not complete all at once). Canvas will make activity 2 and 3 available 24 hours after a student completes previous activity
- Module 1: Adapting Writing for a New Audience
- Module 2: Creating an Audience Profile
- Module 3: Revising Writing to provide audience-focused feedback

Book Review Assignment (12%)
Purpose: Deep analysis, critical evaluation, communication
Objective Alignment: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7

- **Written Review** (10%)

Purpose: Argument analysis, assumption critique, implication discussion

- *Length*: 3-5 single-spaced pages (approx. 1,500–2,500 words)
- *Content Guidelines*:

  – Summarize the author's central argument(s) succinctly.

  - Critically evaluate those arguments using logical reasoning and textual evidence.
  - Identify any assumptions or ideological lenses the author brings.
  - Discuss broader political, ethical, or social implications.
  - Make connections to course themes such as inequality, polarization, or justice.
  - Use citations for any quoted or paraphrased material.

- **In class Discussion** (2%)

  Purpose: Verbal synthesis, peer engagement, clarity of thought
  Format: Small Group Discussions

- *Expectations*:

  - Clear, engaging summary of key ideas from the book.
  - Highlight your critical take or most interesting insight.
  - Encourage discussion by posing a question or provocation.

  Op-ed w/ peer-review (20%)
  Purpose: Persuasive writing, revision, public engagement
  Objective Alignment: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7

- 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.
- **Rough Draft** (2%) & **Peer Review** (8%)

  - *Length*: There is a strict 1,250-word limit.
  - *Content Guidelines*:
    * Prepare a short essay advocating for (or against) any social or political issue of your choosing (topics relating to American politics).
    * The idea is that you will write something that can be submitted to a newspaper or internet blog.
    * Concise arguments made for a more general audience are the goal of this assignment; something your parents can read and understand.
    * The use of data and visualizations is strongly encouraged and is not included in the word count.
  - Peer review should address the substance of the paper, along with grammar (e.g., "Is the thesis clear?", "Is evidence convincing?", "Does it speak to a broader audience?").
    * You will complete peer reviews of two classmate's drafts, providing constructive feedback on clarity, argument strength, and engagement.

- **Final Draft** (10%)

  − Using the feedback from your peers, revise your op-ed to improve clarity, argumentation, and engagement.

  AI-Powered Debate Simulation (10%)
  Purpose: Perspective-taking, applied argumentation, tech-enhanced learning
  Objective Alignment: 4, 5, 6, 8

- *Description*: Students interact with or program AI-generated personas (e.g., a libertarian voter, environmental activist, rural health worker) to simulate debates on divisive policy topics.
- *Options*: Use tools like ChatGPT to role-play or build simple scripted bots that represent different ideological views.
- *Goal*: Understand ideological nuance and test one's arguments against realistic opposition.
- *Deliverables*: Transcript

  Final Capstone: Group Policy Brief (30%)
  Purpose: Research, equity-centered solutions, teamwork *Objective Alignment*: 3, 5, 7

- **Written Brief**: Small teams choose a politically polarizing issue tied to inequality (e.g., gerrymandering, Medicaid expansion, tech bias) and write a formal policy brief (~1,500–2,000 words).

  − *Components*:
    * Executive Summary
    * Problem Definition
    * Background/Context
    * Policy Options & Stakeholder Analysis
    * Recommendation(s)
    * Equity Impact Statement
- **Presentation**: Teams present findings in a mock legislative or community forum during finals week.

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Course Schedule (Subject to Change as Semester Progresses):

August 26: Syllabus Day

- **Introduction to the Course**; topic selection, draft privacy/free speech statement

  − Lewsey, Story: Fred. 2020. "Faith in democracy: millennials are the most disillusioned generation 'in living memory.'" `https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/youthanddemocracy`

August 28

The Fence

- Background on "The Fence"

  – `https://www.cmu.edu/stugov/fence/index.html`

- President Farnam's Statement about the Fence after Trump Visit

  – Statement 1
  – Statement 2

- Articles from *The Tartan* about The Fence's history

  – The True History of the Fence: Part I
  – The True History of the Fence: Part II
  – The True History of the Fence: Part III

- Student Handbook, Advertising on Campus - Graffiti and Poster Policy of Student Government
- Student Government Graffiti and Poster Policy

September 2

America's Founding: Enlightened or Enslaved?

1. *The 1619 Project*

- "America Wasn't a Democracy Until Black Americans Made It One" – Essay by Nikole Hannah-Jones `https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html`

  – Introduces the central thesis of the project: re-centering slavery and Black Americans in the nation's founding narrative.

- "In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation" – Essay by Matthew Desmond `https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html`

  – Connects slavery to contemporary economic systems.

2. *The 1776 Report*

   – Arnn, Larry P., Carol Swain, and Matthew Spalding. 2021. The President's Advisory 1776 Commission. Washington, D.C: The White House. - Presents a traditionalist, patriotic framing of American founding values.
   Optional Readings

1. _The 1776 Report_

- "AHA Statement Condemning Report of Advisory 1776 Commission."
   * *[https://www.historians.org/news/aha-statement-condemning-report-of-advisory-1776-commission/](http*
- McKenna, Konstantin. 2025. "The 1776 Project Is a Desperate Search for the Right Enemies." Foreign Pol:
   * *[https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/21/1776-project-desperate-search-enemies-identity-politics-uname*

2. _The 1619 Project_

- Hannah-Jones, Nikole. 2019. The 1619 Project. The New York Times Magazine.
   * *[https://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/full_issue_of_the_1619_project.pdf?_gl=1*av7vjw*_gc*
- Silverstein, Jake. 2020. "On Recent Criticism of The 1619 Project." The New York Times.
   * *[https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/16/magazine/criticism-1619-project.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2*
- "We Respond to the Historians Who Critiqued The 1619 Project." 2019. The New York Times.
   * *[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-pr*

3. **Optional for ambitious students**

- Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852)
   * (~20 min read, historical context for both projects)

September 4

Organize Topics for Student Led Discussions

September 9

Free Speech in Schools

- Chemerinsky, Erwin. 2024. "The Underlying Issues Concerning
  Free Speech in Schools." Stanford Law Review 76: 1427.
- https://review.law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/
  sites/3/2024/10/Chemerinsky-76-Stan.-L.-Rev.-1427.pdf

   Introduction and the History of Free Speech in America

- Chemerinsky, Erwin, and Howard Gillman. 2018. Free speech on
  campus. Paperback edition. New Haven ; London: Yale University
  Press.

   – Chapter 1: The New Censorship
   – Chapter 2: Why Is Free Speech Important?

September 11

The History of Academic Freedom

- Chemerinsky, Erwin, and Howard Gillman. 2018. Free speech on campus. Paperback edition. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

  – Chapter 3: Nullius in Verba: Free Speech at Colleges and Universities

September 16

- Chemerinsky, Erwin, and Howard Gillman. 2018. Free speech on campus. Paperback edition. New Haven ; London: Yale University Press.

  – Chapter 4: Hate Speech
  – Chapter 5: What Campuses Can and Can't Do
  – Chapter 6: What's at Stake? (short)

September 18

- Iyengar, Shanto. 2025. "Identity Politics, Party Polarization, and the Rise of Donald Trump." In The Changing Character of the American Right, Volume I: Ideology, Politics and Policy in the Era of Trump, eds. Joel D. Aberbach et al. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, p. 79–94.

  – `https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73168-6_4`

September 23

Racism in Policing
  Guest Lecture: Ralph L. Bangs
  Former Associate Director, Center on Race and Social Problems,
School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh

- "Pittsburgh's Massive Racial Disparities in Police Actions, 2021-2023" July 1, 2024.

  – Op-Ed Link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGQTToI1A0/q3ld4QrnSxyaBG8aMxJIRQ/view?utm_content=DAG

- "Police Discrimination Against Black Youth Under Age 18" October 1, 2024.

  – Op-Ed Link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGSX13mhds/KJRJOKXLUTgJiJTZqrWk3Q/view?utm_content=DA

  Optional: - Bangs, R. "Fourth Amendment Problems with Pittsburgh Police Policies" February 2025 * `https://www.crsp.pitt.edu/fourth-amendment-problems-pittsburgh-police-policies` - Bangs, R. "Pittsburgh Leaders Must Recognize the Serious Racial Problems in Police Actions" January 2025 * `https://live-racesocialproblems-pitt.pantheonsite.io/pittsburgh-leaders-must-recognize-serious-racial-problems-police-actions`

- Bangs, R. "Racial Disparities and Discrimination in Drug Arrest Charges by Pittsburgh Police, January-October 2022" November 2024
* `https://www.crsp.pitt.edu/racial-disparities-and-discrimination-drug-arrest-charges-pittsburgh-police`
- Bangs, R. "New National Reports on Anti-Black Pretextual Traffic Stops and Frisks, Related Pittsburgh Police Data, and Recommendations" October 15, 2024 * `https://www.crsp.pitt.edu/new-national-reports-anti-black-pretextual-traffic-stops-and-frisks-related-pittsburgh-police-data`

September 25

- Klein, Ezra. 2020. Why We're Polarized. Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster. **Availalbe from CMU Library, and used at many bookstores. Working on making it available on Canvas.**

  – `https://cmu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CMU_INST/6lpsnm/alma991019694389504436`

- Klein, Introduction: What Didn't Happen
- Klein, Chapter 1: How Democrats Became Liberals and Republicans Became Conservatives

September 30

- Klein, Chapter 2: The Dixiecrat Dilemma
- Klein, Chapter 3: Your Brain on Groups

October 2

The Internet and Social Media

- Larreguy, Horacio, and Pia J. Raffler. 2025. "Accountability in Developing Democracies: The Impact of the Internet, Social Media, and Polarization." Annual Review of Political Science 28(Volume 28, 2025): 413–434.

  – `https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-033123-015559`

- Barrett, Paul, Justin Hendrix, and Grant Sims. 2021. Fueling the Fire: How Social Media Intensifies U.S. Political Polarization And What Can Be Done About It. NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights.

  – `https://bhr.stern.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NYUCBHRFuelingTheFire_FINALONLINEREVISEDSep7.pdf`

- Shapiro, Ari. 2022. "How the polarizing effect of social media is speeding up." NPR.

  – `https://www.npr.org/2022/09/09/1121295499/facebook-twitter-youtube-instagram-tiktok-social-media`

October 7

Mid-Semester FEC with Eberly Center (Patrick Walsh)
Guest, Jonathan Lai, Politico
Read his bio here.
Posner Hall - Great Room
Telling Stories with Data — *A Conversation with* **Jonathan Lai**

Join Jonathan Lai for an engaging session on how data and storytelling come together to make sense of politics and elections. He'll share his personal path into journalism, showcase powerful examples of reporting that blend numbers with narrative, and offer a glimpse into fresh ideas for covering the next election. We'll wrap up with a look at where news and data journalism are headed — and leave plenty of time for your questions.

- Topic and readings TBA

  - (Public Funding of News)
  - (distinguishing between "democracy" and "America")

October 9

Guest, Jonathan Lai, Politico
Topic and readings TBA

October 14

FALL BREAK, no class

October 16

FALL BREAK, no class

October 21

- Klein, Chapter 4: The Press Secretary in Your Mind
- Klein, Chapter 5: Demographic Threat
- Klein, Chapter 6: The Media Divide beyond Left-Right

October 23

- Guest Lecture, **David M. Rabban**, Distinguished Teaching Professor at the *University of Texas School of Law*

- Rabban "Academic Freedom"

  - Introduction: `https://canvas.cmu.edu/courses/47827/files/folder/Academic%20Freedom?preview=13401305`

– Chapter 11 - Student Academic Freedom: `https://canvas.
cmu.edu/courses/47827/files/folder/Academic%20Freedom?
preview=13401306`

October 28

**Special Simulation - How Local Government Makes your Life
Better (or Worse)**
- Location TBD

October 30

- Klein, Chapter 7: Post-Persuasion Elections
- Klein, Chapter 8: When Bipartisanship Becomes Irrational
- Klein, Chapter 9: The Difference between Democrats and Republicans
- Klein, Chapter 10: Managing Polarization—and Ourselves

November 4

DEMOCRACY DAY, no class **Register to Vote**

Join us for CMU's third 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.

November 6

Student led topics/debates
   Gun Control

- Readings:

   – Firearm Legislation and Firearm-Related Fatalities
   – NRA-ILA | Why Gun Control Doesn't Work
   – U.S. Gun Policy: Global Comparisons | Council on Foreign Relations
   – Do Studies Show Gun Control Works? No. - Reason.com
   – For Most U.S. Gun Owners, Protection Is the Main Reason
     They Own a Gun | Pew Research Ch17 — Liberty, Justice for
     Hedgehogs

Optional Reading

1. No, it wasn't ironic that Second Amendment advocate Charlie Kirk was shot

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November 11

Student led topics/debates
Immigration

- Readings:

  - Politico: Former ICE Director Q&A
  - Reason: Immigration and Freedom
  - White House: Protecting the American People Against Invasion

Optional Reading

- RSF Journal: Immigration Study (PDF)

November 13

Student led topics/debates
Affirmative Action

- Readings:

  - History of Affirmative Action
  - Affirmative Action Article (Pro)
  - Penn Carey Law: The Case for Affirmative Action (Pro)
  - NAACP: Affirmative Action in Education Matters (Pro)
  - Pew Research: Topic — Affirmative Action in College Admissions (Neutral Background)
  - The Strange Career of Affirmative Action — Harvard Scholars
  - Affirmative Action Was Wrong from the Start (Anti)
  - Harvard GSE: The Case for Affirmative Action (Pro Case)
  - Stanford Magazine: The Case Against Affirmative Action (Anti Case)

November 18

Voting Rights

- Readings:

Required

- Mixed-Member Proportional Representation Explained
- The Voting System That Actually Represents Everyone
- Partisan Gerrymandering Mostly Cancels Out at National Level, Study Shows
- Biggest Problem with Gerrymandering — Harvard Gazette

Optional

- Supreme Court Rules Partisan Gerrymandering Is Beyond The Reach Of Federal Courts
- What Is Extreme Gerrymandering? | Brennan Center for Justice
- Electoral College | USAGov
- How the Electoral College Works (PDF)

November 20

Student led topics/debates
Reproductive Rights

- Readings:
- **Andrea Tone**, "Roe v. Wade (1973)," from *Controlling Reproduction: An American History* (1997), pp. 190–197.

  – Tone_Roe_v_Wade.pdf

- **Excerpts from *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022)**

  – Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022)

- **NPR**, "Abortion wasn't always the politically charged issue it is today" (2022)

  – Abortion wasn't always the politically charged issue it is today : NPR

- **Throughline**, "The Evangelical Vote" (2019)

  – The Evangelical Vote (2019) : Throughline : NPR

- **Diane Jackson and Jennifer Hoewe**, "Congressional Discussions of Abortion: Moral Framing in Context."
  In *Partisan Rhetoric and Polarization: The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, Volume 10*, edited by Robert X. Browning, vol. 10, Purdue University Press, 2025, pp. 89–104. *JSTOR.*

  – `https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.22177843.10`

- **The New York Times**, "Tracking Abortion Bans Across the Country" (updated continuously)

– Abortion Laws Across the Country: Tracking Bans and Protections by State - The New York Times

November 25

No class because many people will be missing.

November 27

THANKSGIVING DAY, no class

December 2

Group Policy Brief

December 4

Group Policy Brief

Potential topics for Student Led Discussions

Immigration Politics

- https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/protecting-the-american-people-against-invasion/
- https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-immigration-debate-0

Affirmative Action (STUDENTS FOR FAIR ADMISSIONS, INC. v. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, No. 20–1199)) - Decided June 29, 2023

- Opinion of the Court
  - ROBERTS, C. J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which THOMAS, ALITO, GORSUCH, KAVANAUGH, and BARRETT, JJ., joined.
    * https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf
- Dissent
  - SOTOMAYOR, J., filed a dissenting opinion, in which KAGAN, J., joined, and in which JACKSON, J., joined as it applies to No. 21–707.
- Concurring & other Dissenting Opinions
  - THOMAS, J., filed a concurring opinion.

– GORSUCH, J., filed a concurring opinion, in which THOMAS, J., joined.
– KAVANAUGH, J., filed a concurring opinion.
– JACKSON, J., filed a dissenting opinion in No. 21–707, in which SOTOMAYOR and KAGAN, JJ., joined.

Birthright Citizenship
Regulating AI

Student Privacy in Class Discussions

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to safeguard **privacy, students, ideas, discussions, debates, communities, identities, societies, openness, and safety**.
It emphasizes the importance of **freedom of speech, debate, and expression of views**.

Shared Community Agreement

To foster a respectful and productive learning environment, the following policies apply:
   No Recording of Class Discussions - Audio or video recording of class discussion is **not permitted**.
- Recording of lectures may be allowed with approval from **Disability Resources**.
   Technology Use
- Laptops must remain closed.
- Phones must be put away unless otherwise specified.
   Anonymity in Submissions
- All written work should be anonymized (**no names on papers or submissions**).
- Peer reviews will also remain anonymous.
   Confidentiality of Classroom Contributions
- When discussing ideas from class outside of this setting, you may reference the **content**
but not the **identities** of the individuals who contributed.
   Respectful Dialogue - Listen attentively and allow peers to finish their thoughts before responding.
- Do not talk over one another.
- Treat others with the same respect you would expect for yourself.

Civility in Communication - Speak at a moderate volume.

- Critique **ideas**, not individuals.

- Assume the most generous interpretation of your peers' statements.

Use of Generative AI (GAI)

- You may not use a peer's work in generative AI tools without their **explicit permission**.

- Consider each peer's work as **copyrighted**.

Representation of Opinions

- A peer's views expressed in class do not represent the official position of their

clubs, organizations, or extracurricular affiliations.

Course Principles

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. Conversations should be open, free, and respectful.

1. **Analyzing a Range of Perspectives and Political Divides**
   One of our primary themes is exploring how different communities' experiences shape political divides. We will critically examine how underrepresented voices—those with distinct histories, challenges, and worldviews—contribute to a growing political polarization. Understanding these varied experiences is essential for grasping the roots of political conflict and for developing strategies that bridge divides.

2. **The Significance of Varied Viewpoints in Justice and Injustice**
   We will delve into why recognizing and valuing multiple perspectives is crucial for identifying instances of injustice that might otherwise be overlooked. By centering viewpoints from communities whose experiences differ from the majority, we gain insight into how justice is perceived, enacted, and sometimes denied. This work will guide us toward more equitable approaches to social and political challenges.

3. **The Role of Systems and Institutions in Perpetuating Inequality**
   Another critical theme is examining how U.S. institutions and systems have historically reinforced privilege and power imbalances. We will analyze how laws, policies, and institutional practices shape access to resources, opportunities, and rights—often disadvantaging

certain groups. By understanding these systemic forces, we can begin to address the root causes of injustice.

4. **Ethical Obligations to Address Inequality**
Throughout the semester, we will reflect on our individual and collective responsibility to confront inequalities. This includes considering how we can uplift underrepresented voices, advocate for fair policies, and work against oppressive structures. These reflections will encourage us to think critically about our roles in society and the impact of our actions on the broader pursuit of justice.

These themes will be woven into our discussions, readings, and assignments. By the end of the semester, you will have developed a nuanced perspective on how identity, power, and politics intersect—and you'll be equipped to contribute to meaningful change in your communities.

AI Use Policy for Student Work

As artificial intelligence (AI) tools become increasingly accessible, it is important to clarify expectations for their use in this course. You are welcome to use AI technologies (such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, or similar tools) to support your independent work—such as brainstorming ideas, checking grammar, or improving the clarity of your writing. However, you **may not use AI to generate substantive content that you submit as your own original work**. All assignments, essays, and projects must reflect your own analysis, critical thinking, and voice.

Permitted Uses of AI:

- Outlining or organizing your thoughts
- Checking grammar, spelling, or clarity
- Generating ideas or prompts to help you get started
- Reviewing your own drafts for readability

Prohibited Uses of AI:

- Submitting AI-generated essays, paragraphs, or answers as your own work
- Using AI to complete assignments, discussion posts, or projects in place of your own effort
- Copying and pasting AI-generated content without substantial revision and personal input

If you use AI tools in your process, you must **disclose** how you used them in a brief note at the end of your assignment (e.g., "I used ChatGPT to help brainstorm ideas for my outline.").

Violations:

Submitting AI-generated content as your own is considered academic dishonesty and will be treated as a violation of the university's academic integrity policy.

If you have questions about what is or is not allowed, please ask before submitting your work.

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Representation Statement

I am committed to including a broad range of perspectives in the readings and materials for this course. If you believe a critical voice is missing, please let me know so I can improve the syllabus now and in future offerings.

We must treat every individual with respect. We come from many different backgrounds, and this variety of viewpoints is fundamental to building and maintaining an equitable and inclusive campus community. "Representation" can refer to the ways we identify ourselves—race, color, national origin, language, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, ancestry, belief, veteran status, or genetic information, among others. Each of these identities shapes the perspectives our students, faculty, and staff bring to campus. Promoting these varied viewpoints not only fuels excellence and innovation but also advances the pursuit of justice. We acknowledge our imperfections while fully committing to the work—inside and outside our classrooms—of building and sustaining a campus community that 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 an unwelcoming atmosphere 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 seek support—either in the moment or afterward. You can share your experiences using the following resources:

- **Ethics Reporting Hotline**
  Submit an anonymous report by calling 844-587-0793 or visiting **cmu.ethicspoint.com**.
  All reports are documented and reviewed to determine whether further action is needed. Regardless of the incident type, the university will use your feedback to transform our campus climate into one that is more equitable and just.

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Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and an accommodations letter from the Office of Disability Resources, please discuss your 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 you may have a disability and are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, you can contact them at `access@andrew.cmu.edu`.

Student Well-Being

The past few years have been challenging. We are all under significant stress and uncertainty. I encourage you to find ways to move regularly, eat well, and reach out to your support system—or to me at `cervas@cmu.edu`—if you need help. We can all benefit from support during stressful times, and this semester is no exception.

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events can diminish your academic performance and reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. CMU offers services that can help, and treatment does work. Learn more about confidential mental health services available on campus at:

- **Counseling and Psychological Services**: `http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/`
  Phone (24/7): 412-268-2922

Please remember that support is always available—don't hesitate to reach out.

Eberly Center

Students,

This semester, I am working with the Eberly Center on educational research. Because of this, I have included a statement about the research and your rights as a research participant in your syllabus. That same statement along with common questions can be found below in this email.

Please reach out to Laura Pottmeyer `lpottmey@andrew.cmu.edu` with any questions about the study.

Best,
Jonathan

Research to Improve the Course

For this class, the Eberly Center is working with your instructor on educational research. This research will involve your coursework. You will not be asked to do anything above and beyond the normal learning activities and assignments that are part of this course. You are free not to participate in this research, and your participation will have no influence on your grade for this course or your academic career at CMU. If you do not wish to participate or if you are under 18 years of age, please send an email to Laura Pottmeyer (`lpottmey@andrew.cmu.edu`), and then your data will not be included. Participants will not receive any compensation. The data collected as part of this research will include student grades. All analyses of data from participants' coursework will be conducted after the course is over and final grades are submitted. In the future, once we have removed all identifiable information from your data, we may use the data for our future research studies, or we may distribute the data to other researchers for their research studies. The Eberly Center will conduct the data analysis and interpretation of the results for this research project. The Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation is located on the CMU-Pittsburgh Campus and its mission is to support the professional development of all CMU instructors regarding teaching and learning. To minimize the risk of breach of confidentiality, the Eberly Center will never have access to data from this course containing your personal identifiers. All data will be analyzed in de-identified form and presented in the aggregate, without any personal identifiers. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research participant, or to report concerns to this study, please contact Laura Pottmeyer (`lpottmey@andrew.cmu.edu`).

Plain language interpretation:

- After the semester is over, the data generated by students in this course, which often comes from things like assignments, projects, surveys, etc., is stripped of all identifying information and aggregated into a larger research dataset for analysis.
- As a potential participant in this research, you have a say in what happens to your data. If you are OK with data generated by you in this course being de-identified and aggregated into a larger research dataset, then there is nothing you need to do - simply proceed through the course as you would with any other course.

- IF you would NOT like your data to be used for that purpose (or you are under 18) that is when you email Laura Pottmeyer and say "Hi Laura, this is my name and course number, I would like to opt-out, thanks, goodbye", and your data will not be included in the research analyses.
- This opt-out process is confidential, and your instructors will not know whether you have opted out or not.
- Importantly, your decision in this matter will NOT affect your experience in the course. You are only making a decision about what happens to your data AFTER the course is over.

Below are some potential questions students may have…

QUESTION	ANSWER
What do I need to do?	If you would like to opt out of your data being used in research analyses, all you need to do is email Laura Pottmeyer (email is in the syllabus) with your name, course number, and say "I'd like to opt out". **If you do not wish to opt out, you do not need to do anything**.
What is this research about?	Unfortunately, we cannot provide further details at this time. If, after the course is over, you are curious about this kind of work, please feel free to contact Laura Pottmeyer or anyone else at the Eberly Center (`lpottmey@andrew.cmu.edu`).
Do I have to make up my mind right now?	No, there is no need to make up your mind right now. You can choose to opt out anytime, even if it is on the last day of the semester.
What if I don't want to participate?	If you'd like to opt out, the only thing that will change is what happens to your data AFTER the course is over. **Your required coursework will be the same regardless of your decision**.
Can I see the results?	Often the results from this kind of work do not come together right away. If you are curious about the results after this course is over, please feel free to contact Laura Pottmeyer, and we would be happy to give you an update, if possible.
How will the data be used?	In two ways: to help improve the course and to contribute to educational research on how students learn best. Note that all analyses occur after course grades are submitted and student identifiers are removed.

QUESTION	ANSWER
If I opt out, do I still have to complete work assigned by the instructor?	Yes.