



**UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA**

School of Public and International Affairs

POLS 4615: Polarization of American Politics Fall 2026

Instructor: Andrew L. Stone

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1. Course Description and Objective

Description: Causes and impact of modern American political polarization, including rising division at the elite level, increased success of populist campaigns, growing salience of cultural division among voters, the role of campaign funding in polarization, and the influence of modern media in political division.

Objective: This course introduces students to the historical and contemporary factors driving increased division and hostility between America's major political parties. Students will learn why political parties exist in the forms that they do today, how the parties conflict withing our institutions of government, and how current political trends at both the mass and elite level have led American politics to polarize. Students may be evaluated based on examinations, in-class discussion, and/or homework.

2. Meeting Times & Locations

Location: Baldwin 307

Days: Wednesday, Friday

Time: 11:35am to 12:55pm

3. Office Hours

Location: TBD

Days: Wednesday, Friday

Time: 1pm to 2pm *or* by appointment

4. Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class session in-person. Attendance counts for five percent of a student's grade. For each unexcused absence, 1% percent will be taken off the student's final grade. Excused absences for illness, family emergencies, and other similar circumstances will not count against a student's attendance grade. For an absence to be considered excused, the student must notify the instructor prior to the day's session that they will not be in attendance and provide the reason why.

5. Required Text

While there is no textbook required for the course. Students will be expected to read assigned original source documents prior to each class session. Such pieces will be accessible via links in the syllabus or via eLC if not through the UGA library. The specific documents are listed with their respective class day in the course schedule.

6. Grading Breakdown & Grading Scale

Grade Distribution: 100 percentage points in total

- Attendance: 5%
 - o See Attendance Policy above
- Discussion Leader: 25% in Total
 - o Provide substantive response/critique for at least one of the readings for each unit at the start of Discussion Days.
 - o Facilitate discussion of the readings for that unit via asking questions to the class which fellow students will discuss.
- Discussion Response: 20% in Total
 - o Written during the last 15 minutes of a Discussion Day
 - o One-page responses to the day's readings and discussion.
 - o Ten responses to be written in total.
 - o Must include response to points made by the Discussion Leader and citations of the unit's readings.
 - o Due any time before the start of class on the Wednesday directly following a discussion day.
- Exams: 50% in total
 - o One midterm exam, one final exam.
 - o Fifteen multiple choice questions covering lectures or readings, two short essays.
 - o Exam content is NOT cumulative.

Grade Scale:

A = 93 - 100%

A- = 90 - 92%

B+ = 87 - 89%

B = 83 - 86%

B- = 80 - 82%

C+ = 77 - 79%

C = 73 - 76%

C- = 70 - 72%

D = 60 - 69%

F = $\leq$ 59%

6. Important Course Policies and Resources

Academic Honesty

UGA Student Honor Code: *"I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others."* A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy, and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty can be found at honesty.uga.edu

In this course specifically, students will not plagiarize the works of fellow students or other authors in the completion of their own assignments. The use of Generative AI (GAI) tools is **not** permitted in this course. This is because such tools are unnecessary for the completion of the assignments this class, are prone to inaccuracy, and constitute plagiarism in this context. If you are uncertain about using a particular tool to support your work, you must consult with me before using it. We do conduct regular checks of written assignments to determine whether an assignment was created using generative AI. If we believe a violation of A Culture of Honesty may have occurred, we have a responsibility to report to the Office of Academic Honesty. The same is true for any tutor services. The tutor is NOT supposed to write your work for or with you. Assignments for this class are supposed to be 100% your work.

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you need to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Accessibility and Testing. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting accessibility.uga.edu.

Well-being Resources

UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy and engaged student community.

Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit sco.uga.edu. Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the [Embark@UGA](#) program which supports students who are experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity.

UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: well-being.uga.edu
- Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
- University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
- Accessibility and Testing: accessibility.uga.edu

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting well-being.uga.edu.

Grade Appeals

If you have a question regarding your grade, you should contact me within one week of receiving your grade. Keep in mind that when I review your grade, it can go up or down. In your written appeal, make sure to elaborate on how exactly my assessment of your grade appeared incorrect, with citations supporting your answer being appreciated.

Incompletes

A final grade of “Incomplete” will only be given in this course under exceptional circumstances and is solely at the discretion of the instructor. If an incomplete is given, it is the student’s responsibility to complete the necessary requirements as early in the following semester as possible.

Excused Absences from Exams

If you are absent for an exam, please contact me to schedule a makeup session as soon as possible.

Exams for Students Registered with Accessibility and Testing (formerly the Disability Resource Center)

If you are registered with Accessibility and Testing and you need extended exam time, you are required to take the exam at Accessibility and Testing. It is your responsibility to contact Accessibility and Testing at least 48 hours before the exam/quiz date. For exams, please schedule a time on the same day of the exam, any time after the starting time of the exam. Make sure you to inform me so that I know your exam is not missing.

Late Submissions

Late submissions will have their grade docked by 10% per day, for each day that an assignment is late (including weekends). Extensions can be granted in exceptional circumstances, but you are required to contact me prior to the deadline if one is needed.

Syllabus Policy

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus if necessary. I will give you fair notice (at least a week) if something, such as a reading assignment, is to change.

Withdrawal Policy

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal-passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Please review the policy here:

<https://reg.uga.edu/general-information/policies/withdrawals/>

Preferred Name

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to me with the student's legal name. I am eager to address you by your preferred name. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

11. Course Schedule

Unit 1 – Background

- 1. August 19 – Course Introduction Lecture**
- 2. August 21 – What is Ideology? Lecture**
- 3. August 26 – Key Elections Lecture**
Readings: [Converse et al. \(1965\)](#), [Erikson \(2001\)](#)
- 4. August 28 – Discussion**

Unit 2 – America's Party System

- 5. September 2 – Lecture**
Readings: Bankert & Stone (2025), [Knudsen \(2020\)](#)
- 6. September 4 – Discussion**

Unit 3 – Congress

7. September 9 – Lecture

Readings: Mayhew (1974) Ch. 1

8. September 11 – Discussion

Unit 4 – Presidency

9. September 16 – Lecture

Readings: [Cohen \(2011\)](#), [Jacobson \(2003\)](#)

10. September 18 – Discussion

Unit 5 – Judiciary

11. September 23 – Lecture

Readings: [Moraski & Shipan \(1999\)](#), [Hasen \(2019\)](#)

12. September 25 – Discussion

Unit 6 – Thermostatic Politics

13. September 30 – Lecture

Readings: [Park & Reeves \(2020\)](#), [Grossmann & Wlezien \(2024\)](#)

14. October 2 – Discussion

MIDTERM

15. October 7 – The Congress Game

16. October 9 – *EXAM 1*

Unit 7 – Media

17. October 14 – Lecture

Readings: [Prior 2013](#), [Van Bavel et al. \(2021\)](#)

18. October 16 – Discussion

Unit 8 – Money & Politics

19. October 21 – Lecture

Readings: [Page et al. \(2013\)](#), [Pildes \(2019\)](#)

20. October 23 – Discussion

Unit 9 – Demographics

21. October 28 – Economics/Class Lecture

Readings: [Clark \(2003\)](#), [Franko & Witko \(2023\)](#)

22. November 4 – Culture Lecture

Readings: [Feldman & Huddy \(2008\)](#), [Cassese & Holman \(2019\)](#)

23. November 6 – Discussion

Unit 10 – Foreign Affairs

24. November 11 – Lecture

Readings: [Schultz \(2017\)](#), [Friedrichs & Tama \(2022\)](#)

25. November 13 – Discussion

Unit 11 – Are We Actually Polarized?

26. November 18 – Lecture

Readings: Fiorina (2011) Ch. 1-3

27. November 20 – Discussion

FINALS

28. December 1 – Is Polarization Good, Actually? Lecture

Readings: [Levendusky \(2010\)](#), [Dancey & Sheagley \(2016\)](#)

29. December 7 -- *FINAL EXAM*