

# Mini Class: Public Opinion, Polarization, and the Politics of Identity in the United States

---

COURSE INFORMATION	<i>Term:</i> Spring 2022 <i>Level:</i> Intermediate Seminar <i>Meet:</i> Tuesday & Friday, 2:30-3:50 <i>Room:</i> Anthropology Lab <i>Revision:</i> January 28, 2022	<i>Instructor:</i> Jack Reilly <i>Office:</i> Social Sciences 205 <i>E-mail:</i> jreilly@ncf.edu <i>Office Hours:</i> Tues & Fri 4-5:30 and by appt <i>Appointments:</i> jacklreilly.com/appointments
DESCRIPTION	Why do people think about politics in the way that they do? This course will examine the role of mass public opinion in American politics. As members of a representative democracy, the collective judgments of citizens are supposed to play an influential role in the governance of the nation, from the selection of political leaders to the policies those leaders enact into law. However, the judgments that individual citizens make are sometimes faulty, poorly informed, or otherwise erroneous. In this course, we will try to understand what citizens should know about politics, examine what citizens actually know about politics, evaluate the sources of that knowledge, and discuss what implications our answers to these questions have for the American democratic system. Particular attention will be paid to the sources of political attitudes and beliefs, the nature of political polarization, and the identity structures that help form and shape individual and collective public opinion.	
COURSE STRUCTURE	This is an intermediate seminar (discussion) class; students are expected to read and participate in each course period. Each class period has two readings <sup>1</sup> that we will analyze, dissect, and discuss as a class. Each day in class has at least one student discussion leader who will co-lead class with the professor.	
PREREQUISITE	Introductory or intermediate work in political science (American politics recommended) or social psychology. Competence in basic numeracy: comparisons, fractions, proportions, interpreting charts and graphics, averages, the concept of correlation.	
ENROLLMENT	The course has a soft cap of 12, but I anticipate not having to cap the class. If one is necessary, priority will be given to upper year students in political science and related areas (broadly defined), with preference given to those with the most adjacent coursework.	
NOTES	This is a <b>writing enhanced course (WEC)</b> and is eligible for <b>gender studies credit</b> and/or <b>advanced seminar credit</b> toward your Political Science AOC requirements. Students who wish to receive gender studies or advanced seminar credit should contact the professor early in the semester. Students who wish to receive advanced seminar credit will need to take an introductory statistics course as a co-requisite if not already completed.	
INTERESTED?	If you'd like to take the course, <b>let me know!</b> <a href="http://jacklreilly.com/interest">http://jacklreilly.com/interest</a>	

---

<sup>1</sup>Give or take one reading, depending on complexity.

## Materials

---

### BOOKS

#### Required

- Mason, 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became our Identity*. Chicago. ISBN: 9781137342829
- Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017. *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*. Chicago.

#### Recommended

- Most readings for this class are available online in the course google drive. Accordingly, you should budget \$30 for printing articles over the course of the semester. (This is easily less than the cost of additional readers.) We will be engaging in close reading of articles and you will need to be able to reference them in class.

## Course Requirements

---

### OVERVIEW

Satisfactory completion of the course requires completion of the following:

1. Daily Reading & Discussion Questions
2. Short Position Papers (2 papers, 5 pages each). For each paper, you are required to submit in successive weeks:
  - (a) A draft.
  - (b) A discussion of what you would like to revise.
  - (c) A final paper, involving substantive revisions identified in step (2).
3. Exams
  - (a) Midterm
  - (b) Final

*Additional requirements only for those taking the class for the Political Science AOC advanced seminar requirement:*

4. Final Research Project
  - (a) Outlining/Stage Assignments
  - (b) Final Paper (10-15 pages)