

RELG 308/GOVT 391
Two Americas: Polarization in Religion and Politics
Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:20 p.m.
Wren 301

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Course Description

Scholars have noted how the increasing level of polarization in American politics has changed the way citizens view other actors in the political system. Political scientists have explored how these differences manifest in contemporary culture, as Americans signal their political identities in ways that are not explicitly political. Many of these cultural associations are highly correlated with religious practice and religious expression. Religious studies scholars have noted an increasing polarization in America between religious and non-religious people, arguing that the conflation of conservative Christianity and conservative politics in the 1980s led the younger generation to identify as “not religious” in order to avoid association with a conservative political paradigm that many young people see as homophobic and overly strict. Swift growth of the “nones” (as some religious studies scholars call them) constitutes the most significant shift in the American religious landscape since the turn-of-the-century.

This course investigates the origins, processes, and outcomes of this shifting landscape, motivated by the core question: “How do contemporary Americans use cultural codes and social signals to infer the religious and political affiliations of their fellow Americans, and with what consequence?”

Teaching Philosophy and Instructor Expectations

The subject matter of a course serves as a tool to help you develop skills to become a better thinker and communicator. The goals for this course are for you to:

Ask good questions. Learning necessitates curiosity.

Assess and synthesize information. Use the course material to arrive at informed opinions.

Engage in analytical reasoning. Respectfully discuss and deliberate ideas.

Communicate effectively. Continue to improve the skills necessary to write or present a clearly argued and well-developed discourse.

We aim to make class worth your time, and we ask for the same in return. We expect that you will read the course material before the beginning of class and come prepared to participate in the discussion. Attendance every day and active class participation are essential components of this class. However, we recognize that this is only one of your classes in a full course load, and that many of you have important work and family obligations outside of school. If you take your education seriously and communicate with us (with plenty of advance notice) about obstacles or

challenges that may affect your performance in the course, we are happy to work with you to find solutions to help you succeed.

Course Goals

As an upper-division elective, this course is designed to teach you a set of fundamental concepts about topics related to religious and political identities in the contemporary American context. It should give you the cognitive infrastructure and vocabulary to analyze these ideas and empower you to apply that understanding to the world outside the classroom environment. To serve its function as a course in a liberal arts curriculum, this course is designed to facilitate critical thinking and communication skills.

This course also fulfills the COLL 200 CSI/ALV requirement, bridging the Cultures, Societies, and the Individual (CSI) and Arts, Letters, and Values (ALV) domains. Courses in the ALV domain examine the expression and evaluation of values and attitudes. In the first part of this course, you will employ the anthropological methods of participant observation and interviewing to investigate how contemporary religious persons participate in and perceive politics. Courses in the CSI domain examine the realm of human cultures, societies, and individuals through their development, organization, and interaction. In the second portion of this course, you will employ the social science methods of surveys and data coding to assess the differences in attitudes and perceptions between different groups of Americans.

Course Requirements

You will be responsible for a variety of assignments over the course of the semester. The course is divided into two units, and you will have a major project to complete for each unit. There will be an exam at the conclusion of each unit, and you will submit a final paper in lieu of a final exam. You will be given detailed instructions for all assignments.

Grading Policies

Each assignment is given a point value:

Attendance: 42 points (2 points x 24 class sessions, with 3 allowed absences)

Unit projects: 120 points x 2 = 240 points

Exams: 100 points x 2 = 200 points

Final Paper: 50 points

Other opportunities to earn points may become available over the course of the semester. Grades will be determined on a percentage scale (94-100% is an A, 90-93% is an A-, 87-89% is a B+, 83-86% is a B, 80-83% is a B-, etc.). You will receive periodic updates on your grade.

Attendance Policy

There are 24 class sessions at which we will take attendance, and each day you are present you will earn two points. You are allowed three absences without penalty. Thus, your final attendance grade will be adjusted for up to three absences, for a total possible of 42 points. If you are sick, please do not come to class. If you have a significant illness or emergency that prevents you from attending class for more than three sessions, we can discuss a make-up assignment. Habitual tardiness to class is bothersome and extreme cases can affect your participation grade; if you anticipate that you will be late with some frequency (for example, if you have a class on the

other side of campus with a long-winded professor immediately preceding our class), please make us aware of the situation and plan to sit near the door.

Late Policies—Exams

In fairness to everyone, students who arrive late for an exam may not work overtime. The only valid reasons for missing and rescheduling an exam are due to a university-approved reasons (a documented illness, religious observance, death in the family or similarly grave family emergency, or a W&M-sponsored travel commitment that you have discussed with me before the assignment is due), or, during final exams only (as W&M allows), you have several exams in a row. If you are sick enough to miss a test, you are sick enough to go to the doctor. You must 1) email me before the exam to let me know about your illness; 2) provide documentation for your illness when you return to class; and 3) make every effort to take the test in the most expeditious manner possible. We prefer to give students the benefit of the doubt, but if we perceive that you are taking advantage of the situation, you will be subject to a penalty.

If you miss an exam for another reason, you can take a makeup exam for which the maximum grade you can earn is a C (75%).

Late Policies—Other Assignments

The late policy will be clearly outlined on the handout you will receive describing each assignment.

We will not accept assignments after the Friday of the last week of regularly scheduled classes.

Grade Appeals

We do not communicate about grades over email. If you are not in class the day an assignment is passed back, it is your responsibility to come to office hours or make an appointment to pick it up. If you are dissatisfied with your grade on an assignment, you can choose between two options. If you want to talk about your work and discuss ways you can improve on *future* assignments, we are happy to meet with you in office hours or by appointment. You cannot appeal your grade after we have this conversation. Therefore, if you are positive that you want to appeal your grade, you need to write a one-page double-spaced explanation of why you think your work merits a higher grade. After reading your appeal, we will re-grade your assignment. Your grade can go up, stay the same, or go down. We will *then* schedule a meeting to talk about your work.

You are expected to adhere to the Honor Code.

The College of William & Mary has had an honor code since at least 1779. Academic integrity is at the heart of the College, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. We assume that students take the Honor Code and plagiarism as seriously as we do and that academic misconduct will not become an issue in this class. The student-led honor system is responsible for resolving any suspected violations of the Honor Code, and we will report all suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the honor system. The Student Handbook (www.wm.edu/studenthandbook) includes your responsibilities as a student and the

full Code. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. To read the Honor Code, see www.wm.edu/honor.

Misc. Policies

Technology Policy

This classroom is an electronics-free zone. Please power off all cell phones, tablets, and laptops. If you are expecting an important call, tell us before class, keep your phone on vibrate, and leave quietly when you receive the call. Failure to comply with this policy will result in a deduction of 10 points from your grade. For information on why an electronics-free environment is good for your education, see: "[Why I Just Asked My Students To Put Their Laptops Away](#)," by NYU Professor Clay Shirky.

Disability accommodations will be honored. If you do not have disability accommodations and you feel that you must use your laptop in class, you may read the above article and write a 1-page request for in-class laptop usage that addresses the issues raised in the article. We ask that all students using laptops sit on the sides or back of the classroom.

Omnibus Project

As part of the second unit project, you will be required to participate in the Social Science Research Methods Center's Omnibus Project. The project is a collaborative subject pool for survey and experimental research conducted by students and faculty. To help introduce you to the field of political science, you will have the opportunity to participate as a subject in one or more research projects this semester. An alternative writing assignment will be offered to students who do not want to participate in the Omnibus Project or are not old enough to participate. The total time required will be approximately one hour.

Contact Policies

Contacting Dr. Blazer:

I have developed tendonitis in my wrists from computer overuse, so I have had to greatly curtail my typing. If you wish to discuss something with me at length, please come to my office hours or email me to arrange a phone-call or face-to-face meeting. I am happy to answer brief questions over email or text message.

Contacting Dr. Settle:

My preference is to meet during office hours for all substantive questions. Email is my preferred form of communication for anything about which I will need a record (an excused absence, setting up a meeting time outside of office hours, etc.)

Disability Services

William & Mary accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see www.wm.edu/sas.

Course Materials

Books

Putnam, Robert and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster

Harding, Susan Friend. 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Articles and Reports (posted on Blackboard)

Carlson, Taylor and Jaime Settle. *Disinclined and Disengaged: How Our Brains, Bodies, and Biases Lead us to Avoid Politics*. Book manuscript in progress.

Claassen, Ryan. 2015. *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "G-d Gap."* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2017. "Epilogue: The First White President." In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York, NY: One World Books

Controversies in Voting Behavior, 5th Edition, edited by Richard Niemi, Herbert Weisberg and David Kimball

Dionne, E.J., Jr., and Michael Cromartie. 2006. "Modernist, Orthodox, or Flexidox? Why the Culture War Debate Endures." In *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*. Edited by James Davison Hunter, et al. Brookings Institution Press.

Djupe, Paul et al. "Are the Politics of the Christian Right Linked to State Rates of the Nonreligious? The Importance of Salient Controversy." *Political Research Quarterly*, forthcoming

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. "In the Field: Observing, Participating, and Jotting Notes" and "Writing Up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk." In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Favreau, Jon. "The Wilderness, Episode 5: The Backlash." Podcast. Los Angeles, CA: Crooked Media

Hetherington, Marc and Jonathan Weiler. 2018. *Prius or Pickup? How the Answers to Four Simple Questions Explain America's Great Divide*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Hunter, James Davison. 2006. "The Enduring Culture War." In *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*. Edited by James Davison Hunter, et al. Brookings Institution Press.

Kinder, Donald and Nathan Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither Liberal nor Conservative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

- Lelkes, Yphtach. 2016. "Mass Polarization: Manifestations and Measurements." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(S1): 392–410.
- Margolis, Michele. 2018. "How Politics Affects Religion: Partisanship, Socialization, and Religiosity in America" *Journal of Politics* 80(1): 30-43.
- Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Newport, Saad and Moore. 1997. "How Are Polls Conducted?" Excerpted from *Where America Stands*, by Michael Golay
- PRRI Report. "2012 Pre-Election American Values Survey." Read the Executive Summary and "Section 1: The Changing Face of American Religion in 2012"
- PRRI Report. "Beyond Economics: Fears of Cultural Displacement Pushed the White Working Class to Trump."
- Settle, Jaime. 2018. *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press
- Thiessen, Joel, and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme. 2017. "Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56(1): 64–82.
- Weber and Thornton. 2012. "Courting Christians: How Political Candidates Prime Religious Considerations in Campaign Ads." *Journal of Politics* 74(2): 400-413.
- Wolfe, Alan. 2006. "The Culture War that Never Came." In *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*. Edited by James Davison Hunter, et al. Brookings Institution Press.

Course Schedule

I. Introduction

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
Aug. 29 th	Introduction (Both)	
Sept. 3 rd	America's Religious Landscape (Blazer) According to Putnam and Campbell, how can religious pluralism in the U.S. coexist with religious polarization? What are the most significant shifts in America's religious landscape over the last 70 years? Why do these shifts matter?	Putnam and Campbell, Chapters 1, 3, 4
Sept. 5 th	The Rise of the Young Nones (Settle) What is a "young none"? Why do scholars care about the religious unaffiliated? What caused the growth of the religiously unaffiliated population?	PRRI Report Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017
Sept. 7 th	<i>Add/Drop Period Closes</i>	

II. Anthropology and the Study of Religion and Politics in America (Blazer)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
Sept. 10 th	What is the Anthropological Method? What is fundamentalism? What is evangelicalism? How did Jerry Falwell impact these traditions? What is the role of the anthropologist?	Harding, Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-60)
Sept. 12 th	Interview on the Anthropological Method What are fieldnotes? How do anthropologists use fieldnotes?	Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, "In the Field: Observing, Participating, and Jotting Notes" and "Writing Up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk" in <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i> , 17-65.
Sept. 17 th	Modernity and the New American Fundamentalism What happened at the Scopes trial? How did conservative Christians react to the trial?	Harding, Chapter 2 and 3, 61-104

When and why did conservative Christians begin to challenge the idea of secular superiority?
What is “the art of Jerry Falwell”?

Sept. 19th **Political Engagement and Moral Superiority** Harding, Chapter 4 and 5,
What is the gospel economy? 105-152
How did Falwell’s fundamentalists engage politically?

FIELD NOTES DUE

Sept. 24th **Fundamentalism and Gender** Harding, Chapter 6 and 7,
What is secular humanism? 153-209
What threat did the ideology of secular humanism represent to Falwell’s church?
Why are conservative Christians pro-life?
What gender roles are assumed in this ideology?

Sept. 26th **The Beginning and End of the World** Harding, Chapters 8 and 9,
How do fundamentalist/evangelical ideas on creation and the apocalypse inform their politics? 210-246

INTERVIEWS DUE. Small group meetings with Blazer to think about thematic analysis.

Oct. 1st **Anthropology as translation** Reading TBA
What are the benefits of the anthropological method?
What are the drawbacks?
What is this method good at revealing?
What is obscured?

PRESENTATION DUE via Blackboard.

Oct. 3rd **Assessing Our Work** Watch all presentations before class
What did you learn from conducting fieldwork and interviews?
What was most challenging for you?
What surprised you the most?

REFLECTION/PEER REVIEW due.

Oct. 8th **Review for Exam #1**

Oct. 10th **EXAM #1**

Oct. 15th FALL BREAK

III. Political Science and the Study of Religion and Politics in America (Settle)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
Oct. 17 th	Core Concepts in Religion and American Political Behavior Why might a person's religiosity be related to their political views? Could political views lead to religiosity?	Putnam and Campbell, Chapter 11 Margolis 2018
Oct. 22 nd	Methodological Interview with Dr. Settle What is the difference between ideology and partisanship in the American context? How do political scientists typically measure the core concepts pertinent to the study of religion in American political behavior? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the research designs utilized by political scientists to study the relationship between religious and political attitudes or behavior?	<i>Controversies in Voting Behavior</i> , pg. 4-18 Kinder and Kalmoe 2017, Chapter 3 Newport, Saad and Moore 1997
Oct. 24 th	Culture War What is the culture war about, and who is fighting in it? Why are the stakes perceived to be so high in the war? Does a culture war even exist?	Methods readings on assignment handout Dionne and Cromartie 2006 Hunter 2006 Wolfe 2006
<u>MEASUREMENT ASSIGNMENT PART 1 DUE</u>		
Oct. 26 th	<i>Withdraw Deadline</i>	
Oct. 29 th	Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans (NO CLASS SESSION. WATCH RECORDED LECTURE) What are the Christian Right Thesis and Secular Backlash Thesis? Have the Republican and Democratic Parties been captured by the Christian Right and secularists, respectively? Does activism by the Christian Right cause a secular backlash?	Claassen 2015, pg. 1-35 Djupe et al. 2018
Oct. 31 st	The End of White Christian America Has America ever been a "Christian nation?" Why do white evangelicals overwhelmingly support President Trump? What motivates fears of cultural displacement	Selected readings from Robert P. Jones PRRI's "Beyond Economics"

	among white, working class Americans?	Report
Nov. 5 th	<p>Measuring the Culture War What are the challenges in measuring Americans' attitudes about the culture war? What do W&M students think about the "culture war"?</p> <p><u>MEASUREMENT ASSIGNMENT PART 2 DUE</u></p>	<p>Methods readings on assignment handout</p> <p>Data report from the 2016 and 2017 Omnibus Project data collection</p>
Nov. 7 th	<p>Cultural Markers of Political and Religious Views What are the various ways we conceptualize "polarization"? Which conceptualizations are most pertinent to the role of religion in political identity? How do we recognize the way that others' identities align?</p>	<p>Lelkes 2016</p> <p>Excerpt from Mason 2018</p> <p>Excerpt from Hetherington and Weiler 2018</p> <p>Excerpt from Settle and Carlson 2018</p>
Nov. 12 th	<p>Religious Signaling by Candidates How do politicians strategically use religious identity for political gain? What is the difference between implicit and explicit religious cues? Which is more effective and why? Would Americans ever elect an atheist as president?</p>	<p>Weber and Thornton 2012</p> <p>Addtl. Reading TBD</p>
Nov. 14 th	<p>Signaling of Identity on New Media How do we recognize other people's religious identities online? Are people intentionally or unintentionally signaling their identities on social media?</p>	<p>Settle 2018, Chapters 2,4,5</p>
Nov. 19 th	<p>Measuring Signaling and Inference</p> <p><u>MEASUREMENT ASSIGNMENT PART 3 DUE</u></p>	<p>Methods readings on assignment handout</p> <p>Data report from the 2016 and 2017 Omnibus Project data collection</p>
Nov. 21 st	<p>THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS</p>	
Nov. 26 th	<p><u>EXAM 2</u></p>	

IV. Conclusions

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
Nov. 28 th	Religious Fluidity and Tolerance Putnam and Campbell ask “How can American be both devout and diverse without fracturing along religious lines?” What are some answers?	Putnam and Campbell, Chapters 5, 14, 15
Dec. 3 rd	Racial Polarization What does this material on racial backlash add to our conversation about religious and political polarization? How should scholars address multiple and overlapping forms of polarization?	Listen to “The Wilderness, Chapter 5: The Backlash” and read Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The First White President”
Dec. 5 th	Conclusions, Reflections	
Dec. 14 th	5:00 p.m.: Deadline for final paper	