In this seminar, we will explore the polarization of American politics by class, race, religion, geography, education and lifestyle. This polarization has led to increased partisanship among voters and elected officials, gridlock and dysfunction in Washington and an erosion of political norms and social trust that poses a threat to American democracy. Through readings, class discussions and talks by experts and practitioners, we will explore how polarized American society and American politics have become and why—and how that has played out in political campaigns, in Congress and in the media. Throughout the semester, students will work in small groups in class, and outside of it, on one of five final projects of their choosing: (1) creating a set of TV ads for a hypothetical campaign; (2) running a series of focus groups with voters around Virginia; (3) doing an in-depth statistical analysis of a recent congressional race using voting data and poll results; (4) drafting a bipartisan legislative compromise on a seemingly unresolvable hot-button issue; or (5) redrawing the congressional districts in a heavily gerrymandered state. Students should expect to do significant reading of recent books, journal articles and journalistic analyses.

The course is open to juniors and seniors who have an interest in, and working familiarity with, recent events in American politics and government, whether they are government major or not.

Readings:


John Sides and Daniel J. Hopkins, eds, *Political Polarization in American Politics*, Bloomsbury Academic, paperback
Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement, How Politics Became Our Identity*, University of Chicago Press, paperback


Michael Tessler, *Post Racial or Most Racial, Race and Politics in the Obama Era*, University of Chicago Press, paperback


Available online


Pew Research Center, *Political Polarization and Media Habits, From Fox News to Facebook, How Liberals and Conservatives Keep Up With the Politics*, October, 2014