

David Peritz  
Urgent Issues, Extraordinary Politics  
Fromm USF  
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## **Is American Democracy in Peril? Polarization and Tribalism, The Decline of Civility, etc.**

- I. Overview of the Course
- II. Opening Thoughts on 2018: Our Historical Moment in Politics
  - A. The Decline of Serious Discourse: The American Public Sphere has Come to Resemble a Tabloid
  - B. Trump (for a moment)
    1. An Imploding Presidency
  - C. Hostile Takeover vs. the Restoration of Responsiveness
  - D. The Gravity of the Current Moment and the Imperative not to Binge on Trump
- III. Democratic Self-Repair and the Urgency of Restoring Public Agency over American Politics
  - A. The General Idea of Cycles of Democratic Complacency and Mobilization
  - B. Pendulum Swings vs. Death Spirals
  - C. Thesis 1: The Further into the Process of Democratic Decline, the More Difficult the Project of Democratic Self-Repair
  - D. Thesis 2: Democratic Self-Repair Requires Broad-Based Popular Mobilization Organized into Powerful Social Movements to Restore and/or Alter the Terms of Political Discourse and thereby the Rules of the Democratic Game
  - E. Thesis 3: Potential Trade-offs Between Expressing Outrage at Current Dysfunction and Building Kind of Broad-Based Mobilization Democratic Self-Repair Requires
  - F. Note: Especially True for U.S. in Light of Checks and Balances, Separation of Power, etc.
  - G. Concluding Thoughts: On the Urgency of the Issues we Face

- IV. Thoughts on the Nature and Extent of Polarization, the Decline of Democratic Discourse, and What We Can Do About It
  - A. Controversies in Understanding and Characterizing the Nature and Extent of Partisan Polarization
    - 1. Asymmetrical Polarization (Grossman and Hopkins; Hacker and Pierson)
    - 2. Identities More than Issues (Mason)
  - B. Evidence of the Recent Deterioration of Political Discourse
    - 1. Erosion of Partisan Elite's Democratic Norms (Levitsky & Ziblatt)
    - 2. Growth of Partisan Sorting, Negative Partisanship and their Consequences: Bias, Mobilization and Affect/Anger (Mason; Iyengar & Krupenkin)
    - 3. Rapid Growth in Social Intolerance and Anti-Democratic Attitudes (Miller & Davis)
    - 4. Resentment Against and Removal of Conversational *Constraints* as an Elite Construct that Marginalizes the Recently Disadvantaged (Legault, et. al.)
    - 5. Increased Attention to Core Questions of Civic Membership and Status (Edsall, Lieberman, et. al.)
  
- V. Why Are We so Polarized: Competing Theses
  - A. Growing Inequality, Declining Mobility, and Opportunity Hoarding (e.g. Bremmer, Reeves)
  - B. White Resentment of Declining Privilege and Power in an Emerging Multi-Racial Democracy
  - C. Other Contributory Factors
    - 1. Media Segmentation and Bias (Sunstein, Baker)
    - 2. Gerrymandering, Money in Politics, Decline of Party Strength & Discipline (Nivolo & Brady; Persily)
    - 3. The Crisis of Political Responsiveness
  
- VI. Where Cross-Cutting Discourse Occur, Between Whom, and Does it Matter? Diana Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*
  - A. How and When Does Cross-Cutting Discourse Work
  - B. Who Deliberates?
  - C. Where Deliberation Occurs

- VII. A Hypothesis about the Decline of Cross-Cutting Public Political Discourse in Informal Political Conversation
  - A. The Dynamic Tension Between the General and the Particular in the Way in which the Public is Imagined (Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Michael Warner)
  - B. Imagining the Addressee of Public Discourse as the General Other
  - C. Recent Efforts to Expand the 'We' of the American Public and their Consequences: A Fracturing of Newly Expanded Public into Two Fragile Contra-Publics
  
- VIII. Ideal Political Discourse: Reasonableness, a Deliberative Disposition, An Ethos of Generosity (J.S. Mill, John Rawls)
  - A. Mainly Unaddressed Problem: Using Discourse itself to Transform the Currently Unreasonable
  - B. Exemplars of Expanding the Public Imaginary: Gandhi, MLK, Mandela & the Legacy of Nonviolent Action (Barber, Jones)
  - C. The Difficult Work of Decentering without Marginalizing the Hitherto Dominant General Other of Public Discourse
  - D. Some Sympathy for the Fragility of those who Derive Self-Respect by Differentiating Themselves from Abject Others (Hegel, W.E.B. Dubois, DiAngelo)
  
- IX. Some Concluding Thoughts on the Relative Importance of Restoring Meaningful Discourse and the Dangers of Unilateral Disarmament
  - A. Against Reciprocal Incivility
  - B. Against Unilateral Disarmament
  - C. Building on Policy Convergence in a Climate of Partisan Antipathy: Dilemmas of Securing the Status of Equal Citizenship in a Climate of Polarization
  - D. Imagining and Projecting an Inclusive, Multi-racial, Non-Patriarchal, Post-conventional, Egalitarian Public

### Works referred to or drawn on:

- Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump* (Yale: 2018)
- C. Edwin Baker, *Media, Markets, and Democracy* (Cambridge: 2001)
- Michael J. Barber and Nolan McCarty, “Causes and Consequences of Polarization,” in Persily, ed.
- William Barber, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Social Justice Movement* (Beacon: 2016)
- Ian Bremmer, *Us vs. Them: The Failure of Globalism* (Penguin: 2018)
- Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon: 2018)
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- Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minnesota: 1989)
- Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins, *Asymmetrical Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (Oxford: 2016)
- Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT: 1989)
- Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (MIT: 1992)
- Iyengar, S. and Krupenkin, M. (2018), “The Strengthening of Partisan Affect,” *Political Psychology*, 39: 201-218. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12487>)
- Van Jones, *Beyond the Messy Truth: How We Came Apart, How We Come Together* (Ballantine: 2017)
- Robert C Lieberman, et. al., “Trumpism and American Democracy: History, Comparison, and the Predicament of Liberal Democracy in the United States,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, January 2017, ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323976592\\_Trumpism\\_and\\_American\\_Democracy\\_History\\_Comparison\\_and\\_the\\_Predicament\\_of\\_Liberal\\_Democracy\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323976592_Trumpism_and_American_Democracy_History_Comparison_and_the_Predicament_of_Liberal_Democracy_in_the_United_States))
- Lisa Legault, Jennifer N. Gutsell, and Michael Inzlicht, “Ironic Effects of Antiprejudice Messages: How Motivational Interventions Can Reduce (but Also Increase) Prejudice,” *Psychological Science* Vol 22, Issue 12, (December, 2011), pp. 1472 – 1477, (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611427918>)
- Steven Livitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*
- Lilianna Mason, “‘I Disrespectfully Agree’: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume 59, Issue 1, January 2015, pp. 128-145.
- Steven V. Miller, “Economic Threats or Societal Turmoil? Understanding Preferences for Authoritarian Political Systems,” *Polit Behav* (2017) 39: 457, (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-016-9363-7>)

- Steven Miller and Nicholas Davis, “White Outgroup Intolerance and Declining Support for American Democracy,” (unpublished) (<https://github.com/svmiller/woi/blob/master/woi.pdf>)
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- Cass Sunstein, *# Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: 2017)
- Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Zone Books: 2002)