SOSC 13300: Social Science Inquiry III

SPRING 2026

Time and Location	T/Th 9:30 - 10:50 AM, Rosenwald 432
Course Credit	100 units
Professor	Isaac Mehlhaff (imehlhaff@uchicago.edu)
Office Hours	T 2:00 - 4:00 PM, Pick 413 (calendly.com/imehlhaff/office)

Course Description and Objectives

In the final quarter of the Social Science Inquiry sequence, you have a chance to apply the research skills you have learned in the previous two quarters. In this section, we will work collaboratively to produce a single piece of research that contributes to the growing literature on affective polarization.

The course is modified from syllabi developed by Andy Eggers and Molly Offer-Westort, which in turn were built on a course created by Brendan Nyhan at Dartmouth College, which he has successfully run since 2014. Some previous iterations of this course have resulted in papers being reviewed at or published in political science journals. My goal is for this course to result in a collaborative research effort that allows everyone to develop concrete skills in research and teamwork, learn about the joys (and miseries) of the research process, and learn about the relationship (or lack thereof) between affective polarization and democratic attitudes.

Our substantive focus will be how affective polarization—the division of political society into mutually antagonistic partisan groups—affects attitudes toward democracy, such as preferences for democratic or autocratic regime characteristics, willingness to subvert democratic norms, or support for political violence. This is a topic of obvious relevance to contemporary politics in the United States and around the world, and a large, often contradictory, literature has contributed to this body of knowledge.

In the beginning of the course, we will briefly develop substantive knowledge about affective polarization, its relationship to other political attitudes, and how scholars assess those relationships through surveys and experiments. We will quickly pivot to focus on a set of recent survey-based social science papers on affective polarization and democratic attitudes that we might attempt to replicate and extend with our own study. We will discuss why "replication" (in the various senses of the word) is an important part of science, what makes a replication valuable in scientific discourse, and how researchers can best build on existing work. Meanwhile, we will review statistical concepts and skills, develop new skills in research design and survey administration, and choose a previously published paper to replicate and extend.

In teams, we will develop the components of a specific plan for our research, which we will test in a pilot study and formalize in a pre-analysis plan. We will also discuss the importance of pre-specifying hypotheses and procedures. We will then launch our study. Each student will contribute to writing up one component of the final study, and every student will write a version of the abstract, introduction, and discussion. I will piece together a single paper from everyone's contributions. Finally, each student will then offer a critique and reflection on the combined paper.

I will incorporate these critiques into another edit and, if the paper appears to offer a valuable contribution to our knowledge in this area, I will submit the paper to a journal such as *Journal of Experimental Political Science* for consideration. Students who are interested may choose to be part of the peer review process, but this is not required. If the paper is published in a peer-reviewed journal, all students will be listed as coauthors unless they specifically decline that opportunity.

This course should help you develop the ability to:

- Apply the tools you have learned so far in this sequence (data analysis, programming, research design, hypothesis testing)
- Use those tools and additional writing skills in producing a polished piece of research
- Design and conduct an original experiment and analyze the results
- Understand better the differences between observational and experimental research
- Discuss some important issues in climate change policy and politics

Prerequisites

Successful completion of SOSC 13200.

Computing and Software

Everyone will need access to a computer throughout the quarter. iPads, Chromebooks, and similar devices may not be sufficient for running code. For some class sessions we will do computing work in class, and for those you will need to have a machine with you. If you have any issues with access to a computer, please reach out to me and we will find a solution.

We will use the R computer programming language extensively this semester. R has many benefits over other statistical software packages:

- It is the primary tool for statistical computing in private-sector, government, and academic settings.
- It is open-source, which means it is free for anyone to use and contribute to, and users can always see how each function works.
- It is cross-platform, meaning you can run it on almost any operating system.
- It is more powerful and versatile than other software packages.

We will write and edit our R code using a user interface called RStudio. While R code can be written in any plain text editor, RStudio provides a number of useful features in a user-friendly environment.

You must have both R and RStudio installed on your computer when you show up for the first day of class. Follow the two-step process on this website to download R and RStudio: https://posit.co/download/rstudio-desktop/.

Assignments and Grading

Course grades will be based on the categories below. Reaction papers and reflections will be due at 11:59 PM on the due date listed in the course schedule. They should be 1-2 pages, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and 12-point font.

- **Participation (15%):** You are expected to attend class and contribute actively and respectfully to discussions. This includes not allowing yourself to be distracted by technology.
- **Problem sets (10%):** There will be two problem sets early in the quarter to improve your familiarity with Qualtrics and survey data analysis. Assignments will be graded on the degree to which your written responses and code are accurate and thorough.
- **Research proposal (15%):** Based on our discussions of research on affective polarization and your knowledge of best practices in research design, you will write a research proposal that proposes a research question, hypotheses, and an experimenal design. Your proposal will be graded on the degree to which your proposal is clear, well-argued, and feasible.
- **Pre-analysis plan component (15%):** Each group will contribute the appropriate elements to the pre-analysis plan. This grade component also considers the timely completion of any small tasks that will inevitably arise throughout the research process. Your group's grade will reflect the degree to which your writing and/or code is clear, accurate, and thorough.
- **Paper section write-up (15%):** Groups will contribute literature review, theory, methods, and results sections to the final paper. This grade component also considers how earnestly your group engages with peer-review feedback in your revisions. Your group's grade will reflect the degree to which your writing and/or code is clear, accurate, and thorough.
- **Peer review (15%):** Each student will individually provide peer-review comments on one or more sections of the paper draft. Reviews will be graded on the degree to which they are constructive, specific, and actionable.
- **Remainder of paper write-up (15%):** Each student will individually write a version of the abstract, introduction, and discussion sections. Your grade will reflect the degree to which your writing is clear, thorough, and fits with the body of the paper.

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the dates listed below. A final percentage grade x will translate into letter grades as follows:

- $93 \leq x \rightarrow$ A
- $90 \leq x < 93 \rightarrow$ A-
- $87 \leq x < 90 \rightarrow$ B+
- $83 \leq x < 87 \rightarrow$ B
- $80 \leq x < 83 \rightarrow$ B-
- $77 \leq x < 80 \rightarrow$ C+
- $73 \leq x < 77 \rightarrow$ C
- $70 \leq x < 73 \rightarrow$ C-
- $67 \leq x < 70 \rightarrow$ D+
- $60 \leq x < 67 \rightarrow$ D
- $x < 60 \rightarrow$ F

Course Summary

Week	Dates	Tuesday Class	Thursday Class	Due Dates
1	3/23 - 3/27	• Introduction • Affective polarization in the US	• Qualtrics for survey development	• Problem set 1 (F)
2	3/30 - 4/3	• Polarization affects democratic attitudes	• Polarization does not affect democratic attitudes	• Problem set 2 (F)
3	4/6 - 4/10	• Innovative experiments on democratic attitudes	• Mediators and moderators	• Research proposal (F)
4	4/13 - 4/17	• Discuss research plan • Allocate responsibilities	• Group work for pilot	
5	4/20 - 4/24	• Group work for pilot	• Pre-analysis plans • Group work for PAP	• Pilot ready to field (W)
6	4/27 - 5/1	• Group work for PAP	• Academic writing: theory, methods, results	• PAP component (W)
7	5/4 - 5/8	• CLASS OPTIONAL • Writing consult	• CLASS OPTIONAL • Writing consult	• Paper section first draft (F)
8	5/11 - 5/15	• Academic writing: abstract, introduction, discussion	• Group work for paper	• Peer review (W) • Paper section final draft (F)
9	5/18 - 5/22	• CLASS OPTIONAL • Writing consult	• NO CLASS	• Remainder of paper write-up (F)

Course Schedule

All readings and assignment details will be provided on the course Canvas site.

Week 1.1 (3/24): Introduction and Affective Polarization in the US

Readings

- Druckman, James N., Donald P. Green, and Shanto Iyengar. "Does Affective Polarization Contribute to Democratic Backsliding in America?" *The ANNALS of the American Academy*

of Political and Social Science 708, no. 1 (July 2023): 137-163.

- Iyengar, Shanto and Sean J. Westwood. "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (July 2015): 690-707.

Additional Resources

- Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129-146.
- Levendusky, Matthew S. "Americans, Not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?" *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (January 2018): 59-70.
- Parsons, Bryan M. "Social Networks and the Affective Impact of Political Disagreement." *Political Behavior* 32, no. 2 (June 2010): 181-204.
- Rogowski, Jon C. and Joseph L. Sutherland. "How Ideology Fuels Affective Polarization." *Political Behavior* 38, no. 2 (June 2016): 485-508.

Week 1.2 (3/26): Qualtrics for Survey Development

Readings

- Diaz, Gustavo, Christopher Grady, and James H. Kuklinski. "Survey Experiments and the Quest for Valid Interpretation." In *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, edited by Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, 1036-1052. London: SAGE Publications, 2024.
- Leeper, Thomas. "The First Mistake in Crafting Survey Experiments." March 27, 2018. https://thomasleeper.com/2018/03/survey-experiment-first-mistake/.
- Shineman, Victoria. "Methods for Using Surveys to Estimate Behavioral Effects." *The Experimental Political Scientist* 3, no. 2 (2012), 16-25.

Tasks

Before class, please initiate your Qualtrics account. Go to https://uchicago.qualtrics.com/. Click on "No I don't have an account." If necessary, log into the UChicago single sign-on system. You should be taken to Qualtrics XM (it should say "Welcome to XM" at the top). You're done! Please email me if this does not work for you.

Week 2.1 (3/31): Polarization Affects Democratic Attitudes

Readings

- Kingzette, Jon, James N. Druckman, Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, Matthew Levendusky, and John Barry Ryan. "How Affective Polarization Undermines Support for Democratic Norms." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 663-677.
- Voelkel, Jan G., Michael N. Stagnaro, James Y. Chu, et al. "Megastudy Testing 25 Treatments to Reduce Antidemocratic Attitudes and Partisan Animosity." *Science* 386 (October 2024): eadh4764.

Additional Resources

- Braley, Alia, Gabriel S. Lenz, Dhaval Adjodah, Hossein Rahnama, and Alex Pentland. "Why Voters who Value Democracy Participate in Democratic Backsliding." *Nature Human Behaviour* 7, no. 8 (May 2023): 1282-1293.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, Dietlind Stolle, and Olivier Bergeron-Boutin. "The Partisan Nature of Support for Democratic Backsliding: A Comparative Perspective." *European Journal of Political Research* 61, no. 4 (November 2022): 901-929.
- Graham, Matthew and Milan W. Svolik. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (May 2020): 392-409.
- Mernyk, Joseph S., Sophia L. Pink, James N. Druckman, and Robb Willer. "Correcting Inaccurate Metaperceptions Reduces Americans' Support for Partisan Violence." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 16 (April 2022): e2116851119.

Week 2.2 (4/2): Polarization Does Not Affect Democratic Attitudes

Readings

- Broockman, David E., Joshua L. Kalla, and Sean J. Westwood. "Does Affective Polarization Undermine Democratic Norms or Accountability? Maybe Not." *American Journal of Political Science* 67, no. 3 (July 2023): 808-828.
- Voelkel, Jan G., James Chu, Michael N. Stagnaro, Joseph S. Mernyk, Chrystal Redekopp, Sophia L. Pink, James N. Druckman, David G. Rand, and Robb Willer. "Interventions Reducing Affective Polarization Do Not Improve Anti-Democratic Attitudes." *Nature Human Behaviour* 7, no. 1 (January 2023): 55-64.

Additional Resources

- Frederiksen, Kristian Vrede Skaaning. "Do Partisanship and Policy Agreement Make Citizens Tolerate Undemocratic Behavior?" *The Journal of Politics* 86, no. 2 (April 2024): 766-781.

- Hanson, Kolby and Austin J. Knuppe. "Polarization Versus Professionalism: Military and Civilian Views on the Domestic Use of the Military." *Political Science Research and Methods* 13, no. 3 (July 2025): 645-662.

- Touchton, Michael, Casey Klofstad, and Joseph Uscinski. "Does Partisanship Promote Anti-Democratic Impulses? Evidence from a Survey Experiment." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties* 33, no. 2 (April 2023): 197-209.

Week 3.1 (4/7): Innovative Experiments on Democratic Attitudes

Readings

- Simonovits, Gabor, Jennifer McCoy, and Levente Littvay. "Democratic Hypocrisy and Out-Group Threat: Explaining Citizen Support for Democratic Erosion." *The Journal of Politics* 84, no. 3 (July 2022): 1806-1811.

- Yeung, Eddy S. F. "Dynamic Democratic Backsliding." *British Journal of Political Science* 55 (2025): e164.

Additional Resources

- Grossman, Guy, Dorothy Kronick, Matthew Levendusky, and Marc Meredith. "The Majoritarian Threat to Liberal Democracy." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 9 (2022): 36-45.

- Jacob, Marc S. "Citizens as a Democratic Safeguard? The Sequence of Sanctioning Elite Attacks on Democracy." *American Journal of Political Science* 69, no. 2 (April 2025): 455-470.

Week 3.2 (4/9): Mediators and Moderators

Readings

- Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.

  - Chapters 9 (skip sections 9.1, 9.2, and 9.5) and 10 (skip sections 10.2 and 10.3)

Tasks

In class, we will settle on a very broad research plan, on which you will expound in your own research design. For example, we will determine whether we want to treat polarization (broadly construed) as a dependent variable or our key explanatory variable, and how we want democratic attitudes to enter into the mix. To keep the research designs coherent, please stick to whatever broad contours we determine in class. Beyond that, be ambitious and creative!

Week 4.1 (4/14): Research Plan and Responsibilities

Tasks

You will be assigned to a team of four or five people at this stage, with responsibilities listed below. Each group is responsible for a component of our pre-analysis plan as well as the final paper. These responsibilities may change as the project progresses and our needs evolve.

- **Theory:** Create exhaustive spreadsheet of related papers explaining each paper's research design and contribution, write explanation of the motivation for the research with reference to previous literature, formulate precise theory and hypotheses
- **Survey Implementation:** Design experimental manipulation, all survey items (including precise wording), survey flow, and implementation; program the study in Qualtrics; write code to prepare raw data for analysis
- **Data Quality:** Decide on demographic questions for assessing representativeness compared to target population, gather marginal or joint distribution for target population on these measures, design attention and manipulation checks, conduct and present analysis on representativeness and data quality, (possibly) determine survey weights for making the sample representative
- **Data Analysis:** Decide on regression models for main effects and heterogeneous treatment effects, design and code tables and figures for all analyses, justify methodological decisions

Week 4.2 (4/16): Group Work for Pilot

Week 5.1 (4/21): Group Work for Pilot

Week 5.2 (4/23): Pre-Analysis Plans

Readings

- Chen, Lula and Chris Grady. "10 Things to Know About Pre-Analysis Plans." *Evidence in Governance and Politics*. https://egap.org/resource/10-things-to-know-about-pre-analysis-plans/.
- Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.
  - Section 13.1
- Open Science Collaboration. "Estimating the Reproducibility of Psychological Science." *Science* 349, no. 6251 (August 2015): aac4716.

Additional Resources

- Banerjee, Abhijit, Esther Duflo, Amy Finkelstein, Lawrence F. Katz, Benjamin A. Olken, and Anja Sautmann. "In Praise of Moderation: Suggestions for the Scope and Use of Pre-Analysis Plans for RCTs in Economics." *NBER Working Paper Series* no. 26993 (April 2020).
- Lin, Winston, Donald P. Green, and Alexander Coppock. "Standard Operating Procedures for Don Green's Lab at Columbia." Version 1.05 (June 7, 2016). https://alexandercoppock.com/Green-Lab-SOP/Green_Lab_SOP.html.
- PAP examples from previous classes:
  - Eggers 2025
  - Eggers 2024
  - Offer-Westort 2024
  - Eggers 2023

Tasks

We will complete the following exercise in groups during class:

Suppose I carry out an experiment in a sample of size n in which I randomized a binary treatment (say, a text passage in a survey). I record an outcome that I think the treatment might affect. Because I think the treatment effect might be moderated by personality, I also record each subject's zodiac sign (of which there are twelve).

I then do both of the following:

1. I regress the outcome on the treatment. I reject the null hypothesis of no effect if the p-value is less than 0.05.
2. I regress the outcome on treatment separately for each zodiac sign. For each zodiac sign, I reject the null hypothesis of no effect if the p-value is less than 0.05.

You happen to know that the treatment has no effect on the measured outcome for any individual.

Answer the following questions:

1. What is the probability that I will reject the null hypothesis in analysis (1)?
2. What is the probability that I will reject the null hypothesis for at least one zodiac sign in analysis (2)?
3. How do these probabilities depend on the sample size n?

Week 6.1 (4/28): Group Work for PAP

Week 6.2 (4/30): Academic Writing: Theory, Methods, Results

Readings

- Coppock, Alex. "Guidelines for Writing Up an Experiment." April 17, 2018.
- Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.
  - Chapter 13 (skip sections 13.1 and 13.2)

Additional Resources

- Antoan, Damian, Zikai Li, Andrew C. Eggers, et al. "Balanced Messaging about Solar Geoengineering does not Reduce Average Support for Emissions Reductions." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* (forthcoming).
- Chiancone, Olivia, Andrew C. Eggers, et al. "Good News about Good News? The Limited Impacts of Informing Americans about Recent Success in Climate Change Mitigation." *Research & Politics* 11, no. 2 (April 2024): 1-11.
- Chockalingam, Vignesh, Brendan Nyhan, et al. "The Limited Effects of Partisan and Consensus Messaging in Correcting Science Misperceptions." *Research & Politics* 8, no. 2 (April 2021): 1-9.

Week 7.1 (5/5): OPTIONAL Writing Consult

Week 7.2 (5/7): OPTIONAL Writing Consult

Week 8.1 (5/12): Academic Writing: Abstract, Introduction, Discussion

Readings

- Mensh, Brett and Konrad Kording. "Ten Simple Rules for Structuring Papers." *PLoS Computational Biology* 13, no. 9 (September 2017): e1005619.
- Review resources from Week 6.2

Week 8.2 (5/14): Group Work for Paper

Week 9.1 (5/19): OPTIONAL Writing Consult

Week 9.2 (5/21): NO CLASS

Communication

I am always happy to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or outside those hours if they do not work with your schedule. My office hours are generally first-come, first-served, and I encourage you to attend with classmates if you have similar questions. If you prefer a one-on-one meeting, the best option is to sign up for a time slot using the link at the top of this document. Learning is a collaborative endeavor, and we all bring unique backgrounds and experiences to the course material. Treat your classmates how you want to be treated.

Academic Integrity

Familiarize yourself with the university's policies on academic dishonesty and plagiarism: https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/. As always, you should give credit to others when you use their language, materials, or findings. There could be serious consequences for committing plagiarism, including failing the course and being asked to leave the university.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence (AI)—such as OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google's Gemini—is gradually reshaping human-computer interaction. These tools can be helpful for summarizing information, brainstorming ideas, and debugging code. However, all submitted work must be written in your own words (or your own code).

Attendance, Late Work, and Accommodations

Because this course is so fast-paced and our success as a group depends on each individual's timely contributions, I will not accept unexcused absences or late assignments. If you have a compelling reason why you can not attend class or complete an assignment on time, that reason must be communicated to me prior to the affected class period or due date.

Please reach out to me directly if you would like to request accommodations for the course to better facilitate your learning. Student Disability Services (disabilities.uchicago.edu) is also available to provide resources and support, and may provide approval for specific academic accommodations. Informing me in a timely manner will help me to ensure accommodations are met and I am able to implement an appropriate assessment of your learning.