

POSC-146, Spring 2017
Final Paper Essay Prompts

Below are four paper prompts for your final paper. You should be able to answer these questions in 8-10 double-spaced full pages, 12-point font, one-inch margins, not including references. You will likely have to use outside resources to gather arguments, evidence, and scholarship to make your case. Use as many or as few sources you need to make your case, but you will have a hard time making your argument with fewer than five sources. Sources coming from non-academic, Internet sites should be used sparingly, especially information coming from sources not sticking to mainstream journalistic standards of objectivity. In addition to clear and grammatically correct writing, successful papers will include a strong and clear thesis statement, evidence/arguments supporting that thesis statement, and a conclusion. The best papers will specifically address the prompt's question while applying appropriate background information useful in answering the question. Please do not plagiarize, you will be caught.

Pro Tip: Never start a paper, "Since the beginning of time..."

1. Selective Exposure: Arguments have been made that the echo chamber (partisan selective exposure) is a real phenomenon that is driving polarization in American politics. Others disagree (Arceneaux and Johnson; Bakshy, Messing, Adamic), arguing that most people do not live in an echo chamber. Based on a review of the literature, what do you think? Back up your arguments with evidence, data, and previous scholarship.

2. Non-Attitudes: Phil Converse, and later, John Zaller, found that most Americans are lacking in ideological constraint, consistent ideological thinking, and often make up their answers on the spot when confronted with a question regarding their political attitudes. Furthermore, later research has discovered that a large swath of Americans have low levels of political knowledge. But according to other scholars this is not necessarily a problem for the effective functioning of democracy. Why?

3. Media Fragmentation: What is a fragmented media system? Is it ruining politics? If yes, what are the best ways to resolve the current situation? If not, why not?

4. Political Knowledge: In 1940, the percentage of Americans (25 years or older, non-institutionalized) with a 4-year college degree or higher was less than 5 percent. Now, for the first time, that figure stands at just over 30 percent. In addition, shifts in media production virtually guarantee a huge range of options in which to gather information about politics and the world. However, over this time, the levels of political knowledge and understanding of many political issues have dropped, as Americans seem to know less about American politics. Given that we know level of education is one of the main predictors of political knowledge and political participation, how do we explain this paradox?

5. Recently, the presidential administration implemented what many are calling a "Muslim Ban". The initiative specifically targets people from seven predominantly Muslim countries. As a result, many protests began around the country at different airports. Knowing what you do about public opinion, is Trump likely to win in the court of public opinion, why or why not? If yes, who is shifting and why?

6. Although there have been many protests about the travel ban on people from certain countries, many people still support the ban. Why is this? Is this an unusual historical pattern? What are American's typical attitudes regarding civil liberties, especially regarding those from other countries and people of color?

7. Write an essay about the central role of race and ethnicity in the formulation of group attitudes about those groups and the formulation within those groups. Tie your own life and experiences to these attitude formations drawing on from things you have read, lived, and learned. Is there hope for a multicultural society or will there always be problems? How is California leading the way on this?