



# Middlebury

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Greetings, Alumni College Students!

Events this past year suggest we are a deeply divided nation. Insurrectionists storm the nation's Capitol, trying to overturn an election, while protestors seeking police reform burn down public buildings in major urban areas. Even seemingly nonpolitical issues, such as whether to wear a mask to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, become fodder for partisan warfare. These differences become magnified by media coverage that itself seems increasingly divided along partisan lines. We are, it appears, more *pluribus*, and less *unum*.

But do appearances deceive? To find out, this course looks more closely at what political scientists know (or think they know!) about political polarization in the United States. What do we mean by *polarization*? Who is polarized, and why? How unusual is the current state of affairs, and what can be done about it? I think you will find the answers surprising and, perhaps, reassuring too.

So that we might hit the ground running this fall, I would like you to purchase a copy of **Morris Fiorina's *Unstable Majorities***, which you can find in paperback online and at many bookstores. I encourage you to read the entire book, but at the very least please read chapters 1–6, and 8. Fiorina writes clearly, and although there are technical aspects to his argument, I think you will find it accessible. Once the class roster is finalized, I will send you some discussion questions by separate email to get you thinking about some of what you have read, but if you have questions in the interim, please do not hesitate to contact me. Email ([dickinso@middlebury.edu](mailto:dickinso@middlebury.edu)) is always the best way to reach me.

In the meantime, I hope you have a wonderful (and safe) summer, and I look forward to forging new acquaintances, and renewing old ones, this fall. Until then, stay well!

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