

Narratives and Polarization

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Course Outline:

In this lecture series, I will discuss two separate bodies of work. The first is experimental work that thinks of narratives as providing causal explanations of how the world works, such as "immigration causes locals to lose their jobs which in turn reduces their welfare". Here, we show that such narratives generally manipulate beliefs in predictable ways, with the caveat that they have to compete with peoples' priors about the causal relationships between variables. The second body of work pertains to political polarization in the US. Here, I will discuss a couple of papers that show parties play a critical role in driving ideological polarization and then turn to some more recent work which shows that in doing so, parties harm representation. Towards the end of the lectures, I will speculate on how these two bodies of work are related and suggest some potential directions for future research.

Lecture 1: Causal Narratives

Reading list: Causal Narratives, Charles and Kendall (2024):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QzG9l-5f9kP8T-fRWoF-AKmoSFJe5rOu/view?usp=sharing>

Narratives About the Macroeconomy, Andre et al

(2024): <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-2eP--vsV5pp2S8uV7jetnTLi8wBjx1d/view?usp=sharing>

Lectures 2 and 3: Political Parties and Polarization

Reading list: Unbundling Polarization, Canen et al

(2020): https://drive.google.com/file/d/18fcF6L_8j1FE8qXq4azHo6m-j3dTFQr/view?usp=sharing

Political Parties as Drivers of U.S. Polarization: 1927-2018

(2023): https://drive.google.com/file/d/10KlOjCm2uJn03t-R1BSnFHOPfzw_026T/view?usp=sharing

Political Parties and Representation, Kendall (2025): TBD