

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

SPEAKER SERIES

PhD Proposal Presentation

Political polarization and other stories: The limits of polarization narratives in Atlantic Canada and beyond

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Political polarization is widely cited in public discourse, but there is little evidence to support the belief that the general public is divided into distinct, opposing ideological camps. In search of empirical findings that might explain the common sentiment, researchers have looked to different facets of polarization (e.g., elite polarization, partisan sorting, affective polarization, filter bubbles, perceived polarization, and pernicious polarization, among others). This body of research has produced a complex, multifaceted but highly fragmented understanding of political polarization. Depending on its theorization and operationalization, research shows that polarization could be a persistent myth in need of busting or, perhaps, the most pressing threat to contemporary democracy.

While the findings of the many disaggregated approaches have brought academics closer to aligning conceptualizations of polarization with empirical reality, there is also a need for a clearer understanding of its role as an object of discourse, including its connections to alternative frames (e.g., the rise of authoritarianism, neo-fascism, or populism). There is much to be learned about polarization by studying its corresponding narratives. In doing so, I will consider the contexts from which they emerge and challenge the status of political polarization as a “master narrative” for understanding contemporary politics, highlighting its limitations and uncovering some of the realities it excludes or obfuscates. I draw on theory and empirical findings related to political polarization and its narratives in Atlantic Canada.

Friday, April 11th, 2025
McCain #1116 @2:30 p.m.
All Welcome!