

Politics and Culture from All Sides Fall 2026

Dates: Wednesdays, 9/16, 9/23, 9/30, 10/7, 10/14, 10/21, 10/28, 11/4, 11/18, 12/2, 12/9

Time: 12:00–1:15 PM

Facilitators: Professor [Eitan Hersh](#) and [Arik Burakovsky](#)

Location: Eaton Hall, Room 201

Course Description

Hosted by the [Center for Expanding Viewpoints in Higher Education](#) (CEVIHE), this weekly series explores politics and culture through close engagement with articles, book excerpts, legal texts, and public reports; conversations with faculty discussants and guest speakers; and rigorous discussion of sensitive political, economic, social, scientific, and cultural questions. Each week, participants will encounter sophisticated arguments associated with a range of ideological, religious, disciplinary, and cultural viewpoints. Lunch will be provided.

This series is offered as a one-credit reading group, but all students, faculty, and staff across Tufts University are welcome to attend regardless of official enrollment. Non-enrolled participants are encouraged to attend regularly.

Expectations

The series is designed for civil, rigorous discussion of controversial public affairs and policy questions. Participants should expect to encounter perspectives they may find objectionable and should engage those perspectives with seriousness, intellectual humility, and respect. The purpose is to understand arguments on their own terms, test their evidence and assumptions, and identify points of agreement and disagreement.

Students enrolled for credit must complete all assigned readings before each meeting and participate actively in the discussion. All other participants are strongly encouraged to do the same. Readings and updates will be available through Canvas; public readings are also linked below.

No meetings will be held on November 11 or November 25. Please [contact us](#) if you want to be added to the Canvas site or if you have any questions about the workshop.

Schedule

September 16: Abortion Pills and the Supreme Court

What legal standard should govern a state's request to suspend nationwide Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules that allow remote prescribing and mail distribution of mifepristone, a drug used in medication abortion, when the state argues that those rules interfere with enforcement of its abortion laws?

Reading: U.S. Supreme Court. [Danco Laboratories, LLC v. Louisiana](#) and [GenBioPro, Inc. v. Louisiana](#), Nos. 25A1207 and 25A1208. Order granting stays, with dissents, May 14, 2026.

Amy Howe. ["Supreme Court allows for access to abortion pill by mail for now."](#) SCOTUSblog, May 14, 2026.

Discussant: Professor [Liana Woskie](#), Department of Community Health

September 23: Measuring Mountain Grandeur

To what extent can the metric of "jut," which combines a mountain's rise above its surroundings with the steepness of that rise, capture perceived grandeur more meaningfully than elevation or topographic prominence without imposing false precision on an aesthetic judgment?

Reading: Gordy Megroz. ["Have We Been Measuring Mountains All Wrong?"](#) *National Geographic*, September 16, 2025.

Discussant: [Solly Coles](#), Norbert Wiener Fellow, Department of Mathematics

September 30: The Politics of Settler Colonialism

When does the concept of "settler colonialism" illuminate recurring patterns of settlement, displacement, exclusion, and political power across societies, and what historical distinctions must it preserve to avoid flattening fundamentally different cases?

Reading: Aziz Rana. ["Who's Afraid of 'Settler Colonialism'?"](#) *Dissent*, Fall 2025.

Discussant: Professor [Aziz Rana](#), Boston College Law School

October 7: Liberalism and the Literary Imagination

To what extent does liberalism need serious intellectual opposition to remain self-critical, and can literature provide the moral complexity and imaginative range that political argument alone cannot provide?

Reading: Lionel Trilling. [*The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*](#). London, UK: Secker & Warburg, 1951. Preface, pp. ix–xv.

Discussant: Professor [Ichiro Takayoshi](#), Department of English

October 14: Rebuilding Trust in Higher Education

Which reforms to mission, speech, affordability, admissions, teaching, and governance would most plausibly rebuild public trust in higher education while preserving academic freedom and universities' core scholarly purposes, and what tradeoffs would those reforms entail?

Reading: Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education. [*Report of the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education*](#). April 10, 2026. "Recommendations," pp. 23–32.

Discussant: Professor [Peter Levine](#), Lincoln Filene Professor of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life

October 21: The Dream of Settling Mars

Given the biological, psychological, political, and economic obstacles to permanent settlement on Mars, do its potential benefits for scientific discovery, species survival, commercial opportunity, or human expansion justify the resources and risks such a project would require?

Reading: Henry Wismayer. ["The Mars Delusion."](#) *Noema*, June 18, 2026.

Discussant: Professor [Danilo Marchesini](#), Department of Physics and Astronomy

October 28: LGBTQ Identity Across Generations

How should we explain the rapid rise in LGBTQ identification, especially among young women, while distinguishing among changes in underlying attraction or behavior, greater social acceptance, shifting identity categories, media exposure, and generational cohort effects?

Reading: Daniel A. Cox, Jae Grace, and Avery Shields. [“What’s Behind the Rapid Rise in LGBTQ Identity?”](#) Survey Center on American Life, March 6, 2025.

Discussant: Professor [Brian Schaffner](#), Newhouse Professor of Civic Studies, Department of Political Science

November 4: Reading the 2026 Midterms

What do the 2026 midterm election results reveal about American voter priorities, partisan coalitions, and control of national institutions? Which interpretations are justified the day after an election, and which should remain provisional until turnout and geographic patterns are clearer?

No advance reading. Selected results and analysis will be posted on Canvas after Election Day.

Discussant: Professor [Meredith McLain](#), Department of Political Science

November 18: Why Have Children?

What ethical and practical considerations should carry the greatest weight in deciding whether to have children, and how can society discuss that choice without converting a deeply personal decision into a demographic or political obligation?

Reading: Anastasia Berg, Brian Dijkema, and Rachel Wiseman. [“Why Have Children?”](#) *Comment*, June 5, 2025.

Discussant: Professor [Eitan Hersh](#), Department of Political Science

December 2: Conservatism and Political Weirdness

When does transgressive or deliberately provocative politics help conservatism challenge complacent institutions, and when does it undermine the prudence and attachment to ordinary goods that conservatism seeks to preserve?

Reading: R.J. Snell. [“Beware the Cul-De-Sac of Weirdness.”](#) *Public Discourse*, March 16, 2026.

Discussant: Professor [Patrick Forber](#), Department of Philosophy

December 9: AI and Human Dignity

How should commitments to human dignity, freedom, embodiment, work, education, and human relationships guide decisions about when artificial intelligence should augment human judgment and when human beings should retain meaningful control?

Reading: Pope Leo XIV. [Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence](#). Encyclical letter, May 15, 2026. Paragraphs 97–100, 112–130, and 143–150.

Discussant: President [Sunil Kumar](#), Tufts University