

American Political Parties (POLS 3025)
Barnard College
Fall 2018

Last revised: September 4, 2018

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Class time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:40-3:55

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Political parties have evoked widespread scorn in the U.S. since the founding era; and yet, they arose almost immediately and have endured for over two centuries. In this course, we will engage scholarly and popular debates about what exactly parties are, why the founders wished to avoid them, why they formed anyway, and why they have survived even though few people seem to like them. We will also examine how and why they have changed over time as organizations, in the electorate, and in government. Topics will include the presidential nomination process from the founding through the much-discussed 2016 election season, the life cycle of third parties, and the role of party leaders in Congress. Students will learn what is and is not unique about the current historical moment, and how history might shape our expectations of parties moving forward.

Throughout the course, we will pay particularly close attention to the roots of contemporary party polarization and the implications of this phenomenon for representation and governance. In 1950, the American Political Science Association released a report criticizing the two major parties for excessive similarity; today, many people find party polarization troubling. Is there an ideal level of party difference? How much is too much? We will address these difficult questions, among others, in this broad survey of American political parties.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Lectures, readings and assignments are geared toward helping students achieve the following objectives:

1. Think critically about what political parties are, what purposes they serve, and the extent to which they have been (and can be) effective vehicles of representation for the public.
2. Learn how scholars have measured polarization at the mass and elite levels, understand why there is disagreement about the extent to which polarization has occurred among the public, and evaluate different theories about the origins of this trend and its consequences for democracy.
3. Analyze contemporary American politics in light of the academic literature on political parties, and vice versa.
4. Learn how to analyze important sources of data on American political parties and use them to support a clear, concise, and persuasive argument.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your final grade will have four components: class participation, a midterm exam, a final exam, and a research paper.

Final grade breakdown:

Class participation	10%
Midterm	25%
Paper	30%
Final exam	35%

Class Participation

While this is largely a lecture-based class, it will also include discussions and group activities. Your contributions in class will account for 10% of your final grade. Since you cannot contribute if you are not present, frequent absence will affect your grade. Students will be evaluated not only on the number of contributions to discussions and group activities, but also the depth of their engagement with class materials. To receive an A, students need to participate in a way that shows they have completed and thought about the readings.

Students may also participate through electronic discussions on Courseworks. Students may continue discussions from class in this forum, talk about how current events relate to course themes, etc. Students are encouraged to keep an eye out for news articles relevant to the course and post them to the discussion board along with a few thoughts on their relationship to course themes. Participation in these discussion boards is not required—that is, students can receive an A for participation simply by contributing to discussions in class. But, students will also

receive credit toward their participation grade for engaging in these online forums in a way that demonstrates critical thinking about the readings and lecture materials.

Cell phones must be silenced and placed out of sight (e.g, in a bag) during class. Students are encouraged to limit their use of laptops in class. Research shows that electronic note taking significantly reduces students' grades. There is also a "secondhand smoke" effect. That is, your laptop can distract others sitting nearby, particularly if you are using it for anything other than note taking. Repeated use of electronic devices in a manner that is distracting to others (including the instructor) will affect your participation grade.

Exams

There will be a midterm exam, worth 25% of your final grade, administered in class on Tuesday, October 16th. We will hold a review session in class on Thursday, October 11th. We will hold a final exam review session during our last class meeting on Thursday, December 6th. The final exam, worth 35% of your final grade, will be administered during the exam period. The final will be cumulative, but will emphasize material covered after the midterm.

Students must take each exam at the scheduled time. Make up exams are not available except in cases of significant illness, family emergency, or religious observance. Students are encouraged to check their calendars at the beginning of the semester to make sure they have no conflicts with the scheduled exams.

Accommodations will be given to students with disabilities in accordance with university policy. Please contact me at least 72 hours before the exam so we may plan accordingly.

Paper

Each student will be required to write an 8-10 page paper assessing parties' rhetoric and behavior on a particular issue over time with respect to the notion of "responsible party government" (RPG). (We will discuss this concept together in detail.) More specifically, your paper will need to address three sets of questions:

- (1) To what extent have the parties staked out clear, alternative positions on this issue since the mid-twentieth century in the manner advocated by RPG theory? To answer this question, you will need to examine party platforms and State of the Union speeches, as the president is typically viewed as the leader of his/her party. As we will discuss in class, data from the Comparative Agendas Project will streamline this process.
- (2) To what extent have the parties followed through on these positions in the manner preferred by RPG theorists? You will use data on congressional

behavior from the Comparative Agendas Project to answer this question as well.

- (3) Do you think the parties should subscribe more to RPG theory on this issue? Less? Why?

We will discuss this project in more detail in the first few weeks of class. The project will require students to examine qualitative and quantitative data. Please note, however, that *no prior background in statistics is assumed*. We will explore relevant data sets together in class. Students will learn how to manage and examine data—an increasingly important skill in the field of political science and beyond—but no complex statistical analysis will be required.

This paper is due on the last day of class, December 6th. Please bring a hard copy to class. Late papers will receive a penalty of 3 points per day (including weekend days). If you submit a late paper, you must email it to me and leave a hard copy in my mailbox in the political science department. Late papers will not be considered submitted until they arrive in my email inbox.

COURSE TEXTS

The books listed below have been ordered through the bookstore and placed on reserve at the library.

- Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel and John Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Grossman, Matthew and David A. Hopkins. 2016. *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, Frances. 2016. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Masket, Seth. 2016. *The Inevitable Party: Why Attempts to Kill the Party System Fail and How they Weaken Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

All other materials will be available through Courseworks. In addition to these assigned readings, students are also expected to keep up with current events related to American political parties through high quality news outlets (e.g., *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, etc.) and research-oriented political blogs like *The Monkey Cage* and *Mischiefs of Faction*.

COURSE OUTLINE

Note: This course outline is subject to adjustment. Any changes in readings will be announced at least one week in advance. The books required for purchase will not change.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Week 1

Tues 9/4: Introduction to the course

Thurs 9/6: Early thinking on the dangers and virtues of parties; what are parties?

- Assigned reading
 - Hofstadter, Richard. *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 1.
 - Schattschneider, E.E. 1942. *Party Government*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. Chapters 1 and 3.

Week 2

Tues 9/11: Overview of the two-party system; brief history of major parties.

PART II: PARTIES AS ORGANIZATIONS

Thurs 9/13: Intro to parties as organizations; party machines

- Assigned reading/viewing
 - Clark, Peter B. and James Q. Wilson. 1961. "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6(2): 129-166.
 - Watch PBS Documentary about Richard Daley and the Chicago machine entitled *Daley: The Last Boss*:
<https://mediaburn.org/video/daley-last-boss/>

Week 3

Tues 9/18: Party machines in the contemporary era?

- Assigned reading
 - Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. 2016. "American Employers as Political Machines." *Journal of Politics* 79(1).
 - Smith, Jeffrey. "'Walking-Around Money': How Machine Politics Works in America Today." *The Atlantic*, June 12, 2013.

Thurs 9/20: Revisiting the definition of parties; Progressive reforms

- Cohen et al., *The Party Decides*, Chapter 2.

Week 4

Tues 9/25: Progressive reforms (cont.); “Responsible Party Government”

- Assigned reading
 - Toward a More Responsible Two Party System,” *American Political Science Review*, September 1950. Selection TBD.

Thurs 9/27: Data on parties for research papers; national party organizations.

Week 5

Tues 10/2: National party organizations (cont.)

- Heersink, Boris and Jeffrey A. Jenkins. “Who can get Trump to tone it down? Reince Priebus is trying.” *The Monkey Cage*, July 13, 2015.

Thurs 10/4: Party nominations

- Assigned reading
 - Cohen et al., *The Party Decides*, Chapters 6-9 (just chapters, not appendices).
 - Noel, Hans. “Why Can’t the G.O.P. Stop Trump?” *New York Times* Op-Ed. March 1, 2016.
 - Kurtzleben, Danielle. “Celebrities, Lies and Outsiders: How This Election Surprised One Political Scientist.” *NPR*, June 21, 2016.

Week 6

Tues 10/9: Party nominations; revisiting notion of party reform.

- Assigned reading
 - Masket, Seth. 2016. *The Inevitable Party: Why Attempts to Kill the Party System Fail and How they Weaken Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1, 4-5, and 7.

Thurs 10/11: Revisiting the topic of inclusiveness and deliberation in class and on campus; midterm review.

Week 7

Tues 10/16: Midterm exam

PART III: PARTIES IN THE ELECTORATE

Thurs 10/18: Party identification primer

Week 8

Tues 10/23: Party identification (cont.); party coalitions.

- Assigned reading
 - Grossman, Matthew and David A. Hopkins. 2016. *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1-3.

Thurs 10/25: Party coalitions (cont.).

Week 9

Tues 10/30: Party coalitions (cont.).

Thurs: 11/1: Group representation in the two-party system; partisan dynamics of elections.

- Assigned reading
 - Frymer, Paul. 1999. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1, 4 and 7.

Week 10

Tues 11/6: No class (election holiday)

Thurs 11/8: Post-election debrief; mass polarization

- Assigned reading
 - *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics*, Chapter 2 (essay by Fiorina and Levendusky, responses by Abramowitz and Jacobson, rejoinders by Fiorina and Levendusky and Abramowitz) [book available electronically through library].

Week 11

Tues 11/13: Mass polarization

PART IV: PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

Thurs 11/15: Parties in Congress

- Assigned reading:
 - Grossman and Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics*. Chapter 6.
 - Cox, Gary and Mathew McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Week 12

Tues 11/20: Parties in Congress

- Lee, Frances. 2016. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 3-4, 6-7.

Thurs 11/22: No class (Thanksgiving)

Week 13

Tues 11/27: Parties in Congress and the executive branch

Thurs 11/29: Elite polarization

- Assigned reading
 - TBD

Week 14

Tues 12/4: Elite polarization (cont.)

- Assigned reading
 - TBD

Thurs 12/6: Wrap-up; revisiting the topic of inclusiveness and deliberation in class and on campus.

- Paper due.