

**American Political Parties**  
Barnard College  
Spring 2018

Last revised: January 15, 2017

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**Class location:** LL104 Diana Center  
**Class time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:40-3:55

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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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 relationship between political parties and interest groups. 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**

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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**

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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 exam        | 25% |
| Paper               | 30% |
| Final exam          | 35% |

#### **Class Participation**

While this is largely a lecture-based class, it will also include discussions. 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 discussion, 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, March 6<sup>th</sup>. We will hold a review session in class on Thursday, March 1<sup>st</sup>. We will hold a final exam review session during our last class meeting on Thursday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. 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**

Students will analyze the history of a particular issue area (e.g., higher education) in relation to the party system since end of World War II, drawing primarily on data from the Comparative Agendas Project (<http://www.comparativeagendas.net/>). This will culminate in a 10-12 page paper (12 point font, double spaced, with margins no larger than 1.25 inches). The purpose of this assignment is to learn how parties have viewed and managed particular issues at the elite and mass levels over time.

This 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.

## Paper components

Each paper will have four components, described below.

1. *Parties in the electorate.* How have parties in the electorate viewed this issue over time? Do we see a difference between Democrats and Republicans at the mass level? Use survey data (gathered from *ipoll*) to examine these questions. If there are different questions relating to the issue, consider whether question wording and/or issue framing seems to influence support by members of each party.

2. *Parties as organizations.* How have the parties as organizations handled this issue area over time? To what extent have they addressed these issues in their platforms? How similar are their positions? Have they changed over time? Data on platforms are available through the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) ([http://www.comparativeagendas.net/datasets\\_codebooks](http://www.comparativeagendas.net/datasets_codebooks)). Platforms are available through the American Presidency Project in full text form (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>).

3. *Parties in government.* How have parties in Congress voted on this issue (e.g., how internally unified and externally differentiated were the parties)? Has there been change over time? For this, you will need a special dataset (based on a CAP votes dataset) that I will provide.

4. *Overall.* How would you characterize the way in which the parties have viewed and managed this particular issue at the elite and mass levels over time? To what extent do we see polarization? On the whole, how well do the elite parties reflect the mass parties on this issue? Do we see polarization at one level and not the other? If relevant, consider the timing of polarization. That is, if elites and masses polarized on this issue over time, did one seem to lead the other? Discuss any other ways in which course materials may help us understand the patterns you see, and any ways in which your analysis challenges course materials.

## Deadlines

There are two deadlines for this project:

- Proposal - due 2/15
- Paper - due 4/26

*Proposal.* February 15<sup>th</sup> is the proposal deadline. The proposal should be 1-2 pages (12 point font, double spaced, with margins no larger than 1.25 inches). It is not graded formally, but failure to submit it in a timely manner will result in a 2-point deduction from the final paper grade. Your proposal should identify the issue you will examine in your paper, and provide a summary of data availability on this issue. You should address the following questions:

- Which topic/subtopic in the CAP master topics codebook will you be examining?
- How many survey questions are available on this subject through *ipoll*?
- How many Congressional votes were held on this issue?
- How many quasi-sentences about this issue appeared in party platforms?

## **COURSE TEXTS**

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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.
- Karol, David. 2009. *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*. Cambridge: Cambridge 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**

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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 1/16: Introduction to the course.**

### **Thurs 1/18: Early thinking on the dangers of parties.**

- Assigned reading
  - James Madison, Federalist 10 and 51
  - George Washington, Farewell Address
  - 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.

## **Week 2**

### **Tues 1/23: What are parties and what purpose do they serve?**

- Assigned reading
  - Aldrich, John. 2011. *Why Parties?: A Second Look*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1.
  - Schattschneider, E.E. 1942. *Party Government*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. Chapters 1-3.
  - 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. Chapters 1-2.

### **Thurs 1/25: The two-party system.**

- Assigned reading
  - Skuldt, Amanda. "Could a third-party candidate win the U.S. presidency? That's very unlikely." *The Monkey Cage*. August 2, 2016.
  - Hindman, Matthew Dean and Bernard Tamas. "The U.S. has more third-party candidates than it's seen in a century. Why?" *The Monkey Cage*. August 31, 2016.

## **PART II: PARTIES AS ORGANIZATIONS**

## **Week 3**

**Tues 1/30: Overview of data on parties (Group 1, last name A-J); party machines in their heyday, incentive systems (Group 2, last name K-Z).** Group 1 will meet in the Empirical Reasoning Center's computer lab, located inside the library in Barnard Hall, for an overview of data on parties. Group 2 will meet in our regular classroom to watch a selection from a documentary on Richard Daley and Chicago's political machine ("Daley: The Last Boss") and discuss it along with the readings for the week.

- Assigned reading:
  - Clark, Peter B. and James Q. Wilson. 1961. "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6(2): 129-166.
  - Baker, Kevin. "The Case for Bringing Back the Political Machines." *The New Republic*, August 17, 2016.

- Practice skills learned in the lab, explore data, and work on paper proposal.

**Thurs 2/1: Overview of data on parties (Group 2, last name K-Z); party machines in their heyday; incentive systems (Group 1, last name A-J).** Group 2 will meet in the Empirical Reasoning Center's computer lab, located inside the library in Barnard Hall, for an overview of data on parties. Group 1 will meet in our regular classroom to watch a selection from a documentary on Richard Daley and Chicago's political machine ("Daley: The Last Boss") and discuss it along with the readings for the week.

#### Week 4

**Tues 2/6: Overview of data on parties, cont. (Group 1, last name A-J); party machines today? (Group 2, last name K-Z).** Group 1 will meet in the Empirical Reasoning Center's computer lab, located inside the library in Barnard Hall, for an overview of data on parties. Group 2 will meet in our regular classroom to watch a selection from a documentary ("Street Fight") on Cory Booker's challenge to Sharpe James and the Newark, NJ Democratic machine (as some have characterized it) in the city's 2002 mayoral election, and discuss it along with the readings for the week.

- Assigned reading
  - Smith, Jeffrey. "'Walking-Around Money': How Machine Politics Works in America Today." *The Atlantic*, June 12, 2013.
  - Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. 2016. "American Employers as Political Machines." *Journal of Politics* 79(1).
  - Practice skills learned in the lab, explore data, and work on paper proposal.

**Thurs 2/8: Overview of data on parties, cont. (Group 2, last name K-Z); party machines today? (Group 1, last name A-J).** Group 2 will meet in the Empirical Reasoning Center's computer lab, located inside the library in Barnard Hall, for an overview of data on parties. Group 1 will meet in our regular classroom to watch a selection from a documentary ("Street Fight") on Cory Booker's challenge to Sharpe James and the Newark, NJ Democratic machine (as some have characterized it) in the city's 2002 mayoral election, and discuss it along with the readings for the week.

#### Week 5

**Tues 2/13: State and local parties, and attempts to reform them.**

- 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. Chapter 1, 4-5, 7-8.

**Thurs 2/15: National party organizations.**

- PAPER PROPOSALS DUE.
- Assigned reading
  - Heersink, Boris and Jeffrey A. Jenkins. "Who can get Trump to tone it down? Reince Priebus is trying." *The Monkey Cage*, July 13, 2015.

**Week 6**

**Tues 2/20: National party organizations, cont.; 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.

**Thurs 2/22: Party nominations, cont.**

- Assigned reading
  - Hershey, Marjorie. 2017. *Party Politics in America*. New York: Routledge. Chapter 9.

**PART III: PARTIES IN THE ELECTORATE**

**Week 7**

**Tues 2/27: Parties and interest groups.**

- Assigned reading
  - Frymer, Paul. 1999. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.
  - Schlozman, Daniel. 2015. *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-2.
  - Skocpol, Theda and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. 2016. "The Koch Network and Republican Party Extremism." *Perspectives on Politics* 14(3): 681-699.

**Thurs 3/1: Midterm review**

**Week 8**

**Tues 3/6: Midterm**



**Thurs 3/8: Party identification; issues, coalitions, realignments and party systems.**

- 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.
  - Hershey, *Party Politics in America*. Chapter 7.

**Week 9**

No class (spring break).

**Week 10**

**Tues 3/20: Issues, coalitions, realignments, and party systems, cont.**

- Assigned reading
  - Karol, David. 2009. *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, Chapters 2-5.
  - Masket, Seth. "Was the 2016 election actually a political realignment?" *Mischief of Faction*, October 24, 2017.

**Thurs 3/22: Issues, coalitions, realignments, and party systems, cont.**

**Week 11**

**Tues 3/27: 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].
  - *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics*, Chapter 5 (essay by Diana C. Mutz, comments by Thomas Rosenstiel) [book available electronically through library].

**Thurs 3/29: Mass polarization, cont.**

## **PART IV: PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT**

### **Week 12**

#### **Tues 4/3: Parties in Congress.**

- Assigned reading
  - 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.
  - Grossman and Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics*. Chapter 6.

#### **Thurs 4/5: No class (MPSA)**

### **Week 13**

#### **Tues 4/10: Parties in Congress, cont.; parties in the executive branch.**

#### **Thurs 4/12: Party competition and governance; revisiting responsible party government.**

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

### **Week 14**

#### **Tues 4/17: Elite polarization**

- Assigned reading
  - McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal. 2008. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Chapters 1-2 [book available electronically through library].

#### **Thurs 4/19: Elite polarization, cont.**

- Assigned reading
  - *Red and Blue Nation? Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics*. Chapter 5 (Essay by Brady, Ferejohn and Harbridge, Comments by Campbell and Patashnik) [book available electronically through library].

### **Week 15**

#### **Tues 4/24: Partisan dynamics of elections; what we might expect in 2018; where do we go from here?**

- Assigned reading: TBD

#### **Thurs 4/26: Final exam review**

- PAPERS DUE.