

**American Political Parties**  
**Political Science 8219**  
**Fall 2014**

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Class: Wednesdays 6:10-8 pm  
Office hours: Friday mornings  
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**Seminar Description**

This seminar examines American political parties theoretically and empirically. The course is targeted for graduate students intending to take the department's comprehensive PhD exam in American politics. Thus, our goals for the semester are both to gain an understanding of the origins and consequences of American parties and to scrutinize political science approaches to the study of political parties. By the end of the course, you should have a basic understanding of the important classic works on parties and party systems, as well as a strong grasp of recent theoretical and empirical advances and debates in the study of parties. The kinds of questions we will address include, "Why do parties form?" "When, how, and for who might parties 'matter'?" and "How, if at all, are parties related to the workings of democracy?" We will take a brief look at comparative approaches to political parties, but our primary empirical focus will be on political parties in the United States.

We will start with a brief look at some of the fundamental questions raised about the study of parties in recent decades, and then move on to the central theoretical question of why parties form. Next, we will look at party systems from both comparative and historical perspectives. We then tackle the basic "triad" of American parties: parties in the electorate and elections, parties as organization, and parties in government. We will conclude with a look at recent work on parties and polarization.

**Learning Objectives**

- Prepare for PSC department comprehensive exam (PhD or Masters) in American politics
- Understand and evaluate classic works on parties and party systems
- Understand and evaluate competing theories of political parties
- Understand and evaluate empirical studies of political parties

**Requirements**

All requirements must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course. Your final grade will be determined as follows: seminar participation (25%), a research design (25%) and a take-home final exam (50%). If anyone wishes to write a longer piece of original research (in lieu of the research design and final exam), please come speak with me early in the semester. This would be an article-length paper (roughly 15-20 pages) suitable for presentation at a professional conference (i.e. it would include a theoretical framework, appropriate methodological design, and empirical analysis/tests). I would be happy to work with any of you on such a project, so long as we agree on a workable project early in the semester.

**Seminar participation.** Your primary assignment is to complete the readings and to participate effectively in seminar discussions each week. To bolster the quality of our weekly discussion, you are

asked to undertake two tasks. First, for two of the seminar meetings, you are required to submit a list of questions and/or discussion topics by 3 pm on Wednesday. These questions/topics should reflect a critical reading of the week's assigned readings. Second, for one seminar meeting, you will present an article or set of articles from the assigned readings. These presentations (roughly 5 minutes) should:

- Describe the main *themes* of the reading
- Explain what its *contributions* are to our understanding of legislative politics
- Provide *criticisms* of the study (e.g., theoretical argument, hypotheses, evidence, analysis, etc.)
- Raise *questions* about specific theoretical or empirical issues that you did not understand

Readings for presentation are marked by an asterisk (\*) below.

**Research design.** This will be a paper (roughly 10-15 pages) that focuses on a research question of your choice related to the study of political parties. A research design is a project you *would* complete if you had the time and resources. Students will *not* be expected to actually complete the research for their project, but a research design is a good way to begin thinking about potential paper or dissertation projects. The paper will survey the state of the literature on the research question, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of existing work, and identify an interesting research question that is either new, has not yet been well addressed or generalized sufficiently. Finally, you are asked to sketch a methodology for how one might go about addressing the research question. We will use our **October 15<sup>th</sup>** seminar meeting for you to present your proposed topics/research questions. A short (3-5 page) paper outlining your topic/question will be due in class on **October 22<sup>nd</sup>**. The paper will be due **Friday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**. This is an excellent opportunity for you to explore any of the many literatures on parties or electoral politics that we are not able to cover in the course of a single semester.

**Final exam.** The final exam will be a take-home two-hour exam. You will have a choice of questions and the questions will be similar to the types of questions that appear on the American politics comprehensive exam. Thus, preparing for and taking the final exam will be good practice for those of you intending to take the department's comprehensive exam in American politics. **Date TBA.**

### Required texts

All of the texts for this course are available in the GW Bookstore in the basement of the Marvin Center. In addition to these texts, there are articles that are available on JSTOR, Blackboard, or made available for you to photocopy each week. Be sure you have a functioning Blackboard account.

John Aldrich, *Why Parties? A Second Look* (2011)

Marty Cohen, et. al., *The Party Decides* (2008)

Nolan McCarty, et. al., *Polarized America* (2006, 2008)

### Recommended text

Leon Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (1986).

I've listed this book as recommended. Although you will find it dated empirically, the book provides a comprehensive exploration of critical questions in the study of American parties. I like the big broad overview it provides of the development of American parties. I would encourage you to skim through any relevant chapters over the course of the semester (or any chapters that interest you) as a supplement to the required readings.

## Academic integrity

I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>. If you are found to have cheated on any assignment, the likely minimum punishment is a failing grade for that assignment. The case may also be referred to the Academic Integrity Council at the instructor’s discretion, depending on the severity of the offense. If you have questions about what constitutes proper use of published or unpublished sources, please ask me!

## Student support

Disability Support Services (DSS): Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at (202) 994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

University Counseling Center (UCC): The UCC offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students’ personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations and confidential assessment, counseling services, and referrals. See <http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>. Or call (202) 994-5300.

## Course outline

### September 3                      What are parties and why study them?

Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, Chapters 1 and 2 (BB)

Cohen, et. al., *The Parties Decide*, Chapters 1 and 2

Schattschneider, *Party Government*, pp. 1-11, 65-98 (BB)

King, "Political Parties in Western Democracies," *Polity* (Winter 1969) pp. 111-141.

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapters 1 and 9

\*Joseph Schlesinger, “The New American Political Party,” *APSR* (Dec. 1985).

Fiorina, “Parties and Partisanship: A Forty-Year Retrospective.” *Political Behavior* June 2002 (BB/skim)

Fiorina, “Parties as Problem Solvers” in *Promoting the General Welfare* (BB/skim)

"Towards a More Responsible Two Party System," *APSR* (Sept 1950) (Classic piece—at least skim it)

### September 10                      Why parties?

\*Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 2-5

\*Cohen, *The Party Decides*, Chapter 3

Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, pp. 1-9, 49-54, 64-169 (BB)

Laver and Shepsle, “How Political Parties Emerged from the Primeval Slime: Party Cohesion, Party Discipline, and the Formation of Governments.” In Bowler et. al., eds., *Party Discipline* (BB)

**September 17                    Party systems (comparative)**

Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chapter 7 (BB)

\*Duverger, *Political Parties*, pp. 206-255 (BB)

Lipset and Rokkan, "Cleavage Structure, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments," in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (BB)

\*Cox, *Making Votes Count*, chapters 1, 2, 4 (pp. 69-80) (BB)

**September 24                    Party systems (American)**

\*Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections," *JOP* (February 1955)

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 8

Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments* (2004), Chapters 2-3 (BB)

\*Noel, "The Coalition Merchants," *JOP* (January 2012)

Carmines and Stimson, *Issue Evolution* (1990), Chapter 1 (BB)

**October 1                         Parties in the electorate**

Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, *The American Voter*, Chapter 6-7 (BB)

Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, Chapter 5 (BB)

\*Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally," *Political Behavior* (2002).

\*Green and Palmquist, "Of Artifacts and Partisan Instability," *AJPS* (August 1990)

\*Iyengar et al "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *POQ* (2012)

\*Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996" *AJPS* (January 2000)

**October 8                         Party as organization (1)**

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 6

\*Bawn et. al. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* (September 2012)

Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, pp. 15-8, pp 298-311 (BB)

\*Cohen et al., *The Party Decides*, Chapters 1, 4, 5

**October 15                        Paper discussions**

Come prepared to make a brief presentation on your proposed topic/research question for your research design. What question will you investigate? Why is it important/relevant/interesting?

**October 22                        Party as organization (2)**

Short 3-5 page outline of your paper is due: What is your research question and why is it important?

\*Cohen, *The Party Decides*, Chapters 6-10

\*LaRaja et al. "The Fates of Challengers in US House Elections," *AJPS* (forthcoming, BB)

**October 29**                      **Parties in government**

- \*Cooper and Brady, "Institutional Context and Leadership Style," *APSR* (1981)
- \*Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*, Chapters 2 and 6 (BB)
- \*Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan* (1993), Chapters 4 and 5 (BB)
- \*Cox and McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda* (2005), Chapters TBA
- Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 7
- Krehbiel, "Where's the Party?" *BJPS* (2003)

**November 5**                      **Do parties matter? (1)**

- \*Krehbiel, "Cosponsors and Wafflers from A to Z." *AJPS* (1995)
- \*Binder, Lawrence, Maltzman, "Uncovering the Hidden Effect of Party." *JOP* 1999.
- Ansolahehere et al, "The Effects of Party and Preferences on Roll-Call Voting," *LSQ* 2001
- \*Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan, "Out of Step and Out of Office," *APSR* (2002)
- \*Carson, Koger, Lebo and Young, "The Electoral Costs of Party Loyalty in Congress," *AJPS* (2010)

**November 12**                      **Do parties matter? (2)**

- Mayhew, *Divided We Govern?* 2nd edition (2005) (Chapters TBA)
- Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics* (1998), Chapters 2 and 3 (BB)
- Binder, "The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock." *APSR* 1999
- Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Chapters 1 and 9 (BB)
- Gilens, *Affluence and Influence*, Chapters 2 and 6 (BB)

**November 19**                      **Partisan polarization (1)**

- DiMaggio et al., "Have Americans' social attitudes become more polarized?" *AJS* (1996)
- Fiorina, "Americans Have Not Become More Politically Polarized," *Monkey Cage* June 23 (2014)
- Noel, "Polarization is about more than just sorting," *Mischiefs of Faction*, June 25 (2014)
- \*Lee, "Dividers, Not Unifiers: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004" *JOP* (2008).
- \*McCarty et. al, "Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?" *AJPS* (July 2009)
- \*McGhee et. al. "A Primary Cause of Polarization?" *AJPS* (2013)
- Pew, "Political polarization in the American public," June 12, 2014. On-line.

**December 3**                      **Partisan polarization (2)**

- \*McCarty et. al, *Polarized America* (all)