

American Political Parties
Political Science 8219
Fall 2012

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Class: Mondays 4:10-6:00 pm
Office hours: Friday mornings
or by appointment
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Seminar Description

This seminar is designed as a theoretical and empirical examination of political parties, 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?" Although we will spend some time on comparative approaches to political parties, 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 move on to 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 economic inequality.

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

There are a number of requirements for this seminar. All 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 (closed book) 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 piece (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 Monday. 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 5-10 minutes) should:

Describe the main *themes* of the reading

Explain what its *contributions* are to our understanding of legislative politics

Provide specific *criticisms* of the study (e.g., its theoretical argument, hypotheses, evidence, analysis, etc.)

Raise *questions* about specific theoretical or empirical issues that you did not understand

The readings for presentation are marked by an asterisk (*) in the readings below. (If you prefer to discuss a different piece, just clear it with me beforehand.)

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 or in your view has not yet been well addressed. Finally, you are asked to sketch a methodology for how one might go about addressing the research question. We will use our **October 15th** 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 22nd**. The paper will be due **Friday, December 14th**. 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, closed book 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)

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

Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (2008)

Sniderman and Stiglitz, *The Reputational Premium* (2012)

Recommended text

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

If you can find a copy of this book, I recommend having a copy of Epstein's book on hand. Although you will find it dated empirically, the book provides a comprehensive exploration of critical questions in the study 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.

Course outline

September 10 Introduction to course

No assignment.

September 17 What are parties and why study them?

We need to reschedule this seminar because of Rosh Hashanah

Brinkley, Alan, "[The Party's Over.](#)" *Wall Street Journal*, September 6, 2008, p. W1.

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) Skim--You should be familiar with this classic piece

September 24 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)

October 1 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)

October 8 Party systems (American)

*Key, "[A Theory of Critical Elections.](#)" *Journal of Politics* (Feb. 1955)

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 8

Mayhew, [Electoral Realignments](#) (2004), Chapters 2-3 (BB)

Carmines and Stimson, [Issue Evolution](#) (1990), Chapter 1 (BB)

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?

David Samuels (U. Minnesota) offers an excellent guide to writing research designs [here](#).

October 22 Parties in the electorate (1)

Short 3-5 page outline of your paper is due: What is your research question, why is it important, and how will you proceed in your paper?)

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

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

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

*Bartels, "[Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions](#)" *Political Behavior* (June 2002)

*Gerber, Huber, and Washington, "[Party Affiliation, Partisanship, and Political Beliefs: A Field Experiment](#)" *APSR* (November 2010)

October 29 Parties in the electorate (2)

Sniderman and Stiglitz, *The Reputational Premium* (2012), all

November 5 Party as organization (1)

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 6

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

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

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

November 12 Party as organization (2)

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

November 19 Parties in legislatures

*Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (chapters TBA)

*Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan* (1993), Chapters 4 and 5 (BB)

Skim Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 7

Krehbiel, "[Where's the Party?](#)" *BJPS* (2003)

November 26 Do parties matter? (1)

*Frances Lee, "[Dividers, not Unifiers: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004](#)" *Journal of Politics*, October 2008

*Gailmard and Jenkins, "[Negative Agenda Control in the Senate and House: Fingerprints of Majority Party Power](#)", *Journal of Politics*, August 2007

Krehbiel, "[Cosponsors and Wafflers from A to Z.](#)" *AJPS* (1995)

Binder, Lawrence, Maltzman, "[Uncovering the Hidden Effect of Party.](#)" *JOP* 1999.

*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)

Ansolahehere, Snyder, and Stewart, "[The Effects of Party and Preferences on Roll-Call Voting.](#)" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (2001)

December 3 Do parties matter? (2)

*Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (2008)

Kenworthy, How Much Do Presidents Influence Income Inequality? *Challenge* March-April 2010

December 10 TBA

This is the designated make-up day for the semester. We might use this day instead of Tuesday, Dec. 4th (which is a designated Monday).