

**American Political Parties  
Political Science 219  
Spring 2009**

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Class: Tuesdays 3:30-5:20pm  
Office hours: Th 2-4 pm  
or by appointment  
<http://home.gwu.edu/~binder/>

### **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 as an organization, parties in the electorate and elections, and parties in government. We will conclude with a look at recent work on the causes and consequences of partisan polarization.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Preparation for PhD exam in American politics
- Grasp 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 literature critique (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 literature critique 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 2 pm on Tuesday. 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.

Literature critique. This will be a paper (roughly 10-15 pages) that focuses on a topic of your choice in the study of legislative politics. The paper will survey the state of the literature on the topic or 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 research design for how one might go about answering the research question. We will use our March 10th 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 March 24. The paper will be due May 5th. 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. The question(s) will be similar to the type(s) of questions that appear on the American politics comprehensive exam. Thus, preparing for and taking the exam will be good practice for those of you intending to take the department's comprehensive exam in American politics. (You'll have the opportunity to write the exam on a computer at home or school.)

### **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? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (1995)

David Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (1991)

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

McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, *Polarized America* (2006)

### **Recommended text:**

Alas, but my favorite text on American political parties is now out of print. If you are able to obtain a copy of Leon Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (1986), I highly recommend that you purchase a copy for the course. Although it is dated a bit empirically, the book provides a very 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:**

#### **January 13 Introduction to course**

No assignment.

#### **January 20 No seminar—Inauguration, unified party control returns...does it make a difference?**

#### **January 27 What are parties and why study them?**

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 (Copy)

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.

Fiorina, "[Parties as Problem Solvers](#)" in *Promoting the General Welfare* (Brookings 2006) (skim)

"[Towards a More Responsible Two Party System.](#)" *APSR* (Sept 1950) Skim--You should be familiar with this classic piece

#### **February 3 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 (Copy)

Laver and Shepsle, "How Political Parties Emerged from the Primeval Slime: Party Cohesion, Party Discipline, and the Formation of Governments." In Bowler, Farrell, and Katz, eds., *Party Discipline* (Copy)

#### **February 10 Party systems: Comparative politics**

Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Excerpt (Copy)

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

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

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

## **February 17 Party systems: American politics**

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

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 8.

Carmines and Stimson, *Issue Evolution*, Chapter 1 (Copy),

\*Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877-1962*, Chapters 1, 2, 6 (Copy)

## **February 24 Party as organization (activists and nomination politics—part 1)**

Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, pp. 15-18, pp. 298-311 (Copy)

Gibson, Cotter, Bibby, Huckshorn, "[Assessing Party Organizational Strength](#)," *AJPS* (May 1983)

\*Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics*, Chapters intro, 1, 8-9 (Copy)

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 6.

\*Bartels, "[Candidate Choice and the Dynamics of the Presidential Nominating Process](#)," *AJPS* (February 1987)

Get a head start on Cohen et. al. for next week

## **March 3 Party as organization (activists and nomination politics—part 2)**

\*Cohen, *The Party Decides*, Chapters 4-10

## **March 10 Paper discussions**

Please come prepared to make a brief presentation on your proposed topic/research question for your literature critique. What issue/question will you be investigating? Why is it important/relevant/interesting? What have you found so far?

## **March 17 Spring break**

## **March 24 Parties in the electorate**

Campbell, et. al. *The American Voter*. Chapters 4 and 6 (Copy)

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

Wattenberg, "[The Decline of Political Partisanship in the United States](#)" *APSR* (Dec. 1981)

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

## **March 31 Parties in legislatures**

\*Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4,6)

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

Skim Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, chapter 7

Cox and Magar, "[How much is majority status in the U.S. Congress worth?](#)" *APSR* (1999).

## **April 7 Do parties matter (I)?**

\*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, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting."](#) *APSR* (2002)  
Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, ["The Effects of Party and Preferences on Roll-Call Voting."](#) *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (2001)

**April 14 Do parties matter (II)?**

\*Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (2008) (selections TBA)  
Tuftes, *Political Control of the Economy* (1978) Chapters 1, 2, and 6 (Copy)  
Binder, ["Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock."](#) *APSR* 1999.

**April 21 Parties and institutional development**

\*Engstrom, Erik. ["Stacking the States, Stacking the House: The Partisan Consequences of Congressional Redistricting in the 19th Century."](#) *APSR* (2006)  
Stewart and Weingast, "Stacking the Senate, Changing the Nation: Republican Rotten Boroughs, Statehood Politics, and American Political Development," *Studies in American Political Development* (1992) pp. 223-271 (Copy)  
Engstrom and Kernell, ["Manufactured Responsiveness: The Impact of State Electoral Laws on Unified Party Control of the President and House of Representatives."](#) July 2005. *AJPS*.  
Ware, ["Anti-Partism and Party Control of Political Reform in the United States: The Case of the Australian Ballot"](#) *BJPS* (2000)

**April 28 Causes of partisan polarization**

\*McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, *Polarized America* (all)