

Spring, 1998
Office Hours
Tuesday, 2:45 - 4:00
Wednesday, 10:00 - 11:30

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PS 110: American Political Parties

Objectives: Americans are, at the very least, ambivalent about political parties. Generally, parties are objects of scorn and derision, but they are just as often seen as the central ingredients in making democracy work. This course will be centrally concerned with that ambivalence. It is, indeed, true that political parties and the two-party system have been central ingredients in our democracy. To study parties is to study democracy. Thus, the ambivalence about political parties is really ambivalence towards politics and government. Conversely, that parties occupy central positions in our governance gives us a great deal of freedom in this or any course about political parties. We can study just about any aspect of American politics we (well, actually, I) would like.

The course is divided into the following intellectual questions. The first, introductory, section develops the theme of ambivalence, showing it was as present at the Founding as it is today, as present among elites as among the general public. This section will also allow us to discuss such definitional questions as what a party is.

The second section examines party systems, defining them, and considering the most important questions of party systems as relevant to the U.S.: Why do we have a two-party system, and with what consequences? This leads naturally into the questions of when and how third parties have developed in America, of whether there are good (poor, indifferent) prospects of a third party forming now, and of whether we can have a viable three-party system or would any third party survive only by replacing one of the two major parties.

As you will have discovered by this point in the course, much of what we know about third party prospects is drawn from the historical record. It is my belief that the importance of the historical record for understanding the politics of third parties is no coincidence. Parties and party systems are not just institutions, but their persistence and change over time (their history, in other words) is central to understanding their contemporary forms. Therefore, we turn next to the evolution of the two parties and the two-party system in the U.S. from the founding of the Republican party in the 1850s to date. This swath of history will be focused primarily on the times of most dramatic change; periods called “realignments.”

Finally, then, we will turn to the contemporary political party. We will examine briefly its organizational form and its role in nominations and other aspects of regulating access to office. We will spend a bit longer on the role of the party in governance, and even longer in its role in the electorate. Again, we will be interested in changes over time, especially in the so-called era of party decline and in the dramatic changes that have transpired in the 1990s.

Requirements:

You will be required to write two short papers (4-5 pages) on assigned topics, and you will be involved in a class presentation (unless we develop something different in class, we will hold three debates, each of you being involved in one debate). You will have an in-class midterm, a (regular) final, and/or a longer paper. Participation in this relatively small lecture-sized course (or over-sized seminar) will also be graded. While you will have a role in selecting among these options, I will make the final decision, and that decision will be what is available for each of you. The distribution of grades will be determined, in part, by which particular options are chosen, and therefore will be announced to you early in the semester.

The two papers will be reflections on the first section (ambivalence toward parties). One will be due shortly after completing the readings and discussion of that section. The second will be a reconsideration of that first essay, to reflect what you have learned and thought about over the semester, due near the end of the semester. Each can be based on the readings included in the course. Each paper will be graded on its own merits. For those whose grades leave them close to a dividing line between grades, growth in insight and understanding between the first and second paper will be taken into consideration in making such close calls.

Readings:

There are five paperback books required for the course:

Beck, Paul Allen, Party Politics in America, 8th ed. (New York: Longman, 1997).

Rosenstone, Steve J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, Third Party Politics in America, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Shafer, Byron H., ed., Present Discontents (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997).

Sundquist, James, Dynamics of the Party System, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1983).

Wattenberg, Martin, The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1994 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

There is also a coursepack available in the bookstore. The contents are also on hard copy (most of them anyway) and e-reserve (all of them) in the library. The on line copy can be found under aldrich or the author's name, but not necessarily under PS 100.

George Washington, Farewell Address, September 17, 1796 (Commager, Documents in American History, pp. 169-175).

James Madison, Federalist Papers, No. 10, pp. 77-84.

Richard P. McCormack, "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," American Historical Review 65 (January, 1960), pp. 288-301.

Morris P. Fiorina, "The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics," Daedalus, 109 (Summer, 1980), pp. 25-45.

Leon D. Epstein, "The Scholarly Commitment to Parties," Chap. 5, Political Science: The State of the Discipline, ed. By Ada W. Finifter (Washington: American Political Science Association, 1983), pp. 127-154.

William H. Riker, "The Two-party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science," American Political Science Review, 76 (4) December, 1982, pp. 753-766.

Paul R. Abramson, et al., "The Problem of Third-Party and Independent Candidates in the American Political System: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot in Comparative Perspective," paper delivered at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, Sept, 1-4.

V.O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," Journal of Politics, 17 (February, 1955), pp. 3-18.

David Brady, et al., "How the Republicans Captured the House," Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 1995.

John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, "Theories of the Party in the Legislature and the Transition to Republican Rule in the House," Duke University Working Paper in American Politics, No. 199, August 29, 1995.

John H. Aldrich, "Political Parties in a Critical Era," paper delivered at a Bliss Institute Conference, "The State of the Parties: 1996 and Beyond," University of Akron, October 9-10, 1997.

Martin P. Wattenberg, "1996: Missed Opportunities for the Parties," forthcoming, The Decline of American Political Parties, enlarged ed., Harvard University Press, Fall, 1998.

Reading List
PS 110: American Political Parties

The following dates are tentative. I expect you to come to class having completed the required readings for the topic under discussion.

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| Jan. 15 | First Class – Introduction |
| Jan. 20-27 | Setting the Stage: Ambivalence toward Political Parties |
| | <i>Readings</i> Beck, Intro. to Part 1; Chap. 1
Silbey and Barone Chaps. In Shafer
Washington, coursepack
Madison, coursepack
McCormick, coursepack
Fiorina, coursepack |
| Jan. 29-Feb. 3 | The Two-Party System: Part I, Structure |
| | <i>Readings</i> (Abramson, et al., coursepack – recommended)
Beck, Chap. 2
Riker, coursepack |
| Feb. 5-10 | The Two-Party System: Part II, Third Parties |
| | <i>Readings</i> (Abramson, et al., coursepack – required)
Rosenstone, et al. |
| Feb. 12-17 | Realignments: The Concept |
| | <i>Readings</i> Key, coursepack
Sundquist, Chaps. 1-3 |
| Feb. 19-26 | Realignments: Parties in U.S. History |
| | <i>Readings</i> Sunquist, Chaps. 4-8, (9), 10, (11,12), 16-18

Civil War to the 1890s, Chaps. 4-8
The System of the 1890s, Chaps. 7-8 (9 rec.)
The New Deal, Chap. 10 (11, 12 rec.)
The Post-War Years, Chaps. 16-18 |
| March 3 | Party Organizations: Nomination of Candidates |
| | <i>Readings</i> Beck, Chaps. 9-10 |

March 5-10	Parties and Governing
	<i>Readings</i> Aldrich and Rohde, coursepack Beck, Chaps. 13-15
March 12	Midterm Examination
March 17-19	Spring Break
March 24-April 14	Parties and Elections (and Governing)
	<i>Readings</i> Aldrich, coursepack Beck, Chapters 6-8 Wattenberg, <u>The Decline...</u> , entire Wattenberg, coursepack
April 16-23	Reserved time for Class Presentations
April 28	Last Class, Summary (check out Beck's last chapter)