

Political Science 252
American Political Parties
Spring Semester 2012
Clark University

Jonas Clark 217
Monday and Wednesday, 12:00 – 1:15
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Course Description:

Although political parties are not an “official” part of government – that is, unlike other democracies, the United States does not provide a constitutional role for political parties, and our governmental structure throws up many obstacles to the development and successful function of parties – political parties have always been an integral part of American politics. In this course we will analyze the applicability of theories of political parties to the performance of American political parties in the twentieth century and beyond. That is, we will look at the ideas politicians and political scientists have had about the function and responsibilities of democratic political parties and then we will study the political circumstances in which they found themselves in order to compare their theories and expectations of parties with actual political practices of their era. We will use past and current developments in party politics, including this year’s presidential nomination campaigns, to help answer questions about the goals, structure, organization, and internal dynamics of political parties.

There are three organizational themes to this course. First, we will look at what are conventionally held to be the three components of parties: the party organization, the party in the electorate, and the party in government. We will explore the tensions between these three components, and we will study the ways in which they interact. Second, we will explore the history of American parties and of the study of political parties. Scholars tend to look at particular party “regimes” or “alignments” and to study the ways in which parties periodically realign – for instance, the reasons why the Democratic Party dominated American politics from 1932 to the 1960s and why the strength of the Democratic Party was gradually eroded in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to today’s period of uneasy partisan balance. And third, we will explore normative conceptions of political parties: what should parties do? Should they seek to win elections, no matter what they need to do to win, or should they seek to stand for something even if taking such “responsible” positions costs them electoral victories? We will not necessarily explore these themes sequentially, but we will keep these issues and questions in mind throughout the course.

The discussion of parties in this course is bookended by an analysis of the 2012 presidential primaries. At this point I have no way of knowing how quickly the Republican Party will choose its nominee, but we will incorporate a look at the candidate selection process, critique the ways in which parties choose their candidates, and look for clues as to what the primaries say about the health of the Democratic and Republican parties as we head into the 2012 election. Accordingly, I will expect you to keep up on current political news.

Objectives

Although individual politicians often can have a lasting impact on the parties they lead or represent, political parties are complex organizations that often resist the efforts by politicians to control them. By the end of this course, you should have an understanding of the tensions that exist within political parties and the relationship between these tensions and the ideological or electoral goals of politicians and voters. As you will see, the notion that the Democratic Party is the “liberal” party and the Republican Party is the “conservative” party has not always (or even frequently) held true in American politics. You should be able to use your understanding of the history and objectives of political parties to understand contemporary American politics, and to draw upon this knowledge in making your own decisions about what political goals to support and how to work towards them.

Readings

The following books are required for the course and are available at the college bookstore:

Mayer, William G., ed. 2011. *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2012*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hershey, Marjorie Randon. 2010. *Party Politics in America*, 14th edition. New York: Longman.

Stonecash, Jeffrey, ed. 2010. *New Directions in American Political Parties*. New York: Routledge.

Rosenstone, Stephen, Roy Behr, and Edward Lazarus. 1996. *Third Parties in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

All other readings will be distributed as handouts or are available on the web.

Web Resources

There are several good resources out there on political parties. Throughout the primary season, the major newspapers will have good articles on the Democratic and Republican primaries; most of these are available on line, although some require you to register with the newspaper. In addition, the six party campaign committees (the Democratic National Committee, the Republican National Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the National Republican Congressional Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and the National Republican Senatorial Committee) all maintain excellent websites. There are also several excellent compendia of news related to party campaigns; we will maintain an ongoing list of these during class. Good places to start include the National Journal's website (nationaljournal.com) and politics1.com, a good place to get daily news digests.

Feel free to use the web to help in your research, but make sure to be a good consumer of on line information. That is, official sources and the news media can be valuable tools; wikipedia and its ilk are somewhat suspect. Don't let the web be a substitute for a visit to the library!

Requirements and Grading

The most important requirement for this class is your attendance and participation. You must be in class as frequently as you can, and you should come prepared to discuss the readings. I hope to lecture under half of the time; I will make presentations of the main arguments of the readings and of other relevant ideas of the time, but the class will, I hope, take the initiative in discussing the historical readings and how they relate to the ideas we have considered. The level of the readings varies quite a bit; most require little background knowledge, but a few presume knowledge of statistics or of particular aspects of American history. You do not need to have a thorough understanding of everything in the readings, but you should be able and willing to discuss the main points of the readings and to ask questions about aspects of the readings you're unsure about. You also should be willing to discuss ideas about the class with me; no aspect of this course is set in stone, and we may have the flexibility towards the end of the course to consider a different topic or two if students want to do so. Class attendance and participation will comprise 10% of your final grade.

During the course you will complete six written assignments of approximately three to five pages each. For some of these, you will conduct a small amount of research (two or three sources) on the topics listed below and, during the class period on which the assignment is due, we will compare your findings. We will try to make use of current events, including this year's presidential primaries, for these assignments. You should also plan to keep current on political developments by regularly reading the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or other news sources. Each of these assignments will be worth fifteen percent of your grade, for a total of 90%. Papers are due in class.

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Keep the following in mind when writing your papers:

- Papers are due in class on the due date.
- You may turn in a paper late for one grade fraction per day (not including weekends) reduction. That is, an A drops to an A- when it is one day late, then to a B+ on the second day, and so on.
- Papers with inadequate citation of the readings will be returned to you and will be subject to a one grade fraction per day reduction until I receive them back with proper citation.
- Unless you have authorization from me to do so, you may not email your papers to me. Emailed papers will be returned to you and will be subject to the one grade fraction per day reduction until I receive the printed copy from you.

Finally, as you should be aware by now, the work you do in this course must be entirely your own. To be sure we all have the same understanding of academic integrity as it pertains to this course, here is what the Academic Advising *Blue Book* (p. 22) has to say on the subject:

Academic integrity is highly valued at Clark. Research, scholarship and teaching are possible only in an environment characterized by honesty and mutual trust. Academic integrity requires that your work be your own. Because of the damage that violations of academic integrity do to the intellectual climate of the University, they must be treated with the utmost seriousness and appropriate sanctions must be imposed. The maintenance of high standards of academic integrity is the concern of every member of the University community.

Plagiarism refers to the presentation of someone else's work as one's own, without proper citation of references and sources, whether or not the work has been previously published. Submitting work obtained from a professional term paper writer or company is plagiarism. Claims of ignorance about the rules of attribution, or of unintentional error are not a defense against a finding of plagiarism.

Schedule

Wednesday, January 18: Introduction to the Course

Monday, January 23 and Wednesday, January 25: A Brief Look at the 2012 Presidential Primaries

Mayer, *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2012*, ch. 1-3

- Assignment #1 due in class January 25:
Should anything be done about the primary system? What types of reforms do you favor, and how would you go about trying to implement them?

Monday, January 30 and Wednesday, February 1:

Hershey, ch. 7, 9; handouts

- Assignment #2, due in class February 1:
You will be assigned one of the presidential candidates. What does this candidate's performance in the primaries tell us about his/her relationship with his/her party? What does it tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of the party?

Monday, February 6 and Wednesday, February 8: Party Concepts

Ronald Brownstein, *The Second Civil War: How Extreme Partisanship has Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2007). Ch. 10.

Hershey, ch. 1-2

Monday, February 13 and Wednesday, February 15: A Brief History of the American Party System

Reichley, A. James. 2007. "The Future of the American Two-Party System in the Twenty-First Century." In *The State of the Parties*, 5th ed., ed. John C. Green. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 15-34.

Mayhew, David. 2004. *Electoral Realignments*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Selections.

- Assignment #3 due in class February 15:
Choose a decade or so (at least two consecutive elections) that interests you and describe what this era can tell us about the development of American political parties.

Monday, February 20 and Wednesday, February 22: The Party as Organization

Hershey, ch. 3-5

Monday, February 27 and Wednesday, February 29:

Stonecash, ch. 3-5 (Brewer, Hayes, and Dwyre chapters)

March 5 - 9: Spring Break

Monday, March 12 and Wednesday, March 14: The Party in the Electorate

Hershey, ch. 6, 8

Burnham, Walter Dean. 1965. "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe." *American Political Science Review* 59: 7-28. At www.jstor.org
Converse, Philip. 1972. "Change in the American Electorate." In *The Human Meaning of Social Change*, Angus Campbell and Philip Converse, eds. New York: Russell Sage. pp. 268-301.

Monday, March 19 and Wednesday, March 21:

Stonecash, ch. 10-11 (Dunn and Reiter chapters)

➤ Assignment #4 due in class March 21:

You will be assigned one state or region of the country to study. How has the party system developed in this state or region? What can we expect in the future?

Monday, March 26 and Wednesday, March 28: Changes in Party Coalitions

Stonecash, ch. 6-9 (Haynie, Stonecash, Abramowitz, and Olson chapters)

Monday, April 2 and Wednesday, April 4: The Party in Government

Hershey, ch. 13-16

Stonecash, ch. 12-14 (Milkis, Rohde, and Liscio chapters)

Monday, April 9: US Parties in Comparative Perspective

Smith, Raymond A. 2011. *The American Anomaly*. New York: Routledge. Ch. 10, "Political Parties."

Eagles, Munroe, and Sharon Manna. 2008. "Politics and Government." In *Canadian Studies in the New Millennium*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Wednesday, April 11, Monday, April 16 and Wednesday, April 18: Third Parties

Rosenstone, Behr and Lazarus

➤ Assignment #5 due Wednesday, April 18:

What are the prospects for a strong third party candidacy over the next decade?

Monday, April 23 and Wednesday, April 25: Another Look at the 2012 Elections

Mayer, *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2012*, chapters 4-6

Monday, April 30:

➤ Assignment #6 due in class

You are the editor of *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2020*. Write a brief introduction and an annotated table of contents.