

Political Science 424  
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I, 1998-99  
Syllabus  
TTh 11:00-12:15  
1121 Humanities  
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## AMERICAN PARTIES AND POLITICS

Observers of American politics often consider political parties to be the most significant American political innovation. Despite the fact that parties play a central role in politics here and around the world, Americans often hold them in low esteem. By presenting a broad overview of political parties in the United States, this course examines this apparent discrepancy. We will cover the key features of American political parties, examine their impact on the political system, and look at how the importance of political parties has waxed and waned over the course of American history. Given current events, we will discuss developments in the ongoing election process and the president's political difficulties and their relationship to the parties.

I divide the course into three major sections. We start with an overview of how American parties mobilize and represent voters and how party coalitions have changed since the 1930s. We then look at parties' role in the electoral process. Finally, we focus on parties in action. Here, we look at the specifics of how parties operate in various arenas and consider some explanations for why parties behave as they do. Along the way it will become clear that many analysts believe that democracy is virtually unthinkable without parties. At their best, parties represent and integrate a diverse set of interests, precisely as other forces in our politics cater to and mobilize narrow interests. At their best, parties represent those not well represented by other institutions in American politics and give a broad array of citizens an avenue into politics. And at their best, parties provide an incentive for politicians to work together to identify and solve important public problems. But parties are not always at their best. Careful and critical evaluation of the success and failure of parties as democratic institutions helps us gain an understanding of what helps parties achieve these lofty goals and what causes them to fall short.

### ***Course requirements:***

**Composition of Grade:** Your grade is determined by a combination of two in-class exams (30% each), three data gathering/analysis assignments (5% each), and two short strategy memos (one for 10% and one for 15%). As a baseline, let me note that writing quality does matter, so you should be sure you have reviewed your writing before submitting it. (A quick read of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* will pay benefits for years.)

*Examinations* (October 20, December 19): closed-book, in-class exams covering material from the first and second halves of the course, respectively. The second exam covers only the material since the first exam. These will be essay and short answer exams, and I will distribute study guides in advance. I will not give make-up exams except in dire situations. Do *not* miss an exam and assume you can make it up.

*Data gathering/analysis assignments* (15%): There are three of these assignments, each of which results in a brief write up of two or three pages. I will distribute additional details in class.

- Public opinion data analysis (October 6): using an online resource, you will produce a brief study of public opinion as it relates to political parties. For example, you might look at a group of issues and see how they affected people's views toward one party or the other. Or you might look at a group of demographic characteristics to see if they relate to support for third parties. Or you might want to see how being a "strong" partisan rather than an "independent" affects one's perception of the political system overall.
- Campaign finance analysis (October 29): I will assign you a congressional district to track, and for that district, you will determine the amounts spent by each candidate, from whom the money has been raised, and "expert" assessments about who will win the race. On November 5, the Thursday after Election Day, you will submit a brief one-paragraph follow-up noting who won the district, by what margin, and at what cost per vote.
- Party voting analysis (November 10): using techniques of congressional voting analysis that I will present in class, you will select an issue area to track and will compare party voting in two different Congresses. You will use *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* to compile the voting data.

*Strategy memo I* (November 24): Based on course material, you will submit a 3-4 page strategy memo to either of the major parties indicating what you see to be the party's strengths and weaknesses and what political and policy strategy you would advise the party to follow in the coming years. This memo will not just be a wish list or ungrounded opinion, but will be a cogent argument based on the course readings, lectures, and discussions. Obviously you cannot pursue every line of analysis discussed during the semester, so you will need to decide what is really important for the parties to consider. Please note that this assignment is due on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving.

*Strategy memo II* (December 15): Near the end of the course, we will be reading a book that considers party strategy. You will apply the analysis in the book to four current issue areas (short magazine articles are included in the reading packet).

*E-mail*: Although it is not factored into the grade, each student is required to activate an e-mail account if you have not already done so. Because e-mail will be sent automatically to everyone *registered* in the class, it is important that you establish your own e-mail account and not rely on a friend's, roommate's, or parent's. The easiest way to begin is by going to one of the computer labs in the libraries—they will walk you through the process. You should go there with a few dollars in hand in order to purchase the disks. If you are already familiar with e-mail but do not have an account, you can activate your account at [www.students.wisc.edu/activate](http://www.students.wisc.edu/activate). It is also important that you check your e-mail *at least twice a week*. I will often post information on the assignments or answer questions that came up in class. I also very much encourage you to use this as an additional means to ask questions. Information relevant to this course will also be located on a web page ([www.polisci.wisc.edu/~coleman](http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/~coleman)). The web site will contain copies of class materials (syllabus, information on assignments, etc.) and whatever other odds and ends seem useful. This site also will have some useful information links for your assignments.

*Attendance and Reading:* I expect students to attend the class meetings and do the assigned reading, and the course works only if you do both. You should aim to get all the reading done for a topic by the first date listed for that topic on the syllabus. If you cannot do that, the reading is listed more or less in the order in which it makes the most sense to read. I will indicate to you in class if there is material that I absolutely want you to have read by the next class (e.g., I want you to be certain to read the “Should Clinton Resign?” material for our September 8 meeting). We will occasionally do some activities in class that will, in effect, indicate whether you were here, so it is best to make it a regular habit. Also, it is not fair for me to go well out of my way to keep non-attendees up-to-date regarding assignments, changes in assignments, items I would like you to bring to the next class, and so on, so please do not expect me to do so. Excellent attendance, preparation, and participation are all plusses when I look at borderline grades at the end of the semester. One final, evil note: I am willing to start giving unannounced quizzes when I sense that many people are not doing the reading; I use this as another piece of information at the end of the semester when deciding whether to be generous in grading.

**Grading system:** Numerical grades can be interpreted as follows: 93-100 = A, 88-92=AB, 83-87=B, 78-82=BC, 70-77=C, 60-69=D, and below 60=F. Grades are not curved, but there may be some upward adjustment of final grades if I believe the grade distribution is excessively low. You should not assume such an adjustment will take place. I do not in any case adjust grades downward.

If you feel there is a problem with the grading on an assignment, you will have one week from your receipt of the grade to make your *specific* concerns known to me. I will not negotiate grades.

Work submitted after the due date will have one letter grade deducted for each late day.

Any instance of academic dishonesty ([www.wisc.edu/students/acmiscon.htm](http://www.wisc.edu/students/acmiscon.htm) has the details) will result in a failing grade on the assignment, failure of the course, and notification to the Dean. If you are having a problem it is much better to talk to me rather than throw away your reputation.

Please feel free to come by or call during office hours or send e-mail to discuss course-related or other matters.

### ***Course Material:***

The following books are available for purchase at the University Book Store:

William J. Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, 8th ed. (1998)  
Richard F. Fenno Jr., *Learning to Govern: An Institutional View of the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress* (1997)  
John B. Gilmour, *Strategic Disagreement: Stalemate in American Politics* (1995)  
Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (first pub. 1968)

A reading packet with additional articles is on reserve in College Library and available at Studentprint in Memorial Union.

***Course Outline and Reading List:***

***I. PARTY GOALS, COALITIONS, AND POLICY***

**Introduction (9/3)**

No reading

**Why Political Parties? (9/8)**

“Should Clinton Resign for the ‘Good of the Party?’” (\* = in reading packet)  
(you can also find this article on the web page for this course)  
Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, ch. 1

**Changing Parties, Reforming Parties (9/10, 9/15)**

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, pp. 40-56, 73-76, 262-69  
William Crotty, “Urban Political Machines,” in L. Sandy Maisel and William G. Shade,  
eds., *Parties and Politics in American History: A Reader* (\*)

**From the New Deal Coalition to the Republican Revolution (9/17, 9/22, 9/24)**

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, pp. 61-73, 279-83, 289-98  
Nicol Rae, “Party Factionalism, 1946-1996,” in Shafer, ed., *Partisan Approaches to  
Postwar American Politics* (\*)  
“The GOP’s House Divided: Social Activists vs. Business,” *CQ Weekly*, May 30, 1998 (\*)  
“Democratic House Moderates Hope to Make More Suburban Inroads,” *CQ Weekly*, Feb.  
21, 1998 (\*)  
“Labor Wants Out of the Limelight After Glare of Probes, Backlash,” *CQ Weekly*, March  
28, 1998 (\*)  
“A Change of Heart: Abortion and the Missouri General Assembly” (\*)

\*\*\*PUBLIC OPINION DATA ANALYSIS DUE\*\*\* (10/6)

***II. PARTIES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS***

**The Recruitment and Nomination Process (9/29, 10/1, 10/6, 10/8)**

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, ch. 3 and pp. 128-39, 269-71  
Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, section 2

**Voters: Party Identification and Voting Behavior** (10/13, 10/15)

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, ch. 5 and pp. 275-79  
Martin Wattenberg, *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics*, ch. 2 (\*)

\*\*\*FIRST EXAMINATION\*\*\* (10/20)

*III. PARTIES IN OPERATION*

*A. Parties at Work*

**Party Organization and Cohesion in Congress** (10/22, 10/27)

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, pp. 218-38, 238-45, 253-56  
Fenno, *Learning to Govern*, entire

\*\*\*CAMPAIGN FINANCE ANALYSIS DUE\*\*\* (10/29)

**Election Day Profile I: Midterm Elections** (10/29)

James Campbell, "The Revised Theory of Surge and Decline," *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (1987): 965-979 (\*)

**Election Day Profile II: Campaigning in the 1990s** (11/3)

"Independent Groups' Ads Increasingly Steer Campaigns," *CQ Weekly*, May 2, 1998 (\*)  
"Jesse Helms vs. Harvey Gantt: Race, Culture, and Campaign Strategy in the 1990 Senate Battle" (\*)

**Party Organizations: Activities and Impact** (11/5)

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, pp. 273-75, 287-89, 301-03

\*\*\*PARTY VOTING ANALYSIS DUE\*\*\* (11/10)

## **Parties, Presidents, Executives, Legislators: Cooperation & Conflict (11/10, 11/12)**

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, pp. 246-53

Charles O. Jones, "The Clinton Administration in the Separated System: A Presidency at Risk?" *Extensions*, Spring 1996, pp. 3-9 (\*)

Stephen Skowronek, "President Clinton and the Risks of 'Third-Way' Politics," *Extensions*, Spring 1996, pp. 10-15 (\*)

"Clinton Finds Support on Hill Despite GOP's Vocal Attacks," *CQ Weekly*, Jan. 3 98 (\*)

"Public Conversations and Legislative Deliberations: Oregon's Governor Barbara Roberts Takes on Fiscal Reform" (\*)

### *B. Explanations of Party Behavior*

## **Third Parties and Party Insurgency (11/17, 11/19)**

Paul Herrnson, "Two-Party Dominance and Minor Party Forays in American Politics," in Paul S. Herrnson and John C. Green, eds., *Multiparty Politics in America* (\*)

Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "As Bill Goes, So Do We," *The Nation* (May 30, 1994): 744-746 and letters to the editor (\*)

"The GOP and Conservative Christians" (\*)

\*\*\*STRATEGY MEMO I DUE\*\*\* (11/24)

## **Critical Realignments and Party Systems (11/24, 12/1)**

James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*, ch. 2 (\*)

Michael Vlahos, "The New Wave," *National Review*, September 26, 1994, pp. 38 ff. (\*)

"A Revolution, or Business as Usual?", roundtable discussion with "six of the [Republican] party's leading theoreticians," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1995, pp. 44-53 (\*)

\*\*\*NO CLASS\*\*\* (11/26)

## **Political Parties as Rational Actors (12/3)**

Anthony Downs, "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy" (\*)

## **Divided Government and Gridlock (12/8, 12/10)**

Gilmour, *Strategic Disagreement*, chs. 1-4

“Child Care Proposal Sparks Debate Over Working, At-Home Mothers,” *CQ Weekly*, Jan. 17, 1998 (\*)

“Prognosis for Health Care Cure Complicated by Partisanship (Patients’ Rights Bill May Die Aborning),” *CQ Weekly*, August 1, 1998 (\*)

“Democrats Seek GOP Support For Minimum Wage Boost,” *CQ Weekly*, Mar. 21 98 (\*)

“IRS Overhaul Passes House On Way to Speedy Enactment,” *CQ Weekly*, June 27 98 (\*)

## **Campaign Finance (12/15)**

Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, pp. 139-68

“‘Soft Money’ Speaks Loudly on Capitol Hill This Season,” *CQ Weekly*, June 27 98 (\*)

“RNC Fighting Restrictions on Issue Ad Limits,” *CQ Weekly*, May 2, 1998 (\*)

\*\*\*STRATEGY MEMO II DUE\*\*\* (12/15)

\*\*\*SECOND EXAMINATION\*\*\* (2:45pm, December 19)