Seminar Description:

This seminar will examine the theoretical and empirical literatures on political parties, with a particular focus on American political parties. As we will see, political parties are central to democratic governance in the United States. Among other functions, the parties mobilize participation, aggregate preferences, and facilitate the creation of stable public policies. At the same time, citizens’ identifications with the parties stimulate political engagement, structure information processing, and simplify decision making. The impact of parties in the polity becomes all the more remarkable when we consider that the Founders were deeply suspicious of political factions and formulated an institutional design that was specifically structured to limit their effectiveness. Nevertheless, more than two centuries later, the political parties still serve as the main organizational entities in American politics and the principal political referents for American citizens.

In this seminar, we will examine parties in a variety of forms and from several analytical perspectives. We will examine parties as organizations, parties in the electorate, and parties in the government, taking special care to draw conceptual linkages between these three dimensions of political parties. We will also examine political parties from developmental and comparative perspectives, examining how parties have influenced the course of American political development and their similarities and differences with their counterparts in other countries. Our analysis will include both formal theoretic and empirical analyses of parties.

Course Requirements:

Grades in the seminar will be based on the following four items:

1) Class participation  20%
2) Reaction Paper 1   20%
3) Reaction Paper 2   20%
4) Final Exam         40%
Class Participation:
Students are expected to read and critically analyze the required readings prior to each seminar meeting and to come to seminar meetings prepared to discuss the readings. Students should identify areas of synthesis in the week’s readings (and with those in previous weeks) and points of disagreement. Students should also critically consider and identify limitations in the theoretical and analytical components of the readings.

To foster seminar discussion, all students will be required to prepare five discussion questions for each seminar meeting to guide the discussions. I will call on students to present these questions for discussion at the seminar meetings.

Reaction Papers:
In addition to the preparation of discussion questions for each seminar meeting, students will also write two five-page reaction papers during the semester. These reaction papers will critically analyze and synthesize the week’s required readings. The papers, in short, should not review the readings. Instead, they should provide a critical evaluation of the readings along theoretical and analytical dimensions and discuss areas of agreement and disagreement among the week’s readings. The papers are due to me and to your fellow students by 10 a.m. the day of the seminar meeting (no exceptions).

Final Exam:
The final exam will follow the form of a Ph.D. comprehensive exam in the department. Students will be given three questions and will write approximately 12-page answers to two of the three questions (approximately 24 pages total). Students will have one week to write their answers to the questions. Students can consult any of the course materials (books, their own notes, discussion papers, etc.) but cannot consult each other. The final exams will be due by 6:00 pm. on December 10th (no exceptions).

Required and Recommended Books:
Several books are required for the course. All should be available at the local bookstores.

The required books are:


**August 27: Introduction to American Political Parties**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**September 3: Labor Day – No Class**
**September 10: Parties in Comparative Perspective**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**September 17: Spatial Models of Parties and Voting**

*Required:*


**Recommended:**


**September 24: Parties as Organizations**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**October 1: Party Activism**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**October 8: Partisan Identification I**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**October 15: Partisan Identification II**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**October 22: Macro-Level Partisanship**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


October 29: Partisan Realignment

Required:


Recommended:


November 5: Political Parties, Political Psychology, and Information Processing

Required:


Recommended:


**November 12: Parties in Legislatures I**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**November 19: Parties in Legislatures II**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


November 26: Parties in the Courts

Required:


Recommended:


December 3: Conclusion: Parties and Governance

Required:


Recommended:


