

POS 4443 Spring 2026 Tues 11:45am-1:40pm  
Thurs 12:50pm-1:40pm Fine Arts C 127

## *Political Parties and Elections*

Prof. Michael McDonald

Contact Info

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Office Hours

Wed 9:00-11:30am or by appointment

### **Course Description**

Composition, organization and structure of political parties and their roles and relationships in the political process.

### **Course Overview**

This course examines political parties, which are the primary political organizations that nominate candidates and organize deliberations within political institutions.

### **Relation to Program Outcomes**

The course examines American political parties and serves as elective credit for the Political Science major and the campaigning certificate.

### **Student Learning Outcomes for the Course**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Identify** characteristics of American political parties.
2. **Compare** political parties organizations' over time, across states, and between state and national geographies.
3. **Identify** who is likely to engage in political activity, including joining a political party and voting.
4. **Identify** strengths and weaknesses of political parties as organizations, among the electorate, and in legislatures.
5. **Analyze** political parties' campaign successful organizations and strategies to identify party supporters, develop messages, and raise campaign donations.
6. **Identify** party legislative leadership's available strategies to enforce party discipline on legislative votes.
7. **Synthesize** analyses to place into historical context the strengths and weaknesses of America's political parties.

## Course Objectives

Parties are mentioned nowhere in the United States constitution. In his farewell address, George Washington expressed his opposition to political parties shared by many of the Founding Fathers: "...the common & continual mischiefs of the spirit of Party are sufficient to make it the interest and the duty of a wise People to discourage and restrain it." Yet, even in his cabinet, the growing animosity between future presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson would soon develop into the first national political parties.

The goals of this class are to understand the function and organization of political parties. There are three parts to this course that correspond to three aspects of political parties:

- **Parties as organizations** unto themselves: how are they organized locally and nationally? Who joins political parties and why?
- **Parties in the electorate**: how do voters use political parties to orient themselves? As we cover this topic, we will also explore elections in greater depth, covering such topics as who votes, how voters make their decisions, and how campaigns and parties mobilize voters.
- **Parties in government**: what role do parties play in Congress, the presidency, and the courts?

If you're reading this syllabus, congratulations! These three bolded aspects of political parties will likely be an exam question.

## Readings

- Majorie R. Hershey and Barry C. Burden. 2025. *Party Politics in America, 19<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York: Pearson Education Inc.
- Additional readings are available on Canvas.

The readings that will be discussed each class are listed below as a Reading Assignment for that day of class. Readings denoted "(Canvas)" have electronic versions available in the "Files" tab on Canvas. These readings are provided as a courtesy. The university library and professor can provide printed copies for persons who require disability-accessible versions.

## Grades

Grades consist of three midterms and classroom participation. The weighting of the aspects of the grade are:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Due</u>	<u>% of Overall Grade</u>
Midterm 1	Feb 17	30%
Midterm 2	Mar 24	30%
Final	Apr 27	35%

Participation	5%
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Student grades may be modified, as described in the class Attendance Policy and Technology Use Policy.

### **Attendance Policy**

If you do not participate in at least one of the first two class meetings of a course or laboratory in which you are registered, and you have not contacted the department to indicate your intent, you can be dropped from the course. You must not assume that you will be dropped, however. The department will not notify you if you have been dropped from a course or laboratory. You can request reinstatement on a space-available basis if you present documented evidence.

**The university recognizes the right of the individual professor to make attendance mandatory. After due warning, professors can prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a failing grade for excessive absences.**

**The policy for this class** is that every student should make the best attempt to attend all classes. A student that misses four or more classes without a university-approved excuse (e.g., from the Dean's office, sports department or other university official) will have their overall grade reduced a letter step. Students do not need, and should not approach the professor, to provide non-university-approved excuses for missing three or fewer classes. A student with ten or more unexcused class absences will receive a failing grade for the entire course and will be barred from attending further classes.

If there is an issue that affects your ability to attend class, please let the professor know as soon as possible. Accommodations can be made if we devise a plan together as soon as a problem occurs.

### **Technology Use Policy**

Studies find that students who use laptops or cell phones in class tend to receive lower grades than their peers.

Laptops, cell phones, tablets, and other electronic devices are banned from the classroom, unless the professor explicitly states otherwise as some class assignments will use technology.

A first offense earns a warning. A second offense results in letter grade reduction of the overall class grade, and a third offense results in an automatic failing grade for the course.

Students with disabilities who present documentation to the professor are permitted to use laptops for note taking. Other students who wish to use laptops for notetaking must receive permission from the professor. An approval effectively serves as a warning. Any student with an approved laptop will receive a letter grade reduction for the first offense.

of doing anything non-class related on their laptop in class, and a failing grade for the second offense.

### **Honor Code**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Basically, don't cheat. You cheat yourself of your education and more severe punishment may follow. Helping someone else is cheating, too. If you have any questions if your approach to completing an assignment may violate the honor code, please contact the instructor for guidance.

### **Disability Statement**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

My exams tend to have an essay component. If you are eligible for disability services and your disability leads you to need more time taking an exam, please take advantage of disability services. We cannot undo poor performance on an exam if you did not make disability arrangements in advance.

### **Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

<b>Week 1</b> <b>Jan 13 &amp; 15</b>	<p><b>Tues: Welcome! What are Political Parties?</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• George Washington's Farewell Address, (esp. pages 13-16 of the version available on Canvas)</li> <li>• Hershey. Chpt 1.</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: What are Political Parties? Con't</b></p>
<b>Week 2</b> <b>Jan 20 &amp; 22</b>	<p><b>Thurs: America's Two-Party System</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 2</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: State and Local Party Organizations</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 3</li> <li>• Mike Royko. <i>Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago.</i> (The Penguin Group, 1971) Chpt 1 (Canvas)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 3</b> <b>Jan 27 &amp; 29</b>	<p><b>Tues: National Party Organizations</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 4</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Party Activists</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 5</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b> <b>Feb 3 &amp; 5</b>	<p><b>Tues: Party Identification</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 6</li> </ul> <p><b>Party Coalitions and Realigning Elections, Con't</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 7</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b> <b>Feb 10 &amp; 12</b>	<p><b>Tues: Who Votes?</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 8</li> </ul> <p><b>Tues: Who Votes? Con't</b></p>
<b>Week 6</b> <b>Feb 17 &amp; 19</b>	<p><b>Tues: MIDTERM 1</b></p> <p><b>Thurs: Polling</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zukin. "Polling Primer." (Canvas)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b> <b>Feb 24 &amp; 26</b>	<p><b>Tues: Nominating Candidates</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 9</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Nominating Presidential Candidates</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey. Chpt 10</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8</b> <b>Mar 3 &amp; 5</b>	<p><b>Tues: Targeting Voters</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 11</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Campaign Strategy</b></p>

	<p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sides, Shaw, Grossmann, Lipsitz. 2023. <i>Campaigns and Elections</i>, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Chapter 5 (Canvas)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9</b> <b>Mar 10 &amp; 12</b>	<p><b>Tues: Campaign Finance</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 12</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Campaign Finance Con't</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casey Dominguez. "Money: The Resource Race." (Canvas)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 10</b> <b>Mar 17 &amp; 19</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>
<b>Week 11</b> <b>Mar 24 &amp; 26</b>	<p><b>Tues: MIDTERM 2</b></p> <p><b>Thurs: Legislative Parties</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 13</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12</b> <b>Mar 31 &amp; Apr 2</b>	<p><b>Tues: Legislative Parties, Con't</b></p> <p><b>Thurs: Party in Government</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aldrich, John H. and David W. Rhode. 2001. "The Logic of Conditional Party Government: Revisiting the Electoral Connection." In <i>Congress Reconsidered</i>, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition.</li> </ul>
<b>Week 13</b> <b>Apr 7 &amp; 9</b>	<p><b>Tues: Congressional Leadership</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, Schickler, and Curry. <i>Congress and Its Members</i>, 18<sup>th</sup> Edition. Chpt 6. (CQ Press 2022). (Canvas)</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Congressional Leadership Continued</b></p>
<b>Week 14</b> <b>Apr 14 &amp; 16</b>	<p><b>Tues: The Executive and the Courts</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 14</li> <li>• Richard Skinner. "The Partisan Presidency" in <i>The State of the Political Parties</i>, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007) (Canvas)</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Semi-Responsible Parties</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 15</li> </ul>
<b>Week 15</b> <b>Apr 21 &amp; 23</b>	<p><b>Tues: The Place of Parties in American Politics</b></p> <p><u>Reading Assignment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hershey and Burden. Chpt 16</li> </ul> <p><b>Thurs: Reading Day</b></p>
<b>Week 16</b> <b>Apr 27</b>	<b>Mon: FINAL (10am-noon)</b>