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Tuesday, 4th period (10:40-11:30)
Thursday, 4th-5th periods (10:40-12:35)
Anderson 101
Office Hours: before & after class & by appt.

Political Parties & Elections

POS 4443; Spring 2026 (Final; Jan 8)

“Thinking is the hardest work known to man. This would account for why so few engage in it.” Henry Ford

About the Course

Given the course title, you’d be correct to guess that we’ll examine American political parties and elections. However, we’ll approach it in reverse order and in a topical and timely fashion rather than the traditional chronological order approach. We’ll begin the course at the end by getting immediately into the nitty-gritty of campaign strategies and tactics and what the modern parties are up to and, briefly, how they are structured. We’ll spend large parts of the first 3-4 weeks on campaigns and elections and less on parties and then beginning about the 4th or 5th week, we’ll revert back, possibly way back, and take a historical look at democratic theory and political parties.

I realize this is a Political Science class, but one of the weaknesses of our discipline is its focus on short periods of time and the consequent underestimation of and lack of appreciation for history and historical context. We’ll rectify that and spend several weeks discussing the historical development of the American Party system from the philosophical and theoretical arguments against parties in the 18th century, to the practical and logistical and legislative necessities that drove their development in the 19th century, and finally to the institutionalization of the two major parties of the modern era. We’ll also touch briefly on third party and interest group movements as well as the growth of the media and its role in politics.

Coverage of topics will combine class discussion, lecture, academic and non-academic readings and other hands-on materials as appropriate to our topics. By the end of the course, the hope is that you will have a greater appreciation and understanding of several things – the historical reasons why we have political parties in America, their theoretical as well as functional and institutional purposes, our electoral system and its intricacies, and various strategies and tactics employed in campaigns and elections. Hopefully, by May, you’ll be armed and dangerous and ready to make some informed decisions on the candidates, races, and issues of your choice....if you haven’t already ☺

Reading Materials

Required Text:

Party Politics in America, Marjorie Randon Hershey, 18th Edition, 2021 ISBN 9780367472573 (PPA)
(*I encourage you to get used, paperback editions, in the stores and/or online*)

There will also be required journal articles and other articles and readings that can either be gotten online or will be posted on Canvas. Some are already listed in the syllabus or below; others will be announced.

Required Articles:

Even the Geeks are Polarized, Ken Goldstein, The Forum 2014; 12(2):211-222. I will email you a pdf
What is a Party? – by Anson Morse from 1896 – free online

Federalist 10 – free online

Morris Fiorina – I will email you a pdf of 2 different articles

Policies and Grading

Food and drinks in class are fine but clean up after yourselves. If you need to leave to use the restroom, please do so quietly. I do not take attendance, however, your **active participation is expected** and we’ll miss you terribly on those occasions when you are unable to join us; and not being here on those occasions, you just have no idea what you may be missing. Your grade will reflect your performance in the following areas:

- **10% Class participation** – Determined via class discussion, not merely showing up

- **20%** **Reflection paper** – due on Canvas Tuesday Feb 17 on prompt given
- **25%** **Midterm** – Thursday, March 12, in class
- **25%** **Case Study/Memo** - due on Canvas on Tuesday April 2
- **20%** **Final Exam** – Tuesday April 28, 3:00-5:00 pm – format TBD

Reflection Papers & Case Studies/Memos should be approximately 6-8 pages, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point type, plus References and number your pages. Papers should consist of over 75% academic books and articles (i.e., keep newspapers, magazines, internet sources, etc. to a minimum). Papers should be well written, have a stated thesis or objective, a well-organized and articulated analysis of the issues and an argument for and against your thesis, and a conclusion. Logic, facts and evidence are welcome as is good grammar, and I grade on all of the above. **With my prior approval**, you may choose a topic on either American political parties or elections, and also choose from the following formats:

- **Case Study** - Critical Analysis of an aspect of a campaign and why the action taken either won or lost the race (For example, analyze how a candidate spent their money, the media strategy, the timing, grassroots, etc.).
- **Strategy Memo** to a Candidate or Political Party. It must relate to a real situation (for example, to the Democrats or Republicans for 2026; to President Trump or one of his opponents for 2028; to a Florida candidate for governor or senator or whatever).
- **Do you have another idea?**

Section I - Campaigns & Elections – 4 weeks

Goals of the Section: Introduction of the Course and General Housekeeping Matters. Do campaigns matter? What are campaigns all about and how do they work?

Week 1	Jan 13 & 15	Discuss: Syllabus, Readings, Expectations, Grading, Key Dates Fun stuff; Vision, Strategy and Tactics;
Week 2	Jan 20 & 22	Elements of a Campaign Plan; GOTV; Strategy – What type of race is this? PPA – Ch 9 Reading Assignment: “Even the Geeks are Polarized?” “How to beat an incumbent”
Week 3	Jan 27 & 29	Voter Contact – Direct vs. Indirect Reading Assignment: PPA - Ch 6 & 10 Brownstein, Ch 6 – I’ll post a pdf Handouts provided by me
Week 4	Feb 3 & 5	Reading Assignment: PPA – Ch 11 “What is a Party?” by Anson Morse

Section II - Historical Development of American Political Parties – 4 weeks

Goals of the Section: Historical Development of American Parties and Campaigns. What is a Party? As opposed to what? Interest groups, factions & groups. Competing definitions & theories of a party.

Week 5	Feb 10 & 12	The early history and development of American Parties PPA – Part 1 and Ch 1 & 2 Federalist 10 – free online
Week 6	Feb 17 & 19	PPA Ch 1 & 2 Handouts provided by me
Week 7	Feb 24 & 26	Party Systems in the 1800s

**PPA Ch 2 & Ch 7, pgs 144-152
Handouts provided by me**

Week 8	Mar 3 & 5	Party Systems in the 1900s PPA Ch 2; Handouts provided by me
Week 9	Mar 10 & 12	Tues - Party Systems in the 2000s Th - Midterm Exam – will be in class
Week 10	Mar 17 & 19	Spring Break

Section III – Development of Modern, (Ir)Responsible Parties – 6 Weeks

Goals of the Section: What is the Responsible Parties Thesis? Is it still valid today? Was it ever valid? Do parties have a responsibility to be responsible? What is/are the role(s) of modern political parties?

Week 11	Mar 24 & 26	Responsible Parties Thesis – Party in Government Reading Assignment: PPA – Ch 13-15 (especially Ch 15) Brownstein, pages 70 and 365-368.
Week 12	Mar 31 & Apr 2	Party in Organization Reading Assignment: PPA - Ch 3, 4 & 5 Memos due at 11:59 pm on March 31
Week 13	Apr 7 & 9	Party in the Electorate, Part 1 Reading Assignment: PPA - Ch 6, 7 & 8
Week 14	Apr 14 & 16	Synthesis of Modern Parties – how it all hangs together Reading Assignment: Journal Article by Morris Fiorina Link – I will give this to you in class; very important article.
Week 15	Apr 21	Synthesis of Modern Parties – how it all hangs together Reading Assignment: PPA - Ch 16
Week 16	Apr 28	Final Exam – scheduled for 3-5 m, format TBD

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

I take academic dishonesty very, very, very, very seriously. If I find evidence of cheating or plagiarism or other academic dishonesty, I will personally initiate disciplinary action.

Students with Special Needs

It is the responsibility of students needing special accommodation for this course to make an appointment to see me at the beginning of the semester. I will make every effort to meet your needs in accordance with UF Guidelines.

Office Hours

Feel free to come to my office hours for any reason, academic or otherwise. If my office hours are not convenient for you, we'll find a time that is. I am also easy to reach by email and typically respond quite quickly; this is the best way to reach me. I also Zoom or phone calls.

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#)." (The direct link is <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.)