

POSC-3215: AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Spring 2021

Instructor: Boris Heersink

bheersink@fordham.edu

www.borisheersink.com

Office Hours: Monday and Thursday, 2:00-3:00 PM and by appointment

Course Description

Aim of the Course: Despite a long history of skepticism and outright hostility to the concept of parties and factionalism from both voters and major political thinkers in the U.S. across most of American history, political parties have dominated the political process from the late 18th century until the current day. While there have been dramatic changes in the American party system – including which parties are competing for control of the American government, what parties look like, and who is voting for them – it is nearly impossible to envision what the American political system would look like without political parties.

However, while parties are omnipresent, political scientists have struggled to identify how they affect political outcomes. Indeed, there remain major debates within the field about how to even define what parties actually are. The aim of this course is to provide you with a thorough understanding of the history of American political parties, the main theories within political science about the role they play in the political system and the way they influence political outcomes, and the methodological approaches scholars take in testing their theories.

To achieve these goals, we will be reading a number of different perspectives from political scientists who have debated these issues. When reading these works, and when discussing them in class, it is important to keep in mind that these authors are proposing answers to puzzles but, that in doing so, they may get it wrong. You will be expected to have a thorough understanding of the basic arguments put forward by the authors, but you should also be critical of those arguments. Additionally, you should think critically about how these scholars test their theories: what methodological approaches are they relying on? What data are they using? Is this approach convincing? What could they have done better?

Design and Rules of the Course

Please read the below sections of the syllabus carefully.

Covid-19 and Online Education: Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, for the Spring 2021 semester this course will be taught entirely online. This means that, inevitably, the course will not work the way it would if we were able to all be together in the same room, twice a

week, as normal. However, my goal is to replicate the different components of a 'normal' course as much as possible. This means this online course will include the elements that usually would be part of the course, including lectures on the topics, assessments of whether students are following those lectures and doing the readings, and regular opportunities for students to ask me questions and present their thoughts on the topics we are talking about.

The pandemic has thus far affected all of us in some way, though of course the extent to which it has is likely to be different for each of us. However, I imagine that at this point – nearly a full year into the pandemic disrupting life in New York – we are all, if nothing else, tired, frustrated, and facing all types of motivational issues. This is completely understandable. And of course some of us may be dealing with much more serious possible issues caused by Covid-19 – including its effect on our own physical and mental health, that of our family and other loved ones, as well as any economic struggles caused by the pandemic. We all hope that in the next few months things will get better, but as of now we are not out of the dark yet.

Designing a course in these circumstances is complicated. On the one hand, I want this course to be meaningful and to teach you roughly the same things I would teach if we were meeting in person twice a week. I also hope that you participating in a course that is (hopefully!) interesting can serve as a helpful distraction from everything else going on. On the other hand, I am fully aware that the issues mentioned above can make participation in the course to the best of your ability difficult. Additionally, we cannot predict how the coming semester will play out for each of us in terms of the pandemic either.

My core concern above anything else is that each of you makes it through this semester physically and mentally healthy. I also understand that many of you are facing obstacles in your ability to study – including having limited access to the internet, having trouble finding a place to study or take online classes, changing work hours, and health scares. I have tried to design the course in such a way that there is some level of flexibility in when you take in most of the material. This means that most of the things you need to do on a weekly basis you can do at times that work best for you. The one exception concerns a weekly Zoom meeting on Thursday during our scheduled class time. But, if at any point during the semester you are encountering things – big or small – that make it impossible for you to keep up with the pace of the course and/or to attend the Zoom meetings, **please reach out to me**. We can try to figure out ways to help you get through the course, but I can only do that if you talk to me and let me know what you need help with.

Weekly Components: During a normal semester we meet twice a week for a 75-minute class. In addition to this, you are expected to spend a certain amount of time preparing for those classes, by doing readings and preparing assignments. My goal in designing the course is to not go over that amount of time (and in some cases, stay below it). The course consists of two broad components: an online non-synchronous section (which includes the readings, lecture videos, and short weekly assignments) and an online synchronous section (a weekly Zoom meeting).

Non-Synchronous Section: I will be posting a weekly learning module on the course Blackboard site (under Content). This module includes all the information you need for that week: the **readings** assigned (unless it is included in the textbook – see

below), links to **videos** that include the lectures for that week, and copies of the **slides** that I used in the lectures.

Additionally, the learning module includes **two weekly assignments** you have to take. The first concerns a short **multiple choice quiz** on the basis of that week's lecture videos. These quizzes are not intended to be particularly difficult, they are merely there to make sure that you actually watched the videos in full and paid attention. You are not getting specific grades for each quiz, rather I use your performance on the quizzes as a measure of your 'presence' in class. That is, in a normal semester I take attendance and I can see whether students are at least somewhat paying attention. The quizzes are the measure of your 'attendance' in class.

For every week, I have set up a **discussion board** on Blackboard with discussion questions regarding the topics for each class. You can also raise your own questions, and respond to each other's comments or questions. Posting and responding on the message boards counts towards participation the same way talking in class does. That is, in a normal class your physical presence in class counts towards your participation, but the highest participation grades go to students who participate actively – that is, they answer questions I raise, they ask their own questions, give their opinions, etc. The discussion board allows everybody the ability to participate in such a way.

I will make each weekly learning module available on the Friday morning preceding that week (the course readings are also available separately from the course modules in the Readings folder under Content). You are free to watch the videos, take the quizzes, and participate in the discussion board any time between then and that week's **Thursday, at 11 AM**. So, to use an example: for the week of February 15 the learning module will be available starting February 12 and you have until February 18 at 11 AM to get through the material and participate in the assignments.

Synchronous Section: To provide all students a way to communicate directly with me, and with each other, we will meet once a week on Thursday during our regular class time for a 25 minute Zoom meeting with a subset of students.

The reason I am holding these meetings in this particular format is that I think it is important to have direct conversations regularly amongst each other, but also that longer Zoom meetings with a larger group of people tend to be harder to focus on. By limiting the time and the number of participants, and by sharing some of the information through other formats (like the lecture videos) I'm hoping to avoid this.

You will be divided up in one of three groups that meet online at one of the following times. You will receive an email identifying which group you are in during the first week of class.

Group I: Thursdays, 11:30 AM
Group II: Thursdays, 11:55 AM
Group III: Thursdays, 12:20 PM

You are expected to be present in your Zoom session's time slot every week, to have done the readings and watched the lecture videos for that week, and to have taken the quiz and participated in the discussion forum at the start of the Zoom meeting. These meetings are mandatory.

To create an atmosphere in which all students feel comfortable participating and have the ability to achieve their full potential, civility during the discussions is vital. During our conversations we will inevitably come to talk about day to day politics, and it is very much possible that you will find yourself disagreeing strongly with points put forward by your fellow students (and, they with you!). While you should absolutely feel free to challenge other students, it is crucial that you should do so in a respectful way (and, of course, you can expect the same of your fellow students towards you).

If for some reason you cannot be present for understandable reasons (illness, personal circumstances clearly beyond your control, etc.) you should contact me as soon as you can (if at all possible, before the start of class). Note that in line with Fordham's attendance policy there is a maximum number of absences that would result in failing the course. Given that we find ourselves in a much more complex time than usual, I do not intend to follow this rule as it is listed, but there is a point where absences will negatively affect your final grade or could result in failing the course.

Office Hours: If you have any questions or want to chat about the course, you can schedule a Zoom meeting on **Monday and Thursday between 2:00 and 3:00 PM**. If you want to meet but cannot make that time, send me an e-mail and we will schedule a meeting. You can also e-mail me with any questions or concerns – I try to respond to every e-mail within 24 hours. You should not feel like you can only schedule a meeting if you have really specific questions: it's fine if you want to talk about the course (or anything else going on) more broadly.

Grade

Components: Your grade is based on participation on the quizzes, message boards, and in the Zoom meetings (25%), a midterm (20%), a final (25%), and a research proposal paper (30%).

The midterm and final will both follow the same format. The questions will be a mix of ID terms and open ended essay questions regarding both the readings and the material discussed in class. The midterm will cover all the material dealt with up until then; the final covers all material from the course but will predominantly focus on the material covered after the midterm. Both exams are take-home, and will be available for several days to take at your convenience. The midterm will be available in the week of **March 22**. The final will

be available during the regular exam period at the end of the semester, and will include our official exam date.

The research proposal will exist of a 6-page double-spaced paper engaging a specific puzzle regarding political parties in relation to the readings you will read in this course. Throughout the course we will be discussing the question of how political scientists can test their claims using different research methodologies. In the **week of April 12** we will use our class to talk about how to specifically design a research project in political science. We will use part of our Zoom time that week for you to brainstorm and design a research question for the proposal paper. During the **week of April 26**, you will be sharing full drafts of your paper with other students to receive and give feedback. The paper itself is due **May 4**. Specific guidelines regarding the components of the research design will be distributed after the first midterm. However, while doing the readings keep your eye open for a topic you might be interested expanding on for this assignment.

Grading Scale and Calculation of Final Course Grade: For the midterm and final exam you can earn up to 100 points. Those points subsequently are converted to a letter grade which builds towards your final course grade in line with the scale below. For your research paper and participation you will receive a single letter grade which follows the point value outlined below.

Exam Points	Letter Grade	Points toward Final Grade
100-93	A	4.0
92-90	A-	3.7
89-87	B+	3.3
86-83	B	3.0
82-80	B-	2.7
79-77	C+	2.3
76-73	C	2.0
72-70	C-	1.7
69-60	D	1.0
59 and below	F	0.0

Your final grade is based on a weighted average of each of the points earned towards your final grade based on the percentages outlined above. For example, the midterm is worth 20% of your grade. If you receive a B+ for your midterm, that means you have earned $3.3 * 0.20 = 0.66$ points towards your final grade. If you received an A for participation, worth 25%, you earned $4.0 * 0.25 = 1$ point towards your final grade. The final letter grade you receive will be based on the total final grade points as follows:

Total Earned Final Grade Points	Final Letter Grade
4.0 – 3.84	A
3.83 – 3.50	A-
3.49 – 3.17	B+
3.16 – 2.84	B

2.83 – 2.50	B-
2.49 – 2.17	C+
2.16 – 1.84	C
1.83 – 1.34	C-
1.34 – 1.0	D
0.99 and below	F

Grade Complaints: I will grade your performance in this course in comparison to your fellow students as well as predetermined expectations. This means that the grade you earn should be a fair representation of how you have performed in comparison both to my general expectations of all participants, as well as your fellow classmates' work in this course.

It is possible that you may be unhappy with a grade, and I am always willing to discuss your progress during the course to help you improve. If you believe the grade you received is an **incorrect** assessment of the quality of the work you produced, you can challenge your grade. If you want to do so, please email me to set up an appointment and send me a copy of your exam and a written description (approximately half a page) comparing your answers to those listed in the answer key that will be made available online after the exam, explaining why you believe your grade does not accurately represent the quality of the work you submitted. We will subsequently discuss your work and I will assess whether I believe your grade should be changed.

Before you contact me about your grade(s), consider the following things. First, the goal of a grade reassessment is to produce a grade that is a fair representation of your performance: this means that any errors that lowered your grade will be corrected, but any potential errors that *increased* it will also be adjusted. A regrading process can thus result in a higher grade, the exact same grade, or a lower grade than what you received through the original grading process.

Second, a grade challenge means you must make a **specific argument** about why you think the grading does not reflect the **quality** of your work. It is not enough to state that you are confused by your grade, or that you feel that it does not reflect the amount of time and effort you put into the course. While I understand that both of those feelings can be very frustrating, they are not arguments for why a grade is not correct and I will not entertain grading challenges based solely on these arguments. As you are assessing your work in comparison to the answer keys or my comments, make sure you do not just look at the things you did right but also those things you missed. Meaning, if you got an A- for something, you probably did really well but you got some things wrong or did not include them at all. Those are the things that cost you points. Pointing out all the things you *did* include are not an argument for why the grade is incorrect.

Additionally, students sometimes try to 'challenge' their grade through a roundabout way – effectively asking the instructor to defend why they received the grade they received without providing arguments for why they disagree with the grade. Please do not do this: if you think the grade is incorrect, identify what it is you think I did wrong and engage with me on that

basis. If you cannot articulate why you think the grade is wrong, then that might just mean it is in fact a correct assessment of your performance.

Finally, grades are not a negotiation: if you believe I made a mistake, you should feel free to challenge the grade. But the correct use of this process is not to look at your different grades at the end of the semester and to try to up one, or multiple, grade(s) with the sole goal of collecting enough points to increase your final letter grade. If you want to ensure you get the highest grade possible I would advise you to spend your time reaching out to me with questions *before* the exams and paper deadline, and not on trying to haggle about a grade afterwards.

Plagiarism and Other Violations of Code of Conduct: All assignments in this course fall under Fordham University's code of conduct. Any violation (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams, and plagiarism) will result in the student being held accountable to the full extent of university guidelines. Note that this includes self-plagiarism – that is, taking (parts of) assignments you did for other courses and resubmitting them for this course. While self-plagiarism might seem like an innocent act, it means you did not do original work as required for this course. It too can lead to negative consequences, including failing this course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

Notes

Fordham generally provides me with a class list that includes your legal name. If you prefer to be addressed by an alternate name and/or gender pronoun, please do not hesitate to let me know. You can do so in our Zoom meetings, by email, or during an office hour appointment, whichever you prefer. Also, please correct me if I mispronounce your name or use the incorrect gender pronoun!

As a faculty member, I am – by law – a mandatory reporter and I am required to contact and provide information to Public Safety, the Dean of Students, or Fordham's Title IX Coordinator if I am provided with any information indicating that a Fordham student has been sexually harassed (verbally or physically), sexually assaulted, stalked, had domestic violence or dating violence occur in a relationship, or been a victim / survivor of any behavior that is prohibited by Fordham's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures. Once reported, Fordham will seek to support any student and make efforts to stop the negative behavior, prevent it from recurring, and remedy its effects. It is important for you to be aware that there are three confidential places on campus where you can seek support or guidance from Fordham staff members who are **not** mandatory reporters: clinical counselors in Counseling & Psychological Services, pastoral counselors in Campus Ministry, and medical service providers in University Health Services. You can read more about this in the Student CARE brochure or visit www.fordham.edu/care or www.fordham.edu/sexualmisconduct for more information.

If you or someone you know is struggling with emotional or mental health concerns, and/or gender, sexual, or domestic violence, Fordham's Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS)

can provide (free) assistance. The Rose Hill office of CPS is open Monday through Friday and can be reached by phone at 718-817-3725. CPS will be providing remote meetings as well as in-person services at Rose Hill. If you, or a student you know, is experiencing a mental health crisis or emergency that requires immediate attention contact Fordham's office of Public Safety at Rose Hill at 718-817-2222 (available 24/7).

Course Materials

All readings for this course will be made available online through Blackboard.

Course Syllabus

Week of February 1

Topic: Introduction to Political Science and the Study of Political Parties

No readings.

Week of February 8

Topic: Parties and History: Realignment Theory

Readings:

David Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), Chapters 2 and 4.

Week of February 15

Topic: Parties and History I

Readings:

Scott C. James, "Patronage Regimes and American Party Development from 'the Age of Jackson' to the Progressive Era," *British Journal of Political Science* vol. 36, no. 1 (2006) 39-60.

Week of February 22

Topic: Parties and History II

Readings:

Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018) Chapter 3.

["The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider,"](#) *Pew Research Center* (October 5, 2017).

Week of March 1

Topic: Parties in Congress and Party Brands

Readings:

Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 – 2nd edition, 2007) Chapter 7.

Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) Chapters 1 and 2.

Week of March 8

Topic: UCLA School

Readings:

Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) Chapters 1 and 7.

Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2012) 571-597.

Week of March 15:

Topic: Catch-up week

Readings:

No readings.

Week of March 22

Topic: **Midterm Exam**

Readings:

No readings.

Week of March 29:

Topic: Parties in the Electorate

Readings:

Boris Heersink, Brenton D. Peterson, and Jordan Carr Peterson, "Mobilization and Counter-Mobilization: The Effect of Candidate Visits on Campaign Donations in the 2016 Presidential Election," *The Journal of Politics* (Forthcoming).

Week of April 5

Topic: Black Voters and 'Captured Groups' in Party Politics

Keneshia N. Grant, *The Great Migration and the Democratic Party* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2020), Chapter 4.

Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), Chapter 2.

Leah Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 2015), Chapter 7.

Week of April 12

Topic: Research Methodology in Political Science

Readings:

Lisa A. Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods* (Sage, 2016) Chapter 7.

Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, "Whiteness and the Emergence of the Republican Party in the Early Twentieth-Century South," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 34, no. 1 (2020) 71-90.

Week of April 19

Topic: Gender, Religion, and Other (Possibly) Captured Groups

Susan J. Carroll, "Voting Choices: The Significance of Women Voters and the Gender Gap," in Susan J. Carroll and Richard L. Fox, *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 4th edition) 78-115.

Christopher Baylor, *First to the Party: The Group Origins of Political Transformation* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018) Chapter 8.

Week of April 26

Topic: Research Proposal Workshops

Readings:

No readings.

Week of May 3

Topic: Extra office hours

Readings:

No readings.