PLAP 824
The Development of the American Party System

W 2:15 – 4:30
Scripps Library
The Miller Center of Public Affairs

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Course Description

This course will focus on the development of the political party system in the United States, from the late 18th Century through the present day. Over the semester, we will examine why political parties emerged in the U.S., both in Congress and at the mass level; why particular parties like the Federalists and Whigs collapsed; and how different “party systems” have developed historically. Much of the course will focus on the changing electoral fortunes and underlying constituencies of the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S.

In addition, rather than simply document the dynamics of parties and party systems across time, we will study American party development from various theoretical perspectives, including an economic-based perspective (referred to as Rational-Choice Institutionalism), a sociological-based perspective (referred to as Historical Institutionalism), and a more traditional historical perspective. The initial emergence of political parties, the demise of particular parties at various points in time, and the development of different party systems across time have been the result of multiple factors. Different perspectives emphasize different factors – for example, economic-based studies often emphasize the decision-making of elite actors; sociological-based studies typically emphasize pressures from groups in society; and traditional historical studies often emphasize the interaction of multiple (elite and mass) actors in the larger political system – so a complete and thorough accounting of party development and partisan change should incorporate each perspective.

Course Materials

We will use eleven books, all of which will be available at the UVA Bookstore. Some additional readings will be available on-line; these will be identified on the weekly outline. The eleven books we will use are:


**Course Requirements**

Students should finish each week’s reading in advance of our scheduled meeting time. The course will follow a seminar format. This means that I will do little direct lecturing; rather, I will provide background context for the various readings, suggest important questions that should be pursued, and guide the class discussion on a meeting-by-meeting basis. Students are thus expected to participate actively and routinely in class discussion. As a result, class attendance will be mandatory, and participation in class discussion will represent 50% of the course grade. The remaining 50% of the course grade will come from a research paper (the content of which we’ll discuss in the early weeks of the class).

**Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. Students who plagiarize or cheat will be held accountable to the full-extent of university guidelines.

**Readings**

An * next to a piece indicates that I will make it available to you electronically (via a PDF attachment).
Week 1: January 21

Focus: Introduction to the course and discussion of the syllabus

Week 2: January 28

Focus: Understanding the rational-basis for party emergence and formation; introduction to the concept of a “party system.”

Readings:

John Aldrich. *Why Parties?*. Chapters 1 and 2


Week 3: February 4

Focus: Examining the rise of the first political parties in America; discussion of the transition from the First Party System to the Second Party System.

Readings:

John Aldrich. *Why Parties?*. Chapters 3 and 4


Week 4: February 11

Focus: Examining the development of the Second Party System and the rise of the Third Party System.

John Aldrich, *Why Parties?*. Chapter 5


Week 5: February 18

Focus: Examining and critiquing the “broad brush stroke” of party realignment theory.


James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, All.


Week 6: February 25

Focus: Analyzing the ideology of political parties across time, with emphasis on how ideology drives (and reinforces) partisan change.


Week 7: March 4

Spring Break – No Class.

Week 8: March 11

Focus: Analyzing the politics of the Third Party System, moving into the Fourth Party System; party-building strategies across national institutions.


Week 9: March 18

**Focus:** Further analysis of the Fourth Party System; transition to the Fifth Party System; the rise of the Conservative Coalition.


Week 10: March 25

**Focus:** Examining partisanship and institutional change during the Progressive Era.


Week 11: April 1

MPSA meetings – No Class.

Week 12: April 8

Focus: Examining parties and political change at the sub-national level, with specific emphasis on the dynamics of machine-based politics.


Week 13: April 15

Focus: Analyzing the contemporary period in partisan politics, sometimes called the Sixth Party System; the emergence of the conservative movement within the Republican Party and rise of the Southern Republicans.

David Lublin, The Republican South. All.


Week 14: April 22

**Focus:** Examining how partisan differences in recent decades have led to greater polarization in Congress; investigation of factors that have led to polarization at different political levels.


Week 15: April 29

**Focus:** Examining the role of parties in the presidential nomination (selection) process across time.

