1 Course Objectives

E. E. Schattschneider (1942) wrote that “democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties,” a sentiment with which many scholars still agree. This course will investigate one pillar of democracy, political parties, by studying the nature and results of party competition. It is a comparative politics course and as such compares political phenomena across countries, as well as over time. The focus is generally on advanced industrial democracies, e.g. democracies in North America and Western Europe, but students are welcome to apply the material to developing countries. The goals of the course are twofold. First, we will seek to understand how variation in party competition leads to different political outcomes. In particular, the course will focus on the issue of American exceptionalism. Is party politics in the U.S. different from that of other developed democracies and, if so, what are the consequences? Second, we will evaluate arguments about the decline of political parties. Are they in decline, and if so, what are the implications for democracy?

The first part of the course will explore how party competition varies across countries. We will initially seek to characterize party systems, with special focuses on both the content of party politics (that is, on the ideological dimensions of competition as well as the positions that parties take on these dimensions) and the structure (that is, on party organization and campaigning). The second part of the course will seek to explain these differences by studying both political institutions and society. We will evaluate various scholars’ theories in light of recent changes in political competition such as the rise of green parties. The third and most important part of the course will ask why party politics matters. We will examine the role of parties in policy-making and the impact of party competition on a variety of political outcomes generally viewed as significant to peoples’ lives, from economic performance to accountability to the sustainability of democracy itself. We will also take a closer look at alternatives to parties in this final portion of the course.

2 Course Requirements

This course is designed to give you an opportunity to discuss important issues related to representative government in depth. It will also give you a flavor of graduate-level instruction for those who are contemplating pursuit of a graduate or professional degree. Class participation is consequently an important part of the course, as is the case with any seminar. To facilitate participation, you are required to write three short critical response papers to the readings (3–5 double-spaced pages).
Guidelines for the papers are available from the course website, but the goals in a nutshell are two-fold: to summarize the readings and to critically reflect upon them. One paper must be written for each module of the course, i.e. one in weeks 2–4, one in weeks 5–7, and one in weeks 8–10. Papers are due by 10:30 a.m. on the Wednesday of the appropriate week (either in my mailbox or via e-mail); this is so that I have a chance to skim over the paper prior to class and can thus use your thoughts to help steer discussion. Please e-mail your preference ordering over the weeks of each module to me by Friday, 6 April, and I will shortly thereafter get back to you with assignments. (Every effort will be made to give you your preferred weeks while ensuring that there is at least one student writing a paper each week.) In the weeks that you write papers, you are expected to take an active role in leading class discussion.

Other course requirements are a short (and hopefully fun!) midterm project and either a take-home final essay exam or a research paper on a topic of your choice. The midterm project is best thought of as a homework assignment. It is designed to familiarize you with non-US political parties as well as to facilitate mastery of the important initial concepts. It will be handed out in class on 2 May and due in class on 16 May. Please notify me by 16 May as to your choice of either the take-home final or research paper option. Guidelines and suggested topics for the approximately 15 page research paper (standard font and double-spaced) are available from the course website. Students who choose this option are encouraged to consult with me about their topic. We will devote some class time in the last few weeks of the quarter to discussing the projects. Students who choose the exam option will receive the two essay questions on the last day of class, 6 June. Each essay should be approximately 4 and 6 pages (standard font and double-spaced). Both the paper and exam are due on Friday, 15 June by 4:30 p.m. in my mailbox. No late papers or exams will be accepted except in cases of documented personal or medical emergencies.

3 Grading

Grades for the course will be calculated as follows.

- Three 3–5 page response papers. (30%)
- Class participation. (30%)
- A short midterm project due on 16 May. (10%)
- A take-home final exam or a research paper. Both are due on 15 June. (30%)

4 Required Reading Materials

There is no required text. Readings available in hard copy from the “reader” are marked [R]; the few that are available online are marked [E]; and items that are available from the Reserve Book Service (usually for copyright reasons) are marked [RBS]. Reserve Book Service items can be obtained electronically from http://eres.library.ucsb.edu/ using the password supplied in class. Links to the items available online, usually from JSTOR, can be found on the course website although you will only be able to access the items from a UCSB computer.
5 Syllabus

4 April: Organizational Session (Week 1)

PART I: VARIANCE IN PARTY COMPETITION (WEEKS 2–4)

11 April: Introduction: Why Parties, the Decline Thesis, and Characterizing Party Competition (Is America Exceptional?)


The Economist. 2003. “From Sea to Shining Sea.” 6 November. [R]


18 April. A Closer Look at the Content of Party Politics


The Economist. 1999. “Fascism Resurgent?” 7 October. [R]

The Economist. 2001. “Greening the Globe.” 17 April. [R]

The Economist. 2003. “Politics as Warfare.” 6 November. [R]


Lipset, Seymour Martin and Gary Marks. 2000. “An Exceptional Nation” [in part], p. 15-21 (Chapter 1), and “The End of Political Exceptionalism” [in part], p. 269-278 (Chapter 8). In It Didn’t Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. [R]


25 April. A Closer Look at the Structure of Party Politics


PART II: EXPLAINING VARIANCE IN PARTY COMPETITION (WEEKS 5–7)

2 May: Party Behavior, Political Institutions and Communications Technology


9 May: No class

16 May: Bringing in Society (and a Little More about Institutions)


PART III: POLITICAL OUTCOMES (WEEKS 8–10)

23 May: Who Governs? Representation and Accountability


30 May: Public Policy and the Welfare State


6 June: Political Parties, Elections and Democracy


TBA, Reading on interest groups.