

PSCI 3031: Political Parties & Interest Groups
Fall 2017
Tu/Th 2:00 – 3:15 pm
HUMN 135

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Both acclaimed and reviled, groups are seen as vital to the functioning of democracy. In American politics, political parties and interest groups act as intermediaries between citizens and government. They can give voice to the concerns and ideas of large numbers of people who might otherwise remain unheard. Parties can simplify our choices in elections by providing us with a slate of candidates, and can bring together elected officials who have similar policy preferences and help them get those preferences passed into law. By supporting and endorsing candidates, organized interests can tell their sympathizers which candidates are most likely to do what the group wants, and groups can put pressure on office-holders to get certain proposals passed. Ultimately, it is citizens acting through groups that have the power to keep government accountable.

How well are groups living up to these vital political roles? What are these political intermediaries capable of doing in a democracy, what do they actually do in American politics, and what would a variety of reformers have them do differently? The goal of this course is to critically examine the theories and evidence regarding the role and effects of political parties and interest groups in the American political system – including with respect to current political developments.

Course Reading

Readings are drawn from two books, and additional selections as listed on the class schedule. In addition, all students should be paying attention to current political news.

Books:

- Marjorie R. Hershey, *Party Politics in America* (15th ed., 16th ed. or other recent edition)
- Jeffrey M. Berry & Clyde Wilcox, *Interest Group Society* (5th ed. or other recent edition)

Course Requirements

This course is designed to stimulate active thinking and application of key theories and assumptions about the role of political parties and interest groups in American politics. An overview of the exam and assignment schedule is listed below. Specific requirements will be discussed in class, and detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on D2L.

Tues	03 Oct, before class	Assignment 1: Political Parties	15%
Tues	24 Oct, in class	Midterm Exam	20%
Thurs	16 Nov, before class	Assignment 2: News Log	15%
Tues	07 Dec, before class	Assignment 3: Interest Groups	20%
Tues	19 Dec, 1:30 pm	Final Exam	20%
		Participation & Attendance	10%

Class Policies & Expectations

- **Class Participation:** You have to be there – physically and mentally – to be participating. This is an important element of the course, both in grading and for the intellectual value of the class for all involved. Related to this, students are expected to refrain from activities such as web-surfing, emailing, texting and other competing forms of multi-tasking that distract both you and everyone around you.
- **Assignment Submission:** Assignments will be available on D2L and are due to the D2L drop-box before class on the specified due dates. There is no need to submit paper copies. Assignments must be submitted in either MS Word or pdf format. Students are responsible for ensuring that documents are successfully submitted and accessible for grading purposes. If you're having trouble with D2L, you may submit a back-up copy via email as well. Required papers may be subject to Turnitin.com for plagiarism review.
- **Late Assignment Policy:** Papers are due on the due dates. Late papers will be accepted late for reduced credit, as follows: Same day, after class begins: -10%; next day: -20%; each day thereafter, an additional 10% deduction. No late papers accepted after one week overdue.
- **Missed exams:** Alternative make-up exams allowed only for excused and documented absences.
- **Students with Disabilities or Special Needs:** If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (at least one week prior to an assignment due date or exam) explaining your required accommodations so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition, see Temporary Injuries guidelines under Quick Links at [Disability Services website](#) and discuss your needs with me.
- **Religious Observances:** Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, please contact me in advance to explain your circumstances and to discuss any special scheduling needs. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.
- **Classroom Behavior:** Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [student code](#).
- **Misconduct, Discrimination & Harassment:** The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. CU's Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibits sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking or related retaliation. CU Boulder's Discrimination and Harassment Policy prohibits discrimination, harassment or related retaliation based on race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct under either policy should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127. Information about the OIEC, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation can be found at the [OIEC website](#).
- **Honor Code:** All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [academic integrity policy](#) of the institution. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code Council as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at honorcode.colorado.edu.

PSCI 3031, Political Parties & Interest Groups

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

*** Class schedule subject to change ***

Week 1 (Aug 29 & 31): Introduction; what is the role of groups in American politics?

Reading:

- Hershey, Chap. 1

Questions to consider:

- What role do political parties play in the U.S. political system? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the party system?
- What are similarities and differences between political parties and interest groups?

Week 2 (Sept 5 & 7): Effects of groups in American politics – good or bad?

Reading:

- Berry & Wilcox, Chap. 1
- James Madison, Federalist 10, “The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection (continued),” available at <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>
- Alexis de Tocqueville, “Of the Use Which the Americans Make of Public Associations in Civil Life,” Chapter 5 in Volume 2, Part 2 of *Democracy in America*, 1840; on D2L.

Questions to consider:

- What did James Madison mean by “the mischiefs of faction?” What is a faction? What are the dangers of factions in politics?
- Alexis de Tocqueville found civic associations to be an important feature of early American life. Why did he consider these associations valuable?
- What U.S. Constitutional features help to limit the power of parties in American politics?
- How important are political parties in modern democracies?

Week 3 (Sept 12 & 14): Deciphering the nature of contemporary political party politics

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 2 & 6
- Lee Drutman, “Political Divisions in 2016 and Beyond: Tensions Between and Within the Two Parties,” a research report from the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, June 2017; on D2L.

Questions to consider:

- What is party identification? Does a person’s party identification change over time? When?
- Are strong partisans uninformed? Why? What is the myth of the independent voter? How do we know it’s a myth?
- Define polarization as it applies to contemporary American politics. Distinguish between polarization of the electorate versus polarization of politics.
- What is the argument that we have an ideologically polarized electorate? That we do not have a polarized electorate?

Week 4 (Sept 19 & 21): Polarization: electoral and political divide

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 5 & 13

Questions to consider:

- Is polarization just another way of describing the differences across the parties?
- Why do so many consider political polarization to be problematic?
- Though political parties seem to have significant power in American politics, the party system is often considered to be weak. Why is this?

Week 5 (Sept 26 & 28): Decentralized party organization

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 3 & 4

Questions to consider:

- What is the main reason why U.S. political parties are decentralized?
- Why might someone say that we don't really have a two party system as much as a 100-party system? How does this fragmentation affect the ideological coherence of political parties?
- What is the difference between party-centered and candidate-centered politics? What factors gave rise to candidate-centered politics?
- How do national, state, and local party organizations differ from one another? What are the main functions of each level of party organization?
- What are some of the main features of machine politics? What are the effects of machine politics?

Week 6 (Oct 3 & 5): Decentralized political party system and the rules of the game that shape American politics

→ **Tuesday, Oct. 3: Assignment 1 due to D2L before class**

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 9, 10 & 11

Questions to consider:

- Party leaders and activists want good candidates who will serve their election and policy interests. To what extent do political parties control the selection process? Who chooses presidential candidates?
- Candidate selection processes have consequences for the political system. How do primary and caucus approaches differ? How do these differences affect political parties versus citizens? Does it matter?
- Not all primary elections are alike. What types of primary rules tend to be most preferred by party organizations, and why is this? What types are more preferred by voters and citizens, and why is this?
- Presidential campaigns in the U.S. are notoriously long and contentious, with complex scheduling considerations. Why this lengthy process? What factors affect scheduling?

Week 7 (Oct 10 & 12): Basic party organizational feature – two party, historic roots

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 7 & 8
- Sean Trende, Introduction & Chapter 12, "Beyond Realignment," in *The Lost Majority: Why the Future of Government is Up for Grabs – and Who Will Take It* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); on D2L.

Questions to consider:

- The U.S. party system has developed over time in response to both constitutional rules and historic experience. What basic constitutional rule affected the development of the two-party system in the early 1800s? How did parties adjust their strategies in response?
- What are party coalitions? What causes them to shift over time?
- Historians have described a series of party systems reflecting different coalitions of support (economic, social, regional) for the major parties over time. What are the major issue cleavages separating the parties across the six party systems?
- What does Trende argue about party realignments in American politics? To what extent do elections signal popular support for party mandates?

Week 8 (Oct 17 & 19): Why two parties?

Reading:

- Hershey, Chap. 2 (review)

Questions to consider:

- What is a minor party (*aka*, third party)? Why is it difficult for minor parties to win elections?
- When do minor parties tend to arise? How can minor parties have an impact on national politics if they cannot usually compete in national elections?
- Duverger's "Law": What is it? What does it explain?

- Many rules, both formal and informal, influence the U.S. two-party system. What are the most important factors that lead to two-party results?
- Numerous minor rules and practices are in place that reinforce the dominance of the two major parties. What are some of these?

Week 9

Oct 24: Midterm Exam

Oct 26: Party in government: Congress

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 12 & 13 (review)

Questions to consider:

- How do political parties organize the Congress?
- What is conditional party government? How can party leaders in Congress enforce discipline?
- What are basic principles used by federal courts in considering if map lines in the congressional redistricting process are fair?

Week 10 (Oct 31 & Nov 2): Party in government: Executive, Judicial

Reading:

- Hershey, Chap. 14

Questions to consider:

- What role does the president generally play in party politics? How does Pres. Trump's relationship with the Republican Party match or differ from the general pattern?
- How are the courts partisan? Nonpartisan? How are courts targeted in interest group strategies?
- What are general advantages and disadvantages of divided versus unified government?

Week 11 (Nov 7 & 9): Political party remedies?

Reading:

- Hershey, Chaps. 15 & 16

Questions to consider:

- What is the median voter theorem? What are incentives for general election candidates given the median voter theorem?
- What is meant by "responsible parties," (aka, "party government")? Pros and cons of this approach?
- To what extent are American parties ideological? Does this matter?
- Considering the current state of American political parties – for citizens, for decision makers, for governance – what improvements or remedies would you suggest?

Week 12 (Nov 14 & 16): Interest groups in American politics

→ Thursday, Nov. 16: Assignment 2 due to D2L before class

Reading:

- Berry & Wilcox, Chaps. 2 & 3

Questions to consider:

- Are interest groups a threat to the political system, or do they contribute to its proper functioning? Consider the roles played by interest groups in American politics as well as the relative power of different types of interest groups.
- How do interest groups find members? What are some challenges they face in keeping members? What does a group think about when setting its priorities?

*** THANKSGIVING BREAK ***

Week 13 (Nov 28 & 30): Collective action and building group support

Reading:

- Berry & Wilcox, Chaps. 4 & 5
- Mancur Olson, “A Theory of Groups and Organizations,” Introduction and Chapter 1 in *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Good and the Theory of Groups*, 1965 (pp. 1-52); on D2L.
- “The Free Rider Problem,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, May 21, 2003, available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/free-rider/>

Questions to consider:

- Define the free rider problem. What effect does this problem have on group formation? Given the free rider problem, why and how do groups form? Do all groups have an equal chance of forming?
- What are selective incentives? What selective incentives do groups offer to entice people to do their organizational work?
- In what non-financial ways can interest groups affect campaigns? Why would an interest group decide not to give money at all? Why might a group decide to take sides with a political party?
- What is the definition of a Political Action Committee? If a PAC wanted to “buy access,” to whom should it give? Do PAC contributions buy votes in Congress? Why or why not? How could you tell?

Week 14 (Dec 5 & 7): Lobbying

➔ **Thursday, Dec. 7: Assignment 3 due to D2L before class**

Reading:

- Berry & Wilcox, Chaps. 6, 7, 8 & 9

Questions to consider:

- What is lobbying? What behaviors are associated with lobbying? What is the difference between access and influence?
- How does insider lobbying differ from outside (or grassroots) lobbying? Why would an interest group choose one over the other?
- How do lobbyists go about gaining access to members of Congress? As a lobbyist trying to alter the content of legislation in Congress, who would you want to develop good relationships with?
- How do lobbyists lobby the executive branch? Why might they be more successful there than with votes in Congress?

Week 15 (Dec 12 & 14): Bias & representation, Evaluating the effects of group action on American politics

Reading:

- Berry & Wilcox, Chap. 10

Questions to consider:

- Why does the first amendment make it difficult to regulate lobbying?
- On balance, are the actions and effects of groups good or bad for American democracy? What changes would you advise for controlling, channeling or directing the role of groups in the American political system?

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, Dec. 19th, beginning at 1:30 pm