

HERTOG 2020 SUMMER COURSES

CAN PARTISANSHIP BE FIXED?

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If there is one thing about politics that unites Americans these days, it is their contempt for political parties and partisanship. More Americans today identify as independents than with either of the two major political parties. Party leaders in Congress are held in disrepute, criticized by one side for being too soft and condemned by the other for being too extreme. The partisan coalitions that defined the Democratic and Republican parties for decades seem to be breaking apart, as insurgent, “outsider” politicians continue to rise.

Yet while both major parties are less popular than at any time in recent history, partisan antipathy has only intensified. Party affiliation is now a bigger wedge between Americans than race, gender, religion, or level of education. What is the origin of this bitter and seemingly irreconcilable divide? Is there an ideal level of party difference? How much is too much? In this seminar, students will examine the roots of partisanship and its implications for our national politics.

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. Papers are due the day before your assigned session by **5 PM ET**. They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Resources

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Relevant pages include Edmund Burke, *The Federalist*, and Tocqueville (on *The Great Thinkers*), and Edward Banfield, Nathan Glazer, and James Q. Wilson (on *Contemporary Thinkers*).

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

10:00 a.m. to Noon ET American Parties

Readings:

- Edmund Burke, Excerpt from “Thoughts on the Present Discontents”
- Russell Muirhead, “A Defense of Party Spirit,” *Perspectives on Politics* 4:4 (2006)
- A. James Reichley, Ch. 2, *The Life of the Parties* (2000)

- Frances McCall Rosenbluth and Ian Shapiro, Chs. 1–2, *Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy from Itself* (2019)
- Morris P. Fiorina, “Gridlock is Bad. The Alternative is Worse,” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 2014

Discussion Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What are parties?
2. Is partisanship a good thing? Is being a partisan defensible?
3. What were the American Founders’ objections to political parties?
4. What is the ideal or best party system?
5. By what criteria should we judge party systems?

Thursday, July 16, 2020

10:00 a.m. to Noon ET **Party Reform**

Readings:

- James W. Ceaser, “Political Parties and Presidential Ambition,” *Journal of Politics* 40 (1978)
- Edward C. Banfield, Ch. 4, *Here the People Rule* (1991)
- Jonathan Rauch and Raymond La Raja, “Primary Voters Have Way Too Much Power,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, (November 2019)
- Jonathan Rauch, “How American Politics Went Insane,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2016

Audio:

- “James Ceaser: How We Select Our Presidential Candidates,” *Conversations with Bill Kristol*, March 21, 2020
- “The Case for Tammany Hall Being on the Right Side of History: Interview with Terry Golway,” *NPR*, March 5, 2015

Discussion Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What are the different models of parties that have been proposed in American politics since the Founding?
2. Can political parties be made to serve the Founders’ objectives—at least in terms of presidential selection?
3. What have been the consequences of the “democratizing” or “decentralizing” reforms of the 1970s?
4. What is a “party machine”? What are advantages and disadvantages of this mode of party organization?

Monday, July 20, 2020

10:00 a.m. to Noon ET

Party Polarization & Government

Readings:

- Michael Barber and Nolan McCarty, “Causes and Consequences of Polarization,” *Solutions to Polarization in America*, ed. Nathaniel Persily (2015)
- James M. Curry and Frances E. Lee, “Non-Party Government: Bipartisan Lawmaking and Party Power in Congress,” *Perspectives on Politics* 17 (2019)
- Frances E. Lee, “How Party Polarization Affects Governance,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015)
- Pietro S. Nivola, “Partisanship in Perspective,” *National Affairs* (Fall 2010)

Questions:

1. What are the causes of party polarization?
2. Has polarization resulted in policies favoring one party or the other?
3. What is the character of party discipline in Congress?
4. Is party polarization all bad? Can a polarized party system be healthy?

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

10:00 a.m. to Noon ET

Party Polarization & the Public

Readings:

- “Political Polarization in the American Public,” Pew Research Center (2014)
- Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven W. Webster, “Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties but Behave like Rabid Partisans,” *Advances in Political Psychology* 39 (2018)
- Morris P. Fiorina, “The Political Parties Have Sorted,” Hoover Institution, September 2016
- Thomas Edsall, “Is Politics a War of Ideas or of Us Against Them?” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2019
- Matthew Yglesias, “The Great Awokening,” *Vox*, April 2019

Discussion Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What is party identification, and why is it important?
2. Is the American public polarized or do most voters remain political moderates?
3. How, if at all, are party and personal identity related?

Friday, July 24, 2020

10:00 a.m. to Noon ET Fixing Our Parties

Readings:

- Raymond J. La Raja, "Campaign Finance and Partisan Polarization in the United States Congress," *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy* 9:1 (2014)
- Elaine Kamarck, "The Urgent Need for Peer Review in the Presidential Nominating Process," Brookings Institution, October 29, 2019
- Nolan McCarty, "Reducing Polarization: Some Facts for Reformers," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 2015
- Frances E. Lee, "Populism and the American Party System: Opportunities and Constraints," *Perspectives on Politics* 18(2) (June 2020)

Discussion Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. How might changing campaign finance law reduce polarization?
2. What steps might improve the presidential nomination process?
3. What are the prospects for populism in the American party system?