

# Political Alignments in America

## Pol 599U, Spring 2013

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Class: Tuesday 6:25-9:05, Dooly Memorial 212  
Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 3:30-4:30 & by appointment

### Description

America's majoritarian political system incents societal interests to organize themselves into political coalitions – most importantly, party coalitions. A partisan alignment is characterized by the groupings of people and interests within the major parties, and a partisan realignment occurs when the groups within the parties reshuffle. This class will cover theories of coalition formation and change, and will devote substantial attention to studying the historical development of the major American party systems.

### Course Materials

All the required reading will be made available on the Blackboard page for this class.

### Grading

The course grade will be determined by the following:

- Weekly analysis papers (15 percent)
  - You will submit five “think pieces” (600 to 800 words).
    - \* You choose the weeks you want to submit a think piece.
    - \* The only explicit requirement for these think pieces is that they cannot be summaries of the reading.
    - \* Approaches you might take in your think pieces include: comparing two or more readings or arguments, developing a novel interpretation or elaboration of a particular argument, applying a theory or argument to a novel scenario, evaluating the author's argument<sup>1</sup>, etc.
  - Your think piece should be submitted to the professor via email *on the night before the class meeting*.
- Midterm (35 percent)
  - Tentatively scheduled for March 5.
- Take home final essays (35 percent)
- Participation (15 percent)
  - Arrive to class ready to discuss the assigned reading.

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<sup>1</sup>If you evaluate an argument, you must take care to present what the author wants to achieve and how she went about trying to accomplish that goal. You can then discuss whether (and why) the effort was successful or not.

- Contribute to each class meeting. I'm looking for stable participation over the semester, so participating a lot one week and then not participating the next week is not a good strategy.
- In the (hopefully unlikely) event that students start coming to class unprepared, I will administer reading quizzes. My expectation is that this will be unnecessary but I will resort to quizzes if circumstances warrant.
- Note that you will be evaluated on your participation, not your attendance.

## Course Policies

- Students are expected to be courteous and considerate of the instructor and one another. This consideration includes, but is not limited to, not engaging in activities that draw your attention away from the seminar – including sleeping, holding private conversations, surfing the internet, reading, doing homework, etc.
- Computers may only be used for taking course notes.
- Of course, the standard disclaimers regarding cheating, plagiarizing, and the Student Honor code all apply.

## Reading Assignments

- January 15: What are political alignments and why do they matter?
- January 22: The Presidential Game  
McCormick, Richard P. 1982. *The presidential game: the origins of American presidential politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- January 29: Why parties?  
Aldrich, John H. 2011. *Why parties?: A second look*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- February 5: Partisan realignment theory  
Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution.  
Clubb, Jerome M., William H. Flanigan, and Nancy H. Zingale. 1980. *Partisan realignment: voters, parties, and government in American history*. Beverly Hills, Calif: Sage Publications.  
Burnham, Walter Dean. 1970. *Critical elections and the mainsprings of American politics*. New York: Norton.
- February 12 and 19: The party systems  
Wilentz, Sean. 2005. *The rise of American democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: Norton.  
Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution.
- February 26: Critiques of critical realignment theory  
Mayhew, David R. 2002. *Electoral realignments: a critique of an American genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

*The End of realignment?: Interpreting American electoral eras.* 1991. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- March 5: **Midterm**

- March 12: Spring Recess

- March 19: Coalitions in Congress

Poole, Keith T. 2007. *Ideology & Congress*, 2nd ed. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

- March 26: Issue Evolution

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue evolution: race and the transformation of American politics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- April 2: Activists and presidential nominations

Cohen, Marty et al. 2008. *The party decides: presidential nominations before and after reform.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- April 9: Party issue position change

Karol, David. 2009. *Party position change in American politics: coalition management.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

- April 16: Political Ideologies and Political Parties

Noel, Hans. 2013. *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

- April 23: Wrap up

Academic articles posted on Blackboard.