If "democracy" means a system in which the government is controlled by the people, then what do we say about a system in which only about half of the eligible citizens go to the polls to choose a president (resulting in the curious fact that a "landslide" winner is one who receives the votes of about one in four eligible citizens), fewer than four in ten make the effort to vote for Senate and House candidates in off-year elections, and the great majority of us have been found by pollsters to know little or nothing about what most federal and state policymakers are doing, or have done, on a day-to-day basis? Many different revisions of democratic theory have been proposed to try to deal with these distinctive features of American politics---to try to explain why we should continue to describe the United States as a democracy even when such a large number of its citizens, far from working to "control" their government, apparently regard it as an alien and uninteresting place.

One branch of democratic theory suggests that there is no real conceptual problem with calling a nation "democratic" when many or most of its citizens are politically apathetic, as long as there are "intermediary" institutions such as political parties and interest groups present. These institutions gather together the political wants and needs of many citizens and articulate those preferences to the government. The parties, in this view, can nominate candidates for office and label those candidates so as to help citizens make sense of the election process. To some authors, parties can also do much more: they can be used to hold elected officials accountable to a broad set of party principles. Interest groups can "signal" to their sympathizers which political candidates are most likely to do what those sympathizers want. And groups can try to influence elected officeholders to act on those sympathizers' concerns.

So political parties and interest groups play a vital and fascinating role in a democratic government. But the nature and the effectiveness of party and group action in American politics have been hotly debated. Traditionally, political parties and lobbying groups have faced intense criticism and suspicion in the United States; in fact, it could be argued that since their beginnings, parties and interest groups have struggled to contend with a hostile environment in the American political culture. Currently, issues of potential biases in the political system strike at the very core of the representative process, with perhaps the most visible being the politics of
campaign finance.

This course will aim to understand what political parties and interest groups are capable of doing in a democratic system, what they actually do in American politics, and what their presence ultimately means for the functioning of representative democracy. We will begin by examining the nature of intermediary institutions and the environment in which parties and groups developed. Then we'll explore several dimensions of the parties: party identification and voting; activists, organization, and party activities within government. In the second part of the course we will look at the nature, incentives, and organization of interest groups, and how these illustrate the politics of interest group representation. Finally, in the last segment of the course we will examine the politics of campaign finance, and how issues regarding freedom of speech may clash with the politics of who gets what, when, and how.

Readings

To do well in this course you will need to attend class and do a reasonable amount of reading and writing. The following books are required. They are on sale at the Ole Miss Bookstore and at Campus Bookmart. In addition, you are required to purchase a course packet of collected readings, which are denoted by an * in the syllabus. This packet is available at Sir Speedy.


Grading

Exams:

There will be a single comprehensive exam at the end of the course. We will discuss the specific content of the exam at the appropriate time.

Written Assignments

You will be responsible for completing weekly writing assignments. These assignments will be short (2 pages) and will ask you to deal critically with current issues and theories surrounding parties, interest groups, and campaign finance.

While I am normally not a stickler for such things, because of the volume of papers coming my way (roughly 60 per week), I need to set iron-clad rules on how these assignments should be treated. First, papers are to be no more than two typewritten pages, double-spaced. Ridiculous fonts will be treated accordingly. Treat this as a means of helping you develop the skills of making your points in a straightforward and concise fashion. Second, papers are to be turned in no later than the start of class time (9:30) on the day they are due. Finally, I do not want the papers turned in during class; rather they should be emailed to me at (psrbrown@olemiss.edu). Note: Papers that are longer than two pages or that are not turned in on time will not be accepted.
These assignments are designed to help you maintain continuous engagement in the course material and avoid the inevitable cycle of letting things slide and then cramming prior to exams. In evaluating your work, I will be gauging how closely you address the stated goals of the assignment, as well as the degree and clarity of critical thinking and analysis you put forth. In other words, effort matters here. Assignments that are crafted with thought and effort will no doubt exhibit these characteristics. Similarly, assignments that are dashed off immediately prior to class will no doubt exhibit these faults as well.

Participation

This is a course on politics, and if nothing else, politics is about the respectful exchange of ideas (or at least it should be). As such, students will be required to participate in class discussions based on the readings, current events, and their weekly writing assignments. Note that while I do not grade on attendance, per se, if you are not in class you cannot participate.

Group Projects

In addition to the written assignments, you will be required to complete a group project, dealing with the role of parties, interest groups, and campaign finance in the electoral and governmental process. The group project will consist of a major paper (10-12 pages) and a presentation on your chosen topic. Each group will present its paper at the end of the semester during one of the scheduled presentation time periods. The presentation will be 40% of the overall project grade. As with any group project, individual members of a group will be allowed to assess the relative contributions of the other members. Specifics on these projects will be available shortly.

How the Course Grade Will be Determined

Final grades will be determined based on the total of your written assignments, participation, group projects, and final exam. The weight given to each component is as follows:

Weekly Written Assignments: 50%
Participation: 10%
Group Project: 20%
Final Examination: 20%
Course Schedule and Readings

Tuesday 8/23 Introduction

Writing Assignment #1 (Due Thursday, 8/25)

Over 60 years ago, political scientist E.E. Schattschneider wrote the now famous assertion that “democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.” Let’s start the class by thinking for a minute about what parties do in our democracy. Without consulting your book or any other sources, discuss several ways you think political parties might help in facilitating democracy. In your estimation, can you have democracy without political parties? Why or why not?

Thursday 8/25 Parties and Interest Groups as Intermediary Institutions
- Hershey, pp. 1-24
  *-Madison, Federalist #10
  *-Jeffrey Berry, “Madison’s Dilemma”

Tuesday 8/30 Political Parties – American Style
- Hershey, Ch. 2

Writing Assignment #2 (Due Tuesday, 9/6)

Discuss whether or not you believe the U.S. political system is in need of a third party. If yes, why a third party and what would it look like? What issues would it support and what groups would it seek to represent? How would it maintain electoral viability? If no, why do you think the present two-party system is adequate?

Thursday 9/1 No Class: Professor attending APSA meetings

Tuesday 9/6 Party Organization and Activists
- Hershey, Chs. 5 and 15
  *-Dionne, “Gut Check for GOP Moderates”

Writing Assignment #3 (Due Tuesday, 9/13)

Defend each of the following statements: (1) The primary focus of political parties should be to promote issues and ideology, even if it means losing; (2) The focus of political parties should be on winning elections, even if that means fudging on issues.

Thursday 9/8 Party in Electorate I
- Hershey, Ch. 6
  *-Dionne, Party Lines, Battle Lines
Just for Fun:
See where you fit among party coalitions by completing a survey for the Pew Research Center Typology of American Voters (http://www.people-press.org/fit/). Be sure to check out the “Analyze the Issues and Coalitions” section to see where the groups stand on current issues.

Tuesday 9/13  Party in Electorate 2
-Hershey, Ch pp. 118-130
*-Fleisher and Bond, “Evidence of Increasing Polarization Among Ordinary Citizens.” in Cohen, Fleisher, and Kantor eds. American Political Parties: Decline or Resurgence?
*-Dionne, “Our National Nation”

Writing Assignment #4 – Choose One (Due Tuesday, 9/20)

a. Briefly outline the processes by which a realignment might occur. Discuss the possibility that the party system is currently in the process of a realignment? If so, what forces are creating this realignment, and where do you think it might lead? If not now, can you envision a realignment in the future? What would it look like? Similarly, if you do not believe a realignment is occurring or in the future, explain your reasoning.

b. The closeness of the two most recent elections illustrates an electorate that appears to be remarkably evenly divided. What do you think accounts for the nature of this even division, and, for each party, discuss what they need to do to swing the balance significantly in their favor.

Thursday 9/15  Realignment
-Hershey, pp. 130-135
*-Judis and Teixeira, “The Odds-On Favorite in the Future: Dems”
*-Casse, “The Odds on Favorite in the Future: Republicans”

Tuesday 9/20  Parties and Elections 1 - Campaigns
-Hershey, Chs. 9 and 10
*-Broder, David. “No Way to Choose a President.”

Writing Assignment #5 – Choose One (Due Tuesday, 9/27):

a. The electoral process in the U.S. is unique in that it allows “the people” rather than the party organizations to choose the party nominees. Discuss whether you think this is a good or bad idea from the viewpoint of: (1) the public, and (2) the parties. Can there be
such a thing as too much democracy?

b. Despite a modest increase in 2004, voter turnout remains abysmally low in the U.S., particularly among younger voters (age 18-24). In one page, discuss the most prominent reasons for low voter turnout in the U.S. In a second page, give me your thoughts on why turnout is particularly low among younger folks.

c. The 2008 presidential election will be all the more interesting because there is not a sitting President to run for reelection. This means we should have several Republicans and Democrats already laying the groundwork for their campaigns. Choose a potential candidate for president in 2008. Get in the head of this candidate and describe why this candidate thinks he/she has a legitimate shot at the presidency. What does this candidate need to do to get through the primary process, the electoral map, and the myriad of issues in order to build a coalition that could land him/her in the White House?

Thursday 9/22  Parties and Elections 2 – Participation and Voting
-Hershey, Chs. 11 and 8
*-Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal – How Political Science Understands Voters,” The New Yorker
*-Dionne, “We Missed the Middle”

Tuesday 9/27  Party in Government
-Hershey, Ch 13 and 14
*-Binder, “Can the Parties Govern?” in Cohen, Fleisher, and Kantor eds. American Political Parties: Decline or Resurgence?

Writing Assignment #6 (Due Tuesday, Oct. 4)

Responsible party government is an important phrase in the political science literature. Briefly describe what this concept entails, and then in more depth, discuss the following: (a) whether you think the goal of party responsibility is a good one; (b) whether the U.S. party system can achieve this goal, and (c) why or why not?

Thursday 9/29  Future of the Parties
-Hershey, Ch. 16
*-Lowi, “Toward a More Responsible Three-Party System: Plan or Obituary, in Green and Farmer, The State of the Parties

Tuesday 10/4  Taking Stock
*-Coleman, “Responsible, Functional, or Both? American Political Parties and the APSA Report after Fifty Years.” in Green and Farmer, The State of the Parties
Writing Assignment #7 (Due Tuesday, Oct. 13)

We’ve addressed political parties in their roles as linkage institutions. In your estimation, how well do parties serve the interests of democracy and representation? How can they be improved in each regard (i.e.: what reforms would you recommend and why)?

Thursday 10/6 No Class: Instructor out of town
Tuesday 10/11 No class: Instructor attending ERCB meetings

Writing Assignment #8 (Due Tuesday, 10/18)

Discuss the similarities and differences between political parties and interest groups, using an example of each. For example, what things do they tend to emphasize, and why. In what areas are they more likely to be effective or ineffective? Which do you think are more effective tools for fostering democracy and representation? Why?

Thursday 10/13 Interest Groups and Political Parties – Similarities and Differences
Tuesday 10/18 Lobbying – in Washington and the Grassroots
*Berry, “Lobbyists,” “Public Opinion and Grassroots Lobbying,” and “Washington Lobbying”

Writing Assignment #9 (Due Tuesday, Oct. 25)

Choose one issue that is important to you. Examine the lobbying activities of a group related to this issue (both in Washington and the “grassroots”). Briefly explain why you believe these activities have (or have not) been successful.

Thursday 10/20 The “New Sound” of Interest Group Politics
-West and Loomis, Chs. 1-3
Tuesday 10/25 Case Studies in Interest Group Politics
-West and Loomis, Ch. 4 and 5

Writing Assignment #10 (Due Tuesday, 11/1)

Choose a large corporation (e.g., Pfizer, Citigroup, IBM, Aetna, Ralston-Purina, Westinghouse, TRW, Astra-Zeneca, General Foods, Cargill, Warner-Lambert, Texaco, Ford, ADM, Mattel, Texas Instruments, The Gap, Sears, etc.), or some other interest group (e.g.: ideological, single issue, etc), and analyze its efforts to shape public policy. Your analysis should address the following questions: (a) what are the concerns of the corporation or interest group in shaping public policy; and (b) what tactics has the corporation/group used to influence the public’s perception of the need for this policy? What implications do these types of activities
have for issues of pluralism and representation?

Thursday 10/27  The “New Sound” and its Implications for Representative Government
-West and Loomis, Ch. 8 and 9

Tuesday 11/1  Introduction to Campaign Finance
Hershey, pp. 212-228

Writing Assignment #11 (Due Tuesday, 11/8)

Write one page each defending the following statements: (1) There is too much money in politics today; (2) the amount of money in American politics today is not a problem. Your job here is to put in the same amount of effort in your arguments, regardless of statement best describes your own thinking.

Thursday 11/3  Loopholes and the Need for Reform
-Hershey pp. 228-241
*-Wayne, “Has Money Corrupted our Electoral Process?”
*-Kuttner, “Rescuing Democracy from ‘Speech’”

Tuesday 11/8  So Just What Does All This Money Buy?

Writing Assignment # 12 Due Tuesday 11/15

Political scientists have had a difficult time finding a systematic empirical link between campaign donations and how members of Congress vote on legislation. Pretend that the first alien visitor from Mars (ok, aside from Ross Perot and Michael Jackson) has just sought you out to learn about politics. In one page, summarize the campaign finance system in the U.S. (e.g.: who gives, how, how much, what is the money used for, etc.). In the next page, make a sincere effort to explain to your new Martian friend how it can be that money doesn’t influence legislation. Does she believe you?

Thursday 11/10  The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act: Initial Assessments
*-Malbin, “Assessing the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.”

For more see: http://www.cfinst.org/studies/ElectionAfterReform/chapters.html

Tuesday 11/15  The Need for Further Reform?
*-Jay Mandle, “Elections as a Public Good”
* Broder, “Campaign Finance Casualties”
* Broder, “Cash Flow”
* Dionne, “Money Talks, and the Court Listens”

**Writing Assignment # 13 Due Tuesday, 11/24**

Write one page outlining what you perceive to be the negative impacts of money on politics in the present environment. Write one page proposing and explaining one reform (or more) that you think will help alleviate these problems. If you are of the opinion that the current campaign finance system does not present any problems for American politics, state your case and justify your position. Your essay should include a discussion of the impacts of money on democracy and representation.

Thursday 11/17    Taking Stock
Tuesday 11/22    Thanksgiving Break
Thursday 11/24   Thanksgiving Break
Tuesday 11/29    group projects
Thursday 12/1    group projects
Wed 12/7        Final Examination 8:00 a.m.