

David Peritz  
Fromm Institute, USF  
Spring 2021

## Political Parties for and Against Democracy

In this course we will examine partisan polarization in contemporary American politics and the forces producing and exacerbating it from a variety of perspectives: historical, political, social, economic and racial. We will go back to the framing of the American constitution and look at the history of the collapse of democracy in other societies, as well as at more general theories of how parties work and when they break down. The guiding aim will be to determine when and why political parties serve as instruments of democracy: two-way transmission belts that convey communication between ordinary citizens and their representative elites; civil society organizations that allow for bottom-up, spontaneous grass roots participation; schools of political socialization that train new citizens and potential leaders alike about issues, processes and the importance of fidelity to basic norms of constitutional democracy; etc. And we will also examine when and why parties stop playing these positive roles: what social, political, economic, cultural or demographic conditions produce political parties that prioritize the pursuit of power over their commitment to the democratic process itself and mobilize their supporters in ways that generate fear, anger and anxiety of a kind that make it hard to understand or hear the other side, let alone to respect them as fellow citizens? We will survey the rich contemporary literature on this topic, but also pay attention to historical theories from the 18<sup>th</sup> century forward. Having surveyed these issues, we will be in a position to determine the kinds of reform and change is necessary if we are to produce a less fractious and poisonous, more deliberative and constructive politics in an America that stands, at once, on the cusp of finally realizing its democratic promise, and on the precipice of surrendering to the dark forces of division.

## Outline of Topics and Main Works Drawn On:<sup>1</sup>

### **Week 1: Before It Was Cool to Party: Mistrust of “the vicious arts, by which elections are too often carried” in early Modern Democratic Thought**

- Jean Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, esp. Book II, Ch. III
- Madison, Jay and Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*, esp. #10
- John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, esp. Ch. II

### **Week 2: Getting Real About Parties in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Social Science**

- Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (selections) and *Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany*
- Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*
- Joseph Schumpeter, *Democracy, Capitalism and Socialism*
- Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*

### **Week 3: Conservative Parties For and Against Democracy: The Dangers of**

#### **Right Wing Populism**

- Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*
- Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*

### **Week 4: American Parties in Historical Perspective: The Oscillations of**

#### **the GOP, the Democrat-Dixiecrat Pact**

- Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party*
- Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*
- Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy*

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note: these readings are mentioned only for the sake of reference. No prior familiarity with any of these works is assumed in any of these lectures. For anyone interested in going into greater depth on any of these topics. many of these works can be approached on one’s own with patient concentration, but probably not at the pace in which they will be covered in these lectures.

**Week 5: Understanding the Nature and Depth of Partisan Polarization in**

**Contemporary American Politics**

- Ezra Klein, *Why We're Polarized*
- Donald Green, et. al., *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*

**Week 6: Taking the Long View: When Parties Were Forces for Progress,**

**Inclusion and Stability in Democratic Politics**

- Nancy Rosenblum, *On the Side of Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship*

**Week 7: From Common-Good Parties to High Partisanship**

- Russel Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age*

**Week 8: Is Common-Good Partisanship Possible in America in the 2020s?**

- Russel Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age*
- Robert D. Putnam, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*
- Michael Tomasky, *If We Can Keep It: How the Republic Collapsed and How We can Save It*