

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE  
AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND PARTIES

**Terms and concepts to know:**

Political parties	Party in the electorate
Party organization	Party in government
“Two-Party” system	Single-member district / plurality vote
Proportional representation	Political ideology
Federalists / Whigs	Democrats / Republicans
Critical elections	Converting / realigning
Party identification	Party coalitions
Conservative	Liberal
Media and political parties	Divided government

**Study and discussion questions:**

1. Heineman notes that some of the founders felt that parties “represented minority interests working against the larger public interest” and should be suppressed. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Was the 2016 election a “critical” (realigning or converting) election using the criteria given by Heineman? Are we likely to have a critical election in 2020? Why are there so few such elections in the U.S. in your opinion?
3. Are political parties becoming less important to voters? Does the rise in “independent” voters mean anything? If so, what does it suggest?
4. Does television have an inherent bias towards imagery or can substantive discussions of political issues take place through this medium? Can you cite examples of substantive political reporting on TV?
5. Using what I call a “fascism spectrum” (1 being no fascism and 10 being full blown fascism), examine Britt’s 14 characteristics of fascism and pick the two you think are the most obvious signs of what he describes as “proto-fascism” and explain why you have focused on those two.
6. Instead of defining fascism, Britt describes some of the characteristics of rising fascism which he defines as “proto-fascism.” Out of the 14 characteristics he outlines, pick two and explain why you think those two are the most obvious and possibly getting worse.
7. In the article by Chris Hedges, “The Coming Collapse,” he makes reference to both major parties and argues that “[t]he problem is not Trump. It is a political system, dominated by corporate power and the mandarins of the two major political parties, in which we don’t count.” What evidence does he provide that this is true? What would agree with or disagree with and why?

**Readings:**

Heineman. *American Government*, Chapter 5.  
WEB – Readings from “American Political Parties” links.

**Video:** *Alt Right: Age of Rage*