Political Sociology

Spring 2010 (G93.2441.001)

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Wednesday, 6:20-9 pm
Department of Sociology

Course description: This course introduces graduate students to the sociological study of politics. The general theme of the course is the struggle—and the structural preconditions—for democracy in modern societies, that is, the ongoing struggle to collectively control key institutions while simultaneously preserving a sphere of individual and minority-group autonomy. We will explore this general theme by reviewing important scholarship on struggles for political democracy as well as for organizational democracy in trade unions and social movement organizations; the political economy of capitalist democracies, particularly the United States; and the preconditions for revolution and socialist democracy. Although this course is open to students of all interests and backgrounds, it provides a conceptual and theoretical foundation for those sociology graduate students who are thinking of taking a comprehensive examination in the field of political sociology and/or conducting original research in this field.

Requirements and grading: We will generally read and discuss 175-250 pages of text each week. Participation in seminar discussions, including occasional presentations, will count for half of one’s grade; the other half will be based on written responses to the assigned texts. Students will write ten essays of 3 pages each over the course of the semester and a final essay of 6-8 pages. The shorter essays should identify a key shortcoming of the assigned reading for a particular week and explain how a redesigned or reconceptualized study would avoid or at least mitigate this problem (students may decide for themselves which texts they will address). The final essay should expand one (or a combination) of the shorter essays into a proposal for a potential research paper or dissertation.

Required readings: The following books have been ordered at Shakespeare & Co. Bookstore (Broadway @ Washington Place) and are on reserve at Bobst Library (all are available in paperback except the books by Bartels and Archer):

**Class discussions:** This is a discussion seminar, not a lecture course. As noted, participation in seminar discussions is extremely important, counting for half of one’s grade. Our main goal in each class will be to isolate what is and is not persuasive and valuable—theoretically, empirically, and methodologically—in the assigned readings. Each class will **roughly** follow this schedule:

- **6:20-6:30**—Business, announcements, etc.
- **6:30-7:20** (“first hour”)—Discussion of the major claims, research findings, and evidence of the required reading (launched by a short student presentation)
- **7:20-8:10** (“second hour”)—Discussion of the major shortcomings of the required reading—theoretical, conceptual, empirical, and/or methodological—and how they might be redressed in practice (launched by a short student presentation)
- **8:10-8:25**—Break
- **8:25-9:00** (“the home stretch”)—Summary discussion of how the required reading contributes (or not) to the sociology of politics and/or democracy (broadly construed) in particular
Course outline:

Week 1. January 20. Introduction to the course. (No readings.)

Part 1. The Struggle for Political Democracy


Part 2. Organizational Democracy and Its Consequences


Part 3. The Political Economy of Capitalist Democracy

[No class on March 17—Spring recess.]


**Part 4. Revolution and the Struggle for Socialist Democracy**


Week 13. April 21. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), chapters 1-4, 6, Conclusion (pp. 3-173, 206-235, 284-293).


(Final essays or due by 5 pm on Monday, May 10.)