PSCI 314: Comparative Political Parties  
Spring 2009

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Course Objectives and Outline:

Political parties are central actors mediating voters’ policy preferences and political outcomes. Therefore, their role in the practice of modern liberal democracy cannot be underestimated. As Robertson (1976) states, “to talk, today, about democracy, is to talk about a system of competitive political parties.”

In this graduate seminar, we will explore the vast literature on comparative political parties. The goals for this seminar are twofold. First, we will seek to understand the organization and behavior of political parties by focusing on both the classical and more recent literature on political parties. Second, we will evaluate the position of parties today, and their role in the future, both in the established and developing democracies.

The first two weeks of the seminar will be about understanding what parties are and where they come from. We will then talk about party systems, parties as organizations with their own structures, and examine party organizational and party system change. Next, we will talk about party ideologies and ideological change. The literature on how to locate political parties in a policy space and how to examine ideological change is vast and still growing. We will, therefore, spend one more week on measurement and analysis issues. Another growing literature both in comparative and American politics fields is the issue of party and government responsiveness to public opinion. We will spend one week on the issues of representation.

Finally, we will talk about the challenges political parties face: how does the establishment of new and ideologically extreme political parties threaten the more established parties in advanced democracies, and how do the mainstream parties respond to this threat? Are parties still important and strong in the age of globalization and communication as social capital is declining? And, are political parties in developing democracies any different compared to their more established counterparts in advanced democracies, and what are the challenges they face?

Requirements:

Class participation 20%

Class participation is an essential part of this seminar. The course will require a substantial amount of reading, which must be completed prior to the class period so that you participate actively.
**Critical short essays on readings %20**

Each student will submit a two page essay each week (starting for the January 26 session) reacting to the major issues discussed in the readings. These essays should not be summaries, but critical and analytical evaluations of all the readings. You must email me these essays by 9am on Mondays before the class. Note that you are exempt from these short essays for the classes in which you do the critical essay presentations (see below).

**Two critical essays, class presentations, discussion questions (x2) %25**

Students will write two lengthy critical essays throughout the semester for the weeks of their choice, and present their essays in the beginning of the class for 10-15 minutes. These essays should not be more than 7-8 double-space pages, and they must raise criticisms rather than being a summary of the articles. The presentations should not be the summaries of the readings, rather must be critical, and demonstrate some additional research on the topic. Interesting examples from outside the readings and a stimulating presentation will definitely help your grade.

In addition, the student who is responsible for the topic of that particular session must email at least five, at most ten discussion questions to everybody in class by 5pm on Monday, before the class period in which you will present. Keep in mind that a good discussion question is the one that leads to an intensive debate on the issue. You will be graded based on your critical essays, your presentations, and the quality of your discussion questions.

**Paper review 10%**

Another component of the course grade is a review of a conference paper. For this assignment, you must go to APSA or Midwest conference page and find an article on comparative political parties or party systems from the meetings’ paper archives (must be either 2008 or 2009). After I approve the paper you must review the paper for publication at a major political science journal. These reviews are due to the April 6 class.

**Final project 25%**

You can choose between writing a research paper and answering a comprehensive exam question within 24 hours. If you choose to write a paper, it will be a full research paper (including theory, literature review, research design, and data analysis) on the topic of your choice about political parties and party systems. This paper will not be more than 20 double-spaced pages (excluding bibliography, tables and figures). The details for the paper will be distributed later in class to those who are interested in writing the paper.

If you choose to take the exam, you will be given one or two questions that you have to answer within 24 hours. The answer will be at most 10 double-space pages long, and should be a critical
essay. It should not be solely a literature review. Rather, it will answer the question from your point of view with a critical approach to the existing literature.

**Required Readings:**

Some readings are political science journal articles that you can easily download from Heard Library.

There are some articles from journals which are not available at Vanderbilt. These articles and book chapters have asterisks in front them. I will post these articles and the chapters on OAK.

The following books are required for this course. The first two are available in the bookstore. You have to order the others online.

Anthony Downs (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy*


Note also that for the last session we will read *Latin American Party Systems* by Kitschelt et al. It is another required book. However, it will only become available in February, 2010. You can pre-order at Amazon.

**Course Schedule:**

**01/19: What are political parties?**

Downs, chapter 2


01/26: Where do political parties come from?

Duverger, Introduction


02/02: The typology of party systems

Duverger, Book II chapter 1


Sartori, chapters 5-9


02/09: Parties as organizations


Duverger, Book 1, chapters 1 and 2.


02/16: Party and party system change

** Review: Duverger, book 1 ch. 2 and Lipset and Rokkan


02/23: More on party organizational change:


03/02: Party ideologies and ideological change:

Downs, chapter 7, 8.


03/16: Why Change? More applications


03/23: Measurement and analysis issues for party ideologies


03/30: Democratic representation


04/06: Challenges to established parties: The emergence of new parties


04/13: Party persistence and decline: Are parties still relevant? Do parties mater?


04/20: Party politics in newer democracies I: Eastern and Central Europe


04/27: Party politics in newer democracies II: A focus on Latin American party systems
