Washington University in St. Louis
Department of Political Science

PS 4281. Comparative Political Parties.

Fall 2011
T Th 10:00-11:30
Seigle Hall 305

Instructor
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☎ 935-7456
Office hours: M 13:30-15:00

Course description

Political parties pattern and organize many aspects of public life in democratic regimes, yet they are constantly derided as a source of corruption, bad government, and political paralysis. The idea of “party” is so ingrained in public life that many non-democratic regimes mimic their organization, even when they fail to replicate their spirit. Parties, in short, are ubiquitous in modern politics. This fact has not escaped unnoticed by scholars and commentators, who have endeavored since early in the XIXth century to understand how political parties originate, the conditions under which they thrive and decline in the electoral arena, and the various ways in which they aggregate societal preferences into public policy in the legislative realm.

This course aims to provide students with a panoramic view of received social scientific theorizing about political parties and party systems. The comparative focus of the course means two things: First, students are expected to develop a good working knowledge of political parties in countries other than the United States. In particular, we will focus mostly on the experiences of West European and Latin American polities. Second, we resort to the comparative method in order to validate hypotheses about the causes and consequences of political parties and party systems. In this latter meaning, American parties provide “data points” or observations that we consider along with the experiences of other countries in an effort to develop valid descriptive and causal inferences. More importantly, the scholarly literature
that focuses exclusively on American parties advances many theoretical propositions of interest, and is consequently a good starting point to understand party politics in other countries. Throughout the course, we will peruse some of this theoretical literature and bring it to bear on our analysis of parties and party systems in the rest of the world.

**Requirements and Evaluation**

Please read this section carefully: Registration in this course implies that you agree with *all* elements of evaluation.

I intend to run this class as an advanced seminar, rather than as a lecture, which means that active class participation is encouraged and very much expected. Indeed, your ability to contribute to our discussions will determine an important fraction of your final grade (20%). *I will award your participation score based mostly on my evaluation of your contribution to our debates in class.* Needless to say, you will only be able to participate knowledgeably if you read *all* the required material in advance. I have scheduled one midterm exam on October 20 (30%). A final research paper (around 20 pages long) should be turned in by the official final exam date. You can choose to write a co-authored final paper with one other class participant. Along with a 20-minute in-class presentation during the last week of class (December 6–8), the research paper will count for 30% of your final grade; throughout the semester, we will set up additional opportunities to discuss your paper topic (more details in class). The remainder of your grade (20%) will hinge on writing one reaction paper and one book review throughout the semester. I will make every effort to accommodate your preferences for particular weeks, subject to the constraint that no more than two people write reaction papers/book reviews for any one particular class. Please take note of the following policies and grading scale:

**Attendance**: Since class discussion is such an important component of this class, regular attendance is of paramount importance and will be monitored.

**Late assignments**: Late assignments are penalized with a drop in a full letter grade each passing day. Even an excellent paper will receive a failing grade if it is not handed in by the fourth day.

**Extra Credit**: Extra credit can be obtained by volunteering to write reaction papers for no more than two additional weeks. The “best” two among the set of regular and extra reaction papers will be considered for a grade.

Testing your knowledge about any subject-matter is, at best, an exercise in futility. If you know the material well, you will ace any test, regardless of its design; you will also flunk any exam if you have not mastered the material. In between these two extremes, tests and exams are per force imprecise ways to gauge your
knowledge and ability. I will make every effort to grade your exams fairly and in a timely manner. If you consider that I have made a consequential mistake in grading any exam or quiz, you should respectfully address your concerns to me, by e-mail, within three days of receiving your grade. Finally, note that I adhere to the following number-to-letter grade conversion chart:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-97</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-96</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>A–</td>
</tr>
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<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>80-82</td>
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<td>77-79</td>
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<td>73-76</td>
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<td>70-72</td>
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<td>63-66</td>
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<td>60-62</td>
<td>D–</td>
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Students who take this class under the Pass/Fail option must receive a grade of B– or better in order to obtain a Pass on their final grade. Students who take the Pass/Fail option should be aware that only courses taken for a letter grade count toward a major or minor. The College of Arts and Sciences will handle issues pertaining to academic integrity. The academic integrity policy is available here.

Course Schedule

Why parties? (Aug. 30–Sept. 1)


Cross-national variation in party systems and the sociological approach (Sept. 6–8)


The Impact of Electoral Rules on Party Systems (Sept. 20–22)


Spatial Theories of Party Competition (Sept. 27–29)


Programs vs. Patronage (Oct. 4–6)


Nationalization of party systems (Oct. 11–13)


**Review and Midterm Exam (Oct. 18–20)**

**Political geography (Oct. 25–27)**


**Parties in Government (Nov. 1–3)**


Parties in the Electorate (Nov. 8–10)


Parties as Organizations: Candidate Selection Procedures, Political Recruitment, and Mobilization Efforts (Nov. 15–17)


Thanksgiving week. Meetings to discuss papers (Nov. 22–24)

Dominant and niche parties (Nov. 29–Dec. 1)


Final presentations (Dec. 6–8)