Political Parties, Voters, and Elections in the Developing World

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MW 11-12:15pm

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To understand the functioning of democracies, it is essential to understand the nature of political parties and electoral behavior. Parties are central to fundamental political processes ranging from representing societal interests, providing political alternatives, mobilizing voters, and channeling conflict. Parties are also often the core institutions that connect voters to the state and often powerfully shape voters’ attitudes about government. Political behavior, the study of voters’ attitudes and behaviors surrounding elections, is similarly important for understanding how democracies function. Questions from why voters turn out to vote to why they vote against the incumbent government are important for making sense of the dizzying array of election results we’ve seen in recent years.

This course introduces students to the study of parties and electoral behavior with an emphasis on party functioning in developing democracies. We will often explore influential readings that apply to developed countries (the U.S., Europe) alongside studies of parties in developing democracies where institutional contexts are quite different. We will cover topics such as voter turnout, partisanship, electoral volatility, party organization, and consider of variety of types of parties. We will also explore the functioning of elections and why this is important for democratic quality and the nature of electoral competition.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your final grade will be based on the following components:

20% - Class Participation. Attendance is obligatory. An active role in discussions by everyone enrolled in the course is expected, as is the completion of the required readings before the session for which they are assigned. Each student is permitted one unexcused absence (i.e. without a written note from a doctor or a dean). After that, the participation will be reduced 1/3 grade per unexcused absence.

5% - Your Country in the News. I will ask you to pick a country to focus on throughout the term. You will be asked to post one article on sakai discussion board with a paragraph summary for each part of the class. If current events aren’t relevant to the theme you can look back to the year of the most recent election, etc. I’ll ask you to tell us about it in class briefly.

Note: that you must pick a different class session for the response paper and presentation.

15% - Country Case Study Presentations –I will ask each student to complete one presentation on a country (or party within a country) as it applies to the course theme of that particular session. The presentation should last about 10 minutes. The goal of the presentation is to get you
to think about the theoretical arguments addressed in a class session and to apply this to a country (or party) case. All presentations should address theoretical arguments including course readings and additional readings relevant to your case and apply that theory through a case study that includes a presentation of evidence.

25% - Take-Home Midterm – The Midterm will include four short answers and a structured longer essay with a series of questions to address (7-8 double-spaced pages). It will include material presented both in the required readings and in lectures.

35% - Final Paper

The final paper involves a report on elections and parties that covers the topics we will discuss in the course. This 10-12 page paper will focus on the electoral process in a (new or emerging) democracy of your choice. The default option will be to focus on the present period, although people interested in History may talk to me about working on something more historical. This paper will research and analyze the electoral process in a country of your choice (Please email me your choice by Week 5). In doing so, your paper should systematically address each of the substantial questions that we will discuss throughout the term:

- What is the quality of elections in country X? Is there any type of fraud, vote-buying or malpractice? If so which ones?
- What is the political offer like in country X? Are parties important at all (e.g., partisanship)? How many relevant parties are active? Are these parties old?
- Would you consider the party system to be institutionalized?
- On which cleavages are social and partisan cleavages based on? Is there a dominant party?
- How do parties choose candidates?
- How do parties appeal to voters and what do voters look for in parties?
- What role, if any, does ethnicity play in this process?
- Are voters sufficiently informed, mobilized and literate to credibly assess the various options?
- Is politician accountability possible?

Readings

This course requires you to carefully read all assigned readings before class. Generally, 4 articles or book excerpts are assigned for each class meeting. Make sure that you not only understand the basic argument, but give yourself time to think critically about the readings before class. I also encourage you to complete the reading worksheet at the end of this syllabus for each reading.

Books for Purchase:


Course Schedule and Readings

Session 1: Course Introduction (1/18)

Session 2: What are political parties and are they essential to democracy? (1/23)

Schmitter, Phillip and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. “What democracy is... and is not.” Journal of democracy, 2(3) 75-88.


Part 1: The Conduct of Elections


Banerjee, Mukulika. Why India Votes, Chapter 4. [Skim for a qualitative sense]

Session 4: When Elections are Not Free or Fair: Tools of Coercion (1/30)


Session 5: Campaign Finance in Comparative Perspective: How it Works (2/1)


Recommended:


Session 6: Campaign Finance: Consequences for Democracy (2/6)


Part II: Parties and Party Systems


Recommended:


Session 8: Where Do Party Systems Come From? Cleavages and Institutions (2/13)


Session 9: Party System Institutionalization (2/15)

In this class session, we discuss the concept of party system institutionalization and consider cases that provide variation on this concept.


Recommended:


Session 10: Dominant Parties: Monopolization of Political Power (2/20)


Session 11: The Decline of Dominant Parties (2/22)

Guest Lecture: Aditya Dasgupta, Stanford University.


Recommended:


Session 12: Partisanship in Comparative Perspective (2/27)

In this class session, we discuss mainstream theory of partisanship and discuss partisan dynamics in Russia and Latin America.


Hagopian, Frances. 2007. “Parties and Voters in Emerging Democracies”. In Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics.

Session 13: Partisanship in Developing Countries (3/1)


Session 14: Party Organization I: Vote Mobilization on the Ground (3/6)

In this class session, we look under the hood of party organizations and party machines engaged in voter mobilization.


Session 15: Party Organization II: Candidate Selection (3/8)


Recommended:


Spring Break: NO CLASS 3/13 or 3/15

Session 16: When Do Parties Adapt to Change? (3/20)


**Part III: Political Behavior**

**Session 17: Voter Turnout (3/22)**

*In this class session, we discuss theory on voter turnout and economic voting. We engage this theory with research from India and Africa.*


**Session 18: Economic Voting and Its Complications: Concept (3/27)**


**Session 19: Economic Voting: Cases (3/29)**


**Session 20: Who (or what) Shapes Voters’ Political Preferences? (4/3)**


Session 21: Who (or what) Shapes Voters’ Political Preferences II? (4/5)


**Part 4: Parties Linkage Strategies**

Session 22: Clientelism and Vote Buying (4/10)


**Session 23: Clientelism on the Ground (4/12)**


*Recommended:*


**Session 24: Ethnic Parties and Social Cleavages (4/17)**


Session 26: Populist Parties of the Left in Latin America (4/24)


*Recommended:*


Session 27: Right-Wing Populism in Europe (4/26)

*We will also have an in-class debate: Can Left populism compete with Right-wing populism?*


Ivarsflaten, Elizabeth. 2008. “What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful cases.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(1) 3-23. [Skim for the main idea and main results. Don’t worry about the stats].

*Recommended:*


Session 28: Parties and Democratic Accountability (5/1)

*In this final class session, we review the key arguments of the class. We also discuss the implications of party systems and competition on distributive strategies.*


Session 29: Course Conclusion (5/3)
Goals/Objectives of the Course (intended outcomes):
1. Students will come to understand major debates underlying electoral behavior and party competition.
2. Students will engage in effective written expression.
3. Students will learn about the management of elections and partisan conflict in a range of developing countries.
4. Students will learn to analyze complex political phenomena through careful engagement with theory and evidence.

Reading Skills:
As you manage the reading for this and other courses, you are likely to find, if you have not already, that there is no correlation between effort and outcome. It is entirely possible to spend several hours reading something without “getting it.” And it is equally possible to spend less than a half-hour reading something else and getting to the heart of the argument. You will have to devise for yourselves ways to read efficiently. These are some devices that may help:

1. Figure out what the heart of an argument is before you read deeply: skim, read the abstracts, the jacket blurbs, often short reviews published elsewhere. When you know where the center of gravity is, you read more efficiently.

2. Read actively: do not simply soak up the reading for what the author wants to tell you, but approach it with questions, and try to answer them for yourself as you make your way through.

3. Use other peoples’ skills: you do not have to do all the work yourself. It is not “cheating” if you talk through the argument with someone else before or after you delve in, or look at reviews for explication, or form reading groups where you can discuss the argument with each other.

4. Write in order to read. The response papers for this class and the (non-graded) worksheet attached should help.

5. Use diagrams if necessary: often, the structure of an argument can be most clearly expressed if you “draw” it, using arrows and lines, than by trying to understand it in words.

6. Organize your notes in a way that makes retention and information retrieval possible: you could use index cards, annotated bibliographies, database programs like Filemaker Pro etc. These rules may be obvious to some and not to others. Basically do whatever works for you. But be self-conscious about the reading process as a skill that has to be learned and not necessarily as an ability that either comes naturally or does not.
Reading Worksheet

For each book, chapter, or article assigned in this course, you should fill out the following (non-graded) worksheet. Many of these points can be addressed in a sentence or two (e.g., Questions 1 and 2; in some cases, answers will not need even to be full sentences (e.g., Question); and in some cases the answers may overlap. These worksheets should be retained: they will be useful for future reference.

1. State the central question that the reading addresses.

2. State the central argument(s) defended in the paper in response to this question.

3. What type of reasoning or evidence is used to support these arguments? If it is an analytical paper, what is the logic that undergirds the argument? If an empirical paper, what type of data is employed? Are there other data sources that you think might be more appropriate?

4. Do you find the claims of the reading convincing? What do you see as the main gaps that need to be filled?

5. Why (if at all) is the reading interesting?

6. Do you agree with the main claims? What are your hesitations? (This may simply involve restatement of previous points.)

7. Identify one or two implicit premises or background assumptions in the paper that you think are especially controversial or objectionable.

8. In light of your answers to the previous questions, write an abstract for the article of no more than 100 words. (Feel free to repeat formulations given in response to earlier questions.)

9. When you have done this for individual readings, take some time to think about the various readings you have been assigned in relation to each other. See if you can write or imagine a summary table for all the readings taken together, which compares and contrasts them.