Political Parties and Party Systems

Fall 2012 semester

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M.A. Course, Fall 2012

Instructor
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Classes
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00-12:40

Office hours
Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-11:30 and by appointment

Credits
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS credits

Course Description
Political parties face severe challenges. But they continue to be the principal actors of the representative process of modern mass democracies. By studying their structure, their relationships and their responses to the changes in their environment one learns about the nature of power configurations and of collective political action in liberal democracies.

The course kicks off by reviewing the recent debates about the marginalization of parties. The following weeks will discuss the criteria that can be used to describe and evaluate
party behavior in various areas: organization, social relations, party competition, government building, etc. We will investigate a number of specific issues will be investigated: What social forces shape party systems? How the internal organization of parties varies across time and space? How can one identify the ideological position of parties and to what extent can we predict their coalition-making strategies from their ideological position? Do parties represent us or them, the society or the state, and how to differentiate the correct answer from the populist one? Then the course will focus on new democracies and will conclude by the analysis of the impact of European integration on the party politics in its member states.

The course presents socio-cultural, rational choice and institutionalist explanations for the birth and behavior of political parties. It analyzes the intra-organizational dynamics of parties, their patterns of competition and cooperation, the logic of coalition building and the way how parties change under the pressure of European integration. There will be a special emphasis on the institutionalization of parties and party systems. The empirical material of the course mainly comes from Europe (Eastern and Western).

Course Requirements

No prior knowledge is required. Students are expected to be present at all meetings, to read and critically reflect on the mandatory readings listed below. If one is unable to attend the class, (s)he should signal this via e-mail to the lecturer. Activity in the classroom can be complemented with questions, suggestions and comments sent to the lecturer 24 hours prior to the meetings.

Evaluation

The final grade is composed of the results of an in-door exam (25%), class activity (25%), two three-pages (cca. 1000 words) long position paper (30%) and one oral presentation (20%). The position papers are expected to reflect on the mandatory reading of the week, summarizing its main points and interpreting it in the light of the previous readings and lectures. The reproductive part (intelligent, selective summary that covers
the major claims and techniques of the readings) is supposed to provide about 60 percent of the paper. The student decides for which weeks she prepares a position paper, but the paper must arrive 24 hours before the particular week's meeting to the e-mailbox of the instructor. The presentations are also expected to be related to the topic of the week, but in this case complementing it by describing phenomena **not** analyzed by the texts in the reader. The best grades are achieved if the presentation discusses in a structured manner a subfield of party politics and relates it to the course discussions. The topic of the presentations must be chosen during the first two weeks of the course. The in-door exam will cover some of the most central questions of the course, and it will be based largely on the readings, and to a smaller extent on the seminars. Finally, the participation grade will depend on the quality of comments in the classroom, and by quality I mean primarily relevance, creativity and ability to find relationships between the various discussed ideas.

**Learning Outcomes and their assessment**

The overall grade will primarily indicate the ability of the students to comprehend the ways parties operate in modern societies. Among the learning outcomes of the M.A. program this course supports particularly the abilities to actively engage with important political science debates and to comprehend and critique advanced political science texts. The ability to hold an academic conversation, make oral presentations and participate in scholarly debates will be primarily measured by the grade given to class activity and the oral presentations. The ability to use English grammar, vocabulary and style appropriate for written academic products, to construct academic and critical arguments will be measured by the position papers. The in-door exam will reflect on the knowledge of the students gained in the class on the structure of party politics and its links to the wider cultural and institutional environment. By increasing the ability to apply the tools of sociology and political science in the analysis of elections the course will help students to obtain a certificate in Electoral Politics.
First week, September 18-20

The Crisis debate I.


Second week, September 25-27

The Crisis debate II.


(The Thursday class needs to be moved to another, mutually agreed date)

Third week, October 2-4

Functions and origins of parties


Fourth week, October 9-11

Party organization


Fifth week, October 16-18

Parties and society


Sixth week, October 23-25

Political representation


(The Tuesday class is canceled due to national holiday)

Seventh week, October 30 – November 1

Patterns of party relations


(The Thursday class needs to be moved to another, mutually agreed date)

Eighth week, November 6-8

Goals of party competition: ideology and beyond


Ninth week, November 13-15

The logic of coalition building


On Thursday in-class exam.

Tenth week, November 20-22

Party system institutionalization


Eleventh week. November 27-29

Parties and post-communist (de)consolidation
Twelfth week, December 4-6

Party politics and the European integration
