

University of Rochester – PSC/IR 253/253W

Fall 2011

Wednesdays 2-4:40 p.m.

Harkness 210

## **Comparative Political Parties**

Professor Meguid

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### **Course Description**

The purpose of this seminar is to familiarize students with the political instrument at the heart of representative democracy – the political party. We begin with the premise that most observant participants in democratic political systems have some idea about the role and functioning of the political party. But beyond this working knowledge of parties as election-time competitors, how much does one know about this political actor? What differentiates a party from other social groups? What are the different motivations for party formation? Why do certain parties emerge “naturally”, whereas other preference groups find party formation and success difficult? From this starting point, we will explore the historical development of parties and their role in agenda-setting and policy making in democracies around the world. Our discussions will raise questions about the influence of sociological, economic and institutional factors in shaping party organization, the policy and issue positions they advocate and their interaction in the political arena. We will also examine the recent changes in party structures and party systems to decide whether these developments signify a transformation in party politics.

In this seminar, we will be reading the seminal texts and theories on parties and party systems that have shaped the field since World War II. Through the readings and in-class discussions, we will be applying these theories to contemporary party examples in democracies around the world, including the United States and countries in Western and Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. By the end of the semester, students will have arrived at their own informed conclusions as to why, for instance, party politics in the United Kingdom is beginning to resemble that seen in India, how third parties, such as the US Green Party, have been successful without gaining office, and how the strategies of liberal parties can be linked to the rise of right-wing nationalist parties.

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### **Requirements**

This advanced seminar is open to those students who have taken already PSC 101, 103 or 105, or by permission of the instructor. However, no prior coursework on party politics or political systems is required to take this course.

**Informed participation in class:** Students are expected to attend and participate in all class meetings. This seminar places an emphasis on discussion and debate, and thus, active participation is essential and expected. Many of the readings are challenging, and therefore, students should carefully read and take notes on the readings prior to attending class.

**Two 5-7 Page Papers:** Students will be asked to respond to a specific question about the various themes of the course. No outside research should be undertaken for these assignments. However, students are encouraged to think critically about the theories in light of the case studies presented in class.

\*\*Barring extraordinary circumstances, late papers will be marked down a third of a grade (for ex. A to A-) for each 24 hour period after they are due. Thus, if a paper is turned in any time during the first 24 hours after it is due, it is penalized a third of a grade. Any paper not turned in within a week of the assigned due date



## **Part II. Party Origins: Theories and Applications**

How and why do parties come about? Are some types of parties more “natural” than others? Do we see a change in the reasons behind party formation or are the roots of modern parties firmly established in the past? Are Western theories of party formation valid across non-Western cases? How do we rectify recently emerged parties with the claims of older theories? How are the issue preferences behind party formation manifested in different countries?

### **Week Three: Theories of Party Formation (21 Sept.)**

Lipset, Seymour and Stein Rokkan. “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction.” In Peter Mair (ed) The West European Party System. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 91-138.

Aldrich, John. Why Parties? Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chapters 1-2.

Przeworski, Adam and John Sprague. Paper Stones. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Introduction and Chapter 1.

### **Week Four: “Natural” Parties?: Center-Periphery Cleavage Examples from around the World (28 Sept.)**

Bates, Robert H. “Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa.” In State versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas. Eds. Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983. 152-171.

Horowitz, Donald L. Ethnic Groups in Conflict. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. Chapter 7.

Laitin, David. “Hegemony and Religious Conflict.” In Bringing the State Back In

Rohrschneider, Robert, "New Parties versus Old Left Realignments: Environmental

## **Part IV. Parameters of Political Debate**

Which issues get debated in the political ar

**V. Recent Developments: Temporary Shifts or a True Transformation?**

Do recent claims about changes in party systems and party organizations signify temporary shifts or the rearrangement of party politics? Are these trends restricted to advanced industrial democracies or are they occurring in other regions? What are the ramifications of a possible partisan dealignment for the health of democracies? Does party professionalization spell th