

# Parties and Party Systems

M.A. course, Fall 2019

Instructor

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Class meetings: Thursdays, 17:10-18:50

Office hours: by appointment

Credits: 2 CEU credits, 4 ECTS credits

## **Parties and Party Systems**

### ***Course description***

The course is designed to deepen the students' existing knowledge on political parties and party systems. In most democracies political parties are central actors in the mediation of policy preferences and governmental outcomes. Their study can teach us about the nature of power, about the dynamics of collective political action and about the intersections of social conditions and political institutions. The course employs a comparative perspective, and focuses on the most influential theoretical models of the field, presenting socio-cultural, rational choice, historical, institutionalist and agency-focused explanations for various phenomena in the field of party politics. Special attention will be devoted to the institutionalization of parties and party systems.

The topics covered in the course begin with a look at the functions and origins of political parties, the social background of party politics, the institutional incentives that shape party politics, and at the organizational dilemmas of political parties. The second bloc focuses on aspects of party competition and representation: how parties behave in parliaments and governments, how are they related to each other, and how the format and mechanics of party systems can change across time. We will focus on the stability, fragmentation, representativeness and competitiveness of party systems. In the last section the course examines the role of parties in new and non-liberal democracies and it reflects on the normative aspect of contemporary challenges in party politics. A number of further topics, like the mobilization of voters, the explanation of electoral success, the nature of clientelistic and charismatic appeals, the difference between mainstream and extremist parties, or the ethnic aspects of party politics will also feature in the course but will not be focused upon.

### ***Course requirements***

This is a two-credit course. Students are expected to be present at all meetings. If one is unable to attend the class, (s)he should signal this via an e-mail to the lecturer. Activity in the classroom can be complemented with questions, suggestions and comments (maximum 200 words) sent to the lecturer 24 hours prior to the meetings or uploaded to the e-learning site after the class discussion. The use of electronic devices (laptops, tablets, e-readers, phones, etc.) is kindly discouraged.

### ***Evaluation***

Presentation: 15%

Two position papers: 40%

Class activity: 15%

Questions uploaded to the e-learning site: 10%

Final mini-essay: 20%

*Presentation.* You need to give a short (ten-minutes long) presentation that covers, with the help of one or more of the recommended readings, a sub-topic of the theme of the week. The presentations need to be based on a short handout, circulated to other seminar participants by Tuesday 4 pm.

*Position papers.* You need to submit two 800 words-long position papers, excluding bibliography. The position papers should summarize the content of the readings assigned for a particular week and comment on them relying on previous readings and lectures. In the position paper you must refer to at least two academic texts on the topic that are additional to the mandatory readings. 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 rest should consist of original ideas, commenting critically on the readings' concepts, design, methods, or findings. The first position paper must be submitted by the sixth week, uploaded to the e-learning site not later than Tuesday 4 pm.

*Class activity and submitted comments.* Participation is measured not only by the quantity but also by the quality of contribution. In addition to the activity in the classroom, you need to upload to the e-learning site - by 4 pm, Tuesday, each week - one question suggested by that week's readings, with a brief explanation. The question should address important substantive or methodological issues that emerge from that week's readings.

*Final mini-essay.* The final 2000-words long paper should be focused on two recently published articles that present opposed, or at least different, views on a substantive, conceptual or methodological matter in the field of party politics. The essay should highlight and evaluate the differences and aim at solving the controversy. The deadline for the submission of the essay is 14 December.

### ***Learning outcomes and their assessment***

With the help of the course the student should acquire the ability to:

1. understand basic concepts used in the comparative party systems subfield;
2. competently describe and discuss key phenomena such as parties, party systems, relationship between voters and political elites, party system stability, etc.;
3. recognize the difference between stable and fragile party systems, especially to understand the difference between institutionalized, consolidated party systems and the ones that cannot be considered consolidated;
4. understand major traditional, mainly theoretical approaches to the study of parties, as well as the more contemporary, empirically-based, data on parties, their development and the dynamics of party systems.
5. see the differences between party systems of the embedded democracies with those of recently democratized countries.

The position papers are expected to improve the ability to identify the most relevant aspects of a scholarly argument, to establish links between different publications, to discriminate between scholarly and unscholarly arguments, and to channel the knowledge one obtained from sources

inside and outside of class-work into the criticism of particular articles. The class activity will center on the readings, helping the students to synthesize information, determine focus points, and discern the main line of argumentation. The obligation to submit an essay will develop the skills to build up a coherent argument. All aspects of the class contribute to develop the skill of problem analysis in international context: the ability to understand problems in cross-national comparative perspective and to discuss them with students of different cultural background.

### **Week 1: The formation and the functions of political parties**

The first week focuses on the ontology of parties, on their historical development and on the fundamental tasks they perform for the society. We will discuss various definitions, and we will examine what is distinctive about parties as compared to other social and political actors.

#### *Reading*

Aldrich, John (1995) *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 28-50 (51 to 61: recommended).

### **Week 2. The social and historical logic of party politics**

The second week discusses social cleavages and the way they are translated into political cleavages. We will analyze the impact of social conflicts on political mobilization, party organization, political competition, and political representation, and we will also consider the potential influence of parties on their social environment.

#### *Readings*

Bartolini, Stefano and Peter Mair (1990) *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability. The Stabilization of European Electorates 1885-1985*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 212-49.

### **Week 3. Parties as organizations**

The third week looks into the internal organization of political parties. We will differentiate between various party models, and we will discuss temporal tendencies in the style of organization and mobilization. The most important topics of the week include: internal democracy, relations among party units, party membership, candidate selection, the process of program design, party finance, party staff, links to collateral organizations, women's representation, leadership selection, and intra-party referendums.

#### *Readings*

Rahat, Gideon. 2013. What is Democratic Candidate Selection? In: William Cross and Richard S. Katz, eds. *The Challenges of Intraparty Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scarrow, Susan E. (2005) *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. Implementing Intra-Party Democracy*. National Institute for International Affairs (NDI), [http://www.ndi.org/files/1951\\_polpart\\_scarrow\\_1101.05.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/1951_polpart_scarrow_1101.05.pdf), 3-22

#### **Week 4. The life-cycle of party organizations and party institutionalization**

The fourth week continues the analysis of intra-party politics. We will focus on the concept of party institutionalization and we will compare various styles of party leadership.

##### *Readings*

Harmel, Robert and Lars Svåsand (1993). Party Leadership and Party Institutionalization: Three Phases of Development, *West European Politics*, v. 16, pp. 67-88

Panebianco, Angelo (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 49-68.

#### **Week 5. Political institutions and party politics: the institutional logic of party politics**

The fifth week will analyze how electoral institutions, the forms of party funding and the format of government (presidentialism vs. parliamentarism) affect party politics. Special attention will be paid to the impact of institutions on the number of parties, on their ideological character and on the structure of competition.

##### *Readings*

Katz, Richard (1980) *A Theory of Party and Electoral Systems*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 17-34.

Tavits, Margit (2006) Party System Change: Testing a Model of New Party Entry. *Party Politics*, 12(1): 99-119.

#### **Week 6. Party competition**

The sixth week is about the study of the competitive configurations of party politics. We will consider the measurement of the ideological positions of parties, and contrast spatial and non-spatial models of party competition.

##### *Readings*

Albright, Jeremy J. (2010). The Multidimensional Nature of Party Competition. *Party Politics* 16 (6), 699–719.

Green-Pedersen, Christoffer and Peter B. Mortensen (2015) Avoidance and Engagement: Issue Competition in Multiparty Systems. *Political Studies* 63(4), 747–764.

## **Week 7. Parties in the legislature and in the government, representation via candidates and parties**

The seventh week discusses the 'public face' of political parties, their behavior in office, their ability to maintain unity, and to form coalitions. We will also investigate the logic of representation, via parties and via individual politicians, in office and during campaigns.

### *Readings*

Costello, Rory, Thomassen, Jacques, Rosema, Martin (2012) European Parliament Elections and Political Representation: Policy Congruence between Voters and Parties, *West European Politics*, 35 (6), 1226-1248.

Tavits, Margit (2008) The Role of Parties' Past Behavior in Coalition Formation. *American Political Science Review*, 102 (4), 495-507.

## **Week 8. Party Systems**

The eighth week analyzes how parties interact to form systems. We will discuss the different classifications of party systems present in the literature, focusing not only on polarization and fragmentation, but also on the mode and style of competition

### *Readings*

Wolinetz, Steven B. (2006) Party Systems and Party System Types. In Richard Katz and William Crotty, eds., *Handbook on Political Parties* (London: Sage, 2006), 51-62.

Bardi, Luciano and Peter Mair (2008) The Parameters of Party Systems. *Party Politics*, 14(2), 147-166.

## **Week 9. The institutionalization of party systems**

The ninth week deals with the stabilization and destabilization of party systems, and with their degree of closure, including such aspects as the patterns of alternation in government, the continuity in coalition formulae and the ability of established parties to keep challengers out.

### *Readings*

Mainwaring, Scott and Zoco, Edurne (2007) Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Inter-party Competition, *Party Politics*, 13 (2), 155-178.

Mair, Peter (2001) The Freezing Hypothesis: An Evaluation. In: Lauri Karvonen and Stein Kuhnle, eds. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*. London: Routledge, 27-44.

## **Week 10. Electoral Change**

The tenth week will explore models of party system change based on the dynamics of the electoral markets and changing conflict lines in the society. We will ask questions such as: Under what conditions are realignments and dealignments of party systems likely? To what extent do the standard indicators of electoral volatility measure the stability of electorates and of party systems? How do the current socio-economic changes alter the strategies of established parties?

### *Readings*

Mainwaring, Scott, Annabela Espana and Carlos Gervasoni (2016) Extra- and within-system electoral volatility. *Party Politics*, Online first

Häusermann, Silja and Hanspeter Kriesi (2015) What do voters want? Dimensions and configurations in individual-level preferences and party choice. In Pablo Beramendi, Silja Häusermann, Herbert Kitschelt And Hanspeter Kriesi (eds) *The politics of advanced capitalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 202-230

## **Week 11. New Democracies**

The eleventh week will discuss the specificities of party politics in new democracies. Most of the attention will be paid to post-Communist party systems, but developing democracies will also be discussed.

### *Readings*

Casal Bértoa, Fernando (2013) Post-communist Politics: on the Divergence (and/or Convergence) of East and West. *Government and Opposition*. 48(3), 398-433.

Haughton, Tim and Kevin Deegan-Krause (2015) Hurricane Season: Systems of Instability in Central and East European Party Politics. *East European Politics and Society*, 29: 61-80.

## **Week 12. Contemporary challenges, parties and democracy**

The last week will focus on the challenges political parties face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the threats posed by anti-establishment sentiments, populist political actors, globalization and business interests. We will also analyze, next to external challenges, internal issues, such as the cartelization and the personalization of parties.

### *Readings*

Mair, Peter (2009) Representative versus Responsible Government, MPIfG Working Paper 09/8. Cologne: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, 19.  
<http://www.mpifg.de/pu/workpap/wp09-8.pdf>

Van Biezen, Ingrid and Michael Saward (2008) Democratic Theorists and Party Scholars: Why They Don't Talk to Each Other, and Why They Should. *Perspectives on Politics*, 6 (1), 21-35.