

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY (SO322R)
TISCH 208
SPRING 2019
M 1:25-2:20 PM
WF 1:00-2:20 PM

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"The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics." –Bertrand Russell

"The business of America is business." –President Calvin Coolidge

Introduction

This course examines the organization of power and authority in contemporary societies with a particular emphasis on the United States. When most people hear the word politics, they imagine cable news pundits tiresomely raging back and forth over the latest petty controversy. Most sociologists define "politics" far more broadly, seeing it as any social action related to the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority. Thus, sociologists are able to see politics in all sorts of places including the workplace, the kitchen, and the basketball court. While political sociologists do tend to focus on the realms of public affairs and civic life, unlike other analysts, they are just as likely to conceptualize the power of corporations and social movement organizations as the well-coiffed politicians we hear so much about.

In this course, we will consider the primary three spheres of power and authority in our society: the market, the state, and civil society. We will ask timely questions about the relationship between powerful institutions and the individual. For example, how is power seized and exercised by various institutions and actors? What ends are achieved with this power? Are people powerless in the face of corporations and the government or are there occasions for resistance? In considering these and other questions, we will explore major theories of power and authority as well as the dominant methodologies researchers have used to begin to find answers.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing SO322R should be able to:

1. Describe and compare major theories related to power and authority.
2. Critically analyze the relative power exercised by the state, corporations and elites, and actors and organizations within civil society.
3. Describe and critique various current research methods used in political sociology.
4. Use current social scientific research to construct a persuasive argument designed for a public audience.
5. Design and conduct a study using secondary analysis of political attitudes survey data.

Required Texts

There are two required texts for this class, both available from the Skidmore Shop and online.

Walker, Edward T. 2014. *Grassroots for Hire*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Other readings for the course are available on the course's Blackboard site (<http://learn.skidmore.edu>).

Requirements

The following are the course assessments:

1. **Scholarly Attitude** (10%) – Most faculty members evaluate “participation” as a part of students’ course grades. But mere “participation” – how much you do or don’t talk, sit up or fall asleep – isn’t really what most of us want from our students. Instead, most of us hope to see students accept our invitation to “the life of mind” by adopting a “scholarly attitude.” Having a “scholarly attitude” involves developing intellectual curiosity and a genuine engagement with the ideas presented in the course. Students with a scholarly attitude take the student role seriously and demonstrate their commitment to academic pursuits by actively engaging in the material, reflecting deeply on the readings, raising thoughtful questions and comments in class, bringing unsolicited materials to share that are directly relevant to the topics being covered, come early and/or stay late to raise their own questions about the material, and generally go above and beyond the requirements of the course. Students who lack a scholarly attitude passively complete the readings and responses, occasionally engage in other activities during lecture (playing with phones, texting, daydreaming, and so on), and are primarily concerned with obtaining a particular grade in the course. I will send you a course grade report several times over the courses of the semester that includes a current scholarly attitude score.
2. **Exams** (40%) – There will be two non-cumulative examinations testing material covered both in the readings and in class. The first will be held on March 22 and the second during the official exam period. Exams will incorporate definitions, short answer, and essay questions.
3. **Political Op-Ed Assignment** (20%) – In a few stages, students will produce a research-based Op-Ed, using both sources from class and from outside. To do well, students will have to make a clear, well-supported persuasive argument in only about 500-700 words. The intent of this assignment help students think about how the skills you have developed as a critical thinker during your time at Skidmore can be applied in your life as a citizen. While there are a number of intermediate deadlines (including an annotated bibliography and a first draft), the final assignment will be due on April 10.
4. **Stata Lab** (10%) – Most Mondays of the semester (see schedule), we will have a lab that will introduce you to political data analysis using a software program called Stata. For each session, I will distribute dataset and a *.do file which includes instructions and code for running various types of analyses. You will required to run pre-written code and produce some code of your own based on mine in order to run your own analyses. Don’t worry if you have no prior experience with statistics, coding, and Stata. We’ll start with the basics. I expect you will be able to complete each lab within the class session, but you will have until 11:59pm on Mondays to submit your updated *.do and log files to me.

5. Political Sociology Study and White Paper (20%) – Drawing on the skills gained in Stata Lab and using data one of several potential political datasets, students will conduct their own studies on some sociological question about politics or political attitudes. I highly recommend that students choose a research question that builds on existing research examined for the Op-Ed assignment. While there are a number of intermediate deadlines (including drafts of your tables), each student will produce a white paper reporting on the results of your study (due on May 9 by 5pm).

Summary:

- 10% Scholarly Attitude
- 40% Two Exams
- 20% Op-Ed
- 10% Stata Lab
- 20% White Paper

100% Final Grade

Grades:

94%-100%	A	90-93%	A-	87-89%	B+
84-86%	B	80-83%	B-	77-79%	C+
74-76%	C	70-73%	C-	67-69%	D+
64-66%	D	60-63	D-	<60	F

Course Policies

Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center. I would also encourage you to communicate with me about any accommodations well in advance of exams and due dates.

Electronic Devices: Unless directed to do so, I expect that students will not use laptops or other electronic devices in class. Many studies have shown that people are extremely poor multi-taskers. Looking at Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, etc. or even doing Google searches that may seem relevant all distract from lecture and discussion. Moreover, most people retain information better when taking handwritten notes. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me privately. Otherwise, keep your laptop as well as your cell phone and any other devices will be turned off and stowed away during class.

Late Policy: On all assignments, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B, and so on). *After two weeks from the due date, you will receive a zero for the assignment.*

Missed Exam: Students who will miss an exam date due to an official school absence must schedule an alternative exam date and time *in advance*. As a general rule, I do not allow students with unscheduled exam absences to reschedule. In extreme circumstances, a make-up exam will be given at my discretion and I reserve the right to change the format.

Cheating and Plagiarism: By enrolling at the college, all students have agreed to abide by the *Skidmore Honor Code*, which says, “I hereby accept membership in the Skidmore College community and, with full realization of the responsibilities inherent in membership, do agree to adhere to honesty and integrity in all relationships, to be considerate of the rights of others, and to abide by the College regulations.” Part of that code means not to misrepresenting others’ work as your own. Please review the detailed description of the rules and regulations surrounding cheating and plagiarism as described in the *Skidmore College Student Handbook* (http://www.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.php). If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please discuss it with me in advance of due dates or exams. In the case of a violation, the offending student will receive a zero (“F”) for the assignment and I am required to report all offenses to the Dean of Academic Studies, which may result in disciplinary action. Please don’t let this happen!

Title IX Statement and Reporting Responsibilities: Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available. More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator.

Civility and Respect: The *Skidmore Honor Code* also has important implications for how students ought to treat each other. This course will include discussions of class, nationality, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I expect students to show respect toward all the subjects of our study. More importantly, I expect you to treat your classmates and your instructor with respect and dignity at all times – especially when you disagree with them.

Course Outline

All listed readings are required. Please let me know immediately, if you have difficulty accessing the electronic files. (B) = reading available on Blackboard; (W) = Walker; (E) = Electronic files available on Blackboard.

Week 1: Introductions

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| Jan. 23 | Introduction and Overview |
| Jan. 25 | What is Power?
(E) Roscigno, “Power, Sociologically Speaking” |

Week 2: Power and Authority

- Jan. 28 Stata Lab #1
- Jan. 30 Forms of Authority
(E) Weber, “The Types of Legitimate Domination”
- Feb. 1 Democracy and Political Authority
(E) Orum and Dale, “Basic Forms of Political Authority”

Week 3: The Market and the State

- Feb. 4 Stata Lab #2
- Feb. 6 Marx and the Market
(E) Marx, “The German Ideology”
(E) Orum and Dale, pgs. 9-18
- Feb. 8 Weber and the Iron Cage of the State
(E) Weber, “Bureaucracy”
(E) Orum and Dale, pgs. 37-45

Week 4: Civil Society and Pluralism

- Feb. 11 Stata Lab #3
- Feb. 13 Durkheim and Tocqueville
(E) Orum and Dale, pgs. 63-76
(E) Lipset, “American Exceptionalism – A Doubled-Edged Sword”
- Feb. 15 Pluralism and Elitism
(E) Dahl, “Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City”
(E) Mills, Excerpt from *The Power Elite*
Due: One paragraph + List of three articles for Op-Ed

Week 5: Civic (Dis)engagement

- Feb. 18 Stata Lab #4
- Feb. 20 American Citizenship in 2019
(E) Perrin, “Voting, Civil Society, and Citizenship”
(E) Dottle et al., “The 2018 Midterms, In 4 Charts”
- Feb. 22 Apathy in a Movement Society
(E) Buechler, “Movements + Elections = Democracy”
(E) Eliasoph, Excerpt from *Avoiding Politics*

Week 6: Grassroots for Hire

- Feb. 25 Stata Lab #5
- Feb. 27 What is the grassroots industry?
(W) Part I (pgs. 3-76)

March 1 What does the grassroots industry do?
(W) Part II (pgs. 79-151)
Due: Annotated bibliography for Op-Ed

Week 7: *Grassroots for Hire*, Cont'd

March 4 Stata Lab #6

March 6 How does the grassroots industry matter?
(W) Part III (pgs. 155-206)

March 8 Skype Guest: Prof. Edward Walker, author of *Grassroots for Hire*

*****SPRING BREAK (3/9-3/17)*****

Week 8: Exam Week

March 18 Stata Lab #7

March 20 Review Day
Due: First draft of Op-Ed

March 22 Mid-term Examination

Week 9: The Functions of the State

March 25 Stata Lab #8

March 27 What is the State?
(E) Draper, "The State as Superstructure"
(E) Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime"

March 29 The Welfare State
(E) Mettler, Excerpt from *The Submerged State*

Week 10: The Market and the Right

April 1 Stata Lab #9

April 3 The Winner-Take-All Economy
(E) Hacker and Pierson, Excerpt from *The Winner-Take-All Economy* (pgs. 1-72)

April 5 The Conservative Movement
(E) Gross et al., "The Contemporary American Conservative Movement"

Week 11: A Nation, Divided

April 8 White Paper Lab Work Day

April 10 Identity Politics
(E) Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, Excerpt from *Identity Crisis*
Due: Final draft of Op-Ed

April 12 Christian Nationalism
(E) Whitehead et al., “Gun Control in the Crosshairs: Christian Nationalism and Opposition to Stricter Gun Laws”

Week 12: The Decline of Transpartisan Institutions

April 15 White Paper Lab Work Day
Due: First draft of tables and figures for white paper

April 17 Transpartisan Institutions
(E) Roberts, “Donald Trump and the rise of tribal epistemology”

April 19 Gerrymandering and Malapportionment
(E) Wasserman, “Hating Gerrymandering Is Easy. Fixing It Is Harder.”
(E) Enten, “Ending Gerrymandering Won’t Fix What Ails America”
(E) *Optional Video*: “Uh, How Does Gerrymandering Work Again?”

Week 13: Student Choice Week

Note: Readings for these class sessions are TBD based on student interests.

April 22 TBD

April 24 TBD

April 26 TBD

Due: Final tables and figures for white paper

Week 14: Revolution

April 29 Revolution!
(E) Skocpol, “Explaining social revolutions”

May 6 Final Exam (1:30 pm)

White papers due by 5pm on May 9