Sociology 624H: Political Sociology for Honors

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Office hours: Thursdays 15:00 – 16:30 p.m., by appointment

Course description

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to sociological explanations of political behavior. We will examine how different explanatory models (rational choice theories, structuralist approaches, models of contagion, explanations in terms of social influence) shed light on three main questions: (1) Which sociological factors shape people’s political preferences and behaviors in democratic regimes? (2) What are the determinants of political upheavals and revolutions? (3) How does political mobilization take place? A strong emphasis will be put on empirical studies and historical analyses.

Prerequisites

Students need to have had an introductory course in sociological theory (for instance Soc 475).

Course requirements

Each student may earn up to 100 points based on:

1. Attendance and quality of participation in class discussion: 15 points possible.

The class format is centered on lectures and on in-class discussions. Regular attendance and participation are required. You must complete the reading(s) listed for each session before the class in which we discuss them. You should not expect to do well in the course without regular attendance and thoughtful participation in class discussion. Please expect to spend about four-five hours on the readings every week.

Each unexcused absence will take four points off your attendance and participation grade. I will grade the quality of your participation on the remaining points. If you do not miss any session and if in each session you demonstrate a thoughtful reading of the required readings by answering the questions I raise in class, you will earn 15 points.

Please communicate with me before class if you become ill or if emergencies arise so that I am aware of your circumstances and I can excuse your absence. If many emergencies arise in the course of the semester, I will ask you to document them.
Discussion is intended to help you get a handle on the readings. Some weeks you will divide into small discussion groups for part of a class.

**Except in the case of students with special needs, no laptop or electronic device will be allowed in class.**

2. Six response papers (three-page long): 30 points possible.

For each paper, your assignment is to take one (and only one) required reading in the syllabus and write a short essay engaging the central argument(s) of the reading.

The paper is due at the beginning of the class in which we will discuss the reading. I will not accept papers handed in at the end of class. All the papers should be numbered (from one to six).

You may not submit more than one paper on the same day. If you submit two papers on the same day, you will lose half of the points earned for the second paper, which means that you should not wait until the last weeks of the semester to hand in your short papers.

**NOTE:** I request that you submit at least two papers before the mid-term exam.

**Important requirement**

In addition to the hard copy handed in at beginning of the class in which we will be discussing the reading, you will have to submit an electronic copy of your paper to the Turnitin web site: [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) before class. Turnitin is the anti-plagiarism software used by the Sociology Department.

I will not grade papers that will not have been submitted to Turnitin.

**Instructions for submitting the electronic copy**

1. Go to the Turnitin web site: [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com).

2. Click on the New Users at the top of the homepage. The new user wizard will open and walk you through the profile creation process.

3. To create a profile, you must know the **class ID number** (16256795) and the **enrollment password** (H624-f17). Once you finish creating your profile, you will be logged in to Turnitin. The name **Honors Political Sociology – Fall 2017** will show up on your homepage.

4. Click this name to open your portfolio for this class.

5. To submit a paper, click the **submit** button. The paper submission page will open.

6. The **submission title should be the title of the reading**.

7. Then click the **browse** button and locate your paper on your computer.

8. After having selected your paper, click submit to upload your paper.

For further information, please follow this link for the student quickstart:

This quickstart will help you get started with Turnitin and will walk you through the steps for submitting your first paper.

**Directions for the short papers**

These papers should not exceed 3 double-spaced typewritten pages and should have three parts:

1. The first part is a summary of the argument. This part should synthesize the main arguments. Which problem is being addressed? What are the author(s)’s major theses? Which terms and concepts are central to the argument? How does the argument get supported? This summary should be short and synthetic. Long summaries are not better summaries. I encourage you to limit your summary to one page.

I will assess the quality of your summary in light of two criteria: (1) did you get the main points? and (2) How precise and accurate is your summary? It is crucial that you identify and clearly define key concepts. It is also crucial that you summarize the main points in your own words. You should not rely on quotes. The purpose of this exercise is to assess whether you clearly understood the concepts and the arguments under review. That is why quotes are not appropriate. Furthermore, your summary needs to be precise and accurate. If you say “According to Sewell, the ideology of the Old Regime was based on several contradictions,” and do not specify these contradictions, your summary remains wanting. The same remark applies if you are making basic interpretive mistakes. A good summary is a prerequisite for a good grade since in the remaining of the paper, you will be expected to comment on the reading.

2. The second part of the paper presents the reading’s contribution: How does the author(s)’s argument expand, challenge, or refine previous readings or previous theories? To what extent does this argument contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of the issue under consideration?

3. The third part is a critique of the reading: This part should provide a critical evaluation of the reading. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the argument? What is left ambiguous, underdeveloped or unaddressed in the present reading? Which type of investigation could overcome these limitations?

Both your analysis of the contribution of the reading and your critique of its strengths and weaknesses are your comments proper. I will grade your comments by taking into account their relevance and the extent to which they are precise and well-informed. If you say: “this reading is important” or “Sewell is wrong” but do not elaborate these two assertions in light of specific points or examples, your comments do not fulfill their goal.

Each paper will be worth up to 5 points: 2 points for the summary, 2 points for your comments (presentation of the reading’s contribution and critique), and 1 point for clarity.

### 3. One short oral presentation (5 points possible)

During the semester, you will be required to give one classroom presentation on one required reading.

This presentation will be on one of the required readings assigned for the session. It should not be on a reading which you are discussing in a response paper.

In your presentation, you should assume that everyone has carefully read the material. The main purpose of the presentation is not to offer a detailed summary of the reading, but to provide an
evaluation of the reading, and to launch the discussion. Therefore, the “summary part” of your presentation should remain brief.

Please organize your presentation around the claims you want to make about the reading, clearly announce these claims in your introductory remarks, and, as you proceed forward in the course of your presentation, indicate which claim you are elaborating.

To organize your thoughts, you may want to consider the following questions:

What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the argument?

How does the author(s)’s argument expand, challenge, or refine previous readings or previous theories?

To what extent does this argument contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of the issue under consideration?

What is left ambiguous, underdeveloped or unaddressed in the reading?

Which type of investigation could overcome these limitations?

The presentation should not exceed ten minutes.

After you presentation, I will invite your fellow students to ask questions and make comments. You will then the opportunity to respond.


This mid-term examination will be in the form of an in-class short answer and essay examination.

This exam will be held on Monday, October 23.

5. A final examination: 30 points possible

The actual content of the final exam will be announced in class before the exam.

The final grade will be based on total number of points accumulated during the semester: 100-91 points is an A, 90-86 an AB, 85-81 a B, 80-76 a BC, 75-66 a C, 65-56 a D, below 55 a F.

Learning objectives

Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content I will cover in this course, the requirements I have just listed as well as my lectures have been designed to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of sociology:

- Critically Evaluate Published Research. Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.

- Communicate Skillfully: Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.
• Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes: Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the "why" and "how" of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.

• See Things from a Global Perspective: Sociologists learn about different cultures, groups, and societies across both time and place. They are aware of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among residents of the United States. They understand the ways events and processes in one country are linked to those in other countries.

• Conduct Research and Analyze Data (quantitative or qualitative). Although professional quality research requires graduate-level training, we expect that all undergraduate majors will be able to conduct small-scale research in which they formulate a research question, collect data, analyze results, and draw conclusions.

• Prepare for Graduate School and the Job Market: Students use their social research skills to identify opportunities for employment or further study, assess their qualifications for these opportunities, and identify strategies for gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to improve their qualifications. Students are encouraged to develop and maintain portfolios of their written work and educational experiences to aid them in preparing applications and to learn how to present their.

**Academic honesty**

As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University’s rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students at http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/

According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as:

1. seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
2. uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
3. forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
4. intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
5. engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
6. assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University’s standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students website. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please ask me.

**Reading materials**

The readings in each section are grouped under two categories: required and recommended. All participants should be prepared at class time to comment and critique the required readings. Additional readings are recommended for delving deeper into a topic.

The books indicated below have been ordered at the University Book Store. They are also on reserve at the Social Science Reference Library (8th floor, Social Science Building) and at the College Library reserve.


Skocpol, Theda. 1979. States and Social Revolutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


All the other required readings are available on electronic reserve:

https://lcp.library.wisc.edu/viewer/show/56481

Hard copies are also available at the Social Science Reference Library (8th floor).

**Week 1. Introduction (Sept. 11)**

**Part I. Political behavior in democracies**

**Week 2. “Human nature in politics” (Sept 18)**


Week 3. The Civic Culture argument (Sept 25)

1.


2.


**Recommended readings:**


Week 4. Polarization and conflict (Oct 2)

1.


2.


**Recommended readings:**


Week 5. Social class, ideology and voting behavior (Oct 9)

1.

2.

**Recommended readings:**


Week 6. Strategic contests and democratic viability (Oct 16)

1.

2.

**Review for the Midterm Exam**

**Recommended readings:**


Oct. 23: Midterm Exam
Part II. Upheavals and regime breakdowns

Week 8. Relative deprivation (Oct 30)

1. For the short paper, two options are possible: (1) you can focus on one article only or (2) you can treat these two articles as one piece and comment on how they respond to one another.


Recommended readings:


Week 9. Class Conflicts (Nov 6)

Directions for the short paper: (1) Read first Traugott’s chapter 1: this chapter by Traugott is intended to provide you with the basic chronological background of the 1848 revolution. This is not a substantive chapter.

(2) Please focus your response paper on either Marx’s Class Struggles in France, or on the second reading by Traugott (chapters 2, 3 and 6) (do not focus your response paper on Traugott’s chapter 1).


2. 


**Recommended readings:**


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**Week 10. State-breakdowns (Nov 13)**

1. 

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapters 1, pp. 47-51 in chapter 2, chapter 3.

2. 


**Recommended readings:**


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**Week 11. Ideology and Revolution (Nov 20)**

1. 


2. 

Part III. Processes of political mobilization

Week 12. Mass behaviors and collective movements (Nov 27)


Week 13. Political processes (Dec 4)


Recommended readings:


Week 14. Frames and collective interactions (Dec 11)

1.

2.

**Recommended readings:**