

Sociology 361: Political Sociology
Spring Semester, 2011
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Department of Social Sciences, Dillard University
Class Meetings: TT, 2:30-3:40
Office Hours: DUICEF, Rm. 234: TT 9-11 and 1:30-2:30; Wed. 2-4 and by
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Course Description

An introduction to political sociology, using “the sociological imagination” and basic, critical thinking skills to understand our society. Emphasis will be given to the application of political sociology in examining significant, contemporary, policy issues – through civic engagement.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Ability to critique policies using the “sociological imagination”
2. Understand the frameworks (theories), assumptions and boundaries of political sociology
3. Understand democracy and the limits on democracy
4. Understand the political culture affecting behavior and policies
5. Understand the emergence and consequences of major, social policies

Course Requirements

1. Class participation and civic engagement activities: 30%
2. Examinations (mid-term and final): 40%
3. Research Paper (review of literature, research design, summary of findings), due on April 1: 30%

Course Outline

1. Introduction to political sociology:
 - a. Reading: *The Sociological Imagination*;
 - b. Reading: *Critical Thinking*
2. Representative Democracy (Authority of People)
 - a. Reading: *Preamble of the U.S. Constitution*
 - b. Authority of the People
 - c. Strains on Democracy
 1. Legitimation and Alienation
 2. Political Extremism
 3. Revolutions and Breakdowns

3. Theoretical Frameworks: Political Sociology

- a. Reading: "Models of Power Structure in the United States"
- b. Elitist Model: Power Concentrated in Relatively Small, Cohesive Group
 - i. Power Elite I Model, C. Wright Mills "The Military-Industrial Complex," *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills, 1956
 - ii. Power Elite II Model, William Domhoff, "The Governing Class Theory"
- c. The Pluralist Model
 - i. Pluralist Model I: Representative Democracy, Representatives and Masses. Example: The Case of "McCain-Feingold Law": Campaign Reform Act
 - a. Limited "soft money" in federal elections to \$2,000 (previously no limits)
 - b. Loophole 527s: may finance political advertisements (if not an election or candidate)
 - c. Example of Consequence: George Soros and Peter Lewis : Contributed 15 million
 - ii. The Pluralist Model II: Veto Groups, A Plurality of Interest Groups (Riesman, 1950: 213-217)
- d. A Plutocracy: Government by or for the Interest of the Rich
- e. McDonaldization Theory: Globalization and Bureaucratization
Reading: "McDonald's and the Worldwide Bureaucratization of Society"

4. Demography and Politics

- a. Demographic Processes
- b. Reading: "World Population Policy"

5. Family and Politics:

- a. Socialization
- b. Reading: "What's in a Name?"
- c. Reading: "Studying Human Sexuality"

6. Stratification and Politics

- Reading: "Rethinking Welfare in North America and Europe" (Reading)
- Reading: "Stratification in Japan"
- Reading: "Social Class and Financial Aid"

7. Power and the Economy:

Reading: "Power and Politics"

The Case of Microsoft, In Conflict and Order. Chapter 14.

- a. Influencing Policy Makers with Money: Two Opposing Positions
 - i. Essence of democracy – political groups present the best case; policy-makers make decisions most beneficial to the public
 - ii. Efforts to use money are to influence politics – another instance of the privileged getting their way.
- b. Political donations of corporations
- c. Political action committees

8. Consequences of Concentrated Power

Reading: pp. 412-422

- a. Injustice: Scottsboro Trial in Louisiana, 1931
- b. Subsidies to Big Business:
 - i. \$15 Billion to Airlines (not employees) (after 9/11/2001)
 - ii. \$1 Trillion -Government Bailouts to Banks/Financial Firms – 2008
- c. Trickle-Down Solutions: Spend federal money to stimulate economy
 - i. Spend federal money – give directly to the people (unemployment insurance, government jobs, housing subsidies)
 - ii. Spend federal money – give subsidies to businesses --encourage them to employ more people
- d. The Powerless Bear the Burden

"Domestic policy is conducted according to one infallible rule: the costs and burdens of whatever is done must be borne by those least able to bear them." (Robert Hutchins 1976, 4)

 - i. Institute Military Draft (when threatened by war) – tax on the poor
 1. Vietnam War: 10% of men in college were drafted, while 40% draft-age in college; chance of getting killed: 3 times greater for less-educated than college educated (p. 419, Eitzen)
 2. Iraq and Afghanistan Wars – Used Volunteers

Although patriotism was a factor, economic incentive was a powerful motive for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"If this war is truly worth fighting, then the burdens of doing so should fall on all Americans.... If it's not worth your family fighting it, then it's not worth it, period."
(Broyles, 2004:A25)
 - ii. Poor absorb the costs of societal change
 1. In 19th century, the poor built the railroads and the cities

2. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, bulk of the money spent first went to business community and for repairing the Super Dome. Left behind were low-income families.
 - e. Domestic Policy for Corporate Benefit: Case of New Orleans Following Hurricane Katrina
 - i. Poorer residents of the lower ninth ward and East New Orleans displaced at higher rates
 - ii. Financial incentives provided for *Mardi Gras* krewees to continue to have their balls and march on *Mardi Gras*, 2006.
6. Political Sociology and Policy Issues
- a. Political Sociology- Government: “Why Don’t More Young People Vote?”
 - b. Political Sociology and Family: “Human Sexuality” (Reading)
 - c. Political Sociology and Culture:
 - “Cockfighting” (Reading) Folkway or Law?
 - “Culture of Cheating” (Reading)
 - d. Political Sociology and Bilingualism (Reading)
 - e. Political Sociology and “Child Care” (Reading)
 - f. Political Sociology and “Regulating the Net” (Reading)
 - g. Political Sociology and “Organizations” (Reading)
 - Decision-Making in the Jury Room
 - h. Political Sociology and “The State of the Unions” (Reading)
 - i. Political Sociology and “Media Concentration” (Ownership) (Reading)
 - j. Political Sociology and Social Control:
 - “The Death Penalty” (Reading)
 - “On-Campus Binge Drinking”
 - k. Political Sociology and Universal Human Rights (Reading)
 - l. Political Sociology and Gender: “The Battle over Abortion” (Reading)
 - m. Political Sociology and Globalization: “Transnationals” (Reading)
 - n. Political Sociology and Religion: “Religion in Schools” (Reading)

o. Political Sociology and Health: “The Aids Crisis” (Reading)

p. Political Sociology and Research and Development

 “Hired Guns” (Reading)

 “Using Statistics and Graphs” (Reading)