This course provides an overview of major concepts in political sociology, especially as they relate to American political life. We examine recent debates on organizational fields and historical institutionalism, social capital and civic engagement; national interest groups, parties, netroots, faith-based and race-based community organizing; the intersection of fiscal and economic sociology with political sociology; policy design and policy feedback; welfare state and public goods; urban regimes, ecosystems, and governance.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to stay current with all the readings, and come to class prepared for discussion. Some of the reading for will be distributed, to make the amount reasonable. Students will have opportunities to present readings and other work to stimulate class discussion.

Written assignments can take various forms, with a standard of 20 pages total: an end-of-term paper, two shorter papers, four 5-page essays from the course readings, or some other combination that you work out with me.

Required books:

Jan 15: rescheduled for May 7

January 22: Fields, Institutions, and Deliberative Systems in Political Sociology

Required Reading:


January 29: Democracy in America: Historical-Institutional Lineaments

What have been the major contours of democratic development in the U.S. since the revolutionary period: political parties, civic associations, social movements, public lobbies, constitutional designs, state building. How do historical institutionalists (sociologists, political scientists, social and political historians, legal scholars) tend to understand these developments over major eras of change?

Required Reading:


Further Reading:


February 5: Netroots as Networks: The Changing Terrain of Advocacy and the Public Sphere

Required Reading:


Further reading:


Winter Break: Feb 18-22: no classes

Feb 12, Feb 26: The Welfare State, Policy Feedback, and the Politics of Entitlement

The development of the US welfare state, with some European comparisons. Policy design and feedback effects on citizen organization and action. The visible and the submerged. The cognitive challenges of constructing public goods. Age, race, and gender in the construction of the welfare state. Normative justifications and critiques of the welfare state.

Required Reading:


For further reading:

Theda Skocpol, Boomerang: Clinton’s Health Security Effort and the Turn Against Government in American Politics (Norton 1996).
Lawrence R. Jacobs and Theda Skocpol, Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know (Oxford University Press 2010).
Theda Skocpol and Lawrence R. Jacobs, eds., Reaching for a New Deal: Ambitious Governance, Economic Meltdown, and Polarized Politics in Obama’s First Two Years

March 5: Political Sociology at the Intersection of Fiscal Sociology and Economic Sociology

Taxation has been a contentious issue from the founding of the American republic (“no taxation without representation,” repaying war debt, substitution of the land tax for the slave tax during Reconstruction, attempts to limit the franchise in New York City in the 1870s). These conflicts have variants in other countries. The issue of taxation is thoroughly enmeshed in the meaning of democratic self-governance, equity, and public goods. We look at several major historical episodes and then focus on the contemporary American tax revolt, rooted substantially in the revolt against real estate taxes, and the impact this had had on the political parties and the more generalized tax revolt.

Required Reading:


For further reading:

March 12: Religion, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Community Organizing


Required Readings:

Dennis Shirley, Community Organizing for Urban School Reform (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), chapter 3 (Morningside Middle School).

Recommended:

March 19: Community Health, Environmental Justice, and Urban Planning

The politics of urban planning as it impact health and environmental justice. Environmental racism and emergence of the environmental justice movement; local health organizing and health justice; street science as community and professional collaboration; policy tools for empowering communities in face of cumulative and interactive health risks. Competing frames in environmental justice.

Required Readings:


Further Reading:


Spring Break: March 26, April 2 (no classes)

April 9: Collaborative and Democratic Network Governance

Governance in a complex and networked world often elicits more advanced forms of relational politics and multi-stakeholder participation, deliberation, trust building, and coproduction. There are many terms for this, including “collaborative governance” and “democratic networked governance.” In this section, we examine the robust role government itself can play as a catalyst and enabler of civic partnership, and also the challenges of democratic accountability in a networked world, with greater reliance on trust than Weberian forms of bureaucracy or Madisonian solutions to the problem of factions and deliberation about public good. Two of our cases will be at the city level (Seattle, Hampton), and one will be a federal agency (U.S. EPA) relying upon community capacity building and network structures across a variety of programs.

Required reading

Further reading:

Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing, *Theories of Democratic Network Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007);

**April 16: Multi-stakeholder Ecosystem Governance and the Problem of Democratic Accountability**

The emergence of “civic environmental” approaches and grassroots challenges to command-and-control regulation. Watershed associations, land trusts, volunteer monitoring and stewardship networks. Ecosystem restoration, partnerships, deliberative regulatory cultures, dispute resolution, learning communities. What are the dangers of community approaches? Can “new governance” and “networked governance” achieve broad democratic accountability?

In the wake of Hurricane Sandy and the challenges of climate change, we will also explore the appropriateness of collaborative and networked governance models to climate adaptation and mitigation, as well as urban, regional, and ecosystem governance.

**Required Readings:**


**Further reading:**


**April 23: Brazilian Youth Networks, Community Organizing, and Participatory Budgeting**

Brazil has been in the forefront of civic innovation in Latin America, especially in participatory budgeting, health councils, and city master plans, as well as in its sustained mobilization of youth networks to win and consolidate the democratic regime. These and other participatory models from the global South.

**Required Readings:**


**Further reading:**


**April 30, May 7: Big Historical Transformations: Revolutions and Reconstructions**

Revolutions and reconstructions pose fundamental challenges to existing political and social orders. They also provide a good analytic window through which to view the dynamic interaction of nation states, the international state system, parties, movements, war, culture, gender, race. We will examine the antislavery movement field in American political development, and particularly the challenges of Reconstruction, and then pick up the story of the second reconstruction of the civil rights era. During the final class, we will address the topics of revolution and post-revolutionary change in China, if we still have energy for a new topic!

**Required Reading:**


**Further Readings:**

On antislavery and Reconstruction:


On revolutions:


