This course provides an overview of major concepts in political sociology, especially as they relate to American political life. One section focuses on contemporary Brazil as a comparative case of democratic innovation. We examine recent debates on social capital and civic engagement, politics and markets, grassroots and netroots, national interest groups and policymaking, community organizing and urban governance, social movements, and parties and politics at the national level. While the course provides an historical lens on several topics, its main focus is contemporary.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to stay current with all the readings, and come to class prepared for discussion. Students will have opportunities to present some cases from the readings. I list some further readings beyond those required, but these are just suggestions for those wishing to pursue topics in greater depth.

Students are expected to complete two sets of essays of 10 pages each (double-spaced, 12-point or so font, paginated) based on the readings, lectures and class discussions. Each set of essays will count as 45% of the course grade. Class participation and contributions to discussions will count as 10%.

Midterm essays: due Wed Feb 27 (in class): 10 pages (45%)
Final essays: due May 7, 12 noon (in my office): 10 pages (45%)
Class participation: 10% -- ongoing contributions to class discussions; optional individual and team presentations.

Service Learning: students have the option of combining the usual reading, presentations, and writing with internships and other forms of active civic engagement (e.g. with an advocacy campaign, community group, political campaign). Students must work out a specific agreement (on community engagement and course writing) with Prof. Sirianni in order for this work to count as part of the grade and perhaps substitute for other assignments. Students can also use this course to help survey and decide upon summer internships.

Disabled students requiring specific arrangements in completing course work should see the instructor.

Required readings (at Bookstore and on reserve; articles that will be photocopied for distribution or provided as pdfs and on Latté):


Jan 14: Introduction to course

January 16-23: Democracy in America: Historical-Institutional Lineaments

What have been the major contours of democratic development in the U.S. since the revolutionary period: development of 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:

Jan 16:


Jan 21:


Jan 23:


Jan 28-Feb 6: Netroots as Networks: The Changing Terrain of Advocacy, the Public Sphere, and the Political Campaign

Required Reading:
Winter Break: Feb 18-22: no classes


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.

Required Reading:


Midterm DUE Feb 27 in class: 10-pages typed, paginated, stapled, double-spaced, 12-point font

March 4-13: Community Organizing: Faith-based and Race-based Models Compared

Faith-based, congregation-based, or institution-based community organizing – sometimes simply referred to as relational organizing, because of its emphasis on relationship building and “power with” -- is one of the most robust forms of organizing in the U.S. today, encompassing some 5 million members, and has spread to other countries as well. Barack Obama, for instance, was trained as an organizer by one of the main faith-based networks, the Gamaliel Foundation. The IAF, PICO, and DART are other national networks, which together have some 200 or so city-based coalitions across the country. We will examine this model, contrast it to race-based organizing, another widely utilized model.

Required Reading:


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

Further readings:

**Spring Break: March 25-April 2 (no classes), April 3 Brandeis Monday, class as usual**

**March 18-April 10: Collaborative Governance and Democratic Networked 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 will 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.

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 reading**


DVD: Asset Based Community Development Institute, *ABCD in Action* (Inclusion Press, 2006). This DVD will be shown in class.

Barack Obama, “Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government” (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/)

White House Open Government Initiative [http://www.whitehouse.gov/open](http://www.whitehouse.gov/open)

**Further reading:**


April 15-24: 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,” funding 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:


April 29-May 1: 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:


**Final Essays due: Tuesday May 7, 12 noon in my office (Pearlman 20)**