

University of Rochester – PSCI/INTR 253/253W  
Spring 2025  
Meliora 219  
Wednesdays 2-4:40pm

## **Comparative Political Parties**

Professor Meguid  
Office: 306 Harkness Hall  
Email: bonnie.meguid@rochester.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10-12

---

### **Course Description**

The purpose of this seminar is to familiarize students with the political instrument at the heart of representative democracy – the political party. We begin with the premise that most observant participants in democratic political systems have some idea about the role and functioning of the political party. But beyond this working knowledge of parties as election-time competitors, how much does one know about this political actor? What differentiates a party from other social groups? What are the different motivations for party formation? Why do certain parties emerge “naturally”, whereas other preference groups find party formation and success difficult? From this starting point, we will explore the historical development of parties and their role in agenda-setting, policy making and institution building in democracies around the world. Our discussions will raise questions about the influence of sociological, economic and institutional factors in shaping party organization, the policy and issue positions they advocate and their interaction in the political arena. We will also examine the recent changes in party structures and party systems to decide whether these developments signify a transformation in party politics.

In this seminar, we will be reading the seminal texts and theories on parties and party systems. Through the readings and in-class discussions, we will be applying these theories to contemporary party examples in democracies around the world, including the United States and countries in Europe and Africa. By the end of the semester, students will have arrived at their own informed conclusions as to why, for instance, parties “flip flop,” how third parties, such as the US Green Party, have been successful without gaining office, and how the strategies of leftist parties can be linked to the rise of right-wing nationalist parties.

---

### **Requirements**

This advanced seminar is open to those students who have already taken other comparative or American political science courses, or by permission of the instructor. However, no prior coursework on party politics or political systems is required to take this course.

**Informed participation in class:** Students are expected to attend and participate in all class meetings. This seminar places an emphasis on discussion and debate, and thus, active participation is essential and expected.

Many of the readings are challenging, and therefore, students should carefully read and take notes on the readings prior to attending class.

Please note that if you need to miss class due to illness, please notify me via email prior to the class. If you miss more than one class during the semester, a doctor's note will be required.

**Two 5-7 Page Papers:** Students will be asked to respond to a specific question about the various themes of the course. No outside research should be undertaken for these assignments. However, students are encouraged to think critically about the theories in light of the case studies presented in class.

\*\*Barring extraordinary circumstances, late papers will be marked down a third of a grade (for ex. A to A-) for each 24 hour period after they are due. Thus, if a paper is turned in any time during the first 24 hours after it is due, it is penalized a third of a grade. Any paper not turned in within a week of the assigned due date will automatically receive a zero.

**Final Exam:** A cumulative final exam will be administered on **May 10 starting at 4pm.** *Given that the Registrar can change the time, do not make plans to be unavailable before the end of final exam period.*

**For Students pursuing the “W” Option, there is an additional requirement.**

**Fifteen page Research Paper:** Students should write a well-documented and researched paper on a topic of their choice within the field of party politics, using the theoretical frameworks we have discussed in the course. A review of secondary literature is not sufficient; students should draw on primary resources (surveys, newspapers, etc.). **The paper is due May 2 by 5pm.** Students taking the W option are required to submit a detailed 1 page outline of their research projects on **February 26 by 5 pm** and meet with me during the next week to discuss their proposed paper topics. The first draft of the paper is due **April 2 by 5pm.** Failure to satisfactorily meet either the outline or draft deadline will result in removal from the W section. *Also note the academic honesty policy below.*

**Grading for the course will be determined as follows:*****For 253 Students:***

Participation:	25%
2 5-7 page papers:	50% total
Final Exam:	25%

***For 253W Students:***

Participation:	25%
2 5-7 page papers:	35% total
Final Exam	20%
13-15 page research paper:	20%

**Academic Honesty Policy**

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. More information is available at: [www.rochester.edu/college/honesty](http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty).

*In this course, the following additional requirements are in effect:*

You are encouraged to discuss course readings with your fellow students. However, all written work must be done independently and not in collaboration with another person, outside of Professor Meguid or Writing Fellows acting in their official capacity. For this course, AI, such as Chat GPT, may NOT be used. Use of AI *at any stage* in the writing process will be considered cheating. Not only does use of AI undermine the pedagogical purpose of the assignment, but be aware that AI is prone to “hallucinating,” creating sources that do not exist, in addition to producing vague and unsatisfying papers.

**Readings**

In this course, we will read mainly book chapters and journal articles.

Journal articles and chapters in edited volumes are available on-line through Blackboard ([learn.rochester.edu](http://learn.rochester.edu), PSC/IR 253)

We will read significant portions of the Mair book (see below), so I cannot post the passages on electronic reserves. I have placed this book on physical (2 hour) reserve at Rush Rhees. If you would prefer, you can purchase it wherever you get new or used books.

Mair, Peter, (ed) [The West European Party System](#). Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.

We also are reading multiple chapters in the Meguid (2008) book. Rush Rhees has electronic copies. Alternatively, you can purchase it wherever you get new or used books.

---

## **Part I. Foundations: Function and Form**

What is a party? What differentiates it from other political actors, such as social movements and interest groups? What are the advantages and the limitations of the definitions offered by different theories? What are the implications of these different conceptions for party interaction?

### **Week One: Introduction (Jan 22)**

### **Week Two: Theoretical Foundations of a Political Party (Jan 29)**

Downs, Anthony. An Economic Theory of Democracy. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957. Chapter 2.

Schlesinger, J. "On the Theory of Party Organization." Journal of Politics. 46.2 (1984): 369-400.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. The Communist Manifesto. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998 (1888). Parts I, II, and IV.

## **Part II. Party Origins: Theories and Applications**

How and why do parties come about? Are some types of parties more "natural" than others? Do we see a change in the reasons behind party formation or are the roots of modern parties firmly established in the past? Are Western theories of party formation valid across non-Western cases? How do we rectify recently emerged parties with the claims of older theories? How are the issue preferences behind party formation manifested in different countries?

### **Week Three: Theories of Party Formation (Feb 5)**

Lipset, Seymour and Stein Rokkan. "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction." In Peter Mair (ed) The West European Party System. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 91-138.

Aldrich, John. Why Parties? Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chapters 1-2.

Przeworski, Adam and John Sprague. Paper Stones. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Prologue and Chapter 1.

**Week Four: “Natural” Parties? Center-Periphery Cleavage Examples from around the World (Feb 12)**

Isaacs, Harold. “Basic Group Identity: The Idols of the Tribe,” in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds, Ethnicity: Theory and Experience, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975. 29-52.

Bates, Robert H. “Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa.” In State versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas. Eds. Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983. 152-171.

Laitin, David. “Hegemony and Religious Conflict.” In Bringing the State Back In. Ed. R.B. Evans, D. Rueschmeyer, and T. Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 285-316.

**Week Five (Feb 19):** Video to be announced with a response-based writing assignment  
No additional reading necessary.

**Week Six: New Issue Cleavages or a Passing Fad? (Feb 26)**

*\*For W students, one-page outline of the W paper due TODAY by 5 pm.*

Inglehart, Ronald. “The Nature of Value Change.” In Peter Mair (ed), The West European Party System. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990: 247-252

Rohrschneider, Robert, “New Parties versus Old Left Realignments: Environmental Attitudes, Party Policies, and Partisan Affiliations in Four West European Countries,” The Journal of Politics, 55(1993): 682-701.

Meguid, Bonnie. Party Competition between Unequals. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Chapters 1, 5 and pages 257-72. \* the book is available as an electronic copy from the library.

**Week Seven: Reactions to Post-Materialism: The Rise (or return) of the Radical Right Populists (March 5)**

*First 5-7 page paper handed out. Due by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 19.*

Mudde, C. (2016). “Populist radical right parties in Europe today.” *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas: History and recent trends*, 295-307.

Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris. 2017. “Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse.” *Perspectives on Politics*.

Meguid, Bonnie. Party Competition between Unequals. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Chapter 6. \* the book is available as an electronic copy from the library.

***Spring Break: no class March 12***

*No class, March 19: 1<sup>st</sup> Paper due by 5pm*

### **Part III. Parameters of Political Debate**

Which issues get debated in the political arena? How does the ideological content of the political agenda change? Why do parties choose certain ideological positions over others? What drives their position-taking: vote-maximization, constituent representation, or personal ideologies and the values of party leaders? Is this an elite-driven or a mass-driven process?

#### **Week Eight: Setting the Ideological Agenda (March 26)**

Riker, William. Liberalism against Populism. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1982. 197-232.

Budge, Ian and Dennis Farlie. "Party Competition- Selective Emphasis or Direct Confrontation?" in Western European Party Systems: Continuity and Change. Eds. Hans Daalder and Peter Mair. London: Sage Publications, 1983. 267-306.

Plescia, Carolina, Sylvia Kritzinger and Lorenzo De Sio. 2019. "Filling the Void? Political Responsiveness of Populist Parties." Representation 55(4): 513-33.

#### **Week Nine: Party Issue Positions: Competing Models (April 2)**

*\*For W students, first draft of W paper due TODAY by 5pm.*

Downs, Anthony. An Economic Theory of Democracy. New York: Harper and Row, 1957. Chapters 7-8.

Rabinowitz, George and Stuart Macdonald. "A Directional Theory of Issue Voting." American Political Science Review. 83.1(1989): 93-121.

Meguid, Bonnie. Party Competition between Unequals. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Chapter 2. \* the book is available as an electronic copy from the library.

#### **Week Ten: Institutional Forms of Party Strategy (April 9)**

*Second 5-7 Paper Topic handed out. \*\*Due by 11:59pm on Sunday, April 13.\*\**

Boix, Carles. 1999. "Setting the Rules of the Game." American Political Science Review. 93(3).

Helmke, Gretchen and Bonnie M. Meguid. 2008. "Endogenous Institutions: The Origins of Compulsory Voting Laws." Unpublished manuscript.

Catalano Weeks, Ana. 2018. "Why Are Gender Quota Laws Adopted by Men? The Role of Inter- and Intraparty Competition." Comparative Political Studies. 51 (14): 1935-73.

#### **IV. Recent Developments: Temporary Shifts or a True Transformation?**

Do recent claims about changes in party systems and party organizations signify temporary shifts or the rearrangement of party politics? Are these trends restricted to advanced industrial democracies or are they occurring in other regions? Does party professionalization spell the end of representative political systems? Do empirical facts support these theoretical conclusions?

##### **Week Eleven: Changes in Party System (April 16)**

Dalton, Russell and Martin Wattenberg (eds). Parties without Partisans. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Abramowitz, Alan I. and Kyle L. Saunders. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics*. 70.2 (2008): 542-55.

##### **Week Twelve: (April 23) Changing Models of Party Organizations**

Katz, Richard S. and Peter Mair. "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy." *Party Politics* 1.1(1995): 5-28.

Koole, Rudd. "Cadre, Catch-all or Cartel?" *Party Politics* 2.4(1996): 507-23.

Dassonneville, R., & McAllister, I. "Are they different? A comparative study of European populist party members." *Party Politics*, 29.1(2023): 16-25.

##### **Week Thirteen: Political Party Challenges for Democracy and Representation and Course Wrap-up (April 30)**

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. How Democracies Die. New York: Crown. Chapters 1 and 2.

Taub, Amanda and Max Fisher. "Facebook fueled anti-refugee attacks in Germany, new research suggests." *New York Times*. 8/21/2018.

**\*\*\*Research papers for the W students due May 2 by 5pm.**

**\*\*\*Cumulative final exam for all students –Saturday, May 10 starting at 4pm**