Course Description

Since the anticommunist dissent in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, academics and political practitioners have written extensively on the related ideas of civil society and social movements. In this course we will explore what this research frontier in applied political sociology can teach us about democracy in the United States today. Taken together, the course readings make the case that “more” civic engagement in political life is “better” for the vitality of democracy, though we will also consider arguments critical of this position. With this somewhat contested claim in the background, readings will examine questions ranging from why civic engagement might be on the decline in the United States to what kinds of public policy or social movement strategies hold promise to revitalize it.

Readings

Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, Cambridge, 1988

*Other readings available in the following locations:

- On line: The easiest way to access on-line readings is to open the syllabus from Blackboard and follow the electronic link to the site listed in the course schedule. You can read on-line or print the document (Make sure to check if the site is equipped with a printer friendly version of the document).
- Blackboard: Documents are stored in the course documents link.
- On reserve in the Main Library (listed under SOCI 293)

Course Requirements

a) Everyone is expected to read and reflect on all required readings prior to class. Class participation is essential to success in this course and constitutes a part of the final grade.

b) Each student will participate as a discussant in a colloquium organized and presented by a group
of 4-6 people. In each colloquium (indicated on the course calendar) the group will facilitate a class discussion of the assigned readings. Students should meet in a group 2 or 3 times beforehand to plan a colloquium strategy. Every group will be graded on the basis of (i) its success in facilitating a fruitful class discussion and (ii) a paper (6-7 pages), authored by the group as a whole, which presents the ideas and arguments explored in the colloquium. The paper is DUE ON THE DAY OF THE COLLOQUIUM.

c) Every student is expected to produce brief reaction papers (5-6 pages) to any three scheduled class meetings except the week of the student's colloquium project. It is entirely up to each student on which weeks to write a reaction paper. Reaction papers must be e-mailed to me BY TUESDAY AT NOON. Suggested themes for these papers are included in the course schedule, but other themes are strongly encouraged.

d) 18-20 page term paper and research roundtable. There are two options for the term paper.

Option 1: empirical paper
Write about a single nongovernmental/nonbusiness organization or movement that has a record of sustained political activity in the United States, past or present. The emphasis can either be on a national movement (e.g., the environmental movement) or organization (e.g., the National Resources Defense Council) or on a local organization (e.g., Eco Cleveland) that might be connected to a broader movement. Alternatively, you may choose to compare two or more movements or organizations. The purpose of the paper is to examine an empirical case in depth as a means of exploring, challenging, or illuminating an idea, argument or theory covered in the course. Alternatively one can use ideas, arguments or theories covered in the course to answer a specific research question about a case. (e.g., Where is the women's movement today?)

Option 2: critical analysis and debate
Write a well-researched paper critically analyzing a scholarly idea, argument or movement covered in this course (e.g., communitarianism, social capital) or comparing it to another idea, argument or movement. For this option you must include an extensive review of existing scholarly literature on your topic.

Term paper must be sent to me by e-mail NO LATER THAN MAY 19th. Any time BEFORE MARCH 18th every student must meet with me during office hours to discuss the paper topics so that I may provide appropriate feedback. In the research roundtables, which take place on April 27th, students will discuss their research as a work-in-progress to small groups in a "roundtable" format. The objective is to share ideas with others and receive constructive feedback from them.

Evaluation

Class participation = 10 %
Term paper and roundtable= 40%
Colloquium participation and co-authorship of five-page paper = 20%
Reaction papers= 30% (10% each)

Class Schedule and Readings

INTRODUCTION: CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
February 10


I. CONTEMPORARY CIVIL SOCIETY THEORY

February 17: Civil Society and Communal Values


Possible paper topic: The idea of community and the problem of freedom in communitarianism

February 24: Economy, Poverty and Civil Society

W.J. Wilson, When Work Disappears, pp. 3-111

Carole Pateman. “Participation and Democratic Theory.” pp. 22-44 (suggested) (on reserve)

Possible paper topic: Finding the connection between work and community

March 2: Colloquium on Spatial Structure of Civil Society and Urban Planning Theory

Jane Jacobs, Death and Life of Great American Cities, chaps 3 and 6 (on reserve)

Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl, chap. 2 (pp. 36-74) (on reserve; also available at http://www.amazon.com/gp/reader/0805061843/ref=sib_dp_pt/103-0249832-0600615#reader-link)

Possible paper topic: Urban design and civil society: a spatial theory of democratic participation

II. THE CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE ON DEMOCRATIC REVITALIZATION

March 9: Economic Policy as a Path to Civic Renewal in Poor Communities

W.J. Wilson, When Work Disappears, pp. 149-240

Possible paper topic: Can the federal government help revitalize democracy in poor communities?
March 16: Colloquium on Church-based Community Organizations and Democratic Revitalization
Mark R. Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, pp. 3-123
Possible paper topic: How can churches revitalize civil society in poor communities?

March 23: Leadership and Organization in Democratic Revitalization
Mark R. Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, pp. 162-190; 211-264
Possible paper topic: Comparing church-based and non church-based approaches to community organizing

March 30: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

April 6: Social Capital and Community Revitalization
Robert Putnam, “Tuning In, Tuning Out,” Political Science and Politics 28, 4 (December 1995): 664-83 (Blackboard)
Robert J. Sampson, “Crime and Public Safety: Insights from Community-Level Perspectives on Social Capital,” In Social Capital and Poor Communities, eds. Susan Saegert et al., 2001: 89-114 (reserve)
Possible paper topic: What we learn about community when we learn about social capital.

III. THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN DEMOCRACY
April 13: Colloquium on the American social movement in historical perspective
Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement, ch. 1-4
Possible paper topic: How modern democracy has changed the character of social movements

April 20: Social movement perspective in political sociology
Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement, ch. 5-8

Possible paper topic: Social movements: how do they succeed, why do they fail?

April 27: Research roundtables

May 4: Analytical topics in social movement research

Tarrow, Power in Movement, ch. 9-11

Possible paper topic: Is it possible to predict social movement cycles?

May 11: Colloquium on challenges and prospects of contemporary social movements


Immanuel Ness, “Community Labor Alliances: A New Paradigm in the Campaign to Organize Greengrocery Workers in New York City,” In From Act Up to the WTO: 57-74 (reserve)

Joel Lefkowitz, “Students, Sweatshops, and Local Power,” In From Act Up to the WTO, Shepard and Hayduk eds. 2002: 74-80 (reserve)

Eric Rofes, “Beyond Patient and Polite: A Call for Direct Action and Civil Disobedience on Behalf of Same-Sex Marriage,” In From Act Up to the WTO, Shepard and Hayduk eds. 2002: 150-155. (reserve)

Stephen Duncombe, “Stepping off the Sidewalk: Reclaim the Streets NYC” In From Act Up to the WTO, Shepard and Hayduk eds. 2002: 215-228. (reserve)

Possible paper topic: Social movements in the global era: problems, strategies and prospects

May 19: TERM PAPER DUE