Political Sociology

This course is intended as an introduction to a major sub-field of sociology, the sociology of politics. We will begin with an examination of basic concepts such as power, traditional authority relations, the birth of the modern state, and citizenship in the Western world. We will then explore such problems as the social conditions of democracy, class conflict and the Marxist theory of the state, bureaucratization, the elitist critique of democracy, the weakness of American socialism, and the nature of class/elite power in the United States. In the concluding part of the course we will concentrate on the rise of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany in an attempt to isolate some of the factors which can lead to democratic breakdown.

Course Requirements and Grading

There will be two quizzes, two papers (6-7 pages each), and a final exam. The quizzes will consist of 6 short definitions of concepts and will be in class (45 minutes). The final exam will consist of 6 definitions on the mid-term pattern plus an essay question. The two essay topics will be determined by the instructor and will require students to synthesize course material (no additional reading required).

2 Quizzes: 10% x 2 = 20%
2 Essays (6-7 pages): 20% x 2 = 40%
Final Exam = 25%
Class Attendance (including mandatory film screenings) and Participation = 15%

Attendance will be taken as of the third week of class: more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation portion of the grade. Late papers will be penalized and extensions will be given only under exceptional circumstances. Papers must be double-spaced in standard Times New Roman font and properly paginated. Papers will be returned if they are not in the proper format. Computers will be allowed for classroom use only under exceptional circumstances and with the consent of the instructor.

Other requirements: Film screenings (mandatory)

The Leopard by Luchino Visconti
Inside Job by Charles Ferguson
Triumph of the Will by Leni Riefenstahl
**Honor Code**

This course and all its assignments are covered by the Oberlin College honor code. This means, most importantly, that—unless otherwise indicated—you are to produce your own work and honor the rules and conventions of scholarly quotation, attribution, and citation. While you are allowed to ask advice and help from librarians and official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Any case of (suspected) plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For more details, see [http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/10-Policies-Honor.pdf](http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/10-Policies-Honor.pdf)

**Required Books** (also on hard copy reserve at the reference desk in the library).

Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology*


All other readings can be found on the Blackboard site for the class under “Course Documents.” You are welcome to print them out or download them (for personal use only). Readings for every week should be done in advance.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week One. Introduction to the Field of Political Sociology**

Wed. 9/4: What is Political Sociology? Power and Legitimacy in Social Context


**Week Two. Types of Legitimate Authority and the Evolution of the State in the West**

Mon. 9/9: Types of Legitimate Authority: Traditional, Legal-Rational, Charismatic
Max Weber “Politics as a Vocation,” and “Charismatic Authority,” in Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, pp.77-82 (to the end of the first paragraph), 245-252.

Wed. 9/11: The Rise of the State


**Week Three. Political Leadership, Classes, and Status-Groups**

Mon. 9/16: Professional Politicians and Political Parties. Politics as a Vocation.

Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” pp.82-128.

Wed. 9/18: Political Power, Classes, and Status Groups


**Week Four. From Traditional Authority Relations to Modern Citizenship**

Mon. 9/23: The Absolutist State and Pre-Modern Social Rebellion. The End of Paternalism


Wed. 9/25: Civil, Political, and Social Rights. The Political Emancipation of the Lower Classes


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**Week Five. Social Class, Class Conflict, and Politics**

Mon. 9/30: Marx’s Historical Materialism. Society and Ideology


“Marx on the History of His Opinions,” pp. 3-7;  

Wed. 10/2: Class Conflict, Social Change, and Capitalism


**Film Screening. The Leopard by Luchino Visconti** (at a scheduled time outside of class).

**Week Six. Class Conflict and the Marxist Theory of the State.**

Mon. 10/7: **1st Quiz**

*1st quiz in class (45 minutes)*

Discussion of *The Leopard*


**Week Seven. The Social and Elite Foundations of Democracy.**

Mon. 10/14: The Social Base of Liberal Democracy.

Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, pp. 25-86.


Wed. 10/16: Elite Competition and Democracy

First paper due Wednesday, 10/16 in class (hard copy)

Fall Break 10/19-10/27

Week Eight. Bureaucracy and Democracy

Mon. 10/28: The Concept of Bureaucracy


Wed. 10/30: The Iron Law of Oligarchy Formulated

Michels, Political Parties, pp.3-114.

Week Nine. The Pacification of the Class Struggle: Bureaucracy vs. American Exceptionalism

Mon. 11/4: Masses, Leaders, and Party Oligarchies


Wed. 11/6: The American Myth, Capitalism, and Socialism

Werner Sombart, Why is There no Socialism in the United States?

Film Screening. Inside Job by Charles Ferguson (at a scheduled time outside of class).

Week Ten. Power in American Society: A Class-Elite Critique of Pluralism

Mon. 11/11: 2nd Quiz

2nd Quiz in class (45 minutes)

Discussion of Inside Job

Wed. 11/13: Elite and/or Ruling Class? Theoretical Controversies and Empirical Research
Week Eleven. From Democracy to Dictatorship

Mon. 11/18: Elites, Coalitions, and American Electoral Politics


Wed. 11/20: Types of Dictatorship Defined


Week Twelve. Authoritarianism and Fascism in the European Context

Mon. 11/25: Fascism as Middle-Class Extremism

Lipset, “Fascism--Left, Right, Center,” in Lipset, Political Man, pp.127-179.

Second paper due Mon. 11/25 in class (hard copy)

Wed. 11/27: Fascism as an Ideology and Movement in the European Context

Michael Mann, Fascists, pp.1-92.

Week Thirteen. Fascism and Nazism as Social Movements

Mon. 12/2: Fascism and Its Social Base: The Case of Italy

Mann, Fascists, pp.93-138.

Wed. 12/4: Nazism and Its Social Base

Mann, Fascists, pp.139-206.

Film Screening. Triumph of the Will by Leni Riefenstahl (at a scheduled time outside of class).
Week Fourteen.

Mon 12/9: General Thoughts on Dictatorship and Fascism

Mann, Fascists, 353-375.

Discussion of Triumph of the Will

Wed. 12/11: Final Exam Review and Final Thoughts

Final Exam Tuesday, December 17, 2-4 p.m.