

STV4322B – The Politics of Organized Political Actors

Course content

This course addresses the two main types of organized political actors in democracies: political parties and interest groups and the relationship between them. It concentrates on politics at the national level in established democracies and is divided into three main parts. First, we examine and compare the historical roots, fundamental goals and organizational nature of parties and interest groups. What unify and distinguish them as political organizations, and how do they vary internally? Second, we look at parties and interest groups' strategies and behaviour to reach their goals, outside but not least within or pertaining to formal political institutions. Attention is also paid to the organizational relationship *between* the two types of actors and the different ways interest groups may seek access to political parties (and vice versa).

Third, and above all, we address the issue of political influence in public decision-making. Doing this, we situate parties and interest groups in the public policy process from the agenda setting stage to the adoption stage. How do political parties seek political influence in the legislature and in government, and how may interest groups influence public policy via political parties? Parties' policy positions are per se less important than policy outcomes but in systems with relatively strong parties, influencing parties – both their election manifestos and legislative positions – is probably an important way of indirectly affecting policy adoption and outcomes. Moreover, we discuss what “policy” means in this context, according to existing research. Are the policy positions of parties and interest groups generally similar and possible to locate in the same “policy space”? Next, we summarize what the scholarly literature tells us regarding interest groups influence on political parties and public policy. What explain lobbying success of interest groups? When and why do parties and governments listen to interest groups? Finally, we look at the triangle of voters, parties, and interest groups. Does pressure from interest groups strengthen or weaken the link between voters and parties?

An overarching topic is what explains variation over time, within and across political systems and time periods. Different theoretical approaches and major empirical studies within these fields of research will be presented. Taken together, the course throws light on how both parties and interest groups shape the nature of democratic governance.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

Students will:

- obtain a good grasp of the core concepts and theoretical approaches within these fields of research;
- develop a deeper understanding of the nature of political parties and interest groups, and the relationship between them;
- obtain empirical knowledge about their organizational structures, strategies, and behavior in contemporary established democracies;
- learn more about how and why they vary across countries and have changed over time;
- be well acquainted with how parties and interest groups affect the legislative process and public policy outputs;
- obtain a better grasp of the relationship between organized political actors and democracy

Skills

Students are expected to:

- be able to define core concepts and describe theoretical approaches within these fields of research;
- conduct analyses of parties and interest groups – of their structures, strategies, behaviour, and political influence;
- improve their ability to discuss the relationship between organized political actors and democracy;
- be able to synthesize knowledge from different sources and fields

Competences

Students will:

- improve their general analytical skills;
- develop the ability to work with empirical data;
- enhance the competence to discuss academic literature with others;
- improve the ability to read scholarly literature instrumentally and critically

Prerequisites

Recommended previous knowledge: Students without much prior knowledge of comparative politics are recommended to read the chapters on parties and interest groups in an introductory textbook (like Daniele Caramani's *Comparative Politics*, Oxford University Press).

Teaching

Lectures/seminars (10 in 5 weeks). Each session will involve a presentation lead by the professor followed by a discussion of the topic and the assigned readings. This is a Master level course which involves active reading and participation. All students are expected to have done the required readings before each session and come to class with a willingness to critically discuss them.

Compulsory activities

- Attend at least 7 out of 10 sessions. You are expected to have read the course materials carefully, and to actively participate in class. Although the class is in English, your language proficiency will not be assessed, so please don't let your language skills hamper your class participation.
- Submit reading memos for 6 of 9 topics (the first session/topic is excluded). Reading memos are short (1 page) responses to the session's readings (not a summary, but some related idea to discuss, to clarify, some analysis of common or divergent elements in the readings).

You can use the reading memos to inspire or structure in-class participation. The course convener will suggest questions prior to the course, but feel free to address any other question inspired by the readings that is of interest to you in your reading memos. Participants will be asked to kick-off the discussions based on reading memos.

Examination

Term paper to be submitted individually at the end of the sixth week. The term paper must:

- be between 3500-5000 words (including references, figures, notes, etc.)
- be on a given topic (empirical paper or review paper: alternatives and guidelines will be distributed 1 1/2 week in advance).
- meet the [formal requirements for submission of written assignments](#)

[Previous exams with grading guidelines.](#)