

SOC 479: Politics Scandals & Social Media

Instructor: Dr. Stephanie Hilwig

Course: Sociology 479 Politics, Scandals & Social Media (3 Credit Hours)

Time: TTH 11:00 – 12:15

Room: MCD 310

Office Hours: MWF 11:00 – 12:00

Office: MCD 382

TTHF 1:00 – 2:00

or by appointment

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PREREQUISITES:

Soc 201

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age by John B. Thompson. 2000. Polity Press. 978-0-7456-2550-8

Lobbying and Society: A Political Sociology of Interest Groups by John C. Scott. 2018. Polity Press. 9-781509-510351.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

While Sociology is the study of human groups and their interactions, the political system is one of the key social institutions in human societies. Political Sociology as a subdiscipline in its own right focuses on the political process and more specifically who wields the most power in our government. Is our government one that represents the people, or are some groups able to implement their agenda at the expense of everyone else. We see this when dealing with climate change, nutrition recommendations, corporate tax breaks and subsidies, war, trade policies, and healthcare. The policies that are ultimately passed are ones that benefit corporations, contractors and the wealthy. Why? This semester we will exam lobbying groups and interest groups and how power is distributed to those with money. Using a sociological lens, we will exam theories of power from Karl Marx to C. Wright Mills. We will exam the political process using theories of pluralism, elitism, rational choice and corporatism. Using these theories as an investigative tool, we will ask questions about how lobbying groups are heard, what role do social movements have in changing our political structure, how do interest groups challenge large corporations for a voice at the table?

Secondarily in this class, in modern day society our political process has become increasingly tainted with the rise of scandals. Scandals have the ability to destroy social movements, shape political agendas, and alter political careers. With the rise of media increasingly focused on exciting and attention getting headlines at the expense of deep policy discussions, our political system is shaped and molded by the scandals that grab our attention. These scandals range from sex scandals of Anthony Weiner and Bill Clinton, to political scandals of Watergate, Iran-Contra and the Mueller Investigation. Despite their focus, they shape the political discourse. We will be using theories in sociology to break down the rise of scandals and how they shape and dominate our political news cycle. The goal is by the end of the semester to have a clearer view of our political system and how media, corporations, social movements, and interest groups all play a role in shaping the very policies that impact our lives.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the semester I expect you will have a good understanding of the concepts, basic theories, arguments and literature related to Political Sociology. You should be able to answer questions soundly – What is political sociology? What basic theories shape this subdiscipline? I will expect you to be able to articulate, support, and challenge the theoretical perspectives that define the subdiscipline. We will ground our discussions in the assigned readings, lectures, films, and current events.

FORMAT OF THE COURSE:

To spur participation in the class, I will expect everyone to become engaged in current events. To accomplish this, each week every student will be required to read at least one article or watch one political show and come to class prepared to discuss the issues presented. This may include questions you have about the piece, or new ideas you noticed when reading or watching the piece.

Other online publications of interest include:

www.nytimes.com

www.npr.org

www.msnbc.msn.com

www.cnn.com

www.foxnews.com

www.propublica.org

www.economist.com

www.huffingtonpost.com

www.propublica.org

www.thedailybeast.com

www.slate.com

Great political comedy shows to watch include:

Full Frontal with Samantha Bee

Last Week Tonight with John Oliver
The Daily Show with Trevor Noah
The Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj
Saturday Night Live
Problem Areas by Wyatt Cenac
Late Night with Seth Meyers

These shows have become the modern version of the “political cartoon” – brilliant and biting – exposing hidden political truths through humor and satire.

Because the class will be filled with in-class writing assignments (or quizzes), discussions, and lectures, attending class is vital to your success in this class. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to get class notes and information from other students in the class. I suggest you get to know people your very first day. Get e-mails and phone numbers.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Presentation (15%)

In pairs, students will research a political issue and related scandal. Discuss the political controversy and the scandal in detail. How did the scandal shape the way media discussed and framed the political issue at hand. Also discuss the issue and scandal using the theories discussed in class and your textbook.

Some possible examples may include: (These are simply examples, you may select a topic of interest to you. International examples may also be selected.)

Immigration and “caging children”
Pharmaceutical industry and the opioid epidemic
Israel and Netanyahu indicted for corruption
Obesity and the food industry and the sugar industry hiding and falsifying research
Intervention in Nicaragua and the Iran/Contra scandal

Blue Book Reading Assignments: (40% of grade)

Each week you will be required to write a short paragraph summarizing your readings for the week. Choose one key concept or idea from the readings, explain it, and then reflect on that idea with what you know about other social movements. The reading assignments will be worth 40% of your final grade. All questions will come directly from your readings. These reflections will be kept in a Blue Book that I will distribute the second week of class.

Essays: (15% each essay; 45% combined)

A good portion of what you will do in this class is designed to encourage you to make the most out of the material from the readings, lectures, and class discussions. A secondary, but just as important goal is to help with your writing and communication abilities, a skill useful in any occupation. To help facilitate this process, you will each be required to write three papers in

response to the readings, each worth 15% of your grade (45% combined). Each essay should be about 4-5 pages in length clearly analyzing a particular issue based on concepts, facts, and knowledge learned in other courses.

Essay 1: “Choose a political issue that interests you. What are the various interests that have attempted to lobby on either side of this issue? Discuss which lobbying groups have had the most amount of power in making their case? How have they wielded this power? Discuss at least two theoretical approaches when arguing how they have successfully manipulated perceptions of this issue?”

Essay 2: “Select at least one political scandal, either in the U.S. in the abroad, within the last 50 years. After describing the details of the scandal, discuss how the media played a role in “mediated” perceptions by the public. Discuss framing theory and how the scandal was “framed” by various political groups. How were people and politics impacted by the scandal?”

Essay 3: “In this essay, students will attempt to combine the two issues discussed this semester, scandals and interest groups. Select at least one political issue with a scandal surrounding this issue. One example may be Global Warming and “Climategate.” How was the scandal leveraged to hinder or help a political interest groups cause. Discuss the issue and the scandal in detail.”

Grading:

- A 90 % and above
- B 80 – 89 %
- C 70 – 79 %
- D 60 – 69 %
- F 59 % and below

CELL PHONE POLICY:

Phones, notepads and computers will not be allowed in class. All students must silence them and put them out of sight for the duration of class. You may not leave them on your desk. Cellphones and other media are not only a distraction to you, but they distract my ability to teach and they also distract other students in class who can see your screen.

LEAVING DURING CLASS:

I understand that sometimes students must sometimes leave class, but I ask that if you do, please either let me know ahead of time, or come and apologize and explain why afterwards. Please go to the bathroom between your classes and check your cellphone after class.

Persons with Disabilities:

Adams State University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Adams State University is committed to achieving equal educational opportunities, providing students with documented disabilities access to all university programs, services and activities. In order for this course to be equally accessible to all students, different accommodations or adjustments may need to be implemented. The Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) is located in Richardson Hall 3-100, or available at OAS@adams.edu, and 719-

587-7746. They are your primary resource on campus to discuss the qualifying disability, help you develop an accessibility plan, and achieve success in your courses this semester. They may provide you with letters of accommodation, which can be delivered in two ways. You may give them to me in person, or have the Office of Accessibility Services email them. Please make an appointment with their office as early as possible this semester so that we can discuss

how potential accommodations can be provided and carried out for this course. If you have already received letters of accommodation for this course from OAS, please provide me with that information privately so that we can review your accommodations together and discuss how best to help you achieve equal access in this course this semester.

Academic Freedom and Responsibility: for courses that do not involve students in research:

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.*

Academic Misconduct:

Students should abide by all student ethical conduct, especially those rules pertaining to cheating and plagiarism. Plagiarism, cheating, or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. Any student engaging in academic dishonesty in this course can expect a failing grade for the course and formal charges to be brought before the Department Chair.

Films:

Dark Money - Dark Money examines one of the greatest present threats to American democracy: the influence of untraceable corporate money on our elections and elected officials.

The Billionaires' Tea Party – Filmmaker Taki Oldham imbeds himself in the Tea Party groups Americans for Prosperity and Freedomworks, revealing how corporations engineered these “Astroturf” organizations designed to look like organic grassroots movements.

The Best Government Money Can Buy? – Just how influential are lobbyists? Francis Megahy writes and directs this absorbing documentary about lobbyists’ role in American politics, the far-reaching implications of their spending on elections and their threat to democracy. In addition to exploring case studies from several industries such as health care and energy, the film features insights from Capitol Hill insiders, former White House officials and more.

Freedom Fries: And Other Stupidity We'll Have to Explain to Our Grandchildren –

Patriotism and consumerism march lockstep in American culture — or so attests this documentary that examines the measures Americans have been encouraged to take to support their troops abroad. From the anti-French stances adopted during the run-up to Iraq (think eating “freedom fries” and “freedom toast”) to waving Chinese-made American flags, the film shows that what we buy has everything to do with what we believe to be true about our country.

The Money Lobby examines how Political Action Committees (PACs) and Super PACs have managed to monopolize the political discourse in the US in favor of a privileged class.

Truth and Lies: Watergate Exclusive interviews, photos and footage related to the Nixon Watergate scandal. Hulu

Meet the Donors: Does Money Talk? intrepid filmmaker Alexandra Pelosi (HBO’s Emmy-winning *Journeys with George*) takes viewers behind the scenes at top-dollar fundraisers and chats with dozens of ultra-rich mega-donors from both political parties to find out why they are pouring millions into the election.

Citizen Koch Set against the rise of the Tea Party in the aftermath of the US Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United ruling, a citizen uprising to recall Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker collides with the Tea Party-aligned “Americans for Prosperity,” a group founded and lavishly financed by two of the world’s richest men —David and Charles Koch. As Republican working class voters find themselves in the crosshairs of their own party and its billionaire backers, they are forced to choose sides. Directed by Academy Award®-nominated directors Carl Deal & Tia Lessin (*Trouble the Water*; co-producers *Fahrenheit 911* and *Capitalism: A Love Story*). [Watch *Trouble the Water* here: www.troublethewaterfilm.com]

The Clinton Affair Is a Necessary, Maddening Documentary

By featuring the women affected by Clinton’s behavior—including Monica Lewinsky, Paula Jones, Juanita Broaddrick, and Kathleen Willey—the six-part docuseries offers a tough postmortem on a national spectacle with long-lasting consequences

COVER UP: Behind the Iran Contra Affair This documentary video looks inside the Iran-Contra affair. Covered are the allegations of secret governments, drugs, CIA involvement, assassinations and even a plan to suspend the Constitution.

COURSE OUTLINE: (Schedule is Tentative and likely to change)

Topic

Readings

Week 1 – August 20th

Introduction to Interest Groups

Lobbying Introduction
Scandals Introduction

Week 2 August 27th

Political Scandals

Scandals Chp 1

Week 3 Sept 3rd

Interest Groups

Lobbying Chp 1

Week 4 – Sept 10th

Media and Scandals

Scandals Chp 2

Week 5 – Sept 17th

Power and Influence

Lobbying Chp 2

Essay 1 due Tuesday Sept 24th : “Choose a political issue that interests you. What are the various interests that have attempted to lobby on either side of this issue? Discuss which lobbying groups have had the most amount of power in making their case? How have they wielded this power? Discuss at least two theoretical approaches when arguing how they have successfully manipulated perceptions of this issue?”

Week 6 – Sept 24th

Structure of Scandals in the Media

Scandals Chp 3

Week 7 – Oct 1st

Policy Making

Lobbying Chp 3

Week 8 – Oct 8th

Political Scandals

Scandals Chp 4

Week 9 – Oct 15th

Inequality among Interest Groups

Lobbying Chp 4

Week 10 – Oct 22nd

Sex Scandals

Scandals Chp 5

Essay 2 due Tuesday Oct 29th: *“Select at least one political scandal, either in the U.S. in the abroad, within the last 50 years. After describing the details of the scandal, discuss how the media played a role in “mediated” perceptions by the public. Discuss framing theory and how the scandal was “framed” by various political groups. How were people and politics impacted by the scandal?”*

Week 11 – Oct 29th

Global Politics

Lobbying Chp 5

Presentations

Week 12 – Nov 5th

Financial Scandals

Scandals Chp 6

Presentations

Week 13- Nov 12th

New Directions in Policy Making

Lobbying Chp 6

Presentations

Week 14 – Nov 19th

Power Scandals

Scandals Chp 7

Presentations

Essay 3 due Tuesday Dec 3rd : *“In this essay, students will attempt to combine the two issues discussed this semester, scandals and interest groups. Select at least one political issue with a*

scandal surrounding this issue. One example may be Global Warming and “Climategate.” How was the scandal leveraged to hinder or help a political interest groups cause. Discuss the issue and the scandal in detail.”

Some possible examples may include:

Immigration and “caging children”

Pharmaceutical industry and the opioid epidemic

Israel and Netanyahu indicted for corruption

Obesity and the food industry and the sugar industry hiding and falsifying research

Intervention in Nicaragua and the Iran/Contra scandal

Global warming and Climategate

Week 15 – Dec 3rd

Consequences of Scandals

Scandals Chp 8

Final Exam