POL-UA 595/Comparative Politics Seminar:  
Comparative Political Economy of Affirmative Action

Instructor:
Cyrus Samii  
NYU Politics Department  
19 West 4th Street, Office 424  
cdsamii[at]gmail.com

Class Time:
Thursdays, 3:30pm-6:00pm

Location:
366 Waverly Building (24 Waverly Place)

Office Hours:
Wednesdays, 1:00-3:00pm, or by appointment

Overview

This course provides students with analytical tools to study institutions and policies designed to address problems of ethnic exclusion in democratic societies. We will examine exclusion and associated remediation in various domains, including representation in publicly elected offices and public sector institutions as well as access to desirable non-governmental and private sector positions through university admissions and corporate ownership. The term “affirmative action” will be used here in a broad sense to mean any policy that structures voting or market decisions in a way that gives members of under-represented ethnic groups a boost. This includes ethnic quotas and ethnically-preferential scoring procedures, as well as more micro-level interventions aimed at addressing prejudice and segregation.

In the first half of the class, we will study theoretical and empirical literature applied to the cases of the United States, South Africa, and India. The case studies will highlight a variety of contexts marked by variation in wealth, democratic consolidation, legacies of conflict, and nature and intensity of exclusion and discrimination. We will get a sense of how problems of exclusion and inequality are understood and debated in these different contexts and what kinds of strategies have been applied. In the second half of the class, we will switch to “research lab” mode. Students will choose a single country case from a list (see below) and they will complete a series of short written assignments as part of the development of an online wiki page for their case. The wiki will be edited and posted online as a public resource.

The instructional method will be based on instructor-guided discussion and student group presentations. All members of the seminar are expected to actively contribute each week. The goals of the course are for students to develop general policy and institutional analysis skills and to become familiar with this important issue area as applied to the three cases that we develop together and the individual case that the student studies in the second half of the course.

Syllabus
Readings Dropbox
Class List Spreadsheet

Research Lab

This web space hosts the wiki pages for the research lab portion of this course. A link below (and to the left) takes you to the "List of cases" that students are covering as part of the research lab. These case studies examine legacies of inter-group conflict and group exclusion in a set of societies and strategies applied in these societies in the aftermath of political crises that brought inter-group issues forward.