

Political Institutions

POLS 689

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Room: Allen 2064

Meetings times: MTWR, 2:00 – 4:00

Office hours: TBD

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the design and consequences of institutions designed to address political problems at various levels of analysis that are germane to all subfields, including, but not limited to: preference aggregation; externalities; collective action; principal-agent and; commitment problems. These issues will be studied in both their abstract form as well as representative applications from across the subfields.

Students will learn, in each thematic section, about the general approach of studying political phenomena from an institutional perspective. Following this, students will learn how scholars have applied to the general approach to particular substantive environments that vary widely with respect to subfields and political phenomena. Taken together this provides broad insight into how the methodological approach of institutional analysis can be widely applied to most questions of interest to social scientists. Attention will also be paid to contrasting ways of studying institutions as well as political phenomena (e.g., political-psychological approaches). Overall, by the end of the course students should understand, broadly, what institutions are and why and how we study them to provide explanations of political behavior we observe in the world.

Given the goals outlined above, the course is organized thematically around “big ideas” in the institutional study of politics. Each week we will cover a broad thematic topic. The week's will roughly be organized as follows: first, we will discuss broad theoretical ideas underlying each theme with a focus on landmark/canonical work on the topic, and second, we will read papers across the major subfields in political science to explore how scholars have applied the overarching theoretical approaches to answer particular questions in political science. As such, we will cover applications in American politics, comparative politics, (international/comparative) political economy, international relations, etc.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course as it is meant as an introduction to the institutional approach to studying politics.

Course materials

Most, if not all, of the course readings will be made available by the instructors. As a general recommendation, Ken Shepsle and Mark Bonchek's 1997 book, *Analyzing*

politics: rationality, behavior, and institutions is a great book to have on your shelf for reference. Similarly, for formal theory specifically, Scott Gehlbach's book *Formal Models of Domestic Politics* is awesome (once you have taken an introductory graduate game theory course). The instructors are happy to recommend other books based on specific (or general) interests.

Course Requirements

Students will be required to write four short essays that will provide you the opportunity to demonstrate your command over central concepts and theoretical insights from each week's readings. These papers will also offer you the opportunity to critically engage the literature, point to ways that existing work can be refined, extended, and applied to existing puzzles in your subfields of interest.

Students will also present application papers to the class *as if they wrote the paper*. This will aid in not only mastering key theoretical and substantive content, but also help facilitate learning how to effectively communicate that content to diverse political science audiences. Both preparation and presentations will feed into participation grades. Each presentation will be approximately 30 minutes followed by 30 minutes of discussion (e.g., the Q&A following professional paper presentations).

Finally, students are expected to have read course materials *before* class meetings and to come ready to engage in seminar discussions. Consequently, class participation is an important part of your grade. Your participation grade will reflect your ability to lead and participate in seminar discussions. You will be expected to be able to orally summarize, analyze, and criticize class readings and react to your colleagues' efforts to do the same.

Grades

Final Grades will be determined as follows:

Short Essays:	60% (4 x 15%)
Presentation(s):	20%
Overall Class Participation:	20%

Grading

Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

A	B	C	D	F
100 – 89.5%	89.49 – 79.5%	79.49 – 69.5%	69.49 – 59.5%	59.49 – 0%

Students with disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. The Aggie Honor Code: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do." As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website (<http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/>) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section "Scholastic Dishonesty."

Course Schedule*

**Note:* The instructors reserve the right to change the syllabus as needed. Students will be made aware of any changes and provided with a revised syllabus to reflect any changes.

Week 1 (July 6-7): Studying Institutions

Theory:

Required readings:

Shepsle, Kenneth. 1989. "Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1(2): 131-147.

Diermeier and Krehbiel. Institutionalism as a methodology. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15(2): 123-144. (2003)

Clark, William Roberts. 1998. "Agents and Structures: Two Views of Preferences, Two Views of Institutions." *International Studies Quarterly*. 42: 245-270.

Recommended readings:

North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press)

Adam Przeworski. "Institutions Matter?" *Government and Opposition* Volume 39 Issue 4 Page 527 - September 2004

Applications:**Required readings:**

Downs, Rocke and Barsoom. 1996. "Is the good news about compliance good news about cooperation?" *International Organization* 50, 3: 379-406.

Olson, M. (1993). "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *American Political Science Review* 87(3): 567-576.

Tim Besley and Anne Case. 2003. "Policy Institutions and Policy Choices: Evidence from the United States," *Journal of Economic Literature* 41(1): 7-73.

Recommended readings:

Przeworski, Adam. *Democracy as an equilibrium*. *Public Choice*. 123: 253—273, 2005.

Weingast, Barry R. "The Political Foundation of Democracy and the Rule of Law." *American Political Science Review* 91. 2 (1997): 245-63.

Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, Cristian Pop-Eleches, and Andrei Shleifer, "Judicial Checks and Balances," *Journal of Political Economy*. 2004.

Week 2 (July 11-14): Preference Aggregation***Theory:*****Required readings:**

John Patty and Elizabeth Maggie Penn. 2013. *Social Choice and Legitimacy: The Possibilities of Impossibility*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-3.

William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 10.

Recommended readings:

Riker, William. 1980. "Implications from the Disequilibrium of Majority Rule for the Study of Institutions." *American Political Science Review*. 74(2): 432-446.

David Austen-Smith and Jeffrey S. Banks. 1996. "Information aggregation, rationality, and the condorcet jury theorem." *American Political Science Review* 90(1): 34-45.

Timothy J. Feddersen and Wolfgang Pesendorfer. 1996. "The swing voter's curse." *American Economic Review* 86(3):408-424.

Applications:**Required readings:**

Carey, J. M. and M. S. Shugart. 1995. "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas." *Electoral Studies* 14(4): 417-439.

Marco Battaglini, Thomas Palfrey, and Rebecca Morton. 2010. "The Swing Voter's Curse in the Laboratory." *Review of Economic Studies* 77(1): 61-89.

Shigeo Hirano. 2006. "Electoral Institutions, Hometowns and Favored Minorities: Evidence from Japanese Electoral Reforms." *World Politics* 59(1): 51-82.

Hill, Kim Quail, Soren Jordan, and Patricia Hurley, *Representation in Congress: A Unified Theory* New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-46.

Week 3 (June 18-21) Collective Action and Externalities***Theory:*****Required readings:**

Hardin, Russell. 1982. *Collective Action* (Routledge) Chapters 1-5.

Hardin, Garrett. 1968. "Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162(3859):1243-48.

Recommended readings:

Elinor Ostrom. *Governing the Commons*.

Coase, R.H. 1960. "The Problem of Social Cost," *Journal of Law and Economics*. 3:1-44.

Hardin, Russell. 1989. "Why a Constitution," *The Federalist Papers and the New Institutionalism*, Bernard Grofman and Donald Wittman (eds) New York: Agathon Press.

Applications:

Required readings:

Weingast, Barry R., Kenneth A. Sheplse, and Christopher Johnsen. (1981) "The Political Economy of Benefits and Costs: A Neoclassical Approach to Distributive Politics." *Journal of Political Economy* 89.4:642-64.

Bawn, Kathleen, and Frances Rosenbluth. "Short Versus Long Coalitions: Electoral Accountability and the Size of the Public Sector." *American Journal of Political Science* 50. 2 (2006): 251-63.

Iannaccone, Laurence T. 1992. "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectives," *Journal of Political Economy* 100(2):271-291.

Recommended readings:

Schattschneider, E.E. (1935) *Politics, Pressures and the Tariff*. (New York: Prentice Hall) (IPE)

Week 4 (June 25 – 28) Principal-Agent Problems

Theory:

Required readings:

Miller, Gary J. 2005. "The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models." *Annual Review of Political Science* 8:203-225.

Jean Tirole. 1994. "Internal Organization of Government," *Oxford Economic Papers* 46:1-29.

George Stigler, "Economic Theory of Regulation." *Bell Journal of Economics and Management Science* 2 (Spring 1971): 3-21.

Recommended readings:

Gibbons, Lecture Note 1 "Agency Theory" through section 5.
http://web.mit.edu/rgibbons/www/LN_1_Agency_Theory.pdf

Scott Gehlbach. 2013. *Formal Models of Domestic Politics*. Ch. 5 (on delegation).

Avinash Dixit. 2002. Incentives and Organizations in the Public Sector: An Interpretative Review. *The Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 37, No. 4. (Autumn, 2002), pp. 696-727.

Applications:

Required readings:

McCubbins and Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols Versus Fire Alarms." *American Journal of Political Science*

Ian R. Turner. 2016. "Political Agency, Oversight, and Bias: The Instrumental Value of Politicized Policymaking." Unpublished manuscript. Available from Ian's website.

Ken Meier. "Bureaucracy and Democracy: The Case for Less Democracy and More Bureaucracy." *Public Administration Review* 57 (May/June 1997), 193-99.

Gersen and Stephenson. 2014. "Over-accountability." *Journal of Legal Analysis*.

Epstein, David and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1994, "Divided Government and US Trade Policy," *International Organization* 48(4):595-632. (IR)

Recommended readings:

Huber, John D. and Charles R. Shipan, 2002, *Deliberate Discretion? Institutional Foundations of Bureaucratic Autonomy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Phil Keefer, "The Political Economy of Development," *Handbook of Comparative Politics* (clientelism and particularism)

Eric Maskin and Jean Tirole. 2004. "The Politician and the Judge: Accountability in Government," *American Economic Review* 94(4): 1034-1054.

Gailmard, Sean and John W. Patty. 2007. "Slackers and Zealots." *American Journal of Political Science*

Kenneth J. Meier and Lawrence J. O'Toole 2006. *Bureaucracy in a democratic state: A governance perspective*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Timothy Besley. 2005. "Political Selection," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19(3): 43-60.

Week 5 (August 1-4) Commitment Problems

Theory:

Required readings:

Williamson, Oliver. 1985. *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism*. (Simon & Schuster). Chapter 2.

Acemoglu, Daron. 2003. "Why not a political Coase theorem? Social conflict, commitment, and politics." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 31:620-652.

Sen, Amartya. 1985. "Goals, Commitment, and Identity." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*. 341-355.

Thomas C. Schelling 1985. "Enforcing Rules on Oneself." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*. 357-374.

Recommended readings:

Kydland, Finn E. and Edward C. Prescott. 1977. "Rules Rather than Discretion: The Inconsistency of Optimal Plans." *Journal of Political Economy* 85(3):473-492.

Applications:

Required readings:

Douglas North and Barry Weingast. 1989. "Constitutions and Commitment: Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth Century England," *Journal of Economic History* 49:803-832. (constitutions)

Fearon, James D. 1997. "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands vs. Sinking Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41(1): 68-90.

Powell, Robert (2006) "War as a Commitment Problem," *International Organization* 60(1):169-203.

Keefer, Philip and David Stasavage. 2003. "The Limits of Delegation: Veto Players, Central Bank Independence and the Credibility of Monetary Policy." *American Political Science Review* 97(3): 407-423.

Recommended readings:

RJ Barro and DB Gordon. 1983. "Rules, Discretion and Reputation in a Model of Monetary Policy." *Journal of Monetary Economics*.

Milgrom, Paul, Douglass North, and Barry Weingast. 1990. "The Role of Institutions in the Revival of Trade: The Medieval Law Merchant, Private Judges, and the Champagne Fairs." *Economics and Politics* 2(1) (March): 1-23.

Rasmusen, Eric. 1994. "Judicial Legitimacy as a Repeated Game," *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*. 10(1): 63-83.

Final Session (August 6)