

Introduction to Political Institutions
2020 Fall
Central European University, Vienna

B.A. level course
Credit value: 2 US credits (4 ECTS credits)
Mandatory course
Module: Introduction to Politics
Prerequisites: None

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Wednesdays: 9:00-10:00; 10:15-11:15
Office hours: Tuesdays 11:40-13:20; Wednesdays 15:10-16:50, notify me via e-mail that you are coming.

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to political institutions. Students will learn about central political institutions across different political systems, the normative and policy-related implications of institutional choices and the factors that shape these choices. The course starts with an introduction into the scientific method and empirical research, which provide the basis for better understanding and critical reading of scientific literature. Over the course of the semester, we will focus on democratic and non-democratic regimes and study domestic political institutions, actors, processes, and outcomes. We will study electoral systems, parties, legislatures, governments, courts, veto players, and their interplay, whereby we will learn how different institutions constrain and incentivize political actors and influence states' capacity for representation, mitigation of social conflict and policy-making.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this class will 1) know the key functions of political institutions and actors in different political systems and 2) know how these interact and affect democratic quality. 3) In addition to understanding how central political institutions function, students will be able to make predictions if these changes and apply these predictions on cases across the world. 4) Students will have a peak into scientific work and learn how political science scholars study the role of political institutions for political actions, decisions and outcomes. 5) Given these examples, students will develop analytical skills and learn to apply these to critically assess theories and empirical evidence in research and the media.

Learning Activities and Teaching Methods

Learning is divided in three phases. In the *first preparatory phase* students are expected to thoroughly read the required literature, which is on average one text with about 20-25 pages per week. To facilitate the understanding of students and interaction between peers, class

participants are expected to discuss the required readings in groups before class using the online social learning platform called Perusall. Perusall is an online forum, where students can place comments by highlighting the related part of the text and see comments by their peers. For more information about Perusall, watch some YouTube videos (e.g. [Perusall – every student prepared for every class](#), or “[Why use Perusall](#)”). Perusall will be accessible directly through Moodle. The preparatory phase also includes reading world politics on regular basis and relating this to the material covered in class. Every student will be expected to present his “image of the day” once during the semester.

The *second phase* is class attendance, where we will start with a recap and introduction by the instructor and continue with discussion, games, groups work, case studies and other forms of hands-on practical work. To facilitate case study discussions each student is expected to prepare one country report during the semester on a given institution and a country of student’s choice. In which session and which institution students are expected to prepare a country report will be decided in the beginning of the course.

The *third phase* is reflection. Towards the end of the course students will be asked to prepare an empirical research question and explain why it would be interesting to investigate further and try to find an answer. This process should encourage students to think about the covered material, relate the separate pieces and find the big picture. Students will not be required to actually answer this question. However, to encourage interaction and creativity also after the course ends, students will be asked to read the research questions of their peers and find scholarly work which could be helpful to approach this question. Here students are expected to submit a literature list tailored to the research question of their peer.

The course relies on different tasks which are designed to facilitate the learning process (comments on Perusall, class discussions, image of the day, country report, research question and literature list) and assess students work (final exam).

Course Structure

Every session is devoted to a central theme in political institutions and the study of these. We will start with a brief introduction into empirical research. We will then continue with two sessions, which provide a bird view about the institutions and their interactions in democratic and non-democratic political systems. Each subsequent session is devoted to one central institution which will be tackled from a comparative perspective. For selected intuitions we will have an additional session which is devoted to a practical problem and application. Here we will discuss a scientific journal article which investigates this problem.

Assessment

Attendance is mandatory. Students can miss class up to 2 times and need to provide a reasonable justification for not attending the class (e.g. note from the doctor).

Students are expected to read every week the required literature and participate in class discussions. To encourage discussion participation, class discussion will not be graded per sea. However, regular participation can be decisive if the final grade is on the cut-off point between grades. To assess the regularity of class participation, students will be asked to sign a discussion list if they took part in the class discussions in a given session.

- **30% - Weekly assignments**
 - 3 comments on the required literature on Perusall per week. Comments include questions, answers to questions posted by others or just a short commentary/opinion. There are no length requirements or restrictions. Perusall will be accessible directly through Moodle.
 - Grading is based on the number of comments. To stimulate natural exchange of ideas and thoughts between students, the content of the comments will not be graded. More than 3 comments in a given week count as 3 comments.
 - A = 33-36 comments;
 - A- = 29-32 comments;
 - B+ = 25-28 comments;
 - B = 21-24 comments;
 - B- = 17-20 comments;
 - C = 13-16 comments;
 - F = <12 comments;
- **5 % Image of the Day¹:**
 - Students are expected to keep up with current events in world politics by reading news each day before class. Once during the semester, each student is required to present the World Politics Image of the Day. In particular, students are required to identify an important news story, find an image related to this event and explain how the image relates to the content of the course.
 - Upload your image, links to the story, and an accompanying paragraph on Moodle by Tuesday 20h00 of the week to which you are assigned to submit and present in class (not a formal presentation).
 - Image of the day on topics covered in week 2 and 3 can be uploaded by Tuesday 20h00 in week 4.
 - When searching for news items, I recommend beginning with news.google.com, the *New York Times*, *BBC News*, *Washington Post's Monkey Cage* blog, and *The Economist*.
- **10 % One country report**
 - 250-500 words written report on the features of the institutions covered in class for a country of student's own choice
 - Each student has to write one report throughout the semester and be prepared to give a short summary during class discussions (not a formal presentation).
 - Upload your country report on Moodle by Sunday 20h00 of the week to which you are assigned to submit.
 - Country reports for the topics covered in week 2 and week 3 can be uploaded by Tuesday 20h00 in week 4.
 - Guidelines for the country report will be provided on Moodle.
- **15% - Research question and literature list**
 - Students will be asked to find a research question and look for literature for the research question of their peer.
 - The literature list should include at least 20 journal articles and strictly follow the APSA reference style. Guidelines will be provided on Moodle and discussed in class.
 - Research question is due in week 12 (100-250 Words) – Sunday 20h00.
 - Literature list is due by 30.12.2020.

¹ I am thankful for this suggestion to Diana O'Brien.

- **40% - In-class exam in session 10 (60 min):** open book on substantive questions on the journal articles, closed-book on knowledge questions
 - o A catalog with all substantive questions for each journal article (about 10-12 questions per article) will be provided prior the weeks when the journal article is covered. Students can prepare their answers to these questions in advance and bring them to the exam. I will randomly select 5 questions from a total of about 30 questions for the actual exam.
 - o In addition, there will be multiple-choice knowledge questions and several open-end questions.
 - o There is no specified length for the answers. Any length is acceptable, as long as it answers the question. Further requirements and guidelines on the questions will be provided on Moodle and discussed in class.

Course Materials

All course materials for this course can be found on Moodle. The syllabus contains only the required readings.

Textbooks (selected chapters):

- Hague, R., Harrop, M. and McCormick, J. (2019) *Comparative Government and Politics*, 11th Edition, London: Red Globe Press.
- Samuels, D. (2013) *Comparative Politics*, Boston: Pearson.
- Powner (2015) *Empirical Research and Writing. A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*, Los Angeles: Sage.

Tentative Course Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to make any changes to this syllabus and alter the course schedule at any time throughout the semester.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	30 Sep	Introduction and Empirical Research	Powner (2015) p.1-6, 21-31, 41-51
2	07 Oct	Democratic Political Regimes	Samuels (2013) Chapter 3
3	14 Oct	Non-Democratic Political Regimes	Samuels (2013) Chapter. 4
4	21 Oct	Electoral Systems	Hague et al. (2019) Chapter 15
5	28 Oct	Consequences of Electoral Systems	Chang and Golden (2007)
6	04 Nov	Parties and Party Systems	Hague et al. (2019) Chapter 16
7	11 Nov	Governments	Hague et al. (2019) Chapter 8
8	18 Nov	Government Types and Policy-Making	Thies (2001)
9	25 Nov	Legislatures and Executive Oversight	Hague et al. (2019) Chapter 9 McCubbins and Schwartz (1984)
10	02 Dec	<i>Exam</i>	<i>No readings</i>
11	09 Dec	Courts	Hague et al. (2019) Chapter 7
12	16 Dec	Veto Players and Wrap Up	Tsebelis (1999)

Detailed Weekly Plan

Week 1: Introduction and Empirical Research

Powner, L. (2015) *Empirical Research and Writing. A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*, Los Angeles: Sage, p. 1-6, 21-31, 41-51.

Week 2: Democratic Political Regimes

Samuels, D. (2013) Democratic Political Regimes, in D. Samuels D., *Comparative Politics*, Boston: 59-89.

Week 3: Non-democratic Political Regimes

Samuels, D. (2013) Non-Democratic Political Regimes, in D. Samuels, *Comparative Politics*, Boston: Pearson: 92-117.

Week 4: Electoral Systems

Hague, R., Harrop, M. and McCormick, J. (2019) Elections, in R. Hague, M. Harrop and J. McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*, 11th edition, London: Red Globe Press, 252-270.

Week 5: Consequences of Electoral Systems

Chang, E., and Golden, M. (2007) Electoral Systems, District Magnitude and Corruption, *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(01): 115-137.

Week 6: Parties and Party Systems

Hague, R., Harrop, M. and McCormick, J. (2019) Political Parties, in R. Hague, M. Harrop and J. McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*, 11th edition, London: Red Globe Press, 270-287.

Week 7: Governments and Assignment Discussion

Hague, R., Harrop, M. and McCormick, J. (2019) Executives, in R. Hague, M. Harrop and J. McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*, 11th edition, London: Red Globe Press, 124-140.

Powner, L. (2015) *Empirical Research and Writing. A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*: p. 6-17.

Week 8: Government Types and Policy-Making

Thies, M. (2001) Keeping Tabs on Partners: The Logic of Delegation in Coalition Governments, *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(3): 580-598.

Week 9: Legislatures and Executive Oversight

Hague, R., Harrop, M and McCormick, J. (2019) Legislatures, in R. Hague, M. Harrop and J. McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*, 11th edition, London: Red Globe Press, 141-159.

McCubbins, M. and Schwartz, T. (1984) Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms, *American Journal of Political Science*, 28(1): 165-179.

Week 10: Exam + Discussion

- no readings

Week 11: Courts

Hague, R., Harrop, M and McCormick, J. (2019) Constitutions and Courts, in R. Hague, M. Harrop and J. McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*, 11th edition, London: Red Globe Press, 106-123.

Week 12: Veto Players and Wrap-up

Tsebelis, T. (1999) Veto Players and Law Production in Parliamentary Democracies: An Empirical Analysis, *The American Political Science Review*, 93(3): 591-608.

➔ *Research questions (100-250 Words) are due on Sunday of Week 12, 20h00, via Moodle.*

➔ *Literature list (at least 20 journal articles) organized following the APSA style manual are due by 30 December 2020*