Introduction to Political Institutions
2025 Winter
Central European University, Vienna

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

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Fridays: 15:20-16:20; 16:30-17:30
Office hours: on appointment Friday, before or after class.

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, interest groups, 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, policy-making, and citizens' participation.

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.

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 (in small groups if necessary) is expected to prepare one case study report during the semester on a given institution and a country of student's choice and shortly present it in class. 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, case-study presentation, 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. All sessions will rely on the discussion of a scientific journal article or chapter which presents the main tenets or a specific issue linked with the topic of the class.

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) after that. In any case students cannot miss more than a third of the hours for this course.

Students are expected to read every week the required literature and participate in class discussions. To encourage participation, class discussion will not be graded per se. 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, the teaching assistant will collect a discussion list where students will sign if they took part in the discussion in a given session.

Supplementary readings with a stronger methodological profile are provided for each class for students that would like to deepen their understanding of how the scientific literature approaches the study of political institutions and their consequences. Reading them is not mandatory and will not be object to specific evaluation, other than helping improve the in-class participation grade.

- **15% Weekly assignments**
    - o Up to 3 comments on the required literature on Perusall per week. Comments include meaningful questions, answers to questions posted by others or just a short commentary/opinion. Answers should be shortly justified (i.e., not just yes/no), constructive and respectful. Perusall will be accessible directly through Moodle.
    - o Grading is based on the number of comments on all readings. To stimulate natural exchange of ideas and thoughts between students, the content of the comments will not be graded. The number of comments in a given week is topped at 3 comments (i.e. more than 3 still counts as 3).
        - ▪ A = 33+ comments;
        - ▪ A- = 29-32 comments;
        - ▪ B+ = 25-28 comments;
        - ▪ B = 21-24 comments;
        - ▪ B- = 17-20 comments;
        - ▪ C = 13-16 comments;
        - ▪ F = <12 comments.
- **15% In-class participation**
    - o Interactions in class in the form of meaningful questions and comments, in all its phases (introduction by instructor, readings discussion, <u>case-study presentations and discussion</u>)
- **15% Case-study report and short presentation**
    - o 400-500 words written report on the features of the institutions covered in class for a country of student's own choice
    - o Each student will be assigned to a group to write one report during the course of the semester and prepare a short presentation (10 minutes max.) of it to launch class discussion
    - o Upload your case-study report on Moodle by Thursday 20h00 of the week to which you are assigned to submit.
    - o Guidelines for the case study report will be provided on Moodle.
- **15% Research question and literature list**
    - o Students will have to elaborate a research question inspired by the readings and classes on a topic of their choice. The research question has to be operationalizable (i.e., it should be possible to answer it after choosing an appropriate method to investigate it).
    - o Research questions are due in week 11 (100-250 words) and they will be randomly assigned to another student in the class.
    - o Students will then have to develop a literature list of scientific literature related to the research question developed by their peer. The literature should include at least 20 scientific journal articles, chapters or books and strictly follow the APSA reference style (use of bibliographic management software like Zotero is allowed). Guidelines on the task will be provided on Moodle and in class.
    - o Literature list is due by April 4, 2024 (20h00)
- **40% In-class exam in session 10 (60 min)**: open book on substantive questions on the readings, closed-book on knowledge questions
    - o A catalog with substantive questions for each reading will be provided prior the weeks when the reading is covered. I will randomly select questions from this catalog for the substantive questions included in the exam (around 5 questions).
    - o Knowledge questions will be a mix of multiple-choice knowledge questions and open-ended questions.
    - o There is no specified length for the answers as long as they answer the question.

The use of AI and Plagiarism

Reading and writing academic texts (in English) and understanding empirical data are skills you should learn in this class. You can enhance academic skills mainly through practice: Make sure you develop your writing and analytic skills before relying on text-generative AI. In this class, the following rules apply:

- You can use AI to brainstorm ideas, but try to practice your own analytic skills and always question the suggestions.
- You have to search for relevant literature yourself. You have to read all literature you use and cite yourself. Use the academic abstract written by authors as a summary. You can translate the texts you need to read with tools if necessary, so that you can understand it better. Try to practice your English reading skills as much as possible.
- You have to draft all text you write yourself in English. You can use AI to enhance your writing (e.g. Grammarly) after drafting the text. You can use tools for translating certain words or expressions, but not full paragraphs.
- You have to document all steps when you use AI or other tools to help you.
- CEU plagiarism rules apply

Course Materials

All course materials can be found on Moodle. The syllabus contains mandatory readings and additional readings that students can read if they want to explore further the empirical literature on the topic.

Texbook (selected chapters):

Caramani, D. (2023) *Comparative Politics*, 4th Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Powner, L. C. (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	Reading
1	10 Jan	Introduction and Empirical Research	Powner (2015), p. 1-6, 21-31, 41-51.
2	17 Jan	Democratic Political Regimes	Caramani (2023), Chapter 5
3	24 Jan	Authoritarian Political Regimes	Caramani (2023), Chapter 6
4	31 Jan	Legislatures and Executives Control	Caramani (2023), Chapter 7 + Powner
5	7 Feb	Electoral Systems	Caramani (2023), Chapter 11
6	14 Feb	Parties and Party Systems	Caramani (2023), Chapter 13
7	21 Feb	Consequences of Electoral Systems	Chang and Golden (2007)
8	28 Feb	Governments and Bureaucracies	Caramani (2023), Chapter 8
9	7 Mar	Constitutions and Courts	Caramani (2023), Chapter 9
10	14 Mar	*Exam*	*No readings*
11	21 Mar	Interest Groups	Caramani (2023), Chapter 15
12	28 Mar	Political Participation	Caramani (2023), Chapter 18

Sessions outline

Week 1: Introduction to Comparative Politics 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

Pérez-Liñán, A. (2023) 5. Democracies, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics* (6th edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 84-99.

Additional readings:

Anderson, C.J., & Guillory, C.A. (1997). Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems. *American Political Science Review, 91*(1), 66-81.

Week 3: Authoritarian Political Regimes

Lindstaedt, N. (2023) 6. Authoritarian Regimes, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 100-117.

Additional readings:

Lührmann, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2019). A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it? *Democratization*, *26*(7), 1095-1113.

Week 4: Legislatures and Executives Control

Kreppel, A. (2023) 7. Legislatures, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 117-139.

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

Week 5: Electoral Systems

Kedar, O. (2023) 11. Electoral systems and representation, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 197-213.

Additional readings:

Plescia, C., Blais, A., & Högström, J. (2020). Do people want a 'fairer' electoral system? An experimental study in four countries. *European Journal of Political Research*, *59*(4), 733-751.

Week 6: Parties and Party Systems

Katz, R. S. (2023) 13. Political parties, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 235-253.

Additional readings:

Mudde, C. (2014). Fighting the system? Populist radical right parties and party system change. *Party politics*, *20*(2), 217-226.

Week 7: Consequences of Electoral Systems
Chang, E., and Golden, M. (2007) Electoral Systems, District Magnitude and Corruption, *British Journal of Political Science,* 37(1): 115-137.

Additional readings:
Caramani, D. (2023) 14. Party systems, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 254-276.

Week 8: Governments and Bureaucracies
Müller, W. C. (2023) 8. Governments and bureaucracies, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 140-161.

Additional readings:
Bäck, H., Debus, M., & Dumont, P. (2011). Who gets what in coalition governments? Predictors of portfolio allocation in parliamentary democracies. *European Journal of Political Research*, *50*(4), 441-478.

Week: 9 Constitutions and Courts
Stone Sweet, A. (2023) 9. Constitutions, rights, and judicial power, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 162-182.

Additional readings:
Gibson, J. L., Caldeira, G. A., & Baird, V. A. (1998). On the Legitimacy of National High Courts. *American Political Science Review*, *92*(2), 343–358.

Week 10: Exam

Week 11: Interest Groups
Erne, R. (2023) 14. Interest groups, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 252-266.

Additional readings:
Hojnacki, M., & Kimball, D. C. (1998). Organized Interests and the Decision of Whom to Lobby in Congress. *American Political Science Review*, *92*(4), 775–790.
Atikcan, E. Ö., & Chalmers, A. W. (2019). Choosing lobbying sides: the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union. *Journal of Public Policy*, *39*(4), 543–564.

Week 12: Political Participation
Kitschelt, H., and Rehm, P. (2023) 18. Political participation, in D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 334-352.

Additional readings:
Bronner, L., & Ifkovits, D. (2019). Voting at 16: Intended and unintended consequences of Austria's electoral reform. *Electoral Studies*, *61*, 102064.