COMPARATIVE POLITICS: INSTITUTIONS

Objectives
This course investigates the origins, operation, and consequences of political institutions. Institutions are generally thought of as the "rules of the game," within which political actors function and strategize. More pragmatically, we will be examining the structures---mostly formal---that give order to the state and everyday political life: constitutions, parliaments, political parties, electoral systems, and so forth. The class focuses in large part on democratic institutions, but we will also consider the role played by institutions in non-democracies. Toward the end of the quarter, we will dip into the large literature on political institutions' social and economic effects.

There are no prerequisites for this course other than graduate standing, although familiarity with the basic concepts of game theory and econometrics will be helpful. While the course is open to graduate students in other related programs, this class is targeted toward PhD students in political science, and especially those in the field of Comparative Politics. The course has also been designed to complement POLI 220A: State and Society. While we cover significant ground, PhD students preparing for the comprehensive exam in Comparative Politics will need to read beyond the required readings included here. Please consult the list of recommended readings and other courses in this field.

The seminar is organized around ten themes:
1. Political Institutions and Institutional Analysis
2. Democracy: Origins and Types
3. Autocracy
4. Federalism, Consociationalism, and Powersharing
5. Elections and Party Systems
6. Party Organization and Clientelism
7. Presidentialism and Executives
8. Legislatures and Parliamentary Democracy
9. Bargaining, Bureaucracy, and Law
10. The Social Effects of Political Institutions

Format
The seminar will meet weekly on Tuesdays 3-5:50. Each week will introduce a new theme in the comparative study of political institutions and provide a set of required and recommended readings. Required readings (typically 5-6 pieces with a total length of approx. 150-200 pp. per week) will form the basis of the seminar discussions, and all students should read them carefully and critically before class. Recommended readings are supplementary readings of theoretical or empirical importance. If you are preparing for the comprehensive exam, you should gain familiarity at least with those that match your own specialization. Many of these readings are also suitable for seminar presentations and literature review papers.

Assignments
As a student in this seminar, you must do the assigned readings, write two discussion papers (5-8 pages each), participate actively in seminar discussions, and give seminar presentations. Come to class prepared to discuss, critique, and defend all the readings, and do so actively. Be willing to ask simple questions---usually others will want to know the answer, too. Be respectful and wary of interrupting; don't monopolize the discussion.
Presentations. For at least one class meeting, you will be assigned to make a seminar presentation. These presentations (approx. 15-20 minutes in length, plus time for discussion) should address a significant question in the relevant subfield, for example a study questions assigned for that week, or a similar question chosen in consultation with the instructor. Presentations should relate the relevant assigned literature, including some recommended readings and other scholarship as appropriate. Presentations should also follow these guidelines:
- Briefly motivate your question: why does it matter?
- Identify (a small number of) relevant readings that address your question directly or indirectly. Organize these readings and the debates they speak to.
- Summarize the main claims in the literature regarding your question. Draw linkages across readings wherever possible ("One set of texts addresses the moral hazard wrought by these institutional arrangements, the other set..."). Tease out how the readings positively advance our knowledge.
- Pinpoint some salient critiques. These may center on internal theoretical inconsistencies or unstated assumptions, restrictive scope conditions, flaws in research design, misinterpretation of results, etc. Be judicious and measured. Avoid hyperbole.
- Conclude by offering two to four "big picture" questions to guide subsequent class discussion. Try to propose ways ahead.

The best presentations will lay out an incisive, analytical summary of the relevant scholarship, call attention to its main contributions and limitations, and set the agenda for a subsequent discussion. Presentations should be no longer than 20 minutes. You should prepare no more than 10 slides and practice the presentation beforehand.

Discussion Papers. The discussion papers will be on your choice among a set of assigned topics. The assignments are open-book and open-note. There will be a word limit – please respect it. The papers should discuss relevant scholarship and, most importantly, make an argument. The argument should be stated clearly and concisely and guide the rest of the paper. You should engage in depth with the relevant class readings. Citing some outside readings is fine but not necessary for a top grade. There should be a thread running through the paper in the form of an argument. Help the reader understand how each paragraph adds to the larger point you want to make. It is a good idea to state your thesis very near the start of the paper ("In this paper, I argue that...").

- Bring in empirical examples, but don't present tables, figures, or discuss cases at great length. The emphasis should mostly be on the theoretical claims. In this context, empirical cases are best used to illustrate your points instead of offering a rigorous test.
- You may include a few short footnotes, but do not go overboard. Writing style matters. Be focused and succinct and avoid long quotations. Be sure to provide proper references and to respect the university’s standards of academic integrity. Please consult the university's website on academic integrity: (https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/). Students who need accommodations for any disability should request it at the earliest opportunity.

Tentatively, the first of the discussion papers will be due on October 29 and the second one on December 3. Grades will be based on course assignments in the following way: Discussion papers 40% each, presentations and class participation 20%. Extensions, incompletes, etc. will be given in accordance with UCSD policy. Except under very pressing circumstances, however, I discourage such options.

Readings
This seminar covers a large literature, much of which you may want to have at your disposal. The following books have been ordered by the UCSD Bookstore for this course:

These books are central to the field, but your purchasing decisions should be guided by your specific interests,
your professional judgment, and your budget constraint.

1. **POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS** (September 28)

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Study Questions:**
1. What is the best way to think about political institutions?
2. What is path dependency, and how important is it?
3. Can institutional analysis help us identify the good society?
4. How do we ensure that institutions are not merely parchment?

2. **DEMOCRACY: ORIGINS AND TYPES** (October 5)

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Study Questions:**

1. Is democracy a (social) class project?

2. What are the most important subtypes of democracy?

3. Does democratization depend on the right set of values?

4. Does social equality foster democracy, or does democracy foster social equality?

**3. AUTOCRACY (October 12)**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


Study Questions:

1. What are the fundamental motives of rulers, and how do they matter?
2. What functions do elections serve under autocracy?
3. When are autocrats most vulnerable, and why does it matter?
4. For what purposes is it necessary to differentiate between autocracies?

4. FEDERALISM, CONSOCIATIONALISM, AND POWERSHARING (October 19)

Required:


Recommended:


Study Questions:

1. When does federalism succeed?
2. Is inclusion the most important feature of powersharing?
3. To what extent does path dependency help us understand the success or failure of powersharing?
4. Is there a credibility problem in federalism and decentralization?

5. ELECTIONS AND PARTY SYSTEMS (October 26)

Required:


Recommended:


Study Questions:

1. Does popular representation often go astray, and if so why?
2. To what extent do candidate selection procedures remove voters’ choice?
3. How are electoral systems chosen: Normative appeal, strategic choice, or path dependence?
4. Are representational biases in legislatures due to supply or demand?

6. PARTY ORGANIZATION AND CLIENTELISM (November 2)

Required:

Recommended:

Study Questions:

1. What reasons do citizens in democratic states have to distrust political parties?
2. Is class or ethnicity the most important basis of party organization?

3. Why do legislators accept party discipline, and when do they rebel?

4. Is the pursuit of a personal vote an impediment to democracy?

7. **PRESIDENTIALISM AND EXECUTIVES** (November 9)

*Required:*
George Tsebelis (2002), *Veto Players*, chap. 3.

*Recommended:*

*Study Questions:*

1. The Perils of Presidentialism: Design flaw, Latin American heritage, or fiction?

2. Does semi-presidentialism capture the best of both worlds?

3. Is the presence of multiple agents under presidentialism a good thing?

4. Should term limits be applied to presidents, legislators, neither or both?

8. **LEGISLATURES AND PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY** (November 16)

*Required:*
Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, chaps. 6 and 11.

**Recommended:**

**Study Questions:**
1. Parliamentary democracy: Glorious revolution or glorious evolution?
2. Did parties create strong assemblies, or did strong assemblies create parties?
3. Does coalition membership depend mainly on executive institutions, or on legislative arithmetic?
4. Do party leaders look for agreement, complementarity, or arithmetic in coalition bargaining?

**9. BARGAINING, BUREAUCRACY, AND LAW (November 23)**

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Study Questions:**
1. Why do politicians in poor countries favor urban interests?
2. What are legislators most likely to be uncertain about, and how does it matter?
3. “Yes, Minister!” What is the key to the power of bureaucrats?
4. When are courts no more than parchment institutions?

10. **THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS** (November 30)

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Study Questions:**

1. Is the power of the purse the critical legislative power?
2. What matters most to policy performance: regime type, cabinet type, or electoral system?
3. How can we know whether institutions matter?
4. Under what conditions is autocracy good for public policy?