The Theory of Political Institutions

(Provisional Syllabus)

Seminar, 1st term 2018-2019

Organised by Stefano Bartolini

Please register online

Contact: Adele Battistini

Description
First, the seminar discusses the ‘pan-institutionalism’ that spread through several social science disciplines in the last four/three decades. It is claimed that the general theories of institutions mainly refer to economic and sociological institutions and economic and sociological approaches to institutions. Admittedly, theoretical contributions from political science have been modest and very often derivative. The second core question is then whether ‘political institutions’ are like ‘other’ institutions and whether a theory of ‘political institutions’ can be derived from this sociological/economic literature and by the varieties of ‘institutionalism’. The second part of the seminar engages in the attempt to delineate a specific theory of ‘political institutions’.

Therefore, the core questions of the seminar concern what is an ‘institution’ and what is not an institution; the distinction between social, economic and political institutions; the merits of the ‘institutionalist’ approaches; the risks and the fate of ‘pan-institutionalism’; the possibility and the character of a specific theory of ‘political institutions’.

In the first part, the review of the relevant literature is framed by an introduction of the professor and the participant(s) in charge of the session and followed by the debate of the session’s main issue. Due to the paucity of literature, the second part of the seminar will be mainly based on the professor introduction of specific topics in the syllabus followed by in depth discussion of the whole seminar.

Audience
The seminar is devoted to first and second year researchers, but everybody is welcome.

Requirements
This seminar is worth 20 credits. Requirements will depend to a certain extent from the number of participants. By choosing to take this class participants take on the obligation to reading all the materials. Over the course of the seminar participants must submit at least one 1000-word response papers to the readings for a given session and post that paper on the course website at noon on the day before class. These response papers are fundamental for the holding of a good discussion of the materials.
Schedule
The seminar takes place on **Mondays 14-16h**. The full list of the seminar sessions is the following:

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**SYLLABUS**

1. **What is an institution?**


2. **Varieties of Institutions: Social institutions**


3. **Varieties of Institutions: Economic institutions and the economics of institutions**


4. What about ‘Political’ institutions?


5. Political Institutions as games


6. Political Science Institutionalism


7. The confusions of ‘pan-institutionalism’: key questions and a simplified framework.

- The origins of ‘political institutions’: an elusive debate?
- Political institutions as ‘policy institutions’ versus ‘non-policy institutions’
- Can political institutions be defined functionally?
- Can political institutions be defined as ‘behavioral regularities’, as ‘games’, as?
- Can political institutions be considered ‘endogenous’ and ‘efficient’?
- What is the difference between ‘organizations’ and ‘institutions, and namely between ‘political organizations’ and ‘political institutions’?
- Do institutions ‘constitute’ actors?
- Are political institutions stable and persistent?
- Formal and informal political institutions?
- A simplified framework.


8. Definition of ‘political institutions’:
- The problem of behavioural compliance generation
- Institutions as internal ordering, as external ordering, and as interaction ordering.
- Political institution as ‘generating’ institutions
- Scope of political institutions

9/10. The specificities of political institutions

**Internal ordering institutions:**

*Rules:*
- 1) Nomination rules and selectorates
- 2) Organizational tasks rules
- 3) Information access rules
- 4) Decision rules (hierarchy, voting, negotiations)
- (Common to all organizations, associations, etc.)

**External ordering institutions (distribution and protection of entitlements)**

*Rules:*
- 5) Rules of inclusion/exclusion (who is a member, citizenship)
- 6) Rules of delegation
- 7) Competence rules
- 8) Distribution rules
- 9) Enforcement rules
- 10) Sanctioning rules

**Inter-institutional rules (relation with other institutional orders)**

*Rules:*
- 12) Accountability rules
- 13) Countervailing power rules (chief versus sorcerer, pope versus emperor, council of the elder versus ...parliaments versus constitutional courts. Etc.
- 14) Stabilization (anti-disequilibrium) rules (the president of the republic dissolving the parliament; the impeachment of the president, the conflict regulation among regions and states, etc.)

*Last updated 06.07.2018*