

First Term, Academic Year 2026-2027

Field Seminar: The Politics of Public Policy and Institutional Change

Time & Venue: Tuesday, 9:00-11:00, Seminar room 2

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Aims

This Field course offers a comprehensive introduction to the political analysis of public policy and institutional change, against the background of possibly deep social transformations in advanced European democracies. The aim is to introduce researchers to the state of the art in comparative research in the theoretical tradition of three institutionalisms (Hall and Taylor 1996) and the policy-focused analysis of political processes (Hacker and Pierson 2014). The course thus aims to provide researchers with advanced knowledge of key concepts and mechanisms that help explain institutional continuity but also change over time.

Policy reform and institutional change, inescapably building on extant policy legacies across countries, lead to patchwork mixes of old and new policies and institutions on the lookout, perhaps, for greater coherence. Unsurprisingly, this political “search process” remains incomplete, resulting from the institutionally bounded and contingent adaptation to the political aftershocks of crises and against the background of adverse demography, economic (de-)globalization, accelerating digital innovation, and climate change. We use in every session an important case-study in the comparative analysis of policymaking, with particular attention given to competing theories on politics of policy change and methodological strengths and weaknesses of the approach taken.

Participation and examination

Attendance at seminars is compulsory for those who register for this course. Each week, participants will upload a memo on the week's readings (max 2 pages, weeks 2-9) by noon on the day before the course, which will be used to jump-start the weekly discussions.

For those wishing to take this course for credit, we will provide a take-home exam in week 8 due at 23:59 on Monday, 17th November. In addition, qualifying exam candidates must submit a proposed reading list for a PhD course by the end of 1st December in week 10. Both the take-home exam essays and the readings list will then be discussed orally with the two conveners of the course on Tuesday, 8th December.

Note: readings are indicative and can still change slightly.

1. Two different views of public policy-making

[Lindblom](#), Charles E. (1959) The Science of "Muddling Through" *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring, 1959), pp. 79-88 (10 pages)
<https://doi.org/10.2307/973677> • <https://www.jstor.org/stable/973677>

Kingdon, John W. (2011) *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, chapter 1 (20 pages)

2. Studying institutions and public policy

Hall, Peter A. and Taylor, Rosemary C. R. (1996), 'Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms', *Political Studies*, 44 (5), 936-57.

Scharpf, Fritz. W. (1997), *Games Real Actors Play. Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research*, pp.34-68 (ch's 1 and 2)

3. Policy feedback

Hacker, Jacob S. and Pierson, Paul (2014), 'After the "Master Theory": Downs, Schattschneider, and the Rebirth of Policy-Focused Analysis', *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3), 643-62.

Pierson, Paul (1994), *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2 (Interests, institutions and policy feedback). pp. 27-50.

Background reading for future reference:

Béland, Daniel, Campbell, Andrea Louise, and Weaver, R. Kent (2022) *Policy Feedback: How Policies Shape Politics* [online text], Cambridge University Press <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/3231877106C458DoCF766173080B0409>>

4. Veto Points and modes of political interaction

Tsebelis, George (2000), 'Veto Players and Institutional Analysis', *Governance*, 13 (4), 441-74.

Scharpf, Fritz W. (2006), 'The joint-decision trap revisited', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44 (4), 845-64.

5. Strategies of incremental change

Pierson, Paul (2000), 'Not Just What, but When: Timing and Sequence in Political Processes' *Studies in American Political Development*, 14 (1), 72-92.

Streeck, Wolfgang and Thelen, Kathleen (2005), 'Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies', in Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen (eds.), *Beyond Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-39.

6. Forms of accelerated institutional transformation

Baumgartner, Frank R., et al. (2009), 'Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective', *American Journal of Political Science*, 53 (3), 603-20.

Cappoccia, Giovanni and Keleman, Daniel “[The study of critical junctures: theory, narrative, and counterfactual in historical institutionalism](#),” *World Politics*, April 2007, pp. 341-369.

7. Change in Welfare Democracies

Beramendi, Pablo, Silja Häusermann, Herbert Kitschelt, and Hanspeter Kriesi (2015), 'Introduction: The Politics of Advanced Capitalism', in: Beramendi, P. (et al.), [The Politics of Advanced Capitalism](#), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swank, Duane (2001), 'Political Institutions and Welfare State Restructuring: The Impact of Institutions on Social Policy Change in Developed Democracies', in Paul Pierson (ed.), *The New Politics of the Welfare State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 197-237.

Hemerijck, Anton (2013), 'The “New Politics” of the Welfare State Revisited', in: Hemerijck, A., *Changing Welfare States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 23-50.

8. Policy Learning and the Politics of the Long-Term

Dunlop, Claire A., Claudio Radaelli, Ellen Wayenberg and Bishoy Zaki (2024), 'Beyond powering and puzzling: the political dimensions of policy learning', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31 (7), 1979-92.

Hall, Peter (1993) '[Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policy Making in Britain](#)', *Comparative Politics*, 25(3): 275-96.

Jacobs, Alan M. (2011). 'Theorizing Intertemporal Policy Choice', in: [Governing for the Long Term. Democracy and the Politics of Investment](#), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 2, pp. 28-71.

9. Democracy and Its Discontents

Elster, Jon (2000), *Ulysses Unbound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.88-105, 129-153.

Follesdal, Andreas and Hix, Simon (2006), 'Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: Response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44 (3), 533-62.

Mair, Peter (2009), 'Responsible versus responsive government', *MPIfG Working Paper* 09/8, Cologne: Max-Planck Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung.

10. What have we learned? Conclusion and feedback