1 Purpose

This lecture gives an overview of selected theoretical concepts and the main research findings in the field of Comparative Government, specifically focusing on the role of political institutions. The course introduces a number of core themes in the comparative study of political institutions, such as regime types, constitutional design and electoral systems. The lecture covers the impact of different institutional designs on patterns of executive governance, legislative behaviour and policy-making. Not the least because of the fundamental endogeneity problem in the study of institutional effects, we will also consider the causes underlying the choice of certain institutions.

At the end of this course students will be able to:

- contrast the functioning of different institutional designs;
- describe mechanisms through which institutions shape the behaviour of political actors;
- apply theories to predict the impact of institutions on political outcomes;
- assess empirical studies that examine the causes and consequences of political institutions.

2 Meetings

Classes will meet fourteen times, on Tuesdays from 10:15-11:45 in A5, 6, Building B, Room B 243.

While the course is formally organized as a lecture, you should not expect that you can enjoy 90 minutes of effortless entertainment. Classes will typically start with a lecture-style introduction to the topic, but the second part will require active participation in discussion and group work. It is therefore essential that you prepare well for each session. Please remember that the quality of the discussions (and thus your own benefit) crucially depends on what each and every one of you will contribute.
3 Texts

Below you can find a detailed list with obligatory readings. You can access most of the readings directly (from within the university network) by clicking on the authors’ names. There are usually four items, often a mix of review articles and classic original papers. Material that is not available directly can be found on Ilias, or the respective books are on shelf reserve (“Semesterapparat”) in the library.

While the amount of reading may at times appear challenging, please keep in mind that the purpose of this course is to convey a broader picture of institutions. This does not imply an invitation to superficial reading; it means that your focus should be on the key questions, concepts, arguments and findings from the readings for each week.

Should you feel a need to read up on the fundamentals related to a topic, I recommend consulting the respective chapters of the following two books:


For additional readings on the different topics, the overview articles or the various Oxford Handbooks (especially those on Political Institutions, on Legislative Studies and on Political Economy) provide a good starting point.

4 Schedule and Readings

1. **What are institutions and how to study them?** (14 Feb)


2. Theoretical approaches (21 Feb)


3. Democracy and autocracy (28 Feb)


4. Varieties of autocracy (7 Mar)


5. Presidentialism and parliamentarism (14 Mar)


Elgie, Robert. 2016. ”Three Waves of Semi-Presidential Studies.” Democratization 23: 49-70. [this week p. 49-58]


Cheibub, José Antonio. 2007. Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chs. 1, 2, 6. [shelf reserve]

6. Executive-legislative relationships (21 Mar)


7. Coalitions (28 Mar)


8. Electoral systems: types and origins (4 Apr)


9. **Electoral systems: consequences (25 Apr)**


10. **Legislative organization (2 May)**


11. Legislative behaviour (9 May)


12. Federalism and bicameralism (16 May)


13. Courts (23 May)


14. Review session (30 May)

15. Exam (Wed 14 Jun)

5 Assessment

This course is worth 6 ECTS credits.

Grading will be based on a final written examination (on Wed, 14 June) with open-ended questions.

6 Contact

This course has an Ilias page that provides further material.

I can be reached by email (thomas.daeubler@mzes.uni-mannheim.de), and during the week a response within 24 hours is likely.

My office is A209 in Building A of A5, 6 (ring the bell at the entry to MZES). My office hours are Tuesdays 2-4pm. To avoid waiting times, please pre-register by email.