1 Course Objectives

This seminar introduces students to political institutions in comparative perspective. It first aims to familiarize students with the major theoretical approaches to institutions. It then surveys the literature on the core political institutions, from the electoral system to bureaucracy. Along the way, it grapples with issues such as institutional change (for example, which theoretical approach provides the best account?); debates about how institutions should be conceptualized and measured (for example, are mechanisms for contestation the key institutional feature of democratic regimes?); and the link between institutions, democratic representation, and other consequential outcomes of the policy process (for example, do consensual institutions indeed deliver a “kinder and gentler” form of democracy?). Accordingly, the course will help to prepare students for the political institutional component of the comparative politics comprehensive exam, as well as for conducting research in comparative politics.

2 Course Requirements

First and most obviously, students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings. That means having read the readings both carefully and critically.

Second, students are required to serve as a moderator for one topic (i.e., one week’s readings). The moderator’s main job is to come to class prepared enough to keep everyone else (including the instructor!) on their toes. Moreover, with the goal of spurring discussion, the moderator will make a short (circa ten minute) presentation at the beginning of class about what he or she perceives to be some of the core issues raised by the readings. To elaborate, presentations should not merely summarize the readings (e.g., “Jones says X”). Instead, they should be critical. That is, they might describe key conceptual issues; identify central debate(s) running through the different readings; point out any methodological (including measurement) issues that bedevil empirical work; and offer criticisms. An approximately one page written outline of the presentation, containing questions for discussion, should be posted on the course Gaucho Space website (under forums: instructor announcements) by 12:00 p.m. on the Monday before the class meeting so as to allow everyone time to reflect upon it prior to class. Please send me your top three choices of topics (ranked from first to third) by the end of the first day of class, and I will assign students to topics, doing my best to take everyone’s preferences into account.
Third, students will write a brief (approximately three to four page) research prospectus. The prospectus will identify a research question and testable hypothesis drawn from one or more readings for empirical investigation, and then identify a research design for testing this hypothesis. Be creative—this is your chance to draw attention to what you see as an overlooked claim or observable implication of someone’s argument. The best prospectuses will either identify existing data for testing their hypothesis, or make the case that the appropriate data does not exist and describe a methodology for gathering it, from a survey to elite interviews to a comparative case study. Links to data websites, codebooks, and bibliographic resources, etc. are welcome. The goal is to provide students practice with constructing empirical research proposals, a skill that is obviously required of comparative politics doctoral students. The research prospectus should be written for a topic for which the student does not serve as the moderator. It is due in class on the day the topic from which the prospectus is drawn is discussed.

Fourth and finally, students may choose either to write a longer (approximately fifteen to twenty page) research prospectus on a different political institutional topic from the short one, or to write a research paper (approximately fifteen to twenty pages) on an actual or proposed institutional reform. The paper or prospectus will be due by noon on Friday, 14 June. This assignment requires students to go beyond the assigned readings. I recommend that students consult with me about their topics. My hope is that both of these assignments will help students to further develop their own research interests, and perhaps to even start them down the road to a doctoral prospectus.

3 Grading

Grades for the course will be calculated as follows.

- Class participation. (20%)
- Service as moderator, including presentation and outline. (20%)
- Short research prospectus. (20%)
- Research paper or long research prospectus. (40%)

4 Required Reading Materials

Readings for the course are available in one of three ways. With a single exception, books for which we will be reading three or more chapters are available on reserve from the library; these readings are labeled [LIB] in the schedule below. You are of course also welcome to purchase copies of these books. Because they can be obtained from so many online vendors nowadays, often used (and hence inexpensively), I have not asked the university bookstore to stock them. For example, the 1999 edition of the Lijphart text is a fine substitute for the recently-released 2012 edition, and it is available used. Accordingly, if you are interested in building your personal library, which I recommend, go shopping with your fingers for these modern classics! Articles available online are labeled [EJ] in the schedule. Note, however, that you will either need to be on a university computer or to have your home computer
configured for off campus access to access these readings. I have provided links to these articles on the course Gauchospace website. Finally, all other readings (such as shorter book excerpts) are available as PDF files from the course Gauchospace website. These are labeled [GS] in the schedule.

5 Syllabus

Organizational Session (Week 1)

PART I: Theoretical Approaches

An Introduction to Organization Theory (Week 2)


Politics and Organizations (Week 3)


**PART II: Democratic Institutions in Comparative Perspective**

**Democracy and Autocracy (Week 4)**


Barbara Geddes, 1999, “What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115–144. [EJ]


**Political Regimes I: Presidentialism vs. Parliamentarism (Week 5)**


Political Regimes II: Centralization vs. Decentralization (Week 6)


Electoral Systems (Week 7)


Legislatures (Week 8)


George Tsebelis and Jeanette Money, 1997, Bicameralism, New York: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, Chapters 1, 2 and 9. [LIB]

Bureaucracy (Week 9)

John Huber and Charles Shipan, 2002, Deliberate Discretion, New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 8. [LIB]


Pulling It All Together: Institutions, Typologies, and Democracy (Week 10)


