



Philosophy, Politics and Economics, Fall 2021, Period 1

W_JSM_202 | Political Institutions | 6 ECTS

M 11:00-12:30h, W 13:30-15:00h, HG-04A33/ Zoom



Course coordinator
Wynand Kastart
*Dept. of Political Science
and Public Administration,
VU Amsterdam*
E-mail: w.kastart@vu.nl



Seminar instructor
Stefano Merlo
*John Stuart Mill College,
VU Amsterdam*
E-mail: s.merlo@vu.nl

Note: The contents of this syllabus may be subject to changes throughout the semester, which are announced in advance (i.e., before they come into effect). The lectures are held on campus and are live-streamed via Zoom. The corresponding audio recordings are posted to Canvas alongside the online lecture presentation slides. The seminars take place via Zoom. All Zoom links are posted to Canvas.

Course Description: The study of political institutions occupies a central position in political science. Drawing upon both established and recent research from within the field of comparative politics, this course surveys the major theories and findings about the causes, consequences and conduct of political institutions. It does so by first laying out the conceptual groundwork for examining the causal links between institutions, organizations and the costs of exchange (Part I). Next, this course traces the origins of and changes in political institutions through the lenses of competing schools of thought (Part II). Finally, it systematizes the variability in the shape of political institutions in democracies (Part III) and its implications for policy (Part IV).

Course Objectives: This course's main objective is to make students understand the importance of institutions in shaping politics and policies. After this course, students should be able to: define and use the concept of political institutions and discuss it in relation to the relevant literature; describe (patterns in) the large variety of political institutions across countries and other contexts; explain and evaluate the way in which political institutions shape political behaviour, interaction, and discourse; explain how political institutions develop and change, why they often remain unchanged, and how institutional change is possible; explain the differences between various strands of neo-institutionalist theory in political science; apply various concepts and theories in the analysis of concrete cases of politics and policy-making; and present their findings in writing and discuss them with other students.

Required Books:

Albertus, Michael and Victor Menaldo (2018), *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy*, New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press.

Lijphart, Arend (2012), *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

North, Douglass C. (1990), *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press.

Pierson, Paul (2004), *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Course Requirements (percentages indicate weights for the final score):

Seminar Attendance and Participation	0%
Attend the seminars and complete the seminar assignments.	
Assignments (three in total; 10% each)	30%
Submit a total of three assignments (due on Canvas):	
#1 due on Monday (9:00h) of Week 38 (September 20 th).	
#2 due on Monday (9:00h) of Week 40 (October 4 th).	
#3 due on Monday (9:00h) of Week 42 (October 18 th).	
Midterm Exam	25%
Week 39, Monday, September 27 th , 15:30-17:45h, Canvas.	
Final Exam	45%
Week 43, Wednesday, October 27 th , 8:30-11:15h, Canvas.	

Seminar Attendance and Participation

Seminars take place twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays, and are held via Zoom. The dates are listed in the course outline. Each student is randomly assigned to a fixed Seminar Group. Depending on the Seminar Group, the times of the seminars are as follows:

Seminar Days	Seminar Group 1	Seminar Group 2	Seminar Group 3
Tuesday and Friday	09:00-10:30h	11:00-12:30h	13:30-15:00h

Seminar attendance is mandatory. You can request excused absences for illness, familial situations demanding your immediate attention, religious observances and official VU business. All such requests should be submitted to Özlem Terzi (o.terzi@vu.nl). You cannot pass the course without taking the Resit Exam unless you have attended at least 75% of the seminars. To assess seminar participation, there will be six seminar assignments. These assignments are completed during seminars and take the form of peer reviews. Each peer review revolves around a question that appears on one of the three regular assignments, as indicated in the course outline. For instance, Peer Review 1 covers Question 1 of Assignment 1. You cannot pass the course without submitting the Resit Assignment unless you have passed all seminar assignments.

Assignments

Students are required to submit three assignments, which are due on Canvas on the dates listed above. Students should complete these assignments on their own. Late assignments are heavily penalized. Assignments are posted on Canvas. Each assignment is worth 10% of the final score.

Midterm and Final Exams

The Midterm Exam covers the assigned readings and lectures from Weeks 36-38. The Final Exam covers the material from Weeks 37-41, except North (1990, Chapters 9-11). The Midterm Exam and Final Exam are worth 25% and 45% of the final score, respectively. Both are administered via Canvas on the dates and times listed above.

Reading Requirements

The required readings are listed in the course outline and are indicated by citations, which refer to the list of references presented on the front page of this syllabus. For instance, “Pierson (2004, Chapter 1)” assigns Chapter 1 of “Pierson, Paul (2004), *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press” for that particular class date.

Grading Policies

Your final score can range from 0 to 100 points (excluding extra credit). After adding extra credit, and together with the remaining grading policies detailed below, your final score determines your final grade, which is assigned on the basis of the following grade distribution:

≥ 93.00 :	10	73.00-76.99:	7.0	53.00-56.99:	4.0
90.00-92.99:	9.5	70.00-72.99:	6.5	50.00-52.99:	3.5
87.00-89.99:	9.0	67.00-69.99:	6.0	47.00-49.99:	3.0
83.00-86.99:	8.5	63.00-66.99:	5.5	43.00-46.99:	2.5
80.00-82.99:	8.0	60.00-62.99:	5.0	40.00-42.99:	2.0
77.00-79.99:	7.5	57.00-59.99:	4.5	≤ 39.99 :	1.5

Academic Integrity

Students at VU are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the *Student Charter* (available online at <https://vu.nl/en/education/more-about/important-regulations>). When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand. All suspected violations of the Charter are handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, and a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities, and must include a report to the Dean, who may impose additional disciplinary sanctions.

Re: Note Selling

Selling a faculty member's class notes individually or on behalf of commercial services using VU e-mail or Canvas violates both VU information technology and VU intellectual property policy. Violations of this policy are considered violations of the *Student Charter* and are reported to the Dean as a violation of course rules (academic misconduct).

Notifications via Canvas

The default notification settings for Canvas can be found online at <https://sites.google.com/vu.nl/canvasstudentguide/getting-started-with-canvas>. You can customize these settings, but note that customizations apply to all courses in which you are enrolled; there is no way to have messages forwarded for one course, but not for others. By default, you receive messages ("conversations") and announcements forwarded to your VU e-mail inbox. If you modify this default setting, it is your responsibility to check Canvas regularly for communications.

Examination Policies

Assignments and exams are graded within ten working days. Students may appeal final grades with the Examination Board within six weeks of the posting of grades. For at least twenty working days after the announcement of exam results, students can request access to the assessed work and the corresponding grading rubric. Student may submit a reassessment request to the examiner. A reassessment does not affect the timetable for lodging an appeal.

Resit Policies

Irrespective of your final course grade, you can take an integrated Resit Exam, which covers all readings and lectures from Weeks 36-41. The most recent grade applies. Each failed seminar assignment can be retaken by reviewing two regular assignments submitted by your peers (see more below). To participate in any of these resit opportunities, students should notify the course coordinator about this via e-mail (w.kastart@vu.nl) no later than Monday, November 15th, 8:30h. The corresponding due dates are listed in the course outline.

Course Outline

The column on the right reports the workload in hours for each component, which is aggregated at the end of the course outline. The hours listed next to the readings indicate reading time, and correspond to reading on average six pages per hour. The lectures are delivered by Wynand Kastart; the seminars are taught by Stefano Merlo.

Week	Topics and Readings	Hours
	Part I: Institutions, Uncertainty and the Costs of Exchange	
	1 Institutions vs. Organizations	
Week 36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Monday, September 6th <i>Readings:</i> North (1990, Chapters 1-3) • Seminar: Tuesday, September 7th <i>Topic:</i> Course Requirements 	1.5 3.5 1.5
	2 Institutions and the Costs of Exchange	
Week 36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Wednesday, September 8th <i>Readings:</i> North (1990, Chapters 4-7) • Seminar: Friday, September 10th <i>Topic:</i> How to Write for Assignment and Exam Questions 	1.5 5.0 1.5
	Part II: Institutional Origins and Change	
	3 Institutional vs. Organizational Change	
Week 37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Monday, September 13th <i>Readings:</i> North (1990, Chapters 9-11) • Seminar: Tuesday, September 14th <i>Peer Review 1:</i> Assignment 1, Question 1 	1.5 5.2 1.5
	4 Institutional Path Dependence	
Week 37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Wednesday, September 15th <i>Readings:</i> Pierson (2004, Chapter 1) • Seminar: Friday, September 17th <i>Peer Review 2:</i> Assignment 1, Question 2 	1.5 6.0 1.5
	5 Institutional Design	
Week 38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Monday, September 20th <i>Readings:</i> Pierson (2004, Chapter 4) <i>Assignment 1 is to be submitted via Canvas no later than 9:00h.</i> • Seminar: Tuesday, September 21st <i>Peer Review 3:</i> Assignment 2, Question 1 	1.5 4.8 4 1.5

(Course outline continued on the next page.)

Course outline (continued from the previous page):

Week	Topics and Readings	Hours
Week 38	6 Institutional Development	
	• Lecture: Wednesday, September 22 nd <i>Readings:</i> Pierson (2004, Chapters 5)	1.5 5.5
	• Seminar: Friday, September 24 th <i>Topic:</i> Feedback on Assignment 1	1.5
Part III: Varieties of Democracy		
Week 39	7 Consensus vs. Majoritarian Democracy	
	• Lecture: Monday, September 27 th <i>Readings:</i> Lijphart (2012, Chapters 1-3)	1.5 7.0
	• Midterm Exam: Monday, September 27 th , 15:30-17:45h, Canvas <i>Material covered:</i> All readings and lectures from Weeks 36-38.	2.25 10.0
	• Seminar: Tuesday, September 28 th <i>Topic:</i> The Pólya Urn Model	1.5
Week 39	8 Elite-Biased vs. Popular Democracy	
	• Lecture: Wednesday, September 29 th <i>Readings:</i> Albertus and Menaldo (2018, Chapters 1, 3 and 5)	1.5 7.0
	• Seminar: Friday, October 1 th <i>Peer Review 4:</i> Assignment 2, Question 2	1.5
Week 40	9 Sharing Institutional Authority	
	• Lecture: Monday, October 4 th <i>Readings:</i> Lijphart (2012, Chapters 7-9) <i>Assignment 2 is to be submitted via Canvas no later than 9:00h.</i>	1.5 11.0 4
	• Seminar: Tuesday, October 5 th <i>Topic:</i> Feedback on Midterm Exam	1.5
Week 40	10 Dividing Institutional Authority	
	• Lecture: Wednesday, October 6 th <i>Readings:</i> Lijphart (2012, Chapters 10-13)	1.5 10.2
	• Seminar: Friday, October 8 th <i>Topic:</i> Feedback on Assignment 2	1.5

(Course outline continued on the next page.)

Course outline (continued from the previous page):

Week	Topics and Readings	Hours
	Part IV: Policy Implications	
Week 41	<p>11 Policy Implications: Elite-biased vs. Popular Democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Monday, October 11th <i>Readings:</i> Albertus and Menaldo (2018, Chapter 6, Chapter 7: pp. 230-44) • Seminar: Tuesday, October 12th <i>Peer Review 5:</i> Assignment 3, Question 1 	<p>1.5 8.0 1.5</p>
Week 41	<p>12 Policy Implications: Consensus vs. Majoritarian Democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Wednesday, October 13th <i>Readings:</i> Lijphart (2012, Chapters 15-16) • Seminar: Friday, October 15th <i>Peer Review 6:</i> Assignment 3, Question 2 	<p>1.5 6.3 1.5</p>
Week 42	<p>Week Before Finals Week: No lectures or seminars are scheduled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment 3: Monday, October 18th, 9:00h. <i>Assignment 3 is to be submitted via Canvas no later than 9:00h.</i> 	<p>4</p>
Week 43	<p>Finals Week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Exam: Wednesday, October 27th, 8:30-11:15h, Canvas <i>Material covered:</i> All assigned readings and lectures from Weeks 37-41, except North (1990, Chapters 9-11). 	<p>2.75 16</p>
Week 50	<p>Resit Week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resit Exam: Tuesday, December 14th, 8:30-11:15h, Canvas <i>Material covered:</i> All readings and lectures from Weeks 36-41. • Resit Assignment: Tuesday, December 14th, 8:30h, Canvas <i>Instructions:</i> For each failed seminar assignment, submit feedback on two regular assignments submitted by your peers. The course coordinator will send you the materials for these reviews. 	
	<p>Workload: The course workload amounts to roughly 168 hours of work, corresponds to 6 ECTS (6×28 hours) and is composed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lectures: $12 \times 1.5 = 18$ hrs. • Seminars: $12 \times 1.5 = 18$ hrs. • Readings: $525 \div 6 = 88$ hrs. • Assignments: $3 \times 4 = 12$ hrs. • Exams: $(10 + 2.25) + (16 + 2.75) = 31$ hrs. • Total: $18 + 18 + 88 + 12 + 31 = 167$ hrs. 	