

Field Course: The Politics of Public Policy and Institutional Change

Anton Hemerijck and Ellen Immergut

First Term Academic Year 2024-2025

Course description

Aims

It is fair to say that, since the new millennium, we've been living in a period of "structural reform" accelerated by intrusive shocks, such as the Great Recession and, more recently, the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Significant changes in pensions, labour markets, education, health, macroeconomic policy, and environmental regulation have swept the European continent. In some cases, intrusive policy reform was accompanied by profound social and political conflict, while in other instances, unpopular reforms eventually received broad societal and political consent. Alongside significant retrenchment, there have been deliberate attempts – often given impetus by intensified European economic integration – to rebuild health and welfare programs and industrial and environmental policies in sync with the new economic, technological, demographic, and climate realities of the 21st century. Policy reform and institutional change, inescapably building on extant policy legacies across countries, is a work in progress, leading 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 challenges of the aftershocks of the global financial crisis and Covid-19 pandemic against the background of adverse demography, economic (de-)globalization, accelerating digital innovation, and climate change.

This seminar offers a comprehensive introduction to the political analysis of public policy and reform against the background of the changing nature of economics, politics, and society in advanced European democracies. The aim is to introduce researchers to the state of the art in comparative public policy research, particularly emphasizing institutional change and policy reform. The course thus aims to provide researchers with advanced knowledge of the primary institutions and mechanisms that help explain policy and institutional continuity and change over time. Furthermore, the course provides skills in comparative cross-national

policymaking, with particular attention given to competing theories on politics of policy change and continuity in terms of methodological strengths and weaknesses.

Objectives

Researchers who have completed this seminar should be able to:

- Produce well-structured academic response papers, employing the analytical tools of comparative political analysis of public policy drawing on a broad range of sources.
- Make clear and concise oral presentations based on serious reading and collecting relevant data on how social change and associated political conflict and compromise affect policy reform and institutional change.
- Design and write brief synopses on the multidimensional politics of policy continuity and change in selected countries.

The course will provide researchers with the conceptual and empirical background information to enable them to write focused PhD-theses and to answer questions like:

- What drives reform, which institutions, ideas, and power resources help their enactment, and vice versa, and which institutional conditions stall transformative policy change?
- What motivates political actors to pursue structural reform or, vice versa, decline to ponder intrusive policy change?
- How the political boundaries of the EU and domestic social and economic policy are being blurred on the backdrop of what new conflict lines?

Structure

The ten workshop sessions are designed to provide the analytical foundations and methodological tools for the political study of policy reform and institutional change. The course is structured in four parts. After an introductory session, we begin by examining a series of theoretical building blocks for studying the mechanisms of policymaking and policy change: namely, policy feedback, public opinion, party competition, institutional veto points, and ideas. Next, we move on to two areas of application: social investment and health politics. Finally, we conclude with a session taking stock of what we have learned.

Each session's purpose is to discuss the long-term evolution and more recent topical developments from a perspective that allows for discussion of theories of

institutional change and policy adaptation with appropriate methods for empirical analysis. Participants must upload a memo on the week's readings (weeks 2-8) by noon 12 noon on the day before the course, which will be used to jump-start the weekly discussions. For the ninth week of the course, there will be no readings, but instead, the participants will upload a short reflection memo about what they have learned in the course and provide suggestions for improvement. We aim to further develop analytic and conceptual skills not only by summarizing and debating critical readings in the field of policy change but also by employing these concepts and theories as tools that can provide leverage on one's research project. To this end, in many weeks of the course, we will use sections of articles or online resources labelled as 'tools' to promote the application of the concepts and methods of the course to researchers' dissertation projects. Similarly, the application segment is intended to deepen our understanding of applying these analytic tools to novel policymaking and policy change areas.

Participation and examination

1) Requirements for Seminar:

Attendance at seminars is compulsory for those who register for this course. Each week, all participants will upload a short memo raising critical points to discuss the week's readings. In week nine, for which no readings are assigned, participants will write a memo developing their ideas about public policy analysis and commenting on what they learned during the course. Researchers are asked to upload their memos by 12:00 noon on the day before class.

2) Requirements for PhD Qualifying Exam:

For those wishing to take this course for their qualifying exam, we will provide a take-home exam on November 26th due at 23:59 on December 12th. In addition, qualifying exam candidates must submit a proposed reading list for a PhD qualifying course by January 6th, 2025. Both the take-home exam essays and the readings lists will then be discussed orally with two public policy and institutional change research examiners on January 8th, 2025.

Background literature

Michael Moran, Martin Rein, and Robert E. Goodin (2006), *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy* (Oxford University Press) and Anke Hassel and Kai Wegrich (2022), *How To Do Public Policy* (Oxford University Press) have been selected as background reference material.

I. Introduction

Session 1: 1 October 2024 (Anton 1)

What is public policy?

The first session introduces the core concepts of politics, public policy, and institutions in the literature. The first two sentences of Fritz W. Scharpf's seminal treatise on actor-centred institutionalism, read: "Politics is about many things. But foremost among these, in modern democratic polities, is the function of selecting and legitimating public policies that use the powers of the collectivity for the achievement of goals and the resolution of problems that are beyond the reach of individuals acting on their own or through market exchanges" (1997:1). This apt definition of public policy relates to two political actions: *decision-making* policy selection and the more discursive act of societal *legitimation*.

Scharpf, F.W. (1997), *Games Real Actors Play. Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research*, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Giovanni Coppocia and Deniel Keleman, "The study of critical junctures: theory, narrative, and counterfactual in historical institutionalism," *World Politics*, April 2007, pp. 341-269.

II. Building Blocks

Session 2: 8 October 2024

Policy Feedback (Ellen 1)

Does politics produce policy, or do policies construct politics? It depends. Yet, in advanced, and by implication highly institutionalized, polities, policies surely instruct political contestation. The 2023 French pension reform advanced by President Macron is a good example of such policy feedback on political mobilization.

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

Andrea L. Campbell. (2012). "Policy Makes Mass Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15: 333-351. doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-012610-135202.

Session 3: 15 October 2024 (Ellen 2)

Party Competition and Reform

Jean-Claude Juncker, ex-President of the European Commission and ex-Premier of Luxembourg, once conjectured that politicians: 'know exactly what to do, but we do not know how to get re-elected'. An important strand in the recent literature on the welfare state has been the so-called 'electoral turn' in explaining (non-)reform. Scholars advocating an 'electoral turn' are shifting attention to bottom-up electoral behaviour and partisanship mobilization, steeped in quantitative public opinion survey research (and experiments) on policy related issues, to the input side of the political process. There is a distinct departure from the core institutional insight that 'policy shapes social politics', as scholars under the 'electoral turn' assume parties respond in a short-term fashion, congruent to electoral preferences, harking back to the pre-institutional presumption that 'politics creates policy'.

Abou-Chadi, T. (2014). "Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts – How Green and Radical Right Parties Differ in Their Impact." *British Journal of Political Science*: 1 - 20. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123414000155](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123414000155), Published online: 24 June 2014.

About-Chadi T., E. Immergut, Recalibrating social protection: Electoral competition and the new partisan politics of the welfare state, First published: 15 October 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12308>
<https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1475-6765.12308?af=R>

Tools:

Meguid, B. M. (2005), Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success. *American Political Science Review*, 99, 3: 347–359.

<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>
<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/information/documents/visualizations>

Session 4: 22 October 2024 (Ellen 3)

Institutional Veto Points and Policy Change

Institutions – rule-making rules – is the foodstuff of political behaviour, social interaction, and policy development. Although institutions cannot be changed at will, the 'lock in' effects of policy and strategy continuity should also not be exaggerated. For institutions to survive under conditions of structural social and economic change, decision-makers invoke strategies of institutional adaptation which are often accompanied by processes of social learning, characterized by a dialectic intermediating between the 'contest of power' and prevailing 'policy legacies' and the 'rules of the game' of politics and administration.

Haverland, Markus, National Adaptation to European Integration: The Importance of Institutional Veto Points, *Journal of Public Policy*, (2000), 20, 1:83-103.

Finnegan, J. J. "Changing Prices in a Changing Climate: Electoral Competition and Fossil Fuel Taxation." *Comparative Political Studies*, o(0): 00104140221141853. doi:10.1177/00104140221141853.

Recommended Background:

Ellen M. Immergut. (2021). "Political Institutions." In Béland, J. and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, 2nd ed., Oxford Handbooks (online edn, Oxford Academic, 8 Dec. 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198828389.013.18>, accessed 9 Dec. 2022.

Tools:

<https://vaps.shinyapps.io/vaps-dashboard/>

<https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/73926>

Session 5: 29 October 2024 (Anton 2)

Ideas, Policy Learning and Paradigm Shifts

Deep economic crises are moments of political truth. They both expose the strengths and weaknesses of extant policy repertoires and their underlying causal beliefs, ideas, and normative mind-sets. In a Kuhnian fashion, deep crises inspire new thinking and innovative practices, which also includes reconsidering older policy recipes and theories in a new light. In the aftermath of both the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Great Stagflation of the 1970s, policy paradigms were transformed in fundamental ways, giving rise, respectively, to the Keynesian-Beveridgean welfare state after 1945 and, a quarter century later, to the neoliberal critique of the 1970s and 1980s of welfare state intervention, which ushered monetarism, fiscal orthodoxy, retrenchment, and liberalization. Is the 21st century knowledge economy, against the backdrop of accelerating demographic ageing paving the way for a (silent) social investment paradigm shift? Are short-term oriented policymakers recognized that intensified demographic ageing and disruptive technological change, requires long-term include growth to rely heavily on high levels of employment and improvements in productivity. Whilst there is ample proof that social investments in child-care, long-term care, education and training, active labour market policy, lifelong learning, and active ageing, paid parental leave, family services and benefits, can contribute to employment, productivity, demographic balance, improved fertility, increased tax revenue,

reduced long-term reliance on compensatory social protection policies, a fair number of political scientists are therefore somewhat sceptical about social investment reform feasibility. Any kind of politics of investment suggests an explicit political exchange on the part of reformers to deliberately sacrifice or forego short-term consumption to reap long-term gains that make everybody better off in the future.

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

Anton Hemerijck. (2018). "Social investment as a policy paradigm." *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25:6, 810-827, DOI: [10.1080/13501763.2017.1401111](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1401111)

Recommended Background:

Jacobs, A.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.

Tools:

Alan M. Jacobs. (2009). "How do ideas matter?: Mental models and attention in German pension politics." *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(2): 252-279.

III. Applications

Session 6: 5 November 2024 (Anton 3)

Social Investment I

Beramendi, P. S. Hausermann, H. Kitchelt, and H. Kriesi (2015), 'Introduction: The Politics of Advanced Capitalism', in: Beramendi, P. (et al.), *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Julian L. Garritzmann, Marius R. Busemeyer & Erik Neimanns, Public demand for social investment: new supporting coalitions for welfare state reform in Western Europe? Pp. 844-861 | Published online: 22 Mar 2018
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13501763.2017.1401107?casa_token=BC3Jcrx7RCgAAAAA%3AXnIo0L3F5jfLyO3zVBiGZVKFy2AA5EiA1G1xxAO4YMi5-dScl6MIQzEC5iAwtLjXScKEpqpeNpI4

Session 7: 12 November 2024 (Ellen 4)

Health Politics Today

Immergut, E. M. (2021) "Health Politics Today," in Immergut, Anderson, Devitt and Popic, *Health Politics in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Ch. 1, pp. 3-31, link to e-book.

Immergut, E. M., Moise, A., Popic, T. and Wegemann, M. "Still the Century of Partisanship? Multidimensional partisanship, Veto points and European Healthcare Legislation 1989-2019," under review.

Burlacu, D., Immergut, E. M., Oskarson, M. and Rönnerstrand, B. (2018). "The politics of credit claiming: Rights and recognition in health policy feedback." *Social Policy & Administration*, 52(4): 880-894. doi:10.1111/spol.12403.

Session 8: 19 November 2024 (Anton 4)

Social Investment II: Explaining the New Politics of Structural Reform

Structural' reform concern an instance of disruptive path-shifting change with respect to policy substantive and/or governing responsibilities. Reform is structural only if it garners staying power, that is to say if structural reforms survive government turnover. In other words, structural reform successes and failures should not be too closely associated with government turnover in the aftermath of contentious elections per se. Previous strands of research on structural reform focuses predominantly on political actors – be they electorates, parties, governments, and social partners – in driving reform. For this session, we shift the attention from the political 'who' is behind reforms successes and failures to the question of 'how' contemporary reforms are being processed by deeply anchored institutional factors, including standing commitments, policy legacies and state traditions, administrative competencies, policy expertise, political systems, state-society relations, and EU regulation. The theoretical implication is that we have to theorize indeed 'how' post-formative reform efforts are being processed in advanced liberal democracies. The main purpose of this session is to discuss an actor-centered institutionalist heuristic of post-formative policymaking and reform processes, centered around six core questions of public policy, allowing precisely for a better understanding of processes of gradual yet transformative reform.

Hemerijck, A., M. Sobocinski, K. Kourra, and C. Vermorken (manuscript), *Six Core Questions of Public Policy: The Nested Politics of Structural Reform in the European Union (EU)*.

Two chapters from: Hemerijck, A. and M. Matsaganis (2023), *Who's Afraid of the Welfare State Now?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Session 9: 26 November 2024 (Ellen & Anton 5)

Review Session and Distribution of Take-Home Exam Questions

26 November 2024: Take-Home exam questions will be distributed to those requiring a qualifying exam.

Session 10: 3 December 2024 (Ellen & Anton 6)

What have we learned? Conclusion and feedback

PhD Qualifying Examination

12 Dec 2024 (at 23:59 hours): Deadline for Take-home exam

Format: Please answer one question from a list of about four questions, Length 2500-3000 words.

6 January 2025 (at 23:59 hours): Deadline for Reading List

Format: Please submit a reading list of 20 key works on Institutions and Public Policy, such as what you would include if tasked with teaching an advanced Masters' level course in Institutions and Public Policy

8 January 2025 (all day): Oral Exams

Format: 45 minutes discussion with the course instructors about your essay and reading list.