Political Science 490
Informal Institutions: Institutionalism for Developing Countries

Northwestern University
Department of Political Science
Fall 2019
Tues. 9:00-11:50AM, Scott Hall #201 (Ripton Room)

Instructor: Jordan Gans-Morse
Office Hours: Tues. 12:00-2:00PM and by appointment
Location: Scott Hall #203
Email: jordan.gans-morse@northwestern.edu

COURSE SUMMARY

This course will examine informal institutions — rules and procedures that lack formal codification yet effectively structure political behavior. The first part of the course will provide an overview of institutional analysis. Existing institutionalist approaches focus primarily on formal institutions, yet in many developing and transition countries formal rules and procedures have a marginal influence on actual political practices. We will examine recent efforts to define, conceptualize, and empirically analyze informal institutions and informal politics more broadly.

The second part of the course will consider informal institutions in the context of several areas of highly active research in contemporary comparative politics and political economy, including (1) clientelism, (2) institutions and economic growth, (3) corruption, (4) state building, and (5) institutions in non-democratic regimes.

The study of informal institutions entails inherent methodological challenges, in that many of the practices we will examine are illicit and/or covert. Throughout the course we will focus on innovative methodological approaches, ranging from interviewing techniques to statistical tools, designed to overcome these challenges.

The course is designed for graduate students preparing for the comprehensive examination in comparative politics or designing a dissertation prospectus for study of the developing world, but students from other sub-disciplines are welcomed and encouraged to enroll.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation

Students are expected to complete all readings prior to each session and to attend every seminar. Seminar participation will count for 30% of students’ overall grade. In addition to unstructured contributions to the conversation, each week students will be assigned a reading that they should read with particular care and know especially well. When questions or
disputes arise during discussions, the student responsible for the reading will be expected to take the lead in resolving confusion and sorting out divergent interpretations. Finally, students will be expected to post a discussion question on Canvas each week by 5:00PM on Monday.

Assignments

(1) Short essays: During some weeks, students will be asked to prepare a brief essay on a particular reading. Additional information about the content of these essays will be provided later in the quarter. The essays should be no more than two single-spaced pages and should be distributed by email to all seminar participants no later than noon on the day before the seminar meets. The aim of these essays is to introduce the rest of the group to as broad of range of material as possible while keeping the mandatory reading at a reasonable level. Students should be prepared to discuss and answer questions regarding their essay during seminar. The short essay assignments will count for 20% of the overall grade.

With respect to the seminar’s primary assignment, students will have two options:

(2a) Writing assignment option: The writing assignment may consist of a critical literature review, a research proposal, a conference paper, or a data analysis. My primary aim is that the assignment facilitates students’ preparation for the field exam(s), dissertation prospectus, and/or publication of a journal article. With this in mind, I am willing to tailor the assignment to individual students’ goals. Please come discuss your project with me no later than the fifth week of the quarter, and preferably sooner. The writing assignment will count for 50% of the overall grade.

(2b) Exam/journal review option: In place of the writing assignment, students may elect to write two mock journal reviews on readings of their choice from the syllabus and take a written exam. The exam will be designed to simulate field exam questions. The reviews will count for 15% and the exam for 35% of the overall grade. Reviews must be submitted prior to the meeting in which we discuss the particular reading, and the two reviews cannot be done for the same week of readings.

Deadlines: The exam will be held on Tuesday, December 3rd at 9AM and the paper will be due on Wednesday, December 4th by noon.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, the aim is that students will:

• Possess a rigorous conceptual command of the institutionalist approach to political science.
• Be prepared to develop research focused on the role of informal institutions.
• Be familiar with methodological tools for analyzing illicit or informal political behavior.
**COURSE MATERIALS**

The course draws on a wide range of sources, and there are no books that we will read in their entirety. Many of the readings are journal articles that are available in electronic form through the Northwestern library. For excerpts from books, I will make copies available via the course website on Canvas.

That said, you may find it useful – for this class, for your exam preparation, and/or for your own research – to purchase some or all of the following books:

COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1: Alternatives to Institutionalism: Structuralism, Functionalism, Behavioralism
Tuesday, September 24

Key questions:

• What are the alternative approaches to institutionalism?
• How distinct are these different approaches? Is it productive to consider these distinctions?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?

Readings:

• Andrew Janos, Politics and Paradigms: Changing Theories of Change in Social Science (Stanford University Press, 1986)
  o Chapter 2, skim Chapters 1 & 3
• Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978)
  o Chapter 1

Further Background Reading:

• Andrew Janos, East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Post-Communism (Stanford University Press, 2002) (see Chapter 1)
Week 2: Varieties of Institutionalism

Tuesday, October 1

Key questions:

• How do various scholars define the term “institutions”? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each definition?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of institutionalist approaches?
• What precipitated the trend toward institutionalism in political science?
• What are the differences between the major approaches to institutionalism, and what, if anything, do they share in common?
• What is “institutionalization”? Is it a fruitful concept?
• How do institutions form and evolve?

Readings:

• Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” Political Studies 44 (1996): 936-957
• Douglass North, Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance (Cambridge University Press, 1990)
  o Chapter 1
  o Chapters 1, 3, and 4
• Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale University Press, 1968)
  o Skim pages 1-8, read pages 8-24, skim pages 78-92
  o Skim pages 369-381, read pages 381-401

Further Background Reading:

• Ira Katznelson and Barry Weingast, eds., *Preferences and Situations: Points of Intersection Between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism* (Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2005)
Week 3: Conceptualizing Informal Institutions  
Tuesday, October 8

Key questions:

- What are informal institutions?
- How are informal institutions different from informal practices, culture, networks, and other related concepts?
- Is the concept of “informal institutions” useful?
- How do informal and formal institutions interact?
- How do informal institutions form and evolve?

Readings:

  - Read pages 1-2, 11-22
  - Chapter 1
  - Read pages 1-10
  - Introduction and Chapter 1

Readings for Short Essay #1: Regionally Specific Analyses of Informal Institutions

Further Background Reading:

- Peter Van der Windt, Macartan Humphreys, Lily Medina, Jeffrey F. Timmons, and Maarten Voors, “Citizen Attitudes Toward Traditional and State Authorities: Substitutes or Complements?” *Comparative Political Studies* 52, 12 (2019): 1810–1840
Week 4: Enforcement, Compliance, and Institutional Change
Tuesday, October 15

Key questions:

• How are weak institutions different than informal institutions?
• What are the differences between enforcement mechanisms for formal and informal institutions?
• How are enforcement and compliance related to institutional change?
• What factors underlie enforcement and compliance problems?

Readings:

• Douglass North, Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance (Cambridge University Press, 1990)
  o Chapters 5-7
  o Introduction and Chapter 7

Further Background Reading

• Alisha Holland, Forbearance as redistribution: The politics of informal welfare in Latin America (Cambridge University Press, 2017)
• Tom Tyler, Why People Obey the Law (Yale University Press, 1990)
• Avner Greif, Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade (Cambridge University Press, 2006) (Intro and Chapter 1)
• Jack Knight, Institutions and Social Conflict (Cambridge University Press, 1992)
Week 5: Clientelism
Tuesday, October 22

Key questions:

- What is clientelism?
- How is clientelism different than related concepts such as corruption, electoral fraud, patrimonialism?
- Is the concept of “informal institutions” fruitful for understanding clientelism?
- How does clientelism affect the formal institutions of democracy? How do various configurations of formal institutions affect the extent or type of clientelism?
- How can illicit phenomena like clientelism be studied?

Readings:

  - Chapter 1
- Simona Piattoni, “Clientelism in Historical and Comparative Perspective,” in *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation: The European Experience in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, Simona Piattoni, ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Readings for Short Essay #2: Methodological Approaches to the Study of Clientelism

Further Background Reading:

**Overviews**


**Classics**


**More Recent**

- Daniel Corstange, *The price of a vote in the middle east: Clientelism and communal politics in Lebanon and Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)
Week 6: Institutions for Growth
Tuesday, October 29

Key Questions:

- How do informal institutions affect economic development?
- How do informal institutions interact with the formal institutions needed for economic development?
- When is formalization of informal practices beneficial for economic development? When, if ever, is it detrimental?
- How is law related to formal and informal institutions?
- Are lessons from institutional development in the West applicable to developing countries?

Readings:

  - Skim pages 388-421
  - Chapters 1 and 2
  - Introduction and Chapters 3 and 8
  - Chapter 5

Readings for Short Essay #3: Methodological Approaches to the Study of Informal Institutions and Growth

  - Preface, Chapter 1, and pages 27-53
Further Background Reading:

**Background for Assigned Readings**


**Institutions and Growth**

- James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

**Informal Institutions and Growth**


**Non-State Property Rights Protection and Contract Enforcement**

- Timothy Frye, *Property rights and property wrongs: How power, institutions, and Norms Shape Economic Conflict in Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2017)
- Jordan Gans-Morse, *Property Rights in Post-Soviet Russia: Violence, Corruption, and the
Demand for Law (Cambridge University Press, 2017)


Historical Examples of Non-State Property Rights Protection and Contract Enforcement


Mafia Protection of Property Rights and Enforcement of Contracts


Relational Contracting

Week 7: Corruption
Tuesday, November 5

Key questions:

• What is corruption?
• What are the various types of corruption and how, if at all, are they related?
• Is an objective understanding of corruption a feasible goal, or is corruption a culturally subjective concept?
• How is corruption related to other types of informal institutions and informal practices previously examined in this course?
• What positive effects, if any, can corruption have?
• How can illicit behavior, such as corruption, be studied?

Readings:

• Daniel Treisman, “What Have We Learned About the Causes of Corruption from Ten Years of Cross-National Empirical Research?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 211-244
  o Chapters 1 and 2
• Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Yale University Press, 1968)
  o Read pages 59-72
• Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, “Corruption: Diagnosis and treatment,” *Journal of democracy* 17, no. 3 (2006): 86-99

Readings for Short Essay #4: (Quasi)/Experimental Approaches to the Study of Corruption

• Amanda Lea Robinson and Brigitte Seim, “Who is targeted in corruption? Disentangling the effects of wealth and power on exposure to bribery,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 3 (2018): 313-331
• Marianne Bertrand, Simeon Djankov, Remma Hanna, and Sendhil Mullainathan,


Readings for Short Essay #5: Innovative Approaches for Measuring Corruption


Further Background Reading:


• Robert Klitgaard, Controlling corruption (University of California Press, 1988)

• Susan Rose-Ackerman, Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform (Cambridge University Press, 1999)


**Week 8: State Building**  
*Tuesday, November 12*

Key Questions

- Is the concept of strong and weak states useful? How does the study of informal institutions influence our understanding of state strength?
- In what ways do informal institutions support state building? In what ways do they undermine state building?
- How, if at all, does consideration of informal institutions aid in disaggregating the functions of the state? In disaggregating state actors?
- States are often defined in terms of a series of monopolies – on violence, on taxation, on the dispensation of justice. Are there certain spheres in which informal institutions play a greater or lesser role?
- Does the notion of formal vs. formal institutions hold meaning in the absence of a functioning state?

Readings:

- Johan Engvall, *The state as investment market: Kyrgyzstan in comparative perspective* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016)  
  - Introduction and Chapter 1
  - Chapters 1-2
- Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Cornell University Press, 2011)  
  - Introduction and Chapter 1
  - Chapter 1

Further background reading:

• Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)


Week 9: Authoritarian Institutions  
Tuesday, November 19

Key Questions

- How do institutions in authoritarian regimes differ from institutions in democratic regimes?
- Do informal institutions play a greater role in authoritarian regimes than in democratic regimes?
- Why do authoritarian regimes frequently create nominally democratic institutions (e.g., electoral systems, legislatures, courts)?

Readings

- David Art, “What Do We Know about Authoritarianism After Ten Years?” Comparative Politics (2012): 351-373
  - Chapters 1 and 2

Further Background Readings

- Jennifer Ghandi, Political Institutions Under Dictatorship (Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse (Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War (Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Dan Slater, Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia (Cambridge University Press, 2010)
Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2010)


Authoritarian Electoral and Legislative Politics

- Rory Truex, *Making Autocracy Work: Representation and Responsiveness in Modern China* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Authoritarian Courts


Authoritarian Constitutions

- Tom Ginsburg and Alberto Simpser, *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge

**Authoritarian Institutions and Economic Development**

Week 10:
   Part I: Student Presentations of Research Papers
   Part II: Revisiting the Concept of Informal Institutions

Tuesday, November 26

Key Questions

- What are informal institutions?
- How are informal institutions different from informal practices, culture, networks, weak institutions, and other related concepts?
- Is the concept of “informal institutions” useful?