

**Understanding political dynamics:  
institutions, actors, and mechanisms**  
*Giliberto Capano*

Theoretical approaches to explain political dynamics suffer three common limitations: reductionism, reliance on exogenous factors, and excessive emphasis on order and structure. This course offers an overview of the major theories of social and political change, by focusing on the inescapable stability/change nexus of political dynamics and by giving specific theoretical relevance to the role of institutions and agency and their problematic interactions. After the review of the major conceptualizations, a mechanistic perspective will be discussed to better connect together actors and institutions for explaining stability and change.

**Class organization:** Classes will be based on an introductory lecture of the instructor, then on students' presentations of the readings and on general discussion. Students are required to read all the readings in advance of classes.

**Evaluation:** Students' evaluation will be based for 60% on class presentations and active attendance to seminars and 40% on a term paper of about 5000 words to deliver by the end of the term.

**Readings:** Readings are meant to provide the fundamental concepts of each class and I expect all students to read before class.

*7 November, 3-5 p.m. Room: 3.3 Morgagni*

**I. Course presentation and organization.**

The problem of change in Political Science. Epistemological and Methodological Choices to be done.

Recommended readings (for those who are interested to elaborate on the introductory lecture)

Almond, G. (1963) Political Systems and Political Change. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 6(10) 3-10.

Boudon, Raymond, 1986, *Theories of Social Change: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Polity Press).

Capano, Giliberto (2009) "Understanding policy change as an epistemological and theoretical problem". *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, n.1, 2009, pp. 7-31

Coleman, James S., 1986, Micro foundations and macrosocial theory, in: Siegwart Lindenberg, James S.Coleman and Stefan Nowak (Eds) *Approaches to Social Theory* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation),pp. 345-363.

Eldredge, Niles and Gould, Stephen J., 1972, Punctuated equilibria: an alternative to phyletic gradualism,in: Tom J. M. Schopf (Ed) *Models in Paleobiology* (San Francisco: Freeman & Cooper), pp. 82-115.

Eve, Raymond A., Horsfall, Sara and Lee, Mary E. (Eds), 1997, *Chaos, Complexity, and Sociology* (London: Sage).

Gersick, Connie J. G., 1991, Revolutionary change theories: a multilevel exploration of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(1), 10-36.

Giddens, Anthony, 1984, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

Goldstein, Jeffrey A., 2000, Emergence: a concept amid a thicket of conceptual snares. *Emergence*, 2(1), 5-22.

Hayek, F. A. (1973), *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 1: Rules and Order, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hield, Wayne (1954), The Study of Change in Social Science *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 1-11

Nisbet, Robert, 1972, Introduction: the problem of social change, in: Robert Nisbet (Ed.) *Social Change* (New York: Harper and Row), pp. 1–45.

Wimmer, Andreas and Kossler, Reinhart (Eds), 2006, *Understanding Change* (London: Palgrave).

21 November 10am-1pm, Room: Sala riunioni, Palazzina Gaddi

## **II. Institutions and Political Institutions: why do they matter?**

### Readings

Battilana, Julien Bernard Leca & Eva Boxenbaum (2009) 2 How Actors Change Institutions: Towards a Theory of Institutional Entrepreneurship, *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3:1, 65-107.

Blondel, J. (2006), “About Institutions, Mainly, but not exclusively, Political”, in Rhodes, R. A. W., S. A. Binder and B. A. Rockman (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 716-730.

Hernes, G. (1976), “Structural Change in Social Processes”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, n. 3, pp. 513-547

Moe, T. M. (1990), ‘Political Institutions: The Neglected Side of the Story’, *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 6: 213-253.

Powell, W. W., and P. J. DiMaggio (1991), “Introduction”, in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, Powell, W. W., and P. J. DiMaggio (eds.), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-38.

Searle, J. R. (2005), ‘What is an institution?’, *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 1: 1-22.

29 November 10am-1pm, Room: Sala riunioni, Palazzina Gaddi

## **III. Institutional change (1)**

### Readings

North, D. (1990) *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, CUP, chapters 9,10,11

Ostrom, E (1990), *Governing the Commons*. CUP. Chapters 1 and 4 Riker, W. H. (1980), ‘Implications from the Disequilibrium of Majority Rule for the Study of Institutions’, *American Political Science Review*, 74(2): 432-444.

4 December 10am-1pm, Room: Sala riunioni, Palazzina Gaddi

## **IV. Institutional Change (2)**

### Readings

Mahoney J and Thelen K (2010) A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change. In: Mahoney J and Thelen K (eds) *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press, chapters 1,2,4,7.

Rocco P and Thurston C (2014) From metaphors to measures: Observable indicators of gradual institutional change. *Journal of Public Policy* 34(1): 35–62.

Streeck W and Thelen K (2005) Institutional changes in advanced political economies. In: Streeck W and Thelen K (eds) *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–39.

Schmidt, V A, 2008, Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 303-26.

10 December 10am-1pm, Room: Sala riunioni, Palazzina Gaddi

## V. Policy dynamics and agency

### Readings

- Capano, G., and Galanti, T. (2018) 2018. Policy dynamics and types of agency: From individual to collective patterns of action”, *European Policy Analysis*, 4 (1), 23-47.
- Weible, C. M. and P. A. Sabatier, eds. 2017. Theories of the policy process – fourth edition. Boulder, CO: Westview press. Chapters 1,2,3,4.

9 January 2020, 10am-1pm, Room: Sala riunioni, Palazzina Gaddi

## VI. Mechanistic explanations (1)

- Bechtel, W, and Abrahamsen, A, 2005, Explanation: A mechanist alternative, *Studies in History and Philosophy of the Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 36, 421-41.
- Gross, N, 2009, A pragmatist theory of social mechanisms, *American Sociological Review*, 74, 3, 358-79.
- Kuorikoski, J, 2009, Two concepts of mechanism: Componential causal system and abstract form of interaction, *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 23, 2, 143-60.
- Machamer P, Darden L and Craver C (2000) Thinking about mechanisms. *Philosophy of Science* 67(1): 1–25.
- Hedström, P, and Ylikoski, P, 2010, Causal mechanism in the social sciences, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 49-67.

13 January, 2020 10am-1pm, Room: Sala riunioni, Palazzina Gaddi

## VII. Mechanistic Explanations (2)

- Bennett, A., and Checkel, J. (2014). *Process Tracing. From Metaphor to Analytical tool*. CUP. Chapters 3 and 5
- Falleti, T, and Lynch, J, 2009, Context and causal mechanisms in political analysis, *Comparative Political Studies*, 42, 9, 1143-66.
- Gerring, J, 2010, Causal mechanisms: Yes but... , *Comparative Political Studies*, 43, 11, 1499-1526.
- Gryzmala-Busse, A, 2011, Time will tell? Temporality and the analysis of. Causal mechanisms and processes, *Comparative Political Studies*, 44, 9, 1267-97.
- Mahoney, J, 2001, Beyond correlational analysis: Recent innovations in theory and method, *Sociological Forum*, 16, 3, 575-93.
- Mayntz, R, 2004, Mechanisms in the analysis of social macro-phenomena, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 34, 2, 237-59.
- Tilly, C, 2001, Mechanisms in political processes, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4, 21-41.