

**Sciences Po**  
**Master of Public Affairs 2009-2010**  
**Syllabus, Elective Course, First and Second Year, 1<sup>st</sup> Semester (5 credits)**

**The Comparative Politics of Policy Reform:  
State-society Relations and Political Institutions  
in Contemporary Democracies**

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**Instructor:**

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**Course Description :**

This course aims at providing students with the necessary tools to understand the politics of policy reform in a comparative perspective. While the course will contain a strong theoretical element, discussions will concentrate on case studies and the comparison of cases within a global context. Cases will be chosen to illustrate different kinds of policies and institutional and political settings.

The course will focus, first, on state-society relations, looking not just at interest groups, but also social movements and, to a lesser extent, public opinion. The relative importance of those different ways of influencing politics varies from country to country and even from policy to policy. We will review and apply different typologies of interest-group politics and state-society relations in order to understand the varying impact and forms of societal influence on policy-making and policy reform. Second, this course assumes that the institutionalization of state-society relations is strongly linked to the political and institutional context of policy-making. This context is important at different levels. At the national level, political institutions and decision-making structures create specific incentive structures. At the sub-national and/or policy level, particular institutional settings may depart from the national incentive structure and lead to alternative outcomes. This section will draw on mainstream literature in comparative politics and comparative public policy. Third, we will look at how contemporary changes in values, politics or the international context may affect state-society relations and/or their political and institutional settings. We will thus identify the current challenges to state-society relations and try to understand how different types adapt to those changes.

Cases should illustrate the importance of the interplay between state-society relations and political and institutional settings. In order to study the whole bandwidths of situations, we will look at different economic issues like export taxes or budgetary reform. But we will also look at issues with less economic stakes, such as women's rights or environmental issues. If possible, for each class, we will pick two similar cases from entirely different contexts, in order to discuss the importance and significance of particular factors to explain variance.

### **Course Objectives:**

Students should leave the course with a broad understanding of the basic concepts and analytical tools in comparative politics to be able to understand the politics of policy reform in a comparative perspective.

### **Course Requirements:**

The format of the class will include some lectures to familiarize students with the theoretical frameworks, but mostly we will work on country and policy case studies through class discussion. Each student is required to prepare a 20 min introduction to one of the case studies, which provides the following information: (1) how were societal demands channeled on the policy issue in question, (2) what were the interests or demands at stake, (3) what coalitions emerged (4) and to what extent did institutions shape this particular issue? The power point presentations will serve as the basis for class discussion on the case studies. Students are encouraged to supplement the readings with outside material. In addition, each student will be required to prepare one research paper in the course of the semester. The short papers should be longer than 2000 words (~ 6 double spaced pages) up to a maximum of 3000 words (i.e., 9 pages). The final exam will be given as a take-home final. It will ask you to answer three questions (out of five) discussed during the semester by analyzing a case study. If you have participated actively and done the reading during the course, you will find the final quite manageable. The questions will be given at the last day of classes and you will have to hand in the exam at the MPA office the following day by noon.

### **Assessment and Grade Distribution:**

- 40% Class participation and case study presentation
- 30% Short papers
- 30% Take-home exam

### **Books and other material required**

A reader with the mandatory texts will be provided at the beginning of the semester.

### **Course outline (tbc):**

#### **Section 1: Introductory lectures and discussions**

This section will build on lectures by the instructor, followed by general discussions and, if possible, by collective exercises and applications, meant to illustrate or underline particular aspects of given problems.

1. Introduction: Institutions, political actors and policy reform
2. Political institutions and policy making

Compulsory reading:

North, Douglass C. and Barry R. Weingast (1989). "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutional Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England", *The Journal of Economic History* 49:4, 803-832.

Terry Moe and Michael Caldwell (1994), "The institutional foundations of democratic government", *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, vol. 150, no. 1, pp 171-195

3. Elections, parties and policy

Compulsory reading:

Cox, Gary W. (1990). "Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems", *American Journal of Political Science* 34:4, 903-935.

4. Collective action and state-society relations in the contemporary world

Compulsory reading:

Streeck, Wolfgang & Kenworthy, Lane, "Theories and Practices of Neocorporatism", in Janosky et al. (eds), *Handbook of Political Sociology*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005

Kriesi, Hanspeter, Anke Tresch, Margit Jochum (2007). "Going Public in the European Union. Action Repertoires of Western European Collective Political Actors », *Comparative Political Studies*, 40:1, 48-73.

5. Interest group politics, redistribution and regulation

Compulsory reading:

Thomas L. Gais, Mark A. Peterson, Jack L. Walker, "Interest Groups, Iron Triangles and Representative Institutions in American National Government", *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Apr., 1984), pp. 161-185

Robert H. Salisbury, "An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups", *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Feb., 1969), pp. 1-32

## **Section 2: Case studies**

Courses in this section will be based on introductory lectures and comparative case-studies. The latter will be chosen collectively, as student teams will work two cases for each course. The choice of cases will be subject to feasibility (availability and access to sources). Additional reading lists for each class will be distributed in advance. The following list of topics (and classes) is based on the relative availability of sources, but changes may still be made to this programme in accordance with students' interests and expertise.

6. Tax reform
7. Administrative reform
8. Minority rights
9. Environmental/consumer regulation
10. Protectionism and tariffs

11. The reform/liberalization of energy markets (or any other public utility)

Preliminary readings for some of those cases can be found on last year's class page:  
[http://emiliano-grossman.webou.net/hoprubrique.php?id\\_rub=7](http://emiliano-grossman.webou.net/hoprubrique.php?id_rub=7)

### **Section 3: Conclusions**

12. Globalization, state-society relations and democracy

This last class will reflect on the evolution of state-society relations in the contemporary world. In particular, we will think about general tendencies and the determinants of change and/or stability in state-society relations. Moreover, we will try to specify the conditions under which interest groups may make a positive contribution to economic development and democracy.