

Science and Policy: Introduction to Political Sciences

Lecturer: Dr. Sarah Bütikofer (Department of Political Science, UZH and DeFacto)
Location: ETH Zentrum
Dates: May 12 and 19, 2025
Credit Points: 1 ECTS

Description:

The workshop is designed to empower students to engage with the way political and social scientists think.

It offers an introduction to politics in a globalised world, with a focus on how political science tries to understand and explain cross-country and cross-time differences.

The lectures concentrate on political behaviour, institutions, and actors, focusing mainly on democratic and partially democratic countries. Students will learn about the influence of political actors on decision-making processes, political institutions and political outcome.

The group works are as important as the lectures. The students are asked to participate actively in all kind of group work and mutual learning forms. In addition, small groups of students will prepare a poster (exposition) in order to obtain the ECTS point.

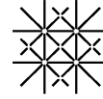
Aims and objectives:

The main aims of this course are to:

- introduce students to the main differences between democratic and non-democratic regimes
- explain how political institutions work
- explain how political behaviour and institutions shape policy outcomes
- prepare students to achieve further knowledge of political processes

The course is divided into the following main sections:

- Section A: Thinking like a political scientist
- Section B: In-class assignment “Adopt a country”
- Section C: Democracies in the World



Course Program:

First day – May 12

Morning:

Lecture: Why almost everything around us is political

Section A: Thinking like a political scientist:

- The differences between the three dimensions politics, polities & policies
- Political science – a very brief introduction

Section C, Lecture I: The rise of Democracies – the troubled history of democratization

Group work and reflection time

Afternoon:

Section B -part I: “Adopt a country”(Homework, in-class assignment)

In the afternoon, students reflect about a country of their choice, its history and current political discussions in that country. They are asked to identify the most important cleavages as well as central political and societal actors. In order to write down their thoughts and present their reflections to their colleagues, they are asked to prepare a poster and a handout (in group of 2-3 persons).

→ Submission deadline: May 18, 16h

Second day – May 19

Morning:

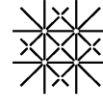
Section C, Lecture II: The importance of political trust and the “crisis of democracy”

In the aftermath, students discuss in small groups how they assess the situation with regard to the concept of political trust in their adopted countries.

Afternoon:

Section B - part II: “Adopt a country” (presentation)

Presentation of in-class assignments and discussion in groups



Individual Performance and Assessment:

In order to obtain the 1 ECTS point, the participants are required to prepare a poster, a handout and to actively participate in the discussions during the course days.

The poster mainly consist in answering a couple of questions concerning the chosen country. The handout should be no longer than 3'00 characters (2-3 pages).

The aim of the exercise is to become an expert on the institutions, the main political and societal actors and the political outcomes in the adopted country. That is why students should choose a country for which information about its politics and political institutions are readily available.

Optional reading:

Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson (2019). [The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty](#). New York City: Penguin Random House.

Hague, Rod; Martin Harrop and John McCormick (2017). *Political Science: A Comparative Introduction*. 8th edition. Palgrave Macmillan.

Inglehart Ronald and Welzel Christian (2010). [Changing Mass Priorities: The Link between Modernization and Democracy](#). *Perspectives on Politics* (June, 2010): 551-567.

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt (2019). [How Democracies Die](#). New York City: Penguin Random House.

Lijphart, Arend (1999). *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. Yale: University Press. Chapters 1-3.

v.d. Meer, Tom W. G. (2017). [Political Trust and the "Crisis of Democracy"](#). *Politics*.

Mounk, Yascha (2018). [The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It](#). Harvard: University Press.

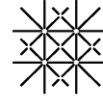
Norris, Pippa (2012). *Making Democratic Governance Work. The impact of Regimes on Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace*. Cambridge: University Press.

Tsebelis George (2002). *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton: University Press. Part II.



University of
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University
of Basel

Zurich-Basel Plant Science Center

Prior Knowledge: None

Number of Participants: Participation is limited to 20 people.

Lecturer: Dr. Sarah Bütikofer studied political science and international law at the University of Zurich and at the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. She was a lecturer and research assistant at the Universities of Zurich and Geneva and received her PhD in political science from the University of Zurich in 2011. She is based at the University of Zurich as editor of "DeFacto.expert". DeFacto.expert is the online journal of the political science departments in Switzerland with the aim of making political science research more visible to a wider audience. Sarah teaches *Swiss politics* and *communicating science* in various institutions and is also a project partner at *Sotomo*, where she has contributed to various studies on Swiss politics and society.