History of Institutions: Civic, Economic and Political
Academic year 2026-27

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The objective of the course is to provide a long-run analysis of institutional change, from a wide range of perspectives. Institutions are often considered among the potential explanatory factors of fundamental historical processes, or of differences among contemporary societies. This course aims to provide the students with a deeper understanding of how institutions (might) explain current dynamics, as well as of the nature of long-term institutional change *per se*. This general objective will be pursued with reference to a specific set of institutions, spanning the civic, economic and political spheres. Additionally, the course will provide an introduction to how social-science research on past societies should properly be conducted.

Course grades will be based on a **final written exam**, based on the lectures and the compulsory readings of the course.

Course Organization and Reading List

Introduction: what is an institution?

- D.C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press, 1990 (chapters 1-4 and 13)
- A. Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, Cambridge University Press, 2006 (only section §2.1 of chapter 2).

Part I: The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe (and Asia)

- R. Bonney, *The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe, c.1200-1815*, Oxford University Press, 1999 (Introduction)
- P. O'Brien and B. Yun Casalilla (eds.), *The Rise of Fiscal States. A Global History, 1500-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 2012 (Introduction and Afterword)
- K. Messere, F. de Kam, C. Heady, *Tax Policy: Theory and Practice in OECD Countries*, Oxford University Press, 2003, chapters 2 and 3
- P. Lindert, "Social Spending and the Welfare State", in *How Was Life?* Vol II, OECD, 2021

Part II: Institutions and Inequality

- D. Acemoglu, S. Johnson, and J. A. Robinson, "Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117 (4), 2002, pp. 1231–1294

- G. Alfani, "Economic inequality in preindustrial times: Europe and beyond", *Journal of Economic Literature*, 59(1), 2021, pp. 3-44.
- G. Alfani, A. Carballo, "Income and inequality in the Aztec Empire on the eve of the Spanish conquest", *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7, 2023, pp. 1265–1274
- F. Alvaredo, A.B. Atkinson, T. Picketty, and E. Saez, "The Top 1 Percent in International and Historical Perspective", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(3), 2013, pp. 3-20.
- M. Borgerhoff Mulder, S. Bowles, et al., "Intergenerational wealth transmission and the dynamics of inequality in small-scale societies", *Science*, vol. 326, 2009, pp. 682-688
- J.M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997 (chapter 14, "From Egalitarianism to Kleptocracy: The Evolution of Government and Religion")
- S.L. Engerman, S. Haber and K. L. Sokoloff, "Factor Endowments and Institutions", in S.L. Engerman and K. L. Sokoloff, *Economic Development in the Americas since 1500*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 31-56.

Part III: Workshops – "doing research" on past societies in a social science perspective
This section of the program is meant to allow students to know about current projects in social-economic history pursued at Bocconi on topics related to the course. This academic year the focus will be on two projects/research agendas:

- Prof. Alfani will discuss the ERC project, *SMITE-Social Mobility and Inequality across Italy and Europe, 1300-1800* (discussion will also introduce the ERC – European Research Council – as a major provider of research funding in Europe)
- Prof. Felix Schaff, as a guest lecturer, will discuss his research on property rights institutions and the origins of gender inequality in preindustrial Europe. More broadly, the lecture will illustrate how historical evidence can be used to study fundamental questions in political economy, including the impact of institutions, family systems, and property rights in shaping economic and social outcomes over the long run.

- S. Ogilvie and F. Schaff, "Claiming Her Share: Property Rights Institutions and Gender Inequality Before Industrialization", *CEPR Working Paper*

Part IV: Long-term Development of Political Institutions
- D.C. North and B.R. Weingast, "Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing public choice in seventeenth-century England", *Journal of Economic History*, XLIX (1989), pp. 803–832.
- E. Ostrom, "Private and Common Property Rights", *Encyclopaedia of Law and Economics*, vol. 2, 2000, pp. 332-352
- W. Scheidel, *The Great Leveler. Violence and the History of Inequality*, Princeton University Press 2017, Chapter 9
- J.L. Van Zanden, E. Buringh and M. Bosker, "The rise and decline of European parliaments, 1188-1789", *Economic History Review*, August 2012, Vol. 65, Issue 3, pp. 835-861
- J.L. Van Zanden, *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution*, Brill 2009 (pp. 205-232, "State formation and citizenship"
- A. Henriques, N. Palma, "Comparative European Institutions and the Little Divergence, 1385–1800", *Journal of Economic Growth*, 28, 2023, pp. 259–294.