

## **Seminar**

University of Bremen  
Spring 2026

### **Theorizing Institutional Change**

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Office hours by appointment via email

Meets Fridays 12:00–14:00 in UNICOM 3.0210 Seminarraum 2.

### **Course Description**

The class examines institutional change as a key theoretical problem across the social sciences. A first part of the seminar introduces core recent accounts of institutional change from a variety of social scientific fields. A second part discusses recent developments in theories of institutional change based on an exemplary empirical problem – the rise of Neoliberalism in advanced capitalism.

### **Participation in the seminar**

Discussion of the readings will make up the core of the seminar sessions. Students are expected to read all assigned texts and to participate regularly and actively. To get credit (6 CP), students must (1) do all assigned readings; (2) prepare three reading reports (4,000 characters each); (3) and submit final papers (12,000 characters).

The reading reports are intended to prepare the ground for discussions by asking participants to set out their responses to the readings in written form. Memos should not just summarize the readings, but rather take up specific arguments, compare the positions of different authors, raise questions of evidence, usefulness, or plausibility or draw attention to particular strengths and weaknesses in the arguments and descriptions. We will share these memos through email. In order for everyone to have time to read over the comments of others, these will be due by 4 pm on the day before the class meets. For the final paper, original research on literature, data, or archival material is required. Term papers have to be written in English. All texts are made available on the Stud.IP website of the course.

For organizational matters please contact Timur Ergen (iawlehre@uni-bremen.de).

## Readings

April 10, 2026

### Introduction

Hall, Peter A. and Rosemary C. R. Taylor. 1996. "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms." *Political Studies* 44(5): 936-957.

April 17, 2026 – no class

April 24, 2026 (double session to 15:30)

### Institutionalization, Taken-for-Grantedness, and Agency

Colyvas, Jeannette A. and Walter W. Powell. 2006. "Roads to Institutionalization: The Remaking of Boundaries between Public and Private Science." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 27: 305-353.

DiMaggio, Paul J. and Walter W. Powell. 1991. "Introduction." In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, pp. 1-38. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

May 01, 2026 – no class

May 8, 2026

### Path Dependence

Pierson, Paul. 2000. "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics." *American Political Science Review* 94 (2): 251-267.

May 15, 2026 (double session to 15:30)

### Critical Junctures & Contingency

Capoccia, Giovanni and R. Daniel Kelemen. 2007. "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism." *World Politics* 59(3): 341-369.

Ermakoff, Ivan. 2015. "The Structure of Contingency." *American Journal of Sociology* 121(1): 64-125.

May 22, 2026 – no class

May 29, 2026

### **Incremental change I**

Streeck, Wolfgang and Kathleen Thelen. 2005. "Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies." In *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, edited by Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen, pp. 1–39. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

June 5, 2026

### **Incremental change II**

Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen. 2010. "A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change." In *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, edited by James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, pp. 1–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

June 12, 2026

### **Neoliberalism 1: What is Neoliberalism?**

Mudge, Stephanie Lee. 2008. "What is Neo-Liberalism?" *Socio-Economic Review* 6(4): 703–731.

Evans, Peter B. and William H. Sewell, Jr. 2013. "Neoliberalism: Policy Regimes, International Regimes, and Social Effects." In *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*, edited by Peter A. Hall and Michèle Lamont, pp. 35–68. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

June 19, 2026

### **Neoliberalism 2: Breaking a path**

Blyth, Mark. 2002. "Disembedding Liberalism: Ideas to Break a Bargain." In *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 126–151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

June 26, 2026 (double session to 15:30)

### **Neoliberalism 3 & 4: Social power structures & Clandestine change**

J Soss, Joe, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford F. Schram. 2011. “The Rise of Neoliberal Paternalism” and “The Color of Neoliberal Paternalism.” In *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kentikelenis, Alexander E. and Sarah Babb. 2019. “The Making of Neoliberal Globalization: Norm Substitution and the Politics of Clandestine Institutional Change.” *American Journal of Sociology* 124(6): 1720–1762.

July 3, 2026 – no class

July 10, 2026

**Neoliberalism 5: After neoliberalism?**

Streeck, Wolfgang. 2014. “How Will Capitalism End?” *New Left Review* 11/87: 35–64.