

Field Seminar in Political Economy (SOT86411)

Technical University of Munich

Term: Winter 2025-26	Instructor: Timo Seidl
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Course Description

The field seminar offers an introduction to international and comparative political economy. Political economy is a subfield of political science which studies economic processes ‘along the lines of distributional conflict and inequalities, contested processes of rule-making, and the power of interests and ideas (...). It implies that the functioning of an economy is always conditioned and shaped by politics’ (May et al., 2024, p. 2). International (also sometimes called global) political economy is primarily concerned with how national political economies are embedded in global economic relationships and international economic institutions, highlighting their inter-relationship but also the interdependencies and hierarchies that characterize the global economy. Comparative political economy, meanwhile, focuses on differences in how economic processes are socially embedded and organized, comparing them both over time or across space: it investigates at how different constellations of interests, ideas, and institutions shape different ‘varieties’ of capitalism, and the implications this has for innovation, (re-)distribution, and politics itself.

While the field seminar offers a general introduction to key concepts, theories, and approaches in comparative and international political economy, the focus will be on their application to real-world developments and challenges. The seminar will thus be organized into three thematic blocs, which are themselves interrelated. The first bloc focuses on the political economy of climate change, exploring how politico-economic approaches can shed light on national differences in climate politics and policymaking while also discussing the global causes and consequences of developments on the national level. The second bloc focuses on the political economy of technological change, exploring how politico-economic approaches can help us understand the course and character of technological change. The third bloc, finally, will focus on how the ongoing geopolitical transformations affect political economies as well as the discipline of political economy itself, exploring dynamics like the weaponization of interdependence, the return of geoeconomics, and the securitization of economic policymaking.

Learning Outcomes

The seminar aims to familiarize with key concepts, theories, and approaches in comparative and international political economy, with a focus on technological, climate change, and geopolitical change. Upon successful completion of the seminar, students will be able to:

- Describe and summarize key theoretical arguments, debates, and empirical findings in comparative and international political economy.
- Critically assess these theoretical arguments and apply them to real-world problems in a manner that allows for empirical investigation.

Requirements

In line with the module, the examination consists of practical credit requirements (Übungsleistung), which involve completing a set of assigned tasks designed to assess students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problems in political economy.

The *first* task consists of up to three reflection papers, in which students are expected to: (i) identify, summarize and critically assess a central theoretical argument from one or more assigned texts for a given week, and (ii) apply this argument to a recent real-world development in political economy in a way that either sheds light on this argument or calls it into question (or both). These reflection papers should be approximately two pages long, with roughly one page dedicated to each of the two subtasks. Students must submit at least two papers for sessions of their choice but have the option to submit a third. If three papers are submitted, the two highest-graded papers will count toward the final grade. These reflection papers will make up 40% of the final grade.

The *second* task is a presentation on one or more of the assigned research papers, where students are expected to: (i) briefly summarize the key theoretical arguments of the selected paper(s), (ii) introduce a real or realistic empirical case study that could be used to test one or more of these arguments, including a reflection on potential data sources and empirical methods, and (iii) engage in discussion by responding to critical questions from the instructor and fellow students about their case study. The presentation, including the discussion, should last approximately 30 minutes and will account for 40% of the final grade.

The *third* task is a short in-class test, where students will write a brief essay in response to a prompt provided at the start of the test. They will choose between two prompt options, each requiring the application of a theoretical concept to a real-world problem. The test will last 15 minutes. Students may bring hand-written or printed notes but may not use any additional aids. This test will account for 20% of the final grade.

Prerequisites

Students need no prior knowledge to successfully complete the seminar, although a general familiarity with social science theories and approaches is helpful.

Course Policy

Basically, don't cheat and try to learn stuff. I'd also would—genuinely—appreciate if you regularly attend class in person, I promise I'll do my best to make it worth your while. For some more details, see below.

Feedback Policy

I want to give you as much feedback as you want—but I also don't want to waste my time writing more detailed feedback if you don't even care. So while by default you will only receive your grade, you can easily request written feedback by simply writing on your assignment or telling me directly that you would like to received written feedback (e.g., 'I want to receive written feedback on this paper.').

E-mail Policy

You can always email me if you have an idea for an assignment, if you want to learn more about a certain topic and don't know where to start, or if you have a question that you really don't want to ask in class. Please don't email me with questions that you could easily find the answer to in the syllabus or in my previous emails. I might take it badly. Two more things that make my life easier: First, please make sure to mention the course title in the subject line of your email. Second, please reply to previous email conversations with me instead of starting a new email, especially if it's about the same topic.

A.I. Policy

I encourage you to use large language models like *ChatGPT* to improve, speed up, or challenge your writing (be that of text or code)—I regularly do so myself. However, not only do I expect you do make this use very (!) transparent.¹ I also want you to reflect on three things: First, current large language models are not very useful if it's really important to get things right. If you see yourself working in an area where this matters, you will have to learn how to get things right. Second, current large language models are much more useful if you actually know what you're doing—much like a cheat code in a video game is much more useful to someone who is actually good at the game. So if you want to be augmented instead of replaced by large language models, keep learning stuff. Lastly, by routinely relying on AI shortcuts you relinquish, as English professor Thomas Pfau puts it, 'the experience of intellectual achievement and growth, which can only ever be the fruit of *sustained* personal effort'. Your time at university will become 'a relentless series of logistical challenges', rather than 'a process of learning and intellectual and personal growth'. So think very clearly about what you are giving up—and risking—when trying to save some time.

¹For example, you used an LLM to help you rephrase a certain paragraph, add a footnote saying something like 'I used GPT-4o to help me improve the phrasing of this paragraph.' If you use an LLM to brainstorm or come up with potential criticisms of your main argument, add a footnote at the start of the paper where you briefly explain how you used this criticism to improve your paper.

Grading Policy

In principle, all assigned tasks must receive a passing grade in order to pass the module. In exceptional cases, deviations from this rule may be considered, but any such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis at the instructor's discretion. However, in exceptional circumstances, alternative assignments may be permitted as a substitute. Your final grade will be a weighted average of the above-described assignments.

In general terms, what is important to me when it comes to grading are two things. First, stick to the task at hand and look at the syllabus to see what is actually expected from you; and second, put a bit of effort into it. Try to write something that you yourself would like to read. Be concise and clear, or at least make it clear when you found something unclear. You don't need to understand everything, have read a ton of additional literature, or write in a fancy way to get a very good grade. Just stick to the task and try to make sense.

Below you can find more detailed grading criteria, which apply, with varying degrees of emphasis, to most types of assessments. These criteria comprise: Strength and Originality of Argument, Theoretical Framework and Literature Engagement, Methodology and Empirical Evidence, Topicality and Academic or Practical Relevance, Structure and Organization, Clarity and Quality of Communication, Citation and Academic Integrity. In addition, I put some general advice on writing (a good term or response paper) on my website, which you can find here.

Very Good (1,0—1,3):

- *The argument is exceptionally clear, compelling, and thoroughly grounded in critical thinking, showcasing a high degree of originality. It demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the topic, integrating novel insights or approaches with persuasive and well-substantiated reasoning.*
- *Demonstrates an exceptional understanding and engagement with the theoretical framework and relevant literature. The research is characterized by extensive depth and breadth, critically engaging with a wide range of sources to offer new insights or interpretations. It reflects a sophisticated integration of theory with the research topic.*
- *The methodology is excellently chosen, well-executed, and thoroughly justified, with empirical evidence used effectively to support the argument. Evidence is highly relevant, accurately interpreted, and integrated seamlessly into the research, enhancing the strength and credibility of the findings.*
- *The research is exceptionally topical, engaging deeply with current questions or themes within the field. It demonstrates a high degree of academic relevance, providing insightful analysis that could inform theoretical frameworks, discussions, or future research. The paper offers thoughtful reflections on potential practical insights or implications, highlighting its broader significance.*
- *Excellently structured. Outstanding organization and clarity.*
- *Exceptional communication. Written or oral expression is clear, fluent, elegant, and highly engaging. Ideas are articulated effectively and concisely, facilitating a deep understanding.*
- *Perfect or near-perfect adherence to citation guidelines and excellent, visually appealing formatting. High academic integrity.*

Good (1,7—2,3):

- *The argument is strong and well-founded, displaying a good level of original thinking and critical engagement with the subject matter. It presents a coherent and convincing case, supported by evidence, with some innovative perspectives or methods.*
- *Shows a thorough understanding of the theoretical framework with a good engagement with pertinent literature. The research covers a broad spectrum of sources, providing a solid grounding in the field and contributing to the topic with some new perspectives or critical reflections.*
- *The methodology is mostly appropriate and well-executed, with good use of empirical evidence that supports the main argument. While mostly relevant and well-integrated, there may be minor issues in execution or interpretation that do not significantly detract from the overall strength of the research.*
- *Shows strong topicality and relevance, connecting well with contemporary scholarly debates or issues. It makes a notable academic contribution, with implications that suggest possible avenues for further investigation, theoretical development, or practical considerations in a more general sense. Practical insights are offered in a way that enriches the academic discourse.*
- *Well-structured. Good organization that supports the content.*
- *Good communication. Mostly clear and engaging, with minimal errors or distractions. Ideas are effectively conveyed, and the overall expression supports comprehension.*
- *Only cosmetic mistakes in citation or formatting. Generally adheres to academic standards.*

Satisfactory (2.7—3,3):

- *The work shows an adequate argument that is reasonably clear and supported, featuring some degree of originality. The argument has merit and is founded on appropriate reasoning, though it may occasionally lack depth or fail to fully persuade.*
- *Provides an adequate review of the theoretical framework and engages reasonably with relevant literature. The research demonstrates a sufficient depth and breadth, identifying key theories and sources, though it may lack in offering substantial new insights or critical analysis.*
- *The methodology is adequate, with some issues in choice or execution. Empirical evidence is used, with some relevance and support for the argument, but the integration and interpretation of data could be improved to strengthen the research outcomes.*
- *Adequately addresses current topics and demonstrates relevance to ongoing academic conversations. It offers some practical insights, presenting a grounded perspective on how the findings might be applied or considered in broader contexts. The paper contributes to academic understanding, albeit with more limited scope or depth.*
- *Adequately structured. Generally clear with some organizational issues.*
- *Adequate communication. Generally clear, though minor errors or awkwardness occasionally distract or impede immediate understanding. Ideas are communicated sufficiently but could benefit from improved presentation.*
- *Some smaller issues with citation or formatting, but generally correct.*

Sufficient (3.7—4.0):

- *There is an attempt at arguing a thesis, but the argument often lacks clarity, depth, and convincing evidence. Originality is limited, with the work showing minimal innovation in thought or approach. The argument is weak and not particularly persuasive.*
- *Exhibits a basic understanding of the theoretical framework with a limited engagement with relevant literature. The research scope is somewhat narrow, with gaps in the depth and breadth of literature reviewed, offering minimal new interpretations or critical engagement with existing theories.*
- *The methodology shows a basic level of appropriateness and execution, but lacks in thoroughness or precision. Empirical evidence is present but limited or flawed, with issues in relevance or integration that weaken the argument and research findings.*
- *Exhibits basic engagement with topical issues, with some relevance to the academic field. It hints at practical insights or implications, though these are not fully developed or are only tangentially addressed. The work provides a modest contribution, with potential areas for further exploration identified but not deeply explored.*
- *Acceptably structured. Some effort at organization but lacks clarity.*
- *Acceptable communication. Understandable overall, but frequently awkward, unclear, or disorganized. Errors or unclear expression frequently interrupt or complicate comprehension.*
- *Acceptable adherence but with some sloppiness or minor errors.*

Insufficient/Fail (4.3—5.0):

- *The argument is poorly structured, unclear, or largely absent, with no evidence of original thinking or critical engagement. It fails to make a convincing case, lacking both in strength and in the presentation of any novel insights or perspectives.*
- *Shows poor understanding and engagement with the theoretical framework and literature. The research is significantly lacking in depth and breadth, with little to no critical engagement with relevant sources or theories, failing to adequately support or contextualize the research topic.*
- *The methodology is poor or inappropriate, with significant flaws in execution. Empirical evidence is poorly used, irrelevant, or largely absent, offering little to no support for the argument or findings. This level reflects a fundamental misunderstanding or neglect of sound research practices.*
- *Lacks significant topicality or relevance, with minimal engagement with current academic or practical concerns. The paper offers little in the way of practical insights, failing to connect findings to broader discussions, potential applications, or theoretical implications.*
- *Poorly structured. Disorganized and difficult to follow.*
- *Poor communication. Frequent errors, unclear wording, disorganization, or a lack of coherence make understanding difficult.*
- *Poor adherence to citation and formatting. Major errors or ethical issues.*

Course Outline

Part I: General Introduction

Week 1, Oct 13, 2025: Introduction

no readings for this session

Week 2, Oct 20, 2025: A General Primer on Political Economy

Required Readings:

May, C., Mertens, D., Nölke, A., & Schedelik, M. (2024). Political Economy: Comparative, International, and Historical Perspectives. Springer International Publishing, pp. 1-36 & 87-108.

Optional Readings:

Cohen, B. J. (2008). International political economy: An intellectual history. Princeton University Press.

Menz, G. (2017). Comparative Political Economy: Contours of a Subfield. Oxford University Press.

Part II: Political Economy of Climate Change

Week 3, Oct 27, 2025: Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma?

Required Readings:

Bernauer, T. (2013). Climate Change Politics. Annual Review of Political Science, 16(1), 421–448. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-062011-154926>

Aklin, M., & Mildemberger, M. (2020). Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change. Global Environmental Politics, 20(4), 4–27. https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00578

Optional Readings:

Colgan, J. D., Green, J. F., & Hale, T. N. (2021). Asset Revaluation and the Existential Politics of Climate Change. International Organization, 75(2), 586–610. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000296>

Week 4, Nov 3, 2025: (The Institutional Foundations of) Strategic State Capacity

Required Readings:

Meckling, J., & Nahm, J. (2022). Strategic State Capacity: How States Counter Opposition to Climate Policy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(3), 493–523. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211024308>

Finnegan, J. J. (2022). Institutions, Climate Change, and the Foundations of Long-Term Policymaking. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(7), 1198–1235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211047416>

Optional Readings:

Finnegan, J. J. (2023). Changing Prices in a Changing Climate: Electoral Competition and Fossil Fuel Taxation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(8), 1257–1290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140221141853>

Kupzok, N., & Nahm, J. (2024). The Decarbonization Bargain: How the Decarbonizable Sector Shapes Climate Politics. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592724000951>

Week 5, Nov 11, 2025: Green Growth Models

Required Readings:

Baccaro, L., Blyth, M., & Pontusson, J. (2022). Introduction: Rethinking Comparative Capitalism. In L. Baccaro, M. Blyth, & J. Pontusson (Eds.), *Diminishing returns: The new politics of growth and stagnation* (pp. 1–50). Oxford University Press.

Nahm, J. (2022). Green Growth Models. In L. Baccaro, M. Blyth, & J. Pontusson (Eds.), *Diminishing returns: The new politics of growth and stagnation* (pp. 443–463). Oxford University Press.

Optional Readings:

Nahm, J. (2021). *Collaborative advantage: Forging green industries in the new global economy*. Oxford University Press.

Allan, B. B., & Nahm, J. (2024). Strategies of Green Industrial Policy: How States Position Firms in Global Supply Chains. *American Political Science Review*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000364>

Week 6, Nov 17, 2025: Unexpected Climate Activists?

Required Readings:

Golka, P. (2024). Epistemic gerrymandering: ESG, impact investing, and the financial governance of sustainability. *Review of International Political Economy*, 31(6), 1894–1918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2024.2382241>

Siderius, K. (2023). An unexpected climate activist: Central banks and the politics of the climate-neutral economy. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 30(8), 1588–1608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2093948>

Optional Readings:

Cooiman, F. (2023). The limits of derisking. (Un)conditionality in the European green transformation. *Competition & Change*, 10245294231224137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10245294231224137>

Gabor, D., & and Braun, B. (2025). Green macrofinancial regimes. *Review of International Political Economy*, 32(3), 542–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2025.2453504>

Part III: Political Economy of Technological Change

Week 7, Nov 24, 2025: The Technology Trap

Required Readings:

Mokyr, J. (1998). The Political Economy of Technological Change: Resistance and Innovation in Economic History. In M. Berg & K. Bruland (Eds.), *Technological Revolutions in Europe: Historical Perspectives* (pp. 39–64). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035335299>

Frey, C. B. (2019). *The technology trap: Capital, labor, and power in the age of automation*. Princeton University Press, pp. 1-28.

Optional Readings:

Frey, C. B. (2019). *The technology trap: Capital, labor, and power in the age of automation*. Princeton University Press, pp. 29-92

Week 8, Dec 1, 2025: Overcoming the Technology Trap: Domestic and International Factors

Required Readings:

Milner, H. V., & Solstad, S. U. (2021). Technological Change and the International System. *World Politics*, 73(3), 545–589. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887121000010>

Ornston, D. (2013). Creative Corporatism. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(6), 702–729. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463881>

Optional Readings:

Seidl, T. (2023). Investing in the knowledge economy: The comparative political economy of public investments in knowledge-based capital. *European Journal of Political Research*, 62(3), 924–944. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12546>

Week 9, Dec 8, 2025: Blockchain & Web3

Required Readings:

Miroshnichenko, A., & Birch, K. (2024). Constructing digital assets through blockchain technologies? Unpacking the techno-economic configuration of non-fungible tokens. *Social Studies of Science*, 03063127241286447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127241286447>

Olk, Christopher, and Louis Miebs. "A Credit Theory of Anti-Credit Money: How the Cryptocurrency Sphere Turned into a Shadow Banking System." *Review of International Political Economy*, April 8, 2025, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2025.2476738>.

Optional Readings:

Becker, K. (2022). Blockchain Matters—Lex Cryptographia and the Displacement of Legal Symbolics and Imaginaries. *Law and Critique*, 33(2), 113–130. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-021-09317-8>

De Filippi, P., Reijers, W., & Mannan, M. (2024). *Blockchain governance*. MIT Press, Introduction.

Week 10, Dec 15, 2025: Governing Artificial Intelligence

Required Readings:

Krurup, T., & Horst, M. (2023). European artificial intelligence policy as digital single market making. *Big Data & Society*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153811>

Paul, R. (2023). European artificial intelligence “trusted throughout the world”: Risk-based regulation and the fashioning of a competitive common AI market. *Regulation & Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12563>

Optional Readings:

Veale, M., Matus, K., & Gorwa, R. (2023). AI and Global Governance: Modalities, Rationales, Tensions. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 19, 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-020223-040749>

Gray Widder, D., West, S., & Whittaker, M. (2023). Open (For Business): Big Tech, Concentrated Power, and the Political Economy of Open AI. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4543807>

Week 11, Dec 22, 2025: Open Session

We decide in class what we want to do in this session. Can involve anything from recaps, to an AMA, to feedback on specific ideas or projects.

Part IV: Geopolitical Economy?

Week 12, Jan 12, 2025: The Second Cold War & The Age of Weaponized Interdependence

Required Readings:

Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (2019). Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion. *International Security*, 44(1), 42–79. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351

Schindler, S., Alami, I., DiCarlo, J., Jepson, N., Rolf, S., Bayırbağ, M. K., Cyuzuzo, L., DeBoom, M., Farahani, A. F., Liu, I. T., McNicol, H., Miao, J. T., Nock, P., Teri, G., Vila Seoane, M. F., Ward, K., Zajontz, T., & Zhao, Y. (2024). The Second Cold War: US-China Competition for Centrality in Infrastructure, Digital, Production, and Finance Networks. *Geopolitics*, 29(4), 1083–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2253432>

Optional Readings:

Rolf, S., & Schindler, S. (2023). The US–China rivalry and the emergence of state platform capitalism. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 55(5), 1255–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X221146545>

Week 13, Jan 19, 2025: Fortress Europe?

The test will take place during this session.

Required Readings:

Lavery, S. (2024). Rebuilding the fortress? Europe in a changing world economy. *Review of International Political Economy*, 31(1), 330–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2023.2211281>

Schneider, E. (2023). Germany's Industrial strategy 2030, EU competition policy and the Crisis of New Constitutionalism. (Geo-)political economy of a contested paradigm shift. *New Political Economy*, 28(2), 241–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2022.2091535>

Optional Readings:

McNamara, K. R. (2024). Transforming Europe? The EU's industrial policy and geopolitical turn. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(9), 2371–2396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2230247>

Seidl, T., & Schmitz, L. (2024). Moving on to not fall behind? Technological sovereignty and the 'geo-dirigiste' turn in EU industrial policy. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(8), 2147–2174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2248204>

Week 14, Jan 26, 2025: The Political Economy of China

Required Readings:

Li, X., & Ban, C. (2025). Financing technological innovation in China: Neo-developmental financial statecraft through government guidance funds. *Review of International Political Economy*, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2025.2546858>

Nahm, J. (2021). Collaborative advantage: Forging green industries in the new global economy. Oxford University Press, chapter 5.

Optional Readings:

Chen, M., & Petry, J. (2023). What about the dragon in the room? Incorporating China into international political economy (IPE) teaching. *Review of International Political Economy*, 30(3), 801–822. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2023.2175711>

Chen Weiss, J. (Ed.). (2025). Getting China Right at Home. Addressing the Domestic Challenges of Intensifying Competition. <https://acf.sais.jhu.edu/assets/files/getting-china-right-at-home.pdf>

Week 15, Feb 2, 2025: Joint Session with the Political Economy of Military Innovation Seminar

Short input by and discussion with Tim Trampedach, Principal Product Manager at Helsing GmbH