14335.0706
Winter term 2026/27

European and international perspectives on the political economy of business interest

This Syllabus version August 2026

Lecturer: Friedrich Haas

Time: Bloc sessions on Fridays (16 October, 2 – 5:30; 6 November, 12 – 5:30; 27 November, 12 – 5:30; 18 December, 12 – 5:30; 8 January, 12 – 5:30)
Place: IBW-Building (Gebäude 211), Room 3.40
First Session: 16. October 2026

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Office Hours upon consulation

Logistics

Exam registration only via KLIPS.
Please check the department's information regarding examinations, etc.:
https://politics.uni-koeln.de/en/academics/examinations/term-papers-and-degree-theses
If you have a disability and need assistance during the course or with the assignments, please send me an email or speak to me directly.

Course Description and Learning Objectives

How much power do companies have over political decisions? Are companies just one interest group among many, or are they fundamentally different? What are the power resources on which corporate power is based? Can the interests and preferences of companies be derived solely from their pursuit of profit? What strategies can companies use to exert influence? And when is which strategy successful? How do corporate strategies, interests, and power vary across different institutional and political contexts, including across national, European, and international levels? What differences exist over time? And how can all of this actually be studied? The goal of this seminar is to provide an overview of these and other questions. To this end, the seminar offers a fundamental introduction to the political economy literature on corporate power and its relevance to international and multilevel politics. In the first part of the seminar, we will examine different levels and types of power and address the question of what interests firms actually pursue. We will also consider how business actors interact with political institutions and decision-makers at the national, European, and international levels**.** To explore all dimensions of corporate power, the second part of the seminar will introduce the development of a research design and present fundamental methods. In the third part of the course, we will examine how corporate power and interests vary across time, space, and levels of governance. We will consider how institutional contexts shape corporate strategies and political influence, including in European and international political processes. We will also examine under what circumstances companies act collectively and when they act individually, and what influence company size has on this. Finally, the fourth section takes a closer look at various strategies companies use to exert influence. We examine how companies can shape the political agenda, the role information plays in corporate power, how companies can influence political decisions through lobbyists, the interplay between public opinion and corporate power, and how companies can influence the implementation of political decisions across different political and institutional settings.

In conclusion, students will have the opportunity to present and discuss their research designs at a mini-conference. It is the shared responsibility of instructors and students to create a respectful, inclusive, and attentive atmosphere in the seminar.
The seminar consists of five block sessions:

16 October, 2 – 5:30	Introduction
6 November, 12 – 5:30	Theoretical foundations
27 November, 12 – 5:30	Research Designs; Temporal, national, multi-level and organizational variations
18 December, 12 – 5:30	European and international perspectives
8 January, 12 – 5:30	Mini Conference

Preliminary Readings:

Hart, D.M. (2010): The Political Theory of the Firm. In: Coen, D., Grant, W. & Wilson, G. (Hrsg.): The Oxford Handbook of Business and Government. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 173-190.

Pierson, Paul (2016): Power in Historical Institutionalism. In: Fioretos, Orfeo; Falleti, Tulia G.; Sheingate, A. (Hrsg.): The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism. 125-141

Korpi, W. (1985): Power Resources Approach vs. Action and Conflict: On Causal and Intentional Explanations in the Study of Power. Sociological Theory, 3(2). 31-45.

Culpepper, Pepper D. (2015): Structural Power and Political Science in the Post-Crisis Era. Business & Politics, 17(3). 291-409.

Young, Kevin (2015): Not by Structure Alone: Power, Prominence, and Agency in American Finance. Business & Politics, 17(3). 443-472.

Bell, S. & Hindmoor, A. (2014): The Structural Power of Business and the Power of Ideas: The Strange Case of the Australian Mining Tax. New Political Economy, 19(3). 470-486.

Busemeyer, Marius & Thelen, Kathleen (2020): Institutional Sources of Business Power. World Politics, 72(3). 448-480.

Culpepper, P.D. & Thelen, K. (2020): Are we all Amazon Primed? Consumers and the Politics of Platform Power. Comparative Political Studies, 53(2). 288-318.

Braun, Benjamin (2020): Central Banking and the Infrastructural Power of Finance: The Case of ECB Support for Repo and Securitization Markets. Socioeconomic Review, 18(2). 395-418.

Woll, Cornelia (2008): Firm Interests: How Governments shape Business Lobbying on Global Trade. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. xi-xiv & 20-38.

Hacker, Jacob S. & Pierson, Paul (2002): Business Power and Social Policy: Employers and the Formation of the American Welfare State. Politics & Society, 30(2). 277-286 & 313-315

Fuchs, D. (2007): Business Power in Global Governance. Chapter 5: Structural Power: Old and New Facets. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 103-137.

Pagliari, S. & Young, Kevin L. (2020): How Financialization is Reproduced Politically. In: Mader, P., Mertens, D. & van der Zwan, N. (Hrsg.): The Routledge International Handbook of Financialization. London: Routledge. 113-124

Kemmerling, M. & Trampusch, C. (2023): Digital power resources (DPR): the political economy of structural and infrastructural business power in digital(ized) capitalism. Socio-Economic Review, 21(4), 1851-1876.

Hancké, B. (2010): Varieties of Capitalism and Business. In: Coen, D., Grant, W. & Wilson, G. (Hrsg.): The Oxford Handbook of Business and Government. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 123-147.

Baumgartner, F.R. (2010): Interest Groups and Agendas. In: Maisel, L.S., Berry, J.M., Edwards III, G.C. (Hrsg.): The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups. 520 - 533.

Culpepper, P.D. (2010): Quiet Politics and Business Power. Corporate Control in Europe and Japan. Chapter 7: Business Power and Democratic Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 177-198.
Kollmann, K. (1998): Outside Lobbying. Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies. Chapter 1: Introduction. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 3-27.
Seidl, T. (2022): The Politics of Platform Capitalism: A Case Study on the Regulation of Uber in New York. Regulation & Governance, 16(2), 357-374.
Keller, E. (2018): Noisy Business Politics: Lobbying Strategies and Business Influence after the financial crisis. Journal of European Public Policy, 25(3). 287-306.
Carpenter, D. & Moss, D.A. (2014): Preventing Regulatory Capture. Special Interest Influence and How to Limit It. Chapter 1: Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1-22
Slayton, R. & Clark-Ginsberg, A. (2018): Beyond Regulatory Capture: Coproducing Expertise for Critical Infrastructure Protection. Regulation & Governance, 12. 115-130.
Endrejat, V. & Thiemann, M. (2020): When Brussels meets Shadow Banking – Technical Complexity, Regulatory Agency and the Reconstruction of the Shadow Banking Chain. Competition & Change, 24(3-4). 225-247.

Requirements and Assessment Format (preliminary)

The course assessment consists of a presentation on a text, a brief presentation of the student's own research design, and a term paper. The goal of this presentation, which should last no more than 10 minutes, is to introduce a relevant research question and explain which concepts, methods, and data are necessary to answer that question. The presentations will take place during the mini-conference at the end of the semester, and passing the presentation is a prerequisite for being admitted to the term paper. The topics of the term papers can be chosen freely but should be related to the course and must be approved in advance. An abstract (approx. two pages) must be submitted by December 21, 2026 (11:55 p.m.). You will receive feedback on this from me and another course participant during the mini-conference. The term paper should be 5,000 words (+/-10%) and must be submitted by January 27, 2027 (11:55 p.m.). Submissions must be made electronically via ILIAS.