

# Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20106]

---

## Proposed title of the session

Government Institutions, Access to Economic Opportunity, and Income Redistribution

## Abstract

Government Institutions play a major role in access to economic opportunity and consequently have substantial implications for the income distribution in an economy. This has become more clear in light of recent books by John Wallis, Douglass North, and Barry Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders* (Cambridge University Press), Doron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail* (Crown Business), and Thomas Piketty, *Capital* (2014). All three make significant contributions to the topic but there is plenty of room for more analysis. Our session will go into depth on a variety of ways in which government institutions structure the interactions between elites and laborers and thus influence economic opportunity. Wallis, North, and Weingast talk about the large number of societies where only the elite in personal relationships dominate the political economy and there is limited access to opportunity for nearly all members of society. One sign of limited access societies is slavery or serfdom. He (Helen) Yang from Xiamen University will examine the structure of serfdom and how it influenced tax policy and the interactions between elites and serfs in China. Another is a strong control by the elites at the national level over local elites Tianyang (Tim) Xi from Peking University will examine the nature of fiscal decentralization and its effect on the control of bureaucratic decisions in the late Qing dynasty in Chinese History. Cong Liu at Arizona (graduate student) will examine the influences of opening up to international trade on the internal structure of labor markets in China. A major question is how a relative small number of societies have made the transition to open access societies where a much larger share of the population has access to economic opportunity. John Wallis of Maryland plans to examine the ways in which the control of violence by elites is organized in limited access states and how this influences the transition to open access states where many have access to economic opportunity. A defining feature of open access societies is the development of rules that are largely applied in a neutral fashion. A key set of rules in such a society related to labor relations, regulation of labor conditions, and laws related to social insurance, and poverty relief. These laws can be strongly influenced by elites, reformers, and workers depending on their relative political strength. They also can have significant impact on societies. A group of scholars will address these issues within various countries, including: Andrew Seltzer at Royal Holloway, Jessica Bean at Denison, Michael Huberman at Geneva, Price Fishback at Arizona, Sam Allen at Virginia Military Institute, Theresa Gutberlet at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and Maria Stanfors at Lunds. We may have room to add scholars, particularly in the limited access and transition phase discussions.

---

## I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Price Fishback (University of Arizona [United States of America])

---

## II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
  2. Prof. Andrew Seltzer (Royal Holloway, University of London [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
  3. Prof. Jessica Bean (Denison University [United States of America])
- 

## III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Andrew Seltzer (Royal Holloway, University of London [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
3. Jessica Bean (Denison University [United States of America])
4. He (Helen) Yang (Xiamen University [China])
5. Tianyang (Tim) Xi (Peking University [China])
6. Maria Stanfors (Lunds University [Sweden])
7. John Wallis (University of Maryland [United States of America])
8. Michael Huberman (University of Geneva [Switzerland])
9. Theresa Gutberlet (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute [United States of America])
10. Cong Liu (University of Arizona [China])