

Strategic Models of Democratic Politics

Winter Term 2020/2021

Time: Mondays and Fridays 14:00 – 15:30 PM

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Office Hours: Wednesday 13:00 – 15:00 PM

Overview. Why do some governments redistribute more than others? Can voters effectively hold politicians accountable for their behavior? Can we identify the ‘will of the people’ through elections? Rational choice models of political decision-making have been used to answer all these questions and many more. This course will introduce students to key analytical concepts and mathematical results from social choice theory – the study of how individual preferences are aggregated – as well as game theory – the study of decision-making by rational agents within a strategic environment. It will also illustrate how the mathematical models developed in these fields can be used to understand recent political events and dilemmas. Finally, towards the end of the course, we will engage with ongoing debates on how mathematical models can and should be interpreted, empirically evaluated, and used by political scientists. By the end of the course, students should be able to (i) solve and interpret simple mathematical models and (ii) to apply such models to the study of political behaviour, processes and outcomes.

Course Organization. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this course will be delivered online using the software Zoom. We will meet online twice a week between 2 November and 14 December 2020, with enrolled participants receiving an invitation to participate in each session before the scheduled time. To accommodate students who are unable to participate at the allotted time, recordings of each session will also be made available via ILIAS.

I will also be available on Zoom in my personal meeting room during my office hours every Wednesday (13:00 – 15:00 PM) for the duration of the lecture period. If you are unable to make this time slot, we can schedule a different time to talk by appointment. Please be aware you may have to wait if there is a queue.

Prerequisites. In order to succeed in this course, students should be comfortable with, or willing to brush up on, high school algebra and basic probability theory. Later in the course, we will also make use of univariate calculus. I suggest some useful resources for revising these topics up to the expected level below, under ‘Readings’. Moreover, students should be able to understand and express themselves in English, as this will be the classroom language – though perfection is neither expected nor required. All coursework should also be completed in English.

Assessment. Your performance in this course will be evaluated using a portfolio examination, comprising of three, equally weighted, graded assignments. The assignments will require students to apply the concepts and tools covered in the class to solve and comment on simple social choice or game theo-

retic problems. Students will have two weeks to complete each assignment (longer over the Christmas break). Completed assignments should be uploaded to ILLIAS by 23:59 CET on 23 November, 7 December and 11 January, respectively.

You may discuss the problems with other students, but answers should be written up independently. Two nearly identical assignments will receive zero, and late submissions will be penalized unless previously arranged with the instructor. If you work with others, please indicate their names on your submission.

Formatting. You are encouraged to use the document preparation system \LaTeX to write up your assignments, which is well-suited for typesetting mathematical content. To provide some initial guidance, a \LaTeX tutorial will be uploaded to ILLIAS along with the first assignment for students to consult in their own time. However, you may upload handwritten assignments if you wish (so long as handwriting is neat and legible).

Readings. Most required readings will be drawn from the two starred textbooks listed below. Students may also like to purchase their own copies from online vendors.

- *Kenneth A. Shepsle. 2010. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*.
- *Steve Tadelis. 2013. *Game Theory: An Introduction*.
- Dennis Mueller. 2003. *Public Choice III*.

In addition to the required (starred) readings, I suggest some additional references for students who would like to deepen their understanding of individual topics. Any recommended readings will be made available to students by the instructor via ILLIAS.

Some useful resources on mathematical methods:

- Schaum's Outline of Probability and Statistics (4th edition), chapter 1.
- Schaum's Outline of Calculus (6th edition), especially chapters 9-10, 13-15.

Key Dates.

- 2 November 2020: first session
- 9 November 2020: Assignment #1 distributed
- 23 November 2020: Assignment #1 due; Assignment #2 distributed
- 7 December 2020: Assignment #2 due; Assignment #3 distributed
- 14 December 2020: last session
- 11 January 2020: Assignment #3 due

Course Schedule

2 November: Fundamentals of Rational Choice

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, chs. 1-2.

6 November: The Problem of Social Choice I

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, chs. 3-4.
- Mueller, *Public Choice III*, ch. 24.

9 November: The Problem of Social Choice II

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, p. 90-110.

13 November: Strategic Behaviour in Politics

- *Ferreira, *Game Theory*, chs. 1.1-1.6 and 2.

16 November: Collective Action Problems I

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, ch. 9 (skip p. 293-301).
- Mueller, *Public Choice III*, p. 9-18 and 39-42.

20 November: Electoral Competition

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, p. 111-123.
- Mueller, *Public Choice III*, ch. 11.

23 November: Strategic Interaction over Time

- *Ferreira, *Game Theory*, ch. 4.

27 November: NO CLASS

30 November: Legislative Bargaining

- *Ferreira, *Game Theory*, ch. 6.
- Mueller, *Public Choice III*, ch. 17.

4 December: Coalition Formation

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, ch. 16.
- Mueller, *Public Choice III*, p. 278-295.

7 December: Collective Action Problems II

- *Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, ch. 10.

11 December: Democracy, Inequality and Redistribution

- Lane Kenworthy and Jonas Pontusson. 2005. "Rising Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution in Affluent Countries." *Perspectives on Politics* 3(3): 449-471.
- Mueller, *Public Choice III*, ch. 21.

14 December: Use and Abuse of Models

- *Donald Green and Ian Shapiro. 1994. *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*, chs. 2-3.

In addition, participants should read at least **one** of the following readings:

1. Mathew McCubbins and Michael Thies. 1996. "Rationality and the foundations of positive political theory." *Rebaisan [Leviathan]* 19: 7-32.
2. Jack Paine and Scott A. Tyson. 2019. "Uses and Abuses of Formal Models in Political Science", in the *SAGE Handbook of Political Science: A Global Perspective*.