

# Strategic Models of Politics

PLSC 342, EP&E 220

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*Class Meetings:* Monday, Wednesday 2:30-3:45, Harkness Hall (WLH) 201 (Sudler)

*Office Hours:* Svolik: Tuesdays 3-4pm, RKZ 330, or by appointment; Grubman (A-L): Thursdays 9:30-11:30am, RKZ 221; Goldstein (M-S): Wednesdays, 4-6pm in RKZ 204

*Course Web Page:* [canvas.yale.edu](https://canvas.yale.edu)

*Midterm Exam:* October 31, 2018, in class

*Final Exam:* December 17, 2018, 7pm

**Description:** This class introduces students to the strategic analysis of politics. We will use insights from rational choice, game theory, and social choice theory to address key questions in political science and political economics: why voters vote in elections; how candidates choose platforms; how electoral systems shape politicians' and voters' behavior; whether voters can hold politicians accountable for their performance in office; how constitutions affect politicians' incentives to compromise; why common resources tend to be overexploited; whether the state is needed for public good provision; and why countries fight wars. Throughout the course, we will introduce key analytical tools and concepts from rational choice and game theory, and we will discuss their use and limitations.

**Course Requirements:** Students are required to attend lectures, read the assigned material, and participate in class discussions. The final grade will be composed as follows: class participation 5%, problem sets 30%, midterm 30%, and final 35%. Class participation includes a paragraph-per-reading email summary of the readings assigned for each meeting

and active participation in class discussions.

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is required. Notify me in advance if you will be absent.

**Reading summaries:** I will ask you to submit a paragraph-per-reading summary/discussion of the readings assigned for each meeting to “Reading Summaries” on Canvas by noon on the day of the class. The purpose of these summaries is to facilitate your preparation for the class and encourage you to participate in class discussions. You can also use these summaries as an opportunity to provide feedback on the assigned readings. I may draw on your summaries during class discussion.

**In-class behavior:** Cell phones and related devices must be turned off and stowed away during class. Laptop computers can be used for class purposes only.

**Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s work, words, or ideas as if they were your own – including in exams and problem sets. Plagiarism is a serious offense that is punished severely at Yale. The most common penalty is suspension from the University. Please be sure to review [Yale’s Academic Integrity Policy](#).

**Readings:** Most instruction will be based on my lectures slides/notes and assigned readings. Additionally, I will base several lectures on the following textbook; you may therefore consider purchasing it:

Shepsle, Kenneth A. 2010. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions (Second Edition)*. New York: W.W. Norton.

The course readings are all available either on reserve at the library (books) or on Canvas (articles and book chapters) under “Files/Readings.” My lecture slides will be posted under “Files/Slides.”

## Course Outline:

Below is a list of topics that we will cover; we will adjust our pace as we go.

### Introduction: Rational Choice and Classic Dilemmas in Politics

*Concepts: Rational Choice, Preferences*

Chapters 1-2 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

Chapter 6, “Prisoner’s Dilemma,” in Poundstone, William. 1992. *Prisoner’s Dilemma*. New York: Anchor Books.

Chapter 1, “The Stag Hunt,” in Skyrms, Brian. 2004. *The Stag Hunt and the Evolution of Social Structure*, chapter The Stag Hunt, pages 1–13. Cambridge University Press.

### Strategic Behavior and Politics

*Concepts: Games in Normal Form, Best Response Function, Nash Equilibrium*

*Recommended Reading:* Chapter 2 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

### Collective Action Problems

pp. 262-292 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

### The Tragedy of the Commons

Chapter 10 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

Chapter 2 in Diamond, Jared M. 2005. *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York: Viking.

## **Protests and Revolutions**

King, Gary, Pan, Jennifer, and Roberts, Margaret E. 2013. How censorship in china allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*.

Gladwell, Macolm, “Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted,” *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, Vol. 86 Issue 30, p. 42-49.

Kuran, Timur. 1991. Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989. *World Politics*, 44:7–48.

## **The Calculus of Voting**

pp. 293-301 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

Gerber, Alan S., Green, Donald P., and Larimer, Christopher W. 2008. Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 102(1):33–48.

## **Coordination Dilemmas in Electoral Systems**

Chapter 7 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

Chapter 4 in [Cox \(1997\)](#).

## **Electoral Competition**

Pages 110-123 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

Chapters 2 and 8 in Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper.

## **Democracy and Redistribution I**

Chapter 2 in Bartels, Larry M. 2009. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chapter 2 in Gelman, Andrew. 2008. *Red state, blue state, rich state, poor state: Why Americans vote the way they do*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## **Taking Turns: Strategic Interaction over Time**

*Concepts: Extensive Games, Subgame Perfect Equilibrium*

*Further Reading:* Chapter 5 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

## **Veto Bargaining in Presidential Systems**

Section “Spatial Models of Legislatures” in Chapter 5 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

## **Bargaining and War**

*Concepts: Choice under Uncertainty, Expected Utility*

Fearon, James D. 1995. Rationalist Explanations for War. *International Organization*, 49(3):379–414.

## **Brinkmanship and Commitment Problems**

Chapter 8, “The Threat That Leaves Something to Chance” in Schelling, Thomas C. 1960. *The strategy of conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

## **Electoral Accountability**

Chapters 4-6 in Achen, Christopher H. and Bartels, Larry M. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton: Princeton.

## **Democracy and Redistribution II**

Chapters 1-2 in Acemoglu, Daron and Robinson, James A. 2005. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## **The Will of the Majority I: Agenda Manipulation and Strategic Voting**

Chapter 6 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).

Chapters 3 and 11 in [Riker \(1986\)](#).

## **The Will of the Majority II: Collective Choice and the Limits of Democracy**

Chapters 3-4 in [Shepsle \(2010\)](#).