Formal Models of Elections and Representation

Tuesday 2:30 PM – 4:30 PM  Eads  Room 209

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Course Abstract: Political representation deals with the correspondence between citizen preferences and public policies. This seminar examines the critical role elections play in linking the two. In particular, we will examine how electoral incentives influence the platforms candidates campaign on and the policies they pursue upon entering office. A reoccurring theme throughout this course will be the role elections play in both disciplining incumbent behavior and enabling voters to select politicians that share their policy commitments. Particular attention will be given to understanding how changes in electoral laws and institutional arrangements affect the incentives of politicians to cater to certain constituencies while neglecting others.

Roughly, the first half of the semester focuses on models of candidate competition (i.e., we examine Down-sian models where campaign promises are binding and citizen-candidate models where campaign promises are pure cheap talk). The second half of the semester focuses on the policy choices of incumbent office holders who make their decisions in the shadow of pending elections.

Office Hours: If you have questions concerning a particular reading, desire feedback on your writing, etc., I strongly encourage you to come to my office hours or make an appointment.

Grading: Your grade will be determined by the quality of your writing (3/5) and class participation/presentations (2/5)

Writing: The writing requirement for this course is six “analytical summaries” and one “research prospectus.”

Analytical Summaries (2/5 of grade): I’d like you to turn in six short analytical summaries over the course the semester. Each summary should be no longer than 4 pages (double-spaced, 12pt font) and focus on a single class reading. Each summary should (1) identify the paper’s research questions, (2) provide a brief overview of the paper’s model, (3) identify the paper’s main results, and (4) explain the logic underlying key results with as little mathematical notation as possible. The bulk of each summary should be devoted to explaining the logic of the results. When writing the summary, think of your audience being a scholar who

1Last edited on January 15, 2013.
2While I do not expect to make changes to the syllabus, I reserve the right to do so if needed.
3Things like “option A and option B” are ok, but do not include equations. For an nice discussion of a model with no math that gives a pretty good understanding of the model and results, see the introduction of Stephen Morris, 2001, “Political Correctness,” Journal of Political Economy 109:231–265.
knows the literature, knows game theory, but hasn’t read the paper being reviewed very closely. Summaries are to be e-mailed to me (jfox26@wustl.edu) the day of class. (For example, if you write a paper dealing with the readings we will discuss on January 22nd, you must e-mail me your paper by 9 AM on January 22nd.)

Research Prospectus (1/5 of grade): Your research prospectus is due at 5 PM on April 25th, and should be about five pages long, double spaced. We will schedule a special session of the class where you will be given ten to fifteen minutes to present your prospectus followed by questions from me and your classmates.

Your research prospectus should consist of an extension of an existing model. Two potentially profitable approaches are the following: (1) Begin with a question – e.g., Does publishing roll-call votes lead to “better” public policy? – and use an existing theoretical setup to address the question. The other approach is to take an existing paper, modify one of its key assumptions in an interesting manner, and explore how the key insights of the original paper are affected. The way to do this is by constructing a simple example that illustrates the primary effect of changing one of the original model’s assumptions.

The ultimate aim of this assignment is to get practice developing the “essential insight” that underlies a research paper. Students are required to meet with me no later than April 2nd to discuss their initial ideas about their research prospectus and to begin the conversation about what will constitute an acceptable prospectus. (1/5 of grade)

Student Presentations: All students will be expected to present two to four papers over the course of the semester (the total number of presentation will depend on the number of students taking the class). To the extent possible, I will take student preferences into account when assigning which papers everyone will present.

Each presentation is to be about 35-40 minutes long. And the presentation should have the following general structure: (1) The first couple minutes should be devoted to framing the question the paper is seeking to address. (2) The presenter should then go through the model’s setup in detail. Be sure to clearly articulate who the players are, their respective strategies, and the solution concept employed. (3) The presenter should then work through the paper’s main results on the white board/chalk board. Here the aim is not to reproduce every step of the paper’s proofs, but to give a deep sense of the model’s mechanics (this sometimes requires using figures, sometimes examining simplified variants of the model being discussed, etc.) and the general logic underlying the paper’s main results. By watching me work through the papers during the first few class meetings, what I’m looking for in presentations will become more concrete. Presenters should meet with me

4I tentatively propose that we hold the session on April 26th.
the Thursday before their presentation to discuss the details of their talk.

Readings and Class Format: All reading are available online. For most weeks, we will cover two theoretical papers. Typically, I’ll spend a couple minutes at the start and end of class highlighting how the assigned papers connect to the larger literature and broader questions of interest to political economists. We’ll devote about 50 minutes to each paper.\footnote{Note, each student should expect to present two to four papers over the course of the semester.}

Prerequisites Either PS 506 or an equivalent game theory course. For those whose game theory is rusty, a very nice overview is “An Introduction to Applicable Game Theory” by Robert Gibbons, published in the Journal of Economic Perspectives.
**Week 1: January 15** *The Spatial Model of Politics: Candidate Divergence* This week I will over the syllabus, walk through the median voter theorem, and present some, but not all, of the results from the following papers.


**Week 2: January 22** *The Spatial Model of Politics: Competing on Ideology and Valence*


**Week 3: January 29** *Citizen Candidate Models of Politics*


**Week 4: February 5** *Spending Limits and Advertising Bans*

Week 5: February 12 Money and Politics Continued


Week 6: February 19 Contracting Models (Inducing effort by politicians)


Week 7: February 26 Selecting on Competence


Week 8: March 5 Selecting on Ideology


Week 9: March 19 Trustee Models and Signaling Competence


**Week 10: March 26 Trustee Models and Signaling Ideology**


**Week 11: April 2 Applications: Institutional Solutions to Agency Slack**


**Week 12: April 9 Campaigning**


**Week 13: April 16 Elections and Public Finance**


**Week 14: April 23 Policymaking when Voters are Learning about Policies**


Student Presentations TBA