Strategic Models of Politics
PLSC 342, EP&E 220

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Teaching Fellows: Daniel Goldstein (daniel.a.goldstein@yale.edu), Nathan Grubman (nathan.grubman@yale.edu)

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

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:


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).


Strategic Behavior and Politics

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

Recommended Reading: Chapter 2 in Osborne (2004).

Collective Action Problems


The Tragedy of the Commons

Chapter 10 in Shepsle (2010).

Protests and Revolutions


The Calculus of Voting

pp. 293-301 in *Shepsle* (2010).


Coordination Dilemmas in Electoral Systems

Chapter 7 in *Shepsle* (2010).

Chapter 4 in *Cox* (1997).

Electoral Competition

Pages 110-123 in *Shepsle* (2010).

Democracy and Redistribution I


**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*


**Brinkmanship and Commitment Problems**


**Electoral Accountability**

Democracy and Redistribution II

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).