

**EMPIRICAL AND MATHEMATICAL REASONING 13:  
ANALYZING POLITICS**  
Spring 2017

Professor:

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### **General Comments**

This course surveys approaches to and models of politics based on the rational-actor paradigm. The underlying theme of the course is that politics may be described and understood in terms of rational, goal-seeking behavior by individuals in various institutional contexts. This approach explains a broad range of political phenomena, provides non-obvious insights, illuminates a number of paradoxes and puzzles, and (hopefully) encourages the student to think deeply and with sophistication about current events, history, and both public and private political life generally. The main emphasis is on providing tools and approaches for *analyzing* political events and phenomena.

The lessons of the rational-choice approach apply to *private* politics as well as to *public* politics – to office and workplace politics and the politics of families, clubs, Harvard houses, university departments, churches, and firms, as well as to the public politics of legislatures, courts, bureaucracies, elections, parties, and interest groups.

The course is arranged into one organizational session, 20+ lectures by me, two guest lectures, and 7 section meetings. Lectures are given two times weekly, lasting one hour each. They are arranged into four main subjects: individual choice, group choice, collective action, and institutions. Sections meet on many of the weeks of the term. Sections will focus on four principal tasks: controversies, experiments, general discussions, and examination reviews.

Student performance is judged on the basis of the following activities: (1) an in-class midterm examination on Thursday, March 9 (35%); (2) section participation + experimental performance (20%); (3) a 1000-word paper on *one* of the “controversies” defined below (10%); and (4) *either* a 3000- word paper due on Thursday, May 4 (the first day of the examination period), *or* an in-class final examination scheduled by the College (35%). The midterm will cover materials through the lectures on collective action. The final paper, if you choose this option, may either be an elaboration of the shorter paper or an entirely new one; it should be discussed with and approved in advance by your TF.

## **Section Participation**

Section participation is extremely important in this course. We will make section assignments no later than Tuesday, January 31. On two such occasions the student will participate in a group social science experiment that illustrates some of the principles with which we shall be concerned during the semester. Three other section meetings will be devoted to selected controversies, applying the lessons of the lecture and specific reading material to controversial issues. Finally, discussion/review meetings of section will be scheduled for just before the midterm and final examinations. Most weeks, section will last only an hour. The experimental sessions may take up the full hour and a half.

## **Readings**

All readings should be done during the week indicated since they are keyed to lecture materials. Some of the readings serve as broad background for the lectures; others explicitly cover lecture materials; still others are assigned for specific section meetings. The books are available at the COOP. The other materials will be made available through electronic links on the syllabus or on-line on the course web page. The books for purchase are:

### REQUIRED

Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> EDITION

### RECOMMENDED

Humphreys, *Political Games: Mathematical Insights on Fighting, Voting, Lying, and Other Affairs of State*

Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*

Laver, *Playing Politics: The Nightmare Continues* (for free on course web site)

The books by Laver and Riker (*The Art...*) are collections of stories, vignettes, and experiments; their contents are distributed throughout the syllabus. The other book by Riker (*Liberalism...*) and the one by Shepsle will serve as texts for the course. The book by Humphreys is a brilliant collection of very short and punchy episodes elaborating theoretical concepts. (Only 18 of the 49 episodes, plus the introduction, are explicitly listed in the reading assignments, but the entire collection is provocative.)

## **Experiments**

On a number of occasions during section meetings, students will participate in social science experiments. In each experiment, students, depending on their play and that of their classmates, will win "points." These points will add up during the semester and students will be rank ordered in terms of total points. Those in the top 40% will have his or her section participation grade incremented by one grading level, e.g., B+ to A-.

## **Papers**

There will be three “controversy” discussions in section. Before the first one, the student must indicate to his or her TF on which one of the three controversies he or she will play a leadership role in discussion. By the Monday before the date of that session, he or she will turn in a memo *no longer than a page* to the TF, outlining the major issues to be emphasized during discussion. A list of bullet points is fine. The TF will use these memos (several students will write them for each discussion) to organize the session. These memos serve an additional function for the student. They will serve as a preliminary outline for a 1000-word paper elaborating on the themes of the controversy. That paper is to be turned in to the TF the following week (so that the student can benefit from any discussion in class). If a student chooses, he or she may expand this paper to satisfy the final paper requirement. The writing of the final paper, if this option is chosen, should be done in consultation with his or her TF. It is due on Thursday, May 4.

## **Examinations and Other Logistics**

Both the in-class midterm and the final are *open-book* and *open-note*. The student will be permitted to use any materials to assist him or her – books, articles, lecture and section notes, handouts, etc. – anything but personal consultants! Therefore, it is vital to attend lecture and section very regularly. Students are encouraged to prepare for these examinations in groups.

Professor Shepsle is available for individual meetings during his office hours (Thursdays 1-3) or at other times that may be scheduled by contacting him after class, telephoning his office, or e-mailing him. Likewise, the TFs are available for assistance and will announce office hours, office locations, and telephone number at the first discussion section.

## **Collaboration Policy**

Students should be aware that in this course collaboration on any papers submitted for formal evaluation is not permitted. This means that, while you may discuss your ideas with other students, all work should be entirely your own and must use appropriate citation practices to acknowledge the use of books, articles, websites, lectures, discussions, etc., that you have consulted to complete your assignments.

## **LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READINGS**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

TU 1.24 ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

### **II. INDIVIDUAL CHOICE**

TH 1.26 LECTURE II: MODELS OF CHOICE (methodological individualism; philosophical meanings of rationality; logic of preferences; risk, uncertainty, and expected utility)

\*\*\* SECTION ASSIGNMENTS NO LATER THAN 1.30 \*\*\*

#### **Readings for Lecture II**

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

RECOMMENDED:

Laver, *Playing Politics*, Chap. 1-2

Cushman, "Rational Fears," *Lingua Franca* (Nov/Dec 1994): 42-54.

### **III. GROUP CHOICE**

TU 1.31 LECTURE III.1: GROUP CHOICE AND ARROW'S THEOREM (Condorcet paradox; examples from politics; generalization of Condorcet paradox to large groups and multiple alternatives; statement of Arrow theorem)

TH 2.2 LECTURE III.2: MAJORITY RULE AND COLLECTIVE CHOICE (Arrow's theorem and majority rule; how likely is collective intransitivity? how can we get around it? Black's single peakedness; other value restrictions)

#### **Readings for Lectures III.1 and III.2**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 3-4

Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*, Chap. 1-3, 5

Humphreys, *Political Games*, Chap. 8, 10-12

TU 2.7 LECTURE III.3: SPATIAL MODELS (ONE DIMENSIONAL) (spatial set-up; Black's logic of committee decision making; Downs's logic of electoral decision making)

TH 2.9 LECTURE III.4: SPATIAL MODELS (MULTIDIMENSIONAL) (win sets; chaos; committees and elections; review of experimental results)

TU 2.14 LECTURE III.4 CONTINUED

#### **Readings for Lecture III.3 and III.4**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 5

Humphreys, *Political Games*, Chap. 14-17.

RECOMMENDED: Laver, *Playing Politics*, Chap. 6-8

#### **IV. COLLECTIVE ACTION**

TH 2.16 LECTURE IV.1: PRISONERS' DILEMMA (problem of cooperation; in-class PD experiment; n-person PD game)

TU 2.21 Continuation of LECTURE IV.1

##### **Readings for Lecture IV.1**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 8

Humphreys, *Political Games*, Chap. 1, 4-6

RECOMMENDED: Laver, *Playing Politics*, Chap. 3-5

Grossman, "[The Dilemma of Prisoners.](#)" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38 (1994): 43-55

TH 2.23 LECTURE IV.2: OLSON'S *THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION* (collective action, voting, other forms of participation)

TU 2.28 Continuation of LECTURE IV.2

##### **Readings for Lecture IV.2**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 9

Johnson (and others) "Why I Won't Vote," *Lawrence (KS) Journal World* (Nov 5 1996), p.5B; (Nov 7 1996), p. 6B; (Nov 9 1996), pp. 8B-9B; (Nov 12 1996), p. 1B

Humphreys, *Political Games*, Chap. 2, 3, 42

RECOMMENDED: Jay, "[The Rise of Facebook Activism](#)"

TH 3.2 LECTURE IV.3: PUBLIC GOODS AND EXTERNALITIES (public goods; externalities; free riding; commons problems; property rights; other institutions)

TU 3.7 Continuation of LECTURE IV.3

##### **Readings for Lecture IV.3**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 10

Frank, "[The Invisible Hand is Shaking.](#)" *New York Times*, May 25, 2008, Week in Review section, page 5.

TH 3.9

\*\*\*MIDTERM EXAMINATION\*\*\*

#### **V. INSTITUTIONS**

TU 3.21 LECTURE V.0: GENERAL REMARKS

##### **Readings for Lecture V.0**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 11

Shepsle, "[Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach](#)," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1 (1989), 131-147

TH 3.23 LECTURE V.1: LEGISLATIVE MODELS (legislative structure; legislative procedure; bicameralism)

TU 3.28 Continuation of LECTURE V.1

**Readings for Lecture V.1**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 12

Shepsle and Weingast, "Penultimate Power: Conference Committees and the Legislative Process," in Fiorina and Rohde (eds.) *Home Style and Washington Work*, pp. 199-219

Stockman, "The Social Pork Barrel," *The Public Interest* (Spring, 1975): 3-30.

Humphreys, *Political Games*, Chap. 28-29.

TH 3.30 LECTURE V.2: HIERARCHY AND BUREAUCRACY (objective functions; incentives and monitoring; markets v. hierarchies bureaucratic drift; coalitional drift; police patrols and fire alarms; capture and cozy triangles)

TU 4.4 Continuation of LECTURE V.2

**Readings for Lecture V.2**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 13-14.

McCubbins and Schwartz, "[Congressional Oversight Overlooked](#)," *American Journal of Political Science* 28 (1984), 165-79

TH 4.6 LECTURE V.3 ALTERNATIVE ELECTION SYSTEMS (plurality; plurality with runoff; proportional representation; rank-order voting; approval and negative voting; elections in Harvard's FAS)

TU 4.11 Guest Lecture: Applications to Comparative Politics

TH 4.13 Guest Lecture: Applications to International Politics

TU 4.18. Continuation of LECTURE V.3

**Readings for Lecture V.3**

Riker, *Liberalism*, Chap. 4

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 7

Levin and Nalebuff, "[An Introduction to Vote-Counting Schemes](#)," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9 (1995): 3-26

Colomer and McLean, "[Electing Popes: Approval Balloting and Qualified-Majority Rule](#)," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (1998): 1-22

TH 4.20 LECTURE V.4 COALITIONS AND GOVERNMENT FORMATION (coalition theories; office-seeking and policy-seeking politicians and parties; government formation)

TU 4.25 Continuation of LECTURE V.4

**Readings for Lecture V.4**

Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics*, Chap. 16

## SECTION SCHEDULE AND READINGS

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Section meeting topic</u>
Jan 31	Majority rule experiment
Feb 14	Controversy #1: What is the Public Interest?  <u>Readings:</u> Riker, <i>Liberalism against Populism</i> , Chap. 10 Grofman and Feld, " <a href="#">Rousseau's General Will: A Condorcetian Perspective</a> ," <i>American Political Science Review</i> 82 (1988), 567-576 Humphreys, <i>Political Games</i> , Chap. 9
Feb 21	Public goods experiment
Feb 28	Midterm review
Mar 28	Controversy #2: Who Will Save New England Fishermen (from themselves)?  <u>Readings:</u> Hardin, " <a href="#">The Tragedy of the Commons</a> ." <i>Science</i> 162 (1968): 1243-1248 Ingrassia, " <a href="#">Overfishing Threatens to Wipe Out Species and Crush Industry</a> ," <i>Wall Street Journal</i> (July 16, 1991), pp. A1, A8 Dobbs, "A Warning by the Surgeon General," <i>Washington Post National Weekly Edition</i> (June 8-14, 1992) Hockstader, "Caviar Wars Decimate Sturgeon," <i>International Herald Tribune</i> (June 10, 1997), p.1 Barro, " <a href="#">Federal Protection -- Only Cute Critters Need Apply</a> ," <i>Wall Street Journal</i> , August 4, 1994, p. A12 McGrory, "Lobstermen Hauling Up Empty Traps," <i>Boston Globe</i> , July 20, 1994, pp. 1, 23
April 4	Controversy #3: Heresthetic – Are politicians manipulators?  <u>Readings:</u> Riker, <i>The Art of Political Manipulation</i> McLean, <i>Rational Choice and British Politics</i> , Chap. 2 Shepsle, " <a href="#">Losers in Politics</a> ," <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> 1 (2003): 307-315.
April 25	Final examination review