

# Political Science 274

## Political Choice and Strategy

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Mondays/Wednesdays 2:30 to 3:45 p.m.  
Social Science 5231

**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m.–noon, 215 North Hall  
Mondays 4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m., 215 North Hall  
Appointments for other times welcome.

### Overview

Political institutions provide mechanisms for societies to make authoritative decisions about what people may, may not, or must do. Politics involves the interaction of people who seek to use and to modify the mechanisms to further their goals. How do political institutions translate the preferences of individuals into social choices? What strategies can individuals employ to affect social choices? These are fundamentally important questions for political scientists and they are the focus of this course.

To answer these questions we will explore a set of analytical tools based on the assumption that politicians and public officials are instrumentally rational: that is, they have preferences over possible outcomes and they take purposeful actions directed at achieving those outcomes that they prefer more to those that they prefer less. We start with simple models of *individual decision making*: choice in the face of exogenous risk (decision analysis) and choice involving strategic risk (game theory) resulting from the dependence of outcomes on the strategies chosen by other rational actors as well. We next consider the problems of *social choice*: What are the properties of commonly used decision rules such as majority and plurality voting? How can they be manipulated through strategic or sophisticated voting and agenda manipulation? Finally, we consider the problems of *collective action*: Under what circumstances will individuals contribute effort and other resources to promote group interests? How can institutions be designed to facilitate collective action? How can leaders induce or inhibit collective action?

Most of the material in the course involves simple models and illustrations as well as a few more substantial cases. The sections introducing decision analysis and game theory, which occur at the beginning of the course, will involve some algebra and probability theory. I do not assume any prior college-level study in mathematics, but I do assume a working knowledge of high school algebra and a willingness to learn the few additional mathematical concepts that we will need. (If you do not want to engage such material, then please take a different course.) I urge you to see me in office hours if you have any difficulty understanding the concepts as they are introduced. I hope to have interaction among us in the classroom. Therefore, I will write on the blackboard rather than use PowerPoint so you can easily ask questions as we proceed. (If you cannot learn without PowerPoint, then please take a different course.)

## Basis for Evaluation

I will assess your performance in the course as follows (contribution to final grade in parentheses):

*Midterm examination* (30 percent). The examination will cover required readings and course concepts. It will be held in class on **March 12**.

*Final examination* (45 percent). The final examination will be cumulative and given as scheduled on **May 12 at 10:05 a.m.**

*Two short papers* (20 percent). Throughout the syllabus are discussion topics associated with readings. Everyone should do **one** paper on the discussion topic related to the case study of the adoption of the Affordable Care Act. Please do a second paper on **one** other discussion topic. Papers should be (two to three double-spaced pages). Each paper is due *before* the class in which the reading is discussed.

*Class participation* (5 percent). Although most of the classes will involve lectures, I encourage you to participate by asking questions and offering answers to questions that I pose. You should be prepared to offer answers to homework problems I will occasionally assign. I encourage you to be ready to discuss readings in class, and I expect you to be ready to discuss the readings related to your short papers.

## Readings

Copies of most required readings will be available through learn@uw. In addition, you should purchase the following two books:

Kenneth A. Shepsle (2010) *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions* 2nd Edition (New York: W.W. Norton).

Stuart Altman and David Shactman (2011) *Power Politics and Universal Health Care* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books).

(I can imagine sharing each book with a classmate. Can you solve the collective action problem?)

Copies of books listed on the syllabus will be placed on reserve. I will rely on several books as sources of case material for lectures and class discussion:

John H. Aldrich (1995) *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Hernando de Soto (1989) *The Other Path* (New York: Harper & Row).

Mark Kleiman (2009) *When Brute Force Fails: How to Have Less Crime and Less Punishment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Iain McLean (2001) *Rational Choice & British Politics: An Analysis of Rhetoric and Manipulation From Peel to Blair* (New York: Oxford University Press).

William H. Riker (1996) *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

William H. Riker (1986) *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

### **Tentative Schedule**

*Course Overview* (January 22)

#### **Part I: Individual Choice**

*Individual Rationality* (January 27)

Shepsle, Chapters 1 and 2

*Non-Strategic Choice: Decision Analysis* (January 29, February 3 and 5)

a. Elements of decision theory

b. Expected utility

Read handout before class.

Zeev Maoz (1981) The Decision to Raid Entebbe: Decision Analysis Applied to Crisis Behavior. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25(4), 677–707.

*Strategic Choice: Single-Play Games* (February 10, 12, 17, and 19)

a. Basic elements of game theory (normal form)

b. Common games in normal form

Andrew H. Kydd (2011) Terrorism and Profiling. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23(3), 458–473.

c. Introduction to extensive form

d. Signaling

## **Part II: Social Choice**

*Arrow's Possibility Theorem* (February 24)

Shepsle, Chapters 3 and 4

*Spatial Models* (February 26 and March 3)

- a. Black's Median Voter Theorem
- b. McKelvey's Chaos Theorem
- c. Structurally induced equilibria

Shepsle, Chapter 5

*Common Voting Rules: Sophisticated Voting and Agenda Manipulation* (March 5 and 10)

- a. Voting systems: majority, plurality, approval, Borda counts
- b. Amendment procedures

Shepsle, Chapter 6 and 7

Riker (1986), Chapters 2, 7, and 11

*Discussion topic:* In class we will be looking at three cases from Riker (1986): Pliny the Younger on Parliamentary Law (Chapter 7); Chauncy Depew and the Seventeenth Amendment (Chapter 2); and Exploiting the Powell Amendment (Chapter 11). Review one of these cases. What were the basic elements of the strategies employed? Could the strategies have been countered?

**Midterm** (March 12)

*Parties as Responses to Social Choice Problems* (March 24)

Aldrich, Chapters 2 and 3

*Discussion topic:* In Chapter 3, Aldrich (1995) argues that the first American parties formed as a response to unstable majorities in the First Congress. In Chapter 5, Aldrich considers the emergence of the Republican Party. Review the logic of Aldrich's argument in one of these chapters, and discuss the sort of evidence that he uses to support the argument.

*Heresthetics and Rhetoric* (March 26 and 31)

McLean, *Irish Potatoes and British Politics: Peel, Wellington, and Repeal of the Corn Laws* (Chapter 2) and *The Patriot Game: Rhetoric and Heresthetic in the Anglo-Irish Treaty Negotiations of 1921* (Chapter 5).

*Discussion topic:* Consider Riker (1996), Chapter 5: offers explanations for why negative arguments dominated the ratification campaign. Do these arguments apply to contemporary electoral campaigns?

*Discussion topic:* McLean considers the repeal of the corn laws in Chapter 2 and the Anglo-Irish treaty negotiations of 1921 in Chapter 5. For one of these cases, consider the role of rhetoric in carrying out a successful heresthetic.

*Contemporary Application: Passage of the Affordable Care Act* (April 2 and 7)

Simon F. Haeder (2012) *Beyond Path Dependence: Explaining Health Reform and Its Consequences*. *Policy Studies Journal* 40(S1), 65–86.

Altman and Shactman, Chapters 2, 10–18.

***Discussion topic (required):*** Draw on the account given by Altman and Shactman of the Obama Administration's efforts to pass the Affordable Care Act to identify an example of a strategic action that you view as representative of some generic type of political or legislative strategy. In other words, set out an action that you see as an heresthetical or rhetorical devise, explain its elements, and illustrate its use or attempted use in the debate over the Affordable Care Act.

*Election Strategies* (April 9)

a. Downsian models of elections

Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), Chapters 3, 7 and 8.

b. Rule Choice, Implementation, and Corruption

### **Part III: Collective Action**

*The Logic of Collective Action* (April 14 and 16)

a. Olson's *Logic of Collective Action*

b. Common property and public goods

Shepsle, Chapters 8, 9, and 10

*The Problem of Cooperation* (April 21 and 23)

- a. Institutions as repeated games
- b. Credibility and commitment
- c. Public versus private preferences

Shepsle, Chapters 11, 12, and 13

*Organizational Design and Leadership* (April 28 and 30 and May 5)

Elinor Ostrom (2011) Background on the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework. *Policy Studies Journal* 39(1), 7–27.

Shepsle, Chapter 14

Kleiman, Chapter 4

de Soto, Chapter 2

Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz (1948) Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12(2), 280–315.

*Discussion topic:* Consider Kleiman (2009), Chapter 4: Tipping, Dynamic Concentration, and the Logic of Deterrence. Apply his ideas about dynamic concentration of punishment to a particular public order problem.

*Discussion topic:* Consider de Soto (1989), Chapter 2: Informal Housing. Imagine that you have been asked by your friends to advise them about how to organize for an act of civil disobedience. What lessons might you draw from the land invasions de Soto describes?

*Discussion topic:* Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz (1948) Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12(2), 280–315, consider the question of why the Wehrmacht continued to fight effectively even after the strategic situation appeared hopeless. What aspects of the organization of the Wehrmacht contributed to cohesion? Can you make any generalizations about such factors?

*Review* (May 7)