

Public Choice

ECO1028

Complete Reading List by Week

Spring 2026

General Resources

Core Textbook (Optional but Recommended)

- Mueller, D. C. (2003). *Public Choice III*. Cambridge University Press.

Other Foundational Texts

- Buchanan, J. M., & Tullock, G. (1962). *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy*. University of Michigan Press.
- Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Harper.

Key Journals

- *Public Choice*
- *Journal of Public Economics*
- *American Political Science Review*
- *American Economic Review*
- *Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Weekly Readings

Week 1: Introduction

Required

- Shughart II, W. F. (2018). "Public Choice." In *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Liberty Fund.
Available online: <https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/PublicChoice.html>

Optional

- Buchanan, J. M. (2003). "Public Choice: Politics Without Romance." *Policy*, 19(3), 13–18.

Week 2: The Paradox of Voting

Required

- Feddersen, T. J. (2004). "Rational Choice Theory and the Paradox of Not Voting." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18(1), 99–112.

Optional

- Blais, A. (2006). “What Affects Voter Turnout?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9, 111–125.

Additional Optional (Recent Evidence)

- DellaVigna, S., List, J. A., Malmendier, U., & Rao, G. (2017). “Voting to Tell Others.” *Review of Economic Studies*, 84(1), 143–181.
Topic: Social image and voting behavior
- Gerber, A. S., Karlan, D., & Bergan, D. (2009). “Does the Media Matter? A Field Experiment Measuring the Effect of Newspapers on Voting Behavior and Political Opinions.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 1(2), 35–52.
- Rogers, T., Ternovski, J., & Yoeli, E. (2017). “Potential Follow-Up Increases Private Contributions to Public Goods.” *Management Science*, 63(5), 1348–1362.

Week 3: The Median Voter Theorem**Required**

- Holcombe, R. G. (1989). “The Median Voter Model in Public Choice Theory.” *Public Choice*, 61(2), 115–125.

Optional

- Lee, D. S., Moretti, E., & Butler, M. J. (2004). “Do Voters Affect or Elect Policies? Evidence from the U.S. House.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119(3), 807–859.

Additional Optional (Evidence & Extensions)

- Dal Bó, E., Finan, F., Folke, O., Persson, T., & Rickne, J. (2017). “Who Becomes a Politician?” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 132(4), 1877–1914.
Topic: Selection into politics; competence vs representation
- Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). “Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India.” *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443.
Topic: Evidence against MVT; identity matters

Week 4: Political Competition and Macroeconomic Performance**Required**

- Shi, M., & Svensson, J. (2006). “Political Budget Cycles: Do They Differ Across Countries and Why?” *Journal of Public Economics*, 90(8–9), 1367–1389.
- Alesina, A., & Summers, L. H. (1993). “Central Bank Independence and Macroeconomic Performance: Some Comparative Evidence.” *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking*, 25(2), 151–162.

Optional

- Schuknecht, L. (2000). “Fiscal Policy Cycles and Public Expenditure in Developing Countries.” *Public Choice*, 102(1–2), 115–130.

Additional Optional (Extensions & Evidence)

- Blomberg, S. B., & Hess, G. D. (2003). “Is the Political Business Cycle for Real?” *Journal of Public Economics*, 87(5–6), 1091–1121.
Topic: Real vs political business cycles
- Besley, T., Persson, T., & Sturm, D. M. (2010). “Political Competition, Policy and Growth: Theory and Evidence from the US.” *Review of Economic Studies*, 77(4), 1329–1352.
Topic: Political competition and growth
- Li, H., & Zhou, L. A. (2005). “Political Turnover and Economic Performance: The Incentive Role of Personnel Control in China.” *Journal of Public Economics*, 89(9–10), 1743–1762.
Topic: Non-electoral incentives for performance

Week 5: Bureaucracy

Required

- Wyckoff, P. G. (1990). “The Simple Analytics of Slack-Maximizing Bureaucracy.” *Public Choice*, 67(1), 35–47.

Optional

- Dunleavy, P. (1985). “Bureaucrats, Budgets and the Growth of the State: Reconstructing an Instrumental Model.” *British Journal of Political Science*, 15(3), 299–328.

Additional Optional (Empirical Evidence)

- Becker, S. O., Boeckh, K., Hainz, C., & Woessmann, L. (2016). “The Empire Is Dead, Long Live the Empire! Long-Run Persistence of Trust and Corruption in the Bureaucracy.” *Economic Journal*, 126(590), 40–74.
Topic: Habsburg bureaucracy persisting 100 years; institutions matter
- Vadlamannati, K. C., & Cooray, A. (2017). “Transparency Pays? Evaluating the Effects of the Freedom of Information Laws on Perceived Government Corruption.” *Journal of Development Studies*, 53(1), 116–137.
Topic: FOI laws and bureaucratic efficiency
- Djankov, S., La Porta, R., Lopez-de-Silanes, F., & Shleifer, A. (2002). “The Regulation of Entry.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(1), 1–37.
Topic: Corruption and over-regulation

Week 6: Federalism & Decentralisation

Required

- Oates, W. E. (1999). “An Essay on Fiscal Federalism.” *Journal of Economic Literature*, 37(3), 1120–1149.

Optional

- Tiebout, C. M. (1956). “A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures.” *Journal of Political Economy*, 64(5), 416–424.

Additional Optional (Evidence & Extensions)

- Hines, J. R., & Thaler, R. H. (1995). “The Flypaper Effect.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9(4), 217–226.
Topic: Money sticks where it hits; grants and spending
- Fan, C. S., Lin, C., & Treisman, D. (2009). “Political Decentralization and Corruption: Evidence from Around the World.” *Journal of Public Economics*, 93(1–2), 14–34.
Topic: Decentralization increases corruption through vertical competition
- Faguet, J. P. (2004). “Does Decentralization Increase Government Responsiveness to Local Needs? Evidence from Bolivia.” *Journal of Public Economics*, 88(3–4), 867–893.
Topic: Decentralization improved responsiveness to local needs
- Barankay, I., & Lockwood, B. (2007). “Decentralization and the Productive Efficiency of Government: Evidence from Swiss Cantons.” *Journal of Public Economics*, 91(5–6), 1197–1218.
Topic: Decentralization and educational outcomes

Week 7: READING WEEK

No assigned readings.

Use this week to:

- Prepare your Project 1 presentation slides
- Review your paper critique one more time
- Practice your 7-minute presentation
- Get feedback from peers or attend office hours

Week 8: Interest Groups, Rent-Seeking & Lobbying

Required

- Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Chapter 1. Harvard University Press.

Optional

- Tullock, G. (1967). “The Welfare Costs of Tariffs, Monopolies, and Theft.” *Western Economic Journal*, 5(3), 224–232.
- Stigler, G. J. (1971). “The Theory of Economic Regulation.” *Bell Journal of Economics and Management Science*, 2(1), 3–21.

Additional Background

- Becker, G. S. (1983). “A Theory of Competition Among Pressure Groups for Political Influence.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 98(3), 371–400.
- Krueger, A. O. (1974). “The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society.” *American Economic Review*, 64(3), 291–303.

Week 9: Behavioural Economics

Required

- Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2003). “Libertarian Paternalism.” *American Economic Review*, 93(2), 175–179.

Optional

- DellaVigna, S. (2009). "Psychology and Economics: Evidence from the Field." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 47(2), 315–372.

Additional Optional (Applications)

- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk." *Econometrica*, 47(2), 263–291.
Topic: Loss aversion; reference dependence
- Madrian, B. C., & Shea, D. F. (2001). "The Power of Suggestion: Inertia in 401(k) Participation and Savings Behavior." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(4), 1149–1187.
Topic: Default effects; status quo bias
- Laibson, D., & List, J. A. (2015). "Principles of (Behavioral) Economics." *American Economic Review*, 105(5), 385–390.
Topic: Six principles of behavioral economics

Week 10: Institutions, Development & Political Regimes**Required**

- Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2005). "Institutions as a Fundamental Cause of Long-Run Growth." In P. Aghion & S. N. Durlauf (Eds.), *Handbook of Economic Growth* (Vol. 1A, pp. 385–472). Elsevier.
- Rodrik, D., Subramanian, A., & Trebbi, F. (2004). "Institutions Rule: The Primacy of Institutions Over Geography and Integration in Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Growth*, 9(2), 131–165.

Optional (Self-Study: Dictatorship & Revolution)

- Mueller, D. C. (2003). *Public Choice III*, Chapter 18: Dictatorship, Revolution, and Democracy. Cambridge University Press.
- Gandhi, J., & Przeworski, A. (2006). "Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion Under Dictatorships." *Economics & Politics*, 18(1), 1–26.

Additional Optional (Institutions & Development)

- Hall, R. E., & Jones, C. I. (1999). "Why Do Some Countries Produce So Much More Output Per Worker Than Others?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 114(1), 83–116.
Topic: Social infrastructure and productivity
- Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2001). "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *American Economic Review*, 91(5), 1369–1401.
Topic: Reversal of fortune; institutional persistence

Additional Optional (Political Regimes & Development)

- Besley, T., & Kudamatsu, M. (2006). "Health and Democracy." *American Economic Review*, 96(2), 313–318.
Topic: Democracy improves health outcomes
- Bentzen, J., Kaarsen, N., & Wingender, A. M. (2017). "Irrigation and Autocracy." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 15(1), 1–53.
Topic: Historical roots of autocracy

- Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. M. (2008). “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(2), 436–455.
Topic: Why people join rebellions; Sierra Leone