FORMAL MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

PLSC 836

Yale University
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Spring 2018
Course Day/time: Tuesday 9:25–11:15am
Office Hours: Monday 2:00–4:00pm
Course website: **Canvas**

Course description

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. Based on interest, we may also spend some time studying models of accountability applied to other political institutions (e.g., control of the bureaucracy).

Prerequisites

I will expect that students have taken PLSC 518 (Introduction to Game Theory). Undergraduates that have taken game theory in political science and/or economics may also enroll with instructor permission (based on preparation). While the focus in this course is on developing *intuition* rather than modeling skills *per se*, the ability to critically engage with applied game-theoretic modeling is necessary for that intuition.

Course materials

There is no required textbook for this course, but I would recommend getting the following book, which is the best resource I know of for canonical applied formal models (I can also recommend a book specifically for IR by Kidd): Gehlbach, Scott. 2013. *Formal Models of Domestic Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

You may also find supplementary game theory texts useful. Some I recommend include Steven Tadelis' *Game Theory: An Introduction*, published by Princeton University Press in 2013;

Martin Osborne's *An Introduction to Game Theory*, published by Oxford University Press in 2003 (also utilize his website for materials); and James Morrow's *Game Theory for Political Scientists*, published by Princeton University Press in 1994. Tadelis is the most thorough, and perhaps most technical, followed by Osborne, then Morrow. There are also more advanced texts for those interested and I will provide suggestions if asked (e.g., Fudenberg & Tirole and Myerson).

For mathematics related to the applied models we will be reading I recommend Sundaram's *A First Course in Optimization Theory*, Simon and Blume's *Mathematics for Economists*, and de la Fuente's *Mathematical Methods and Models for Economists*. Mas-Colell, Whinston, and Green's *Microeconomic Theory* is also a useful reference text for all aspects of microeconomic theory (it is very technical, but very comprehensive). *Quick Calculus* is a useful refresher on basic concepts. Generally, if you plan to pursue game theory as a methodological tool reference books are good investments.

Course requirements

Your grade in this class will be based on the following:

Participation 10%

Presentations 30%

Analytical summaries (6) 40%

Research prospectus 20%

Participation

It goes without saying, but I will say it anyway: you are expected to have read the material assigned *before* class and participate in class discussions based on those readings. Please come prepared with questions you may have and ready to discuss readings critically. This means you should, in particular, read the articles *very* closely and carefully. The reading load is light in this course for that purpose. Indeed, we will generally read two research papers per week. If you are presenting that week I will not expect you to have mastered the other articles assigned (but you should still be familiar with their arguments).

Presentations of readings

A major component of this course is student presentations of readings. The presentation will focus on key elements of the formal model in the paper. Depending on enrollment you may present several times in this capacity. You will present at least two papers (but likely more) in this way. Each presentation will likely be about 20-30 minutes or so. We will calibrate this to maximize understanding as the semester progresses. 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 presented 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 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. That is, the goal here is to convey intuition not just reproduce math (which is consistent with the overall thrust of the course itself). Sometimes, a useful teaching technique is to give an example of a strategy profile which cannot be an equilibrium, an example of a strategy profile which is an equilibrium, and then move into a more general argument about the class of strategy profiles that constitute equilibria. Presenters should meet with me (during my office hours) before their presentation to discuss the details of their talk.

Research presentations

Each student will also present one paper (perhaps more depending on enrollment, but no more than two) *as if it were your own paper*. We can discuss this when the time comes. Treat this like a professional presentation (e.g., a job talk). Students not presenting are also expected to be prepared to ask questions during Q&A time (e.g., as if an audience member at a job talk). This will count as part of participation as well. The goal here is to help you sharpen your presentation skills and learn how to structure a presentation to convey the essential pieces of your own arguments in an environment where you will receive feedback to help you improve.

Analytical summaries

You will write six short analytical summaries over the course of the semester. Each summary should not be longer than 4 pages (double-spaced, 12pt font) and focus on **one** 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.[1] I will circulate an example of one that I wrote in grad school in a similarly organized course. The bulk of each summary should be devoted to explaining the logic of the results. When writing the summary, think of your audience as a scholar who knows the literature, knows game theory, but hasn't read the paper you're reviewing very closely. Summaries are to be uploaded to **Canvas** by noon the day before class (i.e., noon on Monday).

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[1]Statements like, "option A and option B" are fine, but don't include equations. For a nice example of how to discuss a model with no math that still conveys a good idea of the model and its results see the introduction in Stephen Morris, 2001, "Political Correctness," *Journal of Political Economy* 109:231-265.

Research prospectus

Your research prospectus is due at 5PM, TBD and should be about approximately 5–10 pages long, double spaced. We will schedule a special session of class where you will be given ten to fifteen minutes to present your prospectus followed by questions from your classmates and I.

There are several ways to approach this project. First, your research prospectus could consist of an extension of an *existing model*. Two potentially fruitful approaches are the following: (1) Begin with a question of interest, e.g., "Does increased transparency of policymaking lead to better public policy?", and use an existing theoretical setup to address your question;[2] or (2) 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.[3] 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.

Second, you could utilize one of the models from a paper we read in class and argue for applying the logic to a substantive environment not considered by the original author(s). That is, you will not necessarily alter an existing model, but rather take the fundamental logic of an existing model and show how it applies to another, distinct political setting. This would involve motivating the (distinct) research question, summarizing the logic of the paper you are using, and showing how it applies to this distinct setting. This requires deeply understanding the logic and dynamics of the original model.

Finally, and third, you may choose to identify a research question (or questions) related to a topic we cover in class and write a comprehensive analytical literature review. This review would critically engage an existing literature by going much further than the readings we did in class on the topic. It would involve laying out the primary theoretical approaches in that literature, summarizing the main logic and takeaways from those theoretical approaches, and identifying potential future research on the problem with a brief sketch about how you might go about it. This latter point could also involve sketching an empirical project that is closely motivated by the theoretical traditions you identify and describe.

The ultimate aim of this assignment is to get practice developing the "essential insight(s)" that underlies a research paper, or literature. Students are required to meet with me no later than TBD to discuss initial ideas about their research prospectus and to begin the conversation about what will constitute an acceptable prospectus.

Each student will also write a two-page referee report of one of their classmates' final papers. A first draft of the prospectus will be due two weeks prior to the end of the course so we can spend the last day of class presenting both the draft itself and the referee report.

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[2]For example, Justin Fox, 2007, "Government Transparency and Policymaking," *Public Choice* 131:23-44.

[3]For example, Richard Van Weelden 2010, "Deliberation Rules and Voting," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science.*

Late assignments

I will not accept late assignments without a documented, university-approved, excuse. As this is a graduate course I do not foresee this being a problem, but if something extraordinary comes up please talk to me as soon as possible.

Students with disabilities

I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities. Requests go through the Yale University Resource Office on Disabilities. If you feel you need accommodation please contact the Resource Office on Disabilities. Information, including for making contact, can be found at their website.

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone elses work, words, or ideas as if they were your own. Here are three reasons not to do it:

- By far the deepest consequence to plagiarizing is the detriment to your intellectual and moral development: you wont learn anything, and your ethics will be corrupted.

- Giving credit where its due but adding your own reflection will get you higher grades than putting your name on someone elses work. In an academic context, it counts more to show your ideas in conversation than to try to present them as *sui generis*.

- Finally, Yale punishes academic dishonesty severely. The most common penalty is suspension from the university, but students caught plagiarizing are also subject to lowered or failing grades as well as the possibility of expulsion. Please be sure to review Yales Academic Integrity Policy (available in the Student Handbook).

You can also find Definitions of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Documentation of Sources here.

The Yale Writing Center also offers guidance on making sure that you avoid academic dishonesty. More information can be found at their website.

Course outline

Schedule

(this is a draft and subject to change)

Note: I reserve the right to alter the syllabus as needed. I will make sure any and all changes to the outline are clearly communicated to you and that you will have ample time to adjust (for assignments, etc.) if need be. I will not "spring" changes on you without notice.

Week 1. January 16th: Introduction

Background reading

- Dewan, Torun and Kenneth Shepsle. 2011. "Political Economy Models of Elections." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 311–330.

- Ashworth, Scott. 2012. "Electoral Accountability: Recent Theoretical and Empirical Work." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15: 183–201.

- Bendor, Jonathan, Amihai Glazer, and Thomas Hammond. 2001. "Theories of Delegation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4: 235–269.

- Bendor, Jonathan and Adam Meirowitz. 2004. "Spatial Models of Delegation." *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 293–310. *(Recommended)*

- Gibbons. "An Introduction to Applicable Game Theory." *Journal of Economic Perspectives (Recommended 'refresher' on standard game-theoretic concepts)*

Week 2. January 23rd: *Spatial Model of Politics, Candidate Divergence*

- Bernhardt, Dan, John Duggan, and Francesco Squintani. 2009. "The Case for Responsible Parties." *American Political Science Review* 103(4): 570–587.

- Calvert, Randall L. 1985. "Robustness of the Multidimensional Voting Model: Candidate Motivations, Uncertainty, and Convergence." *American Journal of Political Science* 29(1): 69–95. (*Recommended*)

Week 3. January 30th: *Competing on Ideology and Valence* and *Contracting Models*

- **We will not meet this week, but you can submit analytical response papers and can sub one of the papers for presentation if you want.**

  Competing on Ideology and Valence

- Groseclose, Tim. 2001. "A Model of Candidate Location when One Candidate has a Valence Advantage." *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 862–886.

- Kartik, Navin and Preston McAfee. 2007. "Signaling Character in Electoral Competition." *American Economic Review* 97: 852–870.

  Contracting Models (Inducing effort by politicians)

- Ashworth, Scott and Kenneth Shotts. 2011. "Challengers, Democratic Contestation, and Electoral Accountability." *Working paper – available online at SSRN or Scott or Ken's websites.*

- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan. 2007. "Politics and the Suboptimal Provision of Counterterror." *International Organization* 61: 9–36.

Week 4. February 6th: *Citizen Candidate Models of Politics*

- Besley, Timothy and Stephen Coate. 1997. "An Economic Model of Representative Democracy." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112: 85–106. **Presented by Jen.**

- Osborne, Martin J. and Al Slivinski. 1996. "A Model of Political Competition with Citizen-Candidates." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 111(1): 65–96. **Presented by Collin.**

- Besley, Timothy and Stephen Coate. 2008. "Issue Unbundling via Citizens' Initiatives." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 3: 379–397. *(Recommended)*

Week 5. February 13th: *Signaling Competence*

- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Michael Herron, and Kenneth Shotts. 2001. "Leadership and Pandering: A Theory of Executive Policymaking." *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 532–550. **Presented by Jen.**

- Majumdar, Sumon and Sharun Mukand. 2004. "Policy Gambles." *American Economic Review* 94: 1207–1222. **Presented by Shahana.**

- Gersen, Jacob E. and Matthew C. Stephenson. 2014. "Over-accountability." *Journal of Legal Analysis* 6(2): 185–243. *(Recommended overview of accountability pathologies)*

Week 6. February 20th: *Signaling Ideology*

- Groseclose, Tim. 2001. "A Model of Candidate Location when One Candidate has a Valence Advantage." *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 862–886. **Presented by Shahana.**

- Morris, Stephen. 2001. "Political Correctness." *Journal of Political Economy* 109: 231–265. *(Recommended)*

- Coate, Stephen and Stephen Morris. 1995. "On the Form of Transfers to Special Interests." *Journal of Political Economy* 103: 1210–1235. **Presented by Collin.**

Week 7. February 27th: *Transparency*

- Fox, Justin. 2007. "Government Transparency and Policymaking." *Public Choice* 131(1-2): 23–44. **Presented by Jen.**

- Patty, John W. 2016. "Signaling through Obstruction." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(1): 175–189. **Presented by Shahana.**

- Prat, Andrea. 2005. "The Wrong Kind of Transparency." *American Economic Review* 95: 862–877. *(Recommended)*

Week 8. March 6th: *Money and Politics*

- Schnakenberg, Keith E. and Ian R. Turner. "Signaling with Reform: How the Threat of Corruption Prevents Informed Policymaking." *Unpublished manuscript:* http://www.ianrturner.com/SchnakenbergTurner-corruption-online.pdf

- Ashworth, Scott. 2006. "Campaign Finance and Voter Welfare with Entrenched Incumbents." *American Political Science Review* 100(1): 55–68. **Presented by Collin.**

[Spring recess, March 9th – March 26th]

Week 9. March 27th: *Delegation to Bureaucrats I*

- Gailmard, Sean and John Patty. 2012. "Formal Models of Bureaucracy." *Annual Review of Political Science*

- Maskin, Eric and Jean Tirole. 2004. "The Politician and the Judge: Accountability in Government." *American Economic Review* 94: 1034–1054. **Presented by Jen.**

- Fox, Justin and Stuart Jordan. 2011. "Delegation and Accountability." *Journal of Politics* 73(3): 831–844. **Presented by Shahana.**

Week 10. April 3rd: *Delegation to Bureaucrats II*

- Huber, John and Nolan McCarty. 2004. "Bureaucratic Capacity, Delegation, and Political Reform." *American Political Science Review* 98(3): 481–494. **Presented by Shahana.**

- Wiseman, Alan. 2009. "Delegation and Positive-Sum Bureaucracies." *Journal of Politics* 71(3): 998–1014. **Presented by Collin.**

Week 11. April 10th: *Bureaucratic Oversight & Accountability*

- Patty, John W. and Ian R. Turner. 2017. "Ex Post Review and Expert Policymaking: When Does Oversight Reduce Accountability?" *Unpublished manuscript:* https://www.dropbox.com/s/z5ugsbxbm8vmk18/PattyTurner-obfuscation-JOP-V2-online.pdf?dl=0

- Bawn, Kathleen. 1995. "Political Control versus Expertise: Congressional Choice about Administrative Procedures." *American Political Science Review* 89(1): 62–73. **Presented by Jen.**

Week 12. April 17th: *Implementation & Accountability*

- Callander, Steven. 2011. "Searching for Good Policies." *American Political Science Review* 105(4): 643–662.

- Hirsch, Alexander. 2016. "Experimentation and Persuasion in Political Organizations." *American Political Science Review* 110(1): 68–84.

- Ting, Michael. 2009. "Organizational Capacity." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* 27(2): 245–271. **Presented by Collin.**

Week 13. April 24th: *Course Wrap-up*

- **Student presentations**