

## Political Science 516 Formal Comparative Politics

Washington University  
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### Course Information

#### Course Description

In this graduate seminar we will examine some samples from the growing formal literature in comparative politics. We will focus on a variety of substantive areas including legislatures, elections, government formation and stability, public finance, and conflict. The course will require careful reading of 1 technical article each week. It is expected that you will have done this prior to coming to class. You will gain very little from lecture if you have not worked hard on understanding the paper before hand (in particular, you will feel that you understand the models but will neither learn nor remember anything). Because so little reading is assigned, the expectation is that the papers will be read very closely. We will talk more about how to read formal theory articles during the class but, in general, close reading of such articles involves working through the model with pen and pad, reproving each result, and searching for the key assumptions as you read. As a rule of thumb, you should expect to spend between 5-10 hours reading each paper on the syllabus.

#### Course Requirements

There are two requirements for this course:

1. Only one article is assigned each week. The expectation is that you will read the articles carefully, fully working through the mathematics of the models before coming to class.
2. Students should write three 5-7 page papers in the semester. These can be written for any of the weeks. These papers should take the formal model in question and relate it to the existing political science literature on the same subject. Issue that might be addressed include the following. To what extent

do the implications of the model differ from other claims in the literature? Does the model clarify existing debates in the literature? Do the assumptions of the model seem reasonable in light of the substantive literature? Do the predictions of the model seem plausible/interesting? How might one extend the model to address additional substantive issues (this should be answered bearing in mind the feasibility of the proposed extension).

3. There are no formal problem sets in this class. Nonetheless, I want to emphasize that there is no way to learn how to do applied theory without working a lot of problems. As you learn new methods in these papers and in lecture you should seek out problems from game theory text books and do them to hone your skills.

## **Prerequisites**

Political Science 5071 (Game Theory), equivalent course, or permission of the professor. This course is intended for graduate students but qualified undergraduates are welcome.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Elections (4 weeks)**

#### **Strategic Voting**

Cox, Gary W. 1990. "Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(4):903-935. JSTOR

#### **Retrospective Voting and Agency Problems**

Fearon, James D. 1999. "Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance." In *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, ed. Adam Przeworski and Susan C. Stokes. Cambridge chapter 99, p. 999.

Ferejohn, John. 1986. "Incumbent Performance and Electoral Control." *Public Choice* 30.

#### **Informative Party Labels**

Snyder, James and Michael Ting. 2002. "An Informational Rationale for Political Parties." *American Journal of Political Science* 46(1):90-110. JSTOR

## **Party Discipline**

Ashworth, Scott and Ethan Bueno de Mesquita. "Party Discipline with Institutional and Electoral Variation." Institute of Governmental Studies Working Paper. <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1039&context=igs>

## **Legislatures (3 weeks)**

### **Coalitions**

Laver, Michael and Kenneth Shepsle. 1990. "Coalitions and Cabinet Government." *American Political Science Review* 84:873-890. JSTOR

### **Party Formation**

Morelli, Massimo. 2004. "Party Formation and Policy Outcomes under Different Electoral Systems." *Review of Economic Studies* 71:829-853. <http://www.restud.org.uk/PDF/pfpres.pdf>

### **Legislative Cohesion**

Daniel Diermeier and Timothy Feddersen. 1998. "Cohesion in Legislatures and the Vote of Confidence Procedure." *American Political Science Review* 92: 611-621. JSTOR

## **Conflict (3 weeks)**

### **Ethnic Conflict**

Fearon, James and David Laitin. 1996. "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation." *American Political Science Review* 90(4). JSTOR

### **Democratic Transitions**

Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2001. "A Theory of Political Transitions." *American Economic Review* 91.

### **Survival of Leaders**

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, James Morrow, Randolph Siverson, Alastair Smith. 2002. "Political Institutions, Policy Choice and the Survival of Leaders." *British Journal of Political Science* 32(4).

## **Political Economy/Public Finance (4 weeks)**

### **Redistribution 1**

Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2001. "Inefficient Redistribution." *American Political Science Review* 95:649-661. JSTOR

### **Redistribution 2**

Piketty, Thomas. 1995. "Social Mobility and Redistributive Politics." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110(3):551-584. JSTOR

### **Public Finance 1**

Persson, Torsten, Gerard Roland, and Guido Tabellini. 2000. "Comparative Politics and Public Finance." *Journal of Political Economy* 108(6):1121-1161. JSTOR

### **Public Finance 2**

Lizzeri, Alessandro and Nicola Persico. 2001. "The Provision of Public Goods Under Alternative Electoral Incentives." *American Economic Review* 91(1):225- 239. <http://www.econ.nyu.edu/user/lizzeri/aertype7.pdf>