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


Retrospective Voting and Agency Problems


Informative Party Labels

Party Discipline


Legislatures (3 weeks)

Coalitions


Party Formation


Legislative Cohesion


Conflict (3 weeks)

Ethnic Conflict


Democratic Transitions


Survival of Leaders

Political Economy/Public Finance (4 weeks)

Redistribution 1


Redistribution 2


Public Finance 1


Public Finance 2