

POL 314**THEORY AND EXPLANATION IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE****L. DOBUZINSKIS
SPRING 2020****SYLLABUS****Contact:** dobuzins@sfu.ca, tel: 778-782-3841**Office Hours:** Mon. 10:30 am to 12:30 pm (AQ6073)**Objectives of the Course:**

This course is about the *methods* used to study politics. Examples from contemporary events or political history will be used to illustrate theoretical issues and methodological applications. But it is how we can explain or otherwise understand these events, rather than the events themselves, which is the object of the course. In your research essay, you are encouraged to provide concrete illustrations of the *theoretical issues* you chose to discuss but, again, these examples drawn from Canadian or comparative politics should not become the only focus of your paper.

While the course sets a framework for comparing *all* the methods or approaches used in political science, it focuses more specifically on rational choice and game theory models because this approach is not taught in other courses. (POL 201 covers inductive quantitative methods; and POL 200 covers qualitative methods.)

Assignments:**A) Research Paper (40%)**Due date: 30 March 2020Format: 15 pp. double-spaced (not including biblio.)Topics:

Choose one from the following:

1. Identify a political event or problem that you're interested in (e.g., the stability of a minority government; diplomatic negotiations and/or armed conflicts; the federal government's options for addressing climate change; the BC government options for dealing with energy projects; or any other political or policy issue). Explain why this specific case could be analyzed using a game theoretic model. Relevant questions to consider include:

who are the actors?

what strategies are open to them?

what kind of a game do they play?

what is the structure of the payoffs?

is the normal form or the extended form more appropriate? Etc...

Conclude by commenting on what you see as the strengths and limitations of game theory are on the basis of this exercise.

Alternatively, you could select two articles in leading political science journals (see list below) which make use of formal theory (i.e., rational choice, game theory, social choice theory) to analyze roughly comparable topics, and critically discuss the ways in which the author(s) pose

and answer some of the questions listed above (who are the actors, etc.), as well as other relevant question you may want to raise yourself in relation to the author(s)'s findings. Then compare the articles in terms of their own merits (e.g., is one article more convincing than the other, why...).

List of suggested journals:

<i>American Political Science Review</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of Political Science</i>
<i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i>	<i>Political Studies</i>
<i>Political Research Quarterly</i>	<i>British Journal of Political Science</i>
<i>Policy Sciences</i>	<i>Journal of Politics</i>
<i>Political Research Quarterly</i>	<i>Journal of Theoretical Politics</i>
<i>Defense & Security Analysis</i>	<i>Journal of Political Economy</i>

2. Evolutionary and/or behavioural game theory yield perspectives on human motivations which are more nuanced and realistic than the assumption of (narrowly defined) utility maximization. In some sense, this is a welcome development because it could encourage more interdisciplinary research projects combining social psychology and political economy.

But could there also be drawbacks or trade-offs? Parsimonious assumptions can be used to provide rigorous explanations and even to make specific (albeit sometimes wrong) predictions. Combining a multiplicity of insights can be a difficult challenge, and the outcome may seem ambiguous or even contradictory. More generally, what do you view as the advantages and disadvantages, rewards and challenges, of pursuing a parsimonious method (i.e., few but clear assumptions) vs. a complex, multidisciplinary combination of concepts and methods in deploying the resources of game theory, (or any theory/paradigm for that matter)?

Suggested additional readings relevant to this question (not an exhaustive list):

Axelrod, R. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.

Axelrod, R. 1986. "An Evolutionary Approach to Norms." *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.*, 80:1095-1111.

K. Binmore. 2005. *Natural Justice*. Oxford University Press.

S. Bowles and H. Gintis. 2011. *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and its Evolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

L. Dobuzinskis. 2019. "Not Merely Plaaying: The Subversive Proclivities of Game Theory." In D. Laycock, ed. *Political Ideology in Parties, Policy and Civil Society*. UBC Press.

M. Dufwenberg, "Game Theory" 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. *WIREs Cogn Sci*

Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

H. Peyton Young, "The Evolution of Conventions," *Econometrica* vol. 61 issue 1 (Jan. 1993), pp. 57-84.

L. Samuelson (2016). "Game Theory in Economics and Beyond." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Volume 30, Number 4: 107–130

T. Schelling (1960). *The Strategy of Conflict* (rather old but not outdated)

Skyrms, Brian (2004). *The Stag Hunt and the Evolution of Social Structure*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

3. This course contrasts three paradigmatic approaches to the study of politics: i) causal/inductive methods; ii) formal theory/rational choice; and iii) interpretive

perspectives. Identify a research topic of interest to you (e.g., the politics of climate change) and develop three (short) research designs inspired by these three paradigms that would be best suited to study a particular question/problem/event relevant to that topic (these questions would presumably be distinct, on the assumptions that certain types of questions are better answered by empirical vs. formal vs. interpretive methods).

4. You can propose your own research topic but if you choose to do so, you must submit a written proposal that includes:

- a title (in the form of a question)
- a rationale (why is this question relevant to the course; what do you intend to prove, etc.)
- a preliminary bibliography.

B) Exams:

Mid-term (20%) Date: 2 March 2020

Final (30%) Date: TBA

C) Participation (10%)

The participation grade will be based on an oral presentation on one of the following topics, *followed by a written submission* (about 4pp.); remember that you are expected to develop a *coherent* defence of a *well-defined* point of view, and that it is best to announce your from the very beginning of your presentation.

13 Jan.:

Critics of causal explanations have argued that truly significant political events are typically unique and unpredictable. What do you make of this argument? 1) I support it OR 2) I do not.

20 Jan.:

Instrumental rationality might be a useful concept in economics, but it is suited to the study of *political* phenomena? 1) Agree OR 2) disagree.

27 Jan.:

From Niccolò Machiavelli to contemporary International Relations scholars defending a “realist” approach, there is a long line of political theorists who have argued that strategic thinking is central to politics, if not the only appropriate method for making sense of politics. But what do you think qualify as a “good” strategy in politics? Are different sorts of challenges and issues (e.g., social policy vs. defence policy) call for different types of strategies?

3 Feb.:

To what extent is the winner-takes-all logic of zero-sum relevant to politics?

10 Feb.:

1. Provide some examples of the Stag Hunt game in politics/public policy. Could this game be the most relevant to political scientists (for example, more relevant than PD)

2. Is the concept of “correlated equilibrium” another way of saying that institutions are important?

24 Feb.:

1. If people can learn to cooperate in repeated games, could this mean that Thomas Hobbes’ state of nature hypothesis (and the indispensable need for a “sovereign”) is questionable?
2. Evolutionary game theory suggests that the assumption of individual rationality is not always required for developing game-theoretic models. Can you think of situations where following cultural norms (e.g., reciprocity, fairness, etc.) is just as, if not more, conducive to getting large pay-offs than acting on the basis of a narrow self-interest? (The underlying assumption here is that a “culturally evolved strategy” beats a myopic utility-maximizing strategy.)

?

9 March:

1. Cooperative game theory suggests that coalitions are unstable. Can you think of political situations or event that illustrate this way of thinking?
2. Discuss two research topics for which either the Banzhaf index or the Shapley value would be appropriate tools of research.

16 March:

To what extent do you believe conclusions drawn from laboratory experiments conducted with a few subjects in an artificial setting are robust? That is, how applicable do you think they can be to real life situations?

23 March:

1. “Institutions” is a fuzzy concept that means different things to different people. Do the various approaches to institutionalism in political science render these different meanings more intelligible? More generally, is the role of political science to clarify the meaning of terms used in everyday language?
2. Critically evaluate A. Przeworski’s article.

30 March:

Interpretivism is best suited to the study of *** [choose a few relevant cases or types of issues] but not to the study of *** [choose a few relevant cases or types of issues].

6 Apr.:

1. Summarize and critically evaluate the article by A. Driscoll and M. Krook.
2. Many feminist political scientists view themselves as “scholar-activists.” That is to say, they believe that research should be undertaken for the purpose of improving the conditions of women and/or other groups/minorities/categories. More conventional scholars prefer to think of themselves as “scientists” pursuing knowledge for knowledge’s sake. What do you view as the merits or drawbacks of each one of these options?

Reading List .../

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READING LIST

- 6 Jan. Introduction: A Variety of Ways of Doing Political Science**
- Overview of the objectives of the course: to compare and contrast formal theory models (game theory, etc.) with other approaches that are more fully covered in other methods courses in this Department.
 - Assignments.

PART I: CAUSAL INFERENCE—TESTING *EMPIRICAL* HYPOTHESES)

- 13 Jan. The Challenges of Using Probabilistic Methods to Estimate Causal Effects**
Read [NOTE: these texts are very technical but will be summarized in a more accessible manner in the lecture]:
1. *Approaches to causal inference:*
Ch. 2 (Barringer et al.) & ch. 5 (Mahoney et al.), in *Handbook of Causal Analysis for Social Research*
J. Pearl, *The Book of Why*, chs. 1 to 4
 2. *A few issues and challenges:*
P.A. Schrodtt, “Seven Deadly Sins of Contemporary Quantitative Political Analysis” *Journal of peace research*, 2014, Vol.51, No. 2:287-300
J. Gill, "The Insignificance of Null Hypothesis Significance Testing." *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 52 (1999): 647-674.
 3. *Recommended* (also relevant to week of 27 Jan.): E. Sober, *Evidence and Evolution*, ch. 1 {about Bayes’ rule}

PART II: FORMAL MODELS—ASSUMING THAT SOME AXIOMS ARE TRUE,
WHAT CONSEQUENCES *LOGICALLY* FOLLOW (ALBEIT NOT ALWAYS
EMPIRICALLY?)

- 20 Jan. Rational Choice/Formal Modeling: Concepts and Premises**
Read:
M. Laver, *Private Desires, Political Action*, chs. 2 & ch. 5
E. Rosenthal, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Game Theory*, ch. 13
- 27 Jan. Game Theory: some basic concepts**
Read:
Idiot’s Guide, chs. 1 & 2.
E. Sober, *Evidence and Evolution*, ch. 1
Download/watch the videos on “conditional probabilities” & “Bayes’ Theorem” on the Khan Academy website (www.khanacademy.org)
Recommended (more advanced): J. Joyce “Bayes’ Theorem”
- 3 Feb. Game Theory: Zero-Sum Games; Expected Utilities; Mixed Strategies**

Read:*Idiot's Guide*, ch. 3T.S. Ferguson, *Game Theory*, Part II, sections 1 to 4[fergusonII.pdf \(ucsd.edu\)](#)**10 Feb. Game Theory: Nash Equilibrium, Prisoner's Dilemma & Other Games**Read:*Idiot's Guide*, chs. 4 to 8

Turocy & von Stangel "Game Theory," sections III to VII

*Specifically on correlated equilibrium (from easiest to most technical):*E. Klarreich, "In Game Theory, No Clear Path to Equilibrium," *Quanta Magazine*[in-game-theory-no-clear-path-to-equilibrium-20170718 \(quantamagazine.org\)](#)R. McCain, *Game Theory and Public Policy*, 1st ed (2009), ch. 5, sections 5.1 to 5.3K. Binmore, *Playing for Real*, ch.6 section 6.6.2 only**17 Feb. Holiday & Reading Week****24 Feb. Repeated Games and Evolutionary Strategies**Read:*Idiot's Guide*, chs. 17 & 22.K. Binmore, *A Very Short Introduction to Game Theory*, chs. 5 & 8Recommended:D. Kraines & V. Kraines, "Learning to Cooperate with Pavlov." *Theory and Decision* 35 (1993): 107-150,J. Mackenzie Alexander, "Evolutionary Game Theory." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/game-evolutionary/>**2 March Mid-Term Exam****9 March. Bargaining Games**Read:A.M. Colman, *Game Theory and Its Applications*, ch.*Idiot's Guide*, chs. 9 to 12**16 March methods) Behavioural Game Theory (convergence between empirical and formal**Read:*Idiot's Guide*, chs. 18 to 21.J Druckman et al. (eds.) *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, Part II**PART III: INSTITUTIONALISM—WHY INSTITUTIONS MATTER (A MESO-LEVEL APPROACH)****23 March. Institutionalism**

Read:

M. Handler, "Institutionalism and Neo-institutionalism: History of the Concepts." *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., pp. 186-189.

J. Mahoney et al., "Causality and Time in Historical Institutionalism." Chapter 4 in *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism*.

E. Koning, "The Three Institutionalism and Institutional Dynamics" *Journal of Public Policy*, 36 (2016): 639-664.

A. Przeworski, "Institutions Matter?" *Government and Opposition*, 39 (2004), No. 4: 527-540.

PART IV: FROM EXPLANATION TO UNDERSTANDING—THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

30 March Interpretive Approaches

Read:

D. Howarth and S. Griggs, "Discourse Analysis, Social Constructivism and text Analysis." Ch. 26 in *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Political Science*, pp. 400-418.

V. Schmidt, "Taking ideas and discourse seriously: explaining change through discursive institutionalism as the fourth 'new institutionalism'." *European Political Science Review* vo. 2, no. 1 (March 2010): 1-25.

D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Shea (eds.). *Interpretation and Method*, chs. 2 & 6.

6 Apr. Feminism

Read:

Kantola & Lombardo, "Feminist Political Analysis" *Feminist Theory*, 18(2017) No. 3: 323-341.

Gender Innovation in Political Science: New Norms, New Knowledge, eds. M. Sawyer & K. Baker. Chs. 2 (Sawyer), & 6 (Curtin)

A. Driscoll and M. Krook, "Can There be a Feminist Rational Choice Institutionalism?" *Politics & Gender* 5 No. 2: 238-245.