

Formal Models of Comparative Politics

PLSC 736/INRL 595

Fall 2009

Schedule: Wednesdays, 9:25-11:15 AM

Rosenkranz 301

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We will discuss recent formal models of the determinants of political regimes and the sources of institutional persistence, as well as the causes and consequences of electoral rules. A goal of the course is to become better consumers and critics as well as producers of formal work and to learn modeling techniques through the study of leading applications. The focus throughout is on the substantive insights provided by the models. However, we will spend substantial time discussing technical aspects of the models assigned for each lecture.

The course is open to graduate students in political science and in other disciplines, with the permission of the instructor. A previous course in game theory and some math background at the level of undergraduate calculus is recommended.

Required texts:

Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Persson, Torsten and Guido Tabellini. 2000. *Political Economics: Explaining Economic Policy*. Cambridge: MIT press.

Recommended texts:

Brocas, Isabelle, Micael Castanheira, Ronny Razin, and David Strömberg. 2000. *Workbook to Accompany "Political Economics: Explaining Economic Policy."* Cambridge: MIT press.

Dunning, Thad. 2008. *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, Cambridge University Press.

For those who want to bone up on their mathematics, one good option at the level appropriate for this course is:

Simon, Carl P. and Lawrence Blume. *Mathematics for Economists*. New York: W.W. Norton.

A good reference on game theory is:

Fudenberg, Drew and Jean Tirole. 2000. *Game Theory*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Assignments: There are three main assignments for the course: problem sets, presentations, and a take-home final exam.

- (1) There will be two or three problem sets due during the semester. I will ask you to divide into groups of 2-4 (depending on the size of the class) and to work on and turn in problem sets as a group. On weeks when there is a problem set due, I will ask one group (which group will be determined ahead of time) to briefly present and explain its solutions to the class.
- (2) Working in small groups of 2-4 people, I would like you to choose one article or book in which formal models are used to study a substantive problem of interest to you. During one of the final class meetings, you will give a presentation about this work to the class, in which you will identify the substantive question being asked, describe in detail the modeling approach used to investigate it, and discuss the strengths and limitations of the use of formal methods. After forming your group, you should come to speak to me, so that we can agree on the paper you will read and discuss.
- (3) There will also be a take-home final exam, which will involve a mix of (non-formal) discussion of the models we have studied and formal analysis.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

September 2: No class (due to APSA meetings)

PART I. DEMOCRATIZATION, SUFFRAGE EXPANSION, AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSISTENCE

September 9: INTRODUCTION

September 16: Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins*, Chapters 1-5.

September 23: Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins*, Chapter 6-7

- (Recommended) Fudenberg and Tirole, *Game Theory*, pp. 501-518.

September 30: Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins*, Chapters 8-10.

October 7: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes

- Dunning, *Crude Democracy*, Chapters 1-3.

October 14: Institutional persistence

- Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson. 2001. “De Facto Political Power and Institutional Persistence.” *American Economic Review* 96 (2): 326-330.
- Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson. 2006. “Persistence of Power, Elites and Institutions.” Manuscript, Department of Economics, MIT, and Department of Government, Harvard University.

October 21: Alternative perspectives on suffrage expansion

- LLavador, Humberto and Robert J. Oxoby. “Partisan competition, growth, and the franchise.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120 (3): 2005
- Lizzeri, Alessandro and Nicola Persico. 2004. “Why Did the Elites Extend the Suffrage? Democracy and the Scope of Government, with an Application to Britain’s “Age of Reform.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119: 707-765.

PART II. THE EFFECTS OF ELECTORAL RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS

October 28: Persson and Tabellini, *Political Economics*, Ch. 3-5.

November 4: Persson and Tabellini, *Political Economics*, Ch. 6-7.

November 11: Persson and Tabellini, *Political Economics*, Ch. 8-10.

- (Recommended) Persson, Torsten and Guido Tabellini. 2003. *The Economic Effects of Constitutions*. Cambridge: MIT press. Ch. 4-8.

PART III. SELECTED TOPICS

November 18: TBA

November 25: NO CLASS (FALL RECESS)

December 2: Presentations

December 11: Presentations

Take-home exam, TBA