
Political Science 270 Mechanisms of International Relations

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Course Information:
Fall 2008
14:00-16:40 Thursday
Gavet 208

The last ten years or so have seen a major revolution in the social sciences. Instead of trying to discover and test grand “covering laws” that have universal validity and tremendous scope—think Newton’s gravity or Einstein’s relativity—the social sciences are in the process of switching to more narrow and middle-range theories and explanations, often referred to as causal mechanisms.

In the bulk of this course students will be introduced to formal reasoning in an informal manner. However, I will introduce students to some very basic heuristics formal models to show the power and potential of this approach. We will examine one particular mechanism each week and see how it has been applied in international political economy and/or security studies. We will explore several substantive themes, such as the “democratic peace,” ethnic conflict and international trade to illustrate the mechanisms and cumulative potential of this research approach.

Course Requirements Students are of course required to read all the material; be ready to summarize each paper in a cogent paragraph or two; and participate in class discussion. Participation in the seminar comprises a third of your grade. Participation includes participation in class discussions, as well as **one** class presentations. Thus, each student is required to *present and lead the discussion on one readings*.

A midterm exam counts for another third of your grade, and a final exam counts for the final a third of your grade. The final exam is given during the period scheduled by the University. In particular instances, students may substitute a *serious* research paper for the final. Students interested in the research paper option should approach me no later than one week after the mid-term.

Academic Integrity

Be familiar with the University’s policies on academic integrity and disciplinary action (<http://www.rochester.edu/living/urhere/handbook/discipline2.html#XII>). Violators of University regulations on academic integrity will be dealt with severely, which means that your grade will suffer, and I will forward your case to the Chair of the College Board on Academic Honesty.

TEACHING ASSISTANT:

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Texts

The following books should be in the bookstore:

1. Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
2. David A. Lake and Robert Powell, *Strategic Choice in International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
3. Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination and Common Knowledge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Readings not included in one of the texts can be found through one of the online databases or on the library's course web page. These readings are listed in the syllabus in italics. In addition, I expect students to read one of the following newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Financial Times*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Die Zeit*, *Le Monde diplomatique* or a comparable international paper.

Course Outline

Thursday September 4

1. INTRODUCTION

Thursday September 11

2. Causal Mechanisms

- Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Parts 1–3, pp. 3–171.
- Charles Tilly, “Mechanisms in Political Processes,” in *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol.4, June 2001, 21–41. Available at <http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.21>

Thursday September 18

3. Rational Choice and Strategic Choice

- Jon Elster, “Introduction,” in Jon Elster, (ed.) *Rational Choice*, New York: NYU Press, 1986, 1–33.
- Amartya Sen, “Behaviour and the Concept of Preference,” Chapter 2 in Jon Elster, (ed.) *Rational Choice*, New York: NYU Press, 1986, 60–81.
- David A. Lake and Robert Powell, “International Relations: A Strategic Choice Approach,” Chapter 1 in Lake and Powell (eds.), *Strategic Choice in International Relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, 3–38.
- Jeffrey A. Frieden, “Actors and Preferences in International Relations,” Chapter 2 in Lake and Powell (eds.), *Strategic Choice in International Relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Thursday September 25

4. The Prisoner’s Dilemma

- Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, (January 1978), pp.167–214
- Robert Axelrod, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 7 in *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984.
- Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* 1968, Vol 162: 1243–1248.
- Elinor Ostrom, “Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms,” in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 14, No. 3, (Summer 2000), 137–158
- Vinod K. Aggarwal and C. Dupont, “Goods, games, and institutions,” *International Political Science Review*, 20 (4): 393–409, October 1999.

Thursday October 2

5. Coordination

- Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995; Chapter 1–3.
- Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination and Common Knowledge*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001; entire book.

Thursday October 9

6. Coordination; Tipping Models

- Timur Kuran, “Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989,” in *World Politics*, Vol.44, No.1 (October 1991), pp.7–48.
- Duncan Snidal, “Coordination versus Prisoners’ Dilemma: Implications for International Cooperation and Regimes,” *American Political Science Review*, 79 (4): 923–942 (December 1985).
- Gerry Mackie, “Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 6 (December 1996), 999–1017
- Barry R. Weingast, “The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (June 1997), 245–263.
- Thomas Schelling, “Thermostats, Lemons, and Other Families of Models,” Chapter 3 in Thomas Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*, New York: Norton, 1978.

Optional

- Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Back Bay Books; (January 2002)

Thursday October 16

7. Commitment Problems

- John C. Harsanyi, “Advances in Understanding Rational Behavior,” Chapter 3 in Jon Elster, (ed.) *Rational Choice*, New York: NYU Press, 1986, 82–108.
- Thomas Schelling, Chapter 2, “The art of commitment,” in *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966; 35–91
- Barbara F. Walter, “The critical barrier to civil war settlement,” *International Organization*, 51 (3): 335–364 Summer 1997
- James D. Fearon, “Commitment Problems and the spread of Ethnic Conflict,” Chapter 5 in David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, (eds.), *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: fear diffusion, and escalation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, 107–126.
- Barry Weingast and Rui de Figueiredo, “Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict,” in Jack Snyder and Barbara Walter (eds.), *Civil wars, insecurity, and intervention*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Thursday October 23

8. MID TERM EXAM

Thursday October 30

9. **Bargaining**

- Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics, The Logic of Two-Level Games," in *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1988): 427-460
- Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960/1980. Chapters 2 & 3, 21-80. "
- James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," in *International Organization*, Vol.49 (3) (Summer 1995), pp.379-414.
- James D. Fearon, "Bargaining, enforcement, and international cooperation," *International Organization*, 52 (2): Spring 1998
- Dan Reiter, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War." in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2003, pp.27-43.

Thursday November 6

10. **Signalling (Tying Hands, Sinking Costs)**

- James D. Fearon, "Signaling foreign policy interests—Tying hands versus sinking costs," in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41 (1): 68-90 February 1997.
- Kenneth Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, Chapters 2-4.
- Barry R. Weingast, "The Role of Credible Commitments in State Finance," *Public Choice* 66 (1): 89-97 July 1990.
- James D. Morrow, "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signalling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics," Chapter 3 in David A. Lake and Robert Powell (eds.), *Strategic Choice in International Relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Thursday November 13

11. **Principal-Agent Models**

- H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000; Chapters 1-3.
- James D. Fearon, "Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes," *American Political Science Review*, 88 (3): 577-592. September 1994.

Thursday November 20

12. Selection Effects

- James D. Fearon, "Signaling versus the balance of power and interests—an empirical test of a crisis bargaining model, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 38 (2): 236-269. June 1994.
- Kenneth Schultz, "Looking for Audience Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (1) February 2001: 32-60.
- Alastair Smith, "Testing theories of strategic choice: The example of crisis escalation," *American Journal of Political Science*, 43 (4): 1254-1283. October 1999
- Alastair Smith, "A summary of political selection: The effect of strategic choice on the escalation of international crises." *American Journal of Political Science* 42 (2): 698-701 April 1998.
- Curt S. Signorino, "Strategy and selection in international relations," *International Interactions* 2002 Vol. 28 (1): 93-115.

Thursday November 27

13. Thanksgiving Break

Thursday December 4

14. Institutions in International Relations

- Ronald Rogowski, "Institutions as Constraints on Strategic Choice," Chapter 4 in David A. Lake and Robert Powell (eds.), *Strategic Choice in International Relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Lisa L. Martin & Beth A. Simmons, "Theories and Empirical Studies of International Institutions," in *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Autumn 1998, pp.729-757.
- Kenneth W. Abbott & Duncan Snidal, "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance." *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 3, Summer 2000, pp. 421-456.
- Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson & Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions," in *International Organizations*, Vol. 55, No. 4, Autumn 2001, pp. 761-799.
- Barbara Koremenos, "Contracting around international uncertainty," in *American Political Science Review*, Vol.99, Issue 4, November 2005, pp.549-565.

Thursday December 11: Last Day of Class

15. Psychological Mechanisms

- Jack S. Levy, “Loss Aversion, Framing Effects, and International Conflict, Perspectives from Prospect Theory,” in Manus Midlarsky (ed.), *Handbook of War Studies II*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000: 193-221.
- John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “The Psychological Foundations of Culture.” Chapter 1 in Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (eds.), *The Adapted Mind, Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press 1992. Pp. 19-136.
- Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, “Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange,” Chapter 3 in Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (eds.), *The Adapted Mind, Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press 1992. Pp. 163-228.

Optional

- Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice,” Chapter 5 in Jon Elster (ed.), *Rational Choice*, New York, NYU Press, 1986.
- Yuen J. Huo , Heather J. Smith, Tom R. Tyler and E. Allan Lind. “Superordinate identification, subgroup identification, and justice concerns: Is separatism the problem; Is assimilation the answer?” *Psychological Science* 7: (1) 1996, January: 40-45.

Thursday December 18th ??

16. Final Exam

Questions to consider in formulating and evaluating social science research

1. *What is the central question?*
 - Why is it important (theoretically, substantively)?
 - What is being explained (what is the dependent variable and how does it vary)?
 - How does this phenomenon present a puzzle?
2. *What is the central answer?*
 - What is doing the explaining (what are the independent variables and how do they vary)?
 - What are the hypotheses, i.e., what is the relationship between independent and dependent variables, what kind of change in the independent variable causes what kind of change in the dependent variable?
 - What are the causal mechanisms, i.e., why are the independent and dependent variables so related?
 - How do the independent variables relate to each other?
 - What assumptions does your theory make?
 - Is the theory falsifiable in concept?
 - What does this explanation add to our understanding of the question?
3. *What are the possible alternative explanations?*
 - What assumptions are you making about the direction of causality?
 - What other explanations might there be for the phenomenon of study, and to what degree do they conflict with the central answer?
 - Could the hypothesized relationships have occurred by chance?
4. *Why are the possible alternative explanations wrong?*
 - What is the logical structure of the alternative explanations (compare 2)?
 - What is the empirical evidence?
5. *What is the relationship between the theory and the evidence?*
 - What does the research design allow to vary, i.e., in this design are the explanations variables or constants?
 - What does your research design hold constant, i.e., does it help to rule out the alternative competing explanations?
 - How are the theoretical constructs represented empirically, i.e., how do you know it when you see it (measurement)?
6. *How do the empirical conclusions relate to the theory?*
 - How confident are you about the theory in light of the evidence?
 - How widely do the conclusions generalize, i.e., what might be the limitations of the study?
 - What does the provisionally accepted or revised theory say about questions of broader importance?