

Political Science 580: Models of Non-democratic Politics

Room: Harkness 329

University of Rochester Spring 2025

Instructor: Scott A. Tyson

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Office Hours: T 2-3:30

Course Description: This course will study game theoretic models that address core themes in comparative politics, focusing on non-democratic settings. Substantive questions include: How do authoritarian rulers maintain power? Why do countries democratize? How do states monopolize violence and prevent civil wars? The goal of the course is to understand the mechanics of important models from the literature as well as the broader research agendas to which these models contribute. This goal will enable students to identify cutting edge research questions in these literatures.

Prerequisites: A familiarity with Nash equilibrium, Perfect Bayesian equilibrium, the potential outcomes model, as well as key concepts of research design such as the selection and use of an instrument will be helpful but is not required.

Structure of the Course: Each week will be comprised of 1-3 presentations from students based on the weeks assigned readings. I suggest that students work out which papers they might find most helpful and then seek out other students with a similar interest.

There will also be a final project comprised of the proposal of a research paper. I do not necessarily expect every student to complete a fully polished research paper by the end of the course. I do, however, expect students to be able to complete a detailed, yet brief (about 20 pages), proposal of a research project. For example, the student might present an argument in words, situate their argument within the existing literature, provide a detailed description of their empirical strategy or model, and finally, describe how their potential findings would contribute to the literature.

Grades: Your grade in the course will ultimately be determined by performance in (1) class presentations, (2) class discussions, and (3) a final project. The grading scheme is as follows:

Problem Sets (35%)

Class Discussion (25%)

Final paper (40%)

Books: There are four required books for this course:

- Scott Gehlbach. *Formal models of domestic politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2021
- Milan W Svobik. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press, 2012
- Timothy Besley. *Principled agents?: The political economy of good government*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2006

Methodological Background: This course will rely on concepts from game theory as well as causal inference and statistics. Useful background references are:

- Game Theory: Robert Gibbons. An introduction to applicable game theory. 11(1):127–149, 1997
- Research Design: Joshua D Angrist and Alan B Krueger. Empirical strategies in labor economics. *Handbook of labor economics*, 3:1277–1366, 1999

Schedule:

- Introduction (January 22, 2025)
 - (a) Scott Gehlbach, Konstantin Sonin, and Milan W Svobik. Formal models of nondemocratic politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19(1):565–584, 2016
 - (b) Jack Paine and Scott A Tyson. Formal theory: Strategies of authoritarian survival and power. In Anne Wolfe, editor, *Oxford Handbook of Authoritarian Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2024
 - (c) Jean Tirole. The internal organization of government. *Oxford economic papers*, 46(1):1–29, 1994
 - (d) Georgy Egorov and Konstantin Sonin. The political economics of non-democracy. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 62(2):594–636, 2024
 - (e) Milan W Svobik. Democracy as an equilibrium: Rational choice and formal political theory in democratization research. *Democratization*, 26(1):40–60, 2019
- The Principal Agent Model—Moral Hazard (January 29, 2025):
 - (a) Bengt Hölmstrom. Moral hazard and observability. *The Bell journal of economics*, pages 74–91, 1979
 - (b) Milan W Svobik. Contracting on violence: The moral hazard in authoritarian repression and military intervention in politics. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 57(5):765–794, 2013
 - (c) Tiberiu Dragu and Adam Przeworski. Preventive repression: Two types of moral hazard. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1):77–87, 2019
 - (d) Georgy Egorov, Sergei Guriev, and Konstantin Sonin. Why resource-poor dictators allow freer media: A theory and evidence from panel data. *American political science Review*, 103(4):645–668, 2009
- The Principal Agent Model—Adverse Selection and More (February 5, 2025):
 - (a) Georgy Egorov and Konstantin Sonin. Dictators and their viziers: Endogenizing the loyalty–competence trade-off. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 9(5):903–930, 2011
 - (b) B Pablo Montagnes and Stephane Wolton. Mass purges: Top-down accountability in autocracy. *American Political Science Review*, 113(4):1045–1059, 2019

- (c) Scott A Tyson. The agency problem underlying repression. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(4):1297–1310, 2018
- The Principal Agent Model—Career Concerns (February 12, 2025):
 - (a) Bengt Holmström. Managerial incentive problems: A dynamic perspective. *The review of Economic studies*, 66(1):169–182, 1999
 - (b) Mathias Dewatripont, Ian Jewitt, and Jean Tirole. The economics of career concerns, part i: Comparing information structures. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 66(1):183–198, 1999a
 - (c) Mathias Dewatripont, Ian Jewitt, and Jean Tirole. The economics of career concerns, part ii: Application to missions and accountability of government agencies. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 66(1):199–217, 1999b
- Mechanism Design (February 19, 2025):
 - (a) Roger B Myerson. Mechanism design by an informed principal. *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society*, pages 1767–1797, 1983
 - (b) Roger B Myerson. The autocrat’s credibility problem and foundations of the constitutional state. *American Political Science Review*, 102(1):125–139, 2008
 - (c) Roger B Myerson. Multistage games with communication. *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society*, pages 323–358, 1986
 - (d) Jeffrey S Banks. Equilibrium behavior in crisis bargaining games. *American Journal of Political Science*, pages 599–614, 1990
- Coordination (February 26, 2025):
 - (a) Barry R Weingast. The political foundations of democracy and the rule of the law. *American political science review*, 91(2):245–263, 1997
 - (b) James D Fearon. Self-enforcing democracy. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 126(4):1661–1708, 2011
- Coordination—Global Games I (March 5, 2025):
 - (a) Christian Hellwig. Public information, private information, and the multiplicity of equilibria in coordination games. *Journal of Economic Theory*, 107(2):191–222, 2002
 - (b) George-Marios Angeletos, Christian Hellwig, and Alessandro Pavan. Signaling in a global game: Coordination and policy traps. *Journal of Political economy*, 114(3):452–484, 2006
 - (c) Carles Boix and Milan W Svobik. The foundations of limited authoritarian government: Institutions, commitment, and power-sharing in dictatorships. *the Journal of Politics*, 75(2):300–316, 2013
- Coordination—Global Games II (March 26, 2025):

- (a) Scott A Tyson and Alastair Smith. Dual-layered coordination and political instability: Repression, co-optation, and the role of information. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(1):44–58, 2018
- (b) Dimitri Landa and Scott A Tyson. Coercive leadership. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3):559–574, 2017
- (c) Chris Edmond. Information manipulation, coordination, and regime change. *Review of Economic studies*, 80(4):1422–1458, 2013
- Dynamic Models I (April 2, 2025):
 - (a) Jack Paine. The dictator’s power-sharing dilemma: Countering dual outsider threats. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2):510–527, 2021
 - (b) Jack Paine. Reframing the guardianship dilemma: how the military’s dual disloyalty options imperil dictators. *American Political Science Review*, 116(4):1425–1442, 2022
- Dynamic Models II—Dynamic Programming (April 9, 2025):
 - (a) J Adda. *Dynamic Economics: Quantitative Methods and Applications*. The MIT Press, 2003
 - (b) Alexei V Zakharov. The loyalty-competence trade-off in dictatorships and outside options for subordinates. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(2): 457–466, 2016
 - (c) Livio Di Lonardo, Jessica S Sun, and Scott A Tyson. The dynamics of authoritarian repression. *Mimeo*, 2025
- Dynamic Models III—Commitment Problems (April 16, 2025):
 - (a) Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. A theory of political transitions. *American Economic Review*, 91(4):938–963, 2001
 - (b) Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Cambridge university press, 2005
 - (c) Robert Powell. The inefficient use of power: Costly conflict with complete information. *American Political science review*, 98(2):231–241, 2004
- Miscellaneous (April 23, 2025):
 - (a) Livio Di Lonardo, Jessica S Sun, and Scott A Tyson. Autocratic stability in the shadow of foreign threats. *American Political Science Review*, 114(4):1247–1265, 2020
 - (b) Drew Fudenberg and Jean Tirole. A” signal-jamming” theory of predation. *The RAND Journal of Economics*, pages 366–376, 1986
 - (c) Tiberiu Dragu and Mattias Polborn. The administrative foundation of the rule of law. *The Journal of Politics*, 75(4):1038–1050, 2013
- Cushion Week (April 30, 2025):

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations.

Religious and Academic Conflicts: Although the University of Rochester, as an institution, does not observe religious holidays, it has long been the University's policy that every reasonable effort should be made to help students avoid negative academic consequences when their religious obligations conflict with academic requirements. Absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the period of absence. Students who expect to miss classes, examinations, or other assignments as a consequence of their religious observance shall be provided with a reasonable alternative opportunity to complete such academic responsibilities.

It is the obligation of students to provide faculty with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent. Such notice must be given by the drop/add deadline of the given term. Students who are absent on days of examinations or class assignments shall be offered an opportunity to make up the work, without penalty, unless it can be demonstrated that a make-up opportunity would interfere unreasonably with the delivery of the course. Should disagreement arise over any aspect of this policy, the parties involved should contact the Director of Undergraduate Studies/Director of Graduate Studies. Final appeals will be resolved by the Provost.

Students Representing the University of Rochester: There may be instances when students must miss class due to their commitment to officially represent the University. These students may be involved in the performing arts, scientific or artistic endeavors, or intercollegiate athletics. Absence from classes while representing the University does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course missed during the period of absence. Students should provide reasonable notice for dates of anticipated absences and submit an individualized class excuse form.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: University of Rochester is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact the University Counseling Center at UHS at (585) 275-3113 and <http://www.rochester.edu/uhs/ucc/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on River Campus.

Academic Integrity: General University policies and guidelines regarding academic honesty apply. The academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. The University holds all members of its community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an opti-

mal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the University promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards of the College community cannot be tolerated. The College seeks vigorously to achieve compliance with its community standards of academic integrity. Violations of the standards will not be tolerated and will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action.

Grade Grievances: If you believe a grade you have received is unfair or in error, you will need to do the following:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before approaching your instructor.
2. Provide an explanation in writing for why the grade you received was unfair or in error.
3. If you believe the instructor's response fails to address your claim of unfairness or error, you may petition the department's Director of Undergraduate Studies at the latest within the first five weeks of classes following the completion of the course. You must convey in writing the basis for the complaint, with specific evidence in support of the argument that the grade either was given in error or was unfairly determined. This formal complaint also should summarize the outcome of the initial inquiry to the course instructor, indicating which aspects are in dispute. Within three weeks of the receipt of the petition, the DUS will determine whether to convene the Undergraduate Affairs Committee, the student, and the instructor(s) for a formal hearing. Further details on this process are included on the department website under Advising → Contesting a Grade.