
Political Science 270

Mechanisms of International Relations

Hein Goemans
Harkness 337
Office Hours: Wed. 2 { 3 PM
hgoemans@mail.rochester.edu

Course Information:
Spring 2016
16:50{19:30 Wednesday
Meliora 203

The last fifteen years or so saw 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. Recently, however, a new so-called "behavioral" approach (often but not always complementary) is currently sweeping the field. Since mechanisms remain the core theoretical building blocks in our field, we will continue to focus on them.

In the bulk of this course students will be introduced to a range of such causal mechanisms with applications in international relations. Although these causal mechanisms can loosely be described in prose, explicit formalization (e.g., math) allows for a much deeper and richer understanding of the phenomena of study. In other words, formalization enables *simplification* and thus a better understanding of what is "really" going on. To set us on that path, we begin with some very basic rational choice fundamentals to introduce you to formal models in a rigorous way to show the power and potential of this approach. In other words, there will be some *gasp* *Algebra*. For much of the very brief but essential introduction to game theory we will use William Spaniel's Channel (<http://gametheory101.com/courses/game-theory-101/>, also on YouTube), as well as his cheap but very highly rated introductory book *Game Theory 101: The Complete Textbook* available at Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>). Will is a graduate from our Ph.D. program, currently a post-doctoral fellow at Stanford and he will be an Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh next fall. During the rest of the semester we examine specific and ubiquitous mechanisms 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

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

Course Outline

Wednesday January 13

1. INTRODUCTION

Wednesday January 20

2. Thinking Strategically

William Spaniel, from Game Theory 101 MOOC, lesson #1: Introduction. From his book

Wednesday January 27

3. 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>

Wednesday February 3

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

Wednesday February 10

5. Coordination

Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995; Chapter 1{4.

Randall Calvert, "Leadership and Its Basis in Problems of Social Coordination." *International Political Science Review* 13 (1992), pp. 7{24.

Wednesday February 17

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 Inbulation: 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)

Wednesday February 24

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.

Wednesday March 2

8. Mid Term Exam

Wednesday March 9

9. No Class: Spring Recess

Students who are writing a paper for this class must hand in their one page proposal on this day.

11. **Bargaining**

Abhinav Muthoo. 2000. "A Non-Technical Introduction to Bargaining Theory."
World Economics

Wednesday April 13

14. **Principal-Agent Models**

H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000; Chapters 1-3.

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