
Political Science 270
Mechanisms of International Relations

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Course Information:
Fall 2008
14:00–16:40 Tuesday
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** group class presentations. Thus, each student is required to *work in a group format and present and lead the discussion on one class*.

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#XI1>). 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 Assistants:

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Texts

I will provide a hand-out with the typed up lecture notes, currently about 75 pages. I will provide these twice during the semester, once the week before the Mid-term and the second time before the Final.

The following books should be in the bookstore:

1. Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. You can also buy the expanded *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
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

Tuesday September 29

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.

Tuesday October 6

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)

Tuesday October 13

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.

Tuesday October 23

8. Mid Term Exam

Tuesday October 27

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.

Tuesday November 3

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.

Tuesday November 10

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.

Tuesday November 17

12.

Tuesday December 8: Last Day of Class

15. **Psychological Mechanisms**

- John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "The Psychological Foundations of Culture."

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?