Designing American Democracy

Spring 2018

Instructor:	Greg Sasso	**Time:**	MW 11:50-13:05
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Objectives: When can Congress agree on the best policy for the country (and what does "best" even mean)? How does the electoral college affect Presidential campaigns? How does the Supreme Court choose what cases to hear? This course uses a rigorous set of tools including game theory to help students understand the structure of American government. With these tools, we will study US electoral systems, Congress, the Presidency and the executive branch, federalism, and the courts, with a focus on the challenges of group decision making and the inevitable conflicts that arise between the branches of government. Students will leave the course with a deeper understanding of how rules and strategy shape U.S. democracy.

I have two goals when teaching this course. Primarily, we use rational choice theory to understand how the rules of American political institutions affect the strategic choices made by citizens and politicians and these choices affect policies and outcomes. As such, we cover major problems in organizing groups such as collective action problems, coordination problems, and conflicting values, and apply these topics to the study of American politics and institutions. Secondarily, we review and learn modern techniques used in rational choice and institutional analysis including social choice and game theory.

Prerequisites: There are no formal mathematical prerequisites for the course, although some familiarity with logical/mathematical reasoning will be necessary. All that is required is command of high school

Voting and Majority rule

Shepsle: Chapters 3, 4 & 5 (until "Spatial models of Legislatures")

Voting and Electoral Systems

Shepsle: Chapters 6, 7

Analyzing Elections, Chapter 4, Morton (2006)

Bargaining in the Federal Government

Shepsle: Chapters 5 (just "Spatial models of Legislatures")

\Political resource allocation, controlled agendas, and the status quo" Romer and Rosenthal (1978) *Public Choice*, 33.4, pp. 27{43.

Pivotal Politics, Chapter 2, Krehbiel (1998)

Decentralization and Public Goods

Shepsle: Chapters 9, 10

\Centralized Versus Decentralized Provision of Local Public Goods: A Political Economy Approach" Besley and Coate (2003) *Journal of Public Economics*, 87.12, pp. 2611-2637

\Political Decentralization and Economic Reform: A Game-Theoretic Analysis" Treisman (1999) *American Journal of Political Science*, 43.2, pp. 488-517.

Delegation and Bureaucracy

Shepsle: Chapter 13

Delegating Powers, Chapters 2 and 3, Epstein and O'Halloran (1999)

Deliberate Discretion, Chapter 4, Huber and Shipan (2002)

Models of Courts and Judges

Shepsle: Chapter 15

\Game Theory, Legal History, and the Origins of Judicial Review: A Revisionist Analysis of Marbury v. Madison," Clinton (1994) *American Journal of Political Science*, 38.2, pp. 285-302.

\Certiorari and Compliance in the Judicial Hierarchy," Lax (2003) *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15.1: pp. 61{86.

Grading Policy: There will be four problem sets, each of which will be worth 15% of your grade. There will be a nal worth 30% of your grade. In addition, participation in class will comprise the remaining 10%.

Problem sets will include two types of questions. One type will test your comprehension of the technical material. The second type will be a short essay question, requiring you to read a non-technical piece of writing and interpret the argument in light of the models we have studied in class. The length of the essay answer should be between 250{750 words.

Problem sets will generally be non-accumulative. You may work in groups of up to 3 on the problem sets, but each person must submit their own copy. Problem Sets will be handed out during class and will be due at the start of class in one week. Late problem sets will not be accepted unless it has been cleared before hand.