GAMES, STRATEGY, AND POLITICS

Politics: POL-UA 844
New York University, Fall 2017
194 Mercer, Rm. 203
Class: Mon. & Wed., 2:00 - 3:15

The application of game theory—and an alternative strategic theory called “theory of moves”—and social-choice theory to a wide variety of strategic situations, principally but not exclusively in politics, will be studied. Uses of strategy in voting in committees and elections, in political campaigns, in the defense and deterrence policies of nations, and in bargaining and coalition-building situations will be among the topics discussed. Secrecy and deception as political strategies will also be analyzed.

Although the applications of strategic thinking will be mainly to American and international politics, strategy in everything from the Bible to business and sports today will be studied, too. Social-choice topics that will be analyzed include the manipulability of different voting systems, problems of achieving proportional representation in parliamentary democracies, and conflicts among different apportionment methods. Fair-division procedures for resolving disputes will also be analyzed.

In addition to the required readings, further readings will be recommended throughout the course for those interested in pursuing particular topics in greater depth. No mathematical training beyond high school mathematics is assumed in the course. The written requirements of the course include a midterm and a final examination plus a short paper on a topic—to which game theory is applicable—that is chosen in consultation with the instructor. Each of the three written requirements will count approximately 30 percent towards your final grade, with homework constituting the remaining 10 percent.

Required Books


Brams, Steven J. THEORY OF MOVES. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994. TOM


Assignments Due

Sept. 6: RP, chs. 1-2; TOM, Introduction; AS, Introduction and ch. 1
Sept. 11: TOM, ch. 1; AS, chs. 2-3
Sept. 18: TOM, ch. 2; AS, chs. 4-5
Sept. 25: TOM, ch. 3; AS, chs. 6-7
Oct. 2: TOM, ch. 4; AS, ch. 8
Oct. 11: TOM, chs. 5-6
Oct. 16: TOM, chs. 7-8
Oct. 30: RP, ch. 3; AS, chs. 9-10
Nov. 6: RP, ch. 4; AS, chs. 11-12
Nov. 13: RP, chs. 5 & 7 (skip ch. 6)
Nov. 20: RP, chs. 8-9; AS, chs. 13-14
Nov. 27: WW, chs. 1-4
Dec. 4: WW, chs. 5-9
Dec. 11/12: 6-8 page paper due and oral reports on Dec. 11; review on Dec. 12
Dec. 18 (?): Final exam

Game Theory Texts


Börgers Tilman. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF MECHANISM DESIGN. Oxford University Press, 2015.


Harrington, Joseph E., Jr. GAMES, STRATEGIES, AND DECISION MAKING. Worth, 2008.


Lepton-Brown, Kevin, and Yoav Shoham. ESSENTIALS OF GAME THEORY: A

Luce, R. Duncan, and Howard Raiffa. GAMES AND DECISIONS: A CRITICAL SURVEY. Wiley, 1957.


Straffin, Philip D. GAME THEORY AND STRATEGY. Mathematical Association of America, 1993.


Applications and History of Game Theory and Social-Choice Theory

Ankeny, Nesmith C. POKER STRATEGY: WINNING WITH GAME THEORY. Basic, 1981.


Brams, Steven J. PARADOXES IN POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NONOBVIOUS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE. Free Press, 1976.


Bryant, Jim.  ACTING STRATEGICALLY USING DRAMA THEORY.  CRC Press, 2016.


Heckelman, Jac C., and Nicholas R. Miller (eds.).  HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL CHOICE AND VOTING.  Edward Elgar, 2015.


Humphreys, Macartan.  POLITICAL GAMES: MATHEMATICAL INSIGHTS ON FIGHTING, VOTING, LYING & OTHER AFFAIRS OF STATE.  W. W.


Vajda, Steven. MATHEMATICAL GAMES AND HOW TO PLAY THEM. Ellis Horwood, 1992.


