I. Course Description

This course conducts a systematic analysis of the ways through which preferences of individuals and groups are transformed into policies in democratic societies. We will start with individual preferences and discuss the challenges in aggregating them into collective decisions. We will then study elections as the main collective decision-making mechanism. Next, we will discuss how collective action problems affect policy outcomes. Finally, we will study the role played by different legislative and government institutions as well as the media in determining political outcomes. Throughout the course, we will survey models of politics and illuminate a number of paradoxes and puzzles from a rational choice perspective. Hence, our focus will be on the incentives and constraints faced by political actors when choosing public policies. By the end of the semester, students should be able to develop an understanding of politics as the outcome of strategic interactions among political actors in various institutional settings.

II. Course Requirements and Grading

The final grade for this course will have the following components:

Class participation (10%)
Students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussion. Students should do the assigned readings before the lecture, and arrive in class ready to discuss the readings.
Group projects (40%)
There will be two group projects to be presented on Oct. 19 and Nov. 30, each worth 20% of the total grade. The class will be divided into groups of 4 on Sep. 28 and Nov. 9. Each group will be given a presentation question and 3 weeks to plan and prepare their presentation. Each presentation topic will have a set of readings. However, students are encouraged to do their own research and bring in other materials relevant to the question. Students will be assessed by their group performance. More information on what is expected from the presentations will be provided.

Final research paper (50%)
Each student is required to write a research paper. Paper should be no more than 4000 words, and is due on Dec. 21, 2pm by email. The word count for the essay includes footnotes and appendices but excludes references. No late submissions will be accepted. Students are expected to come up with a topic for their paper and discuss it with me by Nov. 9 to get an approval. More information on how to write the research papers will be provided.

III. Required Readings

The following book is required for this course:


In addition to the required text, there will also be articles and book chapters. I will post them on Blackboard one week before the class.

IV. Class Schedule

Sep. 7: Introduction & Overview
No assigned reading

Sep. 14: Preference Aggregation
Shepsle, Ch. 2, 3, 4


**Sep. 21: Electoral Competition**

Shepsle, Ch.5, pp. 111-123


**Sep. 28: Electoral Rules and Policy Outcomes**

Shepsle, Ch. 7


**Oct. 5: Public Goods, Externalities, and Collective Action**

Shepsle, Ch. 8, 9, 10


Oct. 12: Interest Groups and Lobbying


Oct. 19: Group Presentation I

Oct. 26: Policy-making in Legislatures

Shepsle, Ch.5, p.123-148 (“Spatial Models of Legislatures”)


Nov. 2: Political Agency and Accountability


Nov. 9: Organization of the Executive: Parliamentary vs. Presidential Government


**Nov. 16: Coalition Governments**


**Nov. 30: Group Presentations II**

**Dec. 7: Bureaucracy**

Shepsle, Ch. 13


**Dec. 14: Media and Public Policy**

