

# PSC 580: Models of Non-Democratic Politics

University of Rochester  
Fall 2017  
Tuesdays, 12:30-3:25  
Classroom: 329 Harkness

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OHS: Tuesdays 11:30-12:30, Wednesdays 11:15-12:15

## General Information

This course will cover models of authoritarian politics and transitions to democracy, as well as the related substantive literature. The course is intended for multiple audiences: students that want to produce formal theory, students interested in authoritarianism and democratization, students that want to become informed consumers of formal models, and combinations thereof.

## Prerequisites

PSC 407 and 408, or another game theory course approved by the instructor.

## Grading

- **40% Final paper.** The only way to learn how to write a paper is by writing papers. Correspondingly, all students are required to write a final paper of approximately 15-25 pages. The exact content of the paper can vary by student. One possible template is to take a model we cover in class and alter it in one or two ways, solve it, and write an accompanying analysis. Another (non-mutually exclusive) possibility is to read in depth on a handful of cases and assess how well one or several models from the course explain important attributes of those cases. Or, students can write about models and/or substantive themes not covered in the course, as long as it somehow relates to formal theory and authoritarian politics/democratic transitions. We will discuss the projects in more depth as the semester proceeds.
- **40% Other assignments.** There will be three types of assignments throughout the semester in addition to reading: presentations, memos, and problem sets.
  - Each student will co-present two modeling articles throughout the semester with one other student. Although these presentations necessarily require explicating some math, the main focus is on explaining the core intuitions and takeaways from the model, as opposed to explaining every proof in detail (although, of course, sometimes details of the proofs are needed to understand the intuition). Students will be linked to partners and articles in the first week of class, choosing among the eight articles listed below with an \*.

- Each student will write two 5-7 page memos that reflect on the models and substantive readings. These are open-ended writing assignments that will be discussed more later in the semester. They may serve as sounding boards for the final paper. The memos are due by **5pm on the Sunday before class**.
- A handful of formal problems will be assigned throughout the semester, also due by **5pm on the Sunday before class**.
- **20% Class participation.** The individual classes in this course are divided into three types: lectures by the instructor, student presentations of published models, and discussions of substantive readings accompanied by model-building attempts. All of these, especially the latter two and **ESPECIALLY** the model-building sessions, will only succeed with active student participation. This requires careful reading and preparation prior to each class. Needless to say, attendance is required at all sessions without a suitable excuse.

### **Reading**

All required reading is to be completed *prior* to the course for which it is assigned. Supplementary readings are not required at any point. They are intended to be helpful for students who want to learn more about a particular topic, and may also be useful for the final paper. This course only scratches the surface of formal and substantive readings related to authoritarian politics and democratization, and I am happy to provide additional references. I made an explicit choice to focus more in depth on a handful of topics rather than to cover a broader range of topics in a more superficial manner. For students interested in broader reading on authoritarian politics and democratic transitions, the Blackboard page contains the syllabi for related courses at other universities (this reading may also be helpful for the final paper).

Students are not required to purchase any books for the course. Excerpts from books will be uploaded to the Blackboard page or, where noted, are available as an eBook through the UR library website. All of my working papers are available on my website. For all articles, read the published version. Please email me if any of the readings mentioned are unclear.

### **Pedagogical approach**

There are many ways to learn how to become an informed consumer and producer of formal models. These include (1) lectured presentations of models, (2) problem sets, (3) student presentations of published models, (4) collective model-building sessions, (5) active reading of substantive literature with an idea toward generating model ideas, (6) deconstructing published modeling articles with an eye toward writing, (7) reflection writings on models and related substance, and (8) solving original model extensions. This course features a mixture of all these approaches.

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

\*Indicates that a student will present the article/chapter. No asterisk means that I will lecture on the assigned article/chapter.

### **PART I. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS**

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#### **September 5. Introduction to course and workhorse model of political transitions.**

Reading: *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* by Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), ch. 5. Also skim “War as a Commitment Problem” by Powell (2006), who provides a broader overview of commitment problem explanations of political violence. Students may also want to consult *Formal Models of Domestic Politics* by Gehlbach (2013, 189-192; this chapter is available on the Blackboard page), who provides an accessible introduction to Markov perfect equilibrium. This solution concept may sound complicated, but if you are familiar with subgame perfect Nash equilibrium, it should be straightforward to understand. In SPNE, strategies are a function of the entire history of the game. In MPE, strategies are a function of only the state variable and previous actions within the same period, hence avoiding action profiles sustained by complicated punishment strategies.

#### **Supplemental reading:**

- “Formal Models of Nondemocratic Politics” by Gehlbach et al. (2016) provides a recent overview of formal work on non-democratic politics, and is highly recommended for students interested in getting to know the broader field. Note that most recent work has focused either on formal institutions or on strategic information transmission and the media. Most of the focus in this class, by contrast, is on informal institutions and regime transitions with complete information games.
- The following lists reference texts on dynamic games. These suggestions are provided mainly for students that want to do more with dynamic games, as the material they cover goes well outside the scope of the present course.
  - Appendix C of Daron Acemoglu’s (2009) textbook *Introduction to Modern Economic Growth*
  - Stokey and Lucas’ (1989) textbook
  - Mailath and Samuelson’s (2006) textbook

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**September 12. Inequality and democratization.** Reading: Pgs. 193-206 of *Formal Models of Domestic Politics* by Gehlbach (2013), Acemoglu and Robinson *EODD* ch. 6.

#### **Supplemental reading:**

- Acemoglu and Robinson’s (2000, 2001) earlier *APSR*, *QJE*, and *AER* articles provide the core ideas that their book incorporates. Their 2008 *AER* article addresses the possibility that elites can wield power even in democracy.
- “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?” by Fearon (2004) and “A Theory of the Oil-Conflict Curse: Greed, Grievances, and Separatist Civil Wars” by Paine (2017) provide additional examples of repeated bargaining games with stochastic transitions between states. “The Inefficient Use of Power” by Powell

(2004) shows that these belong to a broader class of bargaining games that share a common “commitment power” explanation for fighting.

- *Democracy and Redistribution* by Boix (2003) provides a related model of economic inequality and political transitions using an incomplete information setup. Also see “Economic Roots of Civil Wars and Revolutions” by Boix (2008).

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**September 19. Critiques of redistributive models of political transitions.** Reading: chs. 1-4 of Ansell and Samuels (2014),\* “APSA-CD October 2013” (see Blackboard), “Qualitative Investigation of Formal Models” by Lorentzen et al. (2017). Think about the following questions while reading: Are these critiques convincing? What features should be incorporated into a model in order to address the most pertinent critiques? What would this alternative model look like? During class, in addition to discussing the readings and a student presentation of Ansell and Samuels’ model, we will engage in a “model-building” session where we think about how to further improve these models.

**Supplemental reading:** A large literature has empirically evaluated different aspects of Acemoglu and Robinson’s and Boix’s models of redistributive regime transitions (also see the readings through October 17’s class).

- Acemoglu et al. (2014): “Democracy, Redistribution, and Inequality”
- Aidt and Franck (2015): “Democratization Under the Threat of Revolution”
- Aidt and Jensen (2014): “Workers of the World, Unite!”
- Albertus (2015): *Autocracy and Redistribution*
- Albertus and Menaldo (2014): “Gaming Democracy”
- Gehlbach et al. (2017): “Collective Action and Representation in Autocracies”
- Haggard and Kaufman: “Inequality and Regime Change” (2012) and *Dictators and Democrats* (2016)
- Houle (2009): “Inequality and Democracy”
- Paine (2017): “Redistributive Political Transitions”
- Slater et al. (2014): “Economic Origins of Democratic Breakdown?”
- Smith (2008): “Rethinking the Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy”
- Ziblatt (2008): “Does Landholding Inequality Block Democratization?”

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**September 26. Alternative models of democratization.** Reading: “Why did the Elites Extend the Suffrage” by Lizzeri and Persico (2004),\* “Partisan Competition, Growth, and the Franchise” by Oxoby and Llavador (2005).\*

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**October 3. Democratization in Europe and the U.S.** Reading: TBD.

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**October 10.** Fall break, no class

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**October 17. Comparative democratization.** Reading: TBD.

FIRST MEMO DUE TODAY

## PART II. AUTHORITARIAN SURVIVAL

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**October 24. Checks and balances on authoritarian rule.** Reading: “The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law” by Weingast (1997), “Self-Enforcing Democracy” by Fearon (2013)\*

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**October 31. Global games models of coordination.** Reading: Pgs. 184-9 of *Formal Models of Domestic Politics* by Gehlbach (2013), “Regime Change and Equilibrium Multiplicity” by Bueno de Mesquita (2014), “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government” by Boix and Svulik (2013).\* Note: Although the core idea behind global games models of coordination is relatively straightforward, the math dives off the deep end relatively quickly. Gehlbach’s textbook and Boix and Svulik’s article provide mathematically accessible introductions to this class of models because they assume a uniform distribution. I expect students to also read through the appendix of Boix and Svulik to understand how assuming a uniform distribution enables solving the model. Bueno de Mesquita’s paper is considerably more technically challenging because he uses a Normal distribution. I do not expect students to thoroughly understand the math in his paper. However, he provides a very useful discussion that distinguishes the defining elements of global games (as opposed to related coordination games that do not feature two-sided limit dominance) and relates global games to broader ideas about modeling mass uprisings. I expect students to understand the main points from his paper even if you choose not to go deep through the math (although, of course, that is encouraged for students potentially interested in using this type of model in their research).

**Supplemental reading:** For additional examples of global games (or related coordination) models of revolution and democratization, see research by:

- Ethan Bueno de Mesquita
- Chen and Xu (2017): “Why do Authoritarian Regimes Allow Citizens to Voice Opinions Publicly?”
- Edmond (2008): “Information Manipulation, Coordination, and Regime Change”
- Andrew Little
- Mehdi Shadmehr
- Scott Tyson
- “Formal Models of Nondemocratic Politics” by Gehlbach et al. (2016) provides additional citations on pg. 569.

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**November 7. Popular protests against dictators.** Reading: TBD.

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**November 14. Writing a paper, the review process, professional development.** Assignment: outlining game theory articles TBD, reading reviews of my formal papers.

SECOND MEMO DUE TODAY

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**November 21.** No class

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**November 28. Models of military control.** “Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes?” by Besley and Robinson (2010)\*, “The Guardianship Dilemma” by McMahon and Slantchev (2015)\*

**Supplemental reading:** “The Dilemma of Authoritarian Power-Sharing” by Paine (2017) provides references on the broad formal literature on authoritarian agency and a more detailed review of models of military control.

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**December 5. Controlling the military.** Reading: TBD.

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**December 12. Selectorate theory and its discontents.** Reading: *The Logic of Political Survival* by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) chs. 2 and 3\*, and also skim ch. 1 to get a sense of the ambitions of the book (available as an eBook through UR library); pgs. 570-573 of “Formal Models of Nondemocratic Politics” by Gehlbach et al. (2016), additional readings TBD.

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**December 15:** Final paper due by 5pm. Any extensions to this deadline must be discussed with the instructor well in advance.