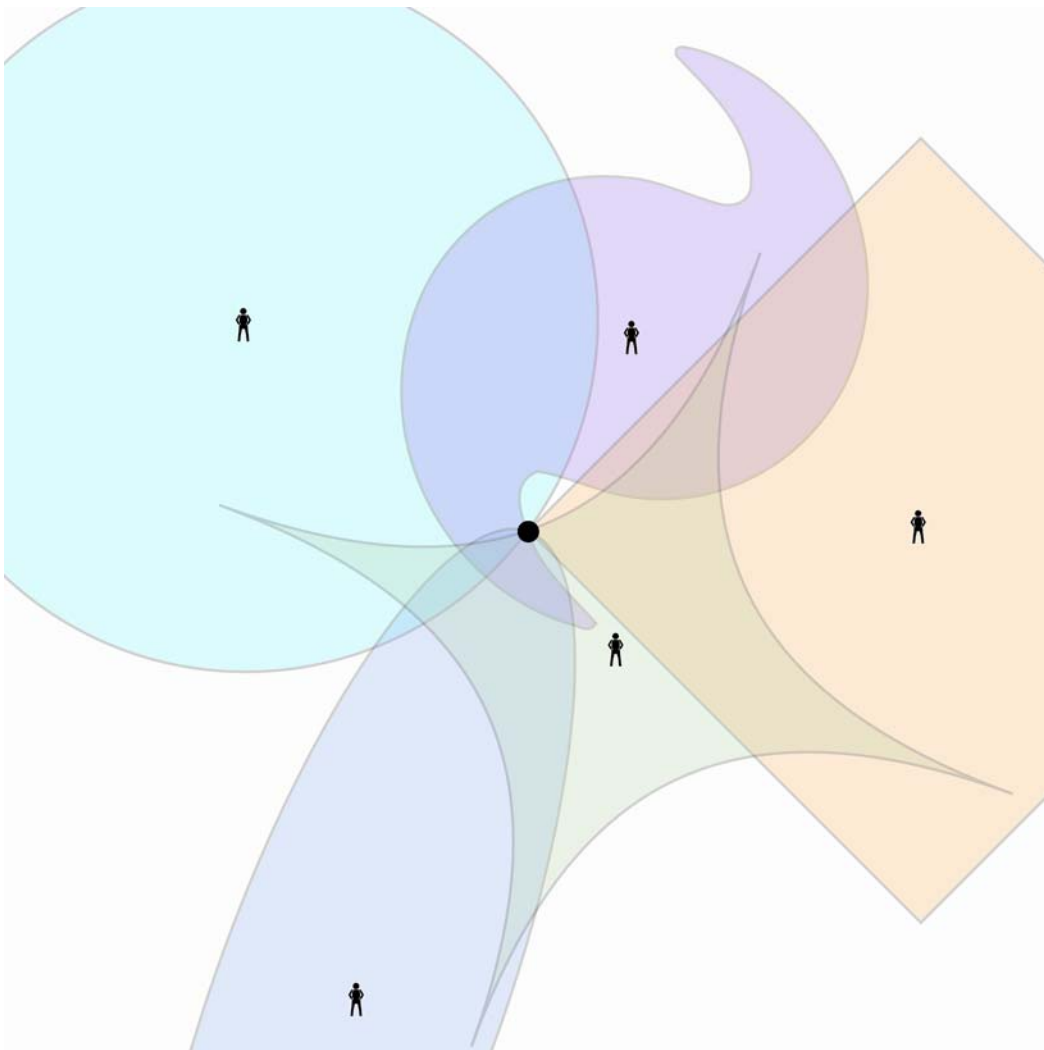


**NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**  
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G53.3500.001: SEMINAR IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS  
**ANALYZING POLITICAL COMPETITION**

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Classes: Tuesdays 4-6pm      Office Hours: Tuesdays 10am-12noon



## OVERVIEW

Political competition is a complex process at the heart of representative democracy. In its broadest sense this process involves the interaction of the following elements:

- a set of *conceivable states of the world*, one of which is the status quo;
- a set of *citizens*, each citizen with views about the relative desirability of conceivable states of the world;
- a set of *constitutional rules*, which define
  - *legitimate actions* by individual citizens,
  - a *decision-making process* that affects the probabilities that different conceivable states of the world will be realized in the future;
- a set of *politicians*, defined as citizens who compete with each other for selection to constitutionally privileged positions in the decision-making process;
- a set of *political parties*, defined as exclusive “clubs” of politicians who choose to coordinate their behavior in some way they perceive to be mutually beneficial;
- a set of *political representatives*, defined as politicians selected under constitutional rules to represent citizens in the decision-making process;
- a set of *office-holders*, defined as politicians selected under constitutional rules to occupy privileged positions in the decision-making process;
- a *government*, defined as a unique coalition of office holders selected under constitutional rules to occupy the most privileged position in the decision-making process.

No existing or conceivable analysis of political competition looks at all of this at once; it is just too complex a process to master. This becomes especially clear when we take account of the strong probability that the preferences of citizens, and the constitutional rules determining how those preferences are expressed in collective decisions, are themselves endogenous outputs of, as well as inputs to, the process of political competition.

As with any scientific endeavor in any field, therefore, systematic discussions of political competition within political science focus on discrete parts of this process that are intellectually tractable. This course will adopt the same approach, although it will also emphasize the importance of requiring the different parts of the process being analyzed to “fit together”, in the sense that they are not mutually incompatible in their assumptions and methodological approaches. (Thus this seminar might have been entitled “Analyzing Party Competition”, but that would have been to assume political parties, which we want to understand and explain.)

Another distinctive feature of this seminar is that it gives equal weight to the theoretical modeling and the empirical analysis of political competition, both of which are very well-developed within the profession. It will lay heavy stress on the interaction between these, privileging theoretical models that can be expressed in ways that are susceptible to empirical analysis, as well as privileging empirical analyses that have solid theoretical foundations.

To give some coherent structure to all of this, we will concentrate on theoretical and empirical analyses of political competition that can be described under the general rubric of the “spatial model” of political competition, described recently by Gary Cox as “the workhorse theory of modern legislative studies”. As we will quickly see, there is not a single spatial model, but what amounts to a portfolio of modeling approaches held together by a “spatial” characterization of the set of conceivable states of the world.

Our seminar discussions of this portfolio will start from the “bottom”, with citizen preferences, and work “up” the decision-making ladder to the making and breaking of governments. At each stage we will look at both theoretical and empirical analyses of the key processes under investigation.

Our approach will be that of a free-flowing “seminar” rather than a rigid “course”. All participants will be encouraged to bring their own problems and interests to the table for discussion, while we will take whatever time is required to get to the bottom of each matter we discuss. What follows, therefore, is an initial agenda that will evolve as the seminar itself evolves. Participants are encouraged to explore the literature and bring to the table for discussion readings they feel bear directly on what we are talking about.

Finally, note that the list of topics and annotated readings that follows *is absolutely not intended as something that any individual should tackle in its entirety* in the time scale of the course! Everyone will have particular interests within this general area and suggested readings are intended to get each person started in the areas identified. People will no doubt want to read more than the suggested readings in areas that interest them, following up key references in the suggested readings and using search engines like Google Scholar ([www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com)). They will neither feel the need, nor be expected, to master all readings in areas in which they have only a peripheral interest.

Assessment will be by a term paper directly related to the author’s own interests, skills, knowledge, and work. Everyone will be expected to present and discuss an outline of their paper at seminars during the middle of the course schedule and also to take the lead in discussions on areas of interest to them.

## **THEMES FOR DISCUSSION**

### **1. Introduction and overview**

Hinich and Munger provide an overview of the spatial model of political competition which is getting a little out of date, but which nonetheless serves as an excellent introduction (Hinich and Munger 1997).

### **“MASS” POLITICS**

#### **2. Characterizing and measuring citizens’ preferences**

- a. Individual perceptions of similarity and distance
- b. Citizen ideal points and common political spaces
- c. The (endogenous?) dimensionality of political spaces

Gärdenfors is a psychologist who presents an overview of the research paradigm according to which human perceptions of similarity and difference are analyzed in spatial terms (Gärdenfors 2000). Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin have assembled an excellent interdisciplinary collection of essays, edited from the perspective of political science, on social cognition and choice (Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin 2000). The collection of essays edited by Zuckerman explores ways in which individual preferences are shaped in a social context (Zuckerman 2005). Abramson and Inglehart report the results of a research program designed to measure the political values and preferences of citizens in a comparative context (Abramson and Inglehart 1995). For an in-depth and more advanced exploration of the role of risk, uncertainty and time in the making of individual choices, see the edited collection by Kahneman and Tversky, though only if this topic is of special interest (Kahneman and Tversky 2000).

#### **3. Characterizing and measuring politicians’ preferences**

- a. The difference between politicians and citizens
- b. The motivations of politicians: office, policy, and what else?
- c. The time horizons of politicians

Spatial models of political competition typically assume that citizens care about policy and politicians care about being elected, formulating policy positions in the instrumental desire to achieve this. The classic spatial model of Anthony Downs makes this distinction very clear (Downs 1957). More recent models assume politicians to be driven by some trade-off policy and office motivations, though empirical data on the parameters of this tradeoff are very sparse. However, Müller and Strøm have edited a collection of essays exploring this trade-off for walking talking politicians (Müller and Strøm 1999).

#### 4. Voting by citizens

- a. Voting as an instrumental or expressive act
- b. Spatial models of voting
- c. Sincere, tactical and strategic voting under different electoral rules

The “paradox of turnout” has obsessed a section of the political science profession for a generation. Aldrich developed widely-cited presentation of the arguments from a rational choice perspective (Aldrich 1993), to which Jackman responded (Jackman 1993). The alternative to an “instrumental” account of voting is to see voting as a non-instrumental act of self-expression by the voter. Schuessler provides an excellent and accessible discussion and development of this idea (Schuessler 2000). Brennan and Lomaski, and Brennan and Hamlin, provide other widely-cited discussion of it (Brennan and Lomasky 1993; Brennan and Hamlin 2000). As noted above, Hinich and Munger provide a good introduction to the basic spatial model of voting (Hinich and Munger 1994; Hinich and Munger 1997). Shepsle provides an alternative short but rigorous presentation (Shepsle 1991). The main alternative to this “proximity” model of voting is the “directional” model (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). Merrill and Grofman attempt to unify the “directional” and “proximity” spatial models (Merrill and Grofman 1999).

#### 5. Competition between politicians

- a. Components of the “offer” by politicians to voters
- b. The (various) policy “positions” of politicians
- c. Spatial models of electoral competition between politicians

Again, standard presentations of the spatial model sum up the received wisdoms on what it is that politicians put before voters. James Adams has produced an account of this with a more empirical orientation (Adams 2001). A recent twist to this has been added by spatial models that include “valence”, a concept that captures the relative different ability of politicians to attract votes *at a given policy position* – as result of their differing non-policy attractiveness to voters (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Schofield 2003; Aragoes and Palfrey 2004; Schofield 2004). Measuring the policy positions of political actors has become a substantial project within political science. Techniques used include that hand-coding of party manifestos (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens et al. 2001), the computer coding of manifestos and speeches (Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003), expert surveys (Benoit and Laver 2006), and the analysis of roll-call voting in legislatures (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).

## “ELITE” POLITICS

### 6. Incentives for politicians under presidential and parliamentary government

The distinction between “presidential” and “parliamentary” government regimes is a very important feature of the institutional context of political competition, generating two very different environments for elections, party competition, legislative behavior, and the making and breaking of governments. A forthcoming dictionary entry by Laver provides an overview of this distinction (Laver 2006), while Lijphart, as well as Shugart and Carey, provide widely-cited and more extensive discussions (Lijphart 1992; Shugart and Carey 1992), updated in (Samuels and Shugart 2003). One of the key defining institutional features of parliamentary government is the parliamentary vote of confidence in the government, of which John Huber, as well as Diermeier and Feddersen, provide widely cited and highly regarded analyses (Huber 1996; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998).

### 7. Political parties

- a. Incentives for politicians to form political parties
- b. Intra-party politics, coordination and/or “discipline”
- c. Fission and fusion of parties

Political scientists have analyzed the incentives of politicians to form, and remain within, political parties in three basic ways. The first analyzes electoral incentives for legislators that arise from the value of a party label (Snyder and Ting 2002). The second analyzes strategic incentives within the legislature that reward legislators who behave in a coordinated fashion (Krehbiel 1993; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2001; Cox and McCubbins 2005). The third analyzes the ability of party leaders to implement a system of rewards and punishments within some sort of game of legislative party governance that imposes “party discipline” by changing the incentive structure of party members (Saalfeld 2002). Incentives for politicians to join and remain loyal to political parties are very different under the constitutional regime of parliamentary government (see above), where party leaders wield much greater power over the career prospects of politicians.

### 8. Government formation (in parliamentary government regimes)

This is an area of political science in which a substantial body of empirical and theoretical work has built up over the years, but which nonetheless continues to develop. Laver and Schofield provide a summary of the early phases of development, updated somewhat by Laver (Laver 1998; Laver and Schofield 1998). An edited collection by Müller and Strøm (2000), provides an empirical overview (Müller and Strøm 2000). A widely-cited empirical evaluation of much of the theoretical work can be found in Martin and Stevenson (2001). Much subsequent work has been based on a model of legislative bargaining attributed to Baron and Ferejohn, with a recent generalization to multi-party legislatures by Ansolabehere et al.; Diermeier and Merlo discuss key empirical aspects of

the model, as observed in real legislatures (Baron and Ferejohn 1989; Diermeier and Merlo 2004; Ansolabehere, Snyder, Strauss et al. 2005).

### **9. Legislation, policy-making, “mid-term” interaction between executive and legislature**

There is relatively little in the theoretical political science literature on important matters concerning what we might think of on the “life and times” of governments in parliamentary government systems. This is to an extent a feature typical of “rational expectations” models of government formation, in which everything that is not an unanticipated shock during the life of the government should have been impounded in the government deal at the moment of formation. Lupia and Strom do offer an interesting argument about ways in which such shocks are assimilated as part of a renegotiated coalition bargain (Lupia and Strøm 1995). However, one of the mysteries of politics that is interesting to models concerns the reasons why incumbent governments with long terms ahead of them respond to short-term shifts in public opinion.

### **10. Government termination (in parliamentary government regimes)**

Considerable methodological advances have been made within the profession on the analysis of government termination and government stability – resulting in a situation where methodological techniques are probably far more sophisticated than theoretical models (Diermeier and Stevenson 1999; Diermeier and Merlo 2000; Diermeier and Stevenson 2000). The Lupia-Strom piece noted above is an exception, while Laver and Shepsle offer another theoretical approach to modeling government stability in terms of the extent to which random events can destabilize a government equilibrium (Laver and Shepsle 1998).

## **INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MASS AND ELITE POLITICS**

We may or may not have time to get to the matters discussed below, which essentially derive from the need to “fit together” various parts of the puzzle discussed above. Suggested readings here, which are sparse, will be provided as the course progresses and people’s detailed interests are revealed.

11. Citizens’ anticipations of future political outputs
12. Citizens’ retrospective evaluations of past political outputs
13. Politicians’ anticipations of citizen’s anticipations (as in 11)
14. Politicians’ anticipations of citizens’ retrospective evaluations (as in 12)
15. Citizens’ and politicians’ incentives to switch types (birth and death of parties)

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