EITM 2025 Realistic Political Problem Solving

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Course Description.

Political economic models of individual or aggregate choice are typically designed for "small worlds;" settings in which there is a known, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive potential states of the world and a known, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive set of consequences for actions given a state of the world. Many of the most interesting questions in political science can be modeled in such a small world, but some can not. This unit discusses these basic elements of model building, starting from the basics of induction or deduction, and discusses the researcher's choices over how to structure the choices they are studying and what these choices imply for research design. In the first half ouf time together we will discuss, among other things, basic model assumptions, necessary and sufficient conditions for events, intractability and uncertainty, and discrimination v optimization (as solution concepts). The second portion of the unit focuses on research design, in which we will discuss (again) necessary and sufficient conditions, compare explanation, identification, and prediction as design goals, and finally endogeneity, as-if random assignment, and instrumental variables and fixed effects estimators.

Day 1, Wednesday, 18 June:

Readings:

Lave and March chapter 2.

Ashworth, Scott, Christopher R. Berry, and Ethan Bueno de Mesquita. "Modeling theories of women's underrepresentation in elections." American Journal of Political Science 68.1 (2024): 289-303.

Session I: Model thinking and critical conditions

- Induction and deduction
- Process formalization
- Necessary and sufficient conditions

Break-out activity:

- Identify necessary and sufficient conditions for a given process
- Group solve: Ashworth, Berry, and Bueno de Mesquita

Day 2, Thursday, 19 June:

Readings:

Gigerenzer, Gerd. "Axiomatic rationality and ecological rationality." Synthese 198 (2021): 3547-3564.

Duch, Raymond M., Jeff May, and David A. Armstrong. "Coalition-directed voting in multiparty democracies." American Political Science Review 104.4 (2010): 698-719.

Unit II: Rational models of choice.

- Specifying choice and chooser
- The "small world" (S, C)
- Intractibility
- Uncertainty
- Optimization v discrimination (lexicographic) choice

Break-out activity:

- Choosing a restaurant (group)
- Choosing an order at that restaurant (individual)

Unit III: Application to retrospective and prospective voting

- Necessary and sufficient conditions for economic voting in general
 - Undisciplined parliament
 - Disciplined parliament
 - Empirical implications of discipline on:
 - * required informational inputs
 - * rules
- Necessary and sufficient conditions prospective voting in general
 - Downsian (or Duchian) voting
 - Empirical implications of cabinet formation / powersharing on:
 - * required informational inputs
 - * rules
 - Axiomatic (optimization) v ecological (discrimination) models of coalition expectations

Day 3, Friday, 20 June:

Readings:

Ahlquist, John, Mark Copelovitch, and Stefanie Walter. "The political consequences of external economic shocks: evidence from Poland" American Journal of Political Science 64.4 (2020): 904-920.

Colantone, Italo, and Piero Stanig. "The trade origins of economic nationalism: Import competition and voting behavior in Western Europe." American Journal of Political Science 62.4 (2018): 936-953.

Anzia, Sarah F., and Christopher R. Berry. "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson effect: why do congresswomen outperform congressmen?" American Journal of Political Science 55, no. 3 (2011): 478-493.

Unit IV: Research design.

- Specifying inputs, actions / rules / mapping functions, and outputs
- Design focus on:
 - Explanation / description
 - * Stipulating inputs and observing outputs, is the mapping function (directionally) consistent with expectations
 - Prediction (classification, efficiency)
 - * Stipulating inputs and mapping functions, are the outputs consistent with expectations

Unit V: Research design 2.

- What is endogeneity?
 - Its threats to inference
- Design implications
 - As-if random assignment
 - Instrumental variables estimators
 - Fixed effects estimators