

# ECON 4230 / PSCI 3400

## Political Economy of Elections

Vanderbilt University, Spring 2022  
Professor Maria Titova

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### Course Objectives

Political economy applies economic analysis, especially from microeconomics and game theory, to analyze political institutions. This course focuses on economic theories of elections. We will examine different models of how parties and candidates choose their positions; why people vote in the first place; how candidates choose campaign messages, and how voters process this information.

### Prerequisites

Intermediate Microeconomics (ECON 3012) OR Political Strategy and Game Theory (PSCI 2259).

### Your Grade

- **5% attendance:** at the end of each week, I will post a short reflection survey that you will have a weekend to submit to get full participation credit. You are allowed to miss 2 reflection notes without that affecting your participation grade, no-questions-asked
- **20% Midterm 1**
- **20% Midterm 2**
- **20% Group Presentation**
- **35% Final Exam**

### Textbook

The primary reference for this course is available on Brightspace. It is

- *Political Economy* by Mattias K. Polborn

For students who wish to consult a game theory handbook, I recommend

- [An introduction to Game Theory, by Martin Osborne](#)

### Other Course Materials

All relevant course materials will be posted on Brightspace.

#### *Lectures*

As of right now, all lectures are scheduled to take place in person in Buttrick Hall 202. I will upload slides before and notes after each lecture.

#### *Practice Problems and Office Hours*

We will post practice problems on brightspace. These problem sets will be **UNGRADED** and are for your practice only. If you have any questions about the problem sets, please come to the TA's

office hours. If you have any questions about the lectures or about the course, please come to the instructor's office hours.

### *Exam Review*

We will hold midterm review sessions on 03/01 and 04/05 and a final review session on 04/28, as well as additional office hours in those weeks.

## **Administrative Issues**

### *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement*

If you are a student with a physical, medical and/or psychiatric disability and feel that you may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of this course, please contact Student Access Services at (615) 343-9727 located in 108 Baker Building 108.

### *Academic Integrity Statement*

By enrolling in this course, you agree to

- complete all tests and assignments on your own, unless collaboration on an assignment is explicitly permitted;
- rely solely on your own work in connection with all assessments, problems, homework and assignments (unless collaboration is expressly permitted);
- acknowledge any and all external sources used in your work;
- not let anyone else use my username and/or password;
- not engage in any activity that would dishonestly improve your results, or improve or hurt the results of others;
- not post answers to problems that are being used to assess learner performance.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Violations of the honor code will result in a grade of 0 on that exam or assignment and a referral to the Honor System Office. See [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student\\_handbook/the-honor-system/](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/) for more information.

## **Group Presentations**

### **logistics for the presentation weeks**

- we will have 4 groups presenting each day
- you can use PowerPoint, LaTeX, or your software of choice to produce the slides for your presentation. The resulting file should be in .pdf format
- you are free to choose who presents the paper in front of the class
- questions from the audience are allowed and encouraged
- each group will have 16 minutes total (hard deadline)
- after each lecture, I will ask you to anonymously evaluate your peers' work (both contents and presentation) via the reflection notes

### **grading**

- every member of the group will receive the same grade
- you will receive your grade along with the feedback a few days after your presentation
- rubric:

- 30 pts: communicating the paper’s question, approach, answer
- 20 pts: slides (are they informative and easy to follow? do they go together with what the presenter is talking about?)
- 20 pts: peer review grade
- 10 pts: time management
- 10 pts: handling questions from the audience
- 10 pts: connection to the course / real-life events (what did we learn from the group members and not the authors?)

You can find The Guidelines for a Good Presentation on Brightspace.

## The List of Papers

1. [I] Alonso, Ricardo, and Odilon Câmara. 2016. “**Persuading Voters.**” *American Economic Review* 106, no. 11 (2016): 3590-3605
2. [V] Ashworth, Scott, Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, and Amanda Friedenberg. "Accountability and Information in Elections." *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 9, no. 2 (2017): 95-138
3. [P] Battaglini, Marco. “**Public Protests and Policy Making,**” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017): 485-549
4. [V] Calvert, Randall L. “**The Value of Biased Information: A Rational Choice Model of Political Advice.**” *The Journal of Politics* 47, no. 2 (1985): 530–55
5. [P] Edmond, Chris. “**Information Manipulation, Coordination, and Regime Change.**” *Review of Economic Studies* 80 no. 4 (2013): 1422-1458
6. [P\*] Egorov, Georgy, and Konstantin Sonin. “**Elections in Non-Democracies.**” *Economic Journal* 131, no. 636 (2020): 1682–1716
7. [I\*] Gehlbach Scott and Konstantin Sonin. “**Government Control of the Media.**” *Journal of Public Economics* 118 (2014): 163-171
8. [I] Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M. Shapiro. “**Media Bias and Reputation.**” *Journal of Political Economy* 114, no. 2 (2006): 280–316
9. [V] Harstad, Bard. “**Majority Rules and Incentives.**” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (2005): 535–568
10. [P\*] Hollyer, James, B. Peter Rosendorff and James Raymond Vreeland. "Transparency, Protest, and Autocratic Instability." *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 4 (2015): 764–784
11. [I] Maskin, Eric, and Jean Tirole. “**Pandering and Pork-Barrel Politics.**” *Journal of Public Economics* 176 (2019): 79-93
12. [P] Meirowitz, Adam, and Joshua A. Tucker. “**People Power or a One-Shot Deal? A Dynamic Model of Protest.**” *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 2 (2013): 478–90

13. [V] Prato, Carlo, and Stephane Wolton. “**Rational Ignorance, Populism, and Reform.**” *European Journal of Political Economy* 55 (2018): 119–35
14. [V] Razin, Ronny. “**Signaling and Election Motivations in a Voting Model with Common Values and Responsive Candidates.**” *Econometrica* 71, no. 4 (2003): 1083–1119
15. [I] Schnakenberg, Keith E. “**Expert Advice to a Voting Body.**” *Journal of Economic Theory* 160 (2015): 102-113

*I: information transmission TO voters (e.g. political ads, media, govt manipulation of media)*

*P: protests*

*V: voters' side (e.g. why vote, how to vote, how to use information, how voters inform politicians)*

*\* marks the papers studying non-democracies*

## ECON 4230 / PSCI 3400 Course Calendar

<b>Week 1:</b> intro; crash course in decision theory	<b>1/18</b>	<b>1/20</b>
<b>Week 2:</b> social choice theory	<b>1/25</b>	<b>1/27</b>
<b>Week 3:</b> median voter theorem	<b>2/1</b>	<b>2/3</b>
<b>Week 4:</b> crash course in game theory	<b>2/8</b>	<b>2/10</b>
<b>Week 5:</b> Downsian models of electoral competition	<b>2/15</b>	<b>2/17</b>
<b>Week 6:</b> probabilistic voting	<b>2/22</b>	<b>2/24</b>
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>3/1</b> <b>REVIEW</b>	<b>3/3</b> <b>MIDTERM 1</b>
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>		
<b>Week 8:</b> why people vote; swing voter's curse	<b>3/15</b>	<b>3/17</b>
<b>Week 9:</b> crash course in information; how voters learn	<b>3/22</b>	<b>3/24</b>
<b>Week 10:</b> information transmission in elections	<b>3/29</b>	<b>3/31</b>
<b>Week 11</b>	<b>4/5</b> <b>REVIEW</b>	<b>4/7</b> <b>MIDTERM 2</b>
<b>Week 12:</b> political advertising campaigns	<b>4/12</b>	<b>4/14</b>
<b>Week 13:</b> group presentations	<b>4/19</b>	<b>4/21</b>
<b>Week 14:</b> group presentations	<b>4/26</b>	<b>4/28</b> <b>REVIEW</b>
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM on 5/6 at 3 PM</b>	