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# Individual preferences and collective decision-making

**Lecturer:**

Thomas Meyer, Visiting Professor ([thomas.meyer@univie.ac.at](mailto:thomas.meyer@univie.ac.at))

**Time:**

Thursday, 1 March 2018 (Sessions 1 & 2)

Friday, 2 March 2018 (Sessions 3 & 4)

Thursday, 8 March 2018 (Sessions 5 & 6)

Friday, 9 March 2018 (Sessions 7 & 8)

Office hours: I'm not in Bordeaux before late February 2018. In urgent cases, please write me an email ([thomas.meyer@univie.ac.at](mailto:thomas.meyer@univie.ac.at)).

**Course description:**

In this seminar, we deal with theories of collective choice. Collective decision-making is an essential element of politics. Politicians and citizens form and express preferences and then decide collectively in elections, referenda, in parliament and in the cabinet. Social choice theory shows the problems and pitfalls when individual preferences lead to collective choices. These decisions may be vulnerable to cycling majorities and strategic voting. Moreover, institutions (e.g. electoral systems) often matter for the actual outcome. We discuss the major results of this literature and illustrate them using empirical examples.

**Evaluation:**

an essay (15.000 characters; submitted until 30 March 2018)

In your final essay (15.000 characters, about 4 pages), you link an empirical example to one of the topics we dealt with in the seminar. The essay contains (1) a detailed description of the empirical case, (2) it links the example to the concepts presented in the seminar, and (3)

provides the implications of this puzzle (i.e. what results should we see? How can we overcome the problem?). The deadline for submitting the essay is 30 March 2018 (most likely via *Moodle*).

**Language:**

The seminar is held in English. This includes all kinds of communication (e.g. email, office hours). English may not be your first language, and you will probably make mistakes. I will not judge your language skills. Rather, I strongly encourage everybody to participate in class!

**Moodle and email:**

Course material will be made available in Moodle. I may also send emails to your university account, so please check your account on a daily basis (automatic onward transfer may not always work; in particular with attachments!).

## **Syllabus:**

### **Session 1 (1 March) Introduction, Basics & Motivation**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapters 1 & 2

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 2: Q1, Q3 & Q6

#### **Topics:**

- ?? Why should we ask „why“-questions?
  - ?? What are preferences and choices?
  - ?? What does completeness and transitivity mean?
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### **Session 2 (1 March) Introduction to group choice analysis**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapters 3 & 4

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 3: Q1, Q2 & Q5; Chapter 4: Q2; Q7

#### **Topics:**

- ?? What are cyclical majorities?
  - ?? What are the major insights from Arrow's Theorem?
  - ?? What implications does Arrow's Theorem have for democratic group choices?
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### **Session 3 (2 March) Spatial models and group choices**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapter 5

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 5: Q1, Q3 & Q5

#### **Topics:**

- ?? What does single-peakedness mean?
  - ?? What does single-peakedness imply for group choice?
  - ?? What are the consequences of multidimensionality for group choices?
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### **Session 4 (2 March) Strategic behaviour**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapter 6

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 6: Q1, Q6 & Q7

**Topics:**

- ?? How can we define strategic or sophisticated behaviour?
  - ?? What are its implications for group choice?
  - ?? What are “heresthetics”?
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**Session 5 (8 March) Cooperation & collective action**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapters 8 & 9

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 8: Q1 & Q6; Chapter 9: Q1, Q2 & Q3

**Topics:**

- ?? How can we define cooperation and what are the problems of cooperation in groups?
  - ?? What are the major challenges associated with collective action?
  - ?? How can we overcome these problems?
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**Session 6 (8 March) Public goods**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapter 10

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 10: Q2, Q4 & Q7

**Topics:**

- ?? How can we distinguish public and private goods?
  - ?? Why are public goods so important in politics?
  - ?? What are (positive and negative) externalities?
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**Session 7 (9 March) Institutions: Legislatures**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapters 11 & 12

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 12: Q1, Q2 & Q5

**Topics:**

- ?? What are institutions?

- ?? What are the characteristics of legislatures (as institutions)?
- ?? In what respect do legislatures affect group choices?
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### **Session 8 (9 March) Cabinet formation and parliamentary democracy**

**Literature:** Shepsle 2010: chapter 16

**Questions to prepare:** Chapter 16: Q1, Q2 & Q3

#### **Topics:**

- ?? Which institutions affect the government formation process?
- ?? Which parties are often considered as being particularly powerful?
- ?? What predictions can we make for government formation, portfolio allocation, and public policy?

#### **References:**

- Gaertner, Wulf (2009). *A Primer in Social Choice Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hinich, Melvin J., and Michael C. Munger (1997) *Analytical politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- King, Gary, Keohane, Robert Owen and Verba, Sidney (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Laver, Michael (1997) *Private desires, political action*. London: Sage.
- Morton, Rebecca B. (1999) *Methods and Models: A Guide to the Empirical Analysis of Formal Models in Political Science*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Powner, Leanne C. (2015) *Empirical Research and Writing. A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. (2010) *Analyzing Politics*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

#### **On writing and research design:**

- Gschwend, Thomas und Schimmelfennig, Frank (eds.) (2007) *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Palgrave/Macmillan.
- Plümper, Thomas (2008) *Effizient Schreiben*. München, Oldenbourg.
- Powner, Leanne C. (2015) *Empirical Research and Writing. A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press.