The main goal of this course is to examine theoretical foundations of a rational choice theory, focusing on its four components: rationality, preference, belief, and strategy. The examination further draws on fundamental issues in Political Science beyond rational choice theories. For example, psychological aspects in human behavior are often considered empirical grounds where a rational choice theory’s utility is negated. However, the negation takes specific positions on questions such as how a theory should be evaluated and what roles theoretical assumptions play. Therefore, reviewing the criticisms of rational choice theories and evaluating the validity of the criticism will provide students with a chance to think about what Political Science is, what it aims to achieve, and how it can achieve its goals.

The course is subdivided into four. The first week examines criticisms of rational choices. Then, students will evaluate the validity of the criticisms while reading articles about the four theoretical components, rationality, preference, belief, and strategy. The remaining weeks are organized for empirical evidence to challenge what rational choice theorists have traditionally assumed on the four components and their theoretical adjustment to the evidence.

Materials for weekly readings

Though a few articles have a certain degree of technical difficulty, most articles do not require mathematical training to read but often raise cognitive, psychological, and ontological issues. This course does not assume students to have taken a game theory course.

Grading

1> Class Participation: 20%
2> Class Presentation: 30% (Each student is expected to give a presentation of a topic of the week at least once, 20-30mins)
3> Take-Home Exam: 50% (twice, each 25%. The sixth and last weeks)

Exam questions (sample)

2> Review readings for the 11th week and discuss how culture can be incorporated into a rational choice theory.

Weekly readings

1. General Criticism.


Further reading.


2. What is Rational Choice Theory and why do political scientists use it?


Further Reading.


3. Rationality.


Further reading.


Further reading.

5. Information and Belief.


Further Reading.


Further Reading.


Further Readings.


10. Rational Choice Theory’s reaction: Beyond individualism


Further Reading.

11. Rational Choice Theory’s reaction: Culture and Norms


Further Reading.

12. Rational Choice Theory’s reaction: Institutional Change

13. Rational Choice Theory’s reaction: Information, Belief, and Decision Making


Further Reading

14. Review.