

Elections as Instruments of Democracy

Winter Term 2020/2021

Time: Wednesday 10:00 – 11:30 AM

Instructor: Jun.-Prof. Chitrlekha Basu, PhD

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Office Hours: Wednesday 13:00 – 15:00 PM

Overview. How effective are elections as ‘instruments of democracy’ (Powell 2000)? Normative democratic theorists, as well as empirical researchers studying elections and voting behaviour, have long debated if and when competition for political office constrains elected politicians to pursue the policies voters most prefer, or enables voters to reward or sanction politicians for their actions when in office. Throughout this seminar, we will ask, and seek to answer, questions like the following. Are politicians more responsive to voter preferences in some settings than others? Are members of the elite able to influence voter preferences through campaigns or the media – and is this problematic? Can, and do, voters use elections to hold politicians accountable for their behaviour? Over the course of the semester, students will learn to how to interpret and evaluate recent quantitative research on the nature and quality of electoral representation. At the same time, students will have the opportunity to develop and enhance their own quantitative research skills, in preparation for an MA or PhD thesis.

Course Organization. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this course will be delivered online using the software Zoom. We will meet online once a week between 4 November and 16 December 2020, with enrolled students receiving an invitation to participate in each session in the few days preceding the scheduled time.

Live session. In each session, I will spend 20-30 minutes introducing and contextualizing the assigned readings in broader debates on the week’s topic. We will spend the remainder of the session discussing and evaluating the week’s readings, paying particular attention to research design and empirical strategy. To accommodate students who are unable to participate at the allotted time, recordings of each session will also be made available via ILIAS.

Office hours. I will be available on Zoom in my personal meeting room during my office hours every Wednesday (13:00 – 15:00 PM) for the duration of the lecture period. Students are welcome to drop by during this time, especially if they are having any problems with R or would like to discuss ideas/feedback on their research papers. If you are unable to make this time slot, we can schedule a different time to talk by appointment. Please be aware you may have to wait if there is a queue. Please also note that I will be on maternity leave from 17 December, and so will not be available to meet with students virtually after this date. (I will endeavour to respond to emails.)

Prerequisites. This is an advanced seminar, and I will assume that students are familiar with regression analysis and concepts like statistical significance. As such, it is essential that students have either previously completed the MA course in quantitative methods (or an equivalent), or take it jointly with

this course if they have no background in quantitative research methods. Moreover, students should be able to understand and express themselves in English, as this will be the classroom language – though perfection is neither expected nor required. All coursework should also be completed in English.

Assessment. Your performance in this course will be evaluated using a portfolio examination, based on in-class participation (10%), two graded data analysis exercises (20% each), and a research paper making use of quantitative research methods (50%). There will also be a shorter, **ungraded**, data analysis exercise which students may complete for up to ten additional bonus points. Please note that bonus points will only be awarded if all other mandatory course requirements have been completed. Bonus points can increase your grade, but will never decrease it.

Participation [10%]. As this is a graduate seminar, and not a lecture, the success of the seminar will hinge entirely on active participation by students in class discussion. To obtain a high grade for participation, students should regularly attend and participate in weekly sessions, and, beginning 11 November (week 2), also hand in **two (reasonable) discussion questions** on the week's assigned readings via email by 12 noon each Tuesday.¹ If there is a reason why you will not be able to regularly attend the seminar (e.g. outside employment or caring responsibilities), please let me know in advance so I can take this into account when determining your participation grade.

Discussion questions should be open-ended and leave room for discussion, disagreement and debate. For instance, "Are policy outcomes better aligned with the median voter's preferences under proportional representation?" is a good discussion question – researchers disagree on the answer. Discussion questions may also single out aspects of the research design that seem unpersuasive (i.e., Is the theoretical argument convincing? Does the evidence provided support the claim being made? Are the measures used appropriate given the research question?). On the other hand, students should not suggest discussion questions where the answer is clear and unambiguous from the assigned readings. For instance, "What are Powell's two visions of democracy?" is not a good discussion question. I will select two to three questions each week from those submitted to guide our discussion.

Data analysis assignments [20% each]. Through these assignments, students will learn (or practice) how to use the statistical software **R** (i) to summarize and visualize data, and (ii) to implement basic regression analyses (up to and including maximum likelihood estimation). Each data analysis assignment (graded or ungraded) will be accompanied by a handout walking students through related commands and packages in **R**. The first (ungraded) assignment will also be accompanied by a brief tutorial on how to download and set up **R** and **R** Markdown. Completed assignments should be uploaded to ILIAS by 23:59 CET on 25 November (optional), 9 December and 13 January 2020, respectively.

Research paper [50%]. A key objective of this course is to help students learn how to write an empirical research paper using quantitative research methods. Enrolled students will therefore be expected to complete a 10-12 page research paper (double-spaced, font size 12, one inch margins) to be uploaded to ILIAS by 23:59 CET on **10 March 2021**. References and appendices will not count towards the page limit. Late submissions will be penalised unless previously arranged with the instructor. Paper submissions will be checked for plagiarism.

Students should also submit a 1-2 page proposal outlining the (i) research question/puzzle, (ii) working

¹That is, I will expect to receive discussion questions from enrolled students beginning Tuesday 10 November.

hypotheses, and (iii) proposed data and methodology (e.g. OLS with fixed effects) to the instructor by 23:59 CET on **1 December 2020**, also using ILIAS. The research question or motivating puzzle in the paper should concern one or more of the topics covered in the course.

Readings. All required readings are listed below and will be made available electronically to enrolled students via ILIAS. Each week, I will also suggest additional (optional) readings for students who may want to deepen their knowledge of a particular topic or debate, especially if considering writing a paper on that topic.

Key Dates.

- 4 November 2020: first session
- 11 November 2020: Assignment #1 (optional) distributed
- 25 November 2020: Assignment #1 due; Assignment #2 (graded) distributed
- 1 December 2020: deadline for 1-2 page proposal (23:59 CET)
- 9 December 2020: Assignment #3 (graded) distributed
- 16 December 2020: last session
- 13 January 2020: Assignment #3 due
- 10 March 2021: deadline to submit research paper (23:59 CET)

Course Schedule

4 November: Theories of Representation

- Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski and Susan C. Stokes. 1999. 'Elections and representation', in Manin et al (eds.), *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, pp. 29-54.
- Andrew Sabl. 2015. 'The two cultures of democratic theory: Responsiveness, democratic quality, and the empirical-normative divide.' *Perspectives on Politics* 13(2): 345-65.

11 November: Electoral Rules and Ideological Congruence

- G. Bingham Powell Jr. 2009. 'The ideological congruence controversy: The impact of alternative measures, data, and time periods on the effects of election rules.' *Comparative Political Studies* 42(12): 1475-1497.
- Matt Golder and Gabriella Lloyd. 2013. 'Re-evaluating the relationship between electoral rules and ideological congruence.' *European Journal of Political Research* 53(1): 200-212.

18 November: Inequalities in Substantive Representation

- Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page. 2014. 'Testing theories of American politics: Elites, interest groups, and average citizens.' *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-581.
- Mads Andreas Elkjær and Torben Iversen. 2020. 'The political representation of economic interests: Subversion of democracy or middle-class supremacy?' *World Politics* 72(2): 254-290.

25 November: Retrospective Voting and Accountability

- Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*, p. 116-145 (ch. 5).
- Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra. 2010. 'Random events, economic losses and retrospective voting: Implications for democratic competence.' *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 5: 193-208.

2 December: Campaign Effects on Voter Preferences

- Gabriel Lenz. 2009. 'Learning and opinion change, not priming: Reconsidering the priming hypothesis.' *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 821-837.
- Michael Tesler. 2015. 'Priming predispositions and changing policy positions: An account of when mass opinion is primed or changed.' *American Journal of Political Science* 59(4): 806-824.

9 December: Media Effects on Voting Behaviour

- Jonathan M. Ladd and Gabriel S. Lenz. 2009. 'Exploiting a rare communication shift to document the persuasive power of the news media.' *American Journal of Political Science* 53(2): 394-410.
- Lucy Barnes and Timothy Hicks. 2018. 'Making austerity popular: The media and mass attitudes toward fiscal policy.' *American Journal of Political Science* 62(2): 340-354.

16 December: Inequalities in Descriptive Representation

- Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu. 2015. 'Rethinking the comparative perspective on class and representation: Evidence in Latin America.' *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1): 1-18.
- Armen Hakhverdian. 2015. 'Does it matter that most representatives are higher educated?' *Swiss Political Science Review* 21(2): 237-245.