Voting Behavior
Elective MA course, Winter 2016
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS

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Classes: time slots and venue as announced at http://politicalscience.ceu.hu/course-schedules

Office hours: appointments can be arranged via http://gabortoka.youcanbook.me/ and http://www.personal.ceu.hu/departs/personal/Gabor_Toka/

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Course description

Voting is central to the democratic process and to legitimating the office-holders and policies that it produces. Accordingly, it is the subject of an enormous literature that offers a uniquely rich and varied insight into theory and methods in contemporary political science, and also touches upon more general questions regarding human decision making, information aggregation problems, attitude formation and the impact of competition on social outcomes in general. This course focuses mostly on issues relevant for political communication and comparative politics; voting behavior and public opinion; empirical democratic theory and comparative political economy; and the methodology of quantitative research. In particular, it queries how citizens, with their limited resources and time available for engaging with politics, perform their role as ultimate decision-makers in democratic politics. This angle gives us an interesting perspective on the entire democratic political process and allows us to inspect the content and empirical validity of its normative foundations. Hence, the course serves as an intermediate-level introduction to the study of political behavior, choice and attitude formation. It has a strongly interdisciplinary approach and always keeps an eye on actual political practice and its use of scientific knowledge.

Specifically, the course examines the prospects and limits of low-information rationality and preference aggregation failures in the electoral arena. In other words, we will ask how social cleavages, economic conditions, ideology, political issues, party identification, factual information, campaigns and various other factors impact on how voters decide, and what all this implies for the quality of democracy and citizen influence on public policy. We will also explore how institutional contexts have an influence on whether elections hold policy-makers accountable to citizens and responsive to popular preferences, and what evidence contemporary scholarship offers on these questions. We will consider the difficult communication and cognitive processing problems that all political actors encounter in the political process, and highlight their relevance for democratic preference aggregation processes while also giving some
attention to the practical lessons that can be drawn for party strategists and political information campaigns. The course reviews a large variety of state-of-the-art empirical research and stresses the importance of first-hand experience in reading and critically discussing cutting edge research output instead of cherry-picking ideas from textbooks, essays, and popular science. Thus, it also pays attention to the philosophy, design and methods of contemporary quantitative and experimental analyses in social research and should improve your understanding of these.

**Lectures, seminars, demonstrations, and exercises**

One week of the semester will be devoted to each topic in the sequence shown below. We will typically devote the second class of the week to exercises and student presentations, and will devote the first to discussing the readings and the lecture slides that students will consult in advance. Your contributions to the weekly classes will be graded (see below).

**Learning outcomes**

- Familiarity with theories, concepts, empirical regularities and research strategies in voting behavior research
- Ability to conceive, elaborate and argue for campaign tools with reference to what scholarly analyses reveal about voting behavior and public opinion
- Reason analytically, apply abstract models to complex empirical situations and engage with different intellectual traditions, subfields, research designs and methodologies in the social sciences
- Improved ability to design high-quality academic or applied research in a rigorous and consistent manner
- Ability for effective oral presentation of scholarly thoughts, developing listening and discussion skills with initiative and autonomy in various professional contexts
- Improved understanding of the potential and limits of statistical analyses and experimental research especially with respect to the establishment of causality; improved appreciation of the potential of qualitative research and rigorous description

**Requirements**

Your course grade will depend on your contributions to classroom discussions (task A, 25% of the grade), in-class exercises (task B, 25% of the grade), short presentations (task C, 10% of the grade), and a max. 5000-word research paper (task D, 40% of the grade). Contributions to seminar discussions will be graded for showing in-depth, critical, but perceptive engagement with the assigned readings and the lecture slides distributed several days before the class. It will be valued if you enable the class to spot errors of argumentation and the normative, theoretical and practical implications with clear, respectful, well-argued, but short contributions, without taking undue time for yourself and preventing others making a similar contribution (task A). In-class exercises (task B) will sometimes take the form of a debating tournament, sometimes a group discussion on how we could use concepts and theories discussed in the course for a more insightful exploration of the issues in a high-brow newspaper or magazine article on elections, and sometimes a competition between project teams in solving a practical task. Debates will focus on topics like under what conditions should citizens living with cognitive disabilities have a right to vote, or what observable traits of a candidate an election campaign should emphasize or attack.
Team projects will consist in things like designing a short snapshot survey on an issue, an electoral system that best serves women’s representation, or a field experiment into whether an election is rigged via miscounting votes. Every team member will contribute to the in-class presentation of the project and be graded separately for how thoughtfully and critically s/he utilized the ideas that we discussed or read about in the course or were otherwise covered via lectures. You will all do short individual presentations (task C) too based on independent library and online research into a relatively narrow topic, like how recent scholarly works and policy papers find about the methods, frequency and typical circumstances of vote buying. Presentations will be graded for how informative, well-structured, accurate and comprehensible their claims were.

Your task D will be to submit a research essay by 7 April. You will need to get my approval for the topic and outline of the paper before 28 February. The paper can do any one of three things. First, it can provide a highly structured, thoughtful and comprehensive overview of the state of the art in the scholarly literature regarding some aspects of elections and voting. Such reviews should be based on a clear, precise and defensible identification of the key questions and methodological challenges in the given field, and a highly synthesized, intelligible, accurate, candid and critical summary of the main findings, their theoretical implications, and the most important questions that remain unresolved till now. i.e., an annotated bibliography summarizing paper after paper with at most some ad hoc and unstructured commentary will not do. Second, your essay could be a case study of a recent regulatory reform concerning the conduct of elections and/or campaigns. Such papers must clearly identify what is the novelty in their contribution, what is its theoretical relevance, and how the new insight was generated. Use primary sources to establish accurately and authoritatively the facts of the story, the chronology of events, the outcome, and the stated goals and likely motivation of the key actors involved. Discuss the plausibility of various possible explanations (covering self-interested, norm-regarding as well as other-regarding explanations) for the deliberate choices of the various actors and what may have been just unintended consequences that they could not avoid. Collect as comprehensive evidence as possible about the effect of the reform and assess it methodically. Third, your essay can present your own qualitative, quantitative or experimental analysis of a question related to voting behavior or public opinion. Such analysis must focus on a clearly identified and arguably pressing gap in human knowledge, present a convincing way of generating a novel insight into it, and present the analysis in a properly documented, argued and transparent way.

In either case, the topic of the paper may overlap with any other paper that you write in other courses or contexts, but its content must not. The essay has to assess the merits and drawbacks of alternative arguments, methods, theories, definitions, and interpretations as it suits the topic. There must be a clear and circumspect reasoning about why one (if any) of the arguments, methods, etc. is better than some others encountered in the literature. Concepts must be clearly defined, empirical assertions carefully documented. A reference must be formally cited any time the ideas, research findings, or data of someone else is mentioned or otherwise utilized. A list of references has to be provided at the end of the paper, and this, of course, must list no more and no less than every work actually referred to in the paper. The whole paper has to be no more than 5,000 words (excluding tables and your list of references but including any notes adjoining the text) and follow an academic journal format throughout. You will need to upload the final version of the paper to the e-learning site of the course. Two percent of the
points on the paper will be deducted for every day of delay in submitting it.

Readings
In the topic-by-topic list below, mandatory readings are marked with #. In the CEU library, you find most books related to our topics at shelf reference numbers 324, 303, and 302. The articles appearing among the recommended readings are nearly all available from the CEU library in hardcopy and/or electronic form through JSTOR or Ebsco. The reading list may change even the week before a given class (but not after), so you’d better check it on the e-learning site of the course before you start preparing for a class.

Note that the course will not cover all existing perspectives on electoral research but focuses on the international mainstream. For a critical opinion on this you can check out for, e.g., Patrick Dunleavy's "Political Behavior: Institutional and Experimental Approaches", in A New Handbook in Political Science, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 276-93). For an introduction to the basic technical terms and statistical concepts used in survey research see pp. 202-12 of David Broughton's Public Opinion Polling and Politics in Britain (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995) and pp. 1-26 of David Denver's Elections and Voting Behaviour in Britain (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 2nd ed. 1994). For some healthy skepticism regarding how much a course like this can tell you about how to win elections, consult Petrocik, John R., and Frederick T. Steeper. 2010. "The Politics Missed by Political Science." The Forum 8 (3): Article 1. If you look for concise overviews of electoral research and related issues at the graduate scholar level instead, then the following works will probably serve you well:


Topic 1. Elections and the political system. (First class:) Introduction to the course. Democratic and non-democratic elections, their role and institutional framework. Elections and political parties as necessary but insufficient guarantees of citizen sovereignty. (Second class:) Why and how can majority preferred outcomes be defeated in democratic elections? Possible problems with electoral systems, party systems, information environments, and citizens and some normative benchmarks that we can use to evaluate them.

Readings:
Topic 2: Modeling the electoral process from candidate emergence to policy outcomes. The rationality assumption and its alternatives in the study of political behavior. How formal models handle empirically intractable questions. Formal models of majority rule and the median voter theorem. Expressive vs. instrumental models and electoral participation as the classic example. The political impact of the expressive motivation of citizen engagement, choices and turnout and the implications for representative democracy.

You must peruse the first two chapters of the Hinich-Munger textbook (see below; it really is a very easy text and much shorter than it seems from the page numbers!) before you sit down to read the mandatory readings of this week. If the ideas discussed there are familiar, then you can browse it extremely quickly; otherwise read it more carefully because it will be a great help in properly understanding the readings that we are going to discuss in class.


Readings:
Topic 3: The “sociological” model of voting behavior as the first empirically-motivated alternative to “rational” voter models. (First class:) The earliest empirical studies of voting behavior and Berelson’s non-spatial low information rationality model. Interpersonal influence and group membership as the archetypical cue-providers. (Second class:) Cross-national and temporal variation in the association between large social groups and party alternatives in established democracies. The hierarchy, universality, inertia, decline, and effect of cleavages. The freezing hypothesis.

Readings:


**Topic 4: Low information rationality, the Drunkard’s Search, schemata, shortcuts, and heuristics in citizen politics. Why are cues always double-edged swords?**

Readings:


Topic 5: Motivational and cognitive accounts of party identification. On-line vs. memory based information processing. Motivated reasoning and partisan projection effects as heuristics. Situations where information can change attitudes and where it really does not matter

Readings:

**Topic 6: Do voters have positional policy preferences after all? How are they structured? Are they self-interested, other-regarding, or what? Non-attitudes, response sets, attenuation effects, and belief systems. Issue publics, framing, and their relevance for preference aggregation in democracies**

Readings:
Lupia, Arthur. 2016. *Uninformed: Why People Seem to Know So Little about Politics and What*
We Can Do about It. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapter 11.

Topic 7: Issues and candidate issue positions as determinants of election outcomes. Open-ended questions and introspective responses versus recursive and non-recursive path models as tools of measuring issue voting. Controversies about the normative desirability of issue voting and vote advice applications

Readings:
Kirzinger, Ashley, Elise Sugarman, and Mollyann Brodie. 2016. "Kaiser Health Tracking Poll:


**Topic 8: Directional, salience, discounting and proximity models of relating personal issue preferences to the vote**

Readings:


**Topic 9: How do voters relate information and policy preferences to vote choice? The impact of risk aversion, time horizon, political sophistication, information costs, and uncertain party positions**

**Readings:**


**Political Science & Politics 49 (4): 761-765**


**Topic 10: Are better-informed votes better votes?**

Readings:


**Topic 11: How do political institutions enhance or constrain electoral accountability? Do they promote economic underachievement in the process? Incumbency- and policy-oriented economic voting and political business cycles**

**Readings:**


Paler, Laura. 2013. "Keeping the Public Purse: An Experiment in Windfalls, Taxes, and the


**Topic 12: The impact of public opinion and elections on governments and policy choices in democracies. Contradictory findings about responsiveness, policy representation, and the quality of electoral democracies**

**Readings:**


