Voting Behavior
Elective MA course, Winter 2019
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS

Version: October 2018

Instructor: Gabor Toka
Department of Political Science
Central European University

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/

Reading lists: see below but note that the list may change throughout the semester as the course evolves. Mandatory readings will always be limited in length to the equivalent of 40-60 pages with a conventional layout for scholarly works plus illustrations and appendices a week, and made available at least a week in advance so that you can engage with them in depth. Updated versions of the syllabus will be made available through the e-learning site of the course.

Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures, seminars, demonstrations, and exercises</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Topic 1. Introduction to the course. The role of elections in the political system. Normative expectations regarding elections, their consequences, and their realism. Why and how can majority preferred outcomes be defeated in democratic elections? Possible problems with electoral systems, party systems, competition, information environments, and citizens. Normative benchmarks that we can use to evaluate election outcomes

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

Topic 3: The “sociological” (or Columbia) model of voting behavior as the first empirically-motivated alternative to “rational” voter models. 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. 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 in Stein Rokkan’s work. The freezing hypothesis and the evidence

Topic 4: The (socio-)psychological (a.k.a. Michigan or party identification) model of voting behavior. Motivational and cognitive accounts of partisanship. On-line vs. memory based information processing. Motivated reasoning and partisan projection effects as heuristics. Relationship to expressive rationality. Situations where information can change attitudes and where it really does not matter

Topic 5: Modern generalizations of low information rationality (or satisficing) models. Schemata, shortcuts, and heuristics in citizen politics. Why are cues always double-edged swords? Is there a place for liberal nudge-
paternalism in elections? ........................................................................................................12

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 ........................................14

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 ........................................16

Topic 8: Directional, salience, discounting and proximity models of relating personal issue preferences to the vote 17

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 ........................................19

Topic 10: Are better-informed votes better votes? ..................................................................................20

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 22

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........24

Course description

Elections are central to the democratic process and to legitimating office-holders and policies in contemporary polities, increasingly even in political systems that are not truly democratic. This course examines how individual citizens use these opportunities to make an input in the political process. This topic 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 individual citizens, with their limited resources and motivation to engage 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.

Above all, the course examines the prospects and limits of low-information rationality and of 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 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. We will consider the difficult communication and cognitive processing problems that all political actors encounter, and highlight their relevance for democratic preference aggregation and 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**

Approximately one week of the semester will be devoted to each topic in the sequence shown below. The classes will mix exercises, student presentations, and conference-style discussion of the readings. Your contributions to the weekly classes will be graded (see below). For most topics except the first, I plan to post my own podcasts and slides on the e-learning site. This will serve as a replacement of in-class lectures, and you will be expected to digest them before the topic comes up in class and you cover the mandatory readings. The classes will discuss the readings, criticize and challenge the podcasts and the slides. If you do not do your homework, there will be no way to hide this in class. But if you do your part in the days before each class, then you can enjoy and develop your skills in intelligent, attentive, goal-oriented but none-is-left-behind and fun conversations that will help us dissect complex analyses, challenging intellectual problems, and uphill tasks for political campaigners.

**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**

The key requirements are (A) active participation in all discussions in-class (25%), one short in-class presentation (15%), and a final paper (60%). 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). You will all do short individual presentations (task B) 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 much their advance group knowledge with new, engagingly presented, well-structured,
accurate, comprehensible and substantially relevant information on insightful theories, interesting empirics, and practically relevant ideas about how to do things (like research or political campaigns).

Your task C 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, accurate, candid and critical summary of the main findings on the given issue, their theoretical implications, and the most important questions that remain unresolved. I.e., an annotated bibliography summarizing paper after paper with 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 the novelty of their contribution, 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 analyses 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 and 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. Plagiarism will be hunted down by all means and sanctioned the harshest way allowed by relevant CEU policies.

Absence from class is accepted within the limits of usual departmental policies, but earn you zero points on the exercises/discussion components of the class you missed. You can compensate for this by submitting a 1000-word position paper discussing what ideas for the design of election campaigns or the ideal design of democratic elections can be extracted from the mandatory readings of the week, how the articles support the importance of the idea (device) in question, and what may be missing from the necessary evidence that you would like to have
before you design a campaign/election following the useful ideas that you extract from the readings. Position papers will be graded for relevance and coherence of argumentation; precision, conciseness and comprehensiveness in interpreting the readings; and fairness and reasonable skepticism towards the achievements and shortcomings of research.
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 hard copy 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 student level instead, then the following works will probably serve you well:

Topic 1. Introduction to the course. The role of elections in the political system. Normative expectations regarding elections, their consequences, and their realism. Why and how can majority preferred outcomes be defeated in democratic elections? Possible problems with electoral systems, party systems, competition, information environments, and citizens. Normative benchmarks that we can use to evaluate election outcomes

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” (or Columbia) model of voting behavior as the first empirically-motivated alternative to “rational” voter models. 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. 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 in Stein Rokkan’s work. The freezing hypothesis and the evidence

Readings:

Gunther, Richard, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, and José Ramón Montero, eds. 2007. Democracy,


Topic 4: The (socio-)psychological (a.k.a. Michigan or party identification) model of voting behavior. Motivational and cognitive accounts of partisanship. On-line vs. memory based information processing. Motivated reasoning and partisan projection effects as heuristics. Relationship to expressive rationality. Situations where information can change attitudes and where it really does not matter

Readings:


**Topic 5: Modern generalizations of low information rationality (or satisficing) models. Schemata, shortcuts, and heuristics in citizen politics. Why are cues always double-edged swords? Is there a place for liberal nudge-paternalism in elections?**

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:

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:

**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:
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:


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:
Powell, G. Bingham, Jr. 2000. Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and

