Parties in parliaments and legislative behavior  
Elective M.A. course, Winter 2017

Instructor  
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Class meetings: Tuesdays 13:30-15:10  
Office hours: TBA  
Credits: 2 CEU credits, 4 ECTS credits
Course description
The course is designed to introduce students to research on legislatures in democracies across the globe, relying on an up to date review of the literature in legislative politics. The first part of the course concentrates on the role of parties in legislatures: how they organize law-making in committees and on the floor, how they engage in cabinet scrutiny and the scrutiny of legislative coalitions’ partners, and how they recruit and socialize Members of Parliament (MPs). The second part of the course focuses on individual legislative behavior, assessing the determinants and consequences of voting dissent, constituency service and committee work. The course will help students understand the implications of partisan and individual legislators' choices for achieving the desired policy outcomes and vote returns. Special attention will be given to the interaction of individual preferences and house rules and how it influences the passage of new legislation.

Learning outcomes
At a general level, the elaboration and feedback received on the position papers, research proposal and final paper will help students improve their analytical and critical writing skills, while their oral communication and presentation skills will benefit from presentations and in-class activities.
At a more specific level, students will be able to grasp and competently utilize the concepts and theoretical propositions which form the core of legislative politics. Moreover, they will be able to recognize key institutional differences of institutionalized and non-institutionalized parliaments and assess the likely outcomes in terms of legislative behavior of various electoral system designs and house rules. Students will also become familiarized with how MPs' actions can foster or undermine programmatic linkages and what types of responsiveness citizens might legitimately demand from them.
Some of the instructor's own articles and work in progress will be integrated occasionally in lectures so as to make students aware of the practical challenges faced when researching and publishing on legislative politics.

Evaluation
Class activity: 15%
Presentation: 10%
Two position papers: 30%
Final paper: 45%

Class activity. Students are expected to participate in the discussion of the topic the session deals with, sharing their insights and intuitions. The discussion will also serve as a medium for clarifying any questions arising from the readings. For a high quality discussion, it is essential for students to complete the assigned readings. Activity in the classroom can be complemented with questions, suggestions and comments (maximum 200 words) sent to the instructor via e-mail or uploaded to the e-learning site 24 hours prior to the meetings.
Presentation. Students are requested to give a 10 minutes presentation on one dimension or strand of research included in the session's topic. For this, they should rely on one or more of the recommended readings.

Position papers. Students are requested to submit two of them and at least one in the first half of the course (i.e. before session 7). The position papers shall have no more than 800 words and students will use them to summarize and comment critically on the mandatory readings assigned for the session. If only one mandatory reading is assigned for the session, the position paper needs to also address one of the recommended readings. When choice is available, i.e. among recommended readings, the position paper should focus on research articles, not on review articles. Students will present the main arguments, methods and findings of the reading while reflecting on how convincing the authors' choices and claims are, and identifying potential flaws.

Final paper. It may be of a quantitative or qualitative nature. This paper will follow the structure of an academic article and its length will be between 3000 and 3500 words. Both quantitative and qualitative papers would draw on theories and scholarship studied during the course, either to test a particular hypothesis or to generate new hypotheses about legislative organization and behavior. The topic of the final paper needs to be discussed and agreed in advance with the instructor. Students are asked to contact the instructor as soon as possible in order to discuss the content of the final paper. In the last session of the course students will present the research proposal or work-in-progress final papers and provide feedback to their colleagues.

Potential sources for the empirical analyses include behavioral, survey and parliamentary office data from the Hungarian and Romanian legislatures (more to be provided by the instructor upon request), European Parliament data, or replication data posted by authors on their personal websites or archives such as the Harvard Dataverse. Other potentially useful political science datasets can be consulted here. Possible qualitative analyses may take on the form of an in-depth (comparative) case study of a specific vote or particular Parliamentary Party Group (PPG), or a comparison of the formal aspects pertaining to committees and parliaments. The deadline for submitting the final paper is April 9.

For the final paper participants should consult additional literature, surveying both theoretical and empirical studies. Specialized journals include: Legislative Studies Quarterly, The Journal of Legislative Studies, Parliamentary Affairs and Representation.

The departmental policies regarding attendance, late submission and plagiarism will be applied.
Course structure and readings

1. Comparing legislatures and legislative behavior
The first meeting offers an introductory overview on the main functions of legislatures and a first assessment of legislative behavior in relation to the strength of legislative parties and constituency linkages.

Mandatory readings

Recommended

2. Agenda setting rules
The second meeting discusses the evolution and the purposes served by restrictive legislative procedures (negative agenda control) as well as other agenda setting rules (e.g. timetable rules or opportunities to amend legislation).

Mandatory reading

Recommended

3. Cabinet scrutiny and politics of legislative coalitions
Individual MPs and legislative parties which support the cabinet are interested that the ministers their parties appointed to the cabinet do not deviate from policy measures and outcomes preferred by the party or by the constituents. In multiparty cabinets, this delegation problem becomes even more complex and parties might use parliamentary procedures and arrangements to keep tabs on their coalition partners' ministers.
Mandatory readings

Recommended readings

4. Opposition behavior
What types of behaviors form the repertoires of parliamentary opposition parties? The session will explore the determinants behind the cooperation or adversarial strategies adopted by opposition parties and the parliamentary tools they can use to achieve oversight or to signal to voters their alternative agendas.

Mandatory readings

Recommended readings

5. Committees
This session introduces the major theories that explain the variation in committee powers and structures, their functions and the ways members are assigned to them. We will also discuss the factors behind the allocation of committee chairs and why they matter.

Mandatory readings

Recommended readings

6. Competing Principals
Among the many possible principals of Members of Parliaments one can distinguish between the national party leadership, local party bosses, constituents and sometimes even European party group leaders. Each of these principals control resources needed by the MPs. What behavioral strategies do the agents adopt when their principals' have conflicting preferences?

Mandatory reading
or

Recommended readings

7. Party unity
The responsible party model and several other political science theories are built on the assumption that (legislative) parties are unitary actors. The session discusses how is party unity achieved de facto and what are the institutional rules that tend to nurture it.

Mandatory readings

Recommended readings

8. Party switching
Once considered an anomaly, limited to under-institutionalized system, party switching is no longer a marginal topic in legislative politics. As some scholars argue, changes in affiliation can provide significant insights for crucial aspects of legislative behavior: from the uneasy relationship between party leaders and the rank-and-file parliamentarians, the types of motivations that guide MPs’ actions, to the politics of government formation, and the patterns of party competition.

Mandatory reading

Recommended readings

9. Electoral system incentives for legislative behavior
The session discusses how the electoral system design (district magnitude, electoral formula, ballot type) can influence the behavior of legislators and their attitudes towards representation.

Mandatory readings

Recommended readings

### 10. Electoral consequences of parliamentary activities and constituency service

Do voters notice their legislators’ parliamentary activities or their engagement in constituency service and vote accordingly? A growing scholarship is devoted to amassing evidence on electoral rewards for cultivating a personal vote.

**Mandatory readings**


**Recommended readings**


### 11. Class and gender effects

MPs tend to be overwhelmingly males recruited from white-collar professions. While the conventional wisdom is that this lack of diversity compared to general populations does not make a difference with respect to substantive representation of diverse interests, recent research has shown that gender, ethnicity and class can influence what policies legislators initiate or support. Scholars have also analyzed the institutional challenges faced by women or ethnic minority legislators once elected.

**Mandatory readings**


**Recommended**


12. Research proposal/ drafts discussion
Students will present their research proposals or draft papers and provide feedback for their peers' work. They should submit their research proposal to all the course participants and instructor by noon on March 23rd. The proposal should include at a minimum a research question, a brief discussion that places the research question within the context of the larger literature, and a section on how the question will be answered.