Pre-Research Seminar: 615-501b Autumn Term 2019

Political Representation and Policy Preferences

Term: Autumn term 2019
Time: Tuesday, 16:15–18:00
Room: AFL-F-172/173 (Affolternstr. 56)
ECTS: 6

Course Content

When do political parties fulfil or break election promises? How can researchers and citizens identify political promises? How does pledge fulfilment relate to theories of political representation? And why do parties and politicians change their positions? These questions will be discussed in this pre-research seminar. First, we revisit classic theories of representation and policy-making. Afterwards, we turn to the definition and measurement of public opinion, different styles of representation, and the concepts of responsiveness and congruence. Based on these theoretical foundations, we analyse party competition as well as salience and latent policy positions. We also discuss and apply to text-as-data methods, and revisit some of the most important aspects for designing a research project. This pre-research seminar is aimed at students who would like to attend the seminar together with the research seminar in the spring term 2020 as a one-year course.

Details

- Pre-Research Seminar (Autumn term 2019); Research seminar (Spring term 2020)
- Language: English
- Grading: Weekly wiki posts about course literature: 90%; Outline of research proposal: 10%

Learning Outcomes

1. Extensive knowledge of central theories of representation, the mandate model of democracy, and party competition.
2. Detailed insights into past and current approaches to study questions about pledge fulfilment, party positions, responsiveness and issue ownership.
3. Critical reading and discussing complex academic literature and diverse methodological approaches.

4. Planning and writing a research design which forms the basis of the empirical research paper (Forschungsarbeit), to be written in the second part of the module (FS 2020).

Introductory Readings

The seminar does not build on a single text book, but relies mostly on papers and chapters of books. For a general overview of the course content, I recommend the following books:


Technical Background and Prerequisites

The course requires good knowledge of general approaches and theories of political science and basic prior knowledge with research design and quantitative methods. The following books provide very good introductions to empirical research designs and applied quantitative methods.

Research Design and Quantitative Methods


Academic Writing


Syllabus Modification Rights

I reserve the right to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time by adjusting the reading list to keep pace with the course schedule. Moreover, I may change the content of specific sessions depending on the participants’ prior knowledge and research interests.
Expectations and Grading

- Students must read all papers or chapters assigned under Mandatory Readings. I also add optional readings which can be used as additional evidence for the weekly wiki posts or serve as a preparation for the empirical research paper.

- Students will upload weekly wiki posts at OLAT. These posts are comparable to response papers. Each post (between 500 and 750 words) should critically discuss the required readings for the respective session. The post must be submitted at last 3 (!) hours before the start of the seminar session. Students should not merely summarise the readings, but discuss weaknesses – either by comparing the papers critically or by making suggestions on how to improve the theory, data, or methods. The posts are supposed to encourage students to think critically about the readings. Students must submit at least 9 posts with passable quality, but have two ‘jokers’: students can submit up to 11 posts and the 2 posts with the lowest grades will not count towards the final grade. More information on the posts will be provided during the course. The nine posts can be written in English or German and count towards 90% of the grade.

- Students will submit an outline of the empirical research paper. This outline counts towards 10% of the final grade and will present a testable research question, theoretical expectations, the dependent variable, a preliminary overview of the data to be collected or analysed for the Forschungsarbeit, and a description of the methodological approach. The outline can be written in English or German, and must be submitted before December 17, 2019 (8:00pm CET). Concrete information on the length of the outline will be provided in class. In spring term 2020, students will use submit a more concrete research design and the final research paper. Additional information on the research design and research paper will be provided at the beginning of spring term 2020.
Course Structure (Autumn Term 2019)

**Week 1: Organisation and Introduction (September 17, 2019)**
- Expectations
- Discussion of syllabus
- Initial information on wiki posts, the outline of the research proposal, and the second term

**Week 2: Parties and Party Systems (September 24, 2019)**
- What are political parties?
- How have political parties evolved over time?
- What constitutes a party system?

**Mandatory Readings**
Week 3: Mandate Model of Democracy (October 1, 2019)

- What is the ‘democratic mandate’?
- How we measure campaign promises/pledges?
- Do parties fulfil their promises?

Mandatory Readings


Week 4: Measuring Public Opinion (October 7, 2019)

- What is public opinion?
- How can we measure public opinion?
- What are advantages and shortcomings of different survey instruments?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


Week 5: Politicians: Trustees or Delegates? (October 15, 2019)

- What roles do politicians take during campaigns and in office?
- What are differences between the trustee and delegate model of representation? What type of representation is preferable?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


**Week 6: Economic Voting and the Cost of Governing (October 22, 2019)**

- What is democratic accountability?
- Why do government parties regularly lose public support at the next election?

**Mandatory Readings**


Optional


**Week 7: Responsiveness (October 29, 2019)**

- What are the differences between accountability and responsiveness?
- Do parties and politicians react to public opinion?

**Mandatory Readings**


Optional


**Week 8: Party Competition (November 5, 2019)**

– What goals do parties and politicians pursue?

– How do parties compete with each other, and how can we measure party competition?

**Mandatory Readings**


Optional


**Week 9: Party Positions, Salience and Issue Ownership (November 12, 2019)**

– What are differences between positions, salience, and issue ownership?

– How can we measure latent policy positions?

– What are methodological difficulties when measuring party positions?

**Mandatory Readings**


Week 10: Application: Quantitative Text Analysis (November 19, 2019)

- Which datasets are available to measure party positions and issue salience?
- What software tools and methods can be used to derive latent party positions and classify issue salience?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


Week 11: Application: Party Positions and Issue Salience (November 26, 2019)

- How can we apply the methods discussed in week 10 to textual data using the quanteda R package?

Mandatory Readings

Optional


Week 12: Representation in the Age of Digital Democracy (December 3, 2019)

- How does the internet change democratic decision making and representation?
- Do politicians and parties react to online discussions?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


Week 13: Research Design: Research Question and Dependent Variable (October 10, 2019)


Optional

Week 14: Research Design: Falsifiability and Causal Inference (December 17, 2019)

Mandatory Readings


Optional