Level 3 Module; Autumn Trimester 2021

Parties and Party Competition (POL30720)

Version: November 1, 2021

Latest version at: https://muellerstefan.net/teaching/2021-autumn-ppc.pdf

Time: Tuesday 11:00–11:45 & Thursday 11:00–11:45
- Tue: E2.16-SCIE (O’Brien Science Centre East)
- Thu: B003-CSI (Computer Science Centre)

Credits: 10.0
Format: Lecture; in-class discussions

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Office: Newman Building, G312
Office hours: Tue, 13:00–15:00 (sign up here)

Module Description

How can we identify differences between party systems, determine party positions, and measure public opinion? Do parties keep their promises, or are politicians “pledge breakers”? Are promises in certain policy areas more likely to be fulfilled? In what policy areas do parties differ in terms of their positions and issue emphasis? And do parties respond to changes in public opinion?

In this module, we first discuss the main functions of political parties, outline features of representative democracies, and identify ways of measuring public opinion. Next, we assess whether parties keep their promises, whether the “mandate model of democracy” is a desirable and realistic mode of political representation, and how we could improve existing studies on election pledge fulfilment. Afterwards, we investigate parties’ willingness and capacity to respond to changes in public opinion. Fourth, we discuss different approaches to measuring party positions, political ideology, and the salience of policy areas. Finally, we briefly discuss alternative types of political participation that go beyond representative government and electoral democracy.

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 quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches
Indicative Module Content

The following topics will be discussed in this module: parties and party systems; the “mandate model of democracy”; measuring and aggregating public opinion; economic voting; the cost of governing; responsiveness; party competition; party positions, salience, and issue ownership; campaign pledges; parties’ online communication and campaigning.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

• Active and task-based learning
• Group work and discussions
• In-class debates
• Problem-based learning

Overview of Assessment

• 1,000 word response paper: 30%
• Descriptive data analysis: summarise and interpret data on party competition in Europe (1,000 words): 20%
• Group project: 4,000 word essay from a choice set of questions: 50%

Expectations and Guidelines

• You are expected to read the papers or chapters assigned under mandatory readings. These readings serve as the basis for in-class discussions.

• You submit one response paper (1,000 words) throughout the course, which counts towards 30% of the grade. By Week 3, everyone will have been assigned a week where they will prepare a response paper. Response papers must be submitted via Brightspace no later than Tuesday, 9am of the respective week, meaning that the assignment has to be submitted before the texts are discussed in class. You are required to choose one of the required or suggested readings for that week (readings marked with a star may not be used). Response papers must contain the following two aspects:

  1. Identify either a limitation of the paper (e.g., how a variable is measured, or an unreasonable/unnecessary assumption) or a possible extension. Either way, you should focus on only one limitation or extension.

  2. Suggest a possible solution to that limitation or describe how you would carry out the extension. Note that what you propose should be feasible (ideally, you should be able to conduct the suggested research proposal). If, for example, you find the author’s data weak, then you should identify better data, or at least propose a plausible way of collecting these data. If you think the method is wrong, explain why and suggest a better one. If the conclusions do not follow from the premises, discuss what conclusions are actually supported. A specific course of action should be outlined. Note that I am not interested in a summary of the selected paper. The idea is to develop innovative ideas for future research projects.

• You also submit a descriptive data analysis. Based on a new interactive collection of materials and data about party competition in Europe, you will explore an empirical question by using existing tools to interpret quantitative data. You do not require prior knowledge of coding or statistical programming languages. The descriptive data analysis counts toward 20% of the final
grade. Questions will be allocated in Week 3 of the course and more details on the expectations will be provided in class and on Brightspace. The entire descriptive data analysis should not exceed 1,000 words. The answers to the questions should not exceed 1,000 words (in total, not per question!). The data exercise must be submitted via Brightspace as a PDF document before 17 November 2021 (8:00pm CET).

• Finally, as a group exercise, you will submit an essay which counts towards 50% of the final grade. The essay must not exceed 4,000 words (including bibliography, captions, and footnotes) and will tackle one of the ‘discussion questions’ listed below. For this essay, your group is required to (i) draw on academic literature (articles and/or books) and (ii) properly cite the academic literature you use to prepare your essay, focusing on peer-reviewed journals from political science. You should read beyond the reading list for this essay and attach an alphabetised bibliography to your essay. The essay must be submitted via Brightspace as a PDF document before 17 December 2021 (8:00pm CET). More information on the essay will be provided in the seminar. For information on academic writing, I recommend the following sources:


For the essay, I recommend paying special attention to the following aspects:

  – **Focus on argumentation, demonstrate critical thinking:** Your essay will be judged primarily on your ability to make nuanced arguments and to demonstrate your understanding of the nuances of the arguments presented by the authors discussed in the course and readings that go beyond the syllabus. While you are expected to engage with the material in the course during your essay, a good essay will do so in a creative way where your own voice comes through clearly. This can be done by critically commenting on the arguments of others; creatively combing arguments from others to make a case; and/or presenting your own original arguments in attempting to improve upon shortcomings in the literature that you have identified.

  – **Read deeply, read widely:** Reading deeply is the most important thing for developing your essay. **But you should also read widely, consulting sources both within and beyond the syllabus.** It is possible to write a great paper by focusing on just a small number of sources. But this is rare enough. As a rule of thumb, well-researched papers usually average between one and two distinct references per double-spaced page. For a 4,000-word essay, this will amount to approximately 15–20 distinct references to texts that you have read and analysed closely.

  – **Presentation:** Be attentive to the presentation of your essay, including consistent referencing-style (with page numbers provided), a bibliography, and a consistent layout. Learning how to deliver well-presented and polished-looking work is part of your undergraduate training and a highly transferable skill. Take it seriously. Poor presentation will result in lost marks. If you require information on proper citation style, please refer to the guidelines of the American Political Science Association:


  – **Important:** collaboration is a central part of many jobs, and it is essential to learn how to work in groups on a challenging question. It is the students’ responsibility to schedule regular group meetings. It is expected that all students contribute equally to the group work. Students should inform the module coordinator as soon as possible if the group work is not proceeding
as expected. Those complaints will be treated anonymously, and groups can arrange a virtual meeting with the instructor can be organised at any time to discuss difficulties. To facilitate constructive group work, I will ask each group to summarise their progress by 1 December 2021.

Essay Questions

Please choose one of the three questions below and make sure to follow the essay guidelines described above.

1. Are governments in which parties keep higher percentages of their previous campaign pledges more democratic than governments in which parties keep fewer pledges? Discuss the reasons for positive and negative answers to this question.

2. Political parties have transformed over time and new types of party organizations have emerged (Katz and Mair 1995, 2009). By referring to the academic literature and by providing examples answer the following questions: Which democratic functions of political parties have declined? And which democratic functions have been better fulfilled by modern political parties.

3. Does retrospective performance voting provide a useful mechanism of holding political parties accountable, or are the fears about ‘blind retrospection’ and irrational voting behaviour justified?

Office Hours

We can meet either in person (Room G312, Newman Building) or online during my office hour on Tuesday from 13:00–15:00. Please sign up for a meeting at https://calendly.com/mueller-ucd/office-hours.

Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism – copying someone else’s text without acknowledgement or beyond ‘fair use’ quantities – is not allowed. Plagiarism is an issue we take very serious here in UCD. Please familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism on UCD’s website¹ and make sure not to engage in it.

Late Submission Policy

All written work must be submitted on or before the due dates. Students will lose one point of a grade for work up to 5 working days late (B− becomes C+). Students will lose two grade points for work between 5 and 10 working days late (B− becomes C). When an extension of more than two weeks is necessary, the student will need to apply for extenuating circumstances application via the SPIRe Programme Office.

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<thead>
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<th>Student effort type</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
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<td>Autonomous Student Learning</td>
<td>196</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>220</strong></td>
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¹https://libguides.ucd.ie/academicintegrity.
Introductory Readings

The seminar does not build on a single text book, but relies on peer-reviewed papers and book chapters. For a general overview of the course content, I recommend the following books. Note that I do not expect you to buy any of these books since the required and optional readings for this module will be almost exclusively freely available online through your UCD Library account.


Technical Background and Prerequisites

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

Research Design and Quantitative Methods


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.

Additional Covid-19 Guidelines

Covid-19 continues to pose a threat to our well-being and health. We all need to follow UCD’s guidelines, which involves wearing masks in the lecture rooms. I will also wear a mask at all times. If you come to my office hours in person, please make sure to wear a mask. If you are unwilling or unable to wear a mask, we can meet virtually. If you are not feeling well, stay home! I try to make all relevant materials available to everyone: I will record all lectures, share the slides, and upload all readings. Protecting everyone’s health is most important. Should you be sick or need a longer period of absence, please get in touch and I happily work with you to ensure your success in this module. We are in this together – let’s try our very best in the months to come and support each other.

Course Structure

**Week 1: Conceptualising Representative Democracy (14 Sept & 16 Sept 2021)**


**Week 3: Parties and Electoral Competition (28 Sept & 30 Sept 2021)**
Week 1: Conceptualising Representative Democracy (14 Sept & 16 Sept 2021)

- Expectations
- Discussion of syllabus
- What are the main differences between the majoritarian and proportional visions of democracy?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


- What are political parties?
- How can we classify different types of democracies?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


**Week 3: Parties and Electoral Competition (28 Sept & 30 Sept 2021)**

- What goals do parties and politicians pursue?
- What does Lijphart mean by the Westminster Model of Democracy and the Consensus Model of Democracy?

**Mandatory Readings**


**Optional**


**Week 4: Governments and Coalitions (5 Oct & 7 Oct 2021)**

- How do we distinguish types of government coalitions?
- Which government types are most frequent across Europe? What could explain the variation over time and across countries?
- Can voters accurately predict the government formed after an election?

**Mandatory Readings**


**Optional**


- How do incumbent parties react to challenger parties or new parties?
- Why do parties join a coalition?
- What happens when populist parties enter parliament?

**Mandatory Readings**


**Optional**


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

**Mandatory Readings**


8
Week 7: Reading Week

Due to reading week, we will not have regular seminars on Tuesday and Thursday. However, I will offer a virtual Q&A session to discuss your questions about the module, the assignments, and the weeks ahead. The exact time will be announced around two weeks in advance.

Week 8: Measuring Party Positions and Issue Salience (2 Nov & 4 Nov 2021)

- 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


Optional

Week 9: Responsiveness (9 Nov & 11 Nov 2021)

- What is democratic responsiveness?
- Do parties and parties and politicians react to public opinion? And from a normative perspective, should political actors change their positions and policies depending on citizens’ preferences?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


Week 10: The (Ir)Rational Voter? (16 Nov & 18 Nov 2021)

- Are voters rational decision-makers, as assumed in many theories of representation?
- Under what circumstances do voters behave (ir)rationally? What are consequences of irrational voting behaviour on political processes and decisions?

Mandatory Readings


Optional


**Week 11: Participation Beyond Political Parties (23 Nov & 25 Nov 2021)**

- What are problems associated with representative politics?
- What other forms of participation exist? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How can these alternative forms of participation supplement representative democracy?

**Mandatory Readings**


**Optional**


**Week 12: Political Parties, the Media, and Digital Democracy (30 Nov & 2 Dec 2021)**

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

**Mandatory Readings**

Optional


