Elections in Comparative Perspective

Course description
Elections are the central focus of political activity in democracies. The characteristics of politics, parties and electoral systems are fundamental to the outcome of elections, which differ across and within countries. To better understand elections we need to study them comparatively, therefore this course focuses on comparative research on elections. We will focus on the context in which elections are fought and how this affects electoral outcomes. A number of contextual effects of electoral behaviour will be covered, such as institutional configurations, election campaigns, the strategies of political parties and the importance of events in understanding the dynamics of electoral outcomes. We will consider competing theoretical and empirical explanations of the electoral process in democratic, as well as partially democratic and even non-democratic, countries.

Time: Tuesday, 12:00 - 13:30, Autumn 2017
Room:  B6, A103
Office hours: Wednesday 12:00-13:00
Language: The language of this course is English, including all readings and assignments

Course Outline
Week 1 (5 Sept)  Introduction
Week 2 (12 Sept)  Electoral Systems
Week 3 (19 Sept)  Turnout
Week 4 (26 Sept)  Forecasting: The 2017 German Election
Week 5  No class (German Reunification Day)
Week 6 (10 Oct)  Economics and voting
Week 7 (17 Oct)  Biology of voting
Week 8 (24 Oct)  Media and campaigns
Week 9  No class (Reformation Day)
Week 10 (7 Nov)  Party leadership
Week 11 (14 Nov)  Elections in partial and non-democracies
Week 12 (21 Nov)  Elections in times of war and terrorism
Week 13 (28 Nov)  Referendums
Week 14 (5 Dec)  Student presentations of final papers
**Course requirements**
Course requirements include regular attendance, active class participation - including class presentations, performing the role of discussant and writing a research paper. You must pass every assignment in order to pass the course.

1. **Class presentation (Pass/Fail)**
Starting in week 3, each student will act as a discussion leader. The student should first introduce the key issues and debates from the readings. You should critically evaluate the required readings plus one additional academic article from the list of recommended readings. Each presentation should be around 10-15 minutes, and should describe key conceptual issues, define the central arguments, identify methodological challenges and suggest avenues for further research on the topic. Following this, you will lead the class discussion, for example by preparing 3-4 discussion questions based on the required readings and your presentation. Topics will be assigned on the first week of class. Depending on the size of the class, it is expected that students could perform this role more than once.

2. **Case studies (Pass/Fail)**
Choose a country and give a brief presentation on an aspect of the electoral process in that country. Choose a theme to focus on, such as an interesting recent or forthcoming election, an overview of a series of elections or an unusual electoral system or practice. The presentation should be no longer than 5 minutes. You should not choose a country that either you or the rest of us are likely to know very well; so Germany, USA, UK or your home country (if that’s different) are not options. Elections in this country should be, at least partially, democratic. You should not present a case study in the same week in which you do your class presentation.

3. **Final Paper (100%)**
One of the goals of this seminar is to facilitate the learning process on how to produce academic research and write term papers, which will eventually help you in writing your MA thesis. Therefore, you will write a research paper on a topic relating to the comparative study of elections. An important element of the seminar is to start working on your research paper early and to receive feedback during the process. The research paper therefore consists of three steps:

   i. You need to develop a specific research question. This research question needs to be submitted to me for approval via email by **Friday (noon), 13 October 2017**.

   ii. Second, you will write a research proposal, in which you
   a. introduce the research question,
   b. briefly justify the importance of the research question,
   c. outline your theoretical argument and state your hypotheses,
   d. outline your research methodology (whether quantitative or qualitative) and your operationalization (e.g. what sources or data you intend to use).
The research proposal should be no longer than 3 pages double-spaced and needs to be emailed to me and your discussant no later than **Wednesday (noon), 29 November 2017**.
iii. Finally, you need to develop your research proposal into a research paper. The paper should employ empirical analyses, using quantitative and/or qualitative methods. The research paper should be no longer than 5000 words. There should be a word count on the cover page; this limit excludes references, tables and figures. The paper should include a brief introduction, theory, hypothesis, operationalization and empirical analysis (quantitative or qualitative). Your research paper should also contain a brief summary of the state of research relevant to your research question.

The paper is due at **12:00 (noon), Monday, 8 January 2018.** Please submit an electronic copy. If you don’t receive a confirmation email within one hour of the deadline assume it has not been received and try again.

You will receive only a mark for the research paper and not for the research proposal, since this will only be used to provide early formative feedback on your project.

4. Discussant (Pass/Fail)

The last session is primarily to enable you to receive feedback on your research proposals, to evaluate other proposals and to provide constructive criticism. Each student will discuss the research proposal of one other student. The discussant will present a discussion including:

i. a brief summary of the student’s research proposal

ii. constructive criticism, such as highlighting points that are not clear and suggesting ways that the project could be improved.

The discussant will hand in a summary of the main points to me and to the author of the research proposal (maximum: 1 page, single-spaced) during the class. The presentation by the discussant should last no longer than 10 minutes.
Reading

**Week 2 (12 September): Electoral systems**


**Recommended:**


**Week 3 (19 September): Turnout**


**Recommended:**


**Week 4 (26 September): Forecasting elections: The 2017 German Election**

Note that the readings this week are relatively short, hence the greater number of articles set to read. You should also take a keen interest in the results of the election on 24 September and come to class prepared to talk about explanations for why the winning candidates/parties were successful.

*Special Issue of PS: Symposium on Forecasting the 2017 German Elections:*


**Recommended:**


*Special Issue of PS: Symposium on Forecasting the 2016 US Elections:*


**Week 5 (3 October): No class – German Reunification Day**

**Week 6 (10 October): Economics and voting**


*Recommended:*


**Week 7 (17 October): Biology of Voting**


**Recommended:**


**Week 8 (24 October): Media and Campaigns**


Recommended:


Week 9 (31 October): No class (Reformation Day)

Week 10 (7 November): Party leadership


Recommended:


**Week 11 (14 November): Elections in partial and non-democracies**


**Recommended:**


**Week 12 (21 November): Elections in times of war and terrorism**


*Recommended:*


Gelpi, Christopher, Jason Reifer & Peter Feaver. 2007. Iraq the Vote: Retrospective and Prospective Foreign Policy Judgments on Candidate Choice and Casualty Tolerance. Political Behavior 29:151-174.


**Week 13 (28 November): Referendums**


**Recommended:**


