

Elections and Political Participation

Lecturers

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Course mnemonic

POLI-D439

ECTS credits

5 credits

Language(s) of instruction

English

Course period

First term

Course content

The course is divided into two main sections. The first section is dedicated to the definition, measurement and explanatory models of political participation. Here we study what political participation is, and what forms it can take. We also study how to measure political participation in a comparative perspective across individuals, countries, and over time. This connects to the debate on declining levels of participation and models of democracy. Lastly, this first section discusses the incentives and barriers to political participation and looks at the various explanatory models of participation.

The second section focuses on a specific type of political participation: electoral participation. We first discuss the issue of why voting – or why to abstain, from different perspectives (rational choice, resource model, institutional incentives etc.). Then, the course concentrates on the issue of how people vote. The course presents and discusses extensively the main explanatory models of voting behaviour. First, we study the sociological model, which has been applied at both the aggregate and individual levels (Columbia School). Second, we look at the social-psychological model which has mostly relied on the concept of party identification (Michigan School). Third, we present several explanatory models pertaining to the rational choice theory – e.g. issue voting and economic voting.

This course touches upon major questions such as:

- > What does it mean to participate politically? Is there a universal understanding of the concept?
- > Which factors stimulate or decrease citizens' involvement in politics?
- > To what extent is political participation biased across age, gender, or class?
- > To what extent is participation dependent on the context in

Objectives (and/or specific learning outcomes)

- > > Specific Outcomes

- > To develop an in-depth knowledge of what political participation and vote choice mean, and of which critical factors may impact why citizens participate politically, or what triggers their vote choice
- > To be able to evaluate the weight of certain factors such as socio-economic status, group mobilization, or institutional rules, to explain variations in political participation and voting behaviour
- > To demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the literature and strong methodological skills related to this specific field of political science
- > on the context in which individual citizens evolve?
- > Are there institutions or specific rules that favour political participation more than others?
- > Are low levels of political participation a danger for democracy?
- > Why do people vote or abstain?
- > How could we reduce abstentionism?
- > How can we explain voters' choices?
- > To what extent does voters' socio-demographic profile determine their voting behaviour?
- > Does party identification still matter?
- > Are voters rational?
- > How does the state of the economy influence voters' choice?

Teaching method and learning activities

The class format is organized around three equilibriums:

- > Accumulation of knowledge and critical thinking;
- > Theoretical background and empirical studies;
- > Class seminar (2 ects) and regular work (3 ects).

The classes are scheduled for 2 hours each week, and 2 hours tutorial.

Contribution to the teaching profile

- > General Outcomes
- > To develop a capacity to summarise and analyse a question, to address a puzzle
- > To produce a research based on acquired knowledge

References, bibliography and recommended reading

List of readings available on the UV

Other information

Contact(s)

¹ Office Hours

Wednesdays 9:30-11:30 (or appointment by email)

Contact: S building – Office S.11.234

Phone: 02/650.66.77

Email: epaulis@ulb.ac.be

Evaluation method(s)

Other

Evaluation method(s) (additional information)

The course is evaluated as follows:

- > Final exam (50%)
- > Final paper (50%)
- > Student will only obtain a grade for the entire course if they submit both assignments before the deadlines; they will be noted as ABS until they do.
- > Student absent when they are asked to comment in class a mandatory reading will be penalized with one negative point on the final mark.

Determination of the mark (including the weighting of partial marks)

¹ 1. Final exam (50%)

The final exam will consist in two questions:

- > One related to the different theories/approaches discussed in classes and presented in some mandatory readings, and their application to interpret an empirical case (2 pp. max)
- > One related to a mandatory reading (1 p.)

Further instructions on the UV

2. Final research note (50%)

Each student is expected to write a final note trying to untangle election trends in a given country since 1990.

A draw will be held in class to determine which country you will be working on. Students who are not in class at that time will be automatically assigned a country.

The list of assigned country for each student will be posted on the UV shortly after.

Further instructions on the UV

Main language(s) of evaluation

English

Programmes

Programmes proposing this course at the faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences

MA-POLI | **Master in Political Sciences : General** | finalité Political Communication/unit 1 and finalité Democratic Challenges/unit 1 and MA60-POLI | **Master in Political Sciences : General (60 credits)** | option JOUR/unit U