

# Elections and Political Participation

## Titulaires

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## Mnémonique du cours

POLI-D439

## Crédits ECTS

5 crédits

## Langue(s) d'enseignement

Anglais

## Période du cours

Premier quadrimestre

## Campus

Solbosch

## Contenu du cours

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 means, 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 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?
- > How do candidates' profiles affect voters' choices?
- > How do salient issues impact on voters' choices?

## Objectifs (et/ou acquis d'apprentissages spécifiques)

### Specific Outcomes

- > To develop an indepth 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 socioeconomic status, group mobilization, or institutional rules, to explain variations in political participation and voting behaviour
- > To demonstrate an indepth knowledge of the literature and strong methodological skills related to this specific field of political science

## Méthodes d'enseignement et activités d'apprentissages

### TEACHING METHOD

The class format is organized around three equilibriums:

- > Accumulation of knowledge and critical thinking
- > Theoretical background and empirical studies
- > Class seminars and final exam (2 ECTS) and personal work (3 ECTS)

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

### COURSE MATERIALS

PowerPoint presentations are posted each week on the Université Virtuelle (UV). These are presentations but they do not constitute an exhaustive syllabus.

## Contribution au profil d'enseignement

- > **General Outcomes**

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

#### > Specific Outcomes

- > To develop an indepth 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 socioeconomic status, group mobilization, or institutional rules, to explain variations in political participation and voting behaviour
- > To demonstrate an indepth knowledge of the literature and strong methodological skills related to this specific field of political science

## Références, bibliographie et lectures recommandées

Students must read **4 mandatory readings**, which are available on the UV. **One question of the final exam** will focus on one of them (5 points out of the 20).

- > Nai A. et al. (2021). Personality Goes a Long Way (for Some). An Experimental Investigation Into Candidate Personality Traits, Voters' Profile, and Perceived Likeability. *Frontiers in Political Science*.
- > Kriesi H. Schulte-Cloos J. 2020. Support for radical parties in Western Europe: Structural conflicts and political dynamics. *Electoral Studies*.
- > Ruess C. et al. (2021): Online political participation: the evolution of a concept. *Information, Communication & Society*.
- > Becker, R. (2023). Voting behavior as social action: Habits, norms, values, and rationality in electoral participation. *Rationality and Society*.

Students must watch the Netflix mini-series "Whose Vote Counts" (2020). A question of the final exam will focus on one of them (5 points out of the 20).

[[table]]

## Support(s) de cours

Université virtuelle

## Autres renseignements

### Lieu(x) d'enseignement

Solbosch

### Contact(s)

EMILIEN PAULIS

2023-24 substitute professor

- Office hours:** every Monday from 9 to 11 am (or appointment by email).
- Office location:** S building – Office S.11.234.
- Contact:**

- > email: emilien.paulis@ulb.be
- > phone: 0032 650 66 77

## Méthode(s) d'évaluation

Examen écrit et Travail personnel

### Méthode(s) d'évaluation (complément)

The course is evaluated as follows:

- > Final **exam** (50%)
- > Final **paper** (50%)

**The final grade is the mean** between the grades obtained for the exam and the paper. **Students will obtain a grade for the course only if they submit the two assignments.** If not, they will be noted as absent until they do.

- > Students decide at their own risk whether they want to retake the final exam, the final paper, or both
- > Final paper: same content as 1<sup>st</sup> session and due by August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (before midnight)

## Construction de la note (en ce compris, la pondération des notes partielles)

### FINAL EXAM (50%)

The final written exam lasts three hours and consist in **three questions (/20)**:

- 1 One big, open transversal question related to the **course (/10)**
- 2 Small, close and open questions related to a mandatory **reading (/5)**
- 3 Small, close and open questions related to an **audio-visual material (/5)**

Evaluation & feedback []

The quality of answers will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- > Form: style of writing and structure
- > Content:
  - > organization, presentation, and development of arguments
  - > accuracy and critical character of the answers

A correction of the exam will be posted on the UV shortly after.

### FINAL PAPER (50%)

Each student is expected to write a final paper (format of a blog note) on **recent electoral trends of one party in a country of their choice**.

Aim []

The final paper pursues two main objectives. The student is expected to:

- > summarize, report, and describe a party's electoral performance over a certain period (not earlier than the 2000s)
- > provide explanations for the electoral patterns that are observed over this period

Students must show their ability to rely on the course and personal research to explain electoral performances (success/stability/decline) of one political party over time.

#### Evaluation & feedback []

The paper will be evaluated on the following criteria (a grid is available on the UV):

- Format (references, style of writing)
- Preparation and research
- Introduction (goal setting) & conclusion (findings' summary)
- Structure, organization and formal presentation
- Accuracy and critical character of the paper

Brief individual feedback will be posted on the UV at the beginning of February.

#### Deadline []

Final paper deadline: **Friday December 22<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (before midnight)**. Paper must be uploaded via the UV platform in an editable document (Word or similar). In case of problem, send the final paper to the professor by email.

**Any paper submitted after the due date and time will not be considered for the first session.** Only serious and documented circumstances will be accepted as excuses (e.g., serious matters of health or other personal emergencies).

#### Langue(s) d'évaluation principale(s)

Anglais

## Programmes

### Programmes proposant ce cours à la faculté de Philosophie et Sciences sociales

MA-POLI | Master en sciences politiques, orientation générale | finalité Political Communication/bloc 1 et finalité Democratic Challenges/bloc 1 et MA60-POLI | Master en sciences politiques (60 crédits) | option JOUR/bloc U