The Political Economy of Democracy

Master in Social Sciences (2nd year)
Juan March - Carlos III Institute

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Aim of the course

The course approaches the study of democratic theory combining the political economy and psychological approaches. The main aim of the lectures is try to understand how democratic representation actually works. It evaluates how institutional and individual factors affect the key elements of representation: how we select and control governments. The course dedicates an important portion of the lectures in how democracy actually works and its weaknesses. The course is structured in three parts. The first is centered on selection, i.e. the capacity of voters to choose representatives that reflect their preferences. The second part of the course considers responsiveness, i.e. the degree to which government decisions reflect the preferences and interests of their constituents. The last part revolves around accountability. It addresses questions about the impact of globalization on retrospective accountability, the electoral consequences of economic austerity and the individual cognitive limitations to accountability.

Course requirements

This course has three major requirements:

Participation: (20%): This is a graduate level seminar and participation is an essential component of satisfactory completion of the course.

Response papers: (30%): Each student will be required to write three response papers once we complete each part of the course. To do so, select one of the topics discussed in that part of the course, describe the core aspect of the theoretical debate, and identify shortcomings in both the theoretical discussion and the empirical evidence. (2-3 pages maximum).

Research paper (50%): Each student is expected to write a research paper related to the topics covered in the course. The paper must identify a research question, present motivating empirical evidence, describe a research design, and report empirical analyses.
Week 1 –September 18th - Course introduction

I. SELECTING GOVERNMENTS

Week 2 –September 25th. The informational challenge (I): selecting without information


In-class exercise: Are really men more politically sophisticated than women?

Week 3 –October 2nd. The informational challenge (III): Campaigns, manifestos and policies as a source of information for selecting representatives.


Research paper: discussion of the topic and tentative hypotheses

Week 4 –October 9th. Thinking about politics: self-interest or emotions?


**In-class exercise:** Brexit: emotions or self-interest?

**II: RESPONSIVENESS**

**Week 5 – October 16th – Responsiveness (I): Public opinion and policy outcomes**


**Week 6 – October 23th – Responsiveness (II): leadership and manipulation**


**Research paper:** Research in progress session

**Week 7 – October 30th - Unequal democracy**


**In-class exercise:** Why the poor do not expropriate the rich?
**Week 8 –November 6th- Descriptive representation: does it matter?**


**In-class exercise:** Should women represent women?

**III. ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Week 9 –November 13th - Accountability in complex settings**


**In-class exercise:** Who benefits from being part of a coalition government?

**Week 10 –November 20th -. Cognitive limitations to accountability**


**Research paper:** Research in progress session
**Week 11** – November 27th - Accountability after the Great Recession


**In-class exercise:**

**Week 12** – December 4th – Research paper presentations