The Political Economy of Democracy

Master in Social Sciences
Carlos III University
Fall 2021

Professor:
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Office hours: Tuesdays from 10am to 1pm, or by appointment

Class time and location:

- Tuesdays from 2.30pm to 5.30pm
  (Since 3h sessions are too long, classes may sometimes end before the established time)
- Classroom: TBD

Course Description

The main aim of this course is to discuss several central aspects of democratic politics and to link them to democratic theory. The central theme of the course will be whether the preferences of citizens are reflected in policymaking. A comparative approach is adopted: attention will be paid to how differences in institutional settings shape two basic issues. Namely, the correspondence between preferences and policies, and the way politicians are held accountable. Being the central mechanism citizens can count on to influence policy, elections will receive particular attention: whether they are free and fair, how citizens use the ballot to adapt to institutional settings and how they may discipline politicians in office.

Course objectives:

The objective of the course is threefold: First, to understand key concepts associated with democratic representation: selection, responsiveness, accountability, responsibility. Second, to be able to apply these concepts to specific settings and to evaluate whether they hold empirically or not. Third, and last, to be able to evaluate the merits and the flaws of empirical research that has been conducted around these concepts.
Course requirements

This is a graduate class, so you are expected to come to class having read the material and prepared to participate.

Course evaluation

Final paper: 50%
Analytical assessment of the readings: 30%
In-class participation: 20%

1. Final paper.
Each student is expected to write a research paper related to any of the topics covered in the course. The paper must: a) state a clear research question, b) motivate the importance of the question empirically, c) discuss the contribution of the paper relative to prior work, d) present a research design, e) report empirical analyses. These can be both descriptive and hypothesis testing. The last day of class (December 21st), students will present their paper project and receive feedback on it. The paper is due January 25th.

2. Analytical assessment of the readings:
Every week each student is expected to provide a short (1-2) paragraph assessment of the readings. The assessment will answer *one* of the following questions:
   a. What is the main contribution of the readings?
   b. The empirical methods chosen in the readings... Why have the authors chosen them? Are there potentially better empirical approaches that the authors could have used?
   c. What research project would you propose to move the research on this area forward? Explain why.

The analytical assessment should consider all readings assigned, but it is possible to pay particular attention to a single reading.
3. **Participation:** You are required to come to class prepared having read the assigned readings. Participation will be 20% of your final grade.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – September 14th -  Political Representation: Basic Concepts

This week provides a broad overview of the concept of political representation, distinguishing between descriptive and substantive representation. Focusing on substantive representation, then we will discuss two key concepts: responsiveness and accountability.

- Hanna F. Pitkin. 1967. The Concept of Representation. Chapters 1, 2 (skim only), 4, 6 (skim only), 7 & 10. Of course, feel free to skim the rest of the book.

FIRST PART OF THE COURSE: SELECTION of POLITICIANS

Week 2 – September 21st – Ensuring representation through the selection of likeminded politicians. Spatial models of Voting and its critics

Elections offer the possibility of choosing representatives. This week examines the spatial model approach to elections, which posits that voters select the candidates or political parties with the most similar policy position or ideology. We then evaluate a major critique addressed to this view.

Week 3 – September 28th – Learning before selecting: Obtaining credible information about the preferences of political parties.

To be able to select likeminded politicians and parties, voters must first know the preferences and policy intentions of the options on the table. How can citizens learn about the ideology of political parties? We focus on different sources of information and their challenges: verbal messages, coalition politics, and government policy.

*Main readings:*


*Further readings if you are particularly interested in the topic:*


Week 4 – October 5th – A Democratic Aristocracy?

This week examines the nature of the pool of politicians. We examine the distribution of key characteristics among representatives and decision makers (the agents) and compare such distribution against that of the principal (citizenry).

*Main readings: [read in the order in which they are listed]*


• Nicholas Carnes & Noam Lupu. 2015. “Rethinking the Comparative Perspective on Class and Representation: Evidence from Latin America.” American Journal of Political Science 59(1).

Further reading (optional, in case you are particularly interested in this topic)

• Bernard Manin. 1997. The Principles of Representative Government. Chapter 4


Week 5 – October 19th - Descriptive Representation: The impact of Quotas

When members of traditionally underrepresented groups access positions of political power, how does this affect the responsiveness of institutions to these underrepresented groups? This is the question we examine in this session.

Main readings:


Additional (optional readings)


SECOND PART OF THE COURSE: RESPONSIVENESS

Week 6 – October 26th - Money and Politics

A key factor that determines who politicians are responsive to is the access of interest groups to lobbying, campaign finance, and the use of the revolving door. This week we examine these three key components of the link between money and politics.

Main readings:


Further (optional) reading:

Week 7 – Nov 2nd – Whose interests are best represented?

This week we examine the influence of social groups and classes on policymaking.

Main readings:

Further (optional) reading:

THIRD PART OF THE COURSE: ACCOUNTABILITY

Week 8 – November 9th – Accountability: Its basic logic and criticism of that logic.

This week we examine a major mechanism to ensure representation: retrospective accountability. According to this logic, voters examine how the incumbent has done in office and reelect if the performance has been good enough. Anticipating this verdict, politicians represent voters’ interests in order to survive that verdict.
Main readings:

Additional (optional) readings

Week 9 – November 16th – Clarity of Responsibility and Accountability

To hold politicians accountable for their actions it must be possible to assign credit and blame for political outcomes. This week we examine the theory of “Clarity of Responsibility” and discuss empirical evidence of how clarity of responsibility (and lack thereof) affects both economic and corruption voting.

Main readings:

Optional Readings

Week 10 – November 23rd – Elections as Instruments to Discipline Governments for Corruption

Main readings:
• Alberto Chong, Ana de la O, Dean Karlan, and Leonard Wantchekon. 2014. Does corruption information inspire the fight or quash the hope? A field experiment in Mexico on voter turnout, choice, and party identification. Journal of Politics 77(1): 55-71

Week 11 – November 30th – Horizontal Accountability

This week examines how institutional checks and balances can hold incumbents accountable.

Main readings:
• Litschig, Stephan and Yves Zamboni. 2015. Judicial presence and rent extraction. Barcelona GSE Working Paper Series. [link]
CODA: Populism and Technocracy

Week 12 – December 14th – Challenges to Representative Government: Populism and Technocracy.


Main readings:


Additional optional readings


Week 13 – December 21st - In-class presentations of paper projects

Paper due January 25th