PO 7010. Topics in Political Behaviour

Michaelmas Term 2018
Tuesdays 09.00 – 11.00, Phoenix House 201

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Module outline

The module discusses some current issues in world politics from a behavioural/psychological perspective. We will cover a number of topics and debates concerning the origins of individual attitudes, self-interest and rationality, symbolic and group based approaches to public opinion, attitude change and stability, media and elite effects, as well as individual and contextual level factors explaining prejudice, intolerance, violence, and collective political action.

Needless to say a number of approaches and interesting topics are left out due to time constraints. However, I hope that the class provides you with the theoretical and methodological tools to conduct research and contribute to the debate in other topics related to political behaviour.

Objectives

The module is designed to introduce students to the psychological study of politics by focusing on recent empirical research in the field. At the end of the module, students should be able to discuss a number of issues with reference to political psychology / political behaviour approaches; be able to engage in informed discussion of various methods used in causal inference including lab, survey, and field experiments, panel surveys, natural experiments, instrumental variable approaches, etc. Overall, the module aims to foster students’ capacity to conduct original empirical research on various themes of the discipline.

Assessment

20% Participation in class discussions

30% Response papers

50% Final assignment (research proposal)

Participation in class discussions. All students must come to class having done all required readings and actively participate in class discussions. Your participation grade will be based on the quality (not quantity) of your contribution throughout the entire term. Failure to attend classes regularly will also lead to a reduction of your participation grade even if frequently contribute to class discussions. Presentations and discussion of proposal drafts in Week 12 also counts towards your participation grade.

Response papers. Students will submit 6 response papers that provide a critical assessment of the week’s required readings. You are free to do the weeks for which you would like to submit your papers.
(sparing of course weeks 1, 7, and 12). Response papers must be submitted before the week’s readings are discussed. Please note that I will not accept any response papers submitted after the class, i.e. the readings are discussed. The ideal length for response papers is 500-750 words.

Response papers should not be summaries of the assigned readings, but must bring a critical reaction to the week’s readings and some novel insights to the topic at hand. The papers may take a variety of approaches; for example, they could provide a discussion and potential resolution of the conflicting arguments and/or findings, criticism of the methodology used in the papers and proposals for future research, or synthesizing the readings of the week with other theories covered in this class or in some other course. Whichever approach you take, make sure that you propose something that would contribute to the progression of knowledge in this area.

**Final assignment.** The final assignment is a research proposal on a topic of your choice related to political attitudes and behaviour. This proposal should be original and should NOT have been submitted somewhere else; meaning it cannot be the same as or derived from your thesis proposal, IRC grant application, or your submissions in other modules (such as PO 7002 Research Design). Failure to submit an original work will result in a grade of F for this assignment. If you have any concerns or questions, please discuss this with me in advance. The ideal length for the research proposal is 6000-8000 words including all notes, footnotes, and references, but excluding appendices.

I will ask you to circulate a draft or outline of your proposal (in Week 11) and present it in class (Week 12). I will also assign each student to discuss another student’s proposal after the presentation. In a way, we will be holding a mock Friday seminar in class in Week 12. The presentation and discussion will count towards your participation grade.

Deadline for the submission of the final assignment will be announced later in the term.

**Class and reading schedule**

* indicates optional readings.

**Week 1: Introduction & course organization**

*Political psychology – where does the field stand?*


*Major issues in political behaviour and public opinion research*


**Week 2: Rational and symbolic sources of attitudes**


**Week 3: Group approaches to attitudes and partisanship**


**Week 4: Attitude change – Communication, media and campaign effects**

*A general model of attitude change*

**Media and campaign effects**


**Week 5: Motivated reasoning and biased information-processing**


*Is it always motivated reasoning?*


Week 6: Intergroup conflict, prejudice, and intolerance: Situational perspectives


Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Intergroup conflict, prejudice, and Intolerance: Dispositional perspectives


Week 9: Mobilization and collective action


Week 10: Political violence – Economic competition and material incentives


**Week 11: Political violence – Mobilization, threat and social influence**


**Week 12: Presentations**

**TBA: Submission of final assignments**