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# Explaining Political Preferences

## Theory, Empirics & Applications

Specialization Module (Vertiefungsseminar), HU Berlin, Summer 2018

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### Logistics

Time: Wed, 10:15 - 13:45

Location: Universitätsstr. 3b, Room 217

Moodle enrollment key:

### Instructor

Denis Cohen, BA MSc

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### Course Description

Most theories of voting behavior agree that voters' decisions at the ballots are driven by their desire to promote policy outcomes in line with their preferences – that is, in line with what they want. In order to understand voting behavior, we thus need to understand political preferences: Who wants what, and why?

Covering literatures from political economy, political sociology and (social) psychology, we will study a broad array of preferences on salient issues of our time, including preferences for social policy (e.g., income redistribution and social insurance), immigration restriction, European integration, and legal equality for homosexual couples. Aside from studying the causes of these preferences, we will also study their effects – that is, we will investigate how different preference sets affect voting behavior for different parties under varying political contexts.

To equip participants with the required tools to conduct their own research (on political preferences and beyond), this seminar assigns equal weight to the substantive treatment of the seminar literature on the one hand and to training in research design and applied quantitative methods on the other. In terms of research design, we will contrast observational studies, quasi-experiments and lab experiments to elicit their respective costs and benefits. In terms of applied methods training, we will cover techniques for measuring preferences (e.g., factor analytical and item response theoretical approaches) as well as techniques for explaining preferences (e.g., generalized linear models and hierarchical models).

The general language of instruction and communication in this class is English. The final paper (Modulabschlussprüfung) may be submitted either in English or in German. This class requires that participants are familiar with the methods covered in *Statistik I + II* (or equivalent).

## Course Requirements

### **I: Attendance, Readings, and Active Participation (4 Credit Points)**

Active participation is central to this class. Participants are expected to have read the assigned readings prior to class and should be able to engage critically with the contents. Class sessions are designed to provide a forum for clarification and discussion – not for extensive summaries and recaps – of the readings.

Participants are encouraged to use the Discussion Forum on Moodle to post questions of any sort (clarification or discussion) in advance of the weekly sessions.

### **II: 2 Substantive Memos (1 Credit Point)**

Text memos should focus on the weekly substantive readings. They should provide a concise summary of the central arguments and findings and a brief critique of one or more aspects of the texts.

Participants are required to submit two text memos over the duration of the course, each worth 0.5 ECTS credits. The first of the two memos must be submitted between weeks 3-7. The second must be submitted between weeks 8-11. The write-up must not exceed 600 words.

### **III: 2 Technical Exercises (2 Credit Points)**

Technical exercises prompt students to engage with the current and previous weeks' methods and/or identification strategies. This may involve (a) answering some questions, to be distributed a week in advance, and (b) solving an analytical and/or data exercise.

Participants are required to submit two technical exercises over the duration of the course, each worth 1 ECTS credits. The first of the two technical exercises must be submitted between weeks 2-5. The second must be submitted between weeks 6-9. The total write-up must not exceed 900 words.

### **IV: Research Proposal & Presentation (1 Credit Point)**

Weeks 12-14 provide a forum for students to present their initial drafts for their final papers in order to receive feedback from their peers and the instructor. Toward that end, students should prepare a *research proposal* of no more than 750 words (featuring research question, theoretical argument/debate, initial hypotheses, as well as proposed research design, data, and methods) one week prior to their scheduled presentation. These will be distributed to,

and should be read by, all participants before class. Presentation and feedback times will depend on the number of participants; presentation slots specifying dates and times will be assigned starting in week 9.

### **V: Research Paper (2 Credit Points)**

Your research paper will give you the chance to explore a substantive problem in the subject area of political preferences and political behavior from both a theoretical and applied empirical perspective. The research paper should be no longer than 6,000 words (excluding references and appendices). It should focus on a concise connection of (a) developing an argument by deductively theorizing *one* hypothesis/mechanism directed at explaining an outcome, (b) briefly motivating and situating your argument against the background of the extant literature, and (c) the development and application of a corresponding empirical strategy. Further information, guidance, and research training will be provided throughout the course.

### **Grading & Accreditation**

Participants who successfully complete all course requirements will earn **10 ECTS** credit points. By default, participants of *Vertiefungsseminare* (specialization modules) receive a course grade, which is determined by their performance in the *Modulabschlussprüfung* (final examination, in this case: the research paper).

### **Submissions**

All written assignments should be submitted through the corresponding upload modules on Moodle. The deadline for participation requirements II and III is Tuesday before class, 10am (i.e., 24 hours in advance). The deadline for the research proposal is Wednesday the week before, 10am (i.e., 7 days in advance). The deadline for the final paper is September 30, 2018. Please keep track of your schedules to ensure submissions without delay. Late submission of the final paper will result in deductions of 1/3 of a grade point per day.

## Overviews and Repositories

### Textbooks on Statistics

- Wooldridge (2002b)
- Greene (2012)
- Wooldridge (2002a)
- Imai (2016)

### Textbooks on Causal Identification and (Quasi-)Experimental Design

- Angrist and Pischke (2008)
- Gerber and Green (2012)
- Morgan and Winship (2007)

### Literature Search Engine

*Scopus* provides a comprehensive search engine for academic publications:

- [scopus.com](https://www.scopus.com)

## Course Schedule\*

### Part A: Introduction

#### (1) April 18, 2018: Introduction

##### *Substantive Part*

- Introduction
- Course outline
- Administrative issues

##### *Methods & Research Design: Mathematics for Social Scientists*

- Linear transformations
- Calculus
- Basic linear algebra

##### *Background Readings*

- Gill (2006)

#### (2) April 25, 2018: Studying Political Attitudes & Preferences

##### *Summary*

We approach the topic by clarifying key concepts: Opinions, attitudes, preferences, values, and ideology. In doing so, we touch upon landmark studies of public opinion, including Converse (2006), Zaller (1992), and Stimson (1999). Furthermore, we discuss different theoretical approaches from political economy, political psychology, and political sociology to explaining attitudes and preferences.

In the second half of the class, we approach problems of causality and causal identification. We introduce the potential outcomes framework and relate assumptions for causal identification to different research designs.

##### *Substantive Part*

- Feldman (2003)

##### *Methods & Research Design: Causality and Causal Identification*

- Gerber and Green (2012, Chs. 1&2)

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\*. Subject to change. All changes to the schedule will be announced on Moodle.

*Note:* Background readings are typically contributions to the academic debates covered in the week's session. Although these are not required readings, abstract-level knowledge of their contents will be highly useful. They also offer additional starting points for delving deeper into a given research area in preparation for the research paper.

- Angrist and Pischke (2008, Ch. 3.2)

#### *Background Readings*

- Ajzen (2005)
- Converse (2006)
- Zaller (1992)
- Stimson (1999)

## **Part B: Explaining Political Preferences**

### **(3) May 02, 2018: Social Policy Preferences I**

#### *Summary*

We start with a broad overview of politico-economic explanations for redistribution preferences. Departing from the workhorse Meltzer-Richard model, we take a closer look at the relationship between economic self-interest and the repercussions of economic inequality. In the second half of the class, we introduce a first strategy for causal identification using observational data in the form of the difference-in-differences design and engage with an application.

#### *Substantive Part*

- Alesina and Giuliano (2011)
- Rueda and Stegmueller (2016)

#### *Methods & Research Design: Difference-in-Differences*

- Angrist and Pischke (2008, Ch. 5.2)
- Margalit (2013)

#### *Background Readings*

- Moene and Wallerstein (2001)
- Iversen and Soskice (2001)
- Scheve and Stasavage (2006)
- Dimick, Rueda, and Stegmueller (2018)

### **(4) May 09, 2018: Social Policy Preferences II**

#### *Summary*

Building up on our discussion from the previous week, we broaden our focus in two ways. First, moving beyond redistribution preferences, we study preferences for social insurance and labor market policies. Second, we look at a set of new explanations of social policy

preferences, including economic precariousness, socialization, economic institutions, and ethnic heterogeneity.

We combine the discussion of the last aspect with a discussion of a second strategy for causal identification using observational data in the form of instrumental variables.

#### *Substantive Part*

- Schwander, Häusermann, and Kurer (2014)
- Neundorf and Soroka (2017)

#### *Methods & Research Design: Instrumental Variables*

- Angrist and Pischke (2008, Ch. 4.1)
- Dahlberg, Edmark, and Lundqvist (2012)

#### *Background Readings*

- Rueda (2005)
- Cusack, Iversen, and Rehm (2006)
- Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007)
- Rehm (2009)
- Shayo (2009)

### **(5) May 16, 2018: Immigration Preferences I**

#### *Summary*

We start with a comprehensive overview of explanations for immigration preferences. We then focus on a contested issue in political economy: Whether labor market competition can explain anti-immigration preferences.

We combine the latter with a critical review of experimental vs. observational studies, contrasting the pros and cons of lab, survey, and field experiments with those of associational studies based on survey data.

#### *Substantive Part*

- Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014)
- Hainmueller and Michael J Hiscox (2007)
- Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004)

#### *Methods & Research Design: Costs and Benefits of Experiments*

- Angrist and Pischke (2008, Ch. 2)
- Levitt and List (2016)



*Background Readings*

- Scheve and Slaughter (2001)
- Mayda (2006)
- Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006)
- Hainmueller and Michael J Hiscox (2010)
- Lancee and Pardos-Prado (2013)
- Dancygier and Donnelly (2013)
- Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit (2015)
- Gerber et al. (2017)
- Naumann, Stoetzer, and Pietrantuono (2018)

**(6) May 23, 2018: Immigration Preferences II***Summary*

Moving past our discussion of political economy approaches, we engage with (psychological) explanations focusing on cultural threat and elite communication.

In the second half of the class, we begin grappling with applied statistics through a formal and applied recap of (generalized) linear models.

*Substantive Part*

- Valentino, Brader, and Jardina (2013)
- Hartevelt, Kokkonen, and Dahlberg (2017)

*Methods & Research Design: Linear and Generalized Linear Models I*

- Review of Least Squares Regression
- Generalized linear models: Gill (2001, Chs. 1&4)
- Uncertainty Estimates

*Background Readings*

- Citrin et al. (1997)
- Brader, Valentino, and Suhay (2008)
- Ha (2010)
- Hopkins (2010)
- Mewes and Mau (2013)
- Valentino et al. (2017)

**(7) May 30, 2018: European Integration & Globalization***Summary*

We shift our focus to a different issue area: Preferences for European integration and for globalization (here, first and foremost, international trade).

For our methods training, we focus on models for ordered outcomes (e.g., responses to agree/neutral/disagree style questions) and models for unordered multinomial outcomes (e.g., voting behavior, which will play a bigger role in Part C of the course).

*Substantive Part*

- Hobolt and de Vries (2016)
- Margalit (2012)

*Methods & Research Design: Linear and Generalized Linear Models II*

- Models for ordered outcomes
- Models for multinomial outcomes

*Background Readings*

- Gabel (1998)
- Hooghe and Marks (2004)
- Baker (2005)
- Hainmueller and Michael J. Hiscox (2006)
- Mansfield and Mutz (2009)
- Margalit (2012)
- Bechtel, Hainmueller, and Margalit (2014)
- Vasilopoulou and Wagner (2017)
- Foos and Bischof (2018)

**(8) June 06, 2018: Social Conservatism***Summary*

This week's readings focus on social conservatism: Attitudes towards homosexuality and transphobia as well as general aversion to social deviance.

For the second half, we focus on two approaches for modelling heterogeneity (e.g., in effects, or between groups): Hierarchical varying-coefficient models and interactions.

*Substantive Part*

- Andersen and Fetner (2008b)
- Broockman and Kalla (2016)

- Stubager (2008)

*Methods & Research Design: Heterogeneity*

- Interaction Effects: Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006)
- Hierarchical Models: Gelman and Hill (2007, Chs. 1&11)

*Background Readings*

- Andersen and Fetner (2008a)
- Solt (2011)
- Van Den Akker, Van Der Ploeg, and Scheepers (2013)

**(9) June 13, 2018: Populism**

*Summary*

For our last session of Part B, we focus on a set of non-issue attitudes that have risen to prominence in political research in recent years: populist attitudes. We introduce the concept of populism, its proposed measurement at the individual level, and initial evidence on who supports it and why.

Methodologically, we deal with measurement models designed to infer individuals' latent dispositions from their observed responses to a number of binary, ordinal, or continuous items.

*Substantive Part*

- Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2013)
- Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck (2016)

*Methods & Research Design: Measurement Models*

- Factor analysis: Bartholomew et al. (2002, Ch. 6, selections)
- IRT Models for binary and ordered responses: Bartholomew et al. (2002, Chs. 7&8, selections)

*Background Readings*

- Elchardus and Spruyt (2014)
- Bakker, Rooduijn, and Schumacher (2016)
- Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza (2017)
- van Hauwaert and van Kessel (2017)

## Part C: Effects of Political Preferences

### (10) June 20, 2018: Political Preferences and Voting Behavior I

#### *Summary*

Why do we care about political preferences? To underline the relevance of the seminar topic, we focus on the role of preferences in models of voting behavior and juxtapose models of issue voting with explanations of voter behavior that emphasize social group membership, social identity, valence and candidate evaluations, or strategic considerations. We also engage with some literature on (issue) competition to understand when and why parties (fail to) attract voters to their platform.

#### *Substantive Part*

- Arzheimer and Falter (2008)
- Meguid (2005)
- Bornschier (2010)

#### *Methods & Research Design: Paper Guidelines*

- Components of applied empirical research
- Guidelines & requirements for research projects

#### *Background Readings*

- Downs (1957)
- Campbell et al. (1960)
- Stokes (1963)
- Lipset and Rokkan (1967)
- Cox (1997)
- Adams, Merrill III, and Grofman (2005)
- Kriesi et al. (2008)

### (11) June 27, 2018: Political Preferences and Voting Behavior II

#### *Summary*

Retrieving the effects of preferences in (causal) models of electoral behavior can be tricky. Sometimes, preferences may act as mediating variables that translate the effects of other variables into voting behavior. Sometimes, the relevance of preferences may critically depend on enabling (individual and/or contextual) characteristics. In this session, we explore some examples to highlight the intricacies of studying the effect of preferences on voting behavior.

*Substantive Part*

- Stegmueller (2013)
- Jessee (2009)

*Background Readings*

- Achen (1992)
- Kedar (2005)
- Bélanger and Meguid (2008)
- Cohen (2017)

*Methods & Research Design: Mediation Analysis*

- Mediation analysis: Imai et al. (2011)
- Deadline: Research proposal (for students presenting in week 12)

**Part D: Student Presentations & Research Training****(12) July 04, 2018: Session I**

- Presentations & feedback
- Course evaluations
- Deadline: Research proposal (for students presenting in week 13)

**(13) July 11, 2018: Session II**

- Presentations & feedback
- Deadline: Research proposal (for students presenting in week 14)

**(14) July 18, 2018: Session III + Wrap-Up**

- Presentations & feedback
- Review of evaluations and general course feedback

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