



Seminar Political Economy WS 2022/23: Experimental Approaches to Voting and Political Decisions

Objective and Target Group

Experimental methods have been rapidly developing in economics and political science over the past few years, especially in the field of electoral behavior. At the same time, voting experiments build on very different traditions (esp. psychology and behavioral economics) and use very different designs and settings (laboratory, field, and survey experiments). The purpose of the seminar is to critically assess the scientific contribution of key studies in the field of electoral behavior and to give the participants both a sense of the frontier research topics and a good command of the tools used in the area.

The seminar is targeted at Master's (and advanced and motivated Bachelor's) students of *Economics*, *Internationale Wirtschaft & Governance*, and *Philosophy & Economics*.

Dates and Deadlines

A short introduction to the available topics (see the list below) will be given on Wednesday, July 27, 2022 at 14:00 in room S 50.

All presentations will be blocked on Thursday, December 1, and Friday, December 2, 2022. The presentations must be submitted until November 27, 2022. Seminar papers must be handed in until March 31, 2023. Please note that deadlines are final and will be strictly enforced.

Assessment

Presentation, comment, participation and seminar paper (approx. 5500-6500 words). The latter should be a critical assessment of your paper. In particular you should try to address the following questions: *What is the research question and why is it relevant? How do the authors try to answer the research question? Do the authors provide convincing answers to the research questions? Do you see scope for future research?*

The seminar gives credit points in:

- Master Economics: *Governance, Wettbewerb und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung* (Governance), *Individueller Schwerpunkt* [selected topics can also give credits for *Advanced Microeconomics II* (Modelltheorie)]
- Master IWG: *Governance & „Politik“* (Governance & Public Management), *Individuelle Spezialisierung* [selected topics can also give credits for *Advanced Microeconomics II* (Ökonomische Modellbildung und empirische Analyse)]
- Master P&E: *Economics Elective* (Specialization)

Seminar Instructions

- The seminar language will be English.
- Time allowed: 45 min. presentation, 5 min. comment, 10 min. discussion.
- Presentations should be a comprehensive overview of the topic.
- Each presentation will be assigned to one other participant, who is to comment on (and initiate the discussion of) the contents of the presentation. Presenters are required to send their presentations to both lecturers and the respective commenters until November 27, 2022.
- Although the literature given below should be the focus of your seminar paper, you are expected to find additional material yourself.

Registration

Students who want to register for the seminar can do so with an e-mail to alexander.mayer@uni-bayreuth.de until September 30, 2022. Please indicate a list of priorities with at least three topics you would like to cover.

Admission to the seminar is based on “first come, first serve”. You will be notified about acceptance (and your topic) directly after registration.

Topics

T1. The Paradox of Turnout

- Schram, A. and J. Sonnemans (1996). *Voter Turnout as a Participation Game: An Experimental Investigation*. International Journal of Game Theory 25, 385-406.

Content: Given the tiny probability that a single vote makes a difference to the outcome, the high levels of turnout in large-scale elections seem difficult to explain and individual participation irrational. This *Paradox of Voter Turnout* has preoccupied economists for decades and numerous theoretical contributions have been made that rationalize the individual turnout decision.

The aim of the seminar paper is to present the factors that influence the decision to participate in an election, including the effect of the electoral system.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T2. Why do Voters Vote?

- **T2a** Gerber, A. S., D. P. Green and C. W. Larimer (2008). *Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment*. American Political Science Review 102, 33-48.
- **T2b** DellaVigna, S., J. List, U. Malmendier and G. Rao (2017). *Voting to Tell Others*. Review of Economic Studies 84, 143-181.

Content: Voting is one important way that citizens can participate in a democracy, make changes to their community, and select political representatives. There are many reasons why citizens go to the polls, including possibly “because others will ask”.

The aim of the seminar paper is to discuss the role of social pressure and preferences for norm-conforming behavior in the decision to vote.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T3. Are Voters Strategic?

- **T3a** Van der Straeten, K., J.-F. Laslier, N. Sauger and A. Blais (2010). *Strategic, Sincere, and Heuristic Voting under Four Election Rules: An Experimental Study*. *Social Choice and Welfare* 35, 435-472.
- **T3b** Tyszler, M. and A. Schram (2016). *Information and Strategic Voting*. *Experimental Economics* 19, 360-381.
- **T3c** Kube, S. and C. Puppe (2009). *(When and How) Do Voters Try to Manipulate?* *Public Choice* 139, 39-52.

Content: Voting is used to correctly aggregate individual preferences to identify the “will of the people”. The ideal of a “correct aggregation”, however, rests on the assumption that every voter votes truthfully. Unfortunately, not everyone does so. For example, voters may abstain from voting, or they may vote strategically. The reason for the latter is that elections are multi-person decision procedures.

The aim of the seminar paper is to present and critically discuss laboratory experiments that study whether voters do really behave strategically (when they have incentives to do so) or if they vote sincerely.

Supervisor: Alexander Mayer

T4. The Role of Costs

- Hodler, R., S. Luechinger and A. Stutzer (2015). *The Effects of Voting Costs on the Democratic Process and Public Finances*. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 7, 141-171.

Content: The cost of voting such as going to the polling station, the time spent queuing, or the hassle with postal voting documents may deter some eligible citizens from casting a vote. Reducing voting costs as far as possible might therefore seem a good idea at first glance. Still, various economists have made an argument that voting costs can also be too low from a welfare perspective.

The aim of the seminar paper is to present and critically examine these arguments.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T5. The Role of the Voting Technology

- **T5a** Card, D. and E. Moretti (2007). *Does Voting Technology Affect Election Outcomes? Touch-Screen Voting and the 2004 Presidential Election*. *Review of Economics and Statistics* 89, 660-673.
- **T5b** Fujiwara, T. (2015). *Voting Technology, Political Responsiveness, and Infant Health: Evidence from Brazil*. *Econometrica* 83, 423-464.

Content: The introduction of voting technology may lead to a de facto enfranchisement of less educated voters who struggle with the traditional ways of casting a vote. It thus seems natural to ask whether voting technology affects election outcomes and if so, what its effects are.

The aim of the seminar paper is to present the conditions under which the introduction of voting technology can be expected to lead to welfare increases.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T6. The Role of Pre-Election Polls

- **T6a** Forsythe, R., R. B. Myerson, T. A. Rietz and R. J. Weber (1993). *An Experiment on Coordination in Multi-Candidate Elections: The Importance of Polls and Election Histories*. *Social Choice and Welfare* 10, 223-247.
- **T6b** Großer, J. and A. Schram (2010). *Public Opinion Polls, Voter Turnout, and Welfare: An Experimental Study*. *American Journal of Political Science* 54, 700-717.

Content: Public opinion polls are used in many countries to provide the electorate with information about intended voter behavior in upcoming elections. However, there are also many countries (e.g., Canada and Switzerland) that have banned the publication of poll releases in the period just before the election because they fear that polls affect voters' behavior and thus change election outcomes.

The aim of the seminar paper is to evaluate the effects of public opinion poll releases using experiments and game-theoretic reasoning.

Supervisor: Alexander Mayer

T7. The Role of Media

- **T7a** Gerber, A. S., D. Karlan and D. Bergan (2009). *Does the Media Matter? A Field Experiment Measuring the Effect of Newspapers on Voting Behavior and Political Opinions*. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, 35-52.
- **T7b** Bond, R. M., C. J. Fariss, J. J. Jones, A. D. I. Kramer, C. Marlow, J. E. Settle, J. H. Fowler (2012). *A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization*. *Nature* 489, 295-298.

Content: The media (i.e., television, newspapers, social networks) plays an important role in the opinion-forming process. They can influence the public not only through the slant of a particular report but also by choosing what to cover.

The aim of the seminar paper is to examine how the media shapes the public's political knowledge, behavior, and opinion and whether there are spillover effects on others via a social transmission channel.

Supervisor: Alexander Mayer

T8. The Role of Information

- Snyder, J. M. and D. Strömberg (2010). *Press Coverage and Political Accountability*. *Journal of Political Economy* 118, 355-408.

Content: It has long been known that a press that actively reports on politics is essential to democratic governance. Informed voters are better able to hold elected officials accountable for their political decisions. Unfortunately, an active press is missing from the political stage not only in poor countries and weak democracies.

The aim of the seminar paper is to identify if there is an effect of active media coverage on the behavior of voters and, more importantly, on the behavior of politicians.

Supervisor: Alexander Mayer

T9. The Role of Deliberation

- Goeree, J. K. and L. Yariv (2011). *An Experimental Study of Collective Deliberation*. *Econometrica* 79, 893-921.

Content: In the run-up to most decisions in small groups, such as management boards, political committees, or juries, there is communication between (some) stakeholders about the issues or candidates. The question arises as to the effect of communication and how this effect is moderated by the decision rules of the group.

The aim of the seminar paper is to reflect upon the conditions under which communication among group members improves the quality of collective decisions. Which role does the size of the group play?

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser