



Seminar Political Economy WS 2023/24: Voting and Political Decisions in Small and Large Groups

Objective and Target Group

The seminar is targeted at Master's (and advanced and motivated Bachelor's) students of *Economics, Internationale Wirtschaft & Governance (Entwicklung)*, and *Philosophy & Economics*, who are interested in the application of economic reasoning to the analysis of voting and political behavior – both in large and small group decision-making.

The purpose of the seminar is to give the participants a sense of the frontier research topics and a good overview of the theoretical, empirical, and experimental approaches used in the area.

Dates and Deadlines

A short introduction to the available 13 topics (see the list below) will be given on Friday, July 21, 2023 at 10:00 in room S 66.

All presentations will be blocked on Thursday, November 16, and Friday, November 17, 2023. The presentations must be submitted until November 12, 2023. Seminar papers must be handed in by March 31, 2024. Please note that deadlines are final and will be strictly enforced.

Assessment

Presentation, comment, participation and seminar paper (approx. 5500-6500 words for Master's students and 4500-5500 words for Bachelor's students). 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), *Individueller Schwerpunkt* [selected topics can also give credits for *Advanced Microeconomics II* (Ökonomische Modellbildung und empirische Analyse)]
- Master P&E: *Economics Electives* (Specialization)
- Bachelor Economics, IWE, P&E: upon request

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 12, 2023.
- 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, 2023. 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

Part 1 – Decisions in Small Groups

T1. Why do Voters Vote? The Paradox of Turnout

- Coate, S., M. Conlin and A. Moro (2008). *The Performance of Pivotal-Voter Models in Small-Scale Elections: Evidence from Texas Liquor Referenda*. *Journal of Public Economics* 92, 582-596.

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, empirical and experimental 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.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T2. Are Voters Strategic? Evidence from the Lab

- **T2a** 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.
- **T2b** 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. Yet, not everyone does so: the multi-person character of the decision situation can give incentives to vote strategically or to abstain.

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

T3. 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

T4. The Role of Moral Costs

- Maaser, N. and T. Stratmann (2021). *Costly Voting in Weighted Committee Decisions: The Case of Moral Costs*. Working Paper 2021-11, Aarhus University.

Content: Collective decisions on an issue of moral relevance can plausibly be modeled as a binary threshold public good game. One interesting question is how the internal organization of the decision-making group affects (i) the propensity of its individual members to contribute to an immoral act and (ii) the probability of an immoral collective decision.

The aim of the seminar paper is to reflect upon the conditions that make moral transgressions by groups more or less likely. For example, do flat hierarchies provide a safeguard against immoral behavior? Is a strong group leader helpful or harmful?

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T5. Influence in Committees

- Kurz, S., A. Mayer and S. Napel (2021). *Influence in Weighted Committees*. *European Economic Review* 132, 103634.

Content: Members of a collective decision making body often wield different numbers of votes. Examples are the US Electoral College, the IMF Board of Governors or shareholders in a private company. It is then natural to investigate the consequences of such differences in voting weight on the ability to influence the collective decision. While the corresponding analysis may look trivial at first, closer inspection shows that voting power is in general not proportional to voting weight. The analysis gets further

complicated if the set of voting alternatives contains more than two alternatives, moving beyond the simple binary “yes”-or-“no” setting.

The aim of the seminar paper is to give an overview of the tools used to measure the influence of asymmetric voters on the collective decision and to investigate how this influence varies with the adopted voting rule.

Supervisor: Alexander Mayer

Part 2 – Decisions in Large Groups

T6. Why do Voters Vote? Norm-Based Voting

- **T6a** 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.
- **T6b** 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 social pressure 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: Alexander Mayer

T7. Are Voters Strategic? Evidence from the Field

- **T7a** Pons, V. and C. Tricaud (2018). *Expressive Voting and Its Cost: Evidence from Runoffs With Two or Three Candidates*. *Econometrica* 86, 1621-1649.
- **T7b** Spenkuch, J. L. (2018). *Expressive vs. Pivotal Voters: An Empirical Assessment*. *Journal of Public Economics* 165, 73-81.

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. Yet, not everyone does so: the multi-person character of the decision situation can give incentives to vote strategically or to abstain.

The aim of the seminar paper is to present and critically discuss empirical tests and field experiments that study whether voters do really behave strategically (when they have incentives to do so) or if they vote sincerely. Given that voters’ true preferences are usually unobserved, the main empirical obstacle is to disentangle strategic and expressive behavior.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser

T8. The Role of Pre-Election Polls

- 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

T9. The Role of Media and Information

- **T9a** Durante, R., P. Pinotti and A. Tesei (2019). *The Political Legacy of Entertainment TV*. *American Economic Review* 109, 2497-2530.
- **T9b** Bond, R. M., C. J. Fariss, J. J. Jones, A. D. I. Kramer, C. Marlow, J. E. Settle and J. H. Fowler (2012). *A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization*. *Nature* 489, 295-298.

Content: The media (i.e., TV, newspapers, social networks) plays an important role in the opinion-forming process. A press that actively reports on politics is essential to democratic governance. The media can influence the public not only through the slant of a particular report but also by choosing what to cover. In addition, there is evidence that other type of media content (e.g., soap operas or advertising in TV) can have persistent effects on political behavior.

The aim of the seminar paper is to examine how the media – classical newspapers as well as social networks and TV consumption – shapes the public's political knowledge and voting behavior.

Supervisor: Nicola Maaser