

GV303-6-SP
Electoral Behaviour
2024

Lecturer and Module Supervisor

Dr. Roi Zur

E-mail: Roi.Zur@essex.ac.uk

Room: 5.017

Academic Support Hours: Monday 12:30-14:30pm

Module Administrators

govquery@essex.ac.uk

Module available for Study Abroad students: Yes No

AVAILABLE ON LISTEN AGAIN: Yes No

Assessment: This module is assessed by 100% coursework

INSTANT DEADLINE CHECKER

Must be submitted by 09:45am on the day of the deadline.

| Assignment Title | Due Date | Coursework Weighting* | Feedback Due |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Assignment 1 | Week 21 (23/02/2024) | 35% | Week 25 (22/03/2024) |
| Assignment 2 | Week 28 (12/04/2024) | 65% | Week 32 (10/05/2024) |

MODULE DESCRIPTION

This module provides a range of theoretical angles and empirical evidence to understand electoral behaviour. The module focuses on individual motivations as well as political and economic influences on electoral participation and vote choice across countries, including the UK.

MODULE AIMS

The module aims to examine three broad issues:

Why do people vote? There are large variations in electoral turnout in different countries and within the same country in different elections. In the Danish General Election of 2015 turnout was 85.8 per cent, while the British General Election the same year had a turnout of 66.4 percent. Within Britain turnout varied from 43 per cent in Manchester Withenshaw an inner-city constituency, to 81.9 per cent in East Dunbartonshire in Scotland. There is a provocative theoretical argument which suggests that if people are rational then they should not vote at all. This is known as the ‘paradox of participation’, and we will examine it closely alongside other theoretical ideas which explain electoral participation.

Why do they support one party or candidate rather than another? Most people do not spend a lot of time thinking about politics. How do they arrive at decision to vote for one party over another in an election? What are the factors that persuade them to vote the way that they do? We look at some of the different theoretical ideas which have been put forward to

explain electoral participation and electoral support for certain parties and examine how these fit with the evidence on voting and how they have changed over time.

How do people reason about voting and politics more generally? Political reasoning is complex. Given that an individual's vote is unlikely to influence the outcome of an election, there is no clear incentive for individuals to spend a great deal of time thinking about voting and politics more generally. But voters have cheaper tools to help themselves make decisions in the elections: They rely on heuristics, or rules of thumb, which simplify their choices and help them make calculations about what to do in situations of risk and uncertainty; decisions are also influenced by what friends and family and people in their wider social networks are thinking, how they feel about key actors in elections such as political leaders and political parties, and how much they are influenced by campaigns and the media.

MODULE OUTCOMES

By the end of the module, students should have a good working knowledge of:

- different theoretical approaches to explain why people vote (and do not vote) and why they support one party or candidate over another.
- how political and economic contexts influence electoral participation and vote choice.
- the psychology of participation, the nature of public reasoning about political issues and interpersonal influences on public opinion
- methodological approaches to modelling voting behaviour and the techniques used to measure and study public opinion, electoral participation, and vote choice.

Key Skills

The course will engage students in interactive discussions and group study skills. It will foster critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative learning and oral communication. Essays will help develop the ability to organise facts and data and produce a logical, coherent and empirically supported argument. The seminars will also help to develop the capacity for critical judgement. The key skills are:

- Communications – writing clearly and working to a deadline.
- Collaboration – interacting with others in academic debates.
- Information Technology – online searching, word processing, data processing.
- Problem solving – analysing quantitative and qualitative evidence, summarizing complex findings from surveys and identifying trends in data.
- Write analytical memorandums about political issues.

Module Requirement

A requirement for enrolling in the module is that students have successfully completed a module in introductory statistics, since the module content requires students to be able to interpret multivariate analyses of electoral behaviour.

MODULE STRUCTURE AND TEACHING

This module will be delivered with a two-hour weekly seminar. Attendance or watching the recorded lectures, reading the assigned materials, and participation in the class/online discussion are required and essential for satisfactory progress. There will be a Moodle site

assigned to this module, and all relevant materials – lecture notes, class exercises, (link to) readings – will be placed there.

| Week | Topic |
|-------------|--|
| Week 16 | What are elections for and why should we study them? |
| Week 17 | Why do people vote (or don't vote)? |
| Week 18 | How do people reason about voting and politics? |
| Week 19 | Cleavages and voting. |
| Week 20 | Policy and voting. |
| Week 21 | Valence and voting. |
| Week 22 | Issue salience and voting. |
| Week 23 | Age and voting. |
| Week 24 | Gender and voting. |
| Week 25 | Review and Conclusions. |

What we expect of you during lecture and classes:

- To attend / watch all lectures and classes after having done the required reading.
- To pay attention and take notes as necessary.
- To think about the readings and lectures notes before the class and be ready to discuss them: try to identify the key assumptions in the texts; map the structure of the argument; underline the conclusions. Highlight to yourself points you don't understand. (If you don't understand it, there's great likelihood others have not understood it either, so don't be shy to ask.) Ask yourself whether you agree with the text, whether you can identify weaknesses or gaps in the argument, and what could someone who disagrees with it argue against it.
- To offer your participation as required (answering questions, asking questions etc.). Learning about and discussing these texts is a communal endeavour and it is a matter of good citizenship to contribute. Further, part of what we want you to achieve, and what we mark you for, is clear and confident oral presentation. You are expected to answer questions, raise new points, and contribute to the progression of discussion in class.

ASSESSMENT: This module is assessed by 100% coursework

INSTANT DEADLINE CHECKER

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Each student is assessed by two coursework assignments. All assignments should be submitted via FASER.

Assignment 1 (35%) During the first half of the module students will write a short (up to 1000 words) a country specific memo. Students will take a close look at one country and will review the main factors effecting electoral behaviour. More details will be provided after

week 17. Students need to choose their country of interest as early as possible and report the choice to the instructor (between Week 17 and Week 19).

Assignment 2 (65%) is an essay (up to 3000 words) that applies theories and models that the module covers in order to predict or explain the outcome of a recent election(s) of the student's choice. Students will focus their essay on electoral behaviour, vote choice, and the resulting vote or seat shares of political parties/candidates in the elections. It is recommended for students to seek advice from the instructor about the scope and the topic of the assignment between Week 20 and Week 23. Further details regarding the assignments will be provided as the module proceeds.

AVAILABLE ON LISTEN AGAIN: Yes No

READING (*The list is provisional and subject to change. These and additional recommended readings can be found on Talis.)

Week 16 What are elections for and why should we study them?

- Dalton, Russell & Hans-Dieter Klingemann. "Citizens and Political Behavior." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. **Chapter 1**
- Ruth Dassonneville (2022) *Voters Under Pressure*. **Chapter 1**

Week 17 Why do people vote (or don't vote)?

- Hanna Wass & André Blais (2017). **Chapter 20:** "Turnout". In *The Sage handbook of Electoral Behaviour*.
- John H. Aldrich; Libby M. Jenke (2017). **Chapter 7:** "Turnout and the calculus of voting". In *The Routledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion*.

Week 18 How do people reason about voting and politics?

- Lau Richard. & Redlawski, David. (2006). *How Voters Decide: Information processing in election campaigns*. **Chapter 1**
- Ruth Dassonneville (2022) *Voters Under Pressure*. **Chapters 2 & 4.**

Week 19 Cleavages and voting.

- James Dennison & Sophia Hunger (2023). **Chapter 10:** "Cleavage politics in the twenty-first century." In *The Routledge Handbook of Political Parties*.
- Robin Best (2011). "The declining electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups." *European Political Science Review*, 3(2), 279-300.
- Ruth Dassonneville (2022) *Voters Under Pressure*. **Chapter 3.**

Week 20 Policy and Voting.

- Orit Kedar (2009). **Chapter 2:** "A theory of Compensatory Vote." In *Voting for policy, not parties: how voters compensate for power sharing*.
- Laura Gallati & Nathalie Giger (2020) "Proximity and directional voting: Testing for the region of acceptability". *Electoral Studies*, Volume 64.

Week 21 Valence and Voting

- Jane Green & Will Jennings (2017). **Chapter 23:** “Valence”. In *The Sage handbook of Electoral Behaviour*.
- Robert Johns & Ann-Kristin Kölln (2020) “Moderation and Competence: How a Party's Ideological Position Shapes Its Valence Reputation.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 64: 649-663.

Week 22 Issue salience and voting.

- Éric Bélanger & Bonnie M. Meguid (2008) “Issue salience, issue ownership, and issue-based vote choice”. *Electoral Studies*, Volume 27, Issue 3.
- Kirkizh, Nora, Caterina Froio, and Sebastian Stier. "Issue trade-offs and the politics of representation: Experimental evidence from four European democracies." *European Journal of Political Research* (2022).

Week 23 Age and voting.

- Ruth Dassonneville (2017). **Chapter 7:** “Age and Voting”. In *The Sage handbook of Electoral Behaviour*.
- Laura Serra & Kaat Smets (2022). **Chapter 32:** “Age, Generation, and Political Participation”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Participation*.

Week 24 Gender and Voting

- Rosie Campbell (2017). **Chapter 8:** “Gender and Voting”. In *The Sage handbook of Electoral Behaviour*.
- Turnbull-Dugarte, Stuart J. "The European lavender vote: Sexuality, ideology and vote choice in Western Europe." *European Journal of Political Research* 59, no. 3 (2020): 517-537.

Week 25 Review and Conclusions

- **No assigned readings.**

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the assessment (marking) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the module and is subject to change with advance notice.

MARKING CRITERIA

See the Department’s marking criteria.

MARKING SCALE

>81% Outstanding work that is at the upper limit of performance.

70-80% The normal range for first class work. A first class essay shows a clear command of material, arguments and sources. It will show a clear understanding of underlying principles and a use of those principles in answering the question. If it is in an

empirically oriented subject it will show control of empirical material, sound use of that material, its relation to appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks and development of argument. If it is in a theoretical subject it will show control of theoretical material, sound use of that material and development of argument. Where appropriate it will utilise empirical material to illustrate theoretical points. The essay will show independence of judgement.

60-69% Upper second class work. An upper second class essay shows a good knowledge of material, arguments and original and secondary sources. If it is in an empirically oriented subject it will show some relation between that material and appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks. If it is in a theoretical subject it will show some grasp of principles and development of argument. Where appropriate it will utilise empirical material. The essay will make a clear point or points and show some critical acumen.

50-59% Lower second class work. A lower second class essay shows a basic, clear and generally correct knowledge of material, arguments and sources, particularly original sources. It will correctly summarise empirical or theoretical material, show some understanding of the material and its importance and draw reasonably appropriate conclusions.

40-49% Third class work. A third class essay shows some knowledge of basic material. The use of material is only just adequate, or it might be otherwise adequate but ill judged or even mistaken in some significant way(s). There are no clear conclusions drawn from the material, none that could be drawn from the material or where drawn they are significantly flawed or irrelevant.

1-39% Fail or unclassified. Marks in this range are usually given when either the use of basic material is absent, flawed, fundamentally mistaken, the essay fails to address a set or otherwise defined question or the use of language is so poor as to make the essay incomprehensible.

0% This mark is reserved for the non-submission of due work, or it may be awarded by the Dean in case of plagiarism.

How to submit your essay using FASER

You will be able to access the online submission system via your myEssex portal or via <https://FASER.essex.ac.uk>. FASER allows you to store your work-in-progress. This facility provides you with an ideal place to keep partially completed copies of your work and ensures that no work, even drafts, is lost. If you have problems uploading your coursework, you should contact Itt@essex.ac.uk. You may find it helpful to look at the FASER guide <http://www.essex.ac.uk/it/elearning/faser/default.aspx>. If you have any questions about FASER, please contact your administrator or refer to the handbook.

Under NO circumstances is your coursework to be emailed to the administrators or the lecturer. This will NOT be counted as a submission.

Coursework deadline policy for undergraduates

There is a single policy at the University of Essex for the late submission of coursework in undergraduate courses. Essays must be uploaded before 09.45 on the day of the deadline.

All coursework submitted after the deadline will receive a mark of zero. The mark of zero shall stand unless the student submits satisfactory evidence of extenuating circumstances that indicate that the student was unable to submit the work prior to the deadline. For further information on late submission of coursework and extenuating circumstances procedures please refer to <http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/exams-and-coursework/ext-circ.aspx>.

Essay feedback will be given via FASER.

ALL submissions should be provided with a coversheet (Available from Moodle).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a very serious academic offence and whether done wittingly or unwittingly it is your responsibility. **Ignorance is no excuse!** The result of plagiarism could mean receiving a mark of zero for the piece of coursework. In some cases, the rules of assessment are such that a mark of zero for a single piece of coursework could mean that you will fail your degree. If it is a very serious case, you could be required to withdraw from the University. It is important that you understand right from the start of your studies what good academic practice is and adhere to it throughout your studies.

The Department will randomly select coursework for plagiarism checks and lecturers are very good at spotting work that is not your own. **Plagiarism gets you nowhere; DON'T DO IT!**

Following the guidance on referencing correctly will help you avoid plagiarism.

Please familiarise yourself with the University's policy on academic offences:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/academic-offences.aspx>.