FELIX SCHÖNENBERGER

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RESEARCH FIELDS

Primary: Political Economy, Applied Microeconometrics

Secondary: Public Economics, Gender Economics, Economic History

JOB MARKET PAPER

Out of Office, Out of Step? Electoral Incentives and Strategic Moderation in the U.S. House of Representatives

Do elected politicians implement their preferred policies, or do they strategically adjust their positions due to reelection concerns? My job market paper proposes a novel identification strategy to separate electoral incentives from selection effects on incumbent politicians' policy choices. Exploiting the unique institutional setup of lame-duck sessions in the U.S. Congress, where lame-duck incumbents who lost reelection vote on the same issues as their reelected colleagues, I use a close election regression discontinuity design to leverage quasi-random assignment of reelection-seeking representatives to lame-duck status, which is orthogonal to voter preferences and incumbents' type. Comparing within-incumbent changes in roll call voting of barely unseated lame ducks to narrowly reelected co-partisans serving the same congressional term, I find that lame ducks revert to more extreme positions with lame-duck Democrats (Republicans) voting more liberally (conservatively). Consistent with lame ducks' loss of reelection concerns driving the result, the effect of lame-duck status on roll call extremism is more pronounced among electorally vulnerable incumbents, representatives of districts with a large proportion of swing voters, and retirement-aged lame ducks who are less likely to rerun in the future. I also consider but ultimately dismiss several other mechanisms including emotional backlash, logrolling motives, party control, and selective abstention. Although quantitatively dominated by selection effects, electoral incentives to moderate positions are large enough to reduce polarization by 21–26% and to flip high-stakes legislative outcomes under plausible counterfactual scenarios motivated by ongoing debates over U.S. constitutional design.

PUBLICATIONS & WORKING PAPERS

Identifying the Effect of Election Closeness on Voter Turnout: Evidence from Swiss Referenda
Journal of the European Economic Association, 2024, 22(2), pp. 876–914.
with Leonardo Bursztyn, Davide Cantoni, Patricia Funk, and Noam Yuchtman

Strategic Policy Responsiveness to Challenger Platforms: Evidence From U.S. House Incumbents
(submitted)

Out of Office, Out of Step? Electoral Incentives and Strategic Moderation in the U.S. House of Representatives *(Job Market Paper)*

The Long-term Disruptive Potential of Protests: Evidence From the Swiss Women Strike
with Patricia Funk and Noam Yuchtman (in progress)

Regressive Gender Norms and Social Pressure NOT to Turn Out: Evidence From Switzerland
with Alda Marchese (in progress)

REFERENCES

Patricia Funk – USI Lugano, Switzerland
Email: patricia.funk@usi.ch

Vincent Pons – Harvard University, USA
Email: vpons@hbs.edu

Noam Yuchtman – University of Oxford, UK
Email: noam.yuchtman@economics.ox.ac.uk

CURRENT POSITION

Postdoctoral Researcher
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) – Department of Economics   *March 2024 - present*

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Economics
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) – Department of Economics   *2018-2024*
Thesis: Electoral Incentives, Voter Turnout and Legislator Behavior: Evidence from Close Elections
Committee: Raphaël Parchet (chair), Patricia Funk (advisor), Vincent Pons (Harvard, external member)

Swiss Program for Beginning Doctoral Students
Swiss National Bank – Study Center Gerzensee   *2018-2019*

Master in Public Administration, Specialization in Public Economics
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) – IDHEAP, University of Lausanne   *2014-2017*

Bachelor in Political Science and Sociology
University of Bern   *2007-2014*

Bachelor in History
University of Bern   *2008-2014*

PRE-DOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS

Patricia Funk (USI Lugano) & Stephan Litschig (GRIPS Tokyo)   *2014-2017*

Axel Franzen (University of Bern)   *2012-2013*

Thess Schönholzer (University of Bern)   *2008-2010*

TEACHING

Development, Public and Gender Economics (MSc Economics) – Co-instructor with
Lucia Corno and Patricia Funk   *2024*

Political Economy and Public Finance (MSc Economics) – TA to Patricia Funk   *2018-2022*

Political Economy (BA Economics) – TA to Patricia Funk   *2019-2023*

Macroeconomics (BA Economics, in Italian) – TA to Saverio Simonelli and Giovanni Pica   *2022-2023*

PRESENTATIONS *(including scheduled)*

2025: *Harris Conference on American Political Economy (Stanford GSB) [invited].* **2024:** EJPE-CEPR Conference on Political Economy [discussant] (CEPR), Annual Meeting of the European Economic Association (EEA), Annual Congress of the International Institute of Public Finance (IIPF), Petralia Workshop (NYU), Journées Louis-André Gérard-Varet (AMSE), International Conference on Public Economic Theory (APET), Annual Congress of the Swiss Society of Economics and Statistics (SSES), IdEP Brownbag Seminar (USI). **2023:** IPL Brownbag Seminar (ETH), IdEP Brownbag Seminar (USI). **2022:** Annual Meeting of the European Economic Association (EEA), Annual Congress of the Swiss Society of Economics and Statistics (SSES), IdEP Brownbag Seminar (USI). **2021:** Annual Midwest Political Science Association Conference (MPSA), IdEP Brownbag Seminar (USI). **2020:** Brazilian Econometric Society Meeting (SBE) [invited], IdEP Brownbag Seminar (USI). **2019:** IdEP Brownbag Seminar (USI).

PROGRAMMING AND LANGUAGES

IT: Stata (proficient), R (advanced), Python (basics), ArcGIS (basics)

Languages: German (native), English (fluent), Italian (fluent), French (C1), Spanish (B1)

SERVICE

- Referee: European Economic Review, American Economic Review: Insights
- Discussant: EJPE-CEPR Conference on Political Economy