Capstone 2020/21 Political Science: Political Alienation Theme
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This research theme provides students with the opportunity to develop a project that seeks to address one of the key political challenges that many established democracies face these days: Why do certain groups of citizens become increasingly disenchanted with democratic politics and traditional forms of political participation – and what can be done about it? We will engage with a broad range of topics on the relationship between voters and politicians in contemporary democracies. These topics may include the complex relationship between democracy and rising economic inequality, the increasing electoral support for anti-immigrant, populist parties and politicians in many Western industrialised democracies, and unequal political participation such as the low voter turnout of especially poor and young voters.

Our goal will be to apply existing statistical methods to data from national election surveys and other data sources (e.g., aggregate turnout data), with the goal to understand the political preferences and behaviour of citizens. The Research Methods skills taught in Junior Sophister (Research Methods A and B) are sufficient methodological training and background for students to take this Capstone theme. The skills acquired in this module can in turn be broadly applied beyond this class and are highly sought after by employers.

Students are free to choose and develop their own research project in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student's choosing, again in consultation with and advice from the instructor. The module will discuss methodological issues, available data, and the advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches.

Possible projects will mostly fall into one of three broad areas:

1. **Right-wing Populism:** Why do citizens vote for anti-immigrant, populist parties? What is the role of economic vs. cultural grievances in explaining support for right-wing populism? Who votes for right-wing populist parties and how are these voters different from mainstream voters? What can be done to reduce support for right-wing populism?

2. **Economic Inequality and Democracy:** Why do citizens not consistently punish governments for allowing increasing concentrations of wealth and income "at the top"? Why do some poor voters vote against their material self-interest by supporting right-wing instead of left-wing parties and politicians? Does information about increasing income inequality make the average voter more likely to support economic redistribution?

3. **Unequal Political Participation:** What factors explain the notoriously low voter turnout among young and poor citizens? What can be done to increase voter turnout among these groups of citizens? What are the political consequences of more equal political participation? In particular, does it increase support for left-wing or anti-immigrant, populist parties and their respective policy agendas?

This module should be a very exciting opportunity for students who are interested in the above topics and who want to know more about using surveys and other quantitative data sources to analyse citizens' political attitudes and preferences.