Electoral Expectations

14 December 2020[1]

Course:

Module: *Individuum & Gesellschaft*
Type: *Vertiefungsseminar*
Credits: 2 / 8 ECTS
Sessions: 12
Language: English
Place: Virtual, via WebEx

Instructor:

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Flexible office hours, via WebEx

1 Subject Description

Voters make decisions under bounded-rationality and uncertainty in electoral environments. *Should we bother to vote, and if so, for whom?* Decades of research shows that these decisions depend partly on things that we cannot know for certain before the results are announced: for example, who is going to win the elections (we like to vote for the winner) and by how much (we are more likely to turn out in close elections). Therefore, elections are as much about beliefs and expectations as they are about facts and reason.

This seminar will focus on the former — specifically on the causes and consequences of voters' expectations about future elections. Through readings, discussions, and data, the seminar

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[1]There may be slight changes in this course syllabus until 31 December 2020.

will explore some of the most consequential questions about elections, including: How and why do we come to form expectations about elections, and what are the behavioural effects of these formations? Are some of us better at forming realistic expectations than others, and if so, why? What happens when our expectations are eventually confirmed, or disconfirmed, by the results?

2 Course Description

This is an advanced thematic seminar (*Vertiefungsseminar*) in the Individual and Society (*Individuum & Gesellschaft*) module. The learning outcomes, assignments, and credit points are designed according to this classification. For detailed information on the classification of courses, please see the departmental guidelines.

2.1 Learning Outcomes

With active participation in the course, you will:

- *understand* the theories behind the relationship between expectations and elections
- *learn* the major findings of research on electoral expectations
- *think critically* about (the management of) electoral expectations — what we already know and what else we need to know

If you decide to complete a term paper as well (I hope so!), you will also:

- *define* a research question about electoral expectations
- *develop* a research design suitable to provide credible answers to that question
- *analyse* an existing dataset
- *communicate* your research project in academic writing

2.2 Assignments and Assessment

Assessment will be based on small assignments (for certificate of participation; *Beteiligungsnachweis*) and an optional term paper (for final examination; *Abschlussprüfung*).

Beteiligungsnachweis — Small Assignments — for all, ungraded

There are three small assignments for everyone to complete: (1) *Muddiest Point*, (2) *Survey Question*, and (3) *Article Classification*. These will not be graded, but you will still receive feedback, either from your peers (on 1) or from me (on 2 and 3).

- Muddiest Point:

  - Having read the texts for the first two days, you will write a short note (around 250 words) about (a) what you thought was the most difficult and/or confusing point that you have encountered in the texts, and (b) why you think it is so difficult and/or confusing.
  - This assignment aims to motivate you to read the texts, which will in turn help you *understand* the theories and *learn* the major findings. It will also encourage you to *think critically* about what you have been reading.
  - You can post your note to the group forum on ILIAS until 9ᵗʰ January.
  - Commenting on each others' notes is highly encouraged, to help each other *understand* even the muddiest of points.

- Survey Question:

  - You will search through publicly available survey documentation, for one or more survey questions that could be used for a research project on electoral expectations. You will then write a short text (around 500 words) about how that project would help us understand electoral expectations — for example, (a) which research question(s) that we can answer, (b) which hypothesis we can test, whether and where this project would fit the main themes of research in this area.
  - This assignment requires you to *think critically* about what we already know and what else we need to know about electoral expectations. It also encourages you to *define* a research question, which you might want to turn into a term paper later on (optional).
  - You will have the off week between sessions 2 and 3 to complete this assignment, which you can submit on ILIAS until 22nd January.

- Research Classification:

  - You will search online for an academic publication — on any aspect of electoral expectations — that is not already listed in this syllabus. You will then write a short note (around 250 words) to argue why it should be in this syllabus, and whether and where it would fit the main themes of research in this area.

– This assignment will help you *learn* about relevant research beyond what is readily provided to you in this course. It will also encourage you to *think critically* about the main themes, and how a given piece of work may or may not fit these themes.
– You can submit this assignment on ILIAS until 23rd January.

Abschlussprüfung — Term Paper — optional, graded

This assignment is optional, for those of you who would like to write a term paper on electoral expectations as a final course examination. This will help you achieve the related learning outcomes above, and earn you additional ECTS credits. There are two parts to this assignment, with formative and summative assessment.

- Formative Assessment:

  – You will write a pre-analysis plan, with as much detail as you see necessary, to explain what you would like to research (i.e., the question) and how would conduct that research (i.e., the design) — before data analysis. You may wish to build on your *Survey Question* for this assignment.
  – This part of the assignment requires you to *define* a research question and *develop* a research design.
  – You will receive written and oral feedback on your plan, but no grades. The purpose of this formative assessment is to provide you with an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses of your plan, guiding you in completing your term paper.
  – You can email this assignment to me until 29th January. We will then arrange a virtual meeting via WebEx.

- Summative Assessment:

  – Building on your research plan and formative assessment, you will conduct the planned research and write the work (3,000 to 6,000 words).
  – This part of the assignment requires you to *analyse* data and *communicate* the results in academic writing.
  – You will receive written feedback and a grade.
  – You can submit this assignment, via email to me, until 31st March.

2.3 Credit Points

There are two ECTS credits for regular, active participation in the course (certificate of participation; *Beteiligungsnachweis*). You will earn these credits for reading the required texts, completing the small assignments, and participating in the course activities.

There is *an option* to earn six additional ECTS credits, for term paper (final examination; *Abschlussprüfung*). To earn these, you will write a pre-analysis plan and meet me to discuss your plan. With feedback from this formative assessment, you will then write your term paper.

2.4 Course Meetings

We will convene online, via WebEx, for all course meetings. These meetings will be streamed live, unrecorded. You will find the necessary information to join the meetings on ILIAS, with reminders sent to your e-mail address.

There will be four full-day meetings in January 2021, from 10:00 till 17:00. You can expect me to *be there* 15 minutes before and after the meetings — in case you have any questions. Or otherwise, come and join me for an informal chat.

I have divided each meeting into three sessions, each covering one theme in two hours. The only exceptions are *Introduction* and *Conclusion*—these sessions will last for one hour only. See Course Schedule for further details.

2.5 Office Hours

I am also available outside of class time to discuss the course. If you would like to meet, please send me an email — you can expect a prompt, welcoming reply. I would be happy to hear from you, and we can then work out a time that suits us both to meet soon afterwards.

3 Course Materials

Course materials include slides, readings, and survey documentation. All course materials, or links to them, will be available on the course website on ILIAS. These materials are for your own use in this course only.

3.1 Slides

You will find the seminar slides available on the course website, before the start of each session. In this course, the slides are designed to provide the structure for the discussions in each session. They do not summarise the reading material, and therefore they cannot be thought as a substitute for the latter.

3.2 Readings

Our discussion of electoral expectations will draw heavily on academic literature, which will help you achieve the learning objectives of this course. See Sessions for the list of *required readings*, which you will complete before we meet to discuss them.

The syllabus also includes recommendations for *further readings*. These might be particularly useful for those of you who decide to work on electoral expectations — be it for the term paper in this course and/or BA thesis.

3.3 Survey Documentation

Much of what we know about electoral expectations comes from survey research. It is important for us to recognize the survey items that are, or can be, used for research in this area.

In this course, we will work with the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) Questionnaire and the GESIS Panel Codebook. You may wish to use these for the relevant assignments in this course, but you do not have to. There is a growing number of publicly available political science datasets and databases, and a comprehensive list can be found online at https://github.com/erikgahner/PolData.

4 Course Schedule

4.1 Timetable

Below is a timetable for sessions and assignments.

- Day 1 — 8 January 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

- *Themes*: Introduction, (Un)Bounded Rationality, Expectancy Violation

- Day 2 — 9 January 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

  - *Themes*: Wishful Thinking, Expectation Managers, Measuring Expectations
  - *Due*: Muddiest Point

- Day 3 — 22 January 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

  - *Themes*: Strategic Voting, Bandwagon Effect, Turnout
  - *Due*: Survey Question

- Day 4 — 23 January 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

  - *Themes*: Coalition Expectations, Disconfirmed Expectations, Conclusion
  - *Due*: Research Classification

- 29 January 2021

  - *Due*: Research Plan (optional)

- 31 March 2021

  - *Due*: Term Paper (optional)

4.2 Sessions

Day 1 — 8 January 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

Session 1 — Introduction

Session 2 — (Un)Bounded Rationality

- *Required Readings*

  - Green, D., & Shapiro, I. (1994). The nature of rational choice theory. In D. Green, & I. Shapiro, *Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applications in political science* (pp. 13–32). Yale University Press.

- Bendor, J., Diermeier, D., Siegel, D. A., & Ting, M. (2011). Bounded rationality and elections. In J. Bendor, D. Diermeier, D. A. Siegel, & M. Ting, *A behavioral theory of elections* (1–22). Princeton University Press.

- Sheffrin, S. M. (1996). The concept of rational expectations. In S. M. Sheffrin, *Rational expectations* (2ⁿᵈ ed., pp. 1–24). Cambridge University Press.

- *Further Readings*

  - Jones, B. D. (1999). Bounded rationality. *Annual Review of Political Science, 2*(1), 297–321.

Session 3 — Expectancy Violation

- *Required Readings*

  - Shepperd, J. A., & McNulty, J. K. (2002). The affective consequences of expected and unexpected outcomes. *Psychological Science, 13*(1), 85–88.

  - Proulx, T., Inzlicht, M., & Harmon-Jones, E. (2012). Understanding all inconsistency compensation as a palliative response to violated expectations. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 16*(5), 285–291.

  - Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. (2019). An introduction to cognitive dissonance theory and an overview of current perspectives on the theory. In E. Harmon-Jones (Ed.), *Cognitive dissonance: Reexamining a pivotal theory in psychology* (pp. 3–24). American Psychological Association.

- *Further Readings*

  - Redlawsk, D. P., Pierce, D., (2017). Emotions and voting. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck, *The SAGE handbook of electoral behaviour* (pp. 406–432). SAGE Publications.

  - Brader, T., & Marcus, G. E. (2013). Emotion and political psychology. In L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, & J. S. Levy, *The Oxford handbook of political psychology* (2ⁿᵈ ed., pp. 165–204). Oxford University Press.

Session 4 — Wishful Thinking

- *Required Readings*

  - Stiers, D., & Dassonneville, R. (2018). Affect versus cognition: Wishful thinking on election day: An analysis using exit poll data from Belgium. *International Journal of Forecasting, 34*(2), 199–215.

  - Meffert, M. F., Huber, S., Gschwend, T., & Pappi, F. U. (2011). More than wishful thinking: Causes and consequences of voters' electoral expectations about parties and coalitions. *Electoral Studies, 30*(4), 804–815.

- *Further Readings*

  - Levine, R. (2007). Sources of bias in voter expectations under proportional representation. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 17*(3), 215–234.

  - Nadeau, R., Niemi, R. G., & Amato, T. (1994). Expectations and preferences in British general elections. *American Political Science Review, 88*(2), 371–383.

  - Regan, D. T., & Kilduff, M. (1988). Optimism about elections: Dissonance reduction at the ballot box. *Political Psychology, 9*(1), 101–107.

  - Searles, K., Smith, G., & Sui, M. (2018). Partisan media, electoral predictions, and wishful thinking. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 82*(1), 888–910.

Session 5 — Expectation Managers

- *Required Readings*

  - Zerback, T., Reinemann, C., & Nienierza, A. (2015). Who's hot and who's not? Factors influencing public perceptions of current party popularity and electoral expectations. *International Journal of Press/Politics, 20*(4), 458–477.

- Blais, A., & Bodet, M. A. (2006). How do voters form expectations about the parties' chances of winning the election? *Social Science Quarterly, 87*(3), 477–493.

- *Further Readings*

  - Eberl, J. M., & Plescia, C. (2018). Coalitions in the news: How saliency and tone in news coverage influence voters' preferences and expectations about coalitions. *Electoral Studies, 55*, 30–39.

  - Guinjoan, M., Simón, P., Bermúdez, S., & Lago, I. (2014). Expectations in Mass Elections: Back to the Future? *Social Science Quarterly, 95*(5), 1346–1359.

  - Leiter, D., Murr, A., Ramírez, E. R., & Stegmaier, M. (2018). Social networks and citizen election forecasting: The more friends the better. *International Journal of Forecasting, 34*(2), 235–248.

Session 6 — Measuring Expectations

- *Required Readings*

  - Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Fournier, P., Nevitte, N., & Hicks, B. M. (2008). Measuring expectations: Comparing alternative approaches. *Electoral Studies, 27*(2), 337–343.

  - Quek, K., & Sances, M. W. (2015). Closeness counts: Increasing precision and reducing errors in mass election predictions. *Political Analysis, 23*(4), 518–533.

- *Further Readings*

  - Murr, A. E. (2011). "Wisdom of crowds"? A decentralised election forecasting model that uses citizens' local expectations. *Electoral Studies, 30*(4), 771–783.

  - Graefe, A. (2016). Forecasting proportional representation elections from non-representative expectation surveys. *Electoral Studies, 42*, 222–228.

Session 7 — Strategic Voting

- *Required Readings*

  - Cox, G. W. (1997). Strategic voting in single-member single-ballot systems. In G. W. Cox, *Making votes count: Strategic coordination in the world's electoral systems* (pp. 69–98). Cambridge University Press.

  - Lago, I. (2008). Rational expectations or heuristics? Strategic voting in proportional representation systems. *Party Politics, 14*(1), 31–49.

- *Further Readings*

  - Cox, G. W. (1997). Strategic voting in multimember districts. In G. W. Cox, *Making votes count: Strategic coordination in the world's electoral systems* (pp. 99–122). Cambridge University Press.

  - Cox, G. W. (1997). Strategic voting in single-member dual-ballot systems. In G. W. Cox, *Making votes count: Strategic coordination in the world's electoral systems* (pp. 123–138). Cambridge University Press.

  - Cox, G. W., & Shugart, M. S. (1996). Strategic voting under proportional representation. *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization, 12*(2), 299–324.

Session 8 — Bandwagon Effect

- *Required Readings*

  - Dahlgaard, J. O., Hansen, J. H., Hansen, K. M., & Larsen, M. V. (2017). How election polls shape voting behaviour. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 40*(3), 330–343.

  - Mayer, R. K. (2002). An Experimental Examination of Electoral Expectations. *American Review of Politics, 23*, 39–54.

- *Further Readings*

  - Stolwijk, S. B., Schuck, A. R., & de Vreese, C. H. (2017). How anxiety and enthusiasm help explain the bandwagon effect. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 29*(4), 554–574.

  - Van der Meer, T. W., Hakhverdian, A., & Aaldering, L. (2016). Off the fence, onto the bandwagon? A large-scale survey experiment on effect of real-life poll outcomes on subsequent vote intentions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 28*(1), 46–72.

Session 9 — Turnout

- *Required Readings*

  - Gerber, A., Hoffman, M., Morgan, J., & Raymond, C. (2020). One in a million: Field experiments on perceived closeness of the election and voter turnout. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 12*(3), 287–325.

  - Duffy, J., & Tavits, M. (2008). Beliefs and voting decisions: A test of the pivotal voter model. *American Journal of Political Science, 52*(3), 603–618.

- *Further Readings*

  - Green, D., & Shapiro, I. (1994). The paradox of voter turnout. In D. Green, & I. Shapiro, *Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applications in political science* (pp. 47–71). Yale University Press.

Day 4 — 23 January 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

Session 10 — Coalition Expectations

- *Required Readings*

  – Bahnsen, O., Gschwend, T., & Stoetzer, L. F. (2020). How do coalition signals shape voting behavior? Revealing the mediating role of coalition expectations. *Electoral Studies, 66*, 1–23.

  – Bargsted, M. A., & Kedar, O. (2009). Coalition-targeted Duvergerian voting: how expectations affect voter choice under proportional representatio. *American Journal of Political Science, 53*(2), 307–323.

Session 11 — Disconfirmed Expectations

- *Required Readings*

  – Granberg, D., & Nanneman, T. (1986). Attitude change in an electoral context as a function of expectations not being fulfilled. *Political Psychology, 7*(4), 753–765.

  – Scheve, K., & Tomz, M. (1999). Electoral surprise and the midterm loss in US congressional elections. *British Journal of Political Science, 29*(3), 507–521.

- *Further Readings*

  – Johnston, C. D., Lavine, H., & Woodson, B. (2015). Emotion and political judgment: Expectancy violation and affective intelligence. *Political Research Quarterly, 68*(3), 474–492.

  – Plescia, C. (2019). On the subjectivity of the experience of victory: Who are the election winners?. *Political Psychology, 40*(4), 797–814.

  – Umit, R. (2020). *Unfulfilled winning expectations decrease voter satisfaction with democracy.* Available at https://resulumit.com/papers/expectations.pdf.

Session 12 — Conclusion