

Electoral Expectations

26 February 2021

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 such 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 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 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 electoral expectations

If you decide to complete a term paper as well, you will also:

- *define* a research question about electoral expectations
- *develop* a research design suitable to provide credible answers to that question
- *analyse* data to answer that question
- *communicate* your research 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) *Critical*, (2) *Reading Expectations*, and (3) *Surveying Expectations*. These will not be graded, but you will still receive feedback, either from your peers (on 1) or from me (on 2 and 3).

- *Critical*:
 - Having read one or more of the required texts, you will write a short note (around 200 words) about one or more questionable points that you have encountered in the readings, including explanations as to why you are critical of these points.

- * You will also react to at least one such note by others in the seminar, explaining your thoughts on others' disagreements.
 - This assignment aims to motivate you to read the required texts, which will in turn help you *understand* the theories and *learn* the major findings, and to *think critically* about what you are reading. It will also create a forum of ideas, where we learn from each other.
 - You can post your note and reaction(s) to the group forum on ILIAS at anytime until 14th May 2021. However, you are strongly encouraged to start reading the texts and the forum as early as possible with this assignment in mind, and not wait until the deadline to complete it.
 - For guidance, you will find an example note and reaction at the top of the ILIAS forum.
- *Reading Expectations:*
 - You will search online, for one or more opinion pieces (e.g., blog posts, columns, Op-Eds) that include at least one reference to expectations for the upcoming German federal election in September 2021. You will then write a short report (around 400 words) about that piece, focusing on the electoral expectations therein, with the concepts that you will have learned during this seminar.
 - This assignment requires you to *think critically* about electoral expectations in popular writing, and how references to electoral expectations in practice may or may not fit among the themes of research that we cover in this seminar. It also encourages you to explore a potential data source, which you might want to use for a term paper later on.
 - You can submit this assignment on ILIAS until 21st May 2021.
 - For guidance, you will find a template for this assignment on the course website on ILIAS.
 - *Surveying Expectations:*
 - 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 400 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 under 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.

- You can submit on ILIAS until 28th May 2021.
- For guidance, you will find a template for this assignment on the course website on ILIAS.

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. This assignment can be registered on *Studierendenportal* until 15th June 2021, and submitted for final assessment until 30th September 2021.

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 *Reading Expectations* or *Surveying Expectations* 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 grade. 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 15th June 2021. 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 30th September 2021.

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 a 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 May 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 readings, slides, and assignment templates. 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 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. For guidance, each required reading comes with a list of questions underneath — while reading, look out for answers to these questions first and foremost.

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.

3.2 Slides

You will find the seminar slides on the course website, made available after the last session of each day. 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.

3.3 Assignment Templates

All three *Small Assignments* come with a template for guidance. For *Critical*, this will be in the form of an example note and reaction on the group forum on ILIAS. For *Reading Expectations* and *Surveying Expectations*, you will find Word documents on ILIAS with structure, instructions, and hints to help you complete these assignments successfully.

There are no templates for the optional term paper assignment. However, if you decide to write a term paper, you will receive individual guidance through formative assessment.

4 Course Schedule

4.1 Timetable

Below is a timetable for sessions and assignments. All deadlines are set to 23:59 Central European Time on the respective dates below.

- Day 1 — 7 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00
 - *Themes*: Introduction, Expected Utility, Expectancy Violation
- Day 2 — 8 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00
 - *Themes*: Forming Expectations, Measuring Expectations, Wishful Thinking
- Day 3 — 14 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00
 - *Themes*: Strategic Voting, Coalition Expectations, Bandwagon Effect
 - *Due*: Critical

- Day 4 — 15 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00
 - *Themes*: Electoral Turnout, Disconfirmed Expectations, Conclusion
- 21 May 2021
 - *Due*: Reading Expectations
- 28 May 2021
 - *Due*: Surveying Expectations
- 15 June 2021
 - *Due*: Research Plan (optional)
- 30 September 2021
 - *Due*: Term Paper (optional)

4.2 Sessions

Day 1 — 7 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

Session 1 — Introduction

- There are no readings for this session.

Session 2 — Expected Utility

- *Required Reading*
 - 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.
 - * *Look out for answers*: What are the four basic assumptions of the rational choice theory (RCT)? What are the two main criticism towards it? What is the role of expectations in the RCT? How do the thin-accounts of RCT differ from the thick-accounts?
 - * *Look out for concepts*: Expected utility; utility maximisation; imperfect information

- *Further Readings*

- 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.
- Jones, B. D. (1999). *Bounded rationality*. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2(1), 297–321.
- Linde, J. (2020). *Expected Utility and Political Decision Making*. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Sheffrin, S. M. (1996). The concept of rational expectations. In S. M. Sheffrin, *Rational expectations* (2nd ed., pp. 1–24). Cambridge University Press.

Session 3 — Expectancy Violation

- *Required Reading*

- 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.
- * *Look out for answers*: What are the four main compensation measures, and how do they differ from each other? What are the basic assumptions of the cognitive dissonance theory, and which of these assumptions are shared by other compensation theories? What is the role of expectations in all of these theories?
- * *Look out for concepts*: Expectancy violation; inconsistency compensation; cognition; cognitive dissonance; aversive arousal; negative *vs.* positive violations

- *Further Readings*

- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- Shepperd, J. A., & McNulty, J. K. (2002). [The affective consequences of expected and unexpected outcomes](#). *Psychological Science*, 13(1), 85–88.
- Townsend, S. S. M., Eliezer, D., & Major, B. (2013). [The embodiment of meaning violations](#). In K. D. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. J. Lindberg (Eds.), *The psychology of meaning* (p. 381–400). American Psychological Association.

Day 2 — 8 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

Session 4 — Forming Expectations

- *Required Reading*

- 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.
 - * *Look out for answers:* What are the objective and subjective sources of electoral expectations? What are the advantaged and disadvantages of relying on each of these source? Who is more likely to rely on which source in forming their expectations?
 - * *Look out for concepts:* Party identification; constituency; political sophistication

- *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.
- Daschmann, G. (2000). [Vox pop & polls: The impact of poll results and voter statements in the media on the perception of a climate of opinion](#). *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 12(2), 160–181.

- Larsen, E. G., & Fazekas, Z. (2019). [Transforming stability into change: How the media select and report opinion polls](#). *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(1), 115–134.
- 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.
- Mayer, R. K. (2001). [What to expect from electoral expectations](#). *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6(3), 71–89.
- 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.

Session 5 — Measuring Expectations

- *Required Reading*

- Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Fournier, P., Nevitte, N., & Hicks, B. M. (2008). [Measuring expectations: Comparing alternative approaches](#). *Electoral Studies*, 27(2), 337–343.
 - * *Look out for answers:* How do Blais et al. (2008) measure electoral expectations? What are the three alternatives that they compare? What criterion or criteria do they compare these alternatives against? Which alternative performs the best against that criteria, and why?
 - * *Look out for concepts:* Validity; cross-sectional surveys; objective *vs.* perceived measures; answer scales

- *Further Readings*

- Graefe, A. (2016). [Forecasting proportional representation elections from non-representative expectation surveys](#). *Electoral Studies*, 42, 222–228.
- Leemann, L., Stoetzer, L., & Traunmueller, R. (2021). [Eliciting beliefs as distributions in online surveys](#). *Political Analysis*, 1–13.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., & Tien, C. (1999). [Voters as forecasters: A micromodel of election prediction](#). *International Journal of Forecasting*, 15(2), 175–184.

- Murr, A. E. (2011). “Wisdom of crowds”? A decentralised election forecasting model that uses citizens’ local expectations. *Electoral Studies*, 30(4), 771–783.
- Quek, K., & Sances, M. W. (2015). Closeness counts: Increasing precision and reducing errors in mass election predictions. *Political Analysis*, 23(4), 518–533.

Session 6 — Wishful Thinking

- *Required Reading*

- 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.
 - * *Look out for answers:* What is wishful thinking, and how does it relate to electoral expectations? Who is more likely to involve in wishful thinking, and why? What are the likely causes of wishful thinking? How do Stiers and Dassonneville (2018) operationalise and measure wishful thinking?
 - * *Look out for concepts:* Wishful thinking; electoral success; exit poll; political interest

- *Further Readings*

- Guinjoan, M., Simón, P., Bermúdez, S., & Lago, I. (2014). Expectations in Mass Elections: Back to the Future? *Social Science Quarterly*, 95(5), 1346–1359.
- Levine, R. (2007). Sources of bias in voter expectations under proportional representation. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 17(3), 215–234.
- 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.
- 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 7 — Strategic Voting

- *Required Reading*

- Gschwend, T. (2007). [Ticket-splitting and strategic voting under mixed electoral rules: Evidence from Germany](#). *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(1), 1–23.

- * *Look out for answers:* What is strategic voting, and how does it relate to electoral expectations? What are the likely causes of strategic voting? Who is more likely to involve in strategic voting, and why? How does strategic voting differ among the supporters of small and large parties, and why? How does Gschwend (2007) operationalise and measure strategic voting?

- * *Look out for concepts:* Strategic voting; mixed electoral systems; ticket splitting

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

Session 8 — Coalition Expectations

- *Required Reading*

- 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.

- * *Look out for answers:* What is a coalition signal, and how does it relate to electoral expectations? What are the three potential mechanisms behind the effect of coalition signals on voting behaviour, and how do they differ from each other? How do Bahnsen et al. (2020) *manipulate* expectations?
- * *Look out for concepts:* Coalition signals; party positions; mechanism; survey experiment

- *Further Readings*

- 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.
- Blais, A., Aldrich, J. H., Indridason, I. H., & Levine, R. (2006). [Do voters vote for government coalitions? Testing Downs’ pessimistic conclusion.](#) *Party Politics*, 12(6), 691–705.
- Bowler, S., Karp, J. A., & Donovan, T. (2010). [Strategic coalition voting: evidence from New Zealand.](#) *Electoral Studies*, 29(3), 350–357.
- Bowler, S., McElroy, G., & Müller, S. 2021. Voter Expectations of Government Formation in Coalition Systems: The Importance of the Information Context. Forthcoming in *European Journal of Political Research*. Available at https://muelerstefan.net/papers/ejpr_bowler_mcelroy_mueller.pdf.

Session 9 — Bandwagon Effect

- *Required Reading*

- 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.

- * *Look out for answers:* What is bandwagon effect, and how does it relate to electoral expectations? What are the likely causes of bandwagon effect? What would be a cognitive-dissonance explanation of bandwagon effect? How do Dahlgaard et al. (2017) *manipulate* expectations?
- * *Look out for concepts:* Bandwagon effect; electoral momentum; wisdom of the crowds
- *Further Readings*
 - Mayer, R. K. (2002). [An Experimental Examination of Electoral Expectations](#). *American Review of Politics*, 23, 39–54.
 - Hardmeier, S. (2008). [The effects of published polls on citizens](#). In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott, *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 504–513). SAGE Publications.
 - 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.

Day 4 — 15 May 2021 — 10:00 – 17:00

Session 10 — Electoral Turnout

- *Required Reading*
 - 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.
 - * *Look out for answers:* Why is it a paradox that people vote? What is the

relationship between electoral expectations and electoral turnout? What does the formula $pB + D > C$ represent? What are the costs of voting? What are its benefits? What are the two hypotheses based on expected utility?

* *Look out for concepts:* Turnout; pivotal voter; psychic gratification

- *Further Readings*

- 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.
- 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.

Session 11 — Disconfirmed Expectations

- *Required Reading*

- 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.
 - * *Look out for answers:* What is dissonance, and how does it relate to electoral expectations? When and how electoral expectations could be disconfirmed? What are the likely consequences of disconfirmed expectations? How do Granberg and Nanneman (1986) operationalise and measure expectations? How do they operationalise and measure *disconfirmed* expectations?
 - * *Look out for concepts:* Dissonance, attitude change; unexpected winners *vs.* losers

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

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

Session 12 — Conclusion

- There are no readings for this session.