Introduction: This course follows an actor centred approach to the analysis of representative government from a comparative perspective. The core problem of representative government concerns the structuring of the relationship between representatives and their constituents. It relates to two classical questions in this regard: 1) Who do representatives represent? A local constituency or a national coalition of voters structured through political parties? 2) How do representatives represent? Do they consider themselves as delegates by implementing the demands of their constituents or do they rather perceive themselves as trustees exercising independent judgement in parliamentary decision making to considerable degrees? The problem of representation can be viewed from a normative angle by asking how this relationship should be structured to comply with the basic values of democracy in a coherent manner or to ensure output legitimacy in satisfactory degrees. The problem of representative government can also be viewed from a structural point of view by asking how the institutions of representative government such as the electoral connection are structured and are functioning. An actor centred approach to political representation focuses on the behaviour of political representatives and on the way how these patterns are structured by institutional incentives. It pursues three core research interests: It firstly aims to identify crucial behavioural patterns and those incentives related to these patterns; it secondly aims to uncover the causal mechanisms linking particular incentives with particular types of behaviour; it thirdly perceives institutions not as a given but as a dependent variable emerging in the long run from the dynamic interaction of individual actors amidst particular social contexts. This course focuses on the subset of established democracies as empirical reference points. These cases share a long history of representative institutions and are thus subject to a relatively large body of literature and thus a sufficient amount of empirical observations. They are also characterized by stable political institutions.

Goals: Assuming that you have read the material and participated regularly in class you will by the end of this class
- have a good knowledge of major empirical theories in political representation research
- be aware of the main debates and issues related to these theories
- have a good knowledge of representative institutions and representative behaviour across established democracies
- have improved your research and writing skills
**Format/Requirements:** The weekly meeting will be devoted to the discussion of the assigned readings. My role will be one of providing some structure to the discussion and adding, where useful, additional information. Your role will be to *lead the discussion.* Two of you will do so each week, in addition to providing the class (on Tuesday by noon through email) with a *critical summary of the assigned readings.* This summary should be no longer than two double-spaced pages. In addition to taking turns at leading the discussion, I expect each of you to participate in the discussion and will feel free to call on you, even when you do not volunteer.

As already noted, each of you will be a discussion co-leader at several sessions during the terms (with how often a function of enrolment), and each of you will be providing your colleagues and me with a critical review of the readings. Finally, you will have to write a research paper of about 20-25 pages in length.

**Basic Readings:** We will read mostly journal articles or single chapters in books which will be made available in electronic form. One book, however, is a “must read” if you deal issues concerning political representation. The reference is as follows: Hanna F. Pitkin. 1967. *The Concept of Representation.* Berkeley, Ca. u.a.: University of California Press. Chapters 3 – 6 of the book are especially useful for our purposes.

**Plagiarism:** Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work. If you have any questions about this policy, please ask or consult the Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others, which can be found in the Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community and also on the web at [http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html](http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html).

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**Course Schedule**

**September 3: Introduction to the Course**

**September 10: Overview and (some) conceptual and methodological issues.** This session aims to get a lay of the land by reading and then discussing several reviews of the research on political representation. It aims to foster our understanding what representation is in conceptual terms and how this concept can be researched in empirical ways.

September 17: Representational Roles. Representational roles are considered “[…] coherent sets of norms of behaviour which are thought by those involved in the interactions being viewed, to apply to all persons who occupy the position of a legislator” (Wahlke et al. 1962: 8). The study of representational roles underwent considerable changes in conceptual and methodological terms since the landmark study of John Wahlke and his collaborators has been published. We will trace these changes and discuss empirical findings from the literature on representational roles in Western democracies.

Required


Optional


September 24: Policy Responsiveness. The concept of representation is closely related to the notion that representatives ought to respond in their legislative behaviour to the demands of their constituents. The landmark study of Miller/Stokes (1963) on the responsiveness of American legislators paved the way to a vital debate on the concept of the constituency, on how to measure and explain responsiveness, and whether the model of Miller/Stokes also holds in comparative research.

Required


Optional

October 1: Political Parties and Representation: Party Unity in Parliament. The Miller/Stokes model is of very limited value for the study of political representation in European systems. In European democracies, individual representatives represent national coalitions of voters rather than local constituencies. Empirical studies on the cohesion of parties in legislative decision making emphasize this point. In this session we will discuss the evidence produced by these studies, the prerequisites for party cohesion as well as the variation within European democracies.

Required

Optional

October 8: Party Systems and Representation. In European systems, the nature of the party system and vote-seat proportionality are further reference points to determine the policy responsiveness of the representative system. In this session, we will continue our discussion on policy responsiveness in party democracies regarding these empirical phenomena.

Required
October 15: Political Parties and Representation: Recruitment. The Selection of Candidates is a crucial factor which determines the responsiveness of a representative system. In the comparative literature, this has been a much overlooked field. We will ask in this session for the strategies and process of candidate selection and will explore the available empirical evidence in this regard. We will also focus on most recent debates about the need for the democratization of candidate selection in European party democracies.

Required

Optional

October 22: Personal Vote Theory. Personal vote theory focuses on “[...] that portion of a candidate’s electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities and records.” (Cain et al: 1984: 111). We will discuss what exactly candidates do to cultivate a personal vote and under which circumstances they do so. We will also discuss the available evidence on whether this really pays off for the candidates on Election Day.

Required
Optional


October 29: The Representation of Minorities. Some students of political representation emphasize the need for legislatures to closely reflect the socio-political composition of the voting population (descriptive representation). We will focus in this session on the problem of minority representation. We will discuss the rational behind the concept of descriptive representation, explore the institutional prerequisites for the fair representation of minorities, scrutinize the actual state of affairs regarding minority representation, and focus on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation.

Required


Optional


November 5: The Representation of Women. The question of the equal representation of women represents an important element of the research agenda that is focused on the concept of descriptive representation. We will continue our discussion on the questions raised above with regard to this particular aspect of descriptive representation.

Required


**Optional**


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**November 12: Elections and Representation.** The most basic understanding of political representation stresses the accountability of representatives. In this perspective, voters ought to be able to unseat those representatives which fail to keep the promises made in previous elections. The turnover rate in national legislatures and turnout rates in the electorate can be perceived as empirical indicators to test for the functioning of this type of representation. Low turnover and low turnout suggests that the electoral connection suffers from functional deficits. Elections should be able to mobilize a sufficient number of voters and to lead to a sufficient degree of turnover in order to ensure accountability. We will survey in this session the empirical evidence regarding these indicators and the prerequisites for a sufficient performance of the electoral connection in this respect.

**Required**


**Optional**


November 19: Media Technology and Representation. New media technologies are constantly reshaping the infrastructural context political representatives act under. How do these means of communication affect the behaviour of representatives? How do new media contexts interact with institutional incentives in shaping this behaviour? How do political representative decide which means to use why and how? In this session we will raise these questions from a cross-media perspective. While these types of debates are mostly focused on particular media technologies such as the internet or parliamentary television, we will adopt a broader perspective in asking these questions.


November 26: Thanksgiving Recess

December 3: Representation and Globalization. The Development of new political structures at the supra-national level represents a challenge for theories of political representation. Do these new structures fit with established empirical models of political representation? If not, can we think of alternative models to link supra-national organizations to the public? How can we develop these models? Can we induct them from current practices or do we have to develop a new theory of representation on the basis of deductive reasoning? These issues are in the spotlight of our last session in this seminar.

Required


Optional