Introduction: Political Representation is a core feature of modern political systems. It is thus of utmost importance for any student of government. The core problem of representation concerns the structuring of the relationship between representatives and their constituents. It raises two classical questions in this regard: 1) Who do representatives represent? A local constituency or a national coalition of voters mediated via collective actors such as 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 judgment in parliamentary decision making to considerable degrees? This course follows an actor centered approach in dealing with these questions. It aims to make us understand better what choices individual legislators take regarding these two questions, why, and with what effects.

The problem of representation can be viewed from different perspectives. It can be viewed from a normative perspective by asking how this relationship should be structured to comply with the basic values of democracy in a coherent manner. The problem of representative government can also be viewed from a structural perspective by asking how the institutions of representative government such as the electoral system or legislatures are structured and are functioning. An actor centered approach to political representation focuses on the behavior of political representatives, on the way this behavior is structured by institutional incentives, and on the effects of specific behavioral patterns on the larger political system. An actor centered approach to political representation aims to identify characteristic behavioral patterns, aims to understand the underlying institutional causes for these patterns, and aims to explore their long term effects at the systemic level in the short and in the long run.

This course follows a comparative approach. It thus aims to identify differences and similarities in representative behavior across different political systems on the one hand. It aims to test particular hypotheses explaining representative behavior across different systems on the other. The course mainly focuses on the subset of established democracies for two main reasons: 1) These cases share a long history of representative institutions. They are thus subject to a relatively large body of literature and to a sufficient amount of empirical observations; 2) Established western democracies share a common historical, economic and cultural basis which allows exploring the relationship between representative institutions and representative behavior in a quasi experimental way, varying institutions such as electoral systems while holding crucial contextual factors constant.
**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. One 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 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:**


- These books are available for purchase at the Campus store. Texts which are not in the required textbooks will be available in electronic form via blackboard.

**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).
Course Schedule

September 2: Introduction to the course

September 9: No class due to professional obligations (European Consortium of Political Research General Conference at Potsdam, Germany)

September 16: Overview and (some) conceptual and methodological issues. This session aims to get a lay of the land by reading and then discussing several overviews on the history of and the research on political representation. It aims to foster our understanding what representation is in conceptual terms, and what it isn’t. It aims to identify core issues in the research on political representation and also core strategies and methods to researching political representation.


September 23: 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 30: Policy responsiveness. The concept of representation is closely related to the notion that representatives ought to respond in their legislative behavior 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 7: 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; representation is collectivist in these systems. The unity of political
parties in legislatures and thus their ability to structure the behavior of their members in parliament is a crucial prerequisite for collectivist forms of representation. In this session we will discuss the literature on party unity to learn more about the level of party unity in democratic legislatures and the explanations for higher or lower levels of party unity. We will incorporate the Latin American experience in our discussions because of John Carey’s important work on this issue.

**Required**


**Optional**


**October 14: Political parties and representation: Recruitment.** Collectivist Representation European style depends on strong party organizations defined by devoted party members, a sophisticated and hierarchical internal structure, and the ability to control access to formal governmental positions. Especially the selection of candidates for public office 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**

October 21: Political parties and representation: Parties in the electorate. Collectivist representation European style depends on the existence of homogeneous national coalitions of voters who share a strong psychological attachment to particular political parties and who can be mobilized to act on behalf of these parties, either by becoming party members or by turning out in elections. In this session, we will review the current troubling developments in European democracies signalling declining membership figures, declining attachment to political parties, and declining turnout. We will ask whether European parties really are parties without partisans, what the sources of declining parties in the electorate are, and how it might affect the future of collectivist representation.

Required

Optional

October 28: Political parties and representation: Parties and political campaigns. Collectivist representation European style depends upon the ability of political parties to communicate their message in election campaigns in unequivocal ways and to thus present basic political alternatives to voters. The debate on this issue focuses on two crucial questions that we will discuss in this session: 1) How do parties respond to their decline in the electorate and to changing electoral markets?; 2) Do campaigns matter for voting behaviour?
November 4: 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 pays off for legislators on Election Day.

Required

Optional

November 11: Accountability 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 who do not meet their expectations. The turnover rate in
national legislatures can be perceived as one empirical indicator to test for the functioning of this type of representation. Low turnover suggests that accountability is low and that the electoral connection suffers from functional deficits. In this session, we will survey the empirical evidence regarding this indicator and the prerequisites for a sufficient performance of the electoral connection in this regard. The debate on economic voting offers a second context to debate issues of accountability. It argues that economic indicators such as employment rates serve as proxies for voters to determine the quality of governments and to identify the rascals that need to be unseated.

Please note that we have to reschedule this class. I will be away on that day due to professional obligations (International Workshop on “New Forms of Measuring Representation” at the University of Bern, Switzerland)

Required


Optional


November 18: The representation of social groups: Women. 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 a particular social group, namely women. We will discuss the rational behind the concept of descriptive representation, explore the institutional prerequisites for the fair representation of women, scrutinize the actual state of affairs regarding womens representation, and focus on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation.

Required


Optional


November 25: Political representation in changing technological and political contexts. Modern representative government faces a number of challenges in the new millennium. This session focuses on two of these challenges. The first one is technological. New media technologies are constantly reshaping the infrastructural context political representatives act under. We will discuss how new means of communication are being used by representatives, how institutional incentives are shaping their media choices, and how these choices affect their behavior. The second challenge is political and concerns the development of supranational regimes such as the European Union. We will discuss the degree to which these systems can be characterized as being already representative in a democratic way, whether these systems will be able to develop into “standard representative systems” as we know them today, or whether new political practices will bring about new forms of political representation that are able to meet.

Required


Optional


December 2: Conclusion and final discussion