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1 An Overview of Completed and Current Research Projects

My research agenda is organized into a number of research projects. Some projects are ongoing and have already received substantive support by external funding, while others are currently in the planning, preparation, and submission stages. I present a brief list that highlights my current and planned research projects and provide more detailed characterizations of each project in the subsequent sections:

1. Political Preferences and Political Behaviour in the European Political Space

(Austrian Science Funds FWF; accepted; completed),

2. Lost in Space? The Emptiness of the Political Center

(Fritz Thyssen Foundation; accepted; current; 312,086 Euro),

3. PLATO – The Post-Crisis Legitimacy of the European Union

(European Union; accepted; current; jointly with Katrin Auel and Johannes Pollak; 512,000 Euro)

4. Who Gets What, When, and How? Budgetary Politics in the European Union

(“Jubiläumsfonds” of the Austrian National Bank; accepted; current; jointly with Katrin Auel; 124,054 Euro)

5. The Benefits of Uncertainty? Party Ambiguity and Voter Uncertainty in Elections to National Parliaments and the EP

(Austrian Science Funds FWF; revise and resubmit),

6. Political Geography of Austrian Elections

(Austrian Science Funds FWF; in preparation).

2 Forschungsprojekte im Detail

Ad 1) Political Preferences and Political Behaviour in the European Political Space

Abstract

The project aims at presenting a systematic, in-depth account of political conflict/ contestation over European integration. Focussing on both political preference formation and political behaviour, the integrated assessment rests on three interrelated pillars, the principal research tasks that structure the project:

1. the micro-level model addresses the spatial determinants of voting behaviour, i.e. the contribution of proximity and directional policy utilities to the subjective evaluation of party alternatives and to actual voting behaviour,
2. the linkage model provides an in-depth account of the interrelations between party elites and voters in EP election and brings processes of preference formation “back in” the study of voting behaviour and party strategy, and
3. the macro-level model explores the context-dependency of electoral behaviour, party competition, and party-voter linkages.

The project builds upon the spatial theory of political competition (cf., among many others, the classical approaches by Downs, 1957; Black, 1958, the more recent advancements by Merrill and Grofman, 1999; Adams et al., 2005). In general, spatial models provide useful tools to mark the programmatic issue positions of voters, parties, and/ or candidates within an n -dimensional political space. Regarding the formal modelling of political conflict/ contestation over European integration, there are at least two major dimensions:

1. the (simplified) domestic politics dimension is labelled in terms of “left” and “right”, and
2. the (one-dimensional) European integration dimension ranges from integrationist to euroskeptic positions.

The concept of a “European political space” (cf. Marks and Steenbergen, 2004) ties both dimensions together and thus serves as the primary analytical grid that structures the analysis of political representation, of the links between voters and parties, and assessments of electoral behaviour. Hence, we assume that there is a two-dimensional political space that sensibly depicts ideological and programmatic positions towards both domestic politics and, particularly, European integration. With a concise focus on European integration and comparative research on parties and elections, the project is deeply rooted in the research traditions of political science and political sociology. Specifically, we emphasize an integrated perspective on preference formation *and* political behaviour that unifies both perspectives and utilizes modern, state-of-the-art methods of data analysis in order to cope with causal complexity.

With the demise of the “permissive consensus” (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970) in the wake of the Maastricht treaty, European integration has become a highly contested matter in daily politics and media discourses of many member states. The integration issue is considered to be among the most salient topics in current and future political/ electoral competition and therefore has the potential to restructure political contestation and, eventually, press for a profound transformation of European party systems (cf. Benoit and Laver, 2006). If this presumption turns out to be accurate, there are a number of highly significant implications. In domestic politics, the high conflict potential within the national public, labelled a “sleeping giant” by van der Eijk and Franklin (2004), might mobilize new strata of formerly uninvolved voters and might also be exploited by populist and/ or extremist political entrepreneurs. At the European level, the consent of the voters, which could formerly either be considered given or not too important, is now essential for the legitimacy and efficiency of European politics.

Financing: Austrian Science Funds FWF; 312,086 Euro; March 2011 to July 2014.

Ad 2) PLATO – The Post-Crisis Legitimacy of the European Union

The PLATO project is concerned with legitimacy issues of the European Union which arise due to multiple economic and political crises (<http://www.plato.uio.no>). Formally, the project is an “Innovative Training Network” (ITN) which receives funding by the Marie Skłodowska Curie Program of the European Union. Lead partner is the ARENA Research Center in Oslo, and the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies is one of nine scientific partner institutions that supervises two of the fifteen doctoral students. Other partners are the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies, the Czech Academy of Sciences, the University of Krakow, Sciences Po Paris and the Universities of Antwerpe, Cambridge and Twente.

Abstract

PLATO investigates the legitimacy of the EU’s responses to the financial crisis. It will use the example of the financial crisis to build and test theory of what would amount to a legitimacy crisis in the case of a multi-state, non-state political system such as the EU. Legitimacy is at the core of “good government”. It means the justified or rightful exercise of political power. Since a right to exercise political power implies that people may have an obligation to comply even with some laws they do not like, legitimate polities are more likely to enjoy the unforced compliance of publics. Polities that can concentrate more on satisfying the needs and values of citizens, rather than coercing them, are more likely to deliver high levels of economic performance and to score well on indicators of human development.

PLATO will promote multi-disciplinary understanding of how different systems – political, economic, social, legal and ecological – can interact to produce problems that challenge the legitimacy of political systems within and beyond the state. PLATO will also innovate in the application of state-of-the-art research methods to the study of the normative and empirical components of legitimacy.

Six PLATO cases will test the legitimacy of the EU’s crisis responses with member states and other implementing authorities. ESR1 tests how far member states accept the legitimacy of crisis responses that imply greater EU involvement with core state powers of taxing, borrowing and spending; ESR2 tests the legitimacy of the Union’s crisis responses with sub-national implementing authorities; ESR3 tests how far the legitimacy of the EU’s crisis responses has been horizontally contested through inter-institutional disagreements at European level; ESR4 tests how far they have been vertically contested within interface mechanisms between the EU and its member states; ESR5 then combines both horizontal and vertical axes by testing how far new agencies introduced in response to the crisis are accepted as legitimate by all their institutional stakeholders; ESR6 tests whether greater contestation and disagreement has had knock-on effects to agree policy. Moreover, PLATO uses nine further cases to test how far the Union’s crisis responses meet standards of democratic legitimacy. These cover parliamentary representation (ESR7); anti-corruption (ESR8); non-domination (ESR9); political trust (ESR10); identities (ESR11); civil society (ESR12); acceptance of political competition (ESR13); contestation in the public sphere (ESR14) and elections (ESR15).

Financing: European Union; 512,000 Euro (share of IHS Vienna); January 2017 to December 2020; jointly with Johannes Pollak and Katrin Auel.

Ad 3) Lost in Space? The Emptiness of the Political Center

Abstract

Recent elections to national parliaments and, perhaps even more so, to the European Parliament, have demonstrated that voters tend to systematically favour parties which are “more extreme” than their personal ideological or programmatic preferences. This project accounts for centrifugal tendencies in EP elections by a two-step model:

We first review spatial models of vote choice and specifically stress those specifications which account for the success of non-centrist political parties. Within the narrower family of spatial voting models, voters may care to select parties which agree with their ideological or programmatic ideal points (“proximity voting”). Given the constraints elected officials face to deliver their advertised policy goals, voters may factor in checks, balances, political compromise and an abundance of veto players and overshoot the mark to get their desired policies enacted (“discounting” or “compensational voting”). Ultimately, when issues are perceived as binary choices and evaluated through the lense of highly symbolic politics, voters may cease to care about preferred positions on a policy continuum, but instead aim to push for change into their desired direction (“directional voting”). These alternative specifications refer to much more than highly specialized controversies in a tiny subfield of electoral research, but come with substantive implications: the classical proximity voting perspective usually tends to imply the victory of centrist parties, compensational and directional voting predict the strong performance less-centrist actors (cf. Merrill and Grofman, 1999).

We also consider the effects of non-spatial utilities and their consequences for centrifugal party competition. First, Adams et al. (2005) have demonstrated that the inclusion of party identification may drive parties out of the political center. When party identification impacts on vote choice, party elites have incentives to compete on spatial grounds for voters who are biased to them for non-spatial reasons. Whenever spatial utilities and correlate with policy- or ideological beliefs, centrifugal party competition may drive party platforms to the more distant sectors of the political space. Secondly, centrifugal party competition may be fueled by turnout decisions and the “threat of abstention”. If voters refrain from voting due to alienation from the policy platforms, candidates or parties are motivated to appeal to their own, non-centrist electoral constituencies. Thirdly, electoral systems provide incentives for political parties to adopt more extreme positions within the political space.

In the subsequent step, we posit political parties strategically “factor in” expected dynamics of electoral behaviour. Because parties cannot (easily) influence non-spatial determinants of vote choice such as party identification or evaluations of the economy, we assume their core strategy in electoral campaigns is to strategically adapt to expected voting behaviour in order to maximize their vote share. Merrill and Adams (2001) have cogently demonstrated that there the provision of unique Nash equilibria is guaranteed in one-dimensional *probabilistic* voting models. We apply iterative algorithms which compute optimal policy positions in one or two-dimensional political space, compare equilibrium with “real” party positions and test the various spatial and non-spatial hypotheses which account for extreme party positions in a systematic empirical framework.

Our empirical analysis of relies on a two broad comparative datasets. We consider the rich “Comparative Study of Electoral Systems” (CSES) survey series so as to explore spatial competition in national elections, and we rely on the “European Election Studies” to explore even more centrifugal patterns of party competition in elections to the European Parliament. These rich datasets are in turn merged with additional aggregate data sources at the party and the election levels.

Financing: Fritz Thyssen Foundation; initially 93,000 Euro; July 2017 to June 2019; an extension for a third year, from July 2019 until June 2020 has been funded with an additional sum of 38,000 Euro.

Ad 4) Who Gets What, When, and How? Budgetpolitik in der Europäischen Union

This project is concerned with budgetary policy-making and is based upon integrated, interdisciplinary work by both

Abstract

“Who gets what, when and how?” (Harold Lasswell, 1936) has always been a key question of policy making, and European Union (EU) politics is certainly not (and has never been) an exemption. Budgetary negotiations have pitted member states against each other and facilitated coalitions of rich vs poor, Northern vs Southern, Eastern vs Western countries. The making of European budgets is also closely

linked to the political programmes of the EU; it therefore sets supporters of leaner and larger budgets against each other and also affects the allocation of scarce budget means to policy fields favoured by the “left” or by the “right”. In short, budgets may act as a proxy and even define what the EU is, what European Union politics can do, and what European integration is all about.

Naturally, the current negotiations on the 2019 annual budget and the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021 to 2027 are high on the to-do-list of the current Austrian Council presidency. This is partly due to the specific policy goals lined out in the agreement of the sitting coalition, which clearly subscribes to the goals of a leaner EU budget and the more efficient allocation of budgetary resources. These substantive plans of a potential agenda-setter coincide with additional pressure on the European Union’s budgetary politics. On the one hand, the EU faces urgent new policy priorities in need of funding, especially in the areas of migration, internal and external security or the provision of means to address potential market failure or asymmetric financial shocks. On the other hand, the future loss of the British contributions will tear a large hole in the budget that will have to be covered either by increased contributions from the remaining member states, by cuts to the budget or by a combination of both.

Against this background, our planned research project aims to shed new light on the budgetary preferences of key actors in the Council and the EP. Research on the question of “Who gets what, when and how?” in budgetary issues of the EU is generally rare. Moreover, current research often neglects the important role of the MFF in structuring and limiting the yearly budgets as well as the EPs proposal and veto possibilities. We will investigate the influence of these factors and explore the contextual determinants which structure the preferences of national representatives in the Council and of legislators in the EP. Additionally, our project seeks to identify which institutions, which national governments and which parliamentary groups were forced to compromise and which prevailed in the budget negotiations. Finally, we will link actor preferences with substantive outcomes concerning the size of the overall budget and the allocation of specific budgetary means and portfolios.

Financing: “Jubiläumsfonds” of the Austrian National Bank; 124,054 Euro; October 2019 to September 2022; jointly with Katrin Auel.

Ad 5) The Benefits of Uncertainty? Party Ambiguity and Voter Uncertainty in Elections to National Parliaments and the EP

Abstract

The spatial theory of voting is the workhorse of electoral studies. Since its codification by Anthony Downs, it is criticized for relying on a number of dubious or outright unrealistic assumptions, and model predictions have regularly been found at odds with the empirics of recent elections.

This project evaluates the political consequences of limited information: Parties may strategically opt to present vague and unclear policy platforms thereby limiting and reducing political information available to the electorate (party ambiguity). Voters may be confused by ambiguous and contradictory campaign signals, may not be inclined to invest into acquiring political information, and sometimes lack the proficiency to meaningfully evaluate the limited and biased information made available (voter uncertainty).

Empirical research on the electoral fallout of party ambiguity and voter uncertainty has often been ambiguous and uncertain itself. The project proceeds in five inter-related steps:

1. Our first task is to discriminate among party ambiguity and voter uncertainty. We propose a theoretical model which illustrates how party ambiguity may be translated into voter uncertainty and argue that the effects of ambiguous party positions need to be mediated by perceptions of voter uncertainty so as to impact electoral choice.

2. Within the expected utility framework, voter reactions to ambiguity and uncertainty are moderated by attitudes towards risk. We demonstrate that large parts of modern electorates are rather risk-neutral than risk-averse so that the mechanical assignment of strictly concave utility profiles cannot be justified.
3. We thus hypothesize that party ambiguity and voter uncertainty will not per se diminish the electoral options of a political party. Instead, we argue that voter uncertainty is likely to reduce the salience of spatial vis-à-vis non-spatial components of voter utility thereby providing party strategists with additional strategic options by laying out blurred campaign messages.
4. Electoral research is often hampered endogeneity concerns. We review and test our hypotheses with a large observational database derived from recent election studies from the “European Election Studies” and “The Comparative Study of Electoral System”. This comparative, multilevel design allows us to explore the scope of our theoretical arguments, to model statistical complexity, and to better guard against confounding variables.
5. Ultimately, we resort to design-based approaches to guard against endogeneity concerns. Building on previous survey experiments which were confined to the effects of party ambiguity and choice under risk, we extend the conceptual framework and explicitly address choice under uncertainty. We also broaden the scope and apply our experiments to multidimensional policy spaces and multiparty competition.

Financing: Austrian Science Funds FWF; RR planned for 04/2020; requested support will be about 358,000 Euro.

Ad 6) The Political Geography of Austrian Elections

Abstract

Jüngere Präsidenten- und Parlamentswahlen, nicht nur in Österreich, haben ein stabiles Muster aufgezeigt: Linke und liberale Parteien gewinnen in den urbanen Zentren, konservative und rechtsradikale Parteien dominieren den ländlichen Raum. Diese neue und erneuerte territoriale Konfliktlinie bringt klassische Wahlstudien an die Grenze ihrer Leistungsfähigkeit. Befragte in klassischen Projekten der Wahlforschung werden noch immer als ein nationales Sample nach Zufalls- oder Quotaverfahren ausgewählt, und auch bei der Datenanalyse wird ihre Lage innerhalb einer Stadt oder auf dem Land nicht oder mindestens nicht systematisch berücksichtigt.

Wahlgeografisch angelegte Aggregatdatenanalysen sind deshalb weit mehr als nur eine zweitbeste Alternative, wenn Mikrodaten bei historischen oder gegenwärtigen Wahlen per se nicht verfügbar sind oder aus anderen, praktischen Gründen nicht zeitnah erhoben werden konnten. Räumliche Modelle sind besonders geeignet, um die Wirkungen territorial heterogen verteilter soziodemografischer Merkmale zu erfassen und den Gegensatz städtischer und ländlicher Elektorate aufzugreifen und zu modellieren. Die quantitative Sozialforschung hat zu diesem Zweck in den letzten Jahren eine Vielzahl von (statistischen) Instrumenten entwickelt, die die Problematik eines “ökologischen Fehlschlusses” mindestens mindern (King, 1997; King et al., 2004). Mit Verfahren wie “multilevel regression and poststratification” (MRP) liegen geeignete Werkzeuge vor, um Einstellungs- und Präferenzdaten auch auf kleinräumliche politische Einheiten, etwa auf Wahlkreise oder Gemeinden, herunterzubrechen (Park et al., 2004; Ghitza and Gelman, 2013; Selb and Munzert, 2011; Toshkov, 2015). Darüber hinaus eröffnen Weiterentwicklungen geografischer Informationssysteme die Möglichkeit, deskriptive Befunde geografisch aufzubereiten und mit räumlichen Regressionsmodellen angemessen umzugehen (Bivand et al., 2013; Ward and John, 2008).

Auf dieser theoretischen und methodischen Grundlage analysiert das beantragte Projekt vier eng miteinander verbundene Perspektiven auf die österreichische Bundespräsidentenwahl von 2016:

1. **Räumliche Heterogenität von sozioökonomischen Strukturdaten, politischen Präferenzen und politischem Verhalten:** Das Projekt gründet auf der Analyse hierarchisch geordneter Aggre-

gatdaten. Für die beiden Runden der Bundespräsidentenwahlen 2016, und für einige vorausgegangene Wahlen, sind aggregierte Wahldaten auf der Sprengel-, der Gemeinde-, der Bezirks- und der Länderebene verfügbar. Detaillierte sozioökonomische Rahmendaten sind von der Gemeindeebene aufwärts verfügbar, und moderne statistische Verfahren wie “multilevel regression and poststratification” (MRP) können somit auch politische Einstellungen und Präferenzen bis auf diese Ebene herunter brechen. Die wahlgeografische Analyse orientiert sich besonders am Konflikt von Stadt und Land. Wir berücksichtigen Daten auf der Sprengel- und Gemeindeebene für das gesamte österreichische Wahlgebiet und Daten auf der Sprengel- und Bezirksebene für die Gemeinde Wien.

2. **Lokale und räumliche Determinanten des Wahlverhaltens:** Im Anschluss an die Bestimmung und Beschreibung wesentlicher Variablen auf den disaggregierten Ebenen von Gemeinde, Bezirk und Bundesland verwenden wir räumliche Regressionsmodelle zur Analyse der politischen und sozioökonomischen Determinanten des Wahlverhaltens. Diese Verfahren prüfen statistisch valide Effekte von sozioökonomischen, kulturellen und politischen Kontextvariablen auf die Stärke der jeweiligen Parteien und Kandidaten. Zudem ermöglichen diese eine genauere Perspektive auf territoriale und kausale Heterogenität, die mit einem nationalen Zufallssample an Mikrodaten nicht erreicht wird.
3. **Wählerströme und strategisches Wählen:** Dieser Aspekt greift die Konstanz oder Veränderlichkeit des politischen Verhaltens zwischen (den letzten) Urnengängen der beiden Runden der Bundespräsidentenwahl 2016 als auch vorausgegangener Wahlen auf. Wählermobilität wird hier als in einem mehrstufigen Prozess analysiert: (1) Veränderungen der Wahlentscheidung von der vorigen Wahl zur ersten Runde und (2) Verschiebungen von der ersten zur zweiten Runde der Bundespräsidentenwahlen.
4. **Wahlforensik als Maßstab demokratischer Qualität:** In den vergangenen Jahren ist das Feld der Wahlforensik im Kontext der Debatten um die Integrität und Qualität demokratischer Wahlen begründet worden (Lehoucq, 2003; Norris et al., 2014; Norris, 2014; Alvarez et al., 2009, 2012). Statistische Analysen möglichst weit disaggregierter Wahldaten, im österreichischen Fall etwa auf der Sprengel-, Gemeinde-, Bezirks- und Länderebene, ermöglichen eine systematische Prüfung der Plausibilität offizieller Wahlstatistiken. Sicher kann festgehalten werden, dass, mindestens nach der Aufhebung des zweiten Wahlgangs der Bundespräsidentenwahl, wahlforensische Analysen und Befunde verstärkt nachgefragt werden.

Financing: Austrian Science Funds FWF; submission planned for 04/2020; requested support will be about 109,000 Euro.

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