Summary

The course aims to teach the basics of party competition, shedding light on different theories and strategies (ranging from the spatial theory of voting, to theories on issue competition, valence politics, populism, negative campaigning, and so on). In addition, students will learn the main techniques (manual or automated) that allow to measure political outcomes, with a focus on estimating the positions of political actors. With respect to this, peculiar attention will be devoted to social media as a source of data.

Structure of the course (attending students only)

The course is divided into four parts: 1) a theoretical section, in which themes and papers (related to 3 sub-categories) will be presented (they will constitute the object of the midterm exam); 2) a break period leading to the midterm oral exam; 3) a hands-on section, to be done using the statistical software R (https://cran.r-project.org/); 4) a collective brainstorming session related to the research projects (that have to be developed for the final evaluation).

The lectures will take place on MS Teams (code to get access: x410zvi). Almost all of them (except one) will be done in synchronous mode.

The course has been thought to be highly intensive, in a “more effort = more learning” framework, with windows of opportunity for active participation (live and asynchronous). Students should follow and study day-by-day in order to get ready for the different steps of the evaluation (see below for further details). In light of this, students need to make a clear-cut choice around whether to take the exam as attending or non-attending students.
Enrollment

Due to the structure of the classes, students willing to take the exam as “attending students” must enroll to the course through the SIFA platform. Enrollment will be available from 12 to 19 April (included). This is crucial to schedule the oral exam and the brainstorming sessions (as well as to define the groups for the final research paper). Students that do not enroll in due time will be considered as non-attending students (no exceptions can be made).

Evaluation

The final mark will combine together four different types of evaluation, weighted as follows:
- 10% class attendance and active participation on the online Ariel forum
- 40% midterm oral exam
- 10% research design “brainstorming”
- 40% research note/paper (in group)

Forum

An online forum, available on ARIEL, has been created. The purpose of the Forum is twofold.

On the one hand, the Forum is a space in which students can elaborate on the contents of the lectures and on the readings, to make connections between different topics, to report their own ideas and to propose original and innovative viewpoints (about the themes of POLiMETRICS), also with an eye to real-world political events.

On the other hand, the Forum allows students to interact with each other and to provide mutual help. Students are encouraged to ask questions to their colleagues and anyone can answer.

The active online participation can be rewarded in the final evaluation.

Oral exam and readings

An oral exam is scheduled at the end of the theoretical section. Students will be divided in two slots (Monday & Tuesday). To allow time to study, a “break” has been scheduled before the exam (overall, there will be 2 weeks between the last lecture and the date of the exam).

The exam will be focused on the contents of all the required readings.

Following the classes day-by-day and reading the papers on time (well before the “break”) will be very helpful also to promptly define an idea for writing the research paper.
The “additional readings” are not compulsory, but they can be useful to get inspired in planning and writing the research paper (note that all these additional readings are compulsory for non-attending students). The “suggested readings” and the “companions” are not compulsory, but they can be useful to follow the “hands-on section” of the course.

Research note/Research paper

Students will be divided into small groups (approximately 3-5 students each, depending on the final class size) to write a brief analytical research paper (say, a research note: 2000-4000 words) using the methods learnt during the course, answering their own research question(s) by estimating the positions of political actors.

The first sketch of the research project has to be presented at the end of the course (see the next section for details). The final deadline for sending the whole paper is set on Tuesday 20/7, 23.59 (approximately one month after the end of the classes). The final paper must be sent to my email address (andrea.ceron@unimi.it) together with the dataset and the replication code. To register their final mark, students must enroll to the exam scheduled on Tuesday 20/7. Notice that the score of the research paper will be the same for each group member, unless the members agree on (and release) a different evaluation of their individual contributions.

Research design brainstorming

A) The last two days will be devoted to host a “Research design brainstorming” (in two sessions). Each group will present, to the whole class, a draft of its intended project in a slide-show format. This draft should outline the research design, present the general idea and the research question(s), as well as the data (specifying where/how to get access to them) and the method(s) that the group is planning to use. The presentation should last approximately 20’ though the exact length will depend on the number of groups.

The slides and the presentation are not subjected to evaluation (no mark!).

B) All the other students, jointly with the professor, are required to give suggestions on how to improve the research design, request clarifications, discuss about other potential directions of the project and about further details that the project must consider.

This live participation, in a brainstorming mode, is subjected to evaluation!

C) Through these brainstorming sessions, students will learn how to define, present and defend a research project and how to reflect on, and deal with, criticism; they will also learn how to review and critically comment on someone else’s research; finally, they will experience that (political) science is a collective effort (check back your notes from the 1st year Political Science course). Taking into account the comments received by the audience, in the final research paper, is not mandatory. However, carefully pondering them and implementing those that seem more promising for improving the project might lead to bonus points for the group.
Course Schedule

1) Theoretical section

1A) Positions

Day 1: Course presentation & introduction

Monday 12/4, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:

Syllabus


Additional readings:


Day 2: Expert surveys

Tuesday 13/4, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


**Supplementary materials:**

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5975c9bfdb29d6a05c65209b/t/5fa04ec05d3c8218b7c91450/160434140585/2019_CHES_codebook.pdf

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5975c9bfdb29d6a05c65209b/t/5ed3029fe080e33f639e6e9a/1590887075513/CHES_UK_Qualtrics.pdf

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5975c9bfdb29d6a05c65209b/t/603fbb4ee4774edd046a0/1614789457024/1999-2019_CHES_codebook.pdf

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**Day 3: Comparative manifesto project**

Monday 19/4, 13:30-15:30

**Required readings:**


**Supplementary materials:**


**Additional readings:**


Day 4: Scaling methods (Wordfish & Wordscores)

Tuesday 20/4, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


Additional readings:


Day 5: Ambiguity vs Clarity

Monday 26/4, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


Additional readings:

1B) Issues

Day 6: Issue competition & issue ownership

Tuesday 27/4, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


Additional readings:


Day 7: Broad appeal strategy

Monday 3/5, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


Day 8: Niche parties & Nicheness

Tuesday 4/5, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


Additional readings:

**Day 9: Topic models**

Monday 10/5, 13.30-15.30

**Required readings:**


**Additional readings:**


1C) Other features

[valence, negativity, populism, unity, …]

**Day 10: Other rhetorical strategies**

Tuesday 11/5, 13.30-15.30

**Required readings:**


Additional readings:


Day 11: Intra-party politics

Monday 17/5, 13.30-15.30

Required readings:


2) Road to evaluation (I)

Day 12(A): How to write a research paper + hints for your research note

Tuesday 18/5, *ASYNCHRONOUS*

Day 12(B): Data collection: Manifesto, CHES, political texts

Tuesday 18/5, *ASYNCHRONOUS*

Break (I): No classes

Monday 24/5

Break (II): No classes

Tuesday 25/5
Day 13: Oral exam (I)
Monday 31/5, 13.30-15.30

Day 14: Oral exam (II)
Tuesday 1/6, 13.30-15.30

3) Hands-on section

Suggested readings:


Companions:


Day 15: Introduction to Text Analysis
Monday 7/6, 13.30-15.30

Day 16: Scaling methods
Tuesday 8/6, 13.30-15.30

Day 17: Topic models
Monday 14/6, 13.30-15.30
Day 18: Dictionaries & Sentiment analysis
Tuesday 15/6, 13.30-15.30

4) Road to evaluation (II)

Day 19: Research design brainstorming (I)
Monday 21/6, 13.30-15.30

Day 20: Research design brainstorming (II)
Tuesday 22/6, 13.30-15.30

Mandatory deadline for sending the final research paper, dataset and replication code
Tuesday 20/7, 23.59

Remember:
To register their final mark, students must enroll to the exam scheduled on Tuesday 20/7.

Next scheduled exams (so far)
Wednesday 30/6, 13.30, oral from remote (non-attending students only!)
Tuesday 20/7, 9.30, oral from remote (non-attending students only!)
   - attending students have to register but don’t need to show up
Tuesday 14/9, 8.30, oral from remote (non-attending students only!)
Additional dates TBD