UCL SUMMER SCHOOL

Political Psychology

Key Information

Module code: ISSU0080
Taught during: Session Two: Monday 22 July – Friday 9 August 2019
Module workload: 45 teaching hours plus approximately 100 study hours
Module leaders: Dr Lee de-Wit
Department: Division of Psychology and Language Sciences
Credit: 15 UCL credits, 7.5 ECTS, 4 US Level
Level: Level 2, second year undergraduate
Pre-requisites: Experience with quantitative research methods (in the form of a first year module in statistical research methods)
Assessment: Multiple-choice examination (50%), Laboratory report (50%)

Module Overview

This module on political psychology will introduce students to the empirical study of political decision making through the lens of psychology and neuroscience. It will explore some of the key individual differences (in personality, moral values and cognitive biases, etc.) that are associated with different political views, and explore some of the key psychological mechanisms (cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias, cognitive heuristics etc.) that influence how we vote. The module will also explore the broader cognitive neuroscience of political decision making, including differences in genetics, brain structure and brain activity associated with different patterns of voting. The module will focus on quantitative research, and develop hands on skills in analysing data using open source software.

Week One
- Individual differences and voting preferences
- Perceptual biases in political decision making
- Analysing data in political psychology using R Studio

Week Two
- Cognitive biases and political decision making
- Psychological mechanisms and the influence of the media
- Collecting and analysing data in political psychology

Week Three
- The psychology of voter turnout
- Neuroscience and political decision making
- Genetics and political preferences

Please note that this module description is indicative and may be subject to change.
Module Aims
This module aims to provide an insight into how human psychology can shape political decision making. More specifically, it aims to explore how individual differences (in personality, beliefs, moral values, genetics, brain structure and activity), can help us to understand political differences. It also aims to provide an insight into some of the key cognitive (confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, etc.) and perceptual (voice preferences, first impressions of faces) biases that play a role in political decision making. The module aims to not only demonstrate how quantitative empirical research methods can be brought to bear on these topics, but to also give hands on training in the collection and analysis of quantitative research data.

Teaching Methods
The classes will consist of lectures and interactive discussions. Background reading will be required prior to some teaching sessions. Statistical research methods will be taught in a hands-on computer lab, during which students will learn to reanalyse data from existing political psychology databases. Students will also run a novel experiment or survey as part of the course. Students will either write up the results of the novel experiment, or perform a novel reanalysis of an existing data set, for their lab report. Further material, including key readings, discussion forums and online quizzes will be available on UCL’s virtual learning environment Moodle.

Learning Outcomes
Upon successful completion of this module, students will:

- Understand the range of individual differences that predict political preferences
- Understand some of the psychological mechanisms that influence political decision making
- Understand how genetics and neuroscience can contribute to our understanding of political decision making
- Have developed a conceptual understanding for empirical methods in studying political decision making
- Have developed hands on statistical analysis skills using R Studio

Assessment Methods
- Multiple-choice examination (50%)
- Laboratory report (50%)

Key Texts


De-Wit, L. (2017). What’s your bias the surprising science of why we vote the way we do. Elliot and Thompson.


**Module Leaders**
Lee de-Wit teaches neuroscience and political psychology at UCL. He has a background in experimental psychology and neuroscience. He studied at the University of Bristol, and Durham University, and has worked at the University of Leuven, the University of Cambridge and University of Oxford. His current research focuses on individual differences in beliefs and cognitive biases underpinning differences in attitudes towards immigration and capitalism.