

Abstracts: 2nd IAST-Sciences Po Paris conference on political economy and political science

Michael Becher, IAST/ UT1

Title: Accountability Beyond Outcomes: Experimental Evidence on Voters and Executive Performance

Abstract. According to much of political science, government leaders have reasons to fear that they will be held accountable by voters for the policy outcomes they produce. In contrast to the dominant outcome-based perspective, we argue that leaders may also be held accountable for how those outcomes are achieved. Executives in many democracies have constitutional powers to circumvent the majoritarian legislative process to make policy despite political opposition, though they can be reluctant to use them. How ordinary people assess the legislative performance of the executive is crucial for political incentives and democratic governance. We empirically assess the importance of democratic process for accountability in a series of three unusually large conjoint-survey experiments conducted in France, whose constitution provides an ideal setting to explore this topic. We find that leadership evaluations reflect trade-offs between competing considerations. Process matters beyond policy, party or the economy, and our evidence is consistent with intrinsic preferences for majoritarian decision-making.

Martial Foucault, Sciences Po

Title: The rise of populism and the collapse of the left-right paradigm: Lessons from the 2017 French presidential election

Abstract: In this paper, we use a large, unique, and rich dataset collected by Cevipof at Sciences Po to examine voter choices in the first round of the 2017 presidential election in France. Existing analysis of populist movements have been limited in analysis due to nature of dataset. We can track the objective situation of the voters, especially education and income (we demonstrate that status such as blue collar or manager play a much less important role). We also have information on subjective well being (life satisfaction in the present and in the future) and measures of the ideology of the electorate (attitudes towards immigrant, homosexuality and the fairness of the system at large). The key question is then the following: what explains that Le Pen voters, among the poorest in the electorate, stand against distribution, siding with Fillon? Why do they oppose Mélenchon with whom they share about the same average level of income? This is the critical question sometimes referred as “why do poor people vote for the right?”. We argue that another dimension must be taken into account, something that we characterize as a sense of universal values that Macron and Mélenchon voters share and that Le Pen and Fillon voters do not have. We argue that neither education nor income are sufficient to explain it (otherwise either Mélenchon and Le Pen or Mélenchon and Fillon would share them), but the relative degree of education with respect to a reference group.

Carlo Horz, IAST**Title:** Electoral Manipulation in Polarized Societies

Abstract: To what extent do polarized interests threaten democracy? I re-examine this question with a model of electoral manipulation in which an incumbent party can change the electoral playing field. I focus on the following strategic trade-off for the incumbent party: as electoral manipulation becomes more severe, and therefore the opposition party's prospects of gaining office dwindle, the opposition party will seek other means to gain office and shape policy. For example, it might exert effort to overthrow the regime. I find that polarization has an ambiguous effect on optimal electoral manipulation, and sometimes the effect is inversely U-shaped. This implies that electoral manipulation is most severe—and democracy most threatened—at intermediate levels of polarization. I also apply a version of the model to the important measure of a party ban, finding the same non-monotone effect.

Romain Lachat, Sciences Po**Title:** Strategic voting under seat-maximizing and policy-maximizing incentives

Abstract: This paper analyses the impact of seat-maximizing and policy-maximizing incentives on strategic voting. Citizens may be incited to defect from their preferred party when its chances of winning a seat in their electoral district are low. Also, following the literature on coalition-directed voting, they may prefer supporting a more extreme party, which could bring the expected government position closer to their preferred location. This article develops a voting choice model that combines both types of incentives. It improves on the existing literature in three ways: by showing that the effects of policy-maximizing incentives are conditional on party viability; by taking into account voters' expectations about the electoral results; and by considering more precise scenarios about the expected changes in the government composition. The analysis of the 2011 Swiss elections show that both district-level and national-level incentives exert a substantial impact on voters' choices.

Patrick Le Bihan, Sciences Po**Title:** False Statements as Fake News

Abstract: When do incumbents choose to release false statements—i.e. statements that are readily shown to be false—knowing that their statement may be readily checked? What features of the political and policy environments make it more or less likely that such false statements turn into “fake news” disseminated by the media? When are they effective in improving the incumbent's political fortunes? We study the political economy of false statement dissemination in the electoral context with a competitive media market. We show that “fake news” dissemination initiated by the incumbent is more readily supported as equilibrium behavior in a more polarized environment, in particular when the media outlets are more ideologically motivated and serving a larger share of voters who are loyal readers rather than readers who choose which media outlet to consume on a story-by-story basis. In any equilibrium with “fake news,” there is a complicit media outlet that publishes the incumbent's statement without debunking it. Incumbents benefit from making verifiably false statements to cushion the possibility of downward update by their partisans in the face of potentially bad news.

Irene Menendez, IAST

Title: Explaining support for non-contributory social protection: evidence from a survey experiment in Argentina.

Abstract: Standard arguments in comparative political economy predict that protected labour market insiders oppose redistribution to poorer labour market outsiders, often working in the informal sector. Opposition from insiders may thus prevent the expansion of non-contributory social policies that mitigate poverty in developing countries around the world. In contrast, this paper develops and tests the argument that not all formal (insider) workers uniformly oppose redistribution. Drawing on theories of social insurance, I argue that risk concerns become more salient than redistributive ones among economically vulnerable insiders. As a result, insiders exposed to high levels of economic insecurity support increased redistribution to outsiders. I examine the empirical implications using a survey experiment for a nationally representative sample of 800 respondents in Argentina, a country with strict employment protection, high informality and weak social insurance. The findings show that low-skilled insiders primed about the risk of job loss more strongly support redistribution to outsiders. These results provide microfoundations that help explain the growth of non-contributory social policies in the developing world over the last two decades.

Lucas Novaes, IAST

Title: Voting for the Police: Law Enforcement, Politics, and Urban Violence

Abstract: Candidates in the developing world often say that they will bring down crime and violence, but what do these law and order candidates achieve after taking office? I argue that even if their law and order policies curb criminal activity, either because the police forces of these countries are ineffective and abusive, or because crackdowns can disrupt the equilibrium among rival criminal gangs, murders may increase. However, it is unlikely that the loss of human lives will cause any political backlash because they fall mostly on politically marginalized young men. This paper first characterizes law and order candidates, and then examines the effects of their election on public security spending, crime, and homicides. Implementing an electoral regression discontinuity design in Brazil that compares municipalities with a winning law and order council candidate versus others where that type of candidate ran for but ultimately lost, this paper shows where they win spending in public security rises. This extra spending indicates actions against crime, which turn out to be modestly effective. At the same time, however, homicides surge among poor, non-white men.

Daniel Rubenson, Sciences Po

Title: For club or country: Using football data to test theories of group identity

Abstract: In a half million person experiment, we show that a very light prime of national identity changes voting behavior. We do this in the context of the Player of the Season (POS) vote in the football app Forza Football. We randomly assigned users to one of three in app ballot conditions: 1) users saw the name and photo of the ten candidates; 2) they saw name, photo and the professional club of candidates; 3) users were exposed to candidate names, photos and the players' nationality. When individuals are reminded they share nationality with a player they are .6 percentage points more likely to vote for the candidate ($p=.00$) than in the baseline condition. We also estimate heterogeneous effects of both the club and nationality primes along strength of identification with one's club and nation and find a larger treatment effect of the nation prime among those who identify more strongly with their nation. The design and analysis plan were preregistered with the EGAP registry.