

Tutorials in Social and Political Sciences

Syllabus

Last revised: 2nd September 2022

Course coordinator: Aron Szekely

Instructors: Aron Szekely, Camilla Borgna, Davide Morisi, Krzysztof Krakowski, Tiziana Nazio, Giuliano Bobba, Giovanna Invernizzi

Location and time: Every **Thursday from 17:30-19:30 (23rd September to 16th December)** in the **Boardroom** at the Collegio Carlo Alberto.

Tutorials in Social and Political Sciences (SPS) combine theory and empirical evidence to examine select core mechanisms in the social and political sciences and their application to substantive issues. From a theoretical perspective, we take a social mechanisms approach and from an empirical perspective we focus on results that prioritise causal inference and have robust, or replicable, results.

The course is 30 hours long and is divided into 12 two-hour tutorial sessions coupled with a workshop afterwards (see below). Students are expected to read the required materials before the tutorial and to be ready to discuss them in-class with the other students and the instructor. Supplementary readings are also provided that students can read if they wish to do so. The instructors will vary throughout the tutorial such that each instructor discusses topics that they are particularly knowledgeable about with the students. Tutorials will be held once every week.

Each week we have highlighted puzzles that are relevant to the tutorial. *Students must submit a short essay every week* (maximum 800 words) by *12 noon Wednesday before class* that discusses one of the puzzles. Submit your essay via email to Federica Gai (federica.gai@carloalberto.org). Once submitted, students will have access to each other's essays through the SPS Allievi folder and are expected to have read these essays before attending the tutorial. Students can also choose to introduce a puzzle that the readings have made them think about and address that in their essays. Students should draw on the readings in their essays. They can also highlight additional questions or points that they wish to discuss during class in their essays. We will then discuss the literature, essays, and puzzles together during the tutorial.

At the end of the tutorial sessions (in June), there will be a puzzle workshop day. Students will work on puzzles of their own before coming to the workshop and submit a draft document beforehand. They will then present these to the class as well as to the instructors of the SPS Tutorials. They will receive feedback on their puzzles and approaches to answering them and resubmit a final document that integrates the feedback. Students are encouraged to use the Tutorials in SPS to start thinking about and discussing their dissertations.

Students are assessed on a combination of their weekly essays (50%) and on their final puzzle workshop document (50%). The core resource for the tutorials is *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Elster, 2007). We will return to this source throughout the course.

1. Rationality and a core challenge

23rd September, *Davide Morisi*

The rational choice model explains action as the combined outcome of constraints, preferences, and beliefs. Constraints define the set of opportunities for actions, preferences motivate agents' aims, and

beliefs concern how a given action is thought by agents to achieve their aims. Action is rational if it best satisfies agents' aims at the lowest cost. Preferences are not explained by the theory but taken as given. Self-interested aims are often seen as a necessary part of the theory, even though it is independent of preferences and rationality tests can be applied to prosocial aims too. In order to provide a rock-bottom explanation of behaviour rational choice models should rely both on independently formed preferences and objectively warranted beliefs. However, mechanisms such as emotions or the pressure to reduce cognitive dissonance can bias preferences (e.g. "sour grapes"), beliefs (e.g. "wishful thinking") or action itself (e.g. impulsiveness). The model may be imperfect or unrealistic but essential as a benchmark.

Puzzles: Can we explain the sharp reduction of crime western countries experienced in the last quarter century by the rational choice model? Can the actions of suicide attackers be explained by the rational choice model? Can the anti-vaccination movement be explained using rationality?

Required readings

- Introduction in Becker, Gary S. 1976. *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*. University of Chicago Press.
- Chapters 2 (Desires and Opportunities), 3 (Rational Choice), 4 (When Rationality Fails), 6 (Selfishness and Altruism), and 7 (Emotions) in Elster, Jon. 1999 edition. *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapter 1 in Gambetta, Diego. 1987. *Were They Pushed or Did They Jump? Individual Decision Mechanisms in Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in Hedström, Peter, and Peter Bearman, eds. 2009. *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Supplementary readings

- Aronson, Elliot, and Carol Tavis. 2020. "The Role of Cognitive Dissonance in the Pandemic." *The Atlantic*. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/role-cognitive-dissonance-pandemic/614074/>).
- Chapter 4 in Becker, Gary S. 1976. *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*. University of Chicago Press
- McRaney, David. 2012. *You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook, Why Your Memory Is Mostly Fiction, and 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself*. Gotham Books.
- Evans, Jules. 2020. "Nazi Hippies: When the New Age and Far Right Overlap." *Medium*. (<https://gen.medium.com/nazi-hippies-when-the-new-age-and-far-right-overlap-d1a6ddcd7be4>).

2. Limits of rationality: framing, heuristics and biases

30th September, Davide Morisi

Many real-world decisions deviate from the prescriptions of rational choice models. A reason for these deviations is the presence of cognitive biases in decision-making. For example, long-standing research across psychology, economics, and political science has shown that the way a decision task is *framed*—how it is presented and interpreted—influences our choices. These choices can be as varied as selecting a public policy, opting for a financial plan, or voting for a political candidate. Another potential source of bias in decision-making arises from the use of *heuristic strategies* (i.e., shortcuts). Although these strategies might help us simplify complex tasks, they can also lead us astray from optimal decisions.

By the end of the class you should be able to define what heuristic strategies are and how they can apply to different domains of decision-making, including voting for political candidates. You should

also have a broad overview of framing theory, and be able to understand how framing effects and heuristic strategies challenge rational-choice models.

Puzzles:

- Can framing effects contribute to explaining the shift in public opinion about climate change?
- Why do people tend to vote more frequently for the No option than the Yes option in referendums?
- In the assigned article, Lau and Redlawsk list five common political heuristics. Can voting for a candidate based on some (or all) these heuristics be considered a rational choice? Are there other heuristics that a voter can use?

Required readings

- Chapter 1 (only pages from 3 to 15) in Gigerenzer, Gerd, Peter M. Todd, and ABC Research Group. 2000. *Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kahneman, Daniel, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard H. Thaler. 1991. “Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5(1): 193–206.
- Lau, Richard R., and David P. Redlawsk. 2001. “Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45(4):951–71.
- Leeper, Thomas, and Rune Slothuus. 2020. “How the News Media Persuades: Framing Effects and Beyond.” Pp. 150–68 in *Oxford Handbook of Electoral Persuasion*, edited by E. Suhay, B. Grofman, and A. H. Trechsel. Oxford University Press.
- Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. 1981. “The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice.” *Science* 211: 453–58.

Supplementary readings

- Druckman, James N. 2001. “The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence.” *Political Behavior* 23(3):225–56.
- Chapter 1 (pages 3-20) in Kahneman, Daniel, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky. 1982. *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chapter 6 “Heuristics” in Kriesi, Hanspeter. 2005. *Direct Democratic Choice: The Swiss Experience*. Lexington Books.
- Quattrone, George A., and Amos Tversky. 1988. “Contrasting Rational and Psychological Analyses of Political Choice.” *American Political Science Review* 82(3):719–36.

3. Strategic interaction and game theory

7th October, Giovanna Invernizzi

Strategic settings, situations in which one agents’ actions shape the outcomes of others and *vice versa*, are fundamental to social behaviour. How can we study these settings formally? Developed in the 1950s, game theory is a mathematical approach to studying strategic situations. It predicts how agents should behave, given specific assumptions, and helps us to understand why they take certain actions. More generally, game theory consists of two different enterprises: games as a taxonomy of social interaction and a theory for predicting actions. Games are also used in empirical research to measure and define concepts such as cooperation, trust, and altruism, and to identify deviations from the basic *Homo Economicus*.

By the end of the tutorial, you should be able to define a game, understand the basic concepts of game theory including strategy, equilibrium, dominance, payoffs, and normal and extensive form games. You will also learn about the core games used in the social sciences, understand how to use games

and game theory in empirical work, and to relate games and game theory to the topics in the later tutorials.

Puzzles: How can cooperation emerge in a world of egoists without a central authority? Can game theory help us understand human behaviour?

Required readings

- Introduction in Camerer, Colin. 2003. *Behavioral Game Theory: Experiments in Strategic Interaction*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Camerer, Colin, and Ernst Fehr. 2004. “Measuring Social Norms and Preferences Using Experimental Games: A Guide for Social Scientists.” in *Foundations of human sociality: Economic experiments and ethnographic evidence from fifteen small-scale societies*, edited by J. Henrich, E. Fehr, H. Gintis, R. Boyd, and S. Bowles. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chapters 19 and 20 in Elster, Jon. 2007. *Explaining Social Behaviour: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fehr, Ernst, and Simon Gächter. 2000. “Cooperation and Punishment in Public Goods Experiments.” *The American Economic Review* 90(4):980–94.
- Herrmann, Benedikt, Christian Thöni, and Simon Gächter. 2008. “Antisocial Punishment across Societies.” *Science* 319(5868):1362–67.

Supplementary readings

- Kaminski, Marek. 2003. “Games Prisoners Play: Allocation of Social Roles in a Total Institution.” *Rationality and Society* 15(2):188–217.
- Osborne, M. 2004. *An Introduction to Game Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rasmusen, Eric. 2007. *Games and Information: An Introduction to Game Theory*. 4th Edition. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

4. Signalling

14th October, Aron Szekely

How can communication occur when interests are at odds? Why doesn't the possibility of manipulating signals—lying, mimicking, forging, faking—destroy communication? The relevance of this question can hardly be overstated. It matters from the very micro of the living world to the very macro of collective entities, to the lives of cells as well as to the fate of warring nations. The theory of signals is our best answer to that question. It is a branch of game theory that emerged in the 1970s in economics and in biology and posits the conditions under which truth can be transmitted even when interests diverge. The answer has to do with the cost of signal manipulation relative to the benefit of succeeding at it versus failing. It involves at a minimum three players, the receiver (or dupe), the honest signaller, and the dishonest signaller. How can the dupe not be duped and distinguish the honest signaller from the dishonest one? How can the honest signaller act in such a way as enable the dupe to do so? This theory is relevant in many fields of human actions both cooperative and conflictual, all fields in which deception can potentially provide an advantage to an agent.

Puzzles: Can self-harm be an effective signal in conflict? Imagine you are a contractor working in a Southern Italian town; a stranger approaches you and informs you that you need ‘permission’ to work there. You say, “whom should I ask then?” and, instead of a name, the reply is “ask around”. Is that reply a signal, and if so of what? Why is a black job applicant who reveals a history of unemployment not penalised as much as a white job applicant? Why is giving an expensive engagement ring not equal to giving the sum that can buy it?

Required readings

- Gambetta, Diego. 2009. "Signaling." Pp. 169–94 in *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, edited by P. Hedström and P. Bearman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chapter 6 in Gambetta, Diego. 2009. *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chapter 1 in Searcy, William A., and Stephen Nowicki. 2005. *The Evolution of Animal Communication: Reliability and Deception in Signaling Systems*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Part 1 and 4 in Zahavi, Amotz, and Avishag Zahavi. 1997. *The Handicap Principle: The Missing Piece of Darwin's Puzzle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Supplementary readings

- Aksoy, Ozan, and Diego Gambetta. 2016. "Behind the Veil: The Strategic Use of Religious Garb." *European Sociological Review* 32(6):792–806.
- McAdams, Richard H. 2001. "Signaling Discount Rates: Law, Norms, and Economic Methodology." *The Yale Law Journal* 110:625–89.
- Pedulla, David S. 2018. "How Race and Unemployment Shape Labor Market Opportunities: Additive, Amplified, or Muted Effects?" *Social Forces* 96(4):1477–1506.
- Posner, Eric. 2002. *Law and Social Norms*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Szekely, Aron, and Diego Gambetta. 2020. "Does Information about Toughness Decrease Fighting? Experimental Evidence." *PLOS ONE* 15(2):e0228285.
- Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

5. Prosocial behaviours

21st October, Krzysztof Krakowski

During this tutorial, we will consider the problem of trust, trustworthiness, cooperation and collective action as examples of prosocial behaviours. We will address what prosocial behaviours are, how they are understood and measured. Among others, we will discuss some common collective action dilemmas and examine how they can be overcome. We will also look at the effect of diversity on trust and cooperation, trying to uncover mechanisms explaining promises and pitfalls of pro-sociality in diverse communities.

At the end of the class, participants are expected to possess tools to define and measure trust, trustworthiness, collective action and cooperation as well as to be able to identify it in everyday situations. Students are also expected to understand mechanisms and contextual factors promoting or hampering prosocial behaviours.

Puzzles: Why do people put their lives at risk to help strangers? Why do we trust others even when it is not in our material interests to do so? How can there be trust among criminals? Why do individuals of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds find it hard to cooperate?

Required readings

- Chapter 1, "The Problem of Cooperation" in Axelrod, Robert. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bigoni, Maria, Stefania Bortolotti, Marco Casari, Diego Gambetta, and Francesca Pancotto. 2016. "Amoral Familism, Social Capital, or Trust? The Behavioural Foundations of the Italian North–South Divide." *The Economic Journal* 126(594):1318–41.
- Chapter 21 "Trust" in Elster, Jon. 2007. *Explaining Social Behaviour: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. 2007. “Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?” *American Political Science Review* 101(4):709–25.
- Kollock, Peter. 1998. “Social Dilemmas: The Anatomy of Cooperation.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1):183–214.

Supplementary readings

- Bacharach, Michael, and Diego Gambetta. 2001. “Trust in Signs.” Pp. 148–84 in *Trust in society*, edited by K. S. Cook. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Charnysh, Volha. 2019. “Diversity, Institutions, and Economic Outcomes: Post-WWII Displacement in Poland.” *American Political Science Review* 113(2):423–41.
- Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 1996. “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation.” *The American Political Science Review* 90(4):715–35.
- Fehr, Ernst, and Bettina Rockenbach. 2003. “Detrimental Effects of Sanctions on Human Altruism.” *Nature* 422(6928):137–40.
- O’Neill, Onora. 2018. “Linking Trust to Trustworthiness.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 26(2):293–300.
- Rustagi, Devesh, Stefanie Engel, and Michael Kosfeld. 2010. “Conditional Cooperation and Costly Monitoring Explain Success in Forest Commons Management.” *Science* 330(6006):961–65.
- Schaub, Max. 2017. “Second-Order Ethnic Diversity: The Spatial Pattern of Diversity, Competition and Cooperation in Africa.” *Political Geography* 59:103–16.

6. Social norms

28th October, Aron Szekely

Social norms have been long used as a core explanation in the social sciences. Some authors give them a central role and argue that they are the “grammar” structuring societies. Others disagree and posit that social norms are vague or epiphenomenal. We explore this discussion, focusing on concrete cases in which different types of behaviours might be explained by underlying differences in social norms. By the end of the class you should be able to define a social norm, have an idea of how to work empirically with social norms, and understand their role in substantive cases.

Puzzles: Why do people leave tips even where they do not expect to return? Can abrupt events—such as the Covid-19 pandemic—generate new social norms? Why do people follow harmful norms such as binge drinking?

Required readings

- Preface and Chapter 1 in Bicchieri, Cristina. 2006. *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapter 22 “Social Norms” in Elster, Jon. 2007. *Explaining Social Behaviour: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gelfand, Michele J., Jana L. Raver, ..., and Susumu Yamaguchi. 2011. “Differences Between Tight and Loose Cultures: A 33-Nation Study.” *Science* 332(6033):1100–1104.
- Henrich, Joseph, Robert Boyd, ..., and David Tracer. 2005. “‘Economic Man’ in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28(6):795–815; discussion 815–855.
- Horne, Christine, F. Nii-Amoo Dodoo, and Naa Dodua Dodoo. 2013. “The Shadow of Indebtedness: Bridewealth and Norms Constraining Female Reproductive Autonomy.” *American Sociological Review* 78(3):503–20.

Supplementary readings

- Cialdini, R., Raymond R. Reno, and Carl A. Kallgren. 1990. "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: Recycling the Concept of Norms to Reduce Littering in Public Places." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58(6):1015–26.
- Introduction in Ellickson, Robert C. 1991. *Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Keizer, Kees, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg. 2008. "The Spreading of Disorder." *Science* 322(5908):1681–85.

7. Conflict

4th November, Krzysztof Krakowski

We will examine the origins of war and violence, and analyse how order can emerge out of conflict and anarchy. We will also study how conflict experiences may affect the evolution of human pro-social behaviours, focusing on the effects of violence on short- and long-term relations between groups. This and other factors will be discussed in terms of their role in preventing the recurrence of conflict.

At the end of the class, participants are expected to be able to engage in timely debates on social, political, and economic causes and consequences of intergroup conflict, as well as to identify unanswered questions in the field of violence and order studies.

Puzzles: Why do people (groups) fight even if it seems to hurt their interests? Why do some countries remain poor, unequal, and violent even if they have potential for development and prosperity? What explains individuals and groups' propensity toward vengeful or conciliatory responses to others' aggression?

Required readings

- Blattman, Christopher, and Edward Miguel. 2010. "Civil War." *Journal of Economic Literature* 48(1):3–57.
- Fearon, James D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49(3):379–414.
- Gambetta, Diego. 2009. "Why Prisoners Fight (and Signal)." in *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gilligan, Michael J., Benjamin J. Pasquale, and Cyrus Samii. 2014. "Civil War and Social Cohesion: Lab-in-the-Field Evidence from Nepal." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3):604–19.
- Chapter 12 "Surprise Attack and Disarmament" in Schelling, Thomas. 1960. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Supplementary readings

- Bauer, Michal, Christopher Blattman, Julie Chytilová, Joseph Henrich, Edward Miguel, and Tamar Mitts. 2016. "Can War Foster Cooperation?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30(3):249–74.
- Chapter 5 (pp. 161-7) in Darwin, Charles. 1981. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hager, Anselm, Krzysztof Krakowski, and Max Schaub. 2019. "Ethnic Riots and Prosocial Behavior: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan." *American Political Science Review* 113(4):1029–44.
- Nunn, Nathan, and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa." *American Economic Review* 101(7):3221–52.

8. Diffusion processes

11th November, Tiziana Nazio

How can collective outcomes be explained by individuals' interactions? During this class we will discuss the contributions of social sciences to the diffusion literature. The explanations that refer to diffusion processes trace collective outcomes from how a particular type of individual behaviour is influenced (also) by the way in which other individuals have previously taken similar choices in a similar situation. We will discuss different attempts to capture measures of social influence, and discuss the development of tools and theoretical thinking since the seminal Coleman's work (1957) and its subsequent reanalyses (1987-2001 in AJS). After the class, students should be able to recognise likely processes of social influence and think critically on how to approach them.

Puzzle: What makes doctors more likely to prescribe a new drug? How do social protests start? Why do friends/siblings tend to have children at the same time?

Required readings

- Balbo, Nicoletta, and Nicola Barban. 2014. "Does Fertility Behavior Spread among Friends?" *American Sociological Review* 79(3):412–31.
- Burt, Ronald S. 1987. "Social Contagion and Innovation: Cohesion versus Structural Equivalence." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(6):1287–1335.
- Coleman, James, Elihu Katz, and Herbert Menzel. 1957. "The Diffusion of an Innovation among Physicians." *Sociometry* 20(4):253–70.
- Hedström, Peter. 1998. "Rational Imitation." in *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory*, edited by P. Hedström and R. Swedberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Palloni, Alberto. 2015. "Diffusion in Sociological Analysis." Pp. 411–16 in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Second Edition), edited by J. D. Wright. Oxford: Elsevier.

Supplementary readings

- Andrews, Kenneth T., and Michael Biggs. 2006. "The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins." *American Sociological Review* 71(5):752–77.
- Buyukkececi, Zafer, and Thomas Leopold. 2020. "Sibling influence on family formation: A study of social interaction effects on fertility, marriage, and divorce." *Advances in Life Course Research* [in press: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2020.100359>]
- Hedström, Peter. 1994. "Contagious Collectivities: On the Spatial Diffusion of Swedish Trade Unions, 1890-1940." *American Journal of Sociology* 99(5):1157–79.
- Chapters 2 and 3 in Nazio, Tiziana. 2008. *Cohabitation, Family & Society*. London & NY: Routledge.
- Nazio, Tiziana, and Hans-Peter Blossfeld. 2003. "The Diffusion of Cohabitation among Young Women in West Germany, East Germany and Italy." *European Journal of Population / Revue Européenne de Démographie* 19(1):47–82.
- Strang, David, and Nancy Brandon Tuma. 1993. "Spatial and Temporal Heterogeneity in Diffusion." *American Journal of Sociology* 99(3):614–39.
- Van den Bulte, Christophe, and Gary L. Lilien. 2001. "Medical Innovation Revisited: Social Contagion versus Marketing Effort." *American Journal of Sociology* 106(5):1409–35.

9. Constraints and agency: mechanisms of social stratification

18th November, Camilla Borgna

Inequality is on the rise in many wealthy countries and its study has become a prominent subfield not only in sociology, but also in economics and political science. But why does inequality exist and why

is it so large? We will address this question from an individual-level perspective, by examining the extent to which stratification processes are produced by: (1) intentional choices of individuals, who deliberately take the path of action perceived as most beneficial (pull factors); (2) external constraints, which shape individual preferences “behind their backs” or otherwise limit the perception of viable alternatives (push factors). We will discuss studies from a variety of methodological perspectives (from ethnography to field experiments) in three domains crucial for life chances: education, labour market, and place of residence.

By the end of the class, students will be able to identify under which kinds of scenarios we can expect, *ex ante*, either push or pull factors to prevail as mechanisms of social stratification. Moreover, students will possess the tools to discern the most credible explanation *ex post*, that is, based on the critical evaluation of empirical evidence.

Puzzles: Why do working class kids (let themselves) get working class jobs? Why do boys drop out of school more than girls do? Why do poor people not move away from poor neighbourhoods?

Required readings

- Bergman, Peter, Raj Chetty, Stefanie DeLuca, Nathaniel Hendren, Lawrence F. Katz, and Christopher Palmer. 2019. *Creating Moves to Opportunity: Experimental Evidence on Barriers to Neighborhood Choice*. Working Paper. 26164. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Borgna, Camilla, and Emanuela Struffolino. 2017. “Pushed or Pulled? Girls and Boys Facing Early School Leaving Risk in Italy.” *Social Science Research* 61:298–313.
- Chapters 1, 4, and Conclusions in Gambetta, Diego. 1987. *Were They Pushed or Did They Jump? Individual Decision Mechanisms in Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapters 1, 12, and 13 in Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. 2nd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Supplementary readings

- Chapters 1, 10, and 11 in Elder, Glen H. 2018. *Children of the Great Depression*. 25th Anniversary Edition. Routledge.
- Sampson, Robert J. 2008. “Moving to Inequality: Neighborhood Effects and Experiments Meet Social Structure.” *American Journal of Sociology* 114(1):189–231.
- Foreword, Introduction, and Chapter 4 in Willis, Paul. 1981. *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs*. Morningside Edition. Columbia University Press.
- Introduction and Part 3 in Piketty, Thomas. 2020. *Capital and Ideology*. Harvard University Press.

10. Cumulative (dis)advantage and social stratification

25th November, Camilla Borgna

This session continues the analysis of mechanisms of inequality, by focusing on dynamic processes of accumulation. Why do sometimes small initial differences between individuals turn, over time, into a growing concentration of resources among the few? The notion of cumulative (dis)advantage (also known as Matthew effect) implies that favourable resources and events at a given point in time have increasing returns on further relative gains in the future. Underlying mechanisms include sequential exposure to risks, status-resources interactions, signaling, and discrimination. We will examine virtuous and vicious cycles of accumulation of resources with examples from the literature on neighbourhoods, crime, family, and scientific funding.

By the end of the class, students will be able to define cumulative advantage, understand its variants, discuss possible underlying mechanisms, and identify potential applications in domains other than those reviewed in class.

Puzzles: Why do “the rich get richer” and “the poor get poorer”? Who is more likely to be called back for a job interview: a Caucasian with criminal records, or an African-American without? Why, among excellent scientists, those who win a research grant early in their career keep applying (and winning)?

Required readings

- Bol, Thijs, Mathijs de Vaan, and Arnout van de Rijt. 2018. “The Matthew Effect in Science Funding.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(19):4887–90.
- DiPrete, Thomas A., and Gregory M. Eirich. 2006. “Cumulative Advantage as a Mechanism for Inequality: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Developments.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 32(1):271–97.
- Hedman, Lina, David Manley, Maarten van Ham, and John Östh. 2015. “Cumulative Exposure to Disadvantage and the Intergenerational Transmission of Neighbourhood Effects.” *Journal of Economic Geography* 15(1):195–215.
- Pager, Devah. 2003. “The Mark of a Criminal Record.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937–75.
- Vandecasteele, Leen. 2011. “Life Course Risks or Cumulative Disadvantage? The Structuring Effect of Social Stratification Determinants and Life Course Events on Poverty Transitions in Europe.” *European Sociological Review* 27(2):246–63.

Supplementary readings

- Willson, Andrea E., Kim M. Shuey, and Jr. Elder Glen H. 2007. “Cumulative Advantage Processes as Mechanisms of Inequality in Life Course Health.” *American Journal of Sociology* 112(6):1886–1924.
- Gangl, Markus. 2006. “Scar Effects of Unemployment: An Assessment of Institutional Complementarities.” *American Sociological Review* 71(6):986–1013.
- O’Rand, Angela M. 2009. “Cumulative Processes in the Life Course.” Pp. 121–40 in *The craft of life course research*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

11. The construction of public problems

2nd December, Giuliano Bobba

The construction of public problems refers to the processes by which social problems (or any issue existing in social space) could acquire public importance. This process is anything but natural or spontaneous—social problems often do not become public problems since people may disagree about what should be considered a problem that deserves to be addressed collectively—and there is often no direct link between the objective importance of a problem and the significance acquired in the public and political debate. Instead, the construction of a public problem is the outcome of different steps involving multiple individual or collective actors who claim for the relevance of a given problem. Through the action of “claimsmaking” actors bring topics to the attention of others by claiming that there is a condition that should be recognized as troubling and that needs to be addressed. Claimsmakers are thus social actors who seek to convince others that something is wrong, and that something should be done about it. Yet not all claimsmakers are equal: we tend to treat some claims more seriously, simply because they seem more plausible, or because they are promoted by people we respect—experts, officials, and so on. Successful claims spread and contribute to setting the public agenda becoming the subject of media coverage and debates over public policy.

The session will point out:

1. the process through which a social problem can become a public problem (i.e. identifying, framing, justifying, popularising, transforming into public policy);
2. the reasons why certain problems struggle or fail to become public problems (i.e. the ecology or asbestos);
3. a number of public problems (called “private-public problems”) for which the state requires citizens to contribute individually to the solution, instead of intervening on the problem itself (i.e. separate waste collection or speed limiters for cars).

Puzzles: Why do some private issues become public problems (i.e. private consumption of marijuana) while some collective problems don't (i.e. the ozone hole)? Why do some public problems find public solutions while other problems find private solutions?

Required readings

- Chapters 1 and 2 in Best, Joel. 2017. *Social Problems*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Hilgartner, Stephen, and Charles L. Bosk. 1988. “The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model.” *American Journal of Sociology* 94(1):53–78.
- Pralle, Sarah B. 2009. “Agenda-setting and climate change”. *Environmental Politics*, 18:5, 781-799.
- Stone, Deborah A. 1989. “Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas.” *Political Science Quarterly* 104(2):281–300.

Supplementary readings

- Best, Joel. 2002. “Constructing the Sociology of Social Problems: Spector and Kitsuse Twenty-Five Years Later” edited by M. Spector and J. I. Kitsuse. *Sociological Forum* 17(4):699–706.
- Cobb, R.W. and Elder, C.D., 1983. *Participation in American politics: the dynamics of agenda-buildings*. Baltimore, PA: John Hopkins University Press.
- Felstiner, William L. F., Richard L. Abel, and Austin Sarat. 1980. “The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming . . .” *Law & Society Review* 15(3/4):631–54.
- Kingdon, J., 1995. *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman.
- Neveu, Erik. 2015. *Sociologie Politique Des Problèmes Publics*. Paris: Armand Colin, chapters 3-5.
- Scheberle, D. .1994. “Radon and Asbestos: A Study of Agenda Setting and Causal Stories”. *Policy Studies Journal*, 22: 74-86.
- Spector, Malcolm, and John I. Kitsuse. 1977. *Constructing Social Problems*. Cummings Publishing Company.
- Woolgar, Steve, and Dorothy Pawluch. 1985. “Ontological Gerrymandering: The Anatomy of Social Problems Explanations.” *Social Problems* 32(3):214–27.

12. Voting behaviour

9th December, Davide Morisi

The factors determining voting behaviour are often context-dependent and change substantially over time and across countries. However, research in political science has identified a few recurring elements that contribute to explaining why people vote for certain parties and candidates in democratic countries. This session provides an overview of some of the main theories and factors that influence voting behaviour. In particular, we will focus on 1) the spatial model of voting, 2) the paradox of voting (is it rational to vote?), 3) retrospective voting, 4) the role of partisanship, and 5) the incumbency advantage.

Main puzzle. We would like all of you to address the following puzzle:

- Is it rational to vote? Consider a rational choice model, in which the expected utility of voting depends on the benefit of your favourite party or candidate winning an election (B), the probability that your vote is decisive (P), and the costs related to the act of voting (C). Can this rational choice model explain why people vote?

Additional puzzles (optional). In addition to the main puzzle, you can also address one of the following questions, if you have space in your essay:

- How can an electorate with relatively stable party preferences keep governments accountable? Can retrospective voting - or the idea that voters reward/sanction incumbents depending on how they performed - be reconciled with the apparent stability of party identification?
- Why do incumbents seem to have an advantage, even when they have a poor record in office?

Required readings

- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1964. *The American Voter. An abridgment*. New York: Wiley, Chapter 1 (“Setting”) and Chapter 5 (“The impact of party identification”).
- Dalton, Russell J. 2016. “Party Identification and Its Implications.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, Chapter 1 (only pages 1-14) and Chapter 8.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press, Chapter 1.

Supplementary readings

- Dinas, Elias. 2014. “Does Choice Bring Loyalty? Electoral Participation and the Development of Party Identification.” *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 449–465.
- Bisgaard, Martin. 2015. “Bias Will Find a Way: Economic Perceptions, Attributions of Blame, and Partisan-Motivated Reasoning during Crisis.” *Journal of Politics* 77(3): 849-860.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. “It’s Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in Us House Elections.” *Journal of Politics* 77(3): 861–73.
- Stegmaier, M., Lewis-Beck, M. S., & Brown, L. 2019. “The Economic Voter Decides.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, Chapter 3 (“The basic logic of voting”).

Puzzle workshop

June (precise date to be confirmed), SPS Tutorials instructors

The final component of the SPS Tutorials is a puzzle workshop. This entails preparing a draft document for submission to the workshop, attending and presenting at the workshop, and submitting a final manuscript after the workshop. The final submission will be marked and represents 50% of the final grade.

An empirical puzzle is a correlation that defies the expectations of common sense or the predictions of some theory.

Before the workshop you will:

1. Come up with a shortlist of promising puzzles that you can whittle down with their mentor to select one puzzle.

2. Specify the puzzle using easily accessible data (e.g. does your puzzle hold in every region of a country, for all age groups, for men and women, or perhaps there are clear limiting factors to your puzzle?)
3. Propose a series of plausible conjectures to explain the more precise puzzle you identified in (2).
4. Derive empirically testable implications from your conjectures.
5. Gather data to test the implications wherever reasonably possible. Where this is overly time consuming or not possible, consider the data that you would want to gather to test the implications.

You will submit a write-up of the above steps before the workshop as a draft of your paper two-weeks before the workshop. You should work with your mentor on this project (i.e. do steps 1-5) and use them as a reference point. If you wish however, after discussing with your mentor, you can approach other Allievi faculty for help as they may be more suitable for your particular topic.

During the workshop you will have 20 minutes to present your project and 20 minutes to receive feedback. In the weeks following the workshop, you will update your paper based on the feedback that you receive, and you will need to submit this document. It should be at maximum 4,000 words (excluding references and appendix).

Contact your mentor shortly after the 12 tutorials classes and start the process. Students should read the introduction to Diego Gambetta's *puzzle bank*. You may use a puzzle from Gambetta's list if they wish to do so although we encourage students to think of their own. This workshop and exercise can be taken as an opportunity to start developing a master's dissertation proposal.