

Elections Workshop, 18 April 2016
Sydney Smith Lecture Theatre, Old Medical School, Doorway 1

Time	
1230-1330	<p>Luke Blaxhill, "Big data" and the Analysis of Parliamentary and Platform Speeches, 1880-present'.</p> <p>John Joseph as respondent.</p> <p>Chair: Gordon Pentland</p>
1330-1445	<p>Ben Rogers, 'Comparing Electoral Scarcity with Electoral Surplus: Politics between Elections in Scotland and England, 1689-1702'.</p> <p>Gary Hutchison, 'Scottish Conservatives after 1832: Party-Political Activity between Elections'.</p> <p>Hayley Mathers, 'Romania's Political and Constitutional Reimagining, 1937-1940: A Desperate Slide into Fascism'.</p> <p>Chair: Robert Crowcroft</p>
1445-1515	<p>Coffee break</p>
1515-1615	<p>Taym Saleh, 'The Use and Abuse of Psephology: The Problem of Late-Victorian Conservatism'.</p> <p>David Kaufman, 'Continuity or Break? The impact of the Great War on popular politics in Eastern Europe'.</p> <p>Chair: Malcolm Petrie</p>
1615-1715	<p>Fabian Hilfrich, 'A Mandate for Imperialism?: The US Elections of 1900'.</p> <p>Julius Ruiz, 'Stalemate: the Spanish General Election of December 2015'.</p> <p>Chair: David Kaufman</p>
1730-1830	<p>Witness seminar: Mike Moffo</p> <p>Mike Moffo is a branding and communications specialist. He was one of the first members of Barack Obama's Presidential Campaign in February of 2007 and John Kerry's Presidential Campaign in May of 2002. Among other assignments, he was a Field Organizer for Kerry's victorious Iowa Caucus campaign in 2003-2004 and Barack Obama's Deputy National Field Director for Special Projects.</p> <p>Chair: Ewen Cameron</p>
1830-	<p>Drinks in McMillan Room</p>

Abstracts

“Big data” and the Analysis of Parliamentary and Platform Speeches, 1880-present

Luke Blaxhill (Hertford College, University of Oxford)

Recent years have seen the release of huge digitised political history texts such as the Nineteenth and Twentieth century press, Hansard parliamentary debates, and countless periodicals and parliamentary papers. This growing textual forest represents a challenge for political historians (and indeed many modern historians) because such a forest is impossible to read, let alone analyse, in totality.

In this paper, I will explore the utility of a variety of simple - and more sophisticated - computational techniques adapted from Corpus Linguistics (often called 'text mining') in potentially reshaping historians' understanding of huge political language texts in these two centuries.

My paper will focus on two case studies: the language of British election speeches from the golden age of platform oratory in the years 1880-1914, and the language of parliamentary debates in the period from 1945-present. Rather than exploring such 'big data' tools for their own sakes, I will demonstrate how they can fruitfully contribute (and in some cases transform) established historical debates. Two examples I will explore are the presentation of imperialism in elections in the high age of Empire, and the differences between the speaking patterns of male and female MPs in the postwar period.

Comparing Electoral Scarcity with Electoral Surplus: Politics between Elections in Scotland and England, 1689-1702

Ben Rogers (University of Edinburgh)

This paper will compare the politics between elections in Scotland and England from 1689 to 1702. It will question how politics impacted on the elections that were held in each Kingdom. During this time, Scotland had only two elections; held in 1689 and 1702 respectively. By contrast, England saw a period of intense electoral competition. This paper asks how electoral politics were similar, or different, in each Kingdom during the time when parliamentary authority was confirmed.

Scottish Conservatives after 1832: Party-Political Activity between Elections

Gary Hutchison (University of Edinburgh)

This paper will explore the extensive and frenetic activity conducted by Scottish Conservatives at a local constituency level after 1832. By focusing on the party-political activities conducted between elections, it can be demonstrated that activities of this kind led to many changes in Scottish political culture. Specifically, they helped to encourage a more deeply embedded partisan adherence in electors, and stimulated the growth of more formalised party organisations.

Romania's Political and Constitutional Reimagining, 1937-1940: A Desperate Slide into Fascism

Hayley Mathers (University of Edinburgh)

During the late 1930s, the rise of fascism, both internally and externally, threatened Romanian security. In a bid to preserve order King Carol II seized control of Romanian politics, held democratically questionable constitutional referendums and created a one-party country. Were democratic elections sacrificed in the hope of ensuring a democratic future?

The Use and Abuse of Psephology: The Problem of Late-Victorian Conservatism

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Taym Saleh (University of Edinburgh)

This paper will look at the historical treatment of the success of the Unionist party in the final fifteen years of the nineteenth century, following the Third Reform Act. Two explanations of this success have arisen in recent decades: first, a more 'sociological' interpretation that emphasised how the Conservatives were limited to a middle-class constituency, and could therefore only attain victory by 'negative' means. This was later largely supplanted by a 'positive' interpretation, that stressed the Conservatives' ability to win over working-class voters through a vibrant political culture. Both schools conduct much of the argument through psephological analysis. This paper argues that this latter approach is constrained by its own theoretical underpinnings, which oblige it to dilute the rigour of its statistical analysis of elections. When this shortcoming is corrected, we see that there is more to the 'sociological' analysis than the later 'revisionists' allowed for.

Continuity or Break? The impact of the Great War on popular politics in Eastern Europe

David Kaufman (University of Edinburgh)

The Great War has often been lazily described as a victory for democracy, but the 1920s were characterised by a move towards authoritarianism throughout Central and Eastern Europe, well before the onset of the Great Depression. All too often, historians choose to use the First World War as a watershed moment in European History, this paper will seek to examine points of continuity between the pre- and post-war periods.

A Mandate for Imperialism?: The US Elections of 1900

Fabian Hilfrich (University of Edinburgh)

The Spanish-American War of 1898 spawned a vigorous debate about what to do with former Spanish colonies, particularly with the Philippines. While the Republican McKinley Administration advocated their retention, Democrats and political independents condemned these policies as 'imperialist' and incompatible with the country's ideological heritage. Accordingly, they planned to turn the election of 1900 into a plebiscite on imperialism and this paper explores in how far they were successful in their strategy. The focus also contributes to a larger debate as to how much foreign policy has ever influenced US elections.

Stalemate: the Spanish General Election of December 2015

Julius Ruiz (University of Edinburgh)

For the first time since the restoration of democracy following General Franco's death in 1975, the 2015 Spanish general election failed to produce a government. At the time of writing, another election in June 2016 looks likely. This is not simply because no party has obtained an overall majority; minority governments were common in Spain during the last thirty years. This paper will discuss why on this occasion 'political stability' – a key principle in Spanish democratic politics following the tumultuous Republican years of the 1930s- has not prevailed in 2015-16. His discussion will not only make reference to the new multi-party political system, but also the emergence of a political culture that seeks to overturn the values associated with the Transition of 1970s.