Examples of past master thesis projects

Johanna Nöbauer (2020): Das politökologische Dilemma der Demokratie
In wissenschaftlichen Debatten wird angenommen, dass die politische Lösung des Klimawandels das Vertrauen in die Demokratie schwächen könnte. Teile der Gesellschaft fordern radikale Veränderungen zur Rettung der Umwelt, auf die Politik und Wirtschaft nur mit mangelnder Reaktionsfähigkeit reagieren. Diese Misere könnte die Demokratie letztlich in eine Legitimationskrise führen. Die vorliegende Arbeit veranschaulicht das ökologische, politische und soziale Dilemma der Demokratie angesichts der Klimakrise. Erstmalig wird die Debatte anhand der Einstellung der Bürgerinnen und Bürger der Europäischen Union mit univariaten und bivariaten Analysen abgebildet. Die univariaten Analysen im Längsschnitt zeigen, dass sich seit 10 Jahren ein Abwärtstrend der Zufriedenheit mit der Demokratie ablesen lässt und die Ergebnisse der bivariaten Analysen im Querschnitt verdeutlichen, dass die Lösung des Klimawandels nicht ohne gesellschaftspolitische Anpassungsprozesse geschehen kann. Diese Auswertungen bestätigen die Bedeutung der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion in einem politischen und gesellschaftlichen Kontext. Letztlich leistet diese Masterarbeit durch ihren explorativen Charakter einen empirischen Beitrag zur Unterstützung der theoretischen Debatte über das Potential von Demokratien im politökologischen Feld.

Niccolo Giorgio Armandola (2020): Opportunity makes a thief? Analyzing the effects of poverty and relative deprivation on dishonesty
Social scientists have tried to identify the causes of dishonesty for centuries. The most important theories on the subject suggest that poor or relative deprived people are more likely to behave dishonestly than rich people. Researchers that analyzed the link between poverty and dishonesty with traditional methods (survey questions or aggregate measures of dishonesty) all seem to agree that economic wealth negatively correlates with dishonesty. However, new experimental designs lead to conflicting findings. This paper analyzes dishonesty on three different levels: (i) the participants' attitudes towards dishonesty, (ii) the participants self-reported dishonest behavior and (iii) the participants true dishonest behavior in a dice game experiment. Our findings suggest that while rich people claim not tolerate dishonesty and to never behave dishonestly, they steal money when they are given the opportunity in an experimental setup. In fact, among non-deprived individuals, the rich steal even more than the poor. On one hand, these findings show that the traditional link between poverty and dishonesty might be untrue. On the other hand, the discrepancy between the participants' moral beliefs, their alleged actions and their true behavior speaks for the importance of including experimental designs in sociological studies. Our analyses are based on a Swiss sample of young adults between 19 and 22 years of age. The data stems from the last wave of the longitudinal z-proso study, which followed an entire cohort of children in the city of Zurich, Switzerland, throughout their childhood and early adult years.

Oliver Brägger (2019): Trust and Trustlessness in Darknet Markets: How Reputation Mechanisms and Technological Innovations Enable Cooperation in Anonymous Marketplaces for Illegal Drugs
In recent years, drug trade on darknet markets has been flourishing in spite of great risks its users face. On one hand, there is on no legal system in the darknet that protects customers by ensuring honest business from vendors. On the other hand, due the illicit nature of items being traded on such marketplaces, there is a legal system that persecutes both parties. Therefore, customers must protect themselves from fraud, and both vendors and customers alike must take efforts to remain anonymous in order protect themselves from law enforcement agencies that are closely monitoring all market related activities. Cooperation, however, depends on trust. This paper attempts to explain why trust is possible in such a hostile environment. It does so by arguing that technological innovations either provide users with trust, or materialize trust, effectively making it unnecessary. Particularly, it argues that institutionalized reputation systems allow vendors to develop trustworthiness, and trustless technologies such as escrow payment systems, multi-signature transaction protocols and anonymous cryptocurrencies enable users to keep a certain degree of control over their funds involved in trades. In order to test this, a crawling software is developed to collect data on the darknet market Wall Street Market which stopped operating just shortly after data collection. Using this data, this paper presents evidence for positive effects of both reputation indicators of vendors and the application of technologies that mitigate trust on both the prices vendors demand for their products and how many orders they are able to complete, thus enabling cooperation. Keywords: Trust, darknet, cooperation, reputation mechanism

Giorgio Cassina (2019): The Actual Effect of the Representative Role: A Methodological Clarification for Representation Studies

Previous studies on the representative role compare representatives' behaviors with individuals' behaviors. Nevertheless, since representatives are a particular type of group members, previous designs inevitably did not distinguish between in-group favoritism effects and the actual effect of the representative role. Carrying on this methodological criticism, the present thesis suggests a new experimental design aimed at disentangling the two effects. Specifically, this study's aim is to causally determine the effect of the representative role on individuals' cooperation and understand which mechanisms foster the representation effect. To do so, an online experiment was conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The results show that neither the in-group favoritism effect nor the effect of the representative role alone seem to have any significant influence on participants' cooperative behaviors, but by conducting the same analysis done by previous studies a decrease in cooperation for representatives can be detected. However, previous interpretations are criticized and the decrease in cooperation is attributed to the interaction between the representation effect and the in-group favoritism effect and not to the representation effect alone. Additionally, self-reported data collected in the post-experimental survey displays that representatives do feel accountable for the represented group mates and, therefore, are willing to equally share their payoff. Finally, for future studies, this research suggests the use of more efficient minimal group procedures to better understand the isolated representation effect and the use of actual behaviors to investigate the mechanisms that lie at the basis of the representative role.

Keywords: representative role, in-group favoritism, Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), responsibility, accountability, implicit justification, minimal group, intergroup interaction, imagination procedure, cooperation.

Antonia Velicu (2019): Underestimating the Instruction - A Meta-analysis on Item Count Technique and Crosswise Model

Survey respondents tend to present themselves in a more favorable light, especially when being asked unpleasant questions. This so-called social desirability bias introduced by sensitive questions often distorts survey responses. As a remedy research draws on indirect questioning formats that aim to protect respondents' privacy and ensure their anonymity. Two prominent examples of such techniques are the Crosswise Model (CM) and the Item Count Technique (ICT). Both methods follow unconventional structures using group answers or known distributions to mask individual answer but that also require long, complex and dense instructions. Previous research has suggested that ICT and CM produce more truthful answers, however they impose a higher cognitive burden on respondents. Although, it is commonly believed that respondents fully understand and follow these more demanding instructions, recent research suggests that this is not always the case. To further investigate this notion, I conduct a meta-analysis of the ICT and CM and analyze the instructions of these methods to answer two core questions: First, how do the implementations of the Item Count Technique and the Crosswise Model differ across studies? Second, how do specific characteristics (i.e., the instruction) of the techniques affect their performance? The meta-analysis indicates mixed results on the performance of the techniques. The CM tends to perform better than the ICT. ICT works best when asked in face-to-face interviews, the sensitive item phrased as a socially undesirable one, and the non-sensitive items chosen from the same contextual background. ICT instructions with too many words and not many word repetitions appear to have a negative influence on its outcome. The results of this research have implications for researchers and practitioners working with these techniques, but also for the broader field measuring and analyzing sensitive characteristics in surveys.

Keywords: Item Count Technique; Crosswise Model; Meta-Analysis; Cognitive Burden; Survey Methodology; Instructions

Tobias Ackermann (2019): Are norm enforcers violent?

Public goods such as a clean environment require cooperation and significant effort from all involved parties and thus can be seen as a basic cooperation problem. As cooperation is costly, the incentive to deviate and not to contribute to a clean environment leads to defectors. Due to the fact that people monitor each other and will recognize deviation, it is also possible to punish or admonish the defectors, but the question is: who will enforce the norm? Prominent studies have highlighted the importance of punishment for cooperation to sustain over time in laboratory games. Hence, punishment, even when it stems from anger or the desire for revenge, still can be of valid use for society. Not much is known about those individuals that enforce norms and punish others. As there is reason to think of them as pro-social individuals, theory and research also suggest that they may be selfish, unkind and maybe even violent. Using data from a survey and behavioral

games, the results from multivariate regressions show that norm enforcers morally neutralize their actions, tend to think of violence as a legitimate form of behavior, see themselves in a good position in society and even tend to show aggressive behavior more often than others. While these constructs are all linked to criminal behavior, no such correlation is found in the data used in this paper. Furthermore, self-control has no effect on punishment, contrary to the idea that self-control would e.g. mediate anger towards unfair behavior. The results suggest that norm enforcers are not pro-social nor criminal or violent, but they clearly show a propensity for violence. Hence, pointing towards such persons being the ones that will admonish others in situations where other people would tolerate the violation of the norm.

Keywords: Social Norms; Norm Enforcement; Punishment; Behavioral Games