Vacancy PhD Researcher
Project “Reforming Representative Democracy?”

Vacancy notice for 1 PhD researcher in Political Science

The Department of Political Science at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) is hiring 1 PhD researchers for the project “Reforming Representative Democracy?” funded as 4-year research project from the FRS-FNRS.

Synopsis of the project

Across contemporary democracies, a large share of the population is dissatisfied with the way the representative system works. As a consequence, institutional changes have been implemented over recent years in most European democracies (Bedock 2017). It ranges from transparency reforms to more citizens’ participation. Politicians and political parties appear to believe that the cure to democratic resentment is to revise democratic institutions. But is this really the case?

The project proposes to tackle this question in three steps examining in details the case of Belgium. First, we will inventory all democratic reforms implemented in Belgium over the last 25 years. Second, we will survey how citizens as well as politicians evaluate representative democracy, and what are the main critics addressed. The goal is to go beyond existing typologies and tools on democratic attitudes by combining an inductive and qualitative approach based upon focus groups with a quantitative survey. Third, the study will also explore how citizens evaluate those reforms implemented and proposed by politicians to address citizens’ dissatisfaction.

A last major component of the project is the attention to those citizens that are the most politically, socially and economically disadvantaged (women, lower educated, ethnic minorities). One of the cornerstones of democracy is that each citizen should have the same political weight. Any diagnosis of what could be wrong with representation must look into this matter. Yet, we know that these groups are hard to approach (see Braconnier and Mayer, 2015). Therefore, the project will pay special attention to disadvantaged groups within Belgian society and will make sure that the survey instruments will include them into the study.
Dans les démocraties contemporaines, une part importante de la population se déclare mécontente de la façon dont le système représentatif fonctionne. En réaction, de multiples réformes institutionnelles sont mises à l’agenda et approuvée à travers l’Europe (Bedock, 2017). Cela va de réformes visant à renforcer la transparence aux initiatives soutenant une plus forte participation des citoyens à la politique. Il semble que les partis politiques et les élus jugent que la réponse au mécontentement citoyen soit de repenser les institutions démocratiques. Mais est-ce vraiment le cas?

Le projet propose de répondre à cette question en trois temps à partir du cas belge. Premièrement, nous allons dresser un inventaire de toutes les initiatives de réforme institutionnelle observées au cours des 25 dernières années. Ensuite, nous allons tenter de mieux cerner le rapport des citoyens belges à la démocratie représentative. Comment l’évalue-t-il ? Quels sont les reproches qu’ils lui adressent ? L’objectif est de dépasser les modèles et outils actuels qui visent à saisir les attitudes des citoyens à l’égard de la démocratie. Pour cela, nous proposons de combiner une approche inductive et qualitative par des focus groups avec une enquête quantitative. Enfin, nous allons étudier les attitudes des citoyens belges par rapport aux réformes institutionnelles proposées au cours des dernières années.

Une dernière composante majeure de ce projet est l’attention portée aux citoyens les plus désavantagés politiquement, socialement et économiquement (femmes, moins éduqués, minorités ethniques). L’une des pierres angulaires de la démocratie est d’octroyer à chaque citoyen le même poids. Tout diagnostic du malaise démocratique qui ignorerait les plus faibles serait vain. Ces groupes sont toutefois difficiles à approcher (Braconnier et Mayer, 2015). Notre projet leur prêtera une attention toute particulière, et fera en sorte de bien les inclure dans nos dispositifs de collecte de données.
Profile

- Holder of a Master degree in political science or related disciplines
- Excellent grades and other signs of academic distinctions
- Research interest and/or expertise in West European Politics, Belgian politics, democracy, citizenship, political participation, and/or political parties
- Good command of quantitative and survey methods for social and political sciences
- Good command of dataset management and statistical software
- Good organizational and time management skills
- Ability to work in a team
- A good command of English, and French and/or Dutch (or willingness to improve one’s command of the other language during the scholarship)

Job description

This is a call for applications for one full-time doctoral position (PhD grant) for four years.

The PhD researcher will become an active member of the research project “Reforming Representative Democracy” (RepResent). The project is coordinated by Professor Jean-Benoit Pilet, Nathalie Brack (ULB) and Pierre Baudewyns (UC Louvain). It offers a stimulating working environment in a dynamic and international research team. The selected PhD researcher will also be closely associated to the activities of two related international projects: Represent (EOS programme) and CureOrCurse (ERC consolidator grant).

The researcher will be based at the Cevipol (ULB). He/she will have an office and relevant administrative support at ULB. She/he will have no teaching obligations but will be allowed to engage in a limited amount of teaching if this is judged appropriate for your academic development. He/she will be expected to contribute to collective work on the project, and to present and publish individual or collective research outputs.

According to the experience of the candidate, the monthly net income will start from 1800 euros. Additional social benefits (public transport, hospitalization coverage, sporting facilities, day care) are provided by the University.

The Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) is an equal opportunity employer.

Tasks

Within the project, the selected PhD candidate will perform the following tasks:

- conduct a PhD project on representative democracy in Belgium, its reforms and how both citizens and political elites perceive and support proposals to
reform the procedures of representative democracy (like participatory, deliberative and direct democracy);
- contribute to an inventory of institutional reforms in Belgium over the last 20 years;
- contribute to a survey of both politicians and citizens to capture attitudes towards representative democracy and its reforms. The surveys will be based upon standardized questionnaires and would be analyze with advanced quantitative methods for social and political sciences.

STARTING DATE is March, 2018.

INTERESTED?
Questions regarding the PhD scholarship can be addressed to Professor Jean-Benoit Pilet (jpilet@ulb.ac.be)

APPLICATIONS should include (in one single PDF document):
- a copy of the passport/ID
- a letter of motivation explaining the candidate’s general interest for the project
- a full CV (including grades obtained for each study year, the title of your MA-thesis, and, when applicable, a list of publications, courses taken, and conference presentations)
- a short research statement presenting what the topic of the PhD project of the selected applicant would be
- Name, affiliation, email and phone number of two referees who can be contacted if necessary

The deadline for applications is February, 9th 2018.
A telephone or face-to-face interview may be organized.

Please send the above documents electronically to Professor Jean-Benoit Pilet (jpilet@ulb.ac.be)