

Joseph Francesco Cozza

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APPOINTMENTS

Rice University

July 2022 to Present

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science

EDUCATION

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2017 to August 2022

Ph.D., Department of Government

Subfields: Public Law and Comparative Politics

Dissertation Title: Authorizing Revolutionary Constitutional Change: Constituent Power, Legitimacy, and the Revolutionary Constitutional Amendment

Dissertation Chairs: Dr. Zachary Elkins and Dr. Gary Jacobsohn

Additional Committee Members: Dr. Daniel Brinks, Dr. Ran Hirschl, Dr. Zeynep Somer-Topcu, and Dr. Stephen Tierney

The London School of Economics and Political Science

November 2015

Master of Science in Comparative Politics.

Specialization: Comparative Political Institutions.

Honors: Graduated with Merit.

Villanova University

December 2012

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Minor in Communication.

Honors: Graduated Summa Cum Laude, member of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society.

PUBLICATIONS

Cozza, Joseph Francesco. 2021. "Authorizing Revolutionary Constitutional Change: The Approximation Thesis." *Constitutional Studies* 7: 157-192

This study examines how the amendment power can be used to legitimately produce a constitutional revolution, altering the core identity of a constitutional system. In doing so, I introduce the concept of the revolutionary amendment and discuss how such an amendment can achieve legitimacy in a constitutional system. Drawing on deliberative civic republican theory, I argue that the process of enactment must approximate the primary constituent power by fostering citizen representation and deliberation in both the drafting and ratification of the amendment. This *Approximation Thesis* can help determine when a revolutionary amendment will be seen as legitimate by the citizens of the state. This theoretical contribution is followed by case studies of contemporary constitutional revolutions in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Cozza, Joseph Francesco, Zachary Elkins, and Alexander Hudson. 2021. "Reverse Mortgages and Aircraft Parts: The Arcane Referendum and the Limits of Citizen Competence." *Electoral Studies* 74 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102408>

Whether from a sincere belief in the ability of the body politic to arrive at optimal decisions, or in an instrumental attempt to generate legitimacy for policy choices, a large number of jurisdictions use the referendum to settle political questions. This practice relies on assumptions about voter interest and competence that merit empirical testing. We conduct a series of survey experiments that leverage variation in wording from a set of arcane ballot provisions from elections in Texas. We find that (1) voters are largely confused about the meaning of such ballot provisions; (2) efforts to improve the wording of such provisions and educate voters has minimal impact on their comprehension; (3) voters

are easily persuaded to change their vote when given the chance; and (4) voters rely heavily on default answers (especially "yes") in casting their votes. On the whole, the evidence suggests that narrow referendum questions that lack clear ideological or informational cues overwhelm the limits of citizen competence, and are thus likely to result in unstable and unreliable decisions.

Cozza, Joseph Francesco and Zeynep Somer-Topcu. 2021. "Membership Vote for Party Leadership Changes: Electoral Effects and the Causal Mechanisms Behind." *Electoral Studies* 71: 1 – 12
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102326>

Political parties in parliamentary democracies have increasingly democratized their leadership selection processes, incorporating the votes of party members. Despite generating numerous headlines, there has been a relative dearth of cross-national scholarly work on the electoral effects of selectorate expansion and the causal mechanisms behind them. This study fills this gap in the literature. Using observational data from eleven parliamentary democracies, we show that expanding the selectorate to include a vote of party members increases parties' polling performance but does not affect electoral performance. Nevertheless, our cross-national analyses and results from a survey experiment from Australia suggest that incorporating members generates excitement, demonstrates an openness to new ideas, and can be a signal of leader work ethic and a commitment to the democratic process, increasing leader legitimacy. We discuss the disconnect between these positive evaluations and the lack of electoral effects, and suggest possible strategies for parties to improve their electoral standing.

WORKING PAPERS

Social Capital, Institutional Rules, and Constitutional Amendment Rates, *Under Review*

Co-Authors: William Blake, David Armstrong, and Amanda Friesen

Why are some constitutions amended more frequently than others? The literature provides few clear answers, as some scholars focus on institutional factors, while others emphasize amendment culture. We bridge this divide with new theoretical and empirical insights. Using data from democratic constitutions worldwide and US state constitutions, we examine how social capital reduces the transaction costs imposed by amendment rules. The results indicate that constitutional rigidity decreases amendment frequency, but group membership, civic activism, and political trust can offset the effect of amendment rules. Our findings have important implications for scholars in public law, constitutional and democratic theory, and social movements.

Trust the Process: Citizen Participation, Procedural Legitimacy and Democratic Decision-Making in Constitutional Change, *Under Review*

Procedural legitimacy is a critical component of democratic governance, particularly in the area of constitutional transformation, where lawmakers and citizens seek to create "higher law." Using an original survey experiment in the United States, this study tests the impact of citizen inclusion in the constitutional amendment process on the legitimacy of constitutional change. In doing so, I separate the processes of amendment initiation and ratification, examining the role of legislatures, referendums, and citizens' assemblies in the amendment process. I find that citizen participation in any stage of the amendment process produces higher levels of legitimacy when compared to legislative-only amendment processes. So too, citizens are more likely to expect a participatory process when the amendment represents a significant alteration of the constitutional text. Finally, I find that key social capital indicators – such as social and political trust – mediate perceptions of legitimacy.

Social Capital and the Legitimacy of the Equal Rights Amendment

Co-Authors: William Blake and Amanda Friesen

Recent research has suggested that social capital can mitigate the transaction costs imposed by constitutional amendment rules (Blake, Cozza, and Friesen 2021). This paper further explores this linkage in the context of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA provides an interesting

test for constitutional attitudes, as it requires the public to legitimate both its substance and to the procedure used to ratify it. Congress attached a seven-year limit for state legislatures to ratify the amendment. If Congress extends the deadline, it would create constitutional questions about state legislative attempts to repeal their initial ratification votes. Using GSS data from when the ERA was first proposed and an original survey experiment, we find that respondents who hold more trusting attitudes and who are more active in civic life are significantly more likely to support the ERA and endorse the legitimacy of its ratification. However, levels of social capital are significantly lower today. These findings suggest that as social capital diminishes, constitutional change becomes less likely.

GRANTS and FELLOWSHIPS

Texas Politics Project Research Grant (\$2,500)	Fall 2021
University Graduate Continuing Fellowship , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$44,000)	Fall 2021-Summer 2022
APSA Committee on the Status of LGBT Individuals in the Profession Travel and Accessibility Grant , <i>American Political Science Association</i> (\$300)	Fall 2021
Government Department Fellowship , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$5,000)	Fall 2017-Spring 2021
Summer Dissertation Fellowship , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$5,000).	Summer 2021
Clark Center for Australia and New Zealand Studies Research Grant (\$7,000)	Fall 2019
Pre-Dissertation Fellowship , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$3,500)	Summer 2018 and 2019
Texas Politics Project Research Grant (\$2,500)	Fall 2018

CONFERENCES and INVITED TALKS

- Law & Society Association: *Lisbon, Portugal*** July 2022
- Presenting: “Social Capital and the Equal Rights Amendment”
with William Blake and Amanda Friesen
- Midwest Political Science Association: *Chicago, Illinois*** April 2022
- Panel: Rights, Rhetoric, and Legitimacy
Presenting: “Trust the Process: Citizen Participation, Procedural Legitimacy and Democratic Decision-Making in Constitutional Change”
- Deciphering the Genome of Constitutionalism Workshop: *UT Austin and Richman University***
- Panel Chair: U.S. Constitutionalism November 2021
- Global Law and Politics Workshop Series** November 2021
- Presenting: “Social Capital, Institutional Rules, and Constitutional Amendment Rates”
with William Blake and Amanda Friesen
- American Political Science Association: *Seattle, Washington*** September 2021
- Presenting: “Social Capital, Institutional Rules, and Constitutional Amendment Rates”
with William Blake and Amanda Friesen
- European Political Science Association: *Prague, Czech Republic*** June 2020
- Presenting: “Membership Vote for Party Leadership Changes”
with Zeynep Somer-Topcu
 - Did not attend due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic
- Midwest Political Science Association: *Chicago, Illinois*** April 2020
- Panel: Who’s Who and How it Matters: Party Membership and Leadership
Presenting: “Membership Vote for Party Leadership Changes”
with Zeynep Somer-Topcu
 - Round Table: Voting on Constitutional Change in the States
 - Did not attend due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

- Conference on Constitution Making and Constitutional Change: *Austin, Texas*** January 2020
- Panel: Legitimacy, Public Participation, and Process
Presenting: “Trust the Process? Procedural Legitimacy and Democratic Decision-Making in Constitutional Change”
- Midwest Political Science Association: *Chicago, Illinois*** April 2019
- Panel: State & Intergovernmental Politics
Presenting: “Reverse Mortgages and Aircraft Parts: Referenda and the Limits of Citizen Competence”
with Zachary Elkins and Alexander Hudson
- Invited Talk: Texas State University** March 2019
- Presenting: “Ireland’s Quiet Revolution: Exploring the role of Popular Sovereignty and Constituent Power in Constitutional Revolutions”
- Southern Political Science Association: *Austin, Texas*** January 2019
- Panel: Democracy, Parties, and Mobilization
Presenting: “Reverse Mortgages and Aircraft Parts: Referenda and the Limits of Citizen Competence”
with Zachary Elkins and Alexander Hudson
- Graduate Conference in Public Law: *University of Texas at Austin*** October 2018
- Panel: Constitutional Theory
Presenting: “Ireland’s Quiet Revolution: Exploring the role of Popular Sovereignty and Constituent Power in Constitutional Revolutions”
- 2018 Bergen Exchanges: *University of Bergen*** August 2018
- Panel: Abortion Lawfare
Presenting: “Ireland’s Quiet Revolution: Exploring the Role of Constituent Power and Popular Sovereignty in Constitutional Revolutions.”

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Visiting Assistant Professor, Rice University** July 2022 to Present
- United States Constitutional Law: *Fall 2022*
 - World Constitutions: *Fall 2022*
 - Comparative Legal Systems: *Spring 2022*
 - Undergraduate Research Design: *Spring 2022*
- Assistant Instructor, University of Texas at Austin** January 2020 to May 2021
- US Constitutional Design in Comparative Perspective: *Spring 2021*
 - Comparative Legal Systems co-taught with Dr. Daniel Brinks: *Fall 2021*
 - Political Internship: *Summer 2020*
 - American Government: *Spring 2020*
- Teaching Assistant, University of Texas at Austin** September 2017 to December 2019
- American Government: *Spring 2019, Fall 2020*
 - Western European Politics with Dr. Zeynep Somer-Topcu: *Spring 2018, Fall 2018*
 - Issues in Third World Development with Dr. Zachary Elkins: *Fall 2017*

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Co-Founder/Co-Organizer, UT Queer in Political Science** February 2020 to July 2022
- Work with field chairs to incorporate queer academics into department speaker series.
 - Represent the organization during visit day, orientation, and professionalization sessions.
 - Plan happy hours and social events throughout the semester to allow for continued engagement among queer academics in the department.

Graduate Student Coordinator, UT Comparative Speaker Series August 2021 to July 2022

- Arrange meetings between invited speakers and current graduate students.
- Coordinate meals for the invited speakers and select guests
- Make travel arrangements for invited speakers while in Austin

Member, UT Admitted Students Visiting Day Planning Committee February 2020 to March 2020

- Coordinated visiting day hosts and transportation.
- Planned visiting day dinner and public law happy hour.
- Assisted in the execution of the visiting day cocktail hour.

Co-Organizer, University of Texas Graduate Conference in Public Law May 2019 to October 2019

- Drafted the conference call for papers.
- Worked with the leadership team to select and invite conference participants.
- Maintained database of conference papers.
- Managed conference logistics.

POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

Legislative Assistant, Delaware State Senator Harris B. McDowell III June 2016 to July 2017

- Conducted in-depth research into critical issues to develop and draft proposed legislation.
- Spearheaded the research, development, drafting, introduction, and passage of Delaware's conversion therapy ban (SB 65).
- Led a small team that worked to author a comprehensive report on Delaware's property reassessment system. This report recommended and proposed the creation of a new, state-wide reassessment system.
- Researched, developed, and drafted speeches, articles, letters, and other printed communication.
- Served as liaison and provided assistance to state agencies and federal and local government offices.
- Represented Senator McDowell at committee meetings, community gatherings, and other forums.

Consultant for Two Delaware Political Campaigns December 2015 to June 2016

- Assisted in the development and implementation of campaign communication strategies.
- Drafted press releases, media advisories, opinion editorials, and email blasts.
- Coordinated initial campaign messaging, voter targeting, and volunteer recruitment strategies.

MEDIA PUBLICATIONS

- “Wisconsin and Michigan Power Grabs: Lame Duck Lawmakers are Threatening Democracy Itself.” December 2018. *USA Today*
- “Can Consociationalism Save Yemen?” May 2016. *Fair Observer*
- “Could Vision 2030 Reforms Destabilize Saudi Arabia?” May 2016. *IndraStra*
- “What if Saudi Arabia Collapses?” with Dr. Theodore Karasik. August 2016. *LobeLog*
- “The International Community’s Failure in Yemen.” August 2016. *LobeLog*
- “Is Wahhabism to Blame for al-Qaeda and ISIS?” with G. Cafiero. September 2016. *LobeLog*