

# Joseph Francesco Cozza

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## EDUCATION

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### **The University of Texas at Austin**

September 2017 to Present

PhD Candidate, Department of Government

**Subfields:** Public Law and Comparative Politics

**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

Degree: Master of Science in Comparative Politics. Specialization: Comparative Political Institutions.

Honors: Graduated with Merit.

### **Villanova University**

December 2012

Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Minor in Communication.

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

## PUBLICATIONS

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### **Authorizing Revolutionary Constitutional Change: The Approximation Thesis**

*Accepted for Publication at Constitutional Studies, July 2021*

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.

### **Reverse Mortgages and Aircraft Parts: The Arcane Referendum and the Limits of Citizen Competence**

**Co-Authors:** Zachary Elkins and Alexander Hudson

*Accepted for Publication at Electoral Studies, September 2021*

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

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### **Social Capital, Institutional Rules, and Constitutional Amendment Rates**

*Co-Authors:* William Blake and Amanda Friesen

Why are some constitutions amended more frequently than others? Despite the importance of this question to political science and legal theory, there is little scholarly consensus regarding forces that shape constitutional amendments. Some scholars only focus on institutional factors, while others emphasize variations in constitutional attitudes. This paper makes a contribution to both literatures by examining how social capital reduces the transaction costs imposed by amendment rules. We conduct cross-sectional analyses of amendment rates for democratic constitutions globally and time-series analyses of efforts to amend the U.S. Constitution. Our findings suggest amendment frequency is a product of amendment rules, group participation rates, and levels of social and political trust, but these effects vary across contexts based on the corresponding transaction costs. Our findings suggest social capital can have beneficial effects on social movements who demand constitutional amendments and the political elites and voters who supply them.

### **Trust the Process: Procedural Legitimacy and Democratic Decision-Making in Constitutional Change**

The maintenance of procedural legitimacy is a critical component of democratic governance. Nowhere is the production of legitimacy more important than in the area of constitutional transformation, where lawmakers and citizens seek to create “higher law.” This study seeks to empirically test the impact of different democratic decision-making mechanisms on the sociological legitimacy of constitutional change through the use of a survey experiment. In analyzing this question, I explore four broad mechanisms that correspond with the different normative conceptions of democracy debated in the literature: representative democracy, direct democracy, deliberative democracy, and jurisdocracy. In doing so, this study finds that greater citizen inclusion in the decision-making process does not always generate higher perceptions of procedural legitimacy. While constitutional changes made through the use of deliberative democracy produced strong perceptions of legitimacy, those made through the use of direct democracy consistently produced the weakest. So too, the results demonstrate that courts and legislatures are not as distrusted as anticipated. Finally, this study finds that perceptions of procedural legitimacy and substantive legitimacy are highly correlated, frustrating our attempts to theoretically and empirically distinguish these two concepts.

## GRANTS and FELLOWSHIPS

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|  |                       |
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| <b>University Graduate Continuing Fellowship</b> , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$44,000) | Fall 2021-Summer 2022 |
| <b>Government Department Fellowship</b> , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$5,000)           | Fall 2017-Spring 2021 |
| <b>Summer Dissertation Fellowship</b> , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$5,000).            | Summer 2021           |
| <b>Clark Center for Australia and New Zealand Studies Research Grant</b> (\$7,000)                 | Fall 2019             |
| <b>Pre-Dissertation Fellowship</b> , <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> (\$3,500)                | Summer 2018 and 2019  |

**CONFERENCES and INVITED TALKS**

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- 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**

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Assistant Instructor, University of Texas at Austin

January 2020 to May 2021

- Spring 2021: Special Issues in American Government: US Constitutional Design in Comparative Perspective
- Fall 2020: Comparative Legal Systems *co-taught with* Dr. Daniel Brinks
- Summer 2020: Political Internship
- Spring 2020: American Government

**Teaching Assistant, University of Texas at Austin**

September 2017 to December 2019

- Spring 2019 and Fall 2020: American Government
- Spring and Fall 2018: Western European Politics *with* Dr. Zeynep Somer-Topcu.
- Fall 2017: Issues in Third World Development *with* Dr. Zachary Elkins.

**INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

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**Co-Founder/Co-Organizer, Queer in Political Science**

February 2020 to Present

- Work with field chairs to incorporate queer academics into department speaker series.
- Represent the organization and provide information 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 Coordinator, Comparative Speaker Series**

August 2021 to Present

- 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, 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, 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**

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**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**

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- “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*

## SKILLS

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- R, LaTeX, Adobe Suite, Microsoft Office Suite