



The department of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences of VU University Amsterdam has vacancies for:

2 PhD positions & 1 Postdoctoral researcher 'High-Risk Politics' f/m

For each 1.0 fte

PhD position 1: vacancy number: 1.2012.00328

PhD position 2: vacancy number: 1.2012.00329

Postdoctoral researcher: vacancy number: 1.2012.00330

Why do politicians start wars, why do they cut public pensions, and why do political parties' change their ideological focus? In more general terms, why do political actors change the electorally safe status quo with policies of which the outcome is unknown and which may lead to a loss of votes and/or office? The project HIGH-RISK POLITICS: Explaining and improving political actors' decision-making on electorally risky issues – sponsored by a major NWO VIDI research grant rewarded to dr. Barbara Vis – develops and tests a theory of political decision-making under risk that holds on the individual level, the meso level (parties), and the macro level (governments). The starting point for this new theory will come from *prospect theory*, a psychological theory that predicts that people take risk-averse decisions when facing gains while they are risk-seeking when confronting losses. The project is unique in applying a behavioral theory on different subfields of political science, thereby integrating and expanding existing approaches.

A total of three researchers will be recruited to work on this project: two PhD students (1.0 fte each) and one postdoctoral researcher (1.0 fte). Each of the researchers addresses one of the three project objectives (macro, meso or micro).

Tasks

PhD position 1 will work on the macro part of the project. S/he will assess empirically why some governments take electorally risky decisions in the areas of welfare state reform and military intervention while others do not. While insights from prospect theory form the starting point for the theoretical model to be developed and tested, PhD 1 will further develop the full theoretical model for this sub-project (in collaboration with the project leader). PhD 1 will conduct both quantitative analyses and configurational comparative analysis. For this position, knowledge of theories of military intervention and their empirical application is a key requirement.

PhD position 2 will work on the meso part of the project. S/he will examine why some political parties risk alienating their constituents by changing their policy position on salient topics (welfare state issues and international security), but other parties do not. Also for this sub-project insights from prospect theory are the starting point for the theoretical model to be developed and tested, with PhD 2 further developing the full theoretical model (in collaboration with the project leader). In terms of methodological approach, PhD student 2 will conduct quantitative analyses – especially



pooled time-series analysis – in addition to configurational comparative analysis. Strong quantitative methodological skills, especially experience with regression analysis, are a necessary requirement for this position.

Both PhD students will receive intensive supervision and take part in the courses and other activities of the Graduate School for the Social Sciences of VU University Amsterdam. In addition, the PhD students may be enrolled in the Dutch/Flemish research school for Public Administration and Political Science (NIG) and can receive additional training at for instance summer schools. Both PhD students will be coached in getting their work published in academic journals and books, among other things by co-authoring with the project leader. The PhD students also have a limited teaching task (0.1 fte). The PhD students will also participate in the relevant national and international research networks and participate in academic conferences.

The **postdoctoral researcher** will concentrate on the micro part of the project. Existing models of decision-making in political science typically assume that a politician is a *Homo Economicus* or a so-called Econ. But is this true? Experimental evidence finds that “normal” individuals are so-called Humans instead, who use decision-making heuristics and display biases. The empirical evidence from applications of prospect theory in political science suggests that politicians might also be Humans rather than Econs. Still, there is no experimental evidence that prospect theory holds, or fails to hold, for politicians. A related question is whether prospect theory – developed based on experiments with *individuals* – also holds on the level of *collective* decision-making. The available experimental evidence on this is scant and conflicting, while analyses of group decision-making by politicians in a controlled, experimental setting are lacking altogether.

By means of experiments, the postdoc will answer these related questions by testing to what extent (groups of) politicians are Humans in that they display the same attitude towards risk as “normal” individuals do. The results of these experiments will help develop the micro-part of the theory of political decision-making under risk, a task in which the postdoc will be actively involved. Moreover, s/he will participate in the relevant national and international research networks and participate in academic conferences.

Candidates need to indicate their preference for one of the three positions.

Requirements

PhD position 1

- an MA/MSc/Research master in political science or a related discipline;
- among the top of his/her cohort in terms of grades.
- strong methodological skills (experience with quantitative analysis, e.g., regression analysis, and/or comparative research);
- willingness and ability to learn new methodological techniques;
- demonstrated affinity for and knowledge of theories of military intervention;
- interest in political decision-making, for instance on welfare state reform.

PhD position 2

- an MA/MSc/Research master in political science or a related discipline;
- among the top of his/her cohort in terms of grades;
- strong quantitative methodological skills (experience with regression analysis is required);
- willingness and ability to learn new methodological techniques, such as configurational comparative analysis;
- demonstrated affinity for research into the behaviour of political parties.

Postdoc

- a PhD (or very close to completion) in political science, behavioural economics, or a related discipline;
- ample experience with, and strong skills in, experimental research;
- demonstrated ability to publish in leading journals;
- demonstrated affinity for research in political decision-making.

For all three positions

- good communicative skills;
- willingness and ability to work independently as well as in a team;
- excellent English language skills, both spoken and written;
- enthusiasm for disseminating findings to scholarly audiences (e.g., at workshops and conferences) as well as to non-scholarly audiences (e.g., through contributions to newspapers).



Further particulars

The initial appointment will be for a period of 12 months. After satisfactory evaluation of the initial appointment, it can be extended for an additional 36 months (PhD positions) or 12 months (postdoc position). The maximum length of the appointments will thus be 48 months (PhD positions) or 24 months (postdoc position). You can find information about our excellent fringe benefits of employment at www.workingatvu.nl like:

- Remuneration of 8,3% end-of-year bonus and 8% holiday allowance;
- Participation in Individual Choices model.

Salary

PhD positions

The salary will be in accordance with university regulations for academic personnel, and amounts € 2.042,- gross per month in the first year up to € 2.612,- in the fourth year (salary scale 85) based on a full-time employment.

Postdoc position

The salary will be in accordance with university regulations for academic personnel, and depending on experience, range from a minimum of € 2.977,- gross per month (salary scale 10.5) up to a maximum of € 3.755,- gross per month (salary scale 10) based on a fulltime employment.

Information

For additional information, please consult the project website www.highriskpolitics.org or contact Dr. Barbara Vis (b.vis@vu.nl) for a detailed project summary. You can also use this email address for any other questions regarding the positions.

Application

Applicants are requested to write a letter in which they describe their abilities and motivation, accompanied by a curriculum vitae, transcript of grades, one selected publication (for the PhD positions, this can be your master thesis; for the postdoc position, this is preferably an international peer-reviewed journal article), and the names and contact details of two references.

Applications should be sent January 7, 2013 at the latest to:

VU University Amsterdam
Faculty of Social Sciences
Attn.: Drs. M. Karssen
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Only by e-mail to: vacature.pol.fsw@vu.nl

Please mention the vacancy number, plus the position you are applying for (PhD1, PhD2 or postdoc) in the e-mail header.

The interviews are scheduled to take place on February 4 and 5, 2013.

Any other correspondence in response to this advertisement will not be dealt with.

