

Political Consequences of Electoral Systems

POLI 124A
Winter 2011

Professor Matthew Shugart

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:15 a.m. – 10:50 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., SSB 390

Course meeting times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30 a.m. – 1:50 p.m.; RBC Room 3202

Democracy, being a system of under which those who govern are those who win elections, requires a set of rules to determine who “wins.” It is not as straightforward as it may seem to determine winners, as there are many different ways in which voters cast votes, in which those votes are counted, and in how votes are translated into seats in legislative and executive institutions. The set of rules that structure this process of voting and representation are what we mean by “the electoral system” for a given political jurisdiction. In this course, we will analyze and compare electoral systems, according to different categories (e.g. proportional and majoritarian) and in a wide range of democratic countries around the world.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is only an outline of the course, and not any sort of contract from which you can claim rights. If deviations from the syllabus are required for any reasons, they will be announced in class. Such announcements always trump this document.

Books

There are two books that you should acquire for your use during the course.

Michael Gallagher and Paul Mitchell, eds., *The Politics of Electoral Systems*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Referred to in the schedule below as “PES” with the corresponding chapter (usually identified by the country that it covers)

See “Reading Suggestions” in an appendix to this syllabus.

International IDEA. *Handbook of Electoral System Design*.

The IDEA Handbook is available on line, for free!

<http://www.idea.int/publications/esd/>

Course requirements

You are expected to keep up with assigned readings and to attend class. There will be two in-class examinations. There is also a research paper; information about the paper is contained in the syllabus following the schedule of topics. These components of the grade will be weighted approximately as follows:

- 20% Midterm examination
- 25% Final examination
- 10% Annotated bibliography (as part of preparing your research paper)
- 30% Research paper
- 15% Participation (explained near the end of this syllabus)

Schedule of topics, readings, and assignments

Week 1

January 4 (session 1)

Introduction and Overview

IDEA Handbook, pp. 1-8.

January 6 (session 2)

Building blocks I: District magnitude, assembly size, number of parties

IDEA Handbook, Chapter 2 (pp. 27-34)

Rein Taagepera, "Electoral Systems," in Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2006.

Week 2

January 11 (session 3)

Building blocks II: Plurality vs. Proportional Systems; Electoral systems in presidential and parliamentary democracies

IDEA Handbook, pp. 35-90 & 130-37

--you can skip the case studies, because we will come back to them; however, reading them now would not hurt, and might help you understand the different systems.

January 13 (session 4)

Discussion of paper topics and research resources; Continuation of "Building Blocks" themes

Visit by Annelise Sklar, Librarian for Political Science

Week 3

January 18 (session 5)

Elections in single-seat districts: Plurality (FPTP)

PES Canada

PES USA

Other short items to be supplied electronically

January 20 (session 6)

A “Surprise” Case of Multipartism and a case study in electoral coordination
India uses FPTP, so you might expect it to have a small number of parties. Wrong! Why?

PES India

Other short items to be supplied electronically

Also recommended: IDEA Handbook Case Study on India (pp. 39-42)

Due January 20: One paragraph proposal for your research paper

Week 4

January 25 (session 7)

PR, party lists, and proportionality I

PES appendices B, C, and D

PES Israel

January 27 (session 8)

PR, party lists, and proportionality II

PES Spain

PES South Africa

Week 5

February 1 (session 9)

PR with open lists

PES Finland

PES Chile

IDEA Handbook Case Studies: Chile (pp. 78-81) and Brazil (pp. 86-89)

February 3 (session10)

PR with flexible lists

PES Netherlands

PES Denmark

Week 6

February 8 (session 11)

*******MIDTERM EXAMINATION*******

February 10 (session 12)

Ranked-choice ballots I

PES Ireland

Brief additional readings to be supplied electronically

Also recommended: IDEA Handbook Case Study: Ireland (pp. 72-74)

Week 7

February 15 (session 13)

Ranked-choice ballots II; two-ballot rules

PES Australia

Readings on 2010 election and post-election bargaining (to be supplied electronically)

PES France

Due February 15: Annotated bibliography for your research paper

February 17 (session 14)

Mixed-member systems

PES Germany

Week 8

February 22 (session 15)

Other electoral systems and the question of electoral reform

IDEA Handbook, pp. 90-91, 95, 103-104, 112-113, 117-120

IDEA Handbook Case Studies:

British Columbia (pp. 17-19), Japan (pp. 114-116), New Zealand (pp. 100- 103), and Mexico (pp. 96-99)

Also recommended: Case Studies on Lesotho and Thailand

February 24 (session 16)

PES New Zealand
Readings on 2005 and 2008 campaigns and policy-making (to be supplied electronically)

Week 9

March 1 (session 17)

PES Japan
Readings on recent elections (to be supplied electronically)

March 3 (session 18)

Is electoral reform coming to the UK?

PES UK
Readings on 2010 election and May, 2011, referendum on reform (supplied electronically)

Week 10

March 8 (session 19)

Other systems and issues in electoral reform

Readings: Some minimal items will be supplied for discussion

******DUE MARCH 8: FINAL VERSION OF RESEARCH PAPER******

March 10 (session 20)

Conclusions and re-cap

Finals week

According to Triton Link, the final examination will be Tuesday, March 15, 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Research Papers

In addition to midterm and final exams, this course also requires that you write a short (about 12 - 15 pages, double-spaced) research paper, which will count for 30% of your final grade. Your project should focus on a specific problem or puzzle in the study of electoral systems and their consequences.

You must consult a minimum of eight relevant academic sources outside of course readings. These sources can be books, book chapters, articles from scholarly journals, or primary sources (e.g. government, NGO, or international organization publications about electoral systems or elections). You are also encouraged (but not required, depending on your topic) to make use of news-article databases (e.g. Lexis-Nexis or Keesing's) for information on election campaigns, results, post-election government formation, etc.

The general purpose of the research assignment is to allow you the opportunity for more in-depth analysis of the relationship of electoral systems to political outcomes, and to further hone your critical thinking and writing skills. In addition, given that we can only address a small subset of country case studies in a 10-week quarter, it gives you the opportunity to explore a case study of your interest and choice.

The country (or other political jurisdiction) that you do your research on must not be a case that is covered by a chapter in the "PES" book; this exclusion extends even to country case chapters that are not required for the course. If you choose to do a comparison of two countries (e.g. two cases with a similar electoral system), it is acceptable to choose as one of the cases a country covered in PES. Exceptions to this rule may be granted if your topic is significantly different from the themes of the chapter in PES. (For instance, something about a change or proposed change in the electoral system that happened after the book was published.)

*A one-paragraph proposal of your research project is due at the beginning of class on **January 20**. An annotated bibliography of at least five relevant scholarly sources is due at the beginning of class **February 15**. Final papers are due no later than the beginning of class on **March 8**.* Because of the size of the class, and the importance of maintaining standards of fairness for all students, late papers will be penalized one-third of a grade for each day that they are late. Please also note that e-mailed versions of papers will not be accepted.

Your paper should have a clear thesis statement and your argument should be carefully developed with supporting evidence. Topics may include such questions as: how it was that the electoral system shaped the conduct of the campaign and/or the outcome of some election in a given country (or state, province, etc.); whether a reform of the electoral system in a given political jurisdiction would help resolve some problem (where the problem is something, identified in your paper, to do with the current electoral system); how and why two seemingly similar electoral systems produce different political consequences in two cases. If you need help narrowing your topic, or if you run into problems finding information on the topic you've chosen, please consult me, your TA, a reference librarian, or the political science research librarian at Geisel, Annelise Sklar.

As mentioned above, a one-paragraph (single-spaced) proposal of your research project is due at the beginning of class on January 20. Proposals should include: (1) a brief statement of the question and why it is important, and; (2) a brief statement and justification of your case study. Of course, I (and your TA) will also be available throughout the quarter through office hours and the WebCT board to assist you as your projects develop.

Class Participation:

This is an upper division political science course, and so you are expected to come to class meetings having done the reading and prepared to discuss central questions, puzzles and concerns that arise from readings assigned for that day, or current events that are related to course topics. Ideally, up to 20 minutes of most 80 minute class sessions will be devoted to questions and discussion.

There are three main ways to participate in the course: (1) class discussion; (2) postings on the course WebCT board; and (3) bringing questions to office hours (individually or with other students). The portion of your grade that is based on participation can only help your final course grade, as long as you are attentive, raise questions once in a while, and respond to questions that I may direct your way. The participation component of your grade will lower your grade (i.e. what it would be based on exams and the writing requirements) only if you are frequently absent, nearly always silent, or you are regularly unable to answer any questions posed to you.

Please try to come to office hours at least once (preferably more!) to discuss your research projects, course readings, current events related to the course, etc. I look forward to getting to know and learning from each of you!

Appendix 1: Reading Suggestions

The country-specific readings from the book, *The Politics of Electoral Systems* (PES), are very detailed, but you should focus on situating each case into a larger conceptual context. Each country's electoral system is part of a larger family. Think about what defines the family, whether this case has unique characteristics within the family, and how this family relates to other families. Each family has attributes that lead to generalizations regarding inter-party and intra-party politics. You should focus on these types of cause-and-effect relationships.

Some of the readings come from the IDEA Handbook, *Electoral System Design*, and these are of two types:

- (1) Overviews of choices and key rules of electoral systems; these will help you make sense of the "families" of electoral systems.
- (2) Case studies of experiences with specific electoral systems; these are much shorter than the case studies in PES.

For many class sessions, there are also news readings about recent politics in one of the countries being covered that day. The purpose of these is to bring the political context up to date. Do not neglect these! They will help you make sense of how electoral systems shape politics. There is also always some chance that I will ask you in class to interpret the events covered in the news in light of what the PES chapter says about the same country.

In thinking about the broader political process in any country (or state, province, etc.), we can posit that various actors have political preferences, meaning outcomes they would like to see come to fruition, goals they would like to achieve, etc. "Actors" here may mean voters, political parties, individual candidates, and sitting legislators, among others. Electoral systems are in a sense the "rules of the political game." Therefore, we need to think in terms such as:

- If a group of voters want a particular policy outcome, how should they proceed given how the electoral system works?
- How might their best strategy change if the electoral system was different?

We will be deducing hypotheses about how we expect electoral systems to influence behavior and we will be looking at the empirical record, as related in the relevant PES chapter, IDEA case study, or news readings, to determine the extent to which our expectations hold.

The main text for the class – *The Politics of Electoral Systems* – is divided into conceptual and country-specific chapters. In the latter set of readings, each chapter is further subdivided into:

- (1) Historical background to the country's political system
- (2) Origins of the current electoral system
- (3) The electoral system as it stands today
- (4) Political consequences of the electoral system
- (5) The politics of electoral reform

Sections 1, 2, and 5 of each chapter can be thought of jointly (and read relatively quickly). When thinking about the origins of systems it is important to remember that electoral systems are adopted by the very actors – namely, politicians and parties – whose behavior they are supposed to constrain. Ask yourself who stood to benefit from the adoption of certain rules and who were the major players in these deliberations?

Sections 3 and 4 should be read very carefully. Their focus is more central to the subject matter of this course. (Except in some latter course sessions, we will typically assume that the electoral system is a given, rather than something that fluctuates). Pay attention to the critical electoral variables in section 3. When you are done reading you should be able to answer the following types of questions (this list is not exhaustive):

- How do parties choose candidates?
- What is the ballot's structure (does it allow for intraparty competition)?
- How many votes does each voter get and are they cast at the party or subparty level?
- When the election is over to what level do votes "pool" (can votes for one candidate help another)?
- How many seats are allocated in each district? By what formula?

I would suggest that you make notes on each country, trying to answer these questions. You should be able to use abbreviated versions of your answer to create a comparative table of electoral systems.

Section 4 will help you think about the theoretically relevant ramifications of these rules on important dimensions of the political system: how political parties interact with their (potential) supporters; the activities in which candidates engage; how campaigns are conducted and what parties talk about; the degree of legislative voting cohesion shown by members of a partisan bloc; the number and type of bills members sponsor (and their likelihood of passing); the role of committees and members' committee careers; the process of government formation (coalitions, cabinet posts); and the legislature's interactions with other branches.

In sum, while you read, focus on getting the basics of the rules correct and how those rules help determine what behavior makes the most sense. This is best done by putting each system in a larger context (think about how it is similar to or different from other systems). *Please be ready at each class to ask questions about the readings or by raising a topic for discussion.*

There may be periods in each class when what I'm talking about seems to have no relationship to what you have read for the day! If this occurs, please raise your hand and ask me to make the connection more explicit. The chances are that I will be trying to show how some characteristic of a an electoral system – in a country *not* covered by the day's readings – encourages voters, candidates, or representatives to behave in a certain way, and I will have chosen this country as an example because it is strikingly like or strikingly unlike the case(s) about which you read for the day. I will try to be explicit about making the connection between the readings and our discussions, but if I am not, please ask for clarification (sooner rather than later).

Appendix 2: Elections scheduled for winter or spring, 2011 (selected)

Source: Maximiliano Herrera's Electoral Calendar

<http://www.angelfire.com/ma/maxcrc/elections.html>

16 January	Haiti	Presidential and parliamentary runoff elections
23 January	Portugal	President
23 January	Central African Republic	Presidential 1st round, and parliamentary and local elections
31 January	Niger	President 1st round and parliament
6 February	Cape Verde	Parliament
18 February	Uganda	President 1st round and assembly
20 February	Chad	Parliament
__ March	Benin	President and assembly
4 March	Samoa	Parliament
6 March	Estonia	Parliament
9 March	Uganda	Presidential runoff
12 March	Niger	Presidential runoff
20 March	Central African Republic	Presidential runoff
2 April	Nigeria	Parliament
9 April	Nigeria	President
10 April	Peru	President and assembly
13 April	Madagascar	Parliamentary and local government elections
17 April	Finland	Parliament
__ May	Cyprus	Parliament
5 May	United Kingdom	Referendum on the Alternative Vote for parliamentary elections
5 May	Scotland (U.K.)	Parliament
5 May	Wales (U.K.)	Regional assembly
12 June	Turkey	Parliament