

# Comparative Electoral Systems

POL 140A Winter 2017 (Sec. 001 CRN: 45059)

Professor Matthew Shugart; Kerr Hall 682. Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:10 to 1:20

Course meeting times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. – 11:50 p.m.; Shrem 1301

Final exam time: Tuesday, March 21, 10:30 a.m.

## Introduction

I wish I had a dime for every time I have read in a newspaper article about how such-and-such country uses a “complex form of proportional representation”. Usually, that implies that even the writer has no real idea what “proportional representation” is, and so doesn’t even want to think that maybe understanding it would help the reader put the country’s politics in context. Sometimes statements about complexity in politics elsewhere imply that things are so much “simpler” here (and “here” usually means the US, but it could also be the UK or somewhere else familiar to the writer or speaker). Yet we Americans had elections in 2000 **and 2016** in which the candidate with the most votes did not become president. Isn’t that complex? Moreover, as recently as 2012, the party that got the majority of seats in the US House was not the party that had the most votes. Did you even know that? It was hardly reported. Do you know why it could happen?

This short introduction keys in on one of my biggest objectives for you in the this course: *to enable you to make sense of how elections work in countries around the world*. I hope that whatever you go on to do in the world after college—and for most of you, it won’t be what I do, which is analyze electoral systems and political parties for a living—you will always remember to ask questions when statements are made in the media or other sources about elections and democracy in your or other countries. To put it simply: I hope you will never look upon a news story about the domestic politics in other countries or your own the same way as you did before. I hope you will come out of this course with a more systematic way of thinking and questioning, and will be better citizens for it.

## What the course is about

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 variations in how voters cast votes, how votes are counted, and how votes are translated into seats in legislative and executive institutions. One common problem—I hope after the first few weeks of this course it will be clear why it is a problem—with much media commentary on elections at home and abroad is references to who will “win” without any thought of what that really means. Win the most votes? Win more than half the seats? Get to be president but face a legislature in complete opposition? Get a chance to form a coalition with one, two, or maybe five other parties? The rules by which elections are held, and governments formed, differ across countries and have systematic impacts on what it means to “win”.

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. When we talk about electoral systems, we usually mean the rules by which the legislature is elected, and that is how we generally will understand it here. However, in countries that have elections for a president, there must also be some set of rules for deciding who wins. (Hint: no other country uses a system like the one in the US.) Thus most of our focus will be on legislatures, but we will also consider the range of methods for electing presidents, as well as how the executive branch is formed in democratic countries that don’t have presidential elections.

Elections are contests for government posts, e.g. seats in a legislative chamber. In democracies, they are contests between politicians who almost always are organized into political parties. If there is more than one party—as there must be for the system to be a democracy (think: why?)—then there is a *party system*. This is a concept that captures the idea of not only how many parties there are (the “two-party system” vs. a “multiparty system”), but also how they interact with one another. Sometimes parties are harshly critical of others (that’s normal!), while other times parties might cooperate and compromise with one another (that’s also normal!). Why, and how does the electoral system of a country shape the way the party system operates? What difference does it make for how people are represented, and for how the government functions? These are key themes of this course.

### **Logistics, Rules, and Other Important Matters**

**Disclaimer:** This syllabus is a general outline and not a contract from which you can claim rights. It is subject to change, and any announcements made in class about changes supersede this document. It is every student’s responsibility to keep up to date about any changes; it is not the professor’s or TA’s role to update students who might have missed a class.

**Readings:** This course will have a significant amount of required reading, somewhat variable in length and difficulty week-by-week. You are assumed to have made it to the upper division of your university education because you know how to keep up with reading.

By taking this course, you hereby agree to keep up with the reading, which means completing it before class. It also means reading carefully enough that you can sound like an intelligent person if asked some question about the day’s assigned readings.

There is no book that you need to acquire for this course. You are either lucky or unlucky, depending on your perspective. I am in the process of co-authoring, with Rein Taagepera (Professor Emeritus, UCI and University of Tartu, and the 2008 Johan Skytte Prize winner<sup>1</sup>), a new book on electoral systems called ***Votes from Seats***. So you get it for free! (Future classes will have to buy it, once it is published.) That is the sense in which you are lucky. The unlucky part? Well, that depends on how you feel about being the first class to “test drive” a new, and as yet unpublished book.

Chapters for the book, *Votes from Seats*, will be posted here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0By0g2VT5gw4ZNFjd2drd1YyXOU?usp=sharing>

In addition to *Votes from Seats*, there will also be **many other readings, and these are also required**. These will be accessible usually through our on-line course site, usually as PDF files. Some other readings will be provided as Web links. Get into the routine of checking the “Files” tab of the Canvas site for this course. (Items will not be put in late to surprise you. Anything newly added will be posted about a week before the date of the session for which it is required, with rare exceptions.) Readings other than chapters from *Votes and Seats* will be posted at the POL 140 **CANVAS** page (<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/101383>)

**Course requirements:** You are expected to keep up with assigned readings and to attend class, and to arrive on time. There will be **at least four in-class writing or calculating assignments** on days that will not be announced in advance. You can miss one of these without penalty, but if you miss more than one, your grade will suffer. If you are present for all of them—which I hope you are—the low score (as long as not zero) will be dropped when determining your final grade (and other scores averaged in its place).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ut.ee/en/ut-professor-emeritus-rein-taagepera-receives-acclaimed-skytte-prize>

Note: You must have a “scientific” calculator with you in class at all times, and not simply one that is on your computer or “smart” phone. A scientific calculator is one that has keys for taking roots and logarithms. If you do not have one, you need to buy one. If you do not know how to use one, you will learn in this class.

Your final paper is an election-analysis paper. See explanation later in the syllabus.

The components of the grade will be weighted approximately as follows:

20%	Midterm examination
25%	Final examination
25%	Election analysis paper
15%	In-class writing assignments
15%	Participation

No student will receive a passing grade without turning in every assignment on time, and taking each exam at the mandated time. No make-up exams or other assignment will be offered, except in the event of dire emergency (for which proper documentation will be required).

**Missing Assignments.** If you know in advance that you will miss an assignment deadline, you may submit a partially completed assignment early—and then appeal for an extension. What if you don’t know in advance? “Purchase some insurance,” I like to say. That is, buy yourself some time by preparing for contingencies; don’t wait till the night before it is due to begin to work on an assignment. I am not very sympathetic to those who fail to plan ahead. Life is complicated; make it less so by managing your time efficiently. Even if your work is not complete because something unexpected interfered, submitting what you have accomplished prior to the emergency is better than failing. Extensions will be granted only under **extreme** circumstances, and at my sole discretion.

NOTE: If you have a University-certified disability that requires accommodation on exams or other course activities, it is imperative that you make this known in plenty of time for accommodations to be arranged.

Alternative research track. For those interested in going into greater depth on a special topic regarding one country’s electoral system or some cross-national theme regarding electoral systems, the option exists for an “independent research” track. This would excuse you from *some* of the requirements defined in the syllabus. In replacement, you would turn in various “installments” on your specialized research project instead. This track means you do a more ambitious and demanding final project than the standard one required of everyone else. The likely number of students admitted into an alternative research track is somewhere between zero and about three. Details will be provided early in the quarter.

**Class meetings** combine lecture, discussion & other learning activities. I expect you to be in your seat when class starts; *sometimes I will start the class with a writing or calculating assignment.* (Other times these will come near the end of a session.) In any case, lectures typically cover material that the readings do not, and you are responsible for (read: “are subject to being graded on”) all material covered in the course.

You are expected to come to class, every class (exceptions only if you are truly ill; do not come and share with all of us your disease!). If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed. I do not answer questions of the sort, “what did I miss?” or “did I miss anything important?” In fact, the latter is insulting to me as well as to your classmates who did show up. *Of course you did!* (There is no need to let me or a TA know when you are going to miss class for some good reason. In fact, please don’t email us to let us know unless it is really, really important for us to know.)

I will use presentation slides some days, but many days I will not. Any slides that I show may contain information not in the readings, and when they do, I will post those slides within a couple of days following the class meeting. I will never post any slide that is a summary of something from the reading. You are responsible for those points on your own.

You are not allowed to take photos in class unless you have my explicit permission. The same restriction applies to audio or video recordings.

This course has a regular 80-minute session and then an add-on designated for “term paper or discussion”. Because the course has a final paper, I will normally not hold the class session for a full 100 minutes, but we may often go somewhat past the 80-minute mark. There will be days when we go the full time, or nearly so; please do not assume that we will end at 11:20 on any given day. **Some planned dates for full sessions are noted on the syllabus, but there could be others.** You have signed up for a class that meets 10:00 to 11:50, and so you are expected to be available for the full allotted time unless I release class early (or announce that it will start late, which you can expect to be very rare).

**Policy on laptops/tablets/phones:** Numerous studies confirm that students who take notes by hand retain more information over time. It is also far less distracting to others when there is not constant typing going on during a lecture/discussion. I am willing to allow for the fact that some individuals do prefer (or even benefit from) taking notes on a computer or tablet. This will be allowed, but under strict conditions. First, if you are taking notes on a machine you will sit in one designated area of the classroom. Second, you will turn off the wifi/cellular data. Third, you consent to being monitored by a TA who will sit behind you, and there will be no second chances if you are caught on a website or engaging in some other task on the computer (tablet, etc.) other than note-taking for this class.

Studies also confirm that students learn more when they are “fully present” in the classroom, which means being unplugged. Learning how to temporarily disconnect is also good practice for professional life...and anyway, things like YouTube videos distract your neighbors and those sitting behind you. If you can't disconnect for the duration of each class session, just skip class. This leads to two very important rules:

- 1) No surfing: If you are using it for note-taking, set your laptop/tablet on airplane mode during class.
  - 2) No texting: Put your phone on silent mode and Put. It. Away. In your bag or coat, not your pocket.
- And if you think I don't notice: normal people don't smile at their own crotch unless they're texting.

These policies are about having respect for your classmates, and doing your part to maintain a good learning environment for us all.

**Getting to know you.** This is important, especially if the class ends up being fairly large!  
**Please bring a dark/bold/big name tag to put on your desk for at least the first few weeks.**

**Extra credit photo – due by the end of class on Wednesday of week two (Bonus 1%):**

Please bring 2 copies (2 pieces of paper, 1 copy on each piece of paper) of a picture of you to your TA.

- Hard copy (8.5 X 11 size paper) only. If you want to tape/paste a picture onto a 8.5 X 11 piece of paper, that is fine as long as what you look like is clearly visible from the picture.
- Black & white photo (or even photocopy) is fine.
- The photo should be one that clearly indicates what you look like. No sunglasses in the picture.
- Please make sure all information (legibly written) is presented on the same side of the page as the photo. Please include your name, the pronunciation of your name, the quarter and class, and your TA's name. If more than one person is in the picture, indicate which one you are. (Better yet: use a different photo.)
- If the course has two TA's, you will be assigned a specific one and you should put that TA's name on the sheet with the photo.
- Late copies not accepted; pictures that do not follow the above instructions will lose at least 1/2 of a point.
- Unless you turn in a picture, I cannot guarantee that you will receive the (positive) participation grade that you deserve.

## Schedule of topics, readings, and assignments

### Week 1. January 9 (session 1)

Introduction and Overview

*Votes from Seats*, Preface

*You should also read the syllabus carefully, and preferably before the first class. I will not go over every point, but I will answer questions.*

Chapters for the book, *Votes from Seats*, will be posted here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/OBy0g2VT5gw4ZNFjld2drd1YyXOU?usp=sharing>

### January 11 (session 2)

Basics: What we mean by “electoral system”, why they matter, and basic components

*Votes from Seats*, Chapters 1 & 2

*Key questions: If we want to understand how electoral systems shape politics, we might start with the number of parties. Why is this important? How might the electoral system matter to the number of parties? To who wins? What is a “simple” electoral system? What are the main types of proportional representation (PR)? What is “First Past the Post”?*

*Essential concepts that you must not fail to grasp: Assembly size, district magnitude, D'Hondt formula, Hare quota and largest remainders*

### Week 2.

January 16 is a **holiday**

### January 18 (session 3)

More components and key measures

*Votes from Seats*, Chapters 3 & 4

*Key questions: What are some key examples of features that make an electoral system “complex” (not “simple”)? Be sure that you understand how each of the following would not qualify as a simple system: STV, SNTV, two-round system. What are “tiers” in an electoral system, and why would some systems be two-tier? What is a threshold?*

### Week 3.

### January 23 (session 4)

The US: Recent elections from the perspective of how electoral systems work

READINGS TBD (*readings not from *Votes and Seats* will be at the **CANVAS** site*)

*Key questions: In what sense is the Electoral College an example of the broader concept of an electoral system? In what sense is it unique? Should it be abolished or changed? Is there good justification for it? How would you characterize the electoral systems for the US House? The Senate? What do we mean by gerrymandering and malapportionment, and are they related concepts or completely different?*

**January 25 (session 5)**

**Due today: One paragraph proposal for your Election Analysis paper**

Electoral systems and their country contexts I

*Votes from Seats*, Chapters 5 & 6

Some news items of relevance to the countries covered or others with similar systems will be provided

*Key questions: Think about the cases used in these chapters as examples. How is each one an example of one of the electoral-system families introduced in earlier sessions and readings? How does the country context matter for the way the electoral system works?*

**Week 4.**

**January 30 (session 6)**

Electoral systems and their country contexts: FPTP in three major parliamentary democracies

Canada, UK, and India. Everyone must read the chapters on *India* and *at least one* of the other two.

*Key questions: Canada and the UK use an electoral system widely thought to be conducive to “two-party” politics. Yet that seems not to be the case (at least not anymore) in these countries. It is even less the case in India. How does the electoral system interact with other features of the country to result in the party systems observed in these countries?*

**February 1 (session 7)**

Electoral systems and their country contexts II: Two examples of PR democracies

Germany & South Africa (everyone must read both)

*Key questions: Why have two tiers of the electoral system, yet design the system as overall proportional? Well, mostly proportional, as long as your party clears 5%! Many political scientists and political-reform activists think Germany’s system is just about the best ever designed. Why? Do you find it appealing, or is it awkward and too complex? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in the South African system? Why, despite PR, is there one dominant party in South Africa?*

**Week 5.**

**February 6 (session 8)**

The Seat Product Model for Nationwide Party Systems

*Votes from Seats*, Chapters 7 & 8

**February 8 (session 9—LONG SESSION)**

The Seat Product Model for Nationwide Party Systems

*Votes from Seats*, Chapter 9

## **Week 6.**

**February 13 (session10)**

**In-class midterm examination (you will be allowed to use the full session)**

**February 15 (session 11)**

How the district level works in simple electoral systems

*Votes from Seats*, Chapter 10

[Spain??]

*Key questions: Why does a district of a given magnitude not have the same effect if it contains all or almost all the country's assembly seats or if it is just one of many in a very large assembly? If you can answer that question, you will have grasped the main lesson here; you certainly do not need to memorize the many equations in Chapter 10, but you need to understand why they are necessary to have a more complete understanding of how electoral systems work. In Spain, how*

## **Week 7.**

**February 20 is a holiday**

**February 22 (session 12)**

How presidential democracy makes electoral systems work differently (and how it does not)

*Votes from Seats*, Chapter 11 & 12

(Appropriately, right after President's Day, we will learn about presidential systems)

## **Week 8.**

**February 27 (session 13)**

The "Intra-Party Dimension

*Votes from Seats*, Chapter 13 & 14

**March 1 (session 14)**

Electoral systems and their country contexts III: France

## **Week 9.**

**March 6 (session 15)**

Electoral systems and their country contexts IV: Finland and Brazil

### March 8 (session 16)

Two-tier systems, thresholds, and other complicating factors  
*Votes from Seats*, Chapter 15 & 16

### Week 10.

### March 13 (session 17)

Electoral reform: The cases of New Zealand, Italy, and Japan  
Everyone must read the New Zealand case; you may choose one of the other two, but you should glance at the third enough to know very broadly what was changed

*Key questions: Why did these three long-lived democracies make major reforms in their electoral systems? What was wrong with what they had before? Have the reforms fixed the problems in either or both countries? Have they created new problems?*

### March 15 (session 18—LONG SESSION)

So, what can we expect from electoral systems?  
*Votes from Seats*, Chapter 17 (and continue anything from 16 that we did not complete already)

This session will take up the whole allotted period with no break. It will also serve as our review before the final. So bring your questions.

**The due date for the election analysis paper will be announced; the final exam date is March 21 (see p. 1)**

You will have one new required reading for the final: **Netherlands case study**. About two thirds of the exam will be testing your ability to apply what you have learned to a case you have not yet seen, which just conveniently happens to have an election on March 15.

## SYLLABUS APPENDIX

### Election Analysis Paper

As part of your requirements for this course, you will prepare an *Election Analysis*. It should be about 5-10 pages, double-spaced. It will take a specific election in some country, and discuss the outcome, including how the electoral system shaped the outcome. The paper must be about the *electoral system* and/or the *party system* of the country, and must be focused on a specific election or its subsequent events.

Unless agreed otherwise, your Election Analysis Paper will have to include some quantitative analysis, for instance calculating the effective number of parties or other indices that are relevant to understanding how the election played out given the country's electoral system and party system.

There may be certain elections that will serve as major examples in class and thus you will not be able to do them for your paper unless you (with my help and that of your TA) select a topic that is quite different from what I will cover. Some restricted cases will be announced in class, but there may be others. Thus it is



critical that you ask your TA before deciding which election you are interested in doing. An upcoming election may be possible, depending on how you frame your question.

For this paper, you must consult a minimum of six sources. There must be at least three academic sources, by which I mean peer-reviewed journal articles or books published by a major press. (We will discuss what these limitations mean in class.) You also should consult web-based sources, such as newspapers or data archives (e.g. Lexis-Nexis or Keesing's). In addition, it would be helpful to consult primary sources (e.g. government, NGO, or international organization publications about electoral systems or elections).

**It is critical that you use web resources only if they are a trusted source.** If in doubt, ask. If it is not a major media outlet, an official government site of a democracy, or other reputable source (such as ones mentioned in this appendix), it is probably best avoided. **It is not OK to rely on Wikipedia articles**, with the exception that it is a good and reliable source for election data.

Your Election Analysis paper must have a clear thesis statement and your argument must be carefully developed with supporting evidence. That is, the point of an analysis is to advance an argument that helps the reader understand what was significant—in your considered judgment—about the election, in the context of concepts introduced in this course. Understand that you are not writing an opinion piece, but a work of analytical political science. Topics may include such questions as: how it was that the electoral system shaped the conduct of the campaign and/or the outcome of the election; how some party or minority group was advantaged or disadvantaged by the electoral system that the country uses; 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). 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, or a reference librarian.

## **Class Participation**

Because this is an upper division political science course, you will be expected to come to class meetings having done the reading and prepared yourself to discuss central questions, puzzles and concerns that arise from those readings. It is also very useful if you keep up with current events that are related to course topics. Ideally, 15–20 minutes of most 80 minute class sessions should be devoted to questions and discussion (not necessarily in one block of time), although some days, especially earlier in the quarter, may be more heavily tilted towards lecture.

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 course grade (i.e. what it would be based on 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!

## **Some Web Resources**

<http://psephos.adam-carr.net/>

<https://fruitsandvotes.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.ifes.org/> (this page might be helpful: <http://www.ifes.org/news/elections-watch-2017>)