

POL 140A: Electoral Systems

University of California, Davis

Spring Quarter, 2021
Tuesdays and Thursdays
3:10-4:30pm

Live lecture URL: <https://ucdavis.zoom.us/j/92845225859>
Class YouTube URL: <https://tinyurl.com/dkxcp22a>
Class Discord Invite URL: <https://discord.gg/xGJYT6CYa2>

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Course Description

Introduction

Elections are one of the most important and most misunderstood political institutions. At a fundamental level, they determine who in a society wields power – what could be more important? And yet, you will often see articles (especially in the United States) saying that such-and-such country uses “a complex form of proportional representation.” The author seldom goes on to explain what that system actually is, ignoring its importance to understanding that country’s politics. Often, they seem to not even know what “proportional representation” is. These articles often presuppose that the US has a “simple” system, that is easy to understand. And yet, the US had elections in 2000 *and* 2016 where the candidates with the most votes didn’t become president. That sounds complex to me! Furthermore, as recently as 2012, the party that won a majority of seats in the US House was not the party that got the most votes. If that’s news to you, it’s probably because it was barely reported! Do you know how such a reversal could happen?

This is all to say that the main objective for this class is to *enable you to understand how elections work in countries around the world*. Whether you continue to pursue political science academically or not, having a working knowledge of elections is an invaluable tool for understanding what goes on in the world and why it happens the way it does. After this class, when you see a story in the news about elections and democracy in other countries, you should have the tools to question the assumptions made.

My hope is that in taking this class, you will feel that you have a fuller view of not just politics at home but politics everywhere.

One thing you should know coming into this class is that *there will be math!* The math will not be above the high school level – the most advanced thing you will have to do is put a fraction in an exponent. You may also need to compute logarithms. You will also *never* have to do this math by hand – I fully expect you to use a calculator (as I usually do!) to perform mathematical tasks. I do not include math in the course simply because I love numbers (I do!) – the equations and mathematical relationships you will encounter in this course are integral to a complete understanding of electoral systems.

This course is meant to be fun! While the material in this class will often get into the weeds of electoral systems, I will endeavor to make sure our discussions are relevant to current political events – particularly current elections! If there is something happening in the news that is relevant to our class, I will be sure to allocate time to discuss it. I encourage you to apply current events to course material in class discussion as well. Electoral reform, national elections, and sub-national elections are all fair game!

What Is This Class 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.

Remote Instruction

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis will make this a challenging quarter for all of us. This class will be my first priority, but I do not expect it to be yours. If you or your family are sick or struggling, let me know – I can help make sure you succeed in this class anyways. There is also no shame in taking this class pass/fail: do not hesitate to let me know if this would be your preference.

I also know that the transition to online courses means that the course structures you are probably used to at UC Davis are not appropriate this quarter. As such, I have taken several steps to make this course as engaging and accessible as possible. There will be no final exam for this course. Instead, the course will have brief assignments throughout the quarter and a final paper. This will help ensure that students face less pressure and that each graded assignment is worth less of the total grade.

The class will feature both live lectures on Zoom (at the regularly scheduled class time) and lecture recordings will be uploaded to YouTube. I encourage you to attend live lecture – there will be opportunities for Q&A and engagement every class. If you cannot attend some classes, you can watch the lecture recording at a time that works for you. Regardless, you are expected to keep up with the class material and attend class when possible. The links for both the live lecture and the YouTube channel are posted at the top of the syllabus.

Class Expectations

Live Lecture

Because of the COVID-19 suspension of in-person classes, all lectures will be given digitally on Zoom. These lectures will be given live on Zoom during the normal class time. There will be opportunities for students participating live to ask questions during lecture. To join lectures throughout the quarter, use the following link: <https://ucdavis.zoom.us/j/92845225859>

Lecture Recordings

Lectures will be recorded and posted to YouTube for students who are not able to attend lecture at the regular time. The YouTube link for class lectures is <https://tinyurl.com/dkxcp22a>. You are responsible for keeping up with lecture and should take care not to fall behind.

Office Hours

The office hours for the instructor and TAs are listed at the top of this syllabus. You can join our Zoom office hours using the links provided at the beginning of the syllabus.

In addition, we are happy to set up additional office hours at a time more convenient for you. Send us an email if you wish to do so. Once you have scheduled additional office hours you may use that same link to meet with us.

Online Access

All readings and documents for this course (except *Votes From Seats*) can be accessed through the

Canvas website or via hyperlinks in the syllabus schedule. Messages will be sent by me via Canvas, so make sure you have email notifications for Canvas messages activated.

Participation

Because this class is fully online, “participation” will not be a part of your grade. However, I still encourage you to ask questions, participate in the class chat, and share your opinions. There will be opportunities to do so during the virtual lecture.

Email

I welcome questions and comments, either by email or by Canvas message. When you email me, you should compose your email as you would any piece of professional correspondence. I will respond to your emails as quickly as possible, but please do not expect a quick response to email sent on weekends or after 5pm on any day.

Scientific Calculator

You will need to use a scientific calculator for class assignments. You may use a physical one, but any computer you use should have one pre-installed as well.

Lecture Slides

Slides will be used in class on most days. Slides will be posted to Canvas before the class session.

Class Discord

There is a Discord channel for this class. Participation is not required and will not affect your grade. You may use it to ask me questions, chat about the class, talk politics, and socialize. While you are encouraged to discuss class material with each other, please keep in mind that you are expected to complete your assignments individually. You may join using the following link:

<https://discord.gg/xGJYT6CYa2>

Required Text

There is a required text for this course.

- *Votes From Seats*. Matthew S. Shugart and Rein Taagepera.

You may access all other readings through the Canvas portal for this class or via hyperlinks in the syllabus.

Grading

Grading for this course will be calculated as follows:

Election Worksheets (x5)	40%
Take-home Midterm	20%
Essay Proposal	5%
Election Analysis Essay	35%
Total:	100%

The final letter grade will be assigned according to the standard table:

97-100: A+	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+
93-96: A	83-86: B	73-76: C	63-66: D
90-92: A-	80-82: B-	70-72: C-	60-62: D-
			00-59: F

If you are 0.5 points or less from the next letter grade at the end of the course, the grade submitted to the registrar will be rounded up to the next letter grade. You will not be able to see this rounding on Canvas.

All graded items listed above are detailed in the sections that follow.

Election Worksheets

Throughout the course I will ask you to apply class material and the mathematical electoral system analysis techniques you have learned to real-world elections. These worksheets will be posted one week before they are due. You should fill out the worksheet and upload the completed document as a Word or PDF document to the corresponding Canvas assignment. You are expected to complete these worksheets *individually*, though I encourage you to seek help from your classmates if you are struggling with the mathematical portions of these worksheets.

Each worksheet will be worth 10% of your final grade. The lowest-scoring worksheet will be dropped from your final grade.

Take-home Midterm

While the worksheets will feature analysis of individual elections, the take-home midterm will instead test your understanding of electoral systems concepts. You will *not* have to compute mathematical quantities in this midterm. The midterm will be online and consist of multiple choice and short answer questions.

The midterm will take place on May 4th. You may start the midterm at any point during the day (there will not be lecture on May 4th). You will be given 80 minutes to complete the exam once you have begun, but it will be designed to take 45-60 minutes to complete. You must complete the exam before midnight.

Election Analysis Essay

You are required to submit an analytical essay on an election of your choice for this class. You 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, using a specific election or its subsequent events. You will also need to include some quantitative analysis (e.g. calculating the effective number of parties) that are relevant to understanding how the election played out given the country's electoral system and party system.

Make sure to use 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spacing, and please numbers. The paper should be 6-8 pages double spaced (not including the bibliography). If you include tables or figures, they will not count against the page limit.

Essays will be graded on content (evidence provided), analysis (claims drawn about the evidence provided), structure (clarity of thesis and logical “flow” of the essay), and mechanics (grammar, punctuation use, sentence and paragraph composition, etc.). The following elements are part of an A paper:

1. **A clear thesis** presented in the first paragraph and argued throughout. Include “In this essay I will argue that...” or something similar.
2. **Evidence to support your thesis** in the form of facts, ideas from existing research, and thoughtful, balanced analysis.
3. **Clear structure**, including an introduction, a conclusion, and reasonably sized body paragraphs. Each body paragraph should start with a topic sentence that introduces that paragraph.
4. **A bibliography** with a complete list of your sources. Some guidelines:
 - Include a **minimum of six (6)** sources total.
 - At least **three (3) academic sources** for each paper. These should be academic articles or university press books (the textbook is fair game).
 - At least **one (1)** of your three academic sources must be from outside the class (meaning that it is not on the syllabus).
 - Lectures may be cited, but do **not** count towards your required sources.
5. **Appropriate and sparing use of quotes**. Quotes do not speak for themselves. They should always be preceded by context and followed by analysis of that quote.
6. **Clear writing** with few grammatical errors.

I cannot emphasize enough the need for a clear thesis statement and an argument 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, using the concepts introduced in this course. 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).

Essay Proposal

Early in the class you will need to select a topic for your final paper. By midnight on April 13th, you will need to go to a Google spreadsheet I have created where you can enter the country and year of the election you intend to study. We would prefer to avoid having students writing about the same election (exceptions if the topics are otherwise clearly distinct), so this will allow us to ensure there are no duplicate studies.

Please also enter the *type* of election you intend to analyze (assembly or presidential). We strongly encourage you to select an assembly election, though a presidential election is also acceptable with sufficient justification. Please input your information into the spreadsheet as soon as you have selected an election for your final paper.

In addition, you are strongly encouraged not to choose a US election, although especially meritorious proposals on a US election will be considered.

To access the sheet, use the following link:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KA8Zvn2x4YR7AIrOFfxLVp6i3XLAX4_DVRuTogNL994/edit?usp=sharing

In addition, a one paragraph proposal for your Election Analysis paper is due by midnight on April 15th. Please submit this proposal on Canvas for the "Election Analysis Paper Proposal" assignment.

Citations and Bibliographies

I am not a stickler for a particular citation format. What does matter is that you cite every source you reference and include a bibliography at the end of every paper you submit that references outside sources. You may use either in-text parenthetical citations (e.g. [APSR style](#)) or footnotes (e.g. [Chicago style](#)), but you MUST be consistent and use citations every time you refer to an outside source rather than your own opinion.

Late Submissions

Do not wait until the night before it is due to begin to work on an assignment. Life is complicated and full of unexpected surprises. Plan for uncertainty by managing your time efficiently. Even if your work is not complete because something unexpected interfered, submit what you have accomplished prior to the emergency. After-the-fact extensions will be granted only under extreme circumstances, and at my sole discretion.

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.

Worksheets submitted late will have 10% deducted from their final score for every day they are late. This penalty begins immediately following the day and time the assignment is due and will not be prorated. Late essays will not be accepted after the scheduled final exam date.

Grade Appeals

If you are not satisfied with the grade you receive on an assignment or exam, please take the following steps:

- 1) Review any comments/feedback the I or the TAs have provided.
- 2) If you still have questions, go to the office hours of the TA who graded you, or contact them by email.
- 3) If you still believe the grade you received is in error, submit a one-paragraph written request for a regrade by email to me. If the request is approved, your work will receive a completely new evaluation by me. Your score may increase, decrease, or stay the same.

Academic Dishonesty

All course work by students is to be done on an *individual basis* unless otherwise specified by me. Any reference materials used to prepare an assignment must be cited. Generally speaking, you must

cite the person at the end of the sentence in which you use another person's idea. When you use a specific phrase, you must put that phrase in quotation marks and cite the original author at the end of the sentence in which you use the phrase. If you wish to submit a piece of writing that you have used in another class, you must receive my permission before doing so. The following webpage contains specific guidelines for avoiding academic misconduct: <https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/code-academic-conduct>.

Disabilities

UC Davis encourages qualified students with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. I am strongly committed to the same policy. If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact the Student Disability Center at (530) 752-3184 as soon as possible to identify and document your specific needs. Additionally, it is your responsibility to contact me privately immediately at the beginning of the quarter (i.e., within the first week) so we can discuss how to accommodate your needs. Do not wait until just before an assignment deadline or an exam to inform me of a learning disability.

Weekly Reading Schedule

The list below indicates reading assignments and class topics. All journal articles and other readings (excluding the required textbook) will be available on Canvas or linked below. You should do each day's readings before that day's class. I'll generally keep us on schedule but note that discussions may bleed over from one class to the next.

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments Due
Week 1		
Tues, Mar 30	Course Introduction & Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syllabus
Thurs, Apr 1	The Basics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Votes from Seats</i>, chapter 1 Electoral Systems Around the World, FairVote: https://tinyurl.com/y3ufplpp
Week 2		
Tues, Apr 6	Components of Electoral Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Votes from Seats</i>, chapters 2 & 4
Thurs, Apr 8	Plurality (FPTP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Votes from Seats</i>, ch. 5 (Trinidad & Tobago, India Sections)
Week 3		
Tues, Apr 13	Alternative Vote & Two-Round (TR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Votes from Seats</i>, ch. 7 Select the election for your final paper on the spreadsheet linked in the syllabus by midnight. You should not pick an election already selected by a classmate (unless you and the classmate agree to analyze the election in very distinct ways).
Thurs, Apr 15	Proportional Representation (PR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Votes from Seats</i>, ch. 6 <i>Votes from Seats</i>, ch. 5 (Israel Section) Election analysis paper proposal due at midnight

Week 4		
Tues, Apr 20	Closed vs. Open List PR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas: Mainwaring, Scott. "Politicians, parties, and electoral systems: Brazil in comparative perspective." <i>Comparative Politics</i> 24, no. 1 (1991): 21-43.
Thurs, Apr 22	Single Transferable Vote (STV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Explainer: How does Ireland's voting system work?” www.thejournal.ie/how-does-prstv-work-2619448-Feb2016/ • Election worksheet #1 due at midnight

Week 5		
Tues, Apr 27	Single Non-transferable Vote (SNTV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas: Cox, Gary W., and Michael F. Thies. "The cost of intraparty competition: The single, nontransferable vote and money politics in Japan." <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 31, no. 3 (1998): 267-291.
Thurs, Apr 29	Party Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Votes from Seats</i>, ch. 13 • Election worksheet #2 due at midnight

Week 6		
Tues, May 4	Midterm Review	
Thurs, May 6	Online Midterm – NO CLASS	

Week 7		
Tues, May 11	Mixed Member Majoritarian (MMM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Votes from Seats</i>, chapter 3
Thurs, May 13	Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas: Thames, F.C. and Edwards, M.S., 2006. "Differentiating mixed-member electoral systems: Mixed-member majoritarian and mixed-member proportional systems and government expenditures." <i>Comparative Political Studies</i>, 39(7), pp.905-927. • Election worksheet #3 due at midnight
Week 8		
Tues, May 18	Electoral Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas: Vowels, Jack. "The politics of electoral reform in New Zealand." <i>International Political Science Review</i> 16, no. 1 (1995): 95-115.
Thurs, May 20	Case Study: Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas: Gamboa, R., & Morales, M. (2016). Chile's 2015 Electoral Reform: Changing the Rules of the Game. <i>Latin American Politics and Society</i>, 58(4), 126-144. • Election worksheet #4 due at midnight

Week 9		
Tues, May 25	Malapportionment & Thresholds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas: Carey, John M. "Malapportionment and ideological bias in Chilean electoral districts." <i>Latin American Politics and Society</i> 58, no. 3 (2016): 123-133 • Liptak, Adam. 2013. "Smaller States Find Outsize Clout Growing in Senate." <i>The New York Times</i>. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/11/us/politics/democracy-tested.html • "The world's most unfair election system – how would your parliament fare?" 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/01/turkey-the-worlds-most-unfair-election-system
Thurs, May 27	Presidential Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Votes from Seats</i>, ch. 11 • Election worksheet #5 due at midnight

Week 10		
Tues, Jun 1	Primary Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yglesias, Matthew, “The US presidential primary process, explained.” https://www.vox.com/a/presidential-primaries-2016-republican-democrat/presidential-primaries-explained • John Oliver, Last Week Tonight, “Primaries and Caucuses.” https://youtu.be/S2G8jhhUHg • Shugart, Matthew. 2020. “The strategic voters’ nightmare that is US Democrats’ “proportional” system.” <i>Fruits & Votes</i>. https://fruitsandvotes.wordpress.com/2020/02/20/the-strategic-voters-nightmare-that-is-us-democrats-proportional-system/
Thurs, Jun 3	Case Study: The United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drutman, Lee. 2017. “Democracy on Life Support.” <i>American Purpose</i>. https://www.americanpurpose.com/articles/democracy-on-life-support/ • Shugart, Matthew. 2021. “Emergency electoral reform: OLPR for the US House” <i>Fruits & Votes</i>. https://fruitsandvotes.wordpress.com/2021/01/19/emergency-electoral-reform-olpr-for-the-us-house/ • Desilver, Drew. 2016. “Trump’s victory another example of how Electoral College wins are bigger than popular vote ones.” <i>Pew Research Center</i>. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/20/why-electoral-college-landslides-are-easier-to-win-than-popular-vote-ones/ • Inversions in US presidential elections, 1836-2016, https://voxeu.org/article/inversions-us-presidential-elections-1836-2016

NO FINAL EXAM – Election Analysis Essay due by midnight on Monday, June 7th