Elections and Democracy
Elector MA course, Fall 2018
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS
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Classes: time slots and venue as announced at [http://politicalscience.ceu.hu/course-schedules](http://politicalscience.ceu.hu/course-schedules)


Reading lists: see below, but note that the list may change throughout the semester as the course evolves. Mandatory readings will always be limited in length to the equivalent of 40-60 pages with a conventional layout for scholarly works (plus illustrations and appendices) a week, and made available at least a week in advance so that you can engage with them in depth. Updated versions of the syllabus will be posted on the e-learning site of the course.

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7. Social choice theory and empirical findings about the likely consequences of voting methods. Heresithecis and permanent disequilibrium. Reasons for (not) getting obsessed with the Arrow theorem and the never-ending search for perfection

Further topic for independent study: Parties and party systems as solutions to preference aggregation, recruitment, policy adjudication and agency problems, and as problems on their own

8. The origin, popularity, modern justifications and technical alternatives of majoritarian electoral systems. Agency loss versus horizontal accountability. Representing communities of interest vs. individual voters. Choice architectures, Duverger’s Law, and the value of diversity. Can preference aggregation be nudged towards centripetal competition? Why do electoral systems ignore negative preferences?

9. Normative and technical problems in the delimitation of electoral district boundaries. Malapportionment, packing, cracking, kidnapping; pro-incumbent, partisan and affirmative gerrymander. Minority vote dilution under single-member district systems

10. Proportional electoral systems and Duverger’s proposition. Notions and indices of proportionality. The stability and horizontal versus vertical accountability of governments. The value of diversity and conciliation. The relative significance of choices regarding district and assembly size, formula, thresholds, ballot format, and bonus seats

11. Mixed electoral rules: Multi-segment, additional member and parallel systems. Excessive fragmentation and concealed majoritarianism or best of both worlds? Constitutional and practical issues with overhang seats

Further topic for independent study: Within-party choices. Candidate selection and nomination with primary elections and otherwise. Intra-party preference voting systems. The endurance and electoral accountability of individual representatives and parties

12. Special arrangements for minority representation and women’s representation via reserved seats, quotas, placement mandates, and nomination rules

Further topic for independent study: Ballot architecture from partisan to non-partisan, neutral versus nudging, and traditional to voter-friendly. The alphabet effect. Voting technology. Electronic and online voting and cyber security

Further topic for independent study: Campaigns and informed electorates. The impact of media pluralism, advertisements, leader debates, manifesto costing, fact-checking organizations, opinion polls, vote advice applications, get-out-the-vote drives and their absence

Further topic for independent study: The funding and costs of elections: can we tell apart worthy spending and waste? The clash of egalitarian, free speech, and citizen engagement considerations. The impact of small vs. large donations
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Course description
Elections are central to the political process in all contemporary political systems save a handful of traditional monarchies and dictatorships. Their importance for legitimating office-holders is second to none in democracies, but is non-negligible and sometimes decisive in authoritarian regimes too. The course first investigates why elections acquired this important place in modern societies and what impact they actually have or lack in the political process. Then we move on to survey all major aspects of election architecture and see what normative dilemmas various issues and solutions raise, and what practical effects they have. We will pay particular attention to the last decades burgeoning literature on elections with some competition but low integrity.

While the course’s main goal is to assist evidence-based, normatively informed analytical thinking about institutions, it also introduces a wide range of technical and comparativist knowledge regarding democratic and authoritarian ways of organizing elections, and how the effectiveness of various tools can be undermined in practice by regime opponents. The course also surveys when and why elections have effects that run against their manifest function, i.e. undermine popular sovereignty in democracies, or lead to a defeat of authoritarian governments in non-democratic regimes. The course prepares participants to analyze, discuss and shape electoral institutions in various professional roles in the media, politics, education and civil
Learning outcomes

- Familiarity with theories, concepts, empirical regularities and research strategies regarding rules for elections. By the end of the course, participants should be able to give informed advice to advocacy groups, government agencies, political parties, write informed analysis about elections for news media and NGOs regarding electoral rules, and distinguish likely charlatanry from solid evidence-based knowledge on the topic.
- Ability to propose, elaborate and persuasively argue for specific electoral rules tools in response to real world electoral system debates, with reference to the results of scholarly analyses and relevant normative concerns.
- Reason analytically, apply abstract models to complex empirical situations and engage with different intellectual traditions, subfields, research designs and methodologies in the social sciences.
- Improved ability to design high-quality academic or applied research in a rigorous and consistent manner.
- Ability for effective oral presentation of scholarly thoughts, developing listening and discussion skills with initiative and autonomy in various professional contexts.
- Improved understanding of the potential and limits of statistical analyses, case studies and experimental research especially with respect to the establishment of causality; improved appreciation of the potential of qualitative research and rigorous description.

Requirements

The classes will always require active participation and careful preparation via reading the required materials and occasional online research. The meetings will typically be of the seminar-type, with multiple shorter presentations, including some by the instructor, followed and/or interrupted by Q&A and with discussion about the readings. The second meeting of each week will at times start with a quick written quiz based on the readings that will ask you to build on what you read in answering questions following just a little bit of thinking about the implications what you read. A good response will show that you covered the assigned readings, can apply the concepts they use, and are able to engage critically with their central arguments, but need not demonstrate that you remember technical details and trivia. We will then promptly discuss what could have been good and less good answers. Occasionally we will have some group exercises with in-class preparation too. 10% of the final grade will be based on the quality of in-class contributions to the discussions and group tasks, 25% on quiz results, 25% on individual presentations, and 40% on a max. 4,000-word long term paper. The topic of the term paper has to be closely related to the topics covered in the course and needs to be agreed upon with the instructor by 20 October. Your paper will address in a novel way a theoretically relevant research question about formal or informal rules regulating elections in one or more countries. It can, for instance, be an original case study of an electoral system feature in terms of the actors’ motivation for its adaptation, and/or its (unintended) effects; a focused and structured literature review on an aspect of one of the topics covered in the syllabus; an in-depth and evidence based analysis about the political impact of a particular election; or your own novel analysis of a related issue using an appropriate data set or theoretical reasoning. Regarding plagiarism and attendance, the departmental policies will apply.
Guide to readings and topics
Below you find first lists of readings and online resources that can prove useful throughout the course, and then a list of readings for our individual topics. Some of the topics will be dealt with in one, others in two sessions. Therefore the number of topics is not equal to the number of either weeks or classes in the semester. For each topic, I present a list of readings. This list may change as the course unfolds – an up to date syllabus will always be available on our e-learning site, so it is a good idea to check that each week before you start your reading sessions.

“Required readings” will always be marked by a # sign, and are expected to be read by all course participants before the respective class. Their length is generally kept below 50 pages per week except when the document layout or extensive use of illustration massively reduces the amount of text contained. For some topics, everyone will read different things and in that sense there are no required readings. It would be unreasonable, however, for you to expect that you do not have to allocate at least a few hours to preparing for this class every week during the term.

The first two weeks – the add/drop period at CEU – shall be devoted to a comprehensive overview of what elections do in democratic settings. Part I of the course concludes with a brief look at what elections do in authoritarian systems and how that helps us understand democratic elections better. Part II reviews design issues regarding free and fair elections. Part III reviews issues, tools and arenas in fights about electoral norms and outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

Inevitably, time constraints will force us to skip over or leave for other courses (Political Theory, Parties and Party Systems, Political Communication, Voting Behavior, to name a few) some highly relevant questions regarding elections and democracy. You may, however, wish to explore these via independent study or in your term paper, and can of course discuss them with me during office hours. Some such topics appear below as unnumbered “further topics for independent study” with a set of recommended readings that can serve as starting points for your research into them.

Recommended general readings


**Advocacy websites**

There is such a very large number organizations dedicated to election law advocacy that this collection of web addresses where you find often challenging, interesting or at least bemusing material cannot even suggest the range of issues, methods and perspectives that their pages offer. But you will find well worth exploring this scene on the internet during the course. Let me know if you find something that particularly grabs your thoughts about elections and democracy!

[https://www.brennancenter.org/](https://www.brennancenter.org/)
[https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/](https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/)
[https://www.idea.int/](https://www.idea.int/)
[http://electoralreformaustralia.org/](http://electoralreformaustralia.org/)
[https://participedia.net/](https://participedia.net/)
[https://www.electology.org/](https://www.electology.org/)
[https://ballot-access.org/](https://ballot-access.org/)

**Recommended data sets**

Some entries below may have been updated between the completion of the syllabus and the time you check, therefore I am trying to give general direction rather than precise citation of specific versions of the data set as it would be expected in a scholarly publication relying on the data:


https://qog.pol.gu.se/data/datadownloads/qogstandarddata

Pilet, Jean-Benoit, and Alan Renwick. [no date]. "Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945." Available from http://www.electoralsystemchanges.eu


Part I: The role of elections

1. The shifting meaning of democracy and voting in centuries of political thought. Imperfect natural selection, priors and path dependence in the evolution of democratic institutions. Public choice theory’s justification for collective choices

Readings (# marks required):

2. The performance of elections in forging responsiveness, accountability, legitimacy and engagement. The stability of democracies and other regimes

Readings (# marks required):
3. What are elections for and what are their key consequences in authoritarian systems? Political system typologies. Legitimacy and responsiveness in democratic and authoritarian regimes

Readings (# marks required):


Part II: Designing democratic elections

4. Controversies about participation as a right. Voting rights of foreigners, expats, military, prisoners, minors, and people living with disabilities. Voter registration and id laws

Readings (# marks required):

5. Roots and remedies of vote buying. Arguments for open and secret ballots

Readings (# marks required):

Further topic for independent study: Who can run in elections? Ballot access, nomination rules, term limits and party bans

Readings (# marks required):


6. Broader and narrower concepts of an electoral system. Voting procedures from unanimity to plurality. The Condorcet paradox, the May, and the Gibbard–Satterthwaite theorems. The normative appeal of majority rule and the counterarguments

**Readings** (# marks required):


7. Social choice theory and empirical findings about the likely consequences of voting methods. Heresthetics and permanent disequilibrium. Reasons for (not) getting obsessed with the Arrow theorem and the never-ending search for perfection

**Readings** (# marks required):


**Further topic for independent study: Parties and party systems as solutions to preference aggregation, recruitment, policy adjudication and agency problems, and as problems on their own**

**Readings** (# marks required):


8. The origin, popularity, modern justifications and technical alternatives of majoritarian electoral systems. Agency loss versus horizontal accountability. Representing communities of interest vs. individual voters. Choice architectures, Duverger’s Law, and the value of diversity. Can preference aggregation be nudged towards centripetal competition? Why do electoral systems ignore negative preferences?

Note: The first item on the reading list is not a required reading, but, if you are unfamiliar with the technical differences between various majoritarian electoral rules, then you may benefit from reading this light introduction first.

Readings (# marks required):
9. Normative and technical problems in the delimitation of electoral district boundaries. Malapportionment, packing, cracking, kidnapping; pro-incumbent, partisan and affirmative gerrymander. Minority vote dilution under single-member district systems

**Readings** (# marks required):


10. Proportional electoral systems and Duverger’s proposition. Notions and indices of proportionality. The stability and horizontal versus vertical accountability of governments. The value of diversity and conciliation. The relative significance of choices regarding district and assembly size, formula, thresholds, ballot format, and bonus seats

**Readings** (# marks required):


11. Mixed electoral rules: Multi-segment, additional member and parallel systems. Excessive fragmentation and concealed majoritarianism or best of both worlds? Constitutional and practical issues with overhang seats

**Readings** (# marks required):

Further topic for independent study: Within-party choices. Candidate selection and nomination with primary elections and otherwise. Intra-party preference voting systems. The endurance and electoral accountability of individual representatives and parties

Readings (# marks required):

12. Special arrangements for minority representation and women’s representation via reserved seats, quotas, placement mandates, and nomination rules

Readings (# marks required):

Further topic for independent study: Ballot architecture from partisan to non-partisan, neutral versus nudging, and traditional to voter-friendly. The alphabet effect. Voting technology. Electronic and online voting and cyber security

Readings (# marks required):


Further topic for independent study: Campaigns and informed electorates. The impact of media pluralism, advertisements, leader debates, manifesto costing, fact-checking organizations, opinion polls, vote advice applications, get-out-the-vote drives and their absence

**Readings** (# marks required):


Further topic for independent study: The funding and costs of elections: can we tell apart worthy spending and waste? The clash of egalitarian, free speech, and citizen engagement considerations. The impact of small vs. large donations

Readings (# marks required):


13. Participation as a duty. Compulsory voting and other turnout-enhancing measures. The impact of turnout on election outcomes

Readings (# marks required):
Ellis, Andrew, and et al. 2006. Engaging the Electorate. Stockholm: International IDEA.

Further topic for independent study: Reasons, opportunities, methods and obstacles to democratize electoral system choice. Deliberative assemblies and referendums on electoral system choice

**Readings** (# marks required):

Further topic for independent study: Direct democratic initiatives and authoritarian plebiscites: what is their use and impact?

**Readings** (# marks required):


Part III: Beyond free and fair elections

15. The concept, measurement and impact of election integrity

Note: In spite of its unconspicuous placement in the class schedule, this is in many ways one of the most important topics in the entire course, and also the topic that probably saw the most advance of comparatist knowledge in the last couple of years, culminating in four key monographs that would well deserve to be read by the whole class. Alas, that is not a realistic option for us. Therefore I suggest that we cover this topic via an exercise in knowledge sharing that can help you prepare for real-life situations in civic initiatives, media organizations, think tanks and international organization where small groups of people often need to overcome extreme time constraints to produce an intelligent response to an unfamiliar political question. Each course participants will prepare for this class by reading one short required reading, prepare
questions for further study on that basis, and one longer section – a different bit for each class participant – from the four monographs. In class, we will go through your questions of further study with me helping to identify who is best placed to answer it given the long reads that you covered. Then, we shall listen to what this person has got as a response to the study question. Below you see the list of the readings that we will collectively over in class.

**Readings (# marks required):**


14. Do elections in authoritarian states advance or hinder democratization? How often do authoritarian leaders lose office because of elections? Case studies and statistical evidence

**Readings (# marks required):**

16. Election fraud and possibilities for its detection. Fraudulent, unsubstantiated and rightful claims of fraud and their impact on the political process

Readings (# marks required):


Further topic for independent study: Exposing fraud: actors, processes, results. Methods and limitations for watchdog media, citizen activists, independent election commissions and appeals to courts.

**Readings** (# marks required):


17. The know-how and impact of election observation missions, norm diffusion, democratic conditionality and international sanctions

Note: I plan to invite a highly experienced international election observer to participate in this class, either in person or via a video link online. Therefore we will probably have to choose an unusual time slot for this class to fit the schedule of our guest. If a suitable guest appearance is assured, each of you will prepare questions for this class from different readings chosen with my help. During the class, we will query our guest with your own questions regarding the purpose, procedures, logistics, and impact of observation missions.

Readings (# marks required):


Further topic for independent study: Election boycotts and electoral protest: how often and to what extent do they reach their manifest goals, and how often are they just a rejection of accepting defeat?

*Readings* (# marks required):


Further topic for independent study: How elections induce the consent of the losers and when they fail to do so? How do elections trigger or avoid political violence?

Readings (# marks required):


