

Political Science 381: The Politics of Electoral Systems

Dr. Brian F. Crisp
285 Siegle Hall
crisp@wustl.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30
or by appointment

Course Description

It is impossible to appreciate the variety of electoral systems used to select legislative bodies without taking a comparative perspective. We will begin this course with a brief consideration of what goals political founders and reformers are pursuing when they design an electoral system. Then we will define the conceptual dimensions along which the incentives created by electoral rules can vary. With these basic concepts in hand we can then study specific national cases to assess the impact of electoral laws on party systems, legislator behavior, and interbranch relations. After completing a long series of case studies, we will return to a comparative perspective to discuss recent scholarly research in this field. Finally, we will conclude the semester by reconsidering the question of what founders and reformers can hope to achieve when selecting electoral systems.

Most fundamentally, you should think of electoral rules as formal institutions that incentivize certain behaviors. If voters, candidates, or members of parliament want to achieve certain outcomes, they must develop a strategy for making that outcome most likely. The strategy one chooses must take into account the rules. For example, how a voter who wants policy to move in a different direction should cast her vote will be affected by the rules regarding district magnitude (the number of seats awarded in each district). An incumbent candidate who wants to win reelection may vote very differently on which proposed bills should become law depending on whether his re-nomination is controlled by a handful of party leaders or by voters in a primary. Whether the executive has to compromise on the ideological content of her preferred bills in order to get legislative support for them will be affected by legislators running for reelection are primarily concerned about their individual, personal reputations or the collective reputation they share with other members of their party.

Electoral systems are made up of rules that govern a host of issues related to how elections work, including rules about how candidates get access to the ballot; the extent to which voters can *disturb* the ballot presented to them; to what level voters votes will be pooled before seats are awarded; how many votes each voter gets to cast and whether they can select individual candidates or just party banners; how seats are allocated within a district or tier once all the votes are counted; and whether certain thresholds must be met before a seat can be won. As we will discuss in great deal over the course of the semester, these rules have effects on *interparty* politics and *intraparty* politics. Aspects of intraparty politics we will explore include the relationship between supporters and a party and the relationship between party leaders and rank-and-file politicians. Aspects of interparty politics we will explore include the the number of political parties that exist, their relative

size, and their position in a policy space.

Course Readings

- Reynolds, Andrew, Ben Reilly, and Andrew Ellis. 2005. *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Gallagher, Michael, and Paul Mitchell, eds. 2008. *The Politics of Electoral Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Course Requirements

Participation

Please plan to attend all class periods and to have completed the readings so that you can participate in a discussion. Every Friday you should send me a brief e-mail assessing your participation during the week. I will respond to your e-mail with my own assessment. Attendance and participation will account for **12.5% of your total grade**.

If you have trouble knowing what you are supposed to “get from” the readings or trouble seeing a connection between the readings and what we are doing in class, please raise the issue immediately. The country-specific readings are very detailed, but I want you to focus on how to put each case into a larger, conceptual context. Each country’s electoral system is part of a larger family and each family has attributes that lead to generalizations regarding interparty and intraparty politics. It is these cause-and-effect relationships upon which I want you to focus. Remember, electoral systems are incentive structures for voters, candidates, sitting legislators, etc. We will be deducing hypotheses about how we expect these systems to influence behavior, and we will be looking at the empirical record to determine the extent to which our expectations hold.

Some days I will spend a great deal of time summarizing the readings, but most days I will assume that you have done them and that we can use them as a common base of knowledge. Again, if it appears to you that there is a fundamental gap between your readings and our discussions, let’s talk about it sooner rather than later. Otherwise, I will expect your regular participation.

Class Presentation

Each of you will make a class presentation of approximately 1/2 hour. The presentation will cover the electoral system of a particular national case including an overview of its electoral system; the historical origins of that system; the political consequences of the electoral system for the party system, parties themselves, parliament, and the government; and any possibilities of electoral reform. Your oral presentation should be accompanied by slides outlining your topic, hard copies of which you distribute to your peers.

Part of your presentation should be devoted to summarizing the text, but I expect you to introduce new material as well. That new material should focus on the consequences of the electoral system for relationships among members of the same party, relationships between

parties, and/or relationships between the legislature and the executive. You should make use of **original empirical data** and draw on **previous scholarly work** on a relevant topic. Please feel free to consult with me regarding your original subject matter and relevant extra readings. Your presentations will account for **12.5% of your total grade**.

Quizzes

On a very regular basis we will have very brief quizzes regarding the day's readings and/or previous discussion. Questions formats include multiple choice; true/false; fill-in-the-blank; matching; short answer; etc. You are welcome to submit possible quiz questions. At the end of the semester, we will drop the scores of your worst quizzes (25% of them) and use your best quizzes (75% of them). The quizzes will be worth **25% of your total grade**.

Research Paper

You will also write a major research paper. It will be evaluated on both its substance and on the quality of your writing. The paper will compare the electoral systems of six or more countries. At least two of those countries should be cases that were *not* covered in the TPoES text. Early and careful selection of your cases will be key to your ultimate success. See the separate document on the paper assignment for more details on case selection.

The paper will be done in installments (see the Course Schedule below). In the first installment you should describe the Intraparty Dimension of electoral politics and the institutions that govern that dimension in your cases. It should conclude with your expectations about what Intraparty Politics should look like in these countries. These expectations (or hypotheses) should be drawn from the existing scholarly literature which I can help you identify.

The second installment will include a revised version of the first installment (in response to my detailed comments). New material should include a description the Interparty Dimension of electoral politics and the institutions that govern that dimension in your cases. It should conclude with your expectations about what Interparty Politics should look like in these countries. These expectations (or hypotheses) should be drawn from the existing scholarly literature which I can help you identify.

The third installment of the paper will include revised versions of the first and second installments and add systematic tests of your expectations about the consequences of the electoral systems for the party systems and parties themselves *or* for the consequences of the electoral system for parliament and government. This will require the reporting of systematic empirical data that you may have to collect from primary sources.

The final installment will include revised versions of the first three installments, an introduction that correctly forecasts the shape your paper took, and a conclusion about causal generalizations. A revised, complete draft of the paper will be due at the final exam.

Each of the first three installments will account for 10% of your grade, and the revised final version will account for 20% of your final grade. In other words, all installments of the paper combined account for **50% of your final grade**.

A more detailed description of the paper assignment will be provided in a separate document.

Course Schedule

Tuesday, January 14: Course Overview

No Readings

Categorizing Electoral Systems

Thursday, January 16: Criteria for Electoral System Design

ESD pp. IX-15

TPoES pp. 20-23

Tuesday, January 21: Dimensions along which Systems Vary: Intraparty

ESD pp. 27-33

TPoES pp. 3-20

TPoES pp. 579-597

Thursday, January 23: Dimensions along which Systems Vary: Interparty

ESD pp. 27-33

TPoES pp. 3-20

TPoES pp. 579-597

Tuesday, January 28: The Politics of Electoral Systems (*Discuss Papers*)

TPoES pp. 3-20

Plurality/Majority Systems

Thursday, January 30: Plurality/Majority Systems

ESD pp. 35-56

Tuesday, February 4: Single-Member Constituency Systems I

TPoES: pp. 79-205 (selected)

Thursday, February 6: Single-Member Constituency Systems II

TPoES: pp. 79-205 (selected)

(*Student Presentations*)

List PR Systems

Tuesday, February 11: Proportional Representation Systems

ESD pp. 57-90

Thursday, February 13: *PAPER INSTALLMENT I DUE*

Tuesday, February 18: CLPR Cases I

TPoES: pp. 333-394 (selected)

Thursday, February 20: CLPR Cases II

TPoES: pp. 333-394 (selected)

(*Student Presentations*)

List PR Systems continued

Tuesday, February 25: OLPR Cases
TPoES: pp. 433-452, 473-490 (selected)

Thursday, February 26: FLPR Cases I
TPoES: pp. 397-432, 453-472, 491-510 (selected)

Tuesday, March 4: FLPR Cases II
TPoES: pp. 397-432, 453-472, 491-510 (selected)
(*Student Presentations*)

Thursday, March 6: STV Cases
TPoES: pp. 511-532

Mixed Systems

Tuesday, March 11: Mixed Systems
ESD pp. 90-112

Thursday, March 13: *PAPER INSTALLMENTS I & II DUE*

Tuesday, March 18: Mixed-Member Cases I
TPoES: pp. 209-330 (selected)

Thursday, March 20: Mixed Cases II
TPoES: pp. 209-330 (selected)
(*Student Presentations*)

Consequences of Electoral Systems for the Policy-Making Process

Tuesday, March 25: Summary of TPoES
TPoES: pp. 543-563

Thursday, March 27: Impact on Intraparty Politics Carey*: 92-107 Olivella and Tavits*:
1-21

Tuesday, April 1: Impact on Interparty Politics Cox*: 145-161 Crisp, Potter, and Olivella*:
143-158

Thursday, April 3: Impact on Interbranch Relations Johnson and Crisp*: 128-142 Saiegh*:
1342-1356

Tuesday, April 8: *PAPER INSTALLMENTS I, II, & III DUE*

Changing the Rules of the Game

Thursday, April 10: Electoral Reform: Theory

ESD: pp. 15-24

TPoES: pp. 57-76

TPoES: pp. 563-566

Tuesday April 15: Electoral Reform: Causes

Benoit*: 363-389 Shvetsova*: 191-212 Colomer*: 1-21

Thursday April 17: Electoral Reform: Effects

Shugart*: 207-224 Calvo and Micozzi*: 1050-1074 Crisp and Ingall*: 733-748

Tuesday, April 22: Which Electoral System Is Best?

TPoES: pp. 566-575 Carey and Reynolds*: 36-47

Thursday, April 24: Which Electoral System Is Best?

Meisburger*: 155-163 Reynolds and Carey*: 164-168

Tuesday, April 6: *PAPER INSTALLMENTS I, II, III, & IV DUE*