

**Department of Political Science  
Case Western Reserve University**

**Fall 2010  
POSC 363/463**

**Dr. Vincent McHale  
Mather House #222  
Email: vem@case.edu**

**COMPARATIVE ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS**

Elections and electoral systems matter – a lot. They not only determine who the policy-makers are, but electoral rules have also worked to shape the political order. The purpose of this research seminar is to examine a variety of electoral arrangements worldwide and issues surrounding them from a comparative perspective using both historical and contemporary examples. Competitive elections have become the norm over the last two decades with over a billion people casting ballots under a variety of electoral arrangements. Elections involve more than the simple act of voting. They are more than a single summary of individual preferences. The rules under which elections are held determine who controls the executive, how votes are converted into legislative seats, and how controversial issues are directly decided through referenda. The mechanics of various electoral arrangements will be examined in detail, and their consequences for the political system will be discussed in terms of strategies and desired outcomes on the part of the contestants. Students will be instructed as to sources of data and methods of analysis. The culmination of this experience will result in the preparation of a professional research report as described below. These reports will be the subject of class discussion during the second half of the semester.

***Requirements and Grading:***

There are no tests. The final grade will be based on the following weighted distribution:

- Class attendance and participation (10%)
- The submission of timely progress reports on the research project (10%)
- A final PowerPoint presentation (30%) – about 20 minutes or more in class
- A final written report (50%) – an end of semester due date will be announced

***A Note on Class Attendance:***

Regular class attendance is expected. Attendance after the “drop-add” period will be monitored. Students with more than (3) unexcused class absences, or those with excessive absences (7 or more) will have their final course grade reduced by one letter grade.

### ***Research Requirement:***

In consultation with the instructor, each student will be required to select a country and analyze a recent election from both a *qualitative* and *quantitative* perspective. The end product will be a compact professional research report (15 to 20 pages) coupled with a class presentation that will include reference to media discussion involving the election, polls, statistical analysis, and PowerPoint graphics. Students will also be introduced to the use of geospatial data for mapping “within-country” variations in electoral behavior. In some *special* cases, research teams may be allowed dealing with different elections in the same country.

### ***Reference Materials:***

There are no required texts for the course. The following selective citations are for reference purposes only.

- David M. Farrell, *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction* (2001).  
Guy Hermet, Richard Rose, and Alain Rouquié (eds.), *Elections Without Choice* (1978).  
D. Nohlen *et al.* (eds.), *Elections in Africa* (1999).  
D. Nohlen *et al.* (eds.), *Elections in Africa and the Pacific: A Data Handbook, Vol I: Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia* (2001).  
D. Nohlen *et al.* (eds.) *Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook, Vol II: South East Asia, East Asia, and the South Pacific* (2001).  
Lisa Rakner and Lars Svasand, *Multiparty Elections in Africa's New Democracies* (Christian Michelson Institute, Report R 202:7).  
Richard Rose (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Elections* (2000).  
Richard Rose and N. Munro (eds.), *Elections and Parties in the New European Democracies* (2005).  
Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (2006).

Additional reading material (e.g., books, articles, professional papers) when required will be placed on reserve at the Kelvin Smith Library or distributed via email. Selected materials may be handed out in advance as a basis for discussion.

### ***Required Software:***

Special software (SPSS, Corel or Adobe graphics, PowerPoint, etc.) may be required in order to complete the research exercise, although most analyses can be handled by EXCEL. Details regarding student access to software will be discussed in class, along with instruction as to its use.

### ***Office Hours:***

Monday and Wednesday, 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., and by appointment.

## Tentative Outline of Class Sessions

### I. INTRODUCTION

- Pervasiveness of competitive elections
- Trends – variety rather than uniformity
- Beyond the simple act of voting
- Shaping the political order through election laws
- Experimentation and reform
- New tools – polls and election forecasting

### II. THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

- Brief history of the field of comparative electoral studies (*Psephology*)
- Molding effects on party systems and political cleavages
- Electoral design and the trajectory of democratization
- Normative issues and electoral reform – the search for equity and legitimacy
- Elections and political authority – is choice enough?

### III. GENERAL ISSUES

- Voter registration – who can participate?
- Eligibility and integrity of electoral lists
- Verification procedures
- Location of the basic electoral law – constitutional or ordinary law?
- Voter turnout – the great unknown
- Invalid ballots – random or patterned?
- Vote thresholds
- Types of elections
  - Legislative, presidential, referenda
  - Local, regional, national
  - Different chambers – different rules

### IV. THE MECHANICS OF ALLOCATING LEGISLATIVE SEATS AND EXECUTIVE OFFICES

- “There is more than one way to conduct a democratic election”
- Plurality – single ballot, “first past the post”
- Majoritarian – two or more ballots possible
- The “wasted vote” issue - examples

## V. THE PLURALITY SYSTEM

- Single member districts – characteristics, opportunities for independents
- Parliamentary and presidential elections
- Plurality voting in multimember districts
- The alternative vote – open versus closed party lists
- Preference voting in single member districts

## V. THE MAJORITARIAN SYSTEM

- Two ballot “run-off” system
- Second ballot strategies
- Special conditions (turnout, thresholds, etc.)

## VI. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

- Single versus several multimember districts
- The search for proportionality
  - *Largest remainder* – simple – quotas
    - Hare
    - Hagenbach-Bischoff
    - Droop
  - *Highest average* – complex -- divisors
    - D’Hondt
    - Sainte-Lague
    - Single transferable vote – still more complex calculations

## VII. COMMENTARY ON PROPORTIONAL ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

- PR systems can alter the distribution of seats, but only in a limited way
- Important differences within the two major methods of PR
- PR methods are sensitive to the number of seats in a district, number of parties competing, and distribution of the votes between parties

## VIII. HYBRID ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

- Trend toward a mixture of PR and single member districts
- The additional member system
- Compensatory and “bonus” seats
- “Set asides” for ethnic and religious minorities

## IX. ELECTION ANALYSIS: BEFORE AND AFTER

### *BEFORE*

- The utility of pre-election polls
- Source and type of poll – sample versus quota
- Pre-election volatility – “don’t knows” and non-respondents
- Turnout estimates – who votes and will variations change the outcome?
- Predictive models and key constituencies

### *AFTER*

- Electoral geography – mapping “political surfaces”
- Where are the voters? Electoral markets and levels of voter activeness
- Geographical bases of party strength
- Regions of electoral stability and volatility

## X. USING THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM TO SHAPE THE POLITICAL ORDER

- Elite uncertainty in fashioning electoral systems in previously non-democratic countries
- Founding elections – How important are they?
- “Trade-offs” between proportional representation and single member districts
- Constructing workable majorities
- Favoring a particular party or denying access to a particular party
- Election fraud – old and new tricks

## XI. REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ELECTION SYSTEMS

- *Anglo-American and Western Europe* – long traditions and minimal fraud
- *Latin America* – long traditions but considerable fraud, punctuated by violence, military nullification, and questionable results
- *Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* – newly-transformed from non-competitive to competitive systems. Considerable variations in elections systems (mostly hybrid). Continued experimentation. Fraud and non-competitiveness still a major concern.
- *Asia* – mixed experience with occasional experimentation (e.g. Japan)
- *Africa* – Continued importance of race, religion, and tribal loyalties in a culture of violence and military rule. Exceptions.

- *Middle East* – state-controlled elections. Dim prospects for competitive elections in a majority of the countries. Exceptions. What types of electoral systems would be appropriate (e.g. Iraq)? Clientelist control and authoritarian contexts.

## XII. – XIV. CLASS PRESENTATIONS BASED ON STUDENT RESEARCH

The remainder of the course will be devoted to student presentations of their individual research projects. The expectation is to have one or two presentations during each class period. Students are also expected to field questions from the class regarding their particular election.