POSC363 The Politics of Electoral Systems  
Spring Semester 2022  
TTh 1:00-2:15pm  
Clark Hall 205

Karen Beckwith, Professor

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Office Hours: by zoom MW 2:30-3:30pm, or by appointment  
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COURSE OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS

“Modern democracy depends on the existence of political parties.”  
– Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016

“While you can have elections without democracy, you cannot have democracy without elections.”  
– Michael Bratton, 1998

Elections are a signature component of democratic political systems. Elections are also bids, by those who rule, for legitimacy, opportunities at regular (if infrequent) intervals for citizens to express political preferences through means regulated by the state (through law), and by political activists, associating in political parties that help to structure the choices presented to the electorate.

Elections present these organized choices to citizens, and permit citizens, as voters, to register preferences. Through elections for government offices, voters make choices among candidates; through national initiatives and local ballot issues, voters assert legislative preferences; through national referenda, voters confirm policy choices. In this course, we will examine how elections emphasize choice and participation, considering the means of citizen involvement in elections, and how elections structure citizen inclusion (or exclusion) in the electorate (through definitions of citizenship, through election law concerning sex, age, and residency, and voter registration and other requirements).

This course takes a comparative perspective, examining elections and electoral system differences across and within democratic political systems, and discussing how preferred outcomes – and what those preferences are – can be shaped within and outside the electoral process.

The course also focuses on political party systems and how they change (or stay the same). Established democracies in West Europe and the (relatively new) states in Central Europe transitioning to democracy (or not) face challenges to their established party systems from new political parties, as major parties of the left and right are losing vote share. The course will address different types of political parties, including populist parties, nationalist parties, Green parties, and minor parties, with special attention to elections and electoral systems in North America and West Europe.

Evaluation of Student Performance. POSC363 is a SAGES departmental seminar. Hence, evaluation of student performance in this course is based on the following criteria. First, students will complete two short research papers, each of which is worth 20 percent of the student’s course grade. A separate Guidelines for Short Research Papers, posted on Canvas, discusses the details of these papers.
Second, students will complete a final research paper, based on the two previous papers, integrating additional materials and evidence, and stating a clear position in regard to major course research questions (see *Guidelines for Final Research Papers* for details concerning the final paper, available on the course Canvas site). The final paper is worth 25 percent of the course grade. Each student will also have responsibility for presenting his or her final paper results to the class in the last two weeks of the semester. Presentation guidelines are provided in the *Guidelines for Final Paper Presentations*, available on the course Canvas site. The final paper presentation is worth 10 percent of the student’s course grade.

The research papers and the final paper are based on a student’s choice of a country and its electoral system; we will discuss and confirm these choices in class during the first two weeks of the semester.

Third, each student will have responsibility for facilitating discussion during one class meeting; the student facilitating discussion for the day will also submit a brief summary discussion report. Discussion facilitation is worth 10 percent, and the summary discussion report is worth 5 percent, of the student’s course grade. Discussion facilitation is assigned by the professor; *Guidelines for Discussion Facilitation and Report* are available on the course Canvas site.

Finally, each student is expected to attend class every day and to be prepared for each class meeting by having read, in advance, the materials assigned for that day. Students should be prepared to discuss the material in detail in class every day, including media reports relevant to the course, and all students are expected to participate. Students are expected, and obliged, to comport themselves, in class, in a professional manner. Professionalism refers to adherence to standards of behavior and performance expected from political scientists. This includes, but is not limited to, courteous attention to other speakers; engagement with the work at hand; being visible to your classmates and professor; and, of course, adherence to university standards of academic integrity. Informed class participation and professionalism are requirements of the course, and account for 10 percent of the final course grade.

Note that students are required to attend all classes and to complete all course assignments.

**Two books are required for this course**, listed below; they are available for purchase in the University Barnes and Noble Bookstore (and elsewhere):

Bonnie Meguid. 2010. *Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe* [electronic version online at Kelvin Smith Library]


**Also recommended (but not required) are**:


**Additional readings** support the required books; these are extensive and provide a deeper understanding and analysis of comparative elections and electoral systems. Additional readings are identified in the *Schedule of*
**Readings and Assignments**, below, and are available on the course Canvas site. Students are encouraged to read a daily national or international newspaper (e.g. the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*).


**Standards of professionalism and academic integrity** are integral components of this course. Students are reminded that they are obliged to understand, to uphold, and to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. A copy of the Code may be found online at [https://bulletin.case.edu/undergraduatestudies/academicintegrity/](https://bulletin.case.edu/undergraduatestudies/academicintegrity/). Students who do not understand the Academic Integrity Policy after having read it should make an appointment to see me to discuss it; indeed, I welcome this discussion and encourage students to see me in advance of any assignment about which they have doubts or questions. It is a course requirement that students read the University’s Academic Integrity Policy.

Students are not to record or to photograph class sessions, or to share recordings of class sessions with others; this course requirement honors and protects the privacy of rigorous in-class discussion. Students are reminded that they are obliged by the University to understand and to comply with the CWRU Community Commitment.
SCHEDULE OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Choice Identified</td>
<td>January 25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper #1</td>
<td>February 15</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper #2</td>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper Presentation</td>
<td>As assigned (April 14, 19, 21).</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>April 28, 11:00am</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Facilitation</td>
<td>As assigned.</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Report</td>
<td>As assigned.</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and Professionalism</td>
<td>Throughout semester.</td>
<td>10%</td>
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SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

January 11   **Introduction to the Course**


January 13  **Why Elections? What Do We Want Elections to Achieve?**


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January 18  Who Should Vote?  Defining the Electorate

READ: Moser and Scheiner, *Electoral Systems and Political Context*, Introduction and Chapter 1


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February 1  Engineering Inclusion: Ethnicity and Sex


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February 15  Who Should Vote?  Defining the Electorate

READ: Ruth Dassonneville, Marc Hooghe, and Peter Miller, “The impact of compulsory voting

FIRST PAPER DUE IN CLASS


February 24  **How to Vote: Ballot Structure**


March 3  **DISCUSSION**

March 7-11  **SPRING BREAK**

March 15  **Niche Parties and Small Party Challenges to Party Systems**

Read: Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals*, Chapters 1 and 2

March 17  READ: Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals*, Chapters 3, and Chapter 5 on the UK Green Party

March 22  READ: Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals*, Chapter 7, on the Scottish National Party
March 24  **Populist Parties and Nationalist Parties**


March 28  **SECOND RESEARCH PAPER DUE BY EMAIL**


April 7  **CLASS CANCELED; PROFESSOR ATTENDING MIDWEST POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION MEETINGS**

April 12  **CLASS CANCELED; PROFESSOR ATTENDING POLITICALSTUDIES ASSOCIATION MEETINGS**

April 14  **Final Paper Presentations #1**

April 19  **Final Paper Presentations #2**

April 21  **Final Paper Presentations #3**

April 27  **Conclusion of the Course**

**FINAL PAPER DUE ON THURSDAY, APRIL 28, BY 11:00AM**