

Electoral Systems

Do They Really Matter?

Time:	Monday 8–11	Room:	1330-024
Language:	English	Lecturer:	Edoardo Alberto Viganò
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Contents of the course

Electoral systems are one of the central and most studied topics in political science. Virtually all democratic systems are representative democracies where the polity does not directly govern itself but delegates the task of political decision-making to a smaller set of public officials. Thus, electoral systems – the rules determining how voters’ preferences are translated into seats of a representative assembly – provide a crucial link in the chain connecting citizens to important political outcomes, including party systems, political representation, legislator behaviours, and policies.

After an introductory session on the main dimensions of variation characterising different electoral systems and the typical categories in which they are classified, the course will be divided in four blocks. The first part of the course will look at voters’ participation and elite-voters linkages. Crucial questions studied in this module will include: do specific types of electoral systems steer people to vote and boost turnout? To what extent can we trace back the ideological congruence between political elites and voters’ preferences to the electoral system in place? Do electoral systems differently encourage women and ethnic minority representation?

In the second part of the course, we will focus on how electoral institutions can shape the party system. In particular, the discussion will revolve around two main issues. First, as famously summarised in Duverger’s law and hypothesis, the electoral system is assumed to impact on the number of parties represented in

the parliament. Second, electoral rules are also thought to influence the diversity of party policy positions and their relative distance in the political spectrum, that is party system polarisation.

The third module will address the effects that electoral incentives have on individual politicians. The way in which legislators are elected has consequences on their behaviour in the parliament. More specifically, electoral systems influence the relative importance of personal and party reputations, which in turn affect re-election seeking members of the parliament' (MPs) optimal strategies to secure their seat. In this light, electoral rules have been shown to impact on MPs' votes on the floor, the types of bills they propose, their probability of switching party, and their geographical focus.

Finally, the last part of the course will be devoted to the analysis of how electoral systems can also explain variation in policy outcomes. Moving from the micro approach typical of legislative studies, we will try to assess potential causal links between macro variables such as electoral institutions and, for instance, economic policies. In particular, we will investigate three types of outcomes: corruption, income redistribution, and social spending.

Goals of the course

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- grasp the main dimensions of variation characterising electoral systems;
- compare and contrast the electoral systems used by different countries, and evaluate how observed differences in the politics of those countries may be related to the electoral systems;
- develop a deep understanding of how electoral institutions shape the party system, voters and elites' behaviour, and policies;
- be able to critically evaluate empirical studies and to compare theories and methods related to the consequences of electoral institutions, identifying their differences/similarities and strengths/weaknesses;
- be able to critically engage in the scholarly debate on electoral systems.

Participation and readings

Students are expected to read the texts before class and to engage in the discussion in class.

Exam

Oral exam with synopsis. We will discuss the structure of the exam in class.

Detailed course outline

Week 1 – 29 August

- What are electoral systems and their main dimensions of variation?
- Why should we bother about them?

Clark, W. R., M. Golder, and S. N. Golder (2012). “Elections and Electoral Systems.” In: *Principles of Comparative Politics*. 2nd edition. Washington, D.C: CQ Press: 535–602.

Gallagher, M. and P. Mitchell (2017). “Dimensions of Variation in Electoral Systems.” In: Herron, E., R. Pekkanen, and M. Shugart, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 23–40.

Week 2 – 5 September

- Do electoral systems influence voters’ turnout?
- What are the causal mechanisms connecting electoral institutions to turnout?
- Is this relationship the same in new and old democracies?

Blais, A. and K. Aarts (2006). “Electoral Systems and Turnout.” *Acta Politica*, 41(2): 180–196.

Cox, G. W., J. H. Fiva, and D. M. Smith (2016). “The Contraction Effect: How Proportional Representation Affects Mobilization and Turnout.” *The Journal of Politics*, 78(4): 1249–1263.

Eggers, A. C. (2015). “Proportionality and Turnout: Evidence From French Municipalities.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(2): 135–167.

Gallego, A., G. Rico, and E. Anduiza (2012). “Disproportionality and Voter Turnout in New and Old Democracies.” *Electoral Studies*, 31(1): 159–169.

Week 3 –12 September

- What are ideological congruence and responsiveness?
- Are congruence and responsiveness contingent on electoral institutions?

Golder, M. and J. Stramski (2010). "Ideological Congruence and Electoral Institutions." *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(1): 90–106.

Bingham Powell, G. (2009). "The Ideological Congruence Controversy: The Impact of Alternative Measures, Data, and Time Periods on the Effects of Election Rules." *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(12): 1475–1497.

Golder, M. and G. Lloyd (2014). "Re-Evaluating the Relationship between Electoral Rules and Ideological Congruence." *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(1): 200–212.

Wlezien, C. and S. N. Soroka (2012). "Political Institutions and the Opinion–Policy Link." *West European Politics*, 35(6): 1407–1432.

Week 4 – 19 September

- How can electoral systems ensure ethnic minority representation?
- Do electoral systems affect women representation?

Lublin, D. and M. Wright (2013). "Engineering Inclusion: Assessing the Effects of pro-Minority Representation Policies." *Electoral Studies*. Special Symposium: The New Research Agenda on Electoral Integrity 32(4): 746–755.

Reilly, B. (2012). "Institutional Designs for Diverse Democracies: Consociationalism, Centripetalism and Communalism Compared." *European Political Science*, 11(2): 259–270.

Profeta, P. and E. F. Woodhouse (2022). "Electoral Rules, Women's Representation and the Qualification of Politicians." *Comparative Political Studies*: 00104140211047414.

Pansardi, P. and A. Pedrazzani (2022). "Do (Strong) Gender Quotas Make a Difference? Multiple Candidacies as a Party Gatekeeping Strategy in Italy." *Party Politics*: 13540688221091052.

Week 5 – 26 September

- What are the effects of electoral systems on party systems?
- What is the Duvergerian agenda and is it empirically supported?

Cox, G.W. (1997a). "Duverger's Propositions." In: *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 13–36.

Fiva, J. H. and O. Folke (2016). "Mechanical and Psychological Effects of Electoral Reform." *British Journal of Political Science*, 46(2): 265–279.

Blais, A., R. Lachat, A. Hino, and P. Doray-Demers (2011). “The Mechanical and Psychological Effects of Electoral Systems: A Quasi-Experimental Study.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(12): 1599–1621.

Kedar, O., L. Harsgor, and O. Tuttnauer (2021). “Permissibility of Electoral Systems: A New Look at an Old Question.” *The Journal of Politics*, 83(2): 439–452.

Optional

Cox, G. W. (1997b). “Strategic Voting in Single-Member Single-Ballot Systems.” In: *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems*. Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 69–98.

Week 6 – 4 October

- Do electoral systems interact with other drivers of party systems?

Clark, W. R. and M. Golder (2006). “Rehabilitating Duverger’s Theory: Testing the Mechanical and Strategic Modifying Effects of Electoral Laws.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(6): 679–708.

Milazzo, C., R. G. Moser, and E. Scheiner (2018). “Social Diversity Affects the Number of Parties Even Under First-Past-the-Post Rules.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(7): 938–974.

Li, Y. and M. S. Shugart (2016). “The Seat Product Model of the Effective Number of Parties: A Case for Applied Political Science.” *Electoral Studies*, 41: 23–34.

Week 7 – 10 October

- Is political polarisation related to electoral institutions?

Dow, J. K. (2011). “Party-System Extremism in Majoritarian and Proportional Electoral Systems.” *British Journal of Political Science*, 41(2): 341–361.

Matakos, K., O. Troumpounis, and D. Xefteris (2016). “Electoral Rule Disproportionality and Platform Polarization.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(4): 1026–1043.

Week 8 – 31 October

- How do electoral systems matter for individual politicians?
- What are personal vote incentives and how are they expected to influence politicians’ behaviour?

Carey, J. and M. Shugart (1995). "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas." *Electoral Studies*, 14(4): 417–439.

André, A., S. Depauw, and S. Martin (2016). "The Classification of Electoral Systems: Bringing Legislators Back In." *Electoral Studies*, 42: 42–53.

Mayhew, D. R. (1974). "The Electoral Incentive (Chapter 1)." In: *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Second Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press: 11–77.

Week 9 – 31 October

- Do electoral systems influence MPs' voting behaviour in the parliament?
- Is there a link between MPs' responsiveness to constituents and electoral rules?
- Do electoral institution impact on the probability of party switching?

Carey, J. M. (2007). "Competing Principals, Political Institutions, and Party Unity in Legislative Voting." *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(1): 92–107.

Breunig, C., E. Grossman, and M. Hänni (2020). "Responsiveness and Democratic Accountability: Observational Evidence from an Experiment in a Mixed-Member Proportional System." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*: lsq.12326.

Klein, E. (2018). "The Personal Vote and Legislative Party Switching." *Party Politics*, 24(5): 501–510.

Week 10 – 7 November

- What are the effects of electoral incentives on legislative activities?
- How do electoral incentives influence MPs' propensity to engage in pork barrel?

Stratmann, T. and M. Baur (2002). "Plurality Rule, Proportional Representation, and the German Bundestag: How Incentives to Pork-Barrel Differ Across Electoral Systems." *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3): 506–514.

Gagliarducci, S., T. Nannicini, and P. Naticchioni (2011). "Electoral Rules and Politicians Behavior: A Micro Test." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 3(3): 144–174.

Motolinia, L. (2020). "Electoral Accountability and Particularistic Legislation: Evidence from an Electoral Reform in Mexico." *American Political Science Review*: 1–17.

Week 11 – 14 November

- Do electoral systems influence politicians' speech-making activities in the parliament?
- Do electoral incentives affect legislative organisation?

Proksch, S.-O. and J. Slapin (2012). "Institutional Foundations of Legislative Speech." *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(3): 520–537.

Høyland, B. and M. G. Søyland (2019). "Electoral Reform and Parliamentary Debates." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 44(4): 593–615.

Martin, S. (2011). "Electoral Institutions, the Personal Vote, and Legislative Organization." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 36(3): 339–361.

Week 12 – 21 November

- Do electoral systems have an impact on patterns of redistribution?

Iversen, T. and D. Soskice (2006). "Electoral Institutions and the Politics of Coalitions: Why Some Democracies Redistribute More Than Others." *American Political Science Review*, 100(2): 165–181.

Rogowski, R. and M. A. Kayser (2002). "Majoritarian Electoral Systems and Consumer Power: Price-Level Evidence from the OECD Countries." *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3): 526–539.

Persson, T. and G. Tabellini (2004). "Constitutions and Economic Policy." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18(1): 75–98.

Week 13 – 28 November

- Can corruption be partly traced back to electoral institution?
- What are the consequences of electoral systems in terms of fiscal and economic policies?

Chang, E. C. C. and M. A. Golden (2007). "Electoral Systems, District Magnitude and Corruption." *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(1): 115–137.

Rickard, S. J. (2012). "Electoral Systems, Voters' Interests and Geographic Dispersion." *British Journal of Political Science*, 42(4): 855–877.

Funk, P. and C. Gathmann (2013). "How Do Electoral Systems Affect Fiscal Policy? Evidence from Cantonal Parliaments, 1890–2000." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 11(5): 1178–1203.

Week 13 (II) – 1 December

- Questions from students
- Which dimensions are relevant for normative statements on electoral systems?
- Peer supervision

Optional

Carey, J. M. and S. Hix (2011). “The Electoral Sweet Spot: Low-Magnitude Proportional Electoral Systems.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(2): 383–397.

Bowler, S., D. M. Farrell, and R. T. Pettitt (2005). “Expert Opinion on Electoral Systems: So Which Electoral System Is “Best”?” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 15(1): 3–19.

Week 14 – 5 December

- Supervision