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POLS 3071 (15 credits)  
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## Electoral Politics

**Module Description:** This module provides students with an overview of the major empirical research conducted in the area of electoral politics. The studies evaluated here are drawn from a wide range of democracies. This is especially useful when we are interested in questions about institutions and the relationship between institutions and elections. The course will cover topics that include electoral systems, the role of political parties, the nature of political campaigns, voting and political behaviour.

**Readings:** The following text is required and is available for purchase at the Blackwell's. An additional copy will be made available on short term loan from the library. Additional readings are drawn from articles and book chapters that can be accessed on line through the Exeter Learning Environment (ELE). Unless otherwise noted all assigned readings are required.

LeDuc, Lawrence, Richard Niemi and Pippa Norris (Editors). 2010. *Comparing Democracies 3: Elections and Voting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Sage.

**Module-specific skills:** At the end of the module you should be able to address questions such as the following: How do differences in institutional arrangements influence voter turnout? Are citizens more likely to be satisfied with the way democracy works in systems that encourage consensus decision making? How do political campaigns influence vote choice? What is the role of political parties in modern political campaigns? How do party leaders influence vote choice?

### Assessment

10% Lead discussion with presentations

90% Take home (48 hours) Final exam will be distributed on 13 Dec. and due on 15 Dec.

**Lead a Seminar:** At some point during the term you will be asked to lead a seminar with two other students. You will need to sign up for a day for your presentation on the module website (listed above). You should do this the first week of classes otherwise you will be left with little or no choice. It is very important that seminar leaders come to class well prepared with interesting and thought-provoking questions and topics of conversation. Your intention is to provoke discussion, NOT to summarize the readings! This requirement is not as scary as you might think. If we have a talkative class, it should be easy! Rather than a summary of each reading, the presentation should attempt to integrate the essential reading (and make reference to suggested reading if appropriate) and outline major themes found in the readings. The presentation should also highlight the broader questions being addressed. The presentation should consider the following questions:

- What are the major theoretical perspectives that structure the argument presented in the reading?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the argument presented?
- What are the major implications of the findings for the study of electoral politics?
- What are the major implications of the findings for particular theory/questions being addressed?
- What suggestions would you make to improve the argument presented?

**Class Participation:** The quality of this seminar—what you get out of it—depends on what you and your classmates put into it. In contrast to a typical class, where the instructor lectures and asks questions, the seminar format requires students to take a much more active role through discussion (and in this seminar, leading discussions). Thus participation in discussions is essential. Yet, I am only interested in *informed* participation. If you talk a lot, but it is apparent that you have not read, you are not fulfilling this requirement. Please prepare for class not only by reading all of the assigned material, but also by thinking about it. A seminar can be a productive and enjoyable experience only if every member of the class is willing to carry his or her share of the load.

### Schedule

#### 5 October: Introduction

Discussion Topic(s): Why Study Elections?  
*Comparing Democracies*, Ch 1.

#### 12 October: Proportional and Majoritarian Visions

Discussion Topic(s): What is the difference between a winner-take-all system and a proportional system? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these systems? How do institutional rules reward winners and punish losers? Why is it more important to understand losers than winners?

*Comparing Democracies*, Ch 2.

Powell, G. Bingham Jr., *Elections as Instruments of Democracy*: Chapters 1 & 2

Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. Yale University Press. Ch. 1-3.

#### Recommended:

Andrew Reynolds, Ben Reilly, and Andrew Ellis (eds.). 2005. *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* Ch. 1-3.

Bryan Curtis, “And the Oscar for Worst Oscar Goes To . . .” *New York Times*, 29 February 2004

Brendan I. Koerner, “How Do You Pick a Pope?” *Slate*, 3 October 2003.

Brendan I. Koerner, “Can You Help Dole Out the Grammys?” *Slate*, 29 August 2003.

Chris Mooney, “Why Does Louisiana Have Such an Odd Election System,” *Slate*, 13 November 2003.

#### 19 October: Parties and Party Systems

Discussion Topic(s): What do parties do? Why are the advantages and disadvantages of a two party system? How do parties mobilize voters?

*Comparing Democracies 3*, Ch 3-4.

Stokes, S. C. 1999. “Political Parties and Democracy” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1):243-67.

Riker, William. 1982. “The Two Party System and Duverger's Law” *American Political Science Review*. 76(4):753-66.

Karp, Jeffrey A. Susan A. Banducci and Shaun Bowler. 2008. “Getting Out the Vote: Party Mobilization in a Comparative Perspective” *British Journal of Political Science*. 38(1): 91-112.

#### 26 October: Campaigns and Communications

Discussion Topic(s): Do political campaigns affect behavior? Why did early research suggest that campaigns didn't matter much? Who is most likely to be affected by paid media? What consequences does this have for democratic processes?

*Comparing Democracies*, Ch 5-6.

Hillygus, D. Sunshine and Todd G. Shields. 2008. *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. Ch. 1.

Gilens, Martin, Lynn Vavreck, and Martin Cohen. 2007. "The Mass Media and the Public's Assessments of Presidential Candidates, 1952–2000." *Journal of Politics* 69(4): 1160-1175.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino. 1994. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88:829-838.

## **2 November Political Attitudes**

Discussion Topic(s): Why are citizens cynical about politics? Who is to blame? What impact do such attitudes have in any on the political system and governance? How do those who voted for losing parties or candidates react to electoral outcomes?

Dalton, Russell J. 2004. *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*. Ch. 2. Oxford University Press.

Anderson, C.J. & Guillory, C.A. 1997. Political Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy: A Cross-national Analysis of Consensus and Majoritarian Systems" *American Political Science Review* 91: 66–81.

Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Putting Polarization into Perspective" *British Journal of Political Science*. 39: 413-448.

Bowler, Shaun and Jeffrey A. Karp. 2004. "Politicians, Scandals and Trust in Government" *Political Behavior*. 26(3): 271-288.

## **9 November: Political Participation**

Discussion Topic(s): Who Votes? How can we explain levels of turnout in elections? What factors affect turnout? Although society has become more affluent, voter turnout still appears to be on the decline in many democracies. Why? What can be done to foster higher turnout?

*Comparing Democracies*, Ch. 8

Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" *Journal of Democracy* 6(1): 65-78.

Franklin, Mark and Sara B. Hobolt. 2011. "The legacy of lethargy: How elections to the European Parliament depress turnout", *Electoral Studies*, 30(1), 67-76.

McDonald, Michael P. and Samuel L. Popkin. 2001. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter." *American Political Science Review* 95:963-74.

Philpot, Tasha S., Daron R. Shaw, and Ernest B. McGowen. 2009. "Winning the race: Black voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73(5): 995-1022.

**16 November: Issues and the Vote Choice**

Discussion Topic(s): How do voters decide? To what extent do issues matter? Are they more or less important than performance?

*Comparing Democracies*, Ch 7

Clark et al. 2009. *Performance Politics and the British Voter*, Cambridge University Press. Ch. 2.

Blais, Andre, Mathieu Turgeon, Elisabeth Gidengil, Neil Nevitte, and Richard Nadeau. 2004.

“Which Matters Most? Comparing the Impact of Issues and the Economy in American, British and Canadian Elections.” *British Journal of Political Science* 34 (03):555-63.

**23 November: Accountability**

Discussion Topic(s): Can voters hold governments accountable? Under what conditions does this occur?

*Comparing Democracies*, Ch 9, 11.

Anderson, Christopher J. 2007. “The End of Economic Voting? Contingency Dilemmas and the Limits of Democratic Accountability.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (1):271-96.

Fisher, Stephen and Sara B. Hobolt. 2010. “Coalition Governments and Electoral Accountability”, *Electoral Studies* 29(3): 358-369.

**30 November: Direct Democracy**

Discussion Topic(s): Advantages/disadvantages of direct democracy, demands on the citizen, impact on the political process.

Gamble, Barbara S. 1997. “Putting Civil Rights to a Popular Vote” *American Journal of Political Science* 41(1):245-69.

Bowler, Shaun and Todd Donovan. 1998. “Direct Democracy and Minority Rights” *American Journal of Political Science* 42: 1020-4.

Smith, Daniel A. and Caroline J. Tolbert. 2004. *Educated by Initiative: The Effects of Direct Democracy on Citizens and Political Organizations in the American States*. University of Michigan Press. Ch. 3.

Donovan, Todd, Caroline Tolbert and Daniel Smith. 2009. “Political Engagement, Mobilization, and Direct Democracy” *Public Opinion Quarterly*.73(1): 98-118.

**7 December: Electoral Reform**

Discussion Topic(s): Negative campaigning, Strengthen parties, Postal voting, compulsory voting, Electoral systems, adopt PR?

*Comparing Democracies*, Ch 10,

Blais, Andre, Agnieszka Dobrzynska, and Indridi H. Indridason. 2005. “To Adopt or Not to Adopt Proportional Representation: The Politics of Institutional Choice,” *British Journal of Political Science* 35(1): 182-190.

Vowles, Jack, Susan A. Banducci and Jeffrey A. Karp. 2006. “Forecasting and Evaluating the Consequences of Electoral Change in New Zealand” *Acta Politica*. 41( 3): 267-284.

Scheiner, Ethan. 2008. “Does Electoral System Reform Work? Electoral System Lessons from Reforms of the 1990s.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (1):161-81.

Bowler, Shaun and Todd Donovan. 2011. “The Limited Effects of Election Reforms on Efficacy and Engagement”

**13 December: Final exam distributed (due 15 December)**