The Politics of Electoral Systems: Political Conflict and Representation

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Course Content

Electoral systems have increasingly received attention during the last years. Most recently, the election of Donald Trump, despite losing the popular vote, has created considerable debate about the representativeness of the US electoral system. In Austria, the social democratic and the conservative parties have repeatedly proposed to introduce majoritarian rule. In contrast, the electoral systems of Swiss cantons Zug, Schwyz and Nidwalden have recently been declared unconstitutional by the Swiss federal court, which has led to the adoption of biproportional apportionment. However, similar problems also occur outside the Europe and the US. For instance, Lebanon’s last election dates back to 2009. Even though MPs are elected on a four-year basis, new elections have been delayed because Lebanese parties failed to agreement on a new electoral law.

The examples show that the questions of electoral systems choice and political representation are of great importance. However, why do have countries different electoral systems? Why do debates about electoral systems center around the representation of minority groups in some countries whereas other countries prefer majority representation? What political and social consequences are linked to different electoral systems?

The course is designed to introduce students to the comparative electoral systems literature. By reviewing the current literature, we address topics such as the origins of electoral systems, how electoral systems incentivize strategic voting and affect party system fragmentation and cohesion, the voting behavior of members of parliament, redistribution, corruption, and the political representation of women and minorities. In every session, multiple papers with different, sometimes opposing views are discussed. Participants learn to critically evaluate different
studies based on the stringency of the argumentation and methodological rigor. In addition, students will gain a better understanding of different research designs to study political phenomena by discussing micro and macro approaches, concept formation, and measurement issues. After participation in the course, students are able to engage critically and informed in debates on electoral systems.

Examination

Examination Time and Form

- One presentation (25%)
- Three term papers (each 25%)

Remarks

Term papers:

- Participants are required to write three 5-Page term papers individually.
- The seminar consists of three parts, focusing on different aspects of electoral systems. Participants have to choose one topic of every part.
- For every paper, the literature is summarized (max. 50% of the paper) and followed by a critical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing research. The papers should be based on the literature outlined in the syllabus. Optionally, additional literature can be consulted.
19.02. Introduction

For each session, up to three papers are listed. All participants are required to read the literature marked with a * prior to the lecture. For presentations, all papers have to be read in order to discuss opposing views about a subject as well as the strength and weaknesses of the current literature.


The Origins of Electoral Systems

26.02 The Socialist Threat, Electoral Geography, and Co-Specific Assets


05.03 Microfoundations


Electoral Systems, Parties, and MPs

12.03 Strategic Voting


19.03 The Number of Parties


26.03 The Left-Right Divide


16.04 Voting Behavior of MPs


Sieberer, U. (2010). Behavioral consequences of mixed electoral systems: Deviating voting behavior of district and list MPs in the German Bundestag. Electoral Studies, 29(3), 484–496

**Electoral Systems, Voters, and Societal Outcomes**

**23.04 Participation in Elections**


**30.04 Congruence between Voters and Legislators**


**07.05 Government Spending**


Martin, L. W., & Vanberg, G. (2013). Multiparty government, fiscal institutions,
and public spending. The Journal of Politics, 75(4), 953–967

14.05 Corruption

