PS 224: Elections in Consolidating Democracies

Objectives
As noted by Fareed Zakaria, “illiberal democracy is a growth industry.” Elections have spread like wildfire to all corners of the globe, including to places that are poor and non-Western and have long histories of authoritarian rule. Often these elections are highly flawed. Parties and party systems are weak; incumbents are omnipotent, oppositions divided; fraud, violence, and clientelism flourish; electorates are uneducated and poorly informed and may be guided more by atavistic attachments to tribe and clan than “rational” evaluations of policy or performance. Although the category of “illiberal democracies” has increased rapidly during the past two decades, our understanding of how elections operate in these countries is limited. The goal of this class is to review some of the literature pertaining to these elections. In the process, we will be asking a series of questions. How do elections work in these countries? What is the “reality on the ground” and is it addressed by our current theories? Are the old theories relevant? How might they need to be changed in order to accommodate new data? Where are new theories most needed? The course considers a variety of important electoral outcomes or aspects of elections (party system institutionalization, party weakness, clientelism, single party dominance, fraud, public opinion formation, violence, ethnic politics, and economic voting) and considers both institutional and behavioral, elite and mass level sources for these outcomes. While the course is divided into ten separate weeks, students should realize that many of these distinctions are arbitrary, and most selections are relevant for multiple weeks.

Assignments
This class has written and oral assignments. The written assignment: three 5-7 page review papers. These should be similar to (but better, since you are now older and wiser) your field seminar papers. They should critically engage the literature for a particular week, both reviewing it (succinctly but in depth) and making a critical argument. These are due at the beginning of class (no extensions, no exceptions). You should plan to write one paper from the first section of the syllabus (parties), one from the second section (voters), and one from the third (electoral quality).

The oral assignment: each student will be designated to lead two class discussions (students will typically work in teams). The seminar leaders will circulate by e-mail to class participants five discussion questions by noon the Thursday before the class meeting. The seminar leaders will also be charged with introducing the week’s topic by starting out class with a 10-15 minute overview (see attached guidelines). You should hand out copies of your overview the day of class. Your leadership will constitute 20% of your grade. I will be available to discuss your discussion questions – please schedule an appointment and send me a draft of the questions prior to our meeting.

Students are expected to do the readings and be prepared to discuss them for each week’s session. The final 20% of your grade comes from class participation. Active participation in
seminar discussions is an important skill to master and essential for getting a good grade in this class!! **So come prepared to TALK!**

**Readings**

Most articles are easily available on-line. In addition, many of the selections come from books. You should buy or have access to the following texts:


PART I: PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS

1. Institutionalization of party systems (October 1)
Note: For this week, it will be most useful to review Cox (1997). You might also look at Cox’s 1999 review piece in the Annual Review of Political Science.


Additional Readings:


3. Party discipline and party labels: the Brazil Debate (October 8)


Additional Readings


Desposato, Scott. Chapter 4 of Dissertation, “Federalism and Parties in Brazil.”

4. Clientelism, Pork and Patronage  (October 15)


Additional Readings


5. Single Party Dominant Systems and Weak Oppositions (October 22)


Additional Readings


**PART II: VOTERS**
6. Culture and Public Opinion  (October 29)


7. Ethnicity  (November 5)


Additional Reading


8. Elections and the Quality of Government: Economic Voting and Candidate Selection (November 12)


Additional Reading


PART III: ELECTION QUALITY

9. Electoral Fraud  (November 19)


Additional reading


10. Violence (December 3)


Additional reading


Template for Weekly Presentations

One or two students will introduce the topic each week. This entails critically summarizing the readings and proposing a set of questions or issues that will help structure the discussion. The presentations, approximately 15 minutes in length, are meant to develop seminar communication skills and to encourage participation by all members.

The following “template” provides a sense of what is required.

- Begin your presentation by introducing and motivating the topic. The heading in the syllabus is a good clue but try to go beyond it, indicating, for example, why the topic is important. For example, why is it relevant to discuss “Institutionalization?” What are the key issues and questions the authors are grappling with? Are there important issues the authors ignore but should also consider? How do these readings relate to/challenge our “standard” views of elections? How do they relate to questions of democratic consolidation?

- Review the main readings of the week. Succinctly state each author’s main argument and findings. What outcomes is each author trying to explain? What variables do they use in explaining these outcomes? How does the article relate to the main themes of the week? Avoid summarizing the details - stick to the most central points. These summaries should be very brief and to the point. They should focus on providing a road-map of the readings – not a definitive review of them.

- Handouts or transparencies are extremely useful. These will help highlight main points and focus attention on areas of debate for further discussion. Keep them simple! As a rule, less is more.

- Close your presentation with a set of discussion questions aimed at getting the discussion going. These are very important, and the more thought you put into them, the better. These might highlight major unanswered (even unasked) questions that the readings do not deal with. What are the authors forgetting? They might tie a week’s readings into earlier themes and readings. They might push on themes some or all of the readings develop. They might explore the empirical evidence the readings bring to bear on their questions. They might suggest ways that the readings challenge existing understandings of elections. They might ask how the week’s topic relates to the broader issue of democratic consolidation. In general, your questions should stimulate conversation by focusing the class on some aspect or aspects of the readings that are interesting, contradictory, revolutionary, etc. At the same time, good questions avoid being so broad that they abstract away from the central issues of the readings. Please circulate these by 2pm the Wednesday before the class meeting.