IR 220: Elections, Parties, and Coalitions in Comparative Perspective

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 2:00-3:00pm and by appointment

Course Overview
This course will focus on party competition and government formation in parliamentary democracies in Western and Central Europe. It will aim to explain voters choices, party strategies, and the origins of governments. It will take a look at elections from the perspective of both parties and voters, and analyze both the pre-election and post-election stages of party competition. The course will explore theories of voting, party systems, and party competition. It will also study pre-election alliances that are formed by parties in order to improve their electoral results as well as their chances to control the government after election. The course will conclude with the analysis of theories of government formation. Throughout the course, the analyzed theories will be used to explain cases of elections and government formation from Central and Western Europe.

Academic Requirements
The requirements are as follows:

• Class attendance and participation: Students are expected to attend classes, to have read the assigned readings and participate actively in class discussions. They will be graded on knowledge of the material and contribution to the discussion.

• Three out of fifteen possible participation points will be given to students who successfully complete the short assignment due at noon on February 12.

• Three in class midterms during the semester. No final exam. Make-up exams will be given only under the most exceptional circumstances.

Grading
Grading for the course will be determined as follows:

• Class Participation: 15%
• Midterm I: 30%
• Midterm II: 30%
• Midterm III: 25%
Readings

In this course we will read a combination of book chapters and articles. Journals as well as some book chapters are accessible through the Library’s electronic reserves on Blackboard. I recommend purchasing the following books:


Course Schedule

**January 16: Introduction to the Course**  
Reading: none

**January 21: Introduction to Electoral Systems**  
Reading:  

**January 23: Introduction to Party Systems**  
Reading:  
- Lijphart. *Patterns of Democracy*. Chapter 5

**January 28: Party Systems 2**  
Reading:  

**January 30: Proximity Voting**  
Reading:  

**February 4: Strategic Voting and Directional Voting**  
Reading:  
February 6: Economic Voting
Reading


February 11: No Class
Class Assignment due February 12th at noon and worth 3 participation points.


and answer the following questions:

1. What is “electoral balancing”?  
2. Why would voters engage in electoral balancing?  
3. What do the terms “unified government” and “divided government” refer to in the case of Germany?

February 13: Expressive Voting
Reading:


February 18: Midterm I

February 20: Types of Parties
Reading:


February 25: Party Ideologies: Stability and Change
Reading:


February 27: Party Ideologies: Stability and Change 2
Reading:


March 4: Moderate Parties
Reading:

March 6: Extreme Parties
Reading:


March 18: Issue Salience and Issue Ownership
Reading:


March 20: New Issues and New Parties 1
Reading:


March 25: New Issues and New Parties 2
Reading:


March 27: Midterm II

April 1: Electoral Rules and Government Formation
Reading:

- Powell, Bingham, Jr.. Elections as Instruments of Democracy. Chapters 2 and 5.

April 3: No Class: Midwest Political Science Association Conference

April 8: Types of Government
Reading:


April 10: Government Formation: Institutions
Reading:

April 15: Pre-Electoral Coalitions
Reading:


April 17: Government Coalition Formation
Reading:


April 22: Government Termination
Reading:


April 24: Policy and Performance
Reading:


April 29: Midterm III