

Elections in Developing Countries, PSCI/INTR 262

Spring 2026 Syllabus

Professor:

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Hours: W 10:15am-12:15pm or by appointment

Classroom & Time: Meliora Room 221, MW 9:00-10:15am

Course Overview

How do elections work in developing democracies? Do contexts that are specific to countries in the developing world have implications for the nature and operation of electoral politics therein? In this course we will explore a number of issues that have particular relevance for elections in developing environments, including clientelism and vote buying, electoral manipulation and fraud, identity-based voting, and electoral violence. In addition, we will consider how limited levels of information and political credibility affect both the operation of electoral accountability and the nature of electoral competition. In doing so, we will draw on examples from Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Lectures and Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Readings come from recent academic work on the subject, and those are available for download at the library website. Book chapters that are not available for download will be posted on blackboard.

Readings are “required”, which means that any component of them could appear in the exams. The lectures will focus on the main ideas being presented by each paper. Many of the readings, however, are quite technical. Here are a few tips on how to better read academic papers in this course:

Focus on the main idea. What is the research question being answered? How does it fit in the themes discussed so far in the course? How does it relate to the other readings? These components are usually well summarized in the first few pages.

Background. Every paper has a section explaining the context for the case study (i.e., details of the policy being evaluated, details on the country in question, etc.). Read this part carefully, so you can understand what the researcher is doing. Do not dwell on specific events, but think about how information from the case study provides insight into the broader themes of the course.

Technical sections. The empirical methodology or the mathematical model, when present, can be quite challenging. Do not focus on this part. When necessary or relevant, I will provide accessible explanations during the lectures. In order to better understand quantitative results in a paper, focus on the conclusion, where they should be summarized. Be prepared. If you do not read in advance, you might not be able to follow the lectures.

Assessment and Grading

There will be 3 in-class exams with 3 essay questions each. These will be taken from a list of 6 questions that will be posted (on Blackboard) the day before each exam. The exams will last 75 minutes. The scores on these will comprise 100% of your grade, and the material for each exam is non-cumulative. The weight of each exam in the final grade is as follows: lowest grade (20%), the remaining two (40% each).

Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

A 93-100
A- 85-92
B+ 80-84
B 75-79
B- 70-74
C+ 66-69
C 63-66
C- 60-62
D+ 56-59
D 53-55
D- 50-52
Fail below 50

In the exams, provide clear and concise arguments. A good answer would include your opinion, based on a thoughtful analysis of the theory and evidence presented in the readings and lectures. The more you prepare in advance, the better you will do in the exams. Also, **prepare your OWN answers in advance** (see academic honesty below). The grade for students missing exams will be zero. If a true emergency arises, contact me before the exam and I'll schedule a make-up exam.

Academic Honesty

Tempted to cheat? Don't do it. Students are encouraged to talk to each other about the readings, and to study them together, even after the questions are posted. The only exception is that students are **NOT ALLOWED** to share written answers. Each student should prepare her own answer for submission. Attempting to plagiarize someone else's work in the exam (and in life!) will only make your own answers appear shallow, weak and unoriginal. If I determine that two answers display evidence of plagiarism, both students will receive zero in the exam. The university's academic honesty policy can be found at:
<http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty>.

Anything else

If any of this is unclear or if there are other relevant details for your situation, please contact me sooner rather than later. If you have a disability for which you may request academic accommodations, you are encouraged to contact both myself and the access coordinator for your school to establish eligibility for academic accommodations (please see <https://www.rochester.edu/disability/students.html>). I hope this course will be an enjoyable experience for everyone.

Schedule and Readings

Jan 21 Syllabus discussion

Introduction

Jan 23 Acemoglu, D., Robinson, J. (2006). *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. Pages 1-43.

Part I. Democracy and Elections. Why?

Jan 26 Bidner, C., Francois, P., Trebbi, F. (2015). A Theory of Minimalist Democracies. Working Paper. (read pages 1-9; 30-33)

Jan 28 Laurent-Lucchetti, J., Thoenig, M., Rohner, D. (2024). Ethnic Conflict & The Informational Dividend of Democracy. *Journal of the European Economic Association* 22(1):73–116

Feb 2 LaGatta, T., Little, A., Tucker, J. (2015). Elections, Protest, and Alteration of Power. *The Journal of Politics* 77(4): 1142-56.

Feb 4 Martinez-Bravo, M., Padró i Miquel, G., Qian, N., Yao, Y. (2022). The Rise and Fall of Local Elections in China. *American Economic Review* 112(9): 2921–58

Feb 9 Gratton G., Lee, B. (2024). Liberty, Security, and Accountability: The Rise and Fall of Illiberal Democracies. *The Review of Economic Studies* 91(1):340-371.

Feb 11 Besley, T., Burgess, R. (2002). The Political Economy of Government Responsiveness: Theory and Evidence from India. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117 (4): 1415-51

Feb 16 Exam 1

Feb 18 NO CLASS

Part II. Accountability Through Elections

Feb 23 Svolik, M. (2013). Learning to Love Democracy: Electoral Accountability, Government Performance, and the Consolidation of Democracy. *American Journal of Political Science*. 57(3): 685-702

Feb 25 Campello, D., Zucco Jr., C. (2016) Presidential Success and the World Economy. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(2): 589-602
Glaeser, E., Ponzetto, G. (2017). Fundamental Errors in the Voting Booth. Working Paper. (read pages 1-5)

Mar 2 Bueno, N., Zucco, C., and Nunes, F. (2023). What You See and What You Get: Direct and Indirect Political Dividends of Public Policies. *British Journal of Political Science* 53(4):1273-1292
Boas, T.C., Hidalgo, F.D. and Melo, M.A. (2019). Norms versus Action: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Malfeasance in Brazil. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63:385-400

Mar 4 Grossman, G., Michelitch, K. and Prato, C. (2024). The Effect of Sustained Transparency on Electoral Accountability. *American Journal of Political Science* 68(3):1022-1040.

Mar 16 Shayo, M. (2009). A Model of Social Identity with an Application to Political Economy: Nation, Class and Redistribution. *American Political Science Review* 103(2): 147-174

Mar 18 Thachil, T. (2014). Elite Parties and Poor Voters: Theory and Evidence from India. *American Political Science Review*, 108:454-477

Mar 23 Huber, John D. (2017). Exclusion by elections: inequality, ethnic identity, and democracy. Cambridge University Press. (posted online)

Posner, D. (2013). The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi. *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545

Mar 25 Bazzi, S., Koehler-Derrick G., Marx, B. (2019). The Institutional Foundations of Religious Politics: Evidence from Indonesia. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Mar 30 Exam 1

Apr 1 NO CLASS

Part III. Intermediaries | Fraud, Misinformation, Violence, Vote Buying, and Bureaucratic Performance

Apr 6 Brusco. V., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M., Stokes, S. (2013). *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1

Gans-Morse, J., Mazzuca, S., Nitcher, S. (2014). Varieties of Clientelism: Machine Politics During Elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 58: 415–32

Apr 8 Larreguy, H., Marshall, J., Querubin, P. (2016). Parties, Brokers and Voter Mobilization: How Turnout Buying Depends Upon the Party's Capacity to Monitor Brokers. *American Political Science Review*, 110(1):160-179

Cruz, C. (2018). Social Networks and the Targeting of Vote Buying. *Comparative Political Studies*, 52(3), 382-411

Apr 13 Little, A., Schnakenberg, K., Turner, I. (2022). Motivated Reasoning and Democratic Accountability. *American Political Science Review* 116(2):751-767

Bowles J., Croke, K., Larreguy, H., Liu S., Marshall, J. (2025). Sustaining Exposure to Fact-Checks: Misinformation Discernment, Media Consumption, and Its Political Implications. *American Political Science Review* 119(4):1864-1887

Apr 15 Slough, T. (2024). Bureaucratic Quality and Electoral Accountability. *American Political Science Review*.

Martin, L., and Raffler, P. (2021). Fault Lines: The Effects of Bureaucratic Power on Electoral Accountability. *American Journal of Political Science* 65(1): 210–224

Apr 20 Rundlett, A., Svolik, M. (2016). Deliver the Vote! Micromotives and Macrobehavior in Electoral Fraud. *American Political Science Review* 110(1):180-97

Gehlbach, S., Simpser, A. (2015). Electoral Manipulation as Bureaucratic Control. *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (1): 212–24

Apr 22 Collier, P, Vicente, P. (2014). Votes and Violence: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria. *The Economic Journal* 124: 327-55

Apr 27 Poertner M. (2023). Does Political Representation Increase Participation? Evidence from Party Candidate Lotteries in Mexico. *American Political Science Review* 117(2):537-556

Apr 29 Exam 3

For W Students only

Students enrolled in the W section are required to write two additional essays during the semester. The essays are graded on a binary PASS/FAIL scale, and do not impact the letter grade of the course. However, a FAIL means that the student will not receive the W credit for the course.

The essays should provide the student's opinion on the two questions presented below. There are no right or wrong answers, and students are free to choose how to develop the argument, as long as it engages with the broad theme of the course. Each essay should contain between 1,500 and 2,000 words, and should be written in the style of a newspaper opinion piece. The piece also needs to cite (and engage with) at least four academic articles that are related to the topic, but outside of the course's reading list. In the text, cite using the following format (Frey, 2019), and include the full reference in the bibliography at the end (the bibliography does not count for the word limit).

#1 Countries such as Russia or Venezuela have had non-democratic regimes that have maintained regular elections, though these have been widely characterized by allegations of fraud, intimidation, clientelism, and recurring popular protests. How do you think that the abundance of oil, or any valuable resource, influences the electoral and political environments of the affected countries?

This essay is due April 4, 2026

#2 All around the world, Parties and Politicians in the Right end of the ideological spectrum successfully mobilize voters on the basis of ethnic, religious, or other culturally relevant cleavages. What is more, they often defeat Left-wing parties that represent the interests of the poor, even in very poor nations. Why does the Left often fail to capitalize on the electoral cleavages created by poverty and income inequality?

This essay is due May 2, 2026