

**POLS 3333: Comparative Elections
(Comparative Election Science)**
Monday and Wednesday
5:30-6:50 p.m.
PGH 200

University of Houston
Fall 2019
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Election science is a field in political science that applies scientific principles to the analysis of electoral institutions and voting behavior. This upper-level course introduces students to the main topics of election science by reviewing the most important issues of contemporary elections across the world. Students will read both classic readings and recent works on a weekly topic as well as apply the concepts learned through the analysis of survey and election data. The goals for students in this course are (1) to become familiar with some of the most relevant topics in the field of election science, (2) to engage in the analysis of contemporary elections, and (3) to gain basic programming skills.

Format

We will meet twice a week for the duration of the semester. The course is organized thematically and there are assigned readings for each week. Students are expected to come to each class having read all the required material. On Mondays, we will cover the theoretical foundations of the topic and discuss some of the most recent evidence on it. On Wednesdays, we will have a hands-down workshop, where we apply our knowledge of the topic to the analysis of a particular database.

Office Hours

Wednesday 1:30-3:30 p.m. at 429 Philip Guthrie Hoffman Hall. If you cannot make it at that time, please send me an e-mail to schedule a meeting outside those hours.

Teaching Assistant

Paul Johnson (pjohnson7@uh.edu). Office hours: Monday 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. at 426 Philip Guthrie Hoffman Hall.

Course Requirements

Reading Quizzes: There will be a weekly quiz based on the assigned readings. Quizzes are designed to make sure you understand the most important concepts of the readings and coming prepared for lectures. Each quiz will consist of multiple choice and short identification questions. There will be no trick questions and answers will be obvious for those who read the material. Quizzes missed due to absences or late arrival cannot be made up. The average of your ten best scores is worth 30% of your final grade.

Workshop Sessions: We will devote Wednesday sessions to learn some tools for analyzing survey and election data. These sessions also will give you the opportunity to practice the R programming skills you will learn throughout the semester. Before coming to the workshop session, you will be assigned a specific lesson from Datacamp¹ (more details below). Completing the assigned lesson before coming to the workshop is a requirement to receive a grade for that session.

During each workshop session, I will group students in teams of three to work together on the exercises for that day. Your grade for each session is distributed as follows: 40% for completing the assigned Datacamp lesson before coming to class and 60% for the grade your team gets in the problem set. The average of your eleven best graded sessions is worth 30% of your final grade.

Election Reports: You will submit two original analysis on an election held during the semester. The purpose of these reports is to learn and engage more actively in the analysis of a contemporary election. Each report should demonstrate student's ability to apply readings and topics from the course.

¹www.datacamp.com

Students can choose one of the following elections occurring this fall:

- Mozambique: October 15
- Bolivia: October 20
- Switzerland: October 20
- Canada: October 21
- Argentina: October 27
- Haiti: October 27
- Uruguay: October 27
- Botswana: October 27
- Cameroon: October 27
- Tunisia: November 10

Each report should focus on a specific topic of the election. The first assignment is a pre-election report that can analyze, for example, the electoral system of the country or the major issues and campaign dynamics during the campaign. The second assignment is a post-election report of the election you previously described. For this report you can discuss the electoral outcome focusing on the electoral results and applying the analysis tools you have learned during the semester. Each report should be about 1,250 (+/- 100) words. The deadlines for the reports are October 9 and December 4. Additional instructions will be provided the first day of class.

Participation: Class participation means that you are fully present during lectures and other class activities. I grade students' participation across the whole semester. The grade represents my overall assessment of your participation in the class. A perfect score will be assigned to students positively contributing to class every day. Positive contributions are those that advance the discussion by presenting relevant and informed insights. I also consider those who are clearly following the conversation and being thoughtful about it. Those who never participate in class but have a regular attendance to class will end up with a score around 50-60%. Lower scores are for students deriding others' contributions in a discourteous way or engaging in distracting behaviors, which include excessive talking, arriving late to class, sleeping, or using electronic devices for purposes other than class-related activities.

A quick note on electronic devices

Out of respect for your fellow students, your professor, and the educational process the use of cell phones is not allowed during class. If you want to use your laptop or table for note taking, at least be aware of its detrimental effects on students' performance.² I reserve the right to deduct all your participation points without notice if you are using any electronic device for texting, social media, or any task unrelated to the class.

Grading

Reading Quizzes	30%
Problem Sets	30%
Election Reports	2× 15%= 30%
Participation	10%
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 100%

²See, for example, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/05/16/why-smart-kids-shouldnt-use-laptops-in-class/> and <http://thechronicleofeducation.com/2017/04/06/using-laptops-class-harms-academic-performance-study-warns/>

Final letter grades will be calculated in an absolute scale as follows: A (94-100%), A- (90-93.9%), B+ (87-89.9%), B (84-86.9%), B- (80-83.9%), C+ (77-79.9%), C (74-76.9%), C- (70-73.9%), D+ (67-69.9%), D (64-66.9%), D- (60-63.9%), F (0-59.9%).

Required Material for the Class

All reading assignments are available on Blackboard. The reading load is not burdensome, but the material may prove challenging. On average, you will read two book chapters or journal articles per week.

If you want to use your own laptop to the workshop sessions, you are required to install R and RStudio. Also, we will make extensive use of lessons from DataCamp, and students in this class will have free access to all DataCamp courses for six months. I will provide the access link the first day of class.

Disabilities

The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for students with a disability. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, the University of Houston strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them.

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both me after you contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD).³

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.⁴

Academic Integrity

Students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the honor pledge that will be provided the first day of class. There will be a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism in any of the required activities for this course, and any violation will be penalized in the terms cited by the UH's Academic Dishonesty Policy.⁵ Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and complicity in academic dishonesty. Feel free to consult with me before submitting your essay if you have concerns about the correct way to reference the work of others.

Deadlines and extensions

There are no make-up quizzes or lab sessions. The late submission period for the election reports will be 48 hours after the deadline. Assignments submitted up to 24 hours late will receive a 15% point penalty. Assignments submitted up to 48 hours late will receive a 30% point penalty. After 48 hours, no assignments will be accepted.

Assignments submitted close to the deadline risk being marked as late, so please submit your work early. Corrupted files will not be graded, and you are responsible for checking your file thoroughly before uploading. Screenshots will not be accepted as proof.

³<http://www.uh.edu/csd/>

⁴http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

⁵http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/_documents-honesty/academic-honesty-policy.pdf

Week 1. Introduction

August 19

No reading assigned

August 21

Datacamp lesson: *Intro to basics* (Introduction to R)

Week 2. Representation

August 26:

Sen, A. (1999). Democracy as a universal value. *Journal of Democracy*, 10(3):3–17

Riker, W. H. (1982). *Liberalism Against Populism*. Waveland Press: 1-19

August 28:

Datacamp lesson: *Vectors* (Introduction to R)

Week 3. Electoral Institutions I

Read:

Gallagher, M. and Mitchell, P., editors (2005). *The Politics of Electoral Systems*. Oxford University Press: 579-597

Datacamp lessons: *Matrices* and *Factors* (Introduction to R)

Week 4. Electoral Institutions II

September 9:

Reynolds, A., Reilly, B., and Ellis, A. (2005). *The International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm: 39-42, 45-46, 50-51, 62-70, 78-81, 86-89, 100-103 (Choose three cases) <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-system-design-the-new-international-idea-handbook.pdf>

Norris, P. (2004). *Electoral Engineering*. Cambridge University Press: 81-95

Lublin, D. and Bowler, S. (2018). Electoral systems and ethnic minority representation. In Heron, E. S., Pekkanen, R., and Shugart, M. S., editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*, pages 159–174. Oxford University Press

September 11:

Datacamp lesson: *Dataframes* (Introduction to R)

Week 5. Electoral Competition

September 16:

Colomer, J. M. (2011). *The Science of Politics*. Oxford University Press: 148-164

Dalton, R. J. (2018). *Political Realignement: Economics, Culture, and Electoral Change*. Oxford University Press: 27-49

September 18:

Datacamp lesson: *Lists* (Introduction to R)

Week 6. Voting Behavior

September 23:

LeDuc, L. and Niemi, R. G. (2014). Voting behavior: Choice and context. In LeDuc, L., Niemi, R. G., and Norris, P., editors, *Comparing Democracies 4: Elections and Voting in a Changing World*, pages 133–149. SAGE Publications, Ltd

Popkin, S. (1991). *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. University of Chicago Press: 1-21

Westen, D. (2007). *The Political Brain*. Public Affairs, New York: ix-xv

September 25:

Datacamp lesson: *Conditionals and Control Flow* (Intermediate to R)

Week 7. Political Campaigns

September 30:

Wlezien, C. (2010). Election campaigns. In *Comparing Democracies 3: Elections and Voting in the 21st Century*, pages 98–117. SAGE Publications, Ltd

Greenberg, S. B. (2009). *Dispatches from the War Room*. St. Martin's Press, New York: 348-392

First draft of the pre-election report due

October 2:

Datacamp lesson: *Loops* (Intermediate to R)

Week 8.

October 7:

Session at the Writing Center

October 9:

Final draft of the pre-election report due

Film: *Our Brand Is Crisis* (Rachel Boynton, 2005)

Week 9. Manipulation of Electoral Institutions

October 14:

Przeworski, A. (2018). *Why Bother with Elections?* *Polity*: 47-70

Wong, S. H.-W. (2019). Gerrymandering in electoral autocracies: Evidence from Hong Kong. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(2):579–610

October 16:

Datacamp lessons: *Functions* and *The apply family* (Intermediate to R)

Week 10. Vote buying

October 21:

Nichter, S. (2018). *Surviving Politics*. Cambridge University Press: 27-65

Wang, C.-S. and Kurzman, C. (2007). The logistics: How to buy votes. In Schaffer, F. C., editor, *Elections for Sale: The Causes and Consequences of Vote Buying*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder

October 23:

Datacamp lesson: *Utilities* (Intermediate to R)

Week 11. Violence

October 28:

Dunning, T. (2011). Fighting and voting: Violent conflict and electoral politics. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 55(3):327–339

Wilkinson, S. I. (2004). *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1-18

October 30:

Datacamp lesson: *Data wrangling* (Introduction to Tidyverse)

Week 12. Electoral Fraud

November 4:

Lehoucq, F. (2003). Electoral fraud: Causes, types, and consequences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6:233–256

Brady, H. E., Herron, M. C., Mebane, W. R., Sekhon, J. S., Shotts, K. W., and Wand, J. (2001). Law and data: The butterfly ballot episode. *Political Science & Politics*, 34(1):59–69

“Venezuela’s fantasy voting” *The Economist*. Aug 5, 2017. p. 27.

Beber, B. and Scacco, A. (June 20, 2009). The devil is in the digits. *The Washington Post*

November 6:

Datacamp lesson: *Data visualization* (Introduction to Tidyverse)

Week 13. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

November 11:

Norris, P. (2014). *Why Electoral Integrity Matters*. Cambridge University Press:91-110.

Maldonado, A. and Seligson, M. A. (2014). Electoral trust in latin america. In Norris, P., Frank, R. W., and Martinez i Coma, F., editors, *Advancing Electoral Integrity*, pages 229–266. Oxford University Press. Working Paper

November 13:

Datacamp lesson: *Grouping and summarizing* (Introduction to Tidyverse)

Week 14. Fixing Elections

November 18:

Mozaffar, S. and Schedler, A. (2002). The comparative study of electoral governance—introduction. *International Political Science Review*, 23(5)

Hyde, S. D. (2007). The observer effect in international politics: Evidence from a natural experiment. *World Politics*, 50(1)

“How to unrig an election” *The Economist*. Jul 22, 2017. p. 47.

November 20:

Datacamp lesson: *Types of visualizations* (Introduction to Tidyverse)

First draft of the post-election report due

Week 15.

November 25:

Writing Center Session

November 27:

Final draft of the post-election report due

Election Reports

You will write two consultancy reports for an international agency. Imagine you have been asked to write a couple of electoral analysis for an international agency. You will choose for each report any of the elections listed on page 2 in the syllabus. Each report should be about 1250 (+/- 100) words in length. Your report should be structured with subheadings as follows.

1. The selected topic, election, and the executive summary of your report
2. Summary of the core topic you have selected and why it matters
3. Review of the relevant literature of the core topic
4. Summary of the main facts or the original evidence you are using to analyze the election
5. Recommendations and next steps

You must consult (and cite) a minimum of five sources, including at least two academic sources—meaning a peer-reviewed journal article or a book published by a major press. You may also make use of web-based sources, such as newspapers, specialized blogs, or data archives. In addition, it would be helpful to consult primary sources (e.g., government, NGO, or international organization publications about electoral systems or elections).

The assignment due on October 9 is a pre-election report. It will analyze a particular issue of the upcoming election. Examples of research topics for this assignment include the way in which electoral system shape the political campaigns in the country, the main challenges for the political representation of specific population groups, or the way electoral rules and country's characteristics determine the principal campaign issues.

The assignment due on December 4 is a post-election report of the election you previously selected. Examples of potential topics for the post-election report include an analysis of the electoral outcome under a different electoral system, an assessment of the claims of electoral irregularities that emerged during the election (if any), or a project of electoral reform that may resolve the perceived problems of the election.

Below are a few examples of pre-election assessments and post-election reports (the respective hyperlinks are in the electronic version of the syllabus):

- Liberia, 2017
- Spain, 2019
- Mexico, 2018
- Palestine, 2006
- Ukraine, 2019
- Venezuela, 2013
- Zimbabwe, 2018

A few recommendations from the National Democratic Institute's *Field Guide for Election Monitoring Groups*⁶ (p. 11-13):

“Do’s”

- **Keep statements brief.** Include necessary facts and examples to support analysis and conclusions. Provide an overview of the big picture (...) It is important for your group to provide the public with an understanding of the quality of the process as a whole.

⁶<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Drafting-Statements-Reports-ENG.pdf>

- **Highlight positive aspects.** The role of an observation group is not simply to focus on violations, but to offer a fair and balanced account of the election process. A statement that ignores the positive aspects of the process is not a fair and balanced statement.
- **Quantify your findings.** Be specific about how often a violation was observed. Be sure to distinguish between isolated errors and general trends as well as whether violations occurred in one region or nationwide.
- **Pay attention to tone and language.** Be diplomatic in your presentation and avoid hasty judgments that may be based on incomplete information. It is important to be objective and neutral in your public statements.
- **Reference international standards.** While it is important to assess the elections against domestic law, a country's rules may be flawed and undermine international standards. It is useful to reference international instruments to which the government has committed when evaluating the process.

“Don'ts”

- **Don't exaggerate.** Let your findings speak for themselves and present them in a straightforward manner that does not mislead the reader. Don't distort data to try and make analysis that you believe may be accurate but lack evidence for (...)
- **Don't include opinion.** While everyone in your group may have some preconceived notions about the political process and elections, it is important to make sure that you stick to the facts. Your findings should reflect your observations, not your opinions.
- **Avoid inflammatory language.** While you have a role to play in providing information, you also have a responsibility to the public. Remember that your statements could incite tensions and violence or be used by spoilers who wish to discredit the process.
- **Don't jump to conclusions.** Ensure that your analysis and conclusions are based on your observed findings and give relevant examples. Conclusions that are incorrect can undermine your group's integrity and lead stakeholders to question your neutrality.

Rubric:

Organization	4 points
Argument	6 points
Analysis	6 points
Style	5 points
Mechanics	5 points
Sources	4 points
Submission of your first draft on time	2 points
Writing Center Meeting	3 points
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 35 points