Electoral Systems

Comparative Government Revision Class – TT21

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What we're doing today

- Broad outline of the major subtopics.

- Review of key readings.

- Thinking about the exam essay

Sub-topic 1: Classifying ES

- Is the distinction between proportional representation and majoritarian systems the best classification of electoral systems? (2020)

- "The most politically relevant component of an electoral system is district magnitude." Discuss. (2014)

- "Has the classification of electoral systems in 'majority' and 'proportional' been made obsolete by the recent emergence and diffusion of 'mixed' electoral systems?" (syllabus)

Sub-topic 2: ES origin and change

- 'To understand why proportional representation systems redistribute more income, one needs to look at the origins of proportional representation.' Discuss. (2017)

- Are electoral systems endogenous to party competition? (2018)

- What are the determinants of electoral reform? (syllabus)

Sub-topic 3: Effects of ES

- Do electoral systems have a direct effect on anything other than the number of parties? (2016)

- Does Duverger's Law adequately capture the effects of electoral systems on party systems? (2019)

- "Ever since Duverger's seminal work, it has been said that electoral systems influence party systems. But electoral systems are designed by parties, so they don't have any real causal force". Discuss. (2013)

- What impact does the electoral system have on the shape and operation of the party system? (syllabus)

Curveballs

- Normative slant on the question:

  - Do mixed-member systems combine the best of the majoritarian and proportional visions of representative democracy? (2017 old regs.)

- Specific aspects of ES:

  - How can electoral systems provide incentives to politicians to cultivate a personal vote and what consequences can these incentives have for the quality of democratic representation? (2015)

Classifying ES: Majoritarian/PR distinction

Different dimensions of variation:

- Seat Allocation Formula - *how* votes translate into seats.
- Electoral tiers/districting: *where* seats are assigned
- District magnitude (M): *how many seats* are assigned in a district.
- Ballot structure: *how many preferences* voters can express, whether they can vote for *parties, candidates, or both*.
- Other legal requirements (thresholds, quora, reserved seats).

Classifying ES: Majoritarian/PR distinction

- Analytical distinction traditionally between majoritarian (plurality, majority) formulae & proportional ones (quota, divisor, PR-STV).

- This also maps onto a distinction between M = 1 and M > 1 (note: district magnitude also distinguishes *between* PR varieties).

  - "an electoral system is majoritarian if the voting occurs in constituencies (usually single-member ones) in which the winner takes all: the so-called first-past-the-post system. Conversely, any electoral system in which the voting occurs in two-or-more member constituencies and produces two-or-more winners elected on a 'highest votes' basis, is a proportional system" (Sartori, 1994)

Classifying ES: Majoritarian/PR distinction

- Cases that do not fit neatly in the distinction (MMP, parallel mixed systems, TRS, limited voting) treated as either subtypes of one or the other or hybrids: 'semi-proportional' (Lijphart, 1999), 'combined systems' (Norris, 2004).

- Similar approach also in Rae (1967), Lakeman (1974), Bingham (2000).

- Something of a 'straw man'. <u>All these authors obviously recognise variation within ES families and along dimensions other than formula/district magnitude.</u>

Classifying ES: Majoritarian/PR distinction

- But still there's an *a posteriori* claim that maj./PR divide is (1) the key explanatory variable for disproportionality (= largest parties bias), and (2) disproportionality correlates with broader patterns of institutional variation.

- "(expected) proportionality of electoral outcomes as the key discriminant among type of electoral systems" (Grofman, 2005)

- Majoritarian and PR ES map onto discrete 'visions' of democracy, and of how elections allow voters to control governments (the 'electoral linkage').
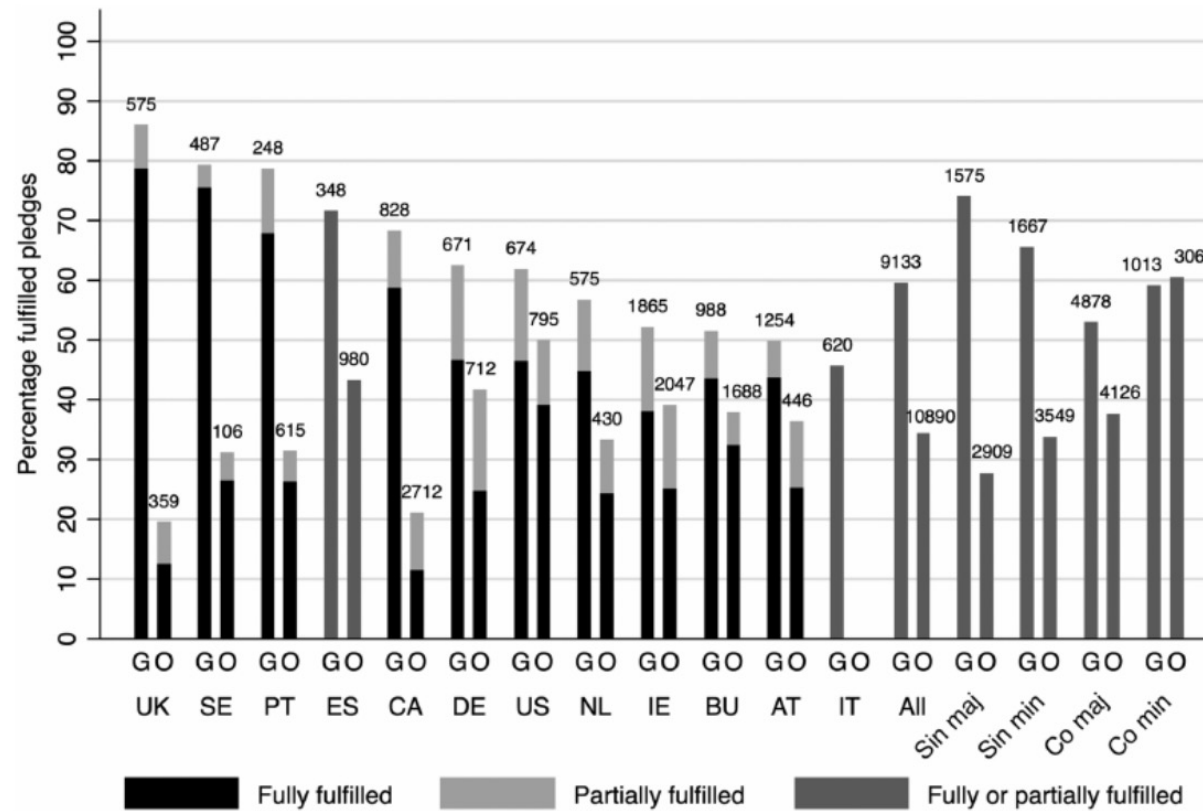
- Lijphart, 1999; Bingham, 2000.

Majoritarian Vision

- Majoritarianism: 'manufactured' (Rae, 1967) majorities create unified control of government. This allows voters to exercise control:

(1) retrospectively, via accountability (unified control -> clarity of responsibility)

(2) prospectively, via the policy mandate (identifiable future government)

- Opinion of the 'median voter' only represented under unrealistic Duvergerian conditions - > encourages strategic voting.

- Encourages electoral decisiveness, concentration of power, executive dominance.

Proportional Vision

- PR: elections constitute the first stage of the representation process, wherein voters *authorise* delegates to represent them.

- Electoral linkage = 'authorized representation' or trusteeship.

- Direct voter control over government composition is traded off for accurate legislative representation. Government composition and policy are determined via bargaining between representatives at later stages.

- Empowers *actual* majorities and allow wider input on policy-making. Encourages dispersion of power, parliamentary control, social inclusion.

Linking to other CG topics: Thomson et al. (2017)

FIGURE 1 The Fulfillment of Election Pledges by Country and Government Type

Note. UK = United Kingdom; SE = Sweden; PT = Portugal; ES = Spain; CA = Canada; DE = Germany; US = United States; NL = The Netherlands; IE = Ireland; BU = Bulgaria; AT = Austria; IT = Italy; G = parties that held executive office after the elections; O = parties that did not. The study of Italy does not include pledges made by opposition parties. Sin maj = single-party majority governments; Sin min = single-party minority governments; Co maj = majority coalitions; Co min = minority coalitions. Numbers above bars refer to the total numbers of pledges tested for fulfillment.

Against the Majoritarian/PR distinction

- Conceptually ambiguous, if not wholly unsound. Hard to map the 'visions' onto ES formal features.

- Electoral formula alone does not allow to draw a distinction:

  - E.g. SNTV and D'Hondt are 'equivalent' (Cox, 1991), net of M and list pooling.
  - "The electoral formula properly defined has little theoretically to do with the number of parties or even the degree of disproportionality between vote and seat shares" (Cox, 1991)

- But *technically* neither does district magnitude:

General Election 1880: Birmingham (3 seats)				
Party	**Candidate**	**Votes**	**%**	**±%**
Liberal	**Philip Henry Muntz**	22,969	24.27	*N/A*
Liberal	**John Bright**	22,079	23.33	*N/A*
Liberal	**Joseph Chamberlain**	19,544	20.65	*N/A*
Conservative	F.G. Burnaby	15,735	16.63	*N/A*
Conservative	Hon. A.C.G. Calthorpe	14,308	15.12	*N/A*
Turnout		63,398 reg.	74.64	*N/A*

- General ticket, MNTV (bloc voting), have M > 1 but obvious majoritarian effects.

Against the Majoritarian/PR distinction

- **Theoretically insufficient**. Focus on party vote/seat disproportionality overlooks other dimensions of ES variation:

  - Do only 'first' preferences count? TRS/AV as 'majority' category distinct from 'plurality' -> allows for multiparty-ism, sincere voting.

    "[The TRS] never is majoritarian-like in the sense that it does not have the coercive impact on the voter- that characterizes the first-past-the-post system. Actually, in the first round voters perform as with proportional representation: they freely express their first preference for all the options. Conversely, the double ballot is never adequately proportional." (Sartori, 1994)

  - Are candidates or parties central to voters' choice? (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Grofman, 2005; André et al., 2016). Similar effects of SMD plurality with party endorsement and closed-list PR.

Against the Majoritarian/PR distinction

- Empirically insufficient -> diffusion of mixed systems since the 1990s.

- MS defined as 'multiple-tier systems where seats are allocated nominally (usually in SMD) in at least one tier and via proportional party lists in at least one'. (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001)

- Combine 'PR' and 'majoritarian' components, with effects approximating one or the other depending on the linkage between tiers (compensatory -> MMP, parallel -> MMM).

Mixed Systems: A distinct family?

- Not just seat linkage. Other dimensions of variation:

  - Share of SMD seats
    - (Bulgaria 2009 technically MMM but with only 12% SMD vs Scotland technically MMP but with 60% SMD)
  - Electoral formula in SMD (plurality/TRS) (Lithuania)
  - Threshold/district magnitude in PR tier.
  - Double/single ballot (Italy 1993-2005)

- Claim: Combination of factors specific to either tier or to their relationship creates unique coordination incentives. In turn, degree of coordination affects party system fragmentation (Cox, 1997).

Mixed System: A distinct family?

- contamination effect: standing in an SMD district increases PR vote within district. In MS, this reduces incentives for coordination typical of plurality systems (Ferrara and Herron, 2005)

- Extent of 'contamination' effect increases the more PR-like the system: if SMD tier is TRS or smaller, if PR tier is compensatory (= system is MMP) and with lower legal/effective thresholds.

- Conclusion: SMD election in MS are different from 'pure' SMD elections.

- BUT the lower level of coordination observed in MS SMD tiers might be largely due to weakly institutionalised democracies with MS (Moser and Schneider, 2004; Riera, 2013).

ES Change

- Two apparent paradoxes of ES change.

- Major changes (occur rarely, but shouldn't at all): why do winners undermine the system that empowered them in the first place?

- Minor changes (occur more often, but not as often as you'd expect): why don't winner tweak the ES to increase their advantage?

ES Change: Power-Maximisation Approach

- Two approaches:
- (1) power-maximization approach (Benoit, 2004)

  - "Electoral systems result from the collective choice of political parties linking institutional alternatives to electoral self-interest in the form of maximizing seat shares … A change in electoral institutions will occur when a political party or coalition of political parties supports an alternative which will bring it more seats than the status quo electoral system, and also has the power to effect through fiat that institutional alternative."
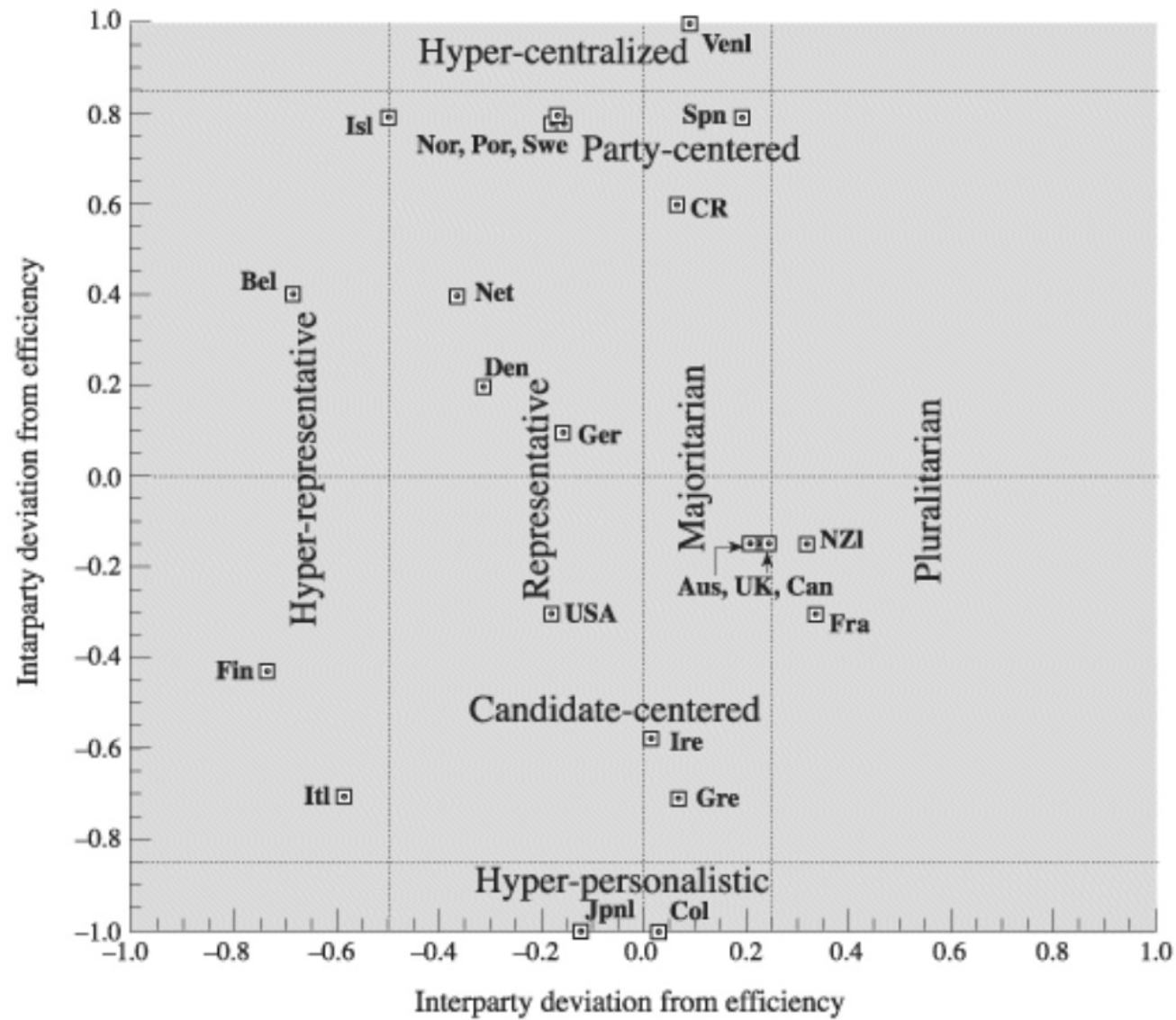
ES Change: Power-Maximisation Approach

- Exogenous causes of ES change: changes in expected vote share (V*) by party with fiat power, party system churn, change in the coalition sets, change of viable ES options, changes in (legal/political) 'permissibility' of reform.

- Explains Hungary (2011) -> Fidesz consolidates dominant position in view of increase in V*, i.e. prospect of a constitutional supermajority

- Explains France (1986) -> Socialists exercise damage control.

- Fails to explain Italy (1993) -> maintaining PR would allow 'First Republic' parties to weather rapid changes to party system.

- Fails to explain New Zealand (1996) -> FPTP entrenches top two parties.

ES Change: Inherent/Contingent factors approach

- (2) Combination of norms- and interest-based drivers (Shugart, 2001):

- Opportunity for change open when the ES is seen as failing to deliver on normative expectations about democracy (systemic failure).

- Reform is advanced in presence of a 'favourable' constellations of actors and contingencies (party splits, corruption scandals, party system churn):

    - Outcome-contingency vs act-contingency (Shugart, 2008)

ES Change: Inherent/Contingent factors approach

- "Those electoral systems that are 'extreme' on either the interparty or intraparty dimension contain within themselves the preexisting conditions that generate reformist pressures" (Shugart, 2001)

- Some electoral systems repeatedly generate outcomes that come to be viewed as pathological by some actors, or by the general public.

- Wider set of relevant actors (opposition parties, courts, public via referenda). More room for normative preferences.
    - see also: Bol, 2016 on party stance on ES reform proposals and their position on minority rights.

ES Change: Inherent/Contingent factors approach

- Interparty dimension: FPTP (disproportionality), undiluted PR (fragmentation)

- Explains why countries switch *away* from SMDP and almost never towards it, and within PR systems ES drift towards 'tempered' forms of PR (Bol et al., 2015).

- In both cases, MS become an attractive proposition.

- Italy (1993), New Zealand (1996)

ES Change: Inherent/Contingent factors approach

- Intraparty dimension: hyperpersonalisation under OLPR, or hyper-partisan control under closed list PR. Venezuela (1997), Japan (1992)

- Again, trend towards MS (combines candidate-centred SMD and party centred list PR)

- Perhaps more importantly, diffusion of 'flexible' list systems, where voters can express preferences but parties retain gate-keeping power.
    - See Passarelli (2020) + Renwick and Pilet (2016); quite a widespread trend after the 1990s: Austria (1992) Belgium (2003), Czechia (2002), Poland (2001) Iceland (2000), Sweden (1997), Netherlands (1989, 1997) etc.

ES Change: The Origins of PR

- Two accounts to explain shift to proportional system after extension of the franchise at the turn of the XX century:

- Boix (1999), building on Rokkan (1970) – rational choice, PR as political insurance against socialist parties.

- Cusack, Iversen and Soskice (CIS; 2007) – CPE, PR seals cross-class coordination equilibrium needed to sustain high-skill industrial economies.

- Both 'grand theories' that tend to overfit (Kreuzer, 2010).

Boix (1999)

- Extension of the franchise corresponds to a (leftward) shock to the median voter. Expected share of a Socialist party S in SMD against two non-socialist parties C and L dependent on:

  - Sufficient closeness of S to the median voter ('viability' of S)
  - Sufficient balance between C and L (coordination uncertainty).

- Therefore non-socialist camp fragmentation + strength of socialist party pose an existential threat to parties competing around the 'old' median voter -> PR as a solution to coordination problem.

- Empirical test on 24 countries:
  - Effective threshold ~ strength of S * Number of 'Old' parties

CIS (2007)

- Industrialisation based on high skills requires co-investment by capital and labour in a regime of skill acquisition.

- This is sustained by high degree of coordination in bargaining actors – unions and employers' association.

- PR allowed veto power for the different groups in regulatory politics: cross-class cooperation would ensure that union do no withhold skills and that business provide human capital investment, in the form of training, insurance and welfare.

- PR is endogenous to structure of economic interests: guarantees consensual labour relationship needed to sustain of high-skill industry.

Problems with Boix (1999)

- In many cases, pre-existing system was two-round majority, so coordination between bourgeois parties was not a central problem (Ahmed, 2010 -> SMDP as alternative 'rationalisation' of the ES around the same time, not the starting point).

- Support for PR among (some) Socialists (Blais et al., 2005):
  - Makes sense with the seat-maximising theory because of geographic concentration of industrial workers

- Process-tracing disconfirms 'left threat' hypothesis in 10 of the 24 cases (Kreuzer, 2010) -> equifinality?

Salvaging Boix (1999)

- Robust quantitative empirics, though causal mechanism only at play in part of the sample: left threat clearly not the *only* driver.

- Rokkan (1970) already hypothesises an 'alternative route' to PR:
  - Even in absence of Socialist threat (DK, CH), franchise extension increases the number of parties. This disadvantages incumbents with geographically dispersed and minoritarian electorates (normally, Liberals).
  - PR as a reaction to the multiparty-ism that comes with new conflicts around the time of franchise extension rather than specifically to Socialists.

- Consistent with microfoundations: some evidence that Left threat operates at legislator level (Leemann and Mares, 2014).

Problems with CIS (2007)

- Theoretically:
  - Improbable that institutional actors would be aware of downstream regulatory effect of a new political system.
  - Empirically, no genuine CPOs:
    - No evidence of public expressions of institutional preferences from interest groups (Kreuzer, 2010)
  - Methodologically:
    - Qualitative overestimation of existence of cross-class coalitions (unions were still tightly restricted prior to WW1).
    - Assumption of stable, unified party preferences.

Alternative explanations to consider

- Ideational factors:
  - Pre-Weimar, widespread normative acceptance of PR as the only 'truly' democratic system; PR often introduced with little opposition: fights over institutional reform often centered around upper house (Blais et al., 2005).
- PR as an intraparty device:
  - After franchise extension, bourgeois parties need to reinvent themselves as mass parties and engage in massive social reforms.
  - MPs who owe their SMD seat to local deals among notables are unreliable in legislative bodies -> factional, undisciplined parties (*trasformismo*).
  - PR centralises control on selection: evidence from Germany (Schröder and Manow, 2020) and Norway (Cox et al. 2018). Already in Lachapelle (1911).

The Effects of ES: Party System

- Duverger's (1954) Law: "the simple-majority single-ballot system favors the two-party system"

- Duverger's Hypothesis: "the simple-majority system with second ballot and proportional representation favors multipartyism"

- Formalised and generalised to a continuum of district magnitudes:

  - $N_{S0} = M_{S0}^{0.5}$ (Taagepera and Shugart, 2017. Note: different from Cox, 1997)
  - The number of pertinent vote-earning parties (N_{V0}) is the number of seat-winning parties (N_{S0}), plus one. $N_{V0} = N_{S0} + 1$.

The Effects of ES: Party Systems

- ES, specifically district magnitude, constrains the number of parties through the interplay of *mechanical* (larger party bias in votes-to-seat translation, see also: cube rule) and *psychological* (strategic coordination) effects.

- Empirical evidence: across SMD elections, the two largest parties dominate the districts (90%+ of the vote); there is very little support for parties finishing <4th. Yet third-place parties do not completely disappear, and ethnic divisions shape party fragmentation levels (Singer, 2013)

The Effects of ES: Party Systems

- Qualifications of Duverger's Law:

- At country level, interaction with sociological variables:
  - ENPP is the *product* of district magnitude and electoral permissiveness: if cleavage structure is simple, party systems fragmentation remains low even for high M (Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994; Cox and Amorim-Neto, 1997).

- Endogeneity
  - Problem throughout, BUT "electoral systems tend to be very stable and to resist change." (Lijphart, 1994)

The Effects of ES: Redistribution

- Persson and Tabellini (2000)
  - SMD allow office-seekers parties to target spending narrowly; proportional systems require broader welfare programmes
- Iversen and Soskice (2006)
  - Coalitional options of the median voter: in a two-party system, middle class faces low tax/low spend tradeoff with the right, but high taxes and redistribution to the poor if they govern with the left. Under multi-party PR, a middle class party can coalesce with the left to jointly "exploit" the rich.
- Rodden (2006)
  - Territorial bias works against geographic distribution of left vote.

Effects of ES: Corruption and Ballot Structure

- Chang and Golden (2007): corruption tied to vote personalisation.

- Corruption increases as M increases under open-list PR systems:
  - More competition for 'personal' votes -> more extractive activity

- Corruption decreases as M increases under closed-list PR systems.
  - Initially, parties select candidates who already have a 'personal' vote, but the marginal utility of that candidate type decreases as M increases

Preparing for the exam

- In an open-book exam, the returns to rehearsing arguments are much higher than memorising evidence or cites.

- But: prepare a repertoire of examples (Handbooks are useful)

- Think critically about methodological choices, theoretical assumptions.

- Signpost, signpost, signpost.

- Observe the word limit.

Are electoral systems endogenous to party competition? (2018)

- Argument: Despite the influence of parties on electoral systems, electoral systems have causal force on party systems.

- 1) ES change strategically deployed by parties in the face of shocks

- 2) But parties cannot always do what they want.

- 3) This means electoral systems shape party expectations and behaviour as they are seen as quite stable.

- 4) And sometimes the choice of electoral system will have unexpected consequences anyway.

- 5) Nevertheless, contrary to what Taagepera argues, this does not wholly remove the possibility of a causal link stretching from party competition to electoral systems.

Does Duverger's Law adequately capture the effects of electoral systems on party systems?

- Overall argument = no, Duverger's Law is a useful starting point, but it misses numerous effects of electoral systems on party systems.

- Para 1: definitions

- Para 2 - Duverger fails to distinguish between the national and constituency level + Cox (1997) does this and finds Duverger's Law is more supported at the constituency rather than national level.

- Para 3 - there are cases of proportional electoral systems where there's only two dominant parties, which Duverger fails to account for + Neto and Cox (1997).

- Para 4 – Mixed Systems – contamination effects.

Do electoral systems have a direct effect on anything other than the number of parties?

- Electoral systems have a direct effect on the incentives of candidates. Specifically, they change how a candidate is re-elected. This has two implications. Firstly, it influences the propensity of a system to have corruption. Secondly, it impacts on the fiscal discipline of a system

- Section 1: how electoral systems influence the incentives of candidates

- Section 2: how the incentives of candidates lead to changes in corruption

- Section 3: how the incentives of candidates change the extent of budget discipline

Cited items not in the syllabus

- Lakeman (1974) How Democracies Vote: A Study of Electoral Systems
- Grofman (2005) Comparisons among electoral systems: Distinguishing between localism and candidate-centered politics
- Thomson et al. (2017) The Fulfillment of Parties' Election Pledges: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Power Sharing
- Cox (1991) SNTV and d'Hondt are 'equivalent'
- André, Depauw and Martin (2016) The classification of electoral systems: Bringing legislators back in
- Carey and Shugart (1995) Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: A rank ordering of electoral formulas
- Shugart (2008) Inherent and Contingent Factors in Reform Initiation in Plurality Systems, in Blais, To Keep or To Change First Past The Post?: The Politics of Electoral Reform
- Bol (2016) Electoral reform, values and party self-interest
- Passarelli (2020) Preferential Voting Systems
- Renwick and Pilet (2016) Faces on the ballot: The personalization of electoral systems in Europe
- Rokkan (1970) Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Processes of Development
- Blais, Dobrzynska and Indridason (2005) To Adopt or Not to Adopt Proportional Representation: The Politics of Institutional Choice
- Leeman and Mares (2014) The Adoption of Proportional Representation
- Schröder and Manow (2020) An intra-party account of electoral system choice
- Cox, Fiva and Smith (2018) Parties, Legislators, and the Origins of Proportional Representation
- Taagepera and Shugart (2017) Votes from seats: Logical models of electoral systems
- Singer (2013) Was Duverger Correct? Single-Member District Election Outcomes in Fifty-three Countries