



Elections with(out) Choice: Comparative Perspectives from Mexico and Latin America

Why do elections, and why does voting, matter?

Voting is, at first sight, the supreme act of citizenship and the founding element of democracy. Yet this ideal type of elections deserves a closer look. While many theories developed in Europe and the USA are being widely used to explain electoral behavior around the world, we seldom think about the deeper significance of “exotic” and “atypical” forms of voting, nor about their possible implications for political choice. The invention of universal suffrage, its gradual extension and globalization, are complex historical processes, full of contingencies and contradictions. Beyond its pure and sanctified connotations in advanced democracies, voting is a massive and a messy social practice, with multiple purposes and meanings that vary across space and time, age and class, cultures and communities.

What drives elections, and what do they tell us about politics in the world nowadays? Which are the main principles and options for collective choice? How are votes translated into seats and what shapes party systems in old and new democracies? Why (so many) people (don't) get involved in politics? Are votes and electoral outcomes predictable? Why poor/rich citizens (don't) vote for liberal/conservative or left/right-wing parties? How history, geography, culture, psychology, economy and sociology, matter? Are all types of elections always and necessarily “democratic”?

Objectives and dynamics of the course

Drawing from theory and from empirical research, this course provides a comprehensive overview of the main approaches to study elections in comparative perspective. It discusses paradigmatic models of voting derived from consolidated democracies and tests them in diverse socio-historical settings with emphasis on Mexico and Latin America, in hybrid contexts of transition from/towards authoritarianism. To provide a practical sense of the logic of scientific methods and research designs, it also shows how different types of empirical data may be used to accept or to reject theoretically relevant hypothesis. This supplies valuable tools for a multidimensional analysis of voting, and sheds light on the various meanings of elections in new and old democracies.

The course pedagogy encourages a participative and interactive learning process. It uses a combination of brief introductory brain-storming exercises to situate the focal points of each session; synthetic lectures on the main theories, methods, data and findings; questions and answers; interactive group discussions of a selection of readings; and a synthesis of the most important lessons learned in class.