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Votes from Seats : Logical Models of Electoral Systems

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Matthew S. Shugart and Rein Taagepera, *Votes from Seats: Logical Models of Electoral Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2017. £ 74.99 (hbk); £ 25.99 (pbk), 358 pp. ISBN 978-1-108-41702-0 (hbk); 978-1-108-40426-6 (pbk). DOI: 10.1017/9781108261128.

The *Votes from Seats* by Shugart and Taagepera is a third contribution to the monographs presenting logical models of electoral systems which follow-up on *Seat and Votes* (Taagepera and Shugart 1989) and *Predicting Party Sizes* (Taagepera 2007). Even though the authors are frequently referring to the previous pieces, the monograph brings substantive and relevant contributions to the electoral studies which I will discuss below.

The most intriguing aspect of the book is the fact that the authors develop “quantitatively predictive logical models” capable of surprisingly accurate estimations of electoral outcomes, while using as few as two fundamental quantities – the number of assembly seats and average district magnitude. Their approach to quantitative research and employment of statistics is rather unique. Instead of testing vaguely formulated hypothesis on empirical data, they firstly develop a logical model which provides an estimate of the outcome in hard-numerical values. Only after that the statistics comes in to test whether the logical model suits empirical data to satisfactory degree, for statistical conventions. This may sound like an unnecessarily complicated approach. However, in the light of current heated discussions regarding the usage of statistics (see e.g., Benjamin et al. 2017; Lakens et al. 2018), it represents a promising and trustworthy enterprise.

Even though this book has its predecessors, Shugart and Taagepera start from the very basics and in the first part (Chaps. 2-6) where they scrutinize the possible mechanical arrangements of electoral systems (Chaps. 2-3), provide useful indicators for measuring their performance (Chap. 4), and present the influence of various electoral arrangements on several archetypal cases (Chaps. 5-6). You may wonder: If the work presented in *Votes from Seats* is built only on assembly size and average district magnitude, why did they decide to waste the time and space on basics? Well, first of all, the argument Shugart and Taagepera are trying to make is that, despite the complexity of electoral rules, at the very core of their institutional setup there are constraints which can provide us with a very valuable hint about the overall effects of a given electoral system. Besides that, the logic presented by the authors works best for the simple electoral systems and, as we move towards their more complex counterparts, the scatter around the predicted values expands. In order to understand varying accuracy of logical models along the simple vs. complex systems dimension, a reader must be aware of the elements which could build up the complexity.

In the second part dedicated to interparty dimension of politics, the book makes an unprecedented critique of the two fundamental views in the contemporary electoral studies. Firstly, the conventional wisdom dictating that the casted ballots processed through an “intervening control box” – the electoral mechanism – are the main determinant in the distribution of seats (i.e. votes → electoral system → seats). However, Shugart and Taagepera demonstrate (Chap. 7) that the electoral system plays a substantial role and, therefore, cannot be perceived only as a “control box”. Instead, institutional setup of an electoral system must be

perceived similarly to votes because they both affect seats from opposite directions (i.e. votes $\leftrightarrow$ seats $\leftarrow$ electoral system).¹

The second relevant point relates to the interaction between districts and country-wide politics. Contemporary electoral studies see district-level competition as the main building block which together with other districts within a given system, conjointly determine the structure of the party system. That was the main reason why Duverger's expectations (1954) have been tested primarily on the district level and their limited occurrence on the country level was not perceived as a big deal. However, Shugart and Taagepera demonstrate (Chaps. 7-8) that the advanced Duverger's expectations (based on assembly size and average district magnitude) correspond to country-wide outcomes to surprisingly high degree. In the second step, it is the district level competition that must be additionally adjusted because of its "embeddedness" in a national system (Chap. 10). Both arguments represent original and important theoretical contributions to electoral studies.

The third part "brings the president in" (Chaps. 11-12), which means that the up-to-now developed logical models are tested in the specific context of presidential regimes. Authors show that the institutional setup (Chap. 11) and timing (Chap. 12) of assembly elections have an influence on the presidential competition. Shugart and Taagepera draw "bigger picture" of interactions between electoral institutions in presidential regimes and make the point that various elections within a system simply cannot be perceived separately. Most importantly, they offer also a tool which allows to grasp some influences between the elections held in the same country.

The fourth part of the book deals with intraparty dimension of representation and, therefore, speaks to the current debates on personalization of electoral systems. It demonstrates how the ballot structure influences the competition among candidates (Chap. 13) and determines the nomination strategies of parties (Chap. 14). The third and fourth parts of the book could be criticized for having shakier theoretical foundations compared to the second part. Nonetheless, the described mechanisms there are clearly relevant for constitutional engineering and their inclusion is fully legitimate.

A multitude of original logical models published for the first time is not the only contribution of the *Votes from Seats*. Relevant work done by Shugart and Taagepera speaks also to the method itself. On numerous places of *Predicting Party Sizes* (2007), Taagepera warns that in case of more complex electoral systems, "all bets are off regarding consequences". The fifth part of *Votes from Seats* presents the extension to logical models for more complex electoral systems with an upper tier (Chap. 15) and empirically manifests that logical models provide an important hint for determining the effects of electoral institution in a more complex environment – in terms of the complexity of electoral mechanism (Chap. 16) as well as societal heterogeneity (Chap. 16). Therefore, the book adds to the space perceived as a dead end by Taagepera a decade ago.

Overall, the contribution of *Votes from Seat* to contemporary social sciences is twofold. Substantively, it creates and formally expresses an appreciable number of connections between electoral institutions and various aspects of political competition which, through established logical models, allow us to estimate the approximate effect of various manipulation with electoral arrangements. Methodologically, it proves that quantitatively predictive logical models represent a powerful tool which allow to grasp and express social reality through mathematical equations. I see both aspects as extremely relevant for contemporary social

¹ This is the main reason why the book is entitled *Votes from Seats*.

sciences and, therefore, *Votes from Seats* has my highest recommendations for any scholar in the field.

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