Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional, Majoritarian and Mixed Systems

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ABSTRACT: Until recently electoral systems have usually proved remarkably resilient to radical reform. Yet in the last decade this pattern has been broken in a number of established democracies. The emergence of newer democracies has also generated a resurgence of interest in what criteria should be used in the choice of an electoral system. Given these developments, the aim of this article is to outline the main variants in different types of electoral system; to consider the normative criteria underpinning debates about reform; and to evaluate the relevant standards for choosing an electoral system. The article compares legislative elections in 53 democracies, including countries at different level of economic and political development, in order to examine the effects of electoral systems under a wide variety of conditions.

In the past, electoral systems have usually proved one of the most stable democratic institutions. Minor tinkering with the rules and regulations concerning the administration of elections has been common, including amendments to the laws governing election broadcasts, financial disclosure, or constituency redistricting. In the post-war period countries have occasionally switched electoral formulas between d'Hondt and LR-Hare, adjusted the effective threshold for election, and expanded their assembly size (Lijphart, 1994). Yet until recently wholesale and radical reform of the basic electoral system—meaning the way votes are translated into seats—has been relatively rare. The most significant exception to this rule is France, which has vacillated between proportional and majoritarian systems. In their classic work on electoral cleavages Lipset and Rokkan (1967) described the party system in Western Europe in the 1960s as "frozen" in the mould established at the turn of the century with the enfranchisement of the working class. In a similar way, until recently electoral systems in liberal democracies seemed set in concrete. The parties in government generally favoured and maintained the status quo from which they

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benefited. The critical voices of those parties or out-groups systematically excluded from elected office rarely proved able to amend the rules of the game.

This stability suggests that electoral systems are inherently conservative. Nevertheless institutions have the capacity to experience a radical breakdown following shocks to their external environment. In Krasner's model of "punctuated" equilibrium, institutions are characterized by long periods of stasis which are interrupted by intermittent crisis which may bring about abrupt change, after which inertia again reasserts its grip (Krasner, 1993). Where radical reforms are implemented these may produce unexpected results. For example, the widespread adoption of primaries in the United States in the late sixties produced unintended consequences, or failed to achieve their initial objectives (Polsby, 1983).

In the last decade significant challenges to government legitimacy fuelled the issue of electoral reform. The issue of electoral reform has become the subject of serious debate in Britain, with all the parties except the Conservatives favouring alternative systems to first-past-the-post for different levels of government (Norris, 1995; Blackburn, 1995). In 1993, after almost a century and a half of first-past-the-post, New Zealand switched to a mixed-member system (MMS) (Vowles, 1995). New Zealand had long experienced a two-party system. In contrast the first contest under MMS, held in 1996, was contested by 34 parties, resulting in the election of six and a coalition government. The United States has experienced growing interest in electoral reform, generated by increasing concern about the representation of women and ethnic minorities (Rule and Zimmerman, 1992), and the obstacles to third parties symbolized by Perot's run for the presidency (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, 1996). Yet dissatisfaction has not been confined to majoritarian systems. In 1992 Israel introduced direct elections for the prime minister (Diskin and Diskin, 1995; Hazan, 1996) while the following year Italy, long seen as an exemplar of proportional representation, adopted a mixed system after prolonged debate (Donovan, 1995).

At the same time there has been a wave of constitution-building following the explosion of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa (see Leduc, Niemi, and Norris, 1996; Huntington, 1993; Lijphart and Waisman, 1996). In these states the choice of an electoral system generated heated debate which needed to be resolved before other constitutional issues could be settled. Newer democracies like Ecuador, Hungary, Russia, and Taiwan have adopted "mixed" electoral systems, believed to combine the best of both proportional and majoritarian systems.

Therefore during the 1990s, debate about the electoral system moved from margin to mainstream on the political agenda. This shift produced growing awareness that electoral rules are not neutral: the way votes translate into seats means that some groups, parties, and representatives are ruled into the policy-making process, and some are ruled out. The core debate concerns whether countries should adopt majoritarian systems which prioritize government effectiveness and accountability, or proportional systems which promote greater fairness to minority parties and more diversity in social representation. Those dissatisfied with the status quo have increasingly turned towards "constitutional engineering" (Sartori, 1994) or "institutional design" (Lijphart and Waisman, 1996) to achieve these ends.

To examine what options are available, this article briefly outlines the main variations in different types of electoral system. I go on to consider the normative criteria underlying debates about reform, and then analyse the consequences of different systems. The conclusion weighs the considerations which are relevant in choosing

an electoral system. The article compares the results of elections held in the early to mid-1990s in all major democracies,[1] including 53 countries (for a discussion of the criteria used in selection, see LeDuc, Niemi, and Norris, 1996). These include both established and emerging democracies, at different levels of economic and political development, in order to examine the effects of electoral systems under a variety of conditions. Although electoral systems can be compared at every level of office—presidential, parliamentary, state, and local—to compare like with like I will focus mainly on national parliamentary elections for the lower house in each country. The "electoral system" includes many different components, such as the regulation of candidacies, the facilities for registration and voting, and the funding of party campaigns. But the heart of the electoral system is the process of translating votes into seats, and this becomes therefore my primary focus.

Classification of Electoral Systems

Ever since the seminal work of Maurice Duverger (1954) and Douglas Rae (1971), a flourishing literature has classified the main types of electoral systems and sought to analyse their consequences (see Lijphart, 1994; Lijphart and Grofman, 1984; Blais and Massicotte, 1996; Bogdanor and Butler, 1983; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1993; Farrell, 1997; Cox, forthcoming). Systems vary according to a number of key dimensions (for a discussion see Lijphart, 1994) including district magnitude, ballot structures, effective thresholds, malapportionment, assembly size, and open/closed lists, but the most important variations concern electoral formulas.

Electoral formulas determine how votes are counted to allocate seats. There are four main types (see Figure 1):

- *majoritarian* formulas (including plurality, second ballot, and alternative voting systems);
- *semi-proportional* systems (such as the single transferable vote, the cumulative vote, and the limited vote);
- *proportional representation* (including open and closed party lists using largest remainders and highest averages formula); and,
- *mixed* systems (such as the Additional Member System combining majoritarian and proportional elements).

Majoritarian Electoral Systems

In a recent worldwide survey, 83 out of 150 countries were found to use majoritarian systems (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1993). This is the oldest electoral system, dating back at least to the twelfth century, and also the simplest. This category can be subdivided into those requiring candidates to win a plurality, or an absolute majority (50+ percent) of votes to be elected.

Plurality Elections

The plurality system, otherwise known as "first-past-the-post," is used for election to the lower chamber in 43 countries including the United Kingdom, Canada, India, the United States, and many Commonwealth states. The aim of plurality systems is to create a "manufactured majority," that is, to exaggerate the share of seats for

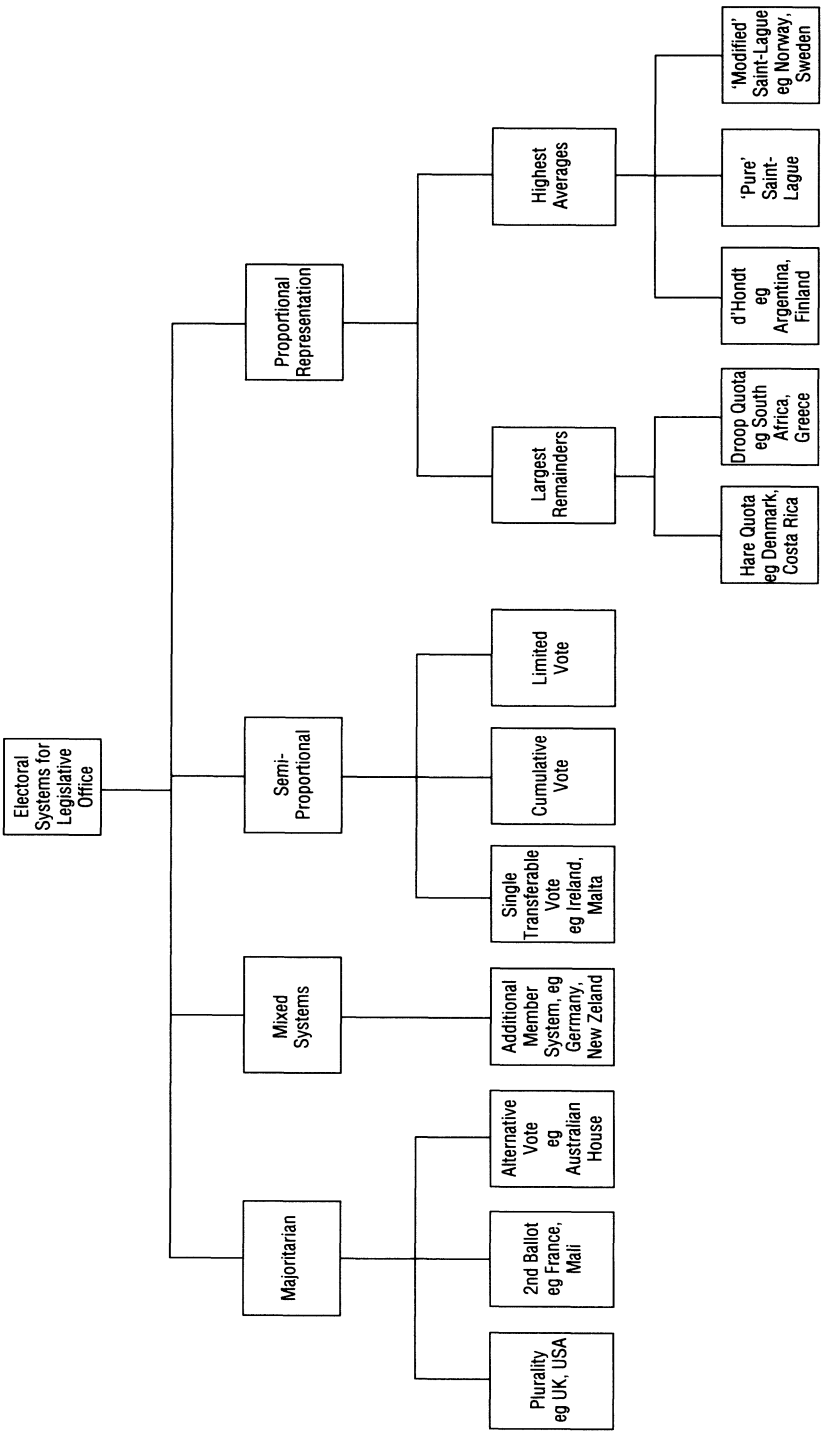

FIGURE 1. *Four Main Types of Electoral Formulae: Majoritarian, Mixed Systems, Semi-proportional and Proportional Representation.*

the leading party in order to produce an effective working parliamentary majority for the government, while simultaneously penalizing minor parties, especially those whose support is spatially dispersed. In "winner take all," the leading party boosts its legislative base, while the trailing parties get meagre rewards. The focus is effective governance, not representation of all minority views. The basic system of simple plurality voting in parliamentary general elections is widely familiar: countries are divided into territorial single-member constituencies; voters within each constituency cast a single ballot (marked by an X) for one candidate; the candidate with the largest share of the vote in each seat is returned to office; and in turn the party with an overall majority of seats forms the government.

One feature of this system is that single-member constituencies are based on the size of the electorate. The United States is divided into 435 congressional districts, each including roughly equal populations with one House representative per district. Boundaries are reviewed at periodic intervals, based on the census, to equalize the electorate. Yet the number of electors per constituency varies dramatically cross-nationally: for example, India has 545 representatives for a population of 898 million, so each member of the Lok Sabha serves about 1.6 million people, while in contrast Ireland has 166 members in the Dáil Eireann for a population of 3.5 million, hence one seat per 21 000 people. The geographic size of constituencies also varies substantially within countries, from small, densely packed inner-city seats to sprawling and more remote rural areas.

Under first-past-the-post, candidates usually do not need to pass a minimum threshold of votes,[2] nor do they require an absolute majority to be elected; instead, all they need is a simple plurality, that is, one more vote than their closest rival. Hence in seats where the vote splits almost equally three ways, the winning candidate may have only 35 percent of the vote, while the other contestants get 34 percent and 32 percent respectively. Although two-thirds of the voters supported other candidates, the plurality of votes is decisive.

In this system the party share of parliamentary seats, not their share of the popular vote, counts for the formation of government. Government may also be elected without a plurality of votes, so long as it has a parliamentary majority. In 1951, for instance, the British Conservative Party was returned to government with a 16-seat majority in parliament based on 48.0 percent of the popular vote, although Labour won slightly more (48.8 percent) of the vote. In February 1974 the reverse pattern occurred: the Conservatives won a slightly higher share of the national vote but Labour formed the government. Moreover, under first-past-the-post governments are commonly returned with less than a majority of votes. No governing party in the UK has won as much as half the popular vote since 1935. For example, in 1983 Margaret Thatcher was returned with a landslide of seats, producing a substantial parliamentary majority of 144, yet with the support of less than a third of the total electorate (30.8 percent).

For minor parties, and for minority social groups, the spatial concentration of votes in this system is critical to the outcome. Parties like the Greens with shallow support spread across a wide range of constituencies do far less well than those, like nationalist parties, with a strong concentration in key regions. Hence, for example, in the 1993 Canadian election the Progressive Conservatives won 16.1 percent of the vote but suffered a chronic meltdown to only two MPs. In contrast the Bloc Québécois got 18.1 percent of the vote but a solid phalanx of 54 MPs. The New Democratic Party won even fewer votes (6.6 percent) but emerged with 9 MPs, far more than the Conservatives. In a similar way social groups who can concentrate their support

spatially, like African-American or Latino voters in urban areas, can prove relatively more effective in getting their representatives into the US Congress than groups which are widely dispersed across legislative districts (Rule and Zimmerman, 1992).

Second Ballot Majority-runoff Systems

Other systems use alternative mechanisms to ensure that the winning candidate gets an overall majority of votes. In France the second ballot "majority-runoff" system is used in elections for the presidency. Candidates obtaining an absolute majority of votes (50+ percent) in the first round are declared elected. If this is not the case, a second round is held between the two candidates who got the highest number of votes. This system is used in 15 of the 25 countries with direct presidential elections including Austria, Colombia, Finland, and Russia. In the 1996 Russian presidential election, for example, 78 candidates registered to stand for election, of which 17 qualified for nomination. Boris Yeltsin won 35.3 percent of the vote on the first round, with Gennadi Zyuganov, the Communist candidate, close behind with 32 percent, and Alexander Lebed third with 14.5 percent of the vote. After the other candidates dropped out, and Lebed swung his supporters behind Yeltsin, the final result was a decisive 53.8 percent for Yeltsin against 40.3 percent for Zyuganov (White, Rose, and McAllister, 1996). A majority-runoff is also used in legislative elections in Mali and Ukraine, and a plurality-runoff is used for the French National Assembly. The aim of runoff elections is to consolidate support behind the victor, and to encourage broad cross-party coalition-building and alliances in the final stages of the campaign.

Alternative Vote

Another majoritarian system is the "Alternative Vote," which is used in elections to the Australian House of Representatives and in Ireland for presidential elections. Australia is divided into 148 single-member constituencies. Instead of a simple "X," voters rank their preferences among candidates (1,2,3. . .). To win, candidates need an absolute majority of votes. Where no one gets over 50 percent after first preferences are counted, then the candidate at the bottom of the pile with the lowest share of the vote is eliminated, and their votes are redistributed amongst the other candidates. The process continues until an absolute majority is secured. In the 1996 Australian elections, for example, there was a close call on the first preferences, with both the Australian Labour Party and the Liberal party getting 38.7 percent of the vote. In the final preferences, however, the ALP won 46.4 percent compared with 53.6 percent for non-ALP candidates. Again this process translates a close lead into a more decisive majority of seats for the leading party. This systematically discriminates against those at the bottom of the poll in order to promote effective government for the winner.

Semi-proportional Systems

Semi-proportional systems provide another option, including the *cumulative vote*, where citizens are given as many votes as representatives, and where votes can be cumulated on a single candidate (used in dual-member seats in nineteenth-century Britain and in the state of Illinois until 1980). The *limited vote* is similar, but voters are given fewer votes than the number of members to be elected (used in elections

to the Spanish Senate). In Japan, until 1994, voters used the *Single Non-Transferrable Vote*, where electors cast a single vote in a multi-member district.

Single Transferable Vote

The system in this category which continues to be used is the "Single Transferable Vote" (STV) currently employed in legislative elections in Ireland, Malta, and the Australian Senate. Each country is divided into multi-member constituencies which each have four or five representatives. Parties put forward as many candidates as they think could win in each constituency. Voters rank their preferences among candidates (1,2,3,4. . .). The total number of votes is counted, then this total is divided by the number of seats in the constituency to produce a quota. To be elected, candidates must reach the minimum quota. When the first preferences are counted, if no candidates reach the quota, then the person with the least votes is eliminated, and their votes redistributed according to second preferences. This process continues until all seats are filled.

Proportional Representation

Party Lists Systems

Where majoritarian systems emphasize governability, proportional systems focus on the inclusion of minority voices. Proportional electoral systems based on party lists in multi-member constituencies are widespread throughout Europe, and worldwide 57 out of 150 countries use PR (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1993). The principle of proportional representation is that the seats in a constituency are divided according to the number of votes cast for party lists, but there are considerable variations in how this is implemented in different systems. Party lists may be open, as in Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, and Italy, in which case voters can express preferences for particular candidates within the list. Or they may be closed as in Israel, Portugal, Spain, and Germany, in which case voters can only select the party, and the ranking of candidates is determined by the political party. The rank order on the party list determines which candidates are elected, for example, the top 10–15 names. Party lists may also be national as in Israel, where all the country is one constituency divided into 120 seats. But most party lists are regional, as in Belgium where there are seven regions each subdivided into between 2 and 34 seats.

The electoral formula varies among systems. Votes can be allocated to seats based on the *highest averages* method. This requires the number of votes for each party to be divided successively by a series of divisors, and seats are allocated to parties that secure the highest resulting quotient, up to the total number of seats available. The most widely used is the d'Hondt formula, using divisors (such as 1,2,3, etc.). The "pure" Sainte-Laguë method divides the votes with odd numbers (1,3,5,7, etc.). The "modified" Sainte-Laguë replaces the first divisor by 1.4 but is otherwise identical to the pure version.

An alternative is the *largest remainder* method, which uses a minimum quota calculated in a number of ways. In the simplest with the Hare quota, used in Denmark and Costa Rica, the total number of valid votes in each constituency is divided by the total number of seats to be allocated. The Droop quota, used in South Africa and Greece, raises the divisor by the number of seats plus one, producing a slightly less proportional result.

Mixed Systems

Additional Member System

Lastly, many newer systems, such as those recently adopted in Italy, New Zealand, and Russia, use mixed systems, although with a variety of alternative designs. The Additional Member System used in Germany combines single-member and party list constituencies. Electors have two votes. Half the members of the Bundestag (328) are elected in single-member constituencies based on a simple plurality of votes. The remaining MPs are elected from closed party lists in each region (*Land*). Parties which receive less than a specified minimum threshold of list votes (5 percent) are not entitled to any seats. The total number of seats which a party receives in Germany is based on the Niemeyer method, which ensures that seats are proportional to votes cast for party lists. Smaller parties which received, say, 10 percent of the list vote, but which did not win any single-member seats outright, are topped up until they have 10 percent of all the seats in parliament. It is possible for a party to be allocated "surplus" seats when it wins more district seats than it is entitled to under the result of the "list" vote.

Normative Criteria of Evaluation

The debate about electoral reform has largely revolved around the practical consequences of incremental changes to the status quo. But underlying these arguments are contested visions about the fundamental principles of representative democracy (see Dunleavy and Margetts, 1995). The heart of the debate concerns the central criteria which an electoral system should meet, and whether strong and accountable government is more or less important than the inclusion of minority voices.

Government Effectiveness

For proponents of the majoritarian system the most important criterion is government effectiveness. For admirers, the system of first-past-the-post in parliamentary systems produces the classic "Westminster model" with the twin virtues of strong but responsive party government. "Strong" in this sense means single-party, not coalition, government. Cohesive parties with a majority of parliamentary seats are able to implement their manifesto policies without the need to engage in post-election negotiations with coalition partners. The election result is decisive for the outcome. Cabinet government can pass whatever legislation they feel is necessary during their term of office, so long as they can carry their own back-benchers with them. Strong government depends on an exaggerative bias in the electoral system which rewards the winner with a bonus of seats. A "manufactured majority" is created by translating a relatively small lead in votes into a larger lead of seats in parliament. In the post-war period, for example, British governments have received, on average, 45 percent of the popular vote but 54 percent of seats. Even in a close election, where the major parties were level-pegging, one party has usually been able to form a government independent of any coalition partners (see Norris, 1996).

Responsive and Accountable Government

Yet governments are also seen as "responsive." At the end of their tenure in office, governments remain accountable to the electorate, who can throw them out if they

so wish. In a competitive two-party system a small swing in the popular vote is sufficient to bring the opposition into office. This system can be envisaged as a pulley-and-weights mechanism: a modest pull on the electoral rope produces a disproportionate displacement of weight. For proponents the twin virtues mean power is shackled with accountability. Governments are given enough freedom to carry out unpopular policies, if necessary, during their full term in office and at the end the electorate can form a clear judgment of their policy record. In addition, at the local level the link between citizens and their constituency MP is thought to provide citizens with a voice in the nation's affairs, as well as making elected members accountable to constituency concerns. Conventional wisdom suggests that there is greater incentive for constituency service in single-member districts than in large multi-member constituencies.

Responsive government, and responsive members, depend upon the rate of potential seat turnover, and a delicate two-party equilibrium. If substantial numbers of government back-benchers have majorities of, say, under 10 percent over their nearest rival, a relatively modest swing of the vote could easily bring the opposition into power. Although governments have a parliamentary majority to take tough and effective decisions, they knew that their power could easily be withdrawn at the next election. By contrast, proponents argue, in systems with coalition governments even if the public becomes dissatisfied with particular parties they have less power to determine their fate. The process of coalition-building after the result, not the election per se, determines the allocation of seats in cabinet.

Fairness to Minor Parties

For advocates of majoritarian elections, responsible party government takes precedence over the inclusion of all parties in strict proportion to their share of the vote. In this view the primary purpose of general elections is for parliament to function as an indirect electoral college which produces an effective, stable government. The way that the system penalizes minor parties can be seen by proponents as a virtue. It prevents fringe groups on the extreme right or left from acquiring representative legitimacy, thereby avoiding a fragmented parliament full of "fads and faddists." Yet at the same time, if the electorate becomes divided between three or four parties competing nationwide, the disproportionality of the electoral system becomes far harder to justify. Smaller parties which consistently come second or third are harshly penalized.

Rather than majoritarian governments, advocates of proportional systems argue that other considerations are more important, including the fairness of the outcome for minor parties, the need for Madisonian checks to party government, and the representation of minority social groups. For critics of plurality systems, the moral case for reform is based traditionally on the "unfairness" to minor parties who achieve a significant share of the vote, like the Canadian Progressive Conservatives in 1993, or the Alliance Party in New Zealand in 1993, or the British Liberal Democrats in 1983, but win few seats because their support is thinly spread geographically. In addition, proponents argue, because fewer votes are "wasted" in a PR system there is a greater incentive for people to turn out to vote.

Social Representation

Demands for change have also been generated in recent decades by increasing concern about the social composition of parliament. Political systems systematically

underrepresent certain social groups in terms of class, race and gender. In 1995 women were only 9.4 percent of national legislators worldwide, and this proportion has declined in recent years (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995). But within democracies there are substantial variations in this pattern, and women have usually lagged furthest behind in countries using majoritarian systems (Norris, 1996). Parties concerned about this issue have considered various strategies including legally binding gender quotas (used in Argentina for the Senate), dual-member constituencies designated by gender, and most commonly affirmative action in party organizations. Some of these mechanisms can be adopted in single-member districts (for example, in the mid-90s the British Labour Party experimented with all-women shortlists for nomination in half its target marginals). But affirmative action is easiest when applied to balancing the social composition of party lists (for example, designating every other position on the list for male or female candidates, or balancing the list by region, occupation, or religion) (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). These mechanisms can also serve other political minorities based on regional, linguistic, ethnic, or religious cleavages, although the effects depend upon the spatial concentration of such groups. Therefore debates about electoral reform have often produced conflict about means (what would be the effect on party fortunes of alternative systems?), but even more fundamentally about ends (what is the primary objective of the electoral system?). In order to examine these claims we need to consider what consequences flow from the adoption of alternative systems.

Consequences of Electoral Systems

A large literature has attempted to examine the impact of alternative electoral systems. The most important consequences examined here include the election of parties to parliament, the proportionality of votes to seats, the production of coalition or single-party governments, the representation of social groups, levels of electoral turnout, and the provision of constituency services. To analyse these factors I will compare the election results for legislative office in the most recent election (mid-90s) in 53 democracies, with data drawn from LeDuc, Niemi, and Norris (1996). These democracies included 17 majoritarian systems, 12 mixed or semi-proportional systems, and 24 countries with proportional representation.

Impact on the Party System

One of Duverger's most famous claims is that, in a law-like relationship, the plurality rule favours a two-party system while proportional systems lead to multi-partyism (Duverger, 1954). This claim raises the question of what is to "count" as a party, in particular how to count very small parties. In recent years Lijphart (1994) reexamined the evidence for this thesis. The study compared 27 advanced industrialized democracies in 1945–90 based on the Laakso and Taagepera measure of the "effective number of parliamentary parties" (ENNP), which takes account not only of the number of parties but also of the relative size of each. Lijphart found that the ENNP was 2.0 in plurality systems, 2.8 in majority systems, and 3.6 in proportional systems. Within proportional systems he found that the minimum threshold of votes also has an effect on the inclusion of minor parties.

We can use the same measure to extend the analysis to a wider range of democracies, including developing and developed societies, in the most recent elections in

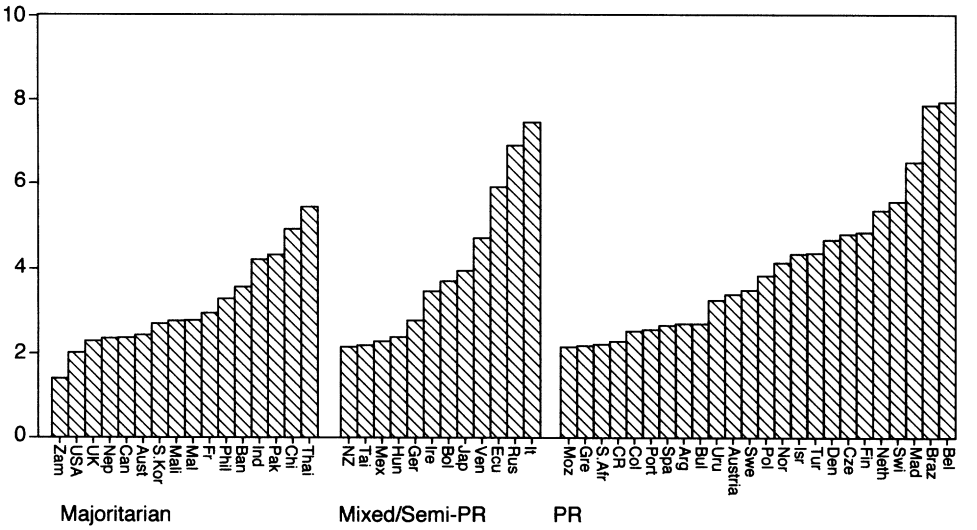

FIGURE 2. *Electoral Systems by ENNP.*[3]

the mid-1990s. The results of this comparison show that the effective number of parliamentary parties was 3.1 in majoritarian systems, 3.9 in mixed or semi-proportional systems, and 4.0 in proportional systems (see Figure 2). Duverger's law that PR is associated with multi-partyism finds further confirmation from this analysis although, as discussed earlier, smaller parties can do well under first-past-the-post if their support is spatially concentrated.

Proportionality of Votes to Seats

The proportionality of election results measures the degree to which the parties' share of seats corresponds to their share of votes. Previous studies have found this to be significantly greater under PR than under majoritarian systems (Mackie and Rose, 1991; Lijphart, 1994; Gallagher, Laver, and Mair, 1995). There are a number of ways of measuring proportionality, which reflect divergent notions of the basic concept. One of the most elegant and simplest solutions is to measure the largest deviation in the election result, which will generally be the percentage overrepresentation of the largest party (Lijphart, 1994). As discussed earlier, majoritarian systems provide a winner's bonus for the party in first place, while penalizing others, so this provides one indication of disproportionality. The results of this measure suggest that the average winner's bonus under majoritarian systems is 12.5 percentage points, compared with 7.4 under mixed systems, and 5.7 under proportional representation. Hence under majoritarian electoral systems a party which won 37.5 percent of the vote or more could usually be assured of a parliamentary majority in seats, whereas under PR systems a party would normally require 46.3 percent of the vote or more to achieve an equivalent result. The "winner's bonus" under PR increases the height of the hurdle for the leading party.

Production of Single-Party or Coalition Governments

The classic argument for majoritarian systems is that they tend to produce stable and responsible single-party governments, so that the electoral outcome is decisive. In contrast, unless one party wins a majority of votes, PR is closely associated with coalition cabinets. A survey of 20 countries found that single-party governments were formed after 60 percent of majoritarian elections, but only 10 percent of PR elections (Blais and Carty, 1987). If we compare the parliamentary democracies in this analysis, 56.3 percent of elections under majoritarian systems produced single-party governments, compared with 36.4 percent of elections under mixed systems, and 34.8 percent of PR elections. In countries with PR and fragmented party systems, like Italy, The Netherlands, and Switzerland, all governments tend to be coalitions. But majoritarian electoral systems can also result in coalition governments, such as in Britain between the wars. Moreover, PR systems may also have single-party governments, such as long periods of dominance by the Austrian Socialists, the Norwegian Labour Party, and the Swedish Social Democrats. The pattern of government formation is therefore far more complex than any simple linear relationship might lead us to expect (Laver and Shepsle, 1995), although as expected there is a significant relationship between the production of single-party governments and majoritarian electoral systems.

Provision of Casework

A further claim of single-member majoritarian systems is that these promote casework, since MPs are elected from a specific district. Members should also have incentives for such service where they compete with others within their party in multi-member systems like STV and the Single Non-Transferable Vote. In contrast, closed party list systems should provide limited incentives for members to engage in such activities, and limited opportunities for citizens to contact "their" representatives. Unfortunately there are few systematic cross-national studies of casework to confirm these propositions, and previous studies which do exist have proved sceptical about any simple and direct relationship between the type of electoral system and the degree of casework (Bogdanor, 1985; Gallagher, Laver, and Mair, 1995).

The 1994 European Representation Study provides some limited evidence, since candidates for the European Parliament ($N = 1308$) were asked to rate the importance of various tasks they might face as an MEP, using a scale from "not very important" (1) to "very important" (7). These tasks included casework, defined broadly as "helping individuals with particular problems." The results indicate that casework emerged as most important for parliamentary candidates from Britain (ranked 5.5 in importance), which is the only country using a majoritarian system for European elections. Nevertheless, there was considerable variation within proportional systems, since this work was also highly rated by candidates from Germany (5.3), Ireland (4.8), and Denmark (4.4), while it was regarded as less important by candidates from Luxembourg (3.6), France (3.5), and Italy (2.9). We need further research about orientations to casework across a range of countries with different electoral systems to explore these issues more systematically.

Impact on Electoral Turnout

The standard assumption from previous studies is to expect turnout to be slightly higher in proportional systems (Powell, 1982; Jackman, 1987; Blais and Carty, 1991;

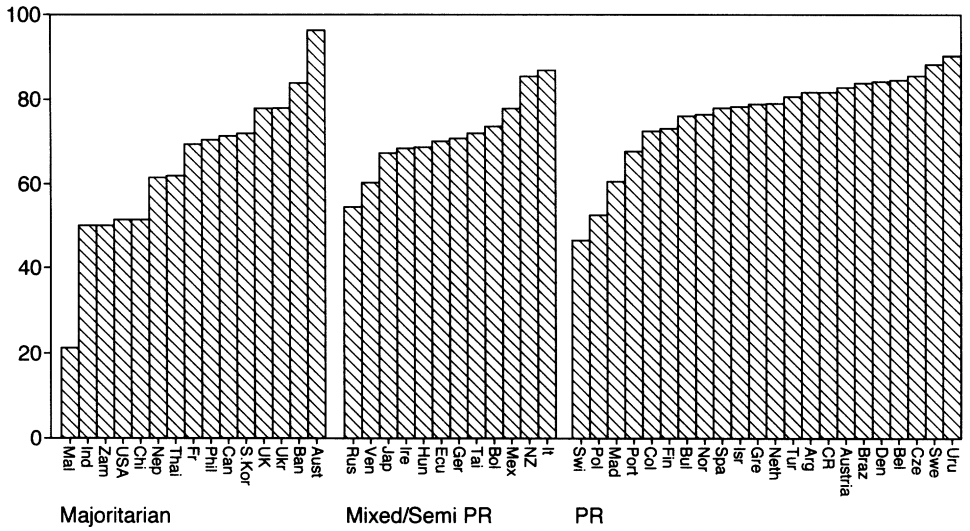

FIGURE 3. *Electoral Systems by Turnout.*[3]

Black, 1991). The reasons are that as a fairer system, since there are no "wasted votes," people may be more willing to participate. PR also increases the number of parties and therefore the choices available to the electorate. Moreover, PR makes elections more competitive, so parties may have a greater incentive to try to maximise their support in all constituencies. The evidence in this comparison confirms this relationship: turnout averaged 65.4 percent in majoritarian systems, 71.2 percent in mixed or semi-proportional systems, and 75.7 percent in proportional systems (see Figure 3). This participation gap was not so great among established democracies, but it proved particularly significant among developing countries.

Representation of Social Groups

One central virtue of proportional systems is the claim that they are more likely to produce a parliament which reflects the composition of the electorate (Norris, 1995). District magnitude is seen as particularly important in this regard. The main reason is that parties may have an incentive to produce a "balanced" ticket to maximize their support where they have to present a party list, whereas in contrast there is no such incentive where candidates are selected for single-member districts. Moreover, measures of affirmative action within party recruitment processes can be implemented more easily in systems with party lists.

In this regard it is difficult to compare the representation of ethnic or religious minorities, which depend in part upon the spatial distribution of these groups, but we can contrast the representation of women across systems. Based on the proportion of women in the lower house in the mid-90s, the results confirm that women are better represented in proportional systems. Women were 7.3 percent of MPs in majoritarian systems, 13.2 percent in mixed or semi-proportional systems, and 17.2 percent of members in PR systems. Of course again the pattern was not linear (see Figure 4), and more women were elected in some majoritarian systems like Canada than in

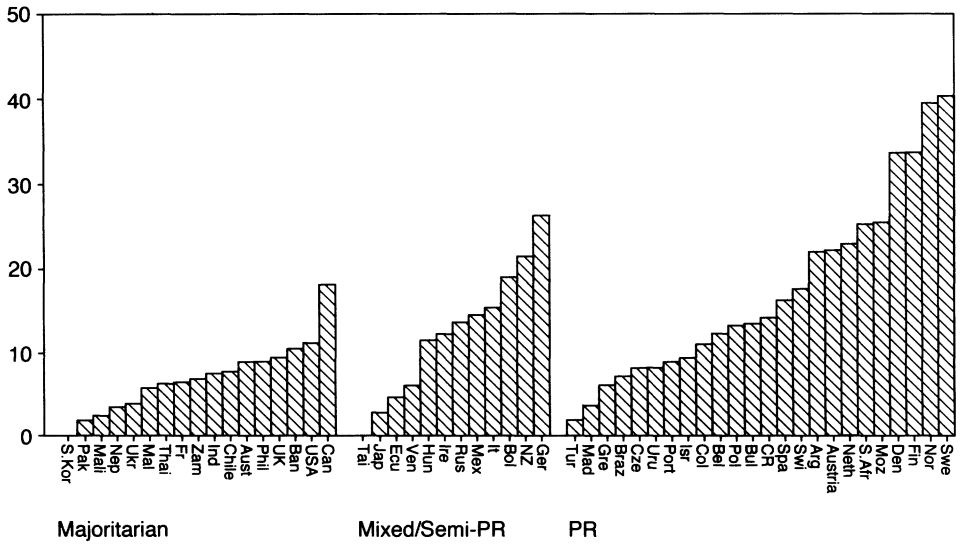

FIGURE 4. *Electoral Systems by Women MPs (percent).*[3]

other countries like Israel using highly proportional systems. The cultural context, and especially the process of recruitment within parties, strongly influences the opportunities for women in elected office (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). Nevertheless, the electoral system functions as a facilitating mechanism which allows for easier implementation of measures within parties, like affirmative action for female candidates.

Conclusion: Choosing an Electoral System

Often the choice of electoral system seems mechanistic—constitutional engineering designed to bring about certain objectives. But the issue of how the electoral system functions has consequences which reflect essentially contested concepts of representative democracy. For advocates of responsible party government the most important considerations are that elections (not the subsequent process of coalition-building) should be decisive for the outcome. The leading party should be empowered to try to implement their programme during their full term of office, without depending upon the support of minority parties. The government, and individual MPs, remain accountable for their actions to the public. And at periodic intervals the electorate should be allowed to judge their record, and vote for alternative parties accordingly. Minor parties in third or fourth place are discriminated against for the sake of governability. In this perspective proportional elections can produce indecisive outcomes, unstable regimes, disproportionate power for minor parties in "kingmaker" roles, and a lack of clear-cut accountability and transparency in decision-making.

In contrast, proponents of proportional systems argue that the electoral system should promote a process of conciliation and coalition-building within government. Parties above a minimum threshold should be included in the legislature in rough proportion to their level of electoral support. The parties in government should therefore craft policies based on a consensus among the coalition partners. Moreover, the

composition of parliament should reflect the main divisions in the social composition of the electorate, so that all citizens have voices articulating their interests in the legislature. In this view majoritarian systems over-reward the winner, producing "an elected dictatorship" where the government can implement its programmes without the need for consultation and compromise with other parties in parliament. The unfairness and disproportionate results of the electoral system outside of two-party contests means that some voices in the electorate are systematically excluded from representative bodies.

Therefore there is no single "best" system: these arguments represent irresolvable value conflicts. For societies which are riven by deep-rooted ethnic, religious, or ethnic divisions, like Mali, Russia, or Israel, the proportional system may prove more inclusive (Lijphart, 1984), but it may also reinforce rather than ameliorate these cleavages. For states which are already highly centralized, like Britain or New Zealand, majoritarian systems can insulate the government from the need for broader consultation and democratic checks and balances. In constitutional design, despite the appeal of "electoral engineering", there appear to be no easy choices.

Notes

1. Major democracies are defined as those countries with a population of at least three million, with a Gastil Political Rights score of 3 or more. For details see Leduc, Niemi, and Norris, 1996.
2. In a few countries using plurality presidential elections, such as Costa Rica and Argentina, there is a minimum threshold requirement, otherwise a runoff is held.
3. Key to abbreviations used in Figures 2, 3 and 4; countries given in full on the figures are not included in this list. Arg: Argentina; Aust: Australia; Ban: Bangladesh; Bel: Belgium; Bol: Bolivia; Braz: Brazil; Bul: Bulgaria; Can: Canada; Chi: China; Col: Colombia; CR: Costa Rica; Cze: Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic; Den: Denmark; Ecu: Ecuador; Fin: Finland; Fr: France; Ger: Germany; Gre: Greece; Hun: Hungary; Ind: India; Ire: Ireland; Isr: Israel; It: Italy; Jap: Japan; Mad: Madagascar; Mal: Malawi; Mex: Mexico; Moz: Mozambique; Nep: Nepal; Neth: Netherlands; Nor: Norway; NZ: New Zealand; Phil: Philippines; Pak: Pakistan; Pol: Poland; Port: Portugal; Rus: Russia; S.Afr: South Africa; S.Kor: South Korea; Spa: Spain; Swe: Sweden; Swi: Switzerland; Tai: Taiwan; Thai: Thailand; Tur: Turkey; Ukr: Ukraine; Uru: Uruguay; Ven: Venezuela; Zam: Zambia.

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