

Electoral Systems

In previous chapters, we discussed the contextual factors that affect the development of political systems. However, the evolution of political systems is not merely a function of the economic, social, cultural, and international environments. Political democracy is also as much a product of human choices as it is a product of context, particularly the choice of institutions that help shape the behavior of political actors. As many scholars in political science have long argued, a crucial choice in building political democracy is the design of electoral systems. Indeed, given that elections are central to the functioning of democratic systems, scholars have sought to understand why different electoral systems are chosen and the impact those choices have on a range of political outcomes, both at the individual and the system level. These outcomes include the quality and breadth of representation, the fractionalization and polarization of political party systems, voter turnout and voting behavior, and the stability of government and the political system.

Much of the comparative work on electoral systems has focused largely on the experiences of countries in the West, particularly in Europe and the United States, although more recently there has been a considerable amount of attention paid to the role of electoral systems in new democracies (Ishiyama, 1997; Moser, 1999; Reynolds, 1999; Reilly, 2002; Benoit, 2007). Since electoral processes and outcomes exert such important effects on the real world of politics, understanding the impact of electoral systems helps connect theory and practice in political science.

What Is the Electoral System?

Generally, we can think of the electoral system as the method by which voters make a choice between different options. More specifically, we can think of the electoral system as being comprised of a set of crucial choices – in particular, who is to be elected, and how?

Elections are used to choose heads of state, heads of government, and members of the legislature, as well as a variety of other offices in political democracies. In the literature, however, the focus is largely on identifying different types of elections designed to determine national executive power and national legislative power. As far as Chief Executives are concerned, they can be elected via *direct* or *indirect* means. In a direct election, voters cast ballots directly for a set of eligible candidates. Political systems that use direct elections of the president include France, Russia, and Argentina. In an indirect election, a group of electors are selected who then elect the President. For instance, the United States employs an indirect method for electing the President, where voters (or state legislatures) select presidential electors, who then comprise an *Electoral College*. These electors then select the President. Although generally the electoral college reflects the popular vote, this has not always been the case in the history of the United States. The most recent example of this being the highly contested 2000 election where the Democratic candidate Al Gore had more popular votes than the Republican George W. Bush, but the latter had more electoral college votes – and was subsequently elected. In other countries, such as Germany and Italy, the President is elected by parliament. One of the advantages of the indirect election of the President is to help insulate the power of the executive from a populist demagogue. Certainly, this was the case with the US political system where the constitutional framers in 1787 were clearly suspicious of the general population's ability to choose wisely, and sought to establish an elite-level check on the political aspirations of the mass electorate.

There are also direct and indirect elections of legislators. For instance, for many years, prior to 1913, members of the upper house of the US Congress, the Senate, were elected by members of state legislatures. In France, Senators are also elected indirectly by approximately 150,000 local elected officials (“grands électeurs”), which includes regional council members, department councilors, mayors, city council members, and deputies of the National Assembly. This system tends to favor the more politically conservative rural areas of the country.

The second question relates to how candidates are to be elected. In general, we can think of electoral systems as being made up of a set of choices, which include: the *electoral formula*, the *district magnitude*, *ballot structure*, and *electoral thresholds* (Farrell, 1997, 2001).

In terms of electoral formula, there is a distinction between plurality, majority, and proportional representation formulae. Generally in Britain, and in many countries that were former British colonies (such as the United States, Canada, India, Kenya, and Nigeria), the most commonly used electoral formula is the plurality formula, sometimes called first past the post (FPTP) system. In such systems the candidate who receives the most votes (not necessarily the majority of the vote) wins the election. Indeed, under such conditions it is quite possible for a candidate to be elected with far less than a majority of the vote (depending on how many candidates run for office). Thus, in 1992, President Bill Clinton received only about 43 percent of the popular vote, but that was enough for his electoral victory, largely because a third party candidate Ross Perot, had also entered the competition. Similarly, in Russian State Duma elections, it was quite common for candidates to the single-member districts to be elected by a very small percentage of the vote (as low as 19 percent) because there were many candidates running for election (Moser, 1999).

Second, there is the majority formula, which is most often associated with “runoff” elections. In such an electoral contest, a candidate can win outright in a single round of voting by garnering an absolute majority of the ballots cast; however, when no one candidate captures 50 percent plus 1 of the eligible votes, a runoff round is held at a subsequent date, with the top two finishers from the first round squaring off. Several countries use this formula for the direct election of their chief executives (such as in France, Russia, Poland, and Argentina) as well as election to the legislature (as in the case of France). This method has the advantage of providing voters with a wide range of candidates from which to choose in the first round. If there is no majority winner in the first round, then this system provides for a second round, which yields a winner supported by a simple majority of those voting in the runoff.

Third, an alternative to single-member, winner-take-all systems of electing representative assemblies is one based on proportional representation (PR) in multimember districts. In PR systems, the goal is to have the proportion of a party’s seats in the legislature reflect the strength of the party in the electorate. Thus, for example, a party securing 25 percent of the vote would be rewarded with 25 percent (either exactly or approximately) of the

legislative seats. The party that won 10 percent of the popular vote would be entitled to 10 percent of the seats in the legislature (and so forth).

The second dimension of an electoral system is the *district magnitude*. District magnitude refers to the number of candidates who will be elected from any given constituency, with the basic distinction between systems that rely on single-member districts and those that employ multimember districts. In the single-member district system, a country is divided into electoral districts from which one individual will emerge as the elected representative. Often, particularly in countries that were once British colonies, single-member districts are set up in tandem with a plurality electoral formula. Generally this means that whichever candidate receives the most votes in a competitive election, wins. Thus such systems are often referred to as winner-take-all systems where there is no compensation for coming in second place. This system is used in the United States, Britain, Canada, Ghana, and India. Others, most notably France, employ a single-member district system with two rounds of voting. In such cases, individual candidates can win outright in the first round with an absolute majority of votes cast, or they can secure the most votes cast among eligible candidates in the second-round runoff.

Advocates of single-member district systems defend the system for generally two reasons. First, there is a clarity of responsibility and democratic accountability by giving citizens in each district the ability to hold their representative responsible. Further, such systems enhance constituency service, in as much as voters can call upon individual representatives to directly address their concerns. Second, and perhaps more importantly for new democracies, advocates of single-member district systems point to the “moderating” influence such systems have on political competition (Duverger, 1954). This is because since candidates have the incentive to win as many votes as possible (in order to win the election), there is a tendency to gravitate towards the ideological center of the political spectrum, or to regress to what Anthony Downs (1957) referred to as the “median voter.” Thus single-member district systems are often lauded as way to hedge against extremism.

Detractors, however, find that aggregating district-level winner-take-all elections into a national whole can produce representational distortions in the national legislature. For example, a party that runs a consistent and respectable second place throughout the country but that fails to win any single district would be excluded from taking seats in the legislature. Such

a system, then, has the potential to under-represent smaller parties in a democracy (Downs, 2010).

Although the most common combination is the use of a plurality formula with single-member districts, there are, however, multimember plurality systems as well, including the “block” voting system. This system uses multi-member districts in which electors have as many votes as there are candidates to be elected. Counting is identical to a first past the post/single-member district plurality system with the candidates with the highest vote totals winning the seats. Thus if there are three seats available in a district, and six candidates are running, then the top three finishers are awarded seats (for a description and application, see Ishiyama, 2009).

Proportional representation systems are characterized by the use of multimember districts, which often vary in size. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, use the entire country as a single “district” and seats are allocated based solely on the national constituency. On the other hand, in Belgium, there are eleven multimember electoral districts, which are apportioned seats proportionally according to population, and results are allocated based upon electoral performance of the parties in each district. Some multimember districts can be quite small as in the single transferable vote system, a form of PR, in Ireland, where district magnitudes range from 3–5 seats per district (Lijphart, 1994).

Further, for PR systems we can also distinguish between *closed party list systems*, and *open party list systems*. In a closed system, voters vote only for a party list (in a multimember constituency, often the whole country), whereas in an *open party list system*, voters can choose from a published list or select an individual candidate. In closed systems the party determines who is on the list and in what order they appear. The order on the list is important, in as much as if a party wins 5 percent of the vote, for example, then the top 5 percent on the list will be awarded seats. The closed party list mechanism clearly provides considerable power in the hands of the party leadership.

On the other hand, in an open list system, parties are generally allowed to place as many candidates on their lists as there are seats available. The formation of the list is an internal process that varies with each party. The place on the list is considered to play a role in the election of a candidate, by giving stronger visibility to those high on the list. Voters, however, in an open list have several options. For instance, in Belgium, they may: (1) vote for a list as a whole, thereby showing approval of the order established by

the party; (2) vote for one or more individual candidates, regardless of his/her ranking on the list (a “preference vote”); (3) vote for one or more of the “alternates” (substitutes); (4) vote for one or more candidates, and one or more alternates; or (5) leave the ballot blank so no one receives the vote. The open list system provides more opportunities for voter input and is touted as more democratic than its closed list counterpart (Downs, 2010).

Ballot structure refers to the way the ballot that appears before voters is organized. Generally, ballots can be organized along *categorical* or *ordinal* lines. A categorical ballot structure allows a single either/or choice of one candidate or one party. This is more commonly used in most electoral systems. The voter cannot divide their vote. On the other hand, an ordinal ballot structure allows the voters the opportunity to rank order their preferences or, in other words, the ability to divide their vote, to vote for more than one candidate. In some ordinal ballots, political parties devise rank ordered lists of candidates to determine which persons ultimately claim those seats. An example is “the single transferable vote” which is also called the “Hare-Clark system” in Australia. In the United States, electoral reform activists have taken to calling it “choice voting.” Currently this system is used to elect parliaments in Ireland and Malta. In Australia, it is used to elect the federal Senate, as well as the legislatures in several states there. Instead of voting for one person, voters rank each candidate in their order of choice. By this method, voters rank candidates preferentially, and if a voter’s first-choice candidate has already cleared a set threshold and does not need additional support to win, then that vote is transferred to a second choice. This process, exemplified most clearly by Ireland, is designed to avoid “wasting” votes, or where votes are cast that are not represented in some way (as is the case in many district-based plurality elections, where votes cast for losers are effectively “wasted”).

Finally, for proportional representation systems, there is the issue of thresholds. Generally, this involves setting some minimum threshold that would qualify parties to obtain representation in the legislature. A very common threshold is 5 percent (used in Germany and Belgium, for instance) but other thresholds, but lower and higher thresholds are also used. Israel has a very low threshold (at 2 percent) whereas Turkey’s is quite high, with its 10 percent threshold for representation. These thresholds are an increasingly common way for PR systems to limit the entry of minor (and sometimes extremist) parties into legislatures.

In sum then, generally plurality systems involve a winner-take-all formula, small district magnitudes, and categorical ballot structures. On

the other hand, most proportional representation systems involve proportional formulae, large district magnitude, categorical ballot structures – and on occasion ordinal ballots (as with the single transferable vote system).

A variety of systems have sought to mix features of both district-based plurality and PR systems into a hybrid type system. For instance, one type of mixed system is the *additional member system* which is used for elections to the lower house of the German Bundestag, the New Zealand House of Representatives, and Scottish and Welsh Assemblies in the United Kingdom. This system combines elements of the single-member district plurality system with characteristics of party-list PR. In this mixed system voters get two votes, and the ballot generally has two sides. In the first part the voters vote for candidates and in the second party they vote for parties. The percentage of second or party-list votes won by a party determines the party's overall number of representatives, and the number of seats won in single-member districts is added to match that overall percentage received by the party in the PR portion of the election. In the German case, there are two sets of minimal thresholds. To qualify for additional seats, a party must win at least three district seats or at least 5 percent of the PR list vote. In this way the two parts of the ballot are linked (Lijphart, 1994). Another variation of the mixed system is the *parallel* system in which the two parts of the ballot are unlinked. For instance, from 1993 to 2007, the Russian Federation used such a system where seats elected via the districts were separate from the list. In other words parties were not entitled to additional seats based upon the percentage won on the list. One of the major purported advantages of the mixed systems is that it combines the accountability of the district-based system while at the same time assuring the proportionality of representation. However, as some scholars have noted (Ishiyama, 1997), this often creates different types of politicians that create divisions within parties between those who were elected from the districts and those who were elected from the PR list. This can create coordination problems for parties during the legislative and policy-making process.

The Effects of Electoral Systems

What are the posited effects of electoral systems, and more specifically, how do they impact the development of democracy? For many democratic theorists, holding elections are the central component of the development

of democracy, and how they are conducted will vitally affect whether democracy evolves. For instance, Schumpeter (1942) argued that democracy is “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (p. 269). Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (2000) also view contested elections as the primary litmus test for democracy. Whether sufficient or not, elections typically figure as necessary conditions for the existence of democracy (Downs 2010).

Generally, the scholarly work on the effects of electoral systems has focused on the longstanding debate between what is the “best” type of electoral system and (a) the relationship between electoral rules and the ideological polarization and size of political party systems; (b) the tendency of electoral systems to impact voter turnout and citizen participation; and (c) the potential for electoral systems to affect the course of democratic development.

Party systems effects

Much of the debate about the “best electoral system” revolves around the differences between single-member district FPTP systems versus List PR systems. On the one hand, advocates of the single-member district plurality electoral system point to a number of advantages of the system. First, such systems provide for incentives for political moderation in the party system and the political system generally. This is because of the incentive for candidates to maximize the number of votes received in an electoral competition, because only by winning the most votes will a candidate be elected to office. The best strategy to increase the number of votes is to appeal to the political center, as opposed to campaigning on the political fringes of the ideological spectrum. Thus candidates (and parties seeking to recruit candidates) have an incentive to present moderate political platforms (Powell, 2000).

On the other hand, critics of PR point out that no such incentive for moderation exists under the PR formula. Indeed, an extremist party could essentially win seats in the legislature, even if they were only able to attain a fairly small fraction of the vote (even with electoral thresholds). Thus there is no incentive to moderate a party’s position on anything, especially if the party expects to win some representation. When combined with parliamentary government and coalitional politics, it is quite possible for even minor parties to gain access to executive power. Further, the openings

created by PR can provide extremist, and even anti-democratic parties a “foothold” in government in which they can expand their recruitment efforts (by distributing patronage) and develop legitimacy to the extent that ultimately take power. This is what the detractors of list PR point out as the principal failing of the German Weimar Republic (1919–1933), in which the PR list system (with a very low threshold) “allowed” Adolph Hitler and the National Socialist Party to first gain a toehold in the German parliament in the 1928 election and from there spread their recruitment efforts and expand their activities (Duverger, 1954). Presumably, had the Weimar Republic had a district-based plurality system, this would not have happened.

A second posited effect of the single-member district plurality system is that it tends to reduce the number of parties and hence promotes governmental stability, particularly when governing coalitions are required (as is the case in many parliamentary systems) (Duverger, 1984). This is because there is a strong incentive for larger parties to form out of smaller ones. Consider this simple example. Suppose in a district competition, Party A’s candidate receives 34 percent of the vote, Party B’s candidate receives 33 percent of the vote, and Party C’s candidate receives 33 percent of the vote. Under FPTP plurality rules, Party A would win the seat, although it won clearly far less than a majority of the popular vote. Further 66 percent of the vote is “wasted” or unrepresented in the final result. Suppose over time this distribution remained stable, with Party A winning again and again. This would provide an incentive for Party B and Party C to find some common ground to perhaps offer a single candidate, or perhaps merge as a single party, in order to defeat their common rival, Party A. Thus, over time, the number of parties should be reduced to nearly two parties in the system (a tendency which is known as “Duverger’s Law” named after the scholar Maurice Duverger).

The notion that plurality elections using one-ballot single-member districts will create two-party systems whereas proportional representation rules with multimember districts will lead to multiparty systems has had considerable staying power. Duverger argued that electoral laws have both *mechanical effects* and *psychological effects*. The mechanical effects highlight the under-representation of third (and fourth, and fifth, etc.) parties, which is likely to occur over time in a single-seat legislative district that is used in an election. Given these mechanical impediments to minor party success, voters who generally support minor parties then have psychological incentives not to “waste” their votes and may often cast ballots against their

preferred candidate in a strategic effort to exercise some influence over the most likely winner in the two-party competition. Sartori (1968) extended Duverger's assertion of a link between proportionality and party system size, arguing that district magnitude is the best predictor of the effective number of political parties in a district.

There has been ample empirical support for Duverger's claims that first-past-the-post, single-ballot elections produce two-party systems (Rae, 1967; Sartori, 1968; Riker, 1982; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Lijphart, 1994; Cox, 1997). Indeed, in elections for the UK House of Commons and the US Congress, the evidence seems to suggest a compelling link between electoral rules and strong, stable, two-party government. Electoral structures in the United States, for example, help explain the consistent failure of third parties to mount successful campaigns. Although smaller parties have been able to win parliamentary seats in the United Kingdom, their representation in the House of Commons does not match their overall support in the electorate, and they have had little chance at becoming the party of government or forcing a coalition. To illustrate, the perennial third-party Liberal Democrats won 22.1 percent of the vote in Britain's 2005 general election but secured only 9.6 percent of the 646 seats in the House of Commons. Tony Blair's Labour Party, having won only 35.3 percent of the votes nationwide, nevertheless captured 55.2 percent of the seats in Parliament and 100 percent of the Cabinet positions in government.

On the other hand, PR systems do not have this reductive effect on the number of political parties. This is because there is far less incentive for parties to coalesce, if they gain representation with a small percentage of the vote. Take, for instance, our example above, with Parties A, B, C. If we had the same vote distribution for the parties under PR, then Party A would be entitled to 34 percent of the seats in parliament, Party B, 33 percent and Party C, 33 percent. Thus, no votes are "wasted" and each party gains representation, providing less incentive to merge as parties. Thus PR, according to Duverger's law, would tend to promote a multiparty as opposed to a two-party system.

However, PR systems also present a problem when forming stable governing coalitions. When no single political party secures a legislative majority, which is generally the case when elections are governed by PR election rules, the post-election period is usually marked by formal negotiations and backroom deals between parties in the process of forming a governing coalition. For instance, in Belgium, which uses a PR List system with a 5 percent threshold for representation in the federal Chamber of

Representatives, the general election of 2007 resulted in 11 parties gaining parliamentary seats. The largest party was the Flemish-speaking Christian Democratic Party, which won only 18 percent of the 150 seats in parliament. Protracted negotiations continued for 196 days after the election, and even then only an interim caretaker government was formed. Seventy-nine more days passed until a full government was agreed upon. The government failed to survive the year and the coalition collapsed.

The impact on voter choice, turnout and citizen participation

Beyond party systems effects, many scholars have argued that electoral systems also impact voter behavior, both choices and turnout (see Downs 2010). For instance, as mentioned above, single-member plurality systems tend to encourage *strategic voting*, or where voters will opt to vote for their second, or third choices, in order to prevent their least preferred choice from getting elected. This means that many voters under such conditions vote against their least preferred candidates, as opposed to voting for their most preferred. This “voting against” behavior makes voters susceptible to negative campaigning, or where electoral campaigns are often conducted to “villainize” opposing candidates to make them the least preferred candidates for voters. Further, according to Arend Lijphart (1994, 1999), majoritarian and plurality electoral systems dilute citizen enthusiasm and voter turnout because so many supporters of minor parties conclude that casting their ballots will have little to no impact on electoral outcomes, government formation, or policy choices. Thus, they simply stop voting.

On the other hand, PR systems, especially those with low electoral thresholds and large district magnitude tend to allow voters to express their preferred choices, and minimizes the practice of strategic voting (Katz, 1980). This is because larger district magnitudes and lower electoral thresholds should increase the likelihood that smaller parties are able to secure seats and obtain a voice in the legislature (and potentially a role in a coalition government). With the greater likelihood of electoral success for minor (and even extreme parties), voter efficacy (the sense that one’s vote counts) and hence the incentives to cast ballots should increase. Thus, voter turnout is generally much higher in countries that use PR systems when compared to countries that use FPTP electoral rules (Lijphart, 1999, p. 284). According to Norris, “Institutional rules do indeed matter: voting participation is maximized in elections using PR, with small electoral districts, regular but relatively infrequent national contests, and competitive party systems, and in presidential contests” (2004, pp. 257–258).

Electoral systems and democratic transition

Recently, several scholars have examined how electoral laws impact the processes of democratic transition and consolidation. Indeed, there has been much recent attention in the political science literature given to the potential for the successful *electoral engineering* of political democracy. There has been certainly no shortage of potential cases to test these theories, ranging from the post-communist states, and post-authoritarian countries throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Further, hotspots such as Iraq and Afghanistan present possibilities to further test our theoretical assertions.

However, as Pippa Norris (2004) notes, the impact of electoral systems on democratic transition and consolidation may be tempered by other cultural factors. Indeed, she identifies two theoretical traditions in the literature on democratization – *rational choice institutionalism* and *cultural modernization*. The rational choice approach emphasizes that political actors adopt different strategies based on the incentives generated by district magnitudes, electoral thresholds and ballot structures. Further, citizens adapt their voting behavior in response to the incentives generated by different electoral rules. Thus, from this perspective, changing the structure of incentives through electoral engineering “should have the capacity to generate important consequences for political representation and for voting behavior” (Norris, 2004, p. 15). On the other hand, the cultural modernization approach argues that cultural habits arising from processes of social modernization place constrain how rules can alter behavior. This culturalist argument is often employed to explain why the wholesale introduction of electoral rules into culturally divided countries frequently fails to produce transformations of individual behavior.

Whatever the case, there certainly are efforts currently to build democracy where it had not existed before, and the cross-national lessons from other countries have informed the design of electoral systems in such world hot spots as Iraq and Afghanistan. When parliamentary elections were held in December 2005 to constitute a post-Saddam Council of Representatives in Iraq, a PR-list system governed 230 of the total 275 seats in 18 multi-member districts (*governorates*). An additional 45 seats were then allocated to political entities that did not win any seats outright in the governorates but that did clear a minimum national threshold of 5 percent. Also Iraq’s electoral law requires that at least 25 percent of the members of those elected be women. In Afghanistan, post-Taliban elections have struggled to

secure domestic and international legitimacy. The 2005 elections for Afghanistan's lower house of parliament employed the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) method in 34 multimember constituencies (a system similar to the Block Vote) and specifically designed to address the ethnic divisions within the country. Candidates, however, ran independently because parties and lists were not recognized by the governing law.

Other effects of electoral systems

Beyond party systems effects and effects on voter behavior, there is also evidence that the type of electoral system can impact the political opportunities for women and minorities (Rule and Zimmerman, 1994). For instance, the countries that consistently sit atop comparative rankings of the proportion of women winning seats in national parliaments, that is Sweden, Iceland, Finland, and the Netherlands, all use PR electoral systems with relatively low thresholds. Further, advocates of PR systems point to the inclusive nature of the system, and contend that inclusion of even extreme parties and their voters will have a moderating effect on politics, in as much as inclusion provides these parties and voters with a "stake" in maintaining the political system (Lijphart and Grofman, 1984; Grofman and Lijphart, 1986).

Perhaps one of the most interesting arguments in favor of the use of proportional representation is made by advocates of the *consociational* school, who have long argued that by promoting the emergence of ethnic politics and then representing groups broadly, this will facilitate the integration of as many subcultures as possible into the political game, thus creating the conditions for inter-ethnic cooperation (Lorwin, 1971; Nordlinger, 1972; Daalder, 1974; Lijphart, 1974; McRae, 1974). Indeed, by securing representation for minority groups, rules such as PR serves to facilitate the integration of groups into the political system, which ultimately leads them to moderate their demands. Frank Cohen (1997, p. 613) states, "By making institutions more accessible and making ethnic cleavages more explicit, ethnic groups will engage in more frequent but less intense conflict. They will use moderate means of resistance to effect change in the status quo."

However, there has been considerable debate as to whether PR list systems in fact "freeze" ethnic cleavages and promote the development of ethnic parties, which Donald Horowitz (1985) views as fundamentally inimical to the development of democracy. Indeed, the ethnification of

politics, which inevitably results from the appearance of ethnic parties, is something to be avoided in countries in transition. Whereas Lijphart advocates power sharing and list PR (for example, Lijphart, 1974), Horowitz (1985) advocates a variation of a single-member district system with an ordinal ballot structure known as the alternative vote (AV).

The *alternative vote*, although not widely used (it has been employed in Australian Senate elections, as well as in local elections in Canada and elsewhere) has been touted as an institutional remedy for politics in ethnically divided societies. The alternative vote system allows voters to express their preferences for candidates in a single-member district (much like the single transferable vote, but for single-member districts). If there is not a single candidate who wins a majority (50 percent) of the first preferences votes, then the lowest polling candidate is eliminated and that candidate's second preferences are redistributed to candidates remaining in the race, until a single candidate surmounts the 50 percent threshold.

Horowitz views the alternative vote, despite its similarity to other district-based systems, as less divisive for ethnically divided societies than FPTP voting. Horowitz views AV as a means to foster interethnic accommodation and moderation through as the result of two effects. First, since voters are asked to express their preferences, even supporters from one ethnic group may choose to express support for interethnic accord by ranking moderate parties associated with the other ethnic group ahead of radical parties associated with their own ethnic group. Although Horowitz acknowledges that in many ethnically divided society, "voters will generally not cross ethnic lines" (1991, p. 179), he also argues that with a preferential ballot, voters might be willing to give support to moderate parties from another ethnic group. As he explains, "The purpose of incentives is to create floating voters at some level of preference" (*ibid.*, p. 179). Thus, it could be the case that a radical party of a given ethnic group might be a plurality winner but still lose out to a moderate party of either its own or the other ethnic group as a result of eventual lower order ballot transfers.

Second, in Horowitz's view, under AV, political parties seek as many second or lower preferences votes outside their own ethnic group. Thus they have an incentive to appear acceptable as a second choice, and hence may adopt more conciliatory or moderate stances on ethnically divisive issues.

Electurally, the way to induce politicians to be moderate is to structure voting arrangements so politicians must rely, in part, on votes delivered by members

of a group other than their own. Such incentives are effective because those votes will not be forthcoming unless the candidates receiving them can be portrayed as being moderate on inter-ethnic issues. (1993, p. 24)

Since the moderate parties are more likely to be able to obtain such cross-ethnic support than extremist parties, in Horowitz's view, AV will "make moderation rewarding and penalize extremism" (Horowitz, 1991, p. 452).

A third effect is that AV is likely to provide an incentive for parties to make post-election deals to for policy adjustments on divisive issues, and ultimately to create an incentive for cross-ethnic electoral alliances. "The exchange of second or third preferences, based on reciprocal concessions on ethnic issues, is likely to lead to an accommodative interethnic coalition if no party can form a government alone" (see *ibid.*, p. 189). These coalitions are likely to be more robust "coalitions of commitment" than the "coalitions for convenience" which are often established by parties after an election under PR systems) (see Horowitz, 1985: 365–388; 1991).

Thus, in these ways, Horowitz believes that the alternative vote is a workable solution for promoting interethnic accommodation in divided societies. This argument, however, has come under some criticism particularly by those who have studied the AV in operation (in Fiji, which is ethnically divided between indigenous Fijian and Indian populations). Fraenkel and Grofman (2004, 2006) question the merits of AV, and have argued that list PR would have been more effective in promoting accommodation between the two groups. Nonetheless, there remains considerable debate over which electoral system would best promote interethnic accommodation in ethnically divided societies.

Another posited effect of electoral systems is that proportional electoral systems should also generally improve overall citizen satisfaction with the political system (Anderson and Guillory, 1997). Thus, in his study of democratic performance in 36 countries from 1945 to 1996, Lijphart (1999) establishes empirically that electoral systems favoring consensus-oriented governance yield gains in citizen satisfaction. Because of multipartism and coalition government, this provides a greater chance that the interests of more people will at least be partially represented. This is not true for FPTP system where the losers' interests are not represented at all. Lijphart's empirical results indeed demonstrate this, where the greatest dissatisfaction occurs in countries that use FPTP systems (like the United States and the United Kingdom) and the most satisfaction in more proportional systems

(with Ireland and its single transferable vote system producing the greatest level of satisfaction). Lijphart's study supports the work of Klingemann (1999), who found that Danes and Norwegians – each with highly proportional systems – scored the highest levels of democratic satisfaction among Western democracies.

Electoral System Change

Given the great attention that political science scholarship has paid to the consequences of electoral systems, it is not surprising that electoral systems have been manipulated to elicit certain political outcomes. For instance, the framers of the 1958 Fifth Republic sought to use electoral rules to avoid the problems that had plagued the French Fourth Republic (from 1946–1958) in particular, the series of weak and frequently collapsing multiparty coalition governments, which were incapable of dealing with the numerous post-war crises that faced France (such as decolonization, the Indo-Chinese War and the Algerian Civil War, etc.). The framers of the French Fifth Republic sought to replace the list PR system used by the previous Fourth Republic with a single-member district, two rounds, majority formula system. In the first round, seats were awarded to candidates who won an outright majority of the votes. If no candidate received a majority, then all candidates that received at least 12.5 percent of the votes in the first round were eligible to contest the second round runoff election, where, whoever won the most votes won the election (in other words the second round was a simple plurality contest). The system was designed to encourage multipartyism (especially with the low threshold to get into the second round) but to provide incentives for parties to gravitate towards the center of the ideological spectrum. In particular, extreme parties are left out of the system, such as the case with the far-right-wing National Front. However, in 1986, the Socialist government of President François Mitterrand altered the system to PR list system, in hopes of fragmenting the right-wing opposition. However, much to the consternation of the Socialists, the National Front won 9.6 percent of the vote and captured 35 of the 577 national legislative seats. In the next parliamentary election, the government altered the electoral system back to the single-member district two-round system. Although the National Front did slightly better (winning 9.7 percent of the vote), they won only one seat in the legislature.

In Japan, there was also a major electoral reform in 1994, when the old system of multimember plurality elections, the single non-transferable votes (block vote system) was scrapped and replaced by a mixed-member system. In part, this was due to the victory of the left opposition (who held power for a brief time in 1994) who sought to “craft a competitive two-party, issue-oriented politics and a cleaner, more efficient government” (Norris, 1994, p. 5). The new system for the lower house of the parliament, the House of Representatives, adopted a mixed parallel system (as opposed to the mixed additional member system in Germany) with 300 single-member district plurality seats, along with 200 PR lists seats. Prior to the reform, Japanese politics was dominated by the conservative Liberal Democrats, and a fragmented opposition. With the new system, there was a coalescing of the opposition into a new Japanese Democratic Party, who won the 2007 legislative elections and took power from the LDP.

In New Zealand, there were also reforms undertaken to replace the single-member district plurality system with a mixed system. Currently the system resembles Germany’s – 70 of the 120 national parliamentary seats continue to be elected via single-member districts via plurality rules. The remaining 50 seats are apportioned so that party seats will reflect the proportion of the vote parties win nationally. The change in electoral system had been endorsed via a referendum in 1993 and has had a notable impact on the party system of New Zealand. Prior to the reform, there were only two large parties that dominated politics. However, after 1993, seven parties have consistently gained representation in the New Zealand parliament.

Conclusion

A powerful tool for constitutional engineers is the design of electoral systems. As discussed above, the rules governing and guiding voting are a crucial part of building democracy. The very rich literature on electoral systems over the past several decades not only provides important insights for countries in transition, but has implications for how to address issues that threaten the health of democracy in the developed world (such as the United States). Issues such as declining voter efficacy, declining voter turnout rates, negative campaigning, the lack of third party alternatives, etc., are in many ways the product of problems with existing electoral systems. Changing electoral rules can alter citizen participation and satisfaction, can enhance or diminish the congruence between voter

preferences and public policy outputs, and can have profound consequences for system stability. Electoral system design is one of the clearest areas where political science scholarship can have practical effects – particularly in new democracies. Taking lessons from the Western experience (such as from the United States, Western Europe, and other cases of consolidated democracy) can inform policies and enhance the role of political scientists in that policy process; however, these experiences cannot be casually transported across the globe to new democracies or systems in transition without considering the constraints defined by a country’s social, economic, cultural, and political contexts. Nonetheless the insights they provide, with adaptation, can be invaluable in addressing some of the most vexing problems in building democracy.

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