

David M. Farrell

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

A Comparative Introduction

2nd Edition



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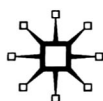
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Electoral Systems

Also by David M. Farrell

Representing Europe's Citizens? Electoral Institutions and the Failure of Parliamentary Representation (with Roger Scully)

The Australian Electoral System: Origins, Variations, Consequences
(with Ian McAllister)

Preface and Acknowledgements

My first political memory is working on the 1973 election campaign for one of the main Irish political parties at the ripe age of just 12 years. In those days my mother was an active party member and our dining room was turned into the campaign headquarters for one of the party's candidates – literally a smoke-filled room. The candidate in question had learned late in the day that another party was fielding a candidate with the same surname but a first name starting with a higher letter in the alphabet than his. The problem was picked up in time for our candidate to suddenly develop an abbreviated first name, thus enabling him to be placed higher on the ballot paper. Unfortunately the campaign literature had already been printed. As a consequence much of my time in those long, exciting evenings after school was spent crossing out the name 'Richard' on the campaign leaflets and replacing it with 'Dick'. Thus, as a 12-year-old I encountered first-hand the phenomenon of 'alphabetical voting', and learned of the importance of 'ballot structure' – two issues that are dealt with in this book.

As we shall see, ballot structure is one of the key characteristics of electoral system design. I was to encounter the other two characteristics in subsequent years. In my early university years in the first part of the 1980s, I was an active member of one of the political parties, and helped on a constituency campaign in south-county Dublin. The party was seeking to win two of the four seats in the constituency, where traditionally in the past they held just one. The leading candidate was (at the time) a highly popular national figure, whose votes could be counted in the high thousands. In this campaign, however, his mantra on the doorstep was 'don't give me your number 1 vote; give that instead to my running mate' – the aim being to ensure enough votes for his running mate to give him a fighting chance (a strategy that was to prove successful on this occasion). This was when I came

to appreciate the significance of ‘district magnitude’ (or M) – in this instance, $M = 4$.

The third, most technical characteristic of electoral system design – ‘electoral formula’ – was to feature several years later when I was one of a small group of political science graduates tasked with running single transferable vote (STV) simulations to provide raw data for the Irish television company (RTÉ) who were testing their fancy new computer graphic wizardry. STV’s ‘Droop quota’ was to become a feature of my dreams by the end of that particular episode.

This potted biography serves not only to explain my developing nerdy interest in electoral systems, but also my personal attraction to the single transferable vote electoral system that is used in Ireland. To use the Irish vernacular, I was ‘born, bred and buttered’ on this system, so it is only to be expected that its quirks and features might appeal. However – and this is an especially important point – this does not mean for a moment that I would conclude that this is the best, ‘most ideal’ electoral system. As this book seeks to demonstrate, there simply is no such thing.

In the researching for and drafting of this new edition I have accumulated a number of debts, particularly to the following individuals: Hein Heuvelman and Joanna Rozanska who helped in the gathering of data used in Chapter 7; and Ben Austin, Ivana Bacik, Ken Benoit, André Blais, Adrian Blau, Shaun Bowler, Elisabeth Carter, Ken Carty, Michael Gallagher, Kimmo Grönlund, Reuven Hazan, Kaisa Herne, Simon Hix, Derek Hutcheson, Hanspeter Kriesi, Anthoula Malkopoulou, Louis Masicotte, Ian McAllister, Henry Milner, Pippa Norris, Jean-Benoit Pilet, Ben Reilly, Alan Renwick, Andy Reynolds, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Roger Scully, Campbell Sharman, Hermann Schiavone, Matt Shugart, Jack Vowles, Paul Wilder and Hans-Urs Wili, who in many and various ways helped in providing answers to queries and/or pointing to interesting new avenues. I am grateful to them all (and, indeed, to any others whose names I may have inadvertently forgotten to mention), and also to my anonymous reviewer who provided detailed and helpful comments. Any remaining errors (of which there are bound to be a few) are mine alone.

I am grateful to Stephen Wenham, Helen Caunce and Keith Povey at Palgrave Macmillan for shepherding this work through its various stages of production, and in this regard especially to Steven Kennedy, who has been his usual supportive and encouraging self, balancing perfectly the appropriate applications of arm-twisting and gentle

cajoling, and, indeed, applying pressure when it was most needed for me to start writing this new edition. The drafting was completed during the winter months of 2009–10, and I am grateful to my new colleagues at University College Dublin for giving me the space and time to get on with this. I want to take the opportunity of once again thanking those people who helped me in my writing of the previous edition to this book, and also the earlier study, *Comparing Electoral Systems* (published in 1997). Among those not already mentioned are: Luciano Bardi, David Denver, Robert Elgie, Brian Farrell, Rachel Gibson, Yoram Gorlizki, Paul Harris, Ken Janda, Jeffrey Karp, Richard S. Katz, Ray Kennedy, Sergei Kondrashov, Arend Lijphart, Malcolm Mackerras, J. P. Pomeroy, Thomas Poguntke, Geoffrey K. Roberts, Marian Sawyer, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Christopher Siddal and Elizabeth Winship. Finally I want to dedicate this edition to my lovely Melissa, who, more than anyone, is responsible for seeing this through to completion.

DAVID M. FARRELL

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1

The Study of Electoral Systems

1.1 Why Study Electoral Systems?

For people who do not specialize in this area, electoral systems are usually seen as a big ‘turn-off’. It can be difficult to instil much interest in the subject of counting rules; to enthuse about the details of how one electoral system varies from another. After all how many wars were fought over whether the electoral formula was ‘largest remainder’ or ‘highest average’; how many politicians have been assassinated over the issue of ‘single transferable vote’ versus ‘single-member plurality’? Pity the student on a hot Friday afternoon who has to struggle through the niceties of the ‘Droop quota’. Pity the teacher who has to burn midnight oil getting to grips with the issue of ‘monotonicity’. It does seem fair to pose the question: why bother? What is the point of spending time examining electoral systems?

Several reasons can be given. First, a very large and growing number of people specialize in electoral systems, so *somebody* must think these systems are important. In actual fact, the interest in studying electoral systems is relatively new. As recently as the 1980s, scholars drew attention to how undeveloped was this branch of the political science literature. The doyen of electoral system research at the time even went so far as to say that ‘the study of electoral systems in undoubtedly the most underdeveloped subject in political science’ (Lijphart 1985: 3; also Taagepera and Shugart 1989). Even then it was already clear that this was likely to become a major field of interest. In his *International Bibliography on Electoral Systems*, Richard S. Katz (1989) listed some 1,500 works ‘dealing with the forms and effects of representation and electoral systems’. By 1992 this list had grown to

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2,500 works (Katz 1992).¹ These have included some very significant developments in the methodology of studying electoral systems; to the extent that this field can now more accurately be characterized as a 'mature' and well developed one (Shugart 2008).

For more than forty years one name has dominated over all treatments of electoral systems. The seminal work by Douglas Rae (1967) set the trend on how to study electoral systems and their political consequences. It is only in recent times that Rae's work has come under closer scrutiny as scholars such as Gary Cox, Michael Gallagher, Bernard Grofman, Richard Katz, Arend Lijphart, Matthew Shugart and Rein Taagepera have sought to develop and improve on some of his ideas. Their work (and the work of others) needs to be incorporated into the textbook treatment of electoral systems. This is one of the major functions of this book.

Second, electoral systems are worth examining because they have become politically interesting. With the process of democratization, in Mediterranean Europe in the 1970s, across Latin America and parts of Africa since then, and perhaps most dramatically towards the end of the 1980s in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, important decisions had to be taken on which electoral systems to adopt in the fledgling representative democracies. As we shall see in later chapters, in none of these cases was the single-member plurality system chosen; in only one case (and only briefly) was the single transferable vote system selected. It is interesting to speculate on the reasoning behind these particular decisions, which we shall do in Chapter 8. Of even greater interest has been the apparent rising interest in reforming existing electoral systems, notably in Italy, Japan and New Zealand – all during the 1990s – and also in a host of other countries where electoral reform has been placed high on the political agenda. This appears to contradict the impression that electoral reform is rare, occurring only 'in extraordinary historical situations' (Nohlen 1984: 218). These reforms also indicate a growing sympathy for 'mixed-member' electoral systems (for a long time associated almost solely with postwar Germany), as we see in Chapter 5. Suddenly electoral reform actually looks possible; it is more than some theoretical notion of unrealistic, out-of-touch academics.

There is a third reason why it is important to study electoral systems and that is because they are important: they define how the political system will function. Metaphorically, electoral systems are the cogs that keep the wheels of democracy properly functioning.

In almost any course on politics the following themes generally feature as important topics for consideration: elections and representation; parties and party systems; government formation and the politics of coalitions. In each of these areas, the electoral system plays a key role. Depending on how the system is designed it may be easier or harder for particular politicians to win seats; it may be easier or harder for particular parties to gain representation in parliament; it may be more or less likely that one party can form a government on its own. In short, there are important questions about the functioning of political systems that are influenced, at least in part, by the design of the electoral system.

Apart from their primary function of ensuring the smooth running and accepted legitimacy of the system, electoral systems are designed to fulfil a number of other – often conflicting – functions, such as reflecting the wishes of voters, producing strong and stable governments, electing qualified representatives and so on. In selecting a particular design of electoral system, the ‘electoral engineers’ have to take important decisions about which function to stress most. As a result, no two countries have the same electoral system.

It is important to distinguish between electoral *laws* and electoral *systems*. Electoral laws are the family of rules governing the process of elections: from the calling of the election, through the stages of candidate nomination, party campaigning and voting, and right up to the stage of counting votes and determining the actual election result. There can be any number of rules governing how to run an election. For instance, there are laws on who can vote (citizens, residents, people over seventeen years of age, the financially solvent and so on); there can even be laws, such as in Australia or Belgium, obliging citizens to turn out to vote. Then there is usually a set of rules setting down the procedures for candidate nomination (for example, a minimum number of signatures or a deposit). The campaign process can also be subject to a number of rules: whether polling, television advertising or the use of campaign cars is permitted; the size of billboards; the location of posters; balance in broadcasting coverage, and so on.

Among this panoply of electoral laws there is one set of rules which deal with the process of election itself: how citizens vote, the style of the ballot paper, the method of counting, the final determination of who is elected. It is this aspect of electoral laws with which this book is concerned for the most part.² This is the electoral system, the mechanism of determining victors and losers, which clicks into action once