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The Politics of Electoral Systems

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In memory of Karen Anne Steinke-Mitchell, who was not especially known to care a great deal about electoral systems, but would have wanted a copy anyway.

And to 'One and All'

26

Conclusion

*Michael Gallagher**

We started this book by asserting that electoral systems matter and identifying a number of areas where we can expect to find evidence of this. It is time to draw conclusions from the evidence from the wide range of countries whose experience has been analysed in the preceding pages. In this final chapter, we attempt to draw general conclusions about the origins and impact of electoral systems, about the consequences of electoral reform, and about the merits of the various electoral system options available. To remind ourselves about the features of the electoral systems that the country chapters have examined, Table 26.1 lists these for all twenty-two countries.

ORIGINS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Like other political institutions, electoral systems are designed and chosen by political actors and, once chosen, constrain and affect the behaviour of those actors. We will examine later one aspect of the question of how far the outcomes of electoral system design can be predicted, by considering how closely the consequences of electoral system reform matched the expectations of the reformers. First, let us review the evidence relating to the initial choice of electoral systems.

The 'outputs' of electoral systems—in terms of their hypothesized consequences for the shape of party systems, for example—have been much more closely studied than have the 'inputs', in other words the factors shaping electoral system design. Yet, the relationship between electoral systems and party systems is not necessarily unidirectional; a long-standing body of argument has it that party systems determine electoral systems more than vice versa (Cox 1997: 15). In Belgium, for example, it has frequently been suggested that to present the introduction of proportional representation (PR) in 1899 as having led to a multiparty system is to confuse cause and consequence; rather, by that stage Belgium already had a multiparty system and PR was introduced to preserve it (or, at least, to preserve specific parties

* Thanks to Paul Mitchell and David Farrell, and especially to Matt Shugart, for comments on an earlier version. The Tables draw upon the country chapters in this book and in some cases upon additional information and judgements supplied by the authors of those chapters. Needless to say, none of the above bears responsibility for the use I have made of their information or suggestions.

Table 26.1 Details of electoral systems in 22 countries

Country (chapter number)	Electoral system	Seats	Districts	Formula	Legal threshold
Australia (4)	AV	150	150	AV	No
Canada (5)	SMP	308	308	SMP	No
France (6)	2RS	577	577	2RS	Candidates need *either* 12.5% support of registered electorate in constituency, *or* to finish in top two, in first round to qualify for second round
India (7)	SMP	543	543	SMP	No
UK (8)	SMP	646	646	SMP	No
USA (9)	SMP	435	435	SMP	No
Germany (10)	Mixed compensatory	598	300† (299+1)	SMD tier: SMP Higher tier: LR–Hare	Parties need 5% of national votes or 3 constituency seats to qualify for share of list seats
Hungary (11)	Mixed, partially compensatory	386	197† (176+20+1)	SMD tier: 2RS PR tier: LR–Droop National tier: D'Hondt	5% of votes in PR tier needed to qualify for any seats from PR tier or national tier
Italy (12)	Mixed, partially compensatory	630	476† (475+1)	SMD tier: SMP Higher tier: LR–Hare	4% of national vote needed to receive any list seats
Japan (13)	Mixed parallel	480	311† (300+11)	SMD tier: SMP PR tier: D'Hondt	2% of votes needed within a PR constituency to qualify for seats there
New Zealand (14)	Mixed compensatory	120	70† (69+1)	SMD tier: SMP Higher tier: Sainte-Laguë	Parties need 5% of national votes or 1 constituency seat to qualify for share of list seats
Russia (15)	Mixed parallel	450	226† (225+1)	SMD tier: SMP PR tier: LR–Hare	5% of list votes needed to qualify for share of list seats
Israel (16)	PR list closed	120	1	D'Hondt	Parties need 2% of votes to qualify for seats
South Africa (17)	PR list closed	400	10† (9+1)	Lower tier: LR–Droop Higher tier: LR–Droop + highest average	No
Spain (18)	PR list closed	350	52	D'Hondt	3% of votes needed within a constituency to qualify for seats there
Austria (19)	PR flexible list	183	53† (43+9+1)	Lowest tier: Hare quota Middle tier: Hare quota National tier: D'Hondt	1 seat in a lowest-tier constituency, or 4% of national vote, needed to qualify for middle or national tier seats
Belgium (20)	PR flexible list	150	11	D'Hondt	5% of votes needed within a constituency to qualify for seats there
Chile (21)	PR quasi-list	120	60	D'Hondt	No
Denmark (22)	PR open list	175*	18† (17+1)	Lower tier: modified Sainte-Laguë Higher tier: LR–Hare	Parties do not qualify for share of higher tier seats unless they win a lower tier seat, win the equivalent of the Hare quota in two of the three regions, or win 2% of national vote
Finland (23)	PR quasi-list	200	15	D'Hondt	No
Netherlands (24)	PR latent list	150	1	D'Hondt	0.67% of national vote
Ireland (25)	PR-STV	166	42	STV	No

† Denotes that country has 'complex districting', i.e. there is more than one tier of seat allocation—usually this entails higher-tier constituencies to reduce discrepancies arising from lower-tier constituencies, though in Japan and Russia the two 'tiers' operate in parallel and neither can be seen as higher or lower.

* The Danish *Folketing* also contains 2 MPs from Greenland and 2 from the Faeroe Islands.

Note: The description of the type of preferential list (Chapters 19–24) is based on the terminology used in Chapter 2.

in that system—see Chapter 20, p. 420). Similarly, in the Netherlands PR was introduced to preserve an existing multiparty system (Chapter 24, p. 497). We might expect societies that are divided by cleavages (ethnic, linguistic, or religious) to be more likely than homogeneous ones to have had multiparty systems even under a majority electoral system and thus to be more likely to have PR. Alternatively, in divided societies majority systems might threaten the existence of the entire political system, again giving impetus to the introduction of PR (Rokkan 1970: 157). In other words, electoral systems are not totally exogenous institutions, imposed upon a set of political actors by outside forces, but rather they were selected by political actors who, presumably, had some idea, even if an incomplete one, of what kind of consequences they might have.

On what basis do political actors choose an electoral system? The rational actor paradigm might suggest that the answer is obvious: actors' preferences are determined by their perception of their own self-interest. Maybe matters are not always quite so simple in real life, though. For one thing, as Richard Katz points out in Chapter 3, it is not always in an actor's self-interest to pursue its own self-interest too blatantly, because other actors, especially voters, react adversely to displays of excessive partisanship. In addition, actors might take into account factors other than their own partisan interest when deciding on institutional design, and some vaguely held notion of a non-partisan 'national interest' is the most likely alternative consideration. Support for the introduction of PR might be generally regarded as simply a logical extension of support for the principle of democracy (Blais et al. 2005: 183–4). Faced with a choice between an electoral system that promises some selective benefit but is likely to be dysfunctional for the political system as a whole, or one that does not confer any special benefit yet seems likely to promote the smooth functioning of the political system, it is not inconceivable that in the real world some actors may prefer the latter. That is particularly likely in conditions of uncertainty, when actors cannot be confident that their calculations regarding their self-interest are accurate.

As motivations, partisan advantage and non-partisan national interest are not always easy to distinguish empirically, however different they may be conceptually. Even the most self-centred actor can be expected to be able to make a plausible case for their chosen course in terms that stress the broader interest rather than their own narrow advantage, and it then becomes a matter of judgement as to whether the justification in terms of the common good is genuine or is a mere figleaf for partisan interest. This is especially difficult when, as often happens, an actor (such as a political party) comes to believe that a particular option—which just happens to benefit it—is also the one that best serves the common good, or is convinced that, pretty much by definition, what is good for it is good for the country. Realistically, 'non-partisan' and 'partisan advantage' are not unambiguous categories but, rather, end-points on a spectrum, and what we are trying to identify is the blend between the two considerations in any particular case. We should also note that, in a few cases, there was simply no 'moment of choice': decision-makers in Canada, the UK, and the USA were hardly aware that they had 'chosen' an electoral system when contested elections began to take place in the nineteenth century or earlier, as

awareness of other options, not to mention knowledge of any 'laws' linking electoral systems to likely consequences, was very low.

The main motivations of the actors who chose the current electoral system, as outlined in the country studies (Chapters 4–25), are shown in Table 26.2. As just emphasized, this indicates which end of the national interest–partisan advantage spectrum the case seems to be closer to; in some instances both motivations seemed to weigh equally. A plurality of cases fall into the middle category, with fewer where the main aim was primarily partisan and fewer still where it was non-partisan. There is also, not surprisingly, a clear correlation between the main motivation behind the decision and the identity of the decision-makers. When the current executive is able to make the decision without seeking broader agreement (e.g. in Australia and Chile), there is a greater likelihood that partisan self-interest will dominate.

We can illustrate the processes at work and the categorizations themselves by looking at a few examples. First, there seems to have been little disagreement in Finland when the current system was chosen as far back as 1906. The use of list-PR in constituencies of fairly large magnitude, which would guarantee a high degree of proportionality, was in keeping with the desire to foster national unity after the period of attempted Russification (Chapter 23). The predominance of a non-partisan national interest motivation may be particularly likely in the wake of a major event such as the achievement or imminence of independence (Ireland, Finland) or the birth/rebirth of a democratic regime (South Africa).

Second, Israel's choice of nationwide list-PR in 1948 exemplifies the combination of partisan and non-partisan motivations that characterizes a number of countries. The parties who chose this system regarded PR as democratic and as consistent with the 'inclusive political legacy' of pre-state Jewish political institutions (Chapter 16). The absence of subnational constituencies sprang partly from the dispersal of members of the army around the country. However, most of the parties involved also calculated that they would benefit more under the system selected than under the likely alternatives.

Third, a good example of a choice that was almost undisguisedly motivated entirely by partisan considerations was that made by the Pinochet regime in Chile in the late 1980s. Pinochet's advisers estimated that the right could expect to receive around 40 per cent of the votes at elections, and opted for a list-PR system based on two-member constituencies with the D'Hondt formula in the expectation that this would guarantee the right around 50 per cent of the seats in parliament. Subsequent debates on electoral reform have been conducted in the same spirit, with actors favouring or opposing reform—sometimes changing their positions over time—according to their expectations as to the likely impact on their fortunes (Chapter 21). In Spain, too, partisan considerations were uppermost in the post-Franco period, with the right favouring majoritarianism and the left preferring PR, resulting in a system that while apparently PR in fact gives significant benefits to the largest party. In Australia the anti-Labor parties introduced the alternative vote as soon as they could, aware that it would deprive Labor of the advantage it was deriving from the split in the anti-Labor vote under SMP; Labor opposed the move for precisely this reason.

Table 26.2 How electoral systems were chosen

Country	Year system was chosen	Chosen by	Aim
Australia	1918	Government parties	Partisan advantage
Canada	1867	Evolved without ever being explicitly chosen	—
France	1958	Government parties	Both
India	1950	Consensus	Both
UK	Middle Ages (1885)	Evolved without ever being explicitly chosen	—
USA	18th century	Evolved without ever being explicitly chosen	—
Germany	1953	Consensus	Both
Hungary	1989	Compromise from interparty bargaining	Partisan advantage
Italy	1993	Compromise from interparty bargaining following popular pressure and referendum	Both
Japan	1994	Compromise from interparty bargaining	Both
New Zealand	1996	Population (via referendum), initiative of reformers within one major party and minor parties	Non-partisan
Russia	1993	Compromise from interparty bargaining	Partisan advantage
Israel	1948	Consensus plus interparty bargaining	Both
South Africa	1993	Consensus plus interparty bargaining	Non-partisan
Spain	1976	Compromise from interparty bargaining	Partisan advantage
Austria	1992	Large parties	Both
Belgium	2000	Compromise from interparty bargaining	Partisan advantage
Chile	1988	Government (military)	Partisan advantage
Denmark	1920 (1953)	Compromise from interparty bargaining (consensus)	Both
Finland	1906 (1955)	Consensus	Non-partisan
Netherlands	1917	Compromise from interparty bargaining	Both
Ireland	1922	Consensus	Non-partisan

Note: when two years are given in the second column, the first refers to the date or period when the fundamental electoral system was adopted, and the second to the last significant revision. 'Aim' refers to the point on the spectrum running from 'non-partisan' (i.e. non-partisan benefit to functioning of system) to partisan advantage.

Table 26.2 also makes clear that electoral systems are fairly durable institutions.[1] Nearly half of the systems listed there were adopted in 1950 or earlier, and several of the rest were chosen as part of a fresh start for the entire political regime, as in Germany, Hungary, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and arguably France (1958). Changing an electoral system is rarely easy, as we discuss later in the chapter, and in only a few countries (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, plus France in 1986 and 1988) have there been post-1950 changes initiated by actors within a continuing regime.

In short, although Sartori has described the electoral system as 'the most specific manipulative instrument of politics' (quoted in Lijphart 1994: 139), electoral systems are not quite as pliable as might be imagined. They may not be unalterable aspects of political life, but, once chosen, they tend to stay chosen.

HOW ELECTORAL SYSTEMS WORK

In the country chapters can be found detailed accounts of exactly how the electoral system in each of the twenty-two countries converts voter preferences first into votes, by the way it structures the choices, and then into seats. Trying to extract patterns from these might seem pointless, but we can identify some general features.

First, most PR electoral systems can be made to look complicated if the small print is emphasized; Arend Lijphart has observed that journalists' reports on elections almost automatically describe any kind of PR system as 'a complex form of PR' (Lijphart 1994: 2). The details of particular systems present an inviting target for critics of PR in principle, who can suggest that they are so convoluted that only a handful of anoraks and initiates really have any idea what is going on in the votes-to-seats conversion process. And, indeed, it might seem that some systems have been constructed by a committee that simply stuck together ideas from several quarters rather than decide between them; simplicity and transparency were evidently not the prime considerations in the minds of those who designed the Danish or Hungarian systems, for example. Similarly, it is no doubt true that very few Italian voters could explain exactly how the *scorporo* operates, and that most Irish voters would not know how to conduct a PR-STV count if presented with a mound of ballot papers.[2]

[1] Table 26.2 attempts to identify the 'moment of choice', though this is not always unambiguous. Sometimes, as we have said, a system seemed simply to emerge without ever having been consciously chosen. In other cases, a specific reform might be seen either as a refinement of an existing system or as the adoption of a basically new system; we treat the Danish and Finnish changes of the 1950s as the former and the more recent changes in Austria (1992) and Belgium (2000) as the latter, but these classifications could be disputed.

[2] There would be many plausible contenders for the title of 'most complicated electoral system ever employed'. The systems used in Denmark, Hungary and Italy described in this book would all have their advocates. However, even these seem fairly straightforward when compared with the system used in Georgia in 1992. It was a mixed system with three tiers of seat allocation, and, in a flourish unmatched by any country covered in this book, 'each voter was allowed to rank order up to three parties (by selecting individual candidates from party lists). The seats were then distributed among parties by means of a quota system based on a complex weighting procedure for first, second, and third preference votes' (Birch 2003*a*: 43).

However, such criticisms would unduly elevate simplicity over all other criteria in evaluating electoral systems. If an electoral system must not possess any details that are difficult to explain, then single-member plurality (SMP) has a clear edge over all its rivals. We might draw an analogy with a taxation system. The simplest system would impose the same rate on every income-earner regardless of their personal circumstances, achieving transparency at the cost of inequity. Consequently, most countries' tax codes have a variety of thresholds, exemptions, allowances, and so on, designed to ensure that the least well off pay lower rates than the rich and perhaps to encourage investment in specific areas of the economy. The result is almost universally seen as better than a one-rate-fits-all system, but this comes at the cost of far greater complexity and a system that hardly anyone understands in its entirety. Similarly, when it comes to electoral systems, what really matters is that voters know how to cast a valid vote and are aware of the likely impact of their vote, not whether they could explain every detail of the system if asked. While the rococo flourishes of some systems might appear a little gratuitous, we have seen no evidence in this book that voters are in the dark about the effect of their vote.

The second point to be made about the way in which electoral systems work is that the rules alone do not determine this. This should not surprise us; we know, after all, that while the written components of constitutions are important, most constitutions also possess a significant unwritten content that can be just as powerful as the printed words. Electoral systems function within a broader political system, and the way in which actors respond to them is inevitably affected by the political cultural context.

This is particularly visible in the case of systems that are open to manipulation by parties and voters. The most obvious example is that of compensatory mixed systems: in these, each voter characteristically has two votes—one for a local constituency representative and one for a party in a national or regional list election—and the distribution of list seats depends on each party's share of the list votes and its number of constituency seats. Put simply, each party receives the appropriate number of list seats to ensure that its total number of seats (list plus constituency) matches its share of the list votes (see Appendix A for fuller details). Thus, the more constituency seats the party has won, the fewer the number of list seats it requires to bring it up to its overall fair share.

As has long been known, such a system is open to manipulation. Two allied parties—call them Y and Z—could agree to advise all their supporters to cast their constituency vote for party Y and their list vote for party Z. That way, the combined seat total of the two parties would be way in excess of their share of the vote, because party Z, not having won any constituency seats, would be entitled to receive a number of list seats equal to its overall entitlement. Alternatively, one party might set up fake or dummy lists linked to its constituency candidates in order to achieve the same effect.

Would this be regarded as legitimate behaviour? The answer supplied by the political culture varies. In Germany, it seems that it would not be regarded as proper if, for example, the SPD and the Greens (or the CDU and the FDP) attempted to implement this sort of scheme; the parties do not attempt such a strategy except occasionally on a very local scale. In Denmark, when the Agrarian Liberals tried this trick in 1947, it was widely seen as 'cheating' by the public and the other parties and the party suffered punitive measures (see Chapter 22). In Italy, in contrast, the two main parties both availed themselves of this loophole in 2001, setting up 'fake lists' in order that their real lists do not have to sustain the cost of winning their single-member seats (see Chapter 12). And in Albania's 2001 election, the two main parties tried to manipulate the system not by running dummy lists but by registering most of their single-member district (SMD) candidates as independents so that the entitlement of their lists would not be reduced by SMD seats, a manoeuvre that was thwarted not by public outrage, let alone by peer pressure from other parties, but by the electoral commission (Szajkowski 2003: 363).

Since the way in which apparently identical sets of rules are given effect can vary from context to context, we can expect the consequences of electoral systems, too, to be impossible to predict with certainty. For many students of this subject and for electoral reformers, the most important questions concern the political consequences of different electoral systems. As we indicated in Chapter 1, and as has been done in each of the country chapters, we will examine these consequences under four headings, looking at the effect of electoral systems upon party systems, upon parties themselves, upon parliament, and upon government.

IMPACT OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS UPON PARTY SYSTEMS

This is undoubtedly the most comprehensively studied aspect of electoral systems, and the area where most progress has been made towards formulating rigorous and testable laws and hypotheses.

Summary of the country findings

In Table 26.3 we attempt to summarize the picture that emerges from our twenty-two country chapters regarding the impact of electoral systems upon party systems. We draw on the terminology suggested by Sartori (e.g. Sartori 1997: 32) according to which the effect might be strong—in the sense of constraining, restraining, coercing, or manipulating—or weak (permissive, not constraining), or somewhere in between.

While acknowledging that any attempt to distil a country's complex reality into just one word involves some over-simplification, the Table suggests that the single-member constituency systems (India apart) are, as we would expect, the most likely to be perceived as exercising a constraining effect on party systems. In most cases the number of parties, especially the number of parliamentary parties, is low, certainly lower than would be likely under a PR system. In Hungary, too, the electoral system is perceived as having a strong influence, as it is seen to exert a more majoritarian influence than either of its components would separately (Chapter 11).

Table 26.3 Impact of electoral systems upon party systems

Country	Impact on party system	Nature of impact
Australia	Constraining	High disproportionality, small number of parties win nearly all the seats
Canada	Constraining	High disproportionality, over-representation of largest party, exaggeration of regional cleavages
France	Constraining	High disproportionality, multiparty competition with alliances
India	Medium	Moderate to high disproportionality, set of different two-party systems across the country
UK	Constraining	High disproportionality, manufactured majorities
USA	Constraining	Reinforces two-party system
Germany	Medium	Constrains numbers of parties in parliament compared with pre-war Weimar system
Hungary	Constraining	Tendency towards two-party system
Italy	Medium	Creation of two multiparty pre-election alliances without reduction in number of parties
Japan	Medium	Tendency towards bipolar competition
New Zealand	Permissive	Has led to multiparty legislative system
Russia	Medium	SMD component allows small parties and independents to continue to exist while high threshold in list component is constraining; no stable party system
Israel	Permissive	Allows high degree of multipartism
South Africa	Permissive	Allows multiparty system
Spain	Medium	Large party bias while permitting many small parties to exist
Austria	Permissive	Allows multiparty system
Belgium	Permissive	Allows multiparty system
Chile	Medium	Constrains number of parties less than expected, but gives those parties strong incentives to form alliances
Denmark	Permissive	Allows multiparty system
Finland	Permissive	Allows multiparty system
Netherlands	Permissive	Allows multiparty system
Ireland	Permissive	Perhaps constrains multipartism due to small district magnitude, but facilitates election of independents

Terminology from Sartori (e.g. *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 1997: 32).

In most PR systems, in contrast, the effect of the electoral system is perceived to be 'permissive'. Again, this is in line with expectations, according to which PR allows the expression of whatever political tendencies exist. In a few cases the effect is regarded by country specialists as 'medium' rather than weak. In Italy, even though the number of parties remains large, the electoral system is credited with corralling them into two identifiable pre-election alliances. In Japan the electoral system, to the extent that its effects can be separately identified in the midst of an upheaval in the party system, seems to have encouraged the emergence of competing multiparty alliances. In Spain, as in the UK, small district magnitude favours the large parties while also looking kindly upon those that are strong in a region, but penalizes weak statewide parties. In Chile the binomial system has not reduced the number of parties to the degree that might have been expected, but, as in Italy, its potential to produce high disproportionality has encouraged the emergence of alliances among parties that would be likely to hang separately if they did not hang together. In Germany the effect is seen as medium, in that the number of parties that manage to gain a foothold in parliament is lower than the number we would expect under a system with no meaningful threshold, such as that in the pre-war Weimar Republic. By contrast, in New Zealand the very similar electoral system is seen as highly permissive, because the reference point is not, as in Germany, 'pure' PR but the previous SMP system, which had a highly constraining effect on the party system (Chapter 14).

Since SMD-based systems usually constrain party systems more than PR systems do, we could expect that the SMD component of mixed systems will be more constraining than the PR component. This is indeed usually the case: in Germany, Japan, and New Zealand, for example, the effective number of parties at constituency level is consistently greater in the list component than in the SMD component (Gallagher 2001: 620). In a number of postcommunist countries, though, significant thresholds in the list component and a large number of independent candidates in the SMDs have meant that the SMD party system is much more fragmented than the list one. In Russia, the 5 per cent list threshold (soon to be raised to 7 per cent) and the weakly organized nature of most parties means that the list component does not generate anything like a competitive multiparty system, but the SMD component enables smaller groups and independents to survive—to the displeasure of the Kremlin, which in 2004 decided upon the elimination of the SMD component altogether. Having analysed the impact of electoral systems upon party systems in a number of postcommunist countries, Birch (2003*a*: 118) concludes that when a party system is nationalized, SMD rules have a restrictive effect on the number of parties that compete and win seats, whereas when it is not, they may generate highly fragmented party systems.

Duverger's laws

Much of the research into the effect of electoral systems upon party systems has been focused around 'Duverger's laws', whose author has stated them thus:

1. Proportional representation tends to lead to the formation of many independent parties.
2. The two-ballot majority system tends to lead to the formation of many parties that are allied with each other.
3. The plurality rule tends to produce a two-party system (Duverger 1986: 70).

We do not intend to try to test these propositions *de novo*, given the extensive work already done (see Chapter 2; Riker 1986; Taagepera and Shugart 1989: 142–55; Lijphart 1994: 95–117), but let us review the evidence from our country studies. In Table 26.4 we summarize the situation from these and, for purposes of comparison, from other cross-national surveys of fragmentation and disproportionality.

First, it is clear from Table 26.4 and Appendix D, as from Table 26.3, that the countries using single-member constituencies—the first group in Appendix D—do indeed stand out. The effective number of elective parties (i.e. the fragmentation of the vote) is relatively low, below four in all but two cases.[3] Moreover, one of those two cases, France, is our only example of the double-ballot system, where Duverger predicted that there would be many parties. The effective number of legislative parties (i.e. the fragmentation of parliamentary strength) is also low: in all but two cases, 2.5 or less. As we would expect, these systems produce the highest levels of disproportionality; five of the six most disproportional elections among those in our book are found in this group (see Appendix D), with only India and the US House election producing a reasonably close match between vote shares and seat shares.

It is beyond dispute that there is a strong pattern here—and yet matters are not black and white. The deviant case is India, where single-member plurality (SMP) has not prevented the emergence of what is indisputably a multiparty system. Sartori (1997: 40–1) attempts to explain away the Indian exception by arguing that we

Table 26.4 Indices of fragmentation and disproportionality for elections

	Effective number of parties (votes)	Effective number of parties (seats)	Disproportionality (least squares index)
All systems (22/22/21)	4.7	3.8	6.2
Single-member constituency systems (6)	4.2	3.1	10.9
Mixed systems (6/6/5)	4.5	3.5	6.9
PR-list and PR-STV systems (10)	5.0	4.4	3.1
All PR systems (16/16/15)	4.8	4.1	4.4
All electoral systems in 27 democracies 1945–90 (69)	3.9	3.3	5.7
All PR electoral systems in 27 democracies 1945–90 (57)	4.1	3.6	4.3
Elections in 28 European countries 2000–4 (28)	4.8	3.9	5.5

Sources: First five rows refer to most recent elections covered in chapters in this book; details in Appendix D. For elections 1945–90, Lijphart (1994: 99, 101); for Europe 2000–4, Gallagher et al. (2006: 364).
Note: number in parentheses indicates *N*. There is no Italian figure for disproportionality, hence the reduced *N* in the disproportionality column in the first, third, and fifth rows.

[3] See Appendix B for an explanation of the effective number of parties.

cannot expect Duverger's law to work where the party system is, as in India, 'unstructured'. This is clearly unsatisfactory, however, since if the law worked as it is supposed to, the party system would be firmly structured. In other words, Sartori seems to be arguing for the setting aside of cases where the dependent variable has the 'wrong' value; in cases where it does not apply, we simply argue that we could hardly expect it to apply there. We are therefore, and happily, left with those cases where there is a two-party system and we can conclude that among these cases, the law appears to work—but that is because we have conveniently excluded the awkward cases where it does not work.

India constitutes a powerful exception to Duverger's laws, and it highlights another difficulty. Many writers have pointed out that the logic of Duverger's argument applies within each constituency but that it is unclear why, even if the number of viable parties per constituency usually has a maximum value of 2, these should be the same two parties in every constituency. Why will we not find that parties A and B are dominant in one constituency, A and C in another, and D and E in a third? Even if each constituency tends towards two-party competition, why should the country as a whole have two-party competition? Attempts have been made to solve this puzzle and to explain why 'linkage' across constituencies occurs (Cox 1997: 181–202), but, in many cases, this linkage is increasingly not occurring, and those who wonder 'why doesn't the pattern of two-party competition vary across the country?' can be told 'it does'.

This is, again, most visible in India. As Chapter 7 shows, there is a pattern of effectively two-party competition in many of India's 543 constituencies, but the two parties in question vary greatly from state to state. In most cases, indeed, one of the two leading parties in any given constituency is likely to be a party that contests few if any constituencies outside its home state. Nor can India be dismissed as 'the exception that proves the rule'. In Canada, at least before the merger on the right in late 2003, there was only one genuinely national party, the Liberal Party, which confronted the Bloc Québécois in Québec, the NDP or Reform in the western provinces, and the Progressive Conservatives in most of the Atlantic provinces. In Britain, too, the trend is towards different party systems in different parts of the country, with Labour now the only party that is competitive nationwide. In England, its main rivals are the Conservatives, but the latter are only a weak force in Scotland and Wales, where Labour's most significant opponents are the SNP and Plaid Cymru respectively. In the USA, it is true, the same two parties are dominant everywhere—though, of course, it can be pointed out that the US parties are exceptionally incohesive and loosely organized, to the extent that each candidate might almost be seen as constituting his or her own party. Deviations from two-party systems across the USA are most likely to see not *more* than two parties but *fewer*: many districts are more or less single-party fiefdoms with the other party mounting only a token challenge, if even that. (This is not incompatible with Duverger's law since that implies that there will be at most two viable parties in SMD systems, not that there will be precisely two.) Moreover, the two-party system in the USA has something close to a legally

protected status. Exceptionally high (albeit gently falling) entry barriers are imposed to discourage challengers to the two dominant parties; aspiring new parties face significant legal and financial difficulties even to get onto the ballot, and have to fight for this right state by state (Chapter 9).

Second, let us focus for a moment on the least discussed of Duverger's three laws, the one according to which the two-round system (2RS) leads to a large number of parties that form opposing alliances. In Duverger's analysis, this is clearly an extrapolation from French experience—like all too many of Duverger's propositions, critics would say. French experience still largely bears out this hypothesis. But how can it be valid to generalize in this way from just one case: to assume that the shape of the party system in France must be due to the electoral system? Quite obviously, as Birch puts it, it is 'difficult to disentangle effects characteristic of France from those inherent in the system itself' (Birch 2003*b*: 325). It is clear from this book, in fact, that several other countries' party systems have a basically similar shape, namely a sizeable number of parties that combine into two broad alliances that oppose each other at elections; this is the case in Chile, Germany, Italy, Japan, and perhaps New Zealand. If the same outcome is observed in a variety of electoral system settings, there is little logic in identifying one particular electoral system as its cause. It might, perhaps, still be claimed that 2RS is sufficient to bring about this type of party system, even if not necessary. But that is not so either—in 'young' party systems where 2RS is used there is little sign of stable alliances of parties emerging (Birch 2003*b*: 328). Indeed, mixed systems—especially parallel ones—can be just as plausibly identified as likely to encourage competition between two multiparty blocs (Shugart and Wattenberg 2003*a*: 583–4).[4]

Third, Duverger's remaining proposition tells us that PR tends to lead to the formation of many independent parties. It is not quite clear whether Duverger means (as he states) that PR actually causes the formation of more parties or that it simply facilitates their formation, and Cox rephrases the argument more carefully by suggesting that each system has a maximum 'carrying capacity' and that this maximum is larger under PR than under SMD-based systems (Cox 1997: 273). Certainly, there can be no dispute that in PR systems there do tend to be more parties than in SMD systems. Table 26.4 shows clearly that the number of both elective and (especially) legislative parties is higher under PR systems than under the SMD systems, while disproportionality is much lower.

Variations among PR countries

Under PR, then, there tend to be more parties and less disproportionality than under a single-member constituency system. PR systems, though, are not a homogeneous bloc, and we will try to explore variations among them.

[4] The causal connection is perhaps not thus far sufficiently firmly established that we can speak of 'Shugart and Wattenberg's Law'.

First, it is obvious that high effective district magnitude is negatively associated with the level of disproportionality ($r = -0.55$),[5] and if effective district magnitude is high enough then disproportionality virtually disappears, as in South Africa. This relationship is so well known as not to need labouring (Taagepera and Shugart 1989: 112–41; Lijphart 1994: 95–117). At the same time, it does not necessarily have a decisive effect on the shape of a party system, since quite different values for the effective numbers of parties (at both elective and legislative levels) can be associated with similar effective district magnitudes. The relationship between effective district magnitude and the number of legislative parties is weak ($r = 0.10$).

The six countries using some kind of mixed system stand out a little from the others. The effective number of parties is lower at both electoral and parliamentary levels, and disproportionality is higher. These systems seem to be somewhere on the spectrum between other PR systems and SMD systems, though much closer to the former than to the latter. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that some of these systems—the ones we term 'parallel', which operate in Japan and Russia—are indeed mixtures of single-member constituencies and a PR component with, typically, the proportional tier able to moderate but not to redress completely the disproportionality created in the single-member tier. In Germany and New Zealand this does not apply; the two tiers there are linked, that is, the system is 'compensatory'. However, the high threshold (5 per cent of the votes) has a dampening effect on party system fragmentation and generates disproportionality, especially in Germany. The remaining two mixed systems, those of Hungary and Italy, are neither completely parallel nor completely compensatory. In each there is a link between the single-member constituency tier and the PR tier, but the 'compensation' or 'correction' applied by the PR tier is only partial (Chapters 11 and 12; Shugart and Wattenberg 2003*b*: 20). In Hungary, indeed, as mentioned earlier, a dynamic has developed whereby the link between the single-member tier and the PR tiers has the effect of compounding rather than ameliorating the majoritarian effect of the single-member tier. In Italy, exceptionally for the countries in this 'mixed' group, party system fragmentation is higher than the average for all PR systems, because of the way the parties 'proportionalize' the single-member constituency tier, as we discuss below.

The relationship between the two parts of mixed systems can be a complex one. There is almost always some degree of 'cross-tier contamination', whereby the effects of each part of the system seep across to the other. What happens in the SMD component of a mixed system will be at least a little different from what happens in a 'pure' SMD-based system, and the same is true of the list component (Cox and Schoppa 2002). Linkage between the two can affect the behaviour of both parties and voters. Parties may feel that running a candidate even in a hopeless SMD is likely to boost their list vote there, and in this way the PR component 'contaminates'

[5] This and the next correlation coefficient (Pearson's) is based on logged effective district magnitude from Appendix C and measures of disproportionality (and fragmentation) from Appendix D, in both cases from most recent election (N = 21 as Italy is excluded).

the SMD component by leading to greater vote fragmentation in the SMDs than we would expect in a pure SMD system. In addition, it seems that in many countries SMD seats have rather higher status than list seats in the eyes of MPs, and even candidates who could content themselves with a safe list position like to fight an SMD as well. Contamination effects can occur even if the system is parallel rather than compensatory. In Japan, smaller parties often avail themselves of the facility to rank their list candidates equally, meaning that any seat won goes to the candidate who achieved the best SMD performance (Chapter 13), again producing seepage from the list to the SMD component. The strategic incentives facing parties are in fact quite complex and can lead to behaviour that is difficult to predict, even if it possesses its own rationality (Herron 2002)

The behaviour of voters, too, is affected by 'contamination' between the two components. The existence of a threshold in the list component creates the possibility of tactical voting in mixed systems, as under pure list systems. Beyond that, the contamination effects differ slightly between compensatory and parallel systems. In the former, as is well known and much discussed in a German context in particular (see Chapter 10), supporters of small parties have an incentive to give their SMD vote to an allied large party (to avoid wasting their SMD vote) while some supporters of the large party may give their list vote to the small party (to help it over the threshold). Since the list votes are decisive in determining overall seat allocations, we would expect the list component of these systems to predominate, yet this does not necessarily happen. Many voters, it is clear, are unaware that the list vote is the one that really 'matters'. In Hungary (neither fully compensatory nor entirely parallel), it appears that the reductive effect of the SMD component spills over into the list component, resulting in something that looks very much like a two-party system (Chapter 11).

Under parallel systems, the possibility of tactical voting in the SMDs arises just as it does in any pure SMD-based system, since the SMD outcome really 'matters'. In a compensatory mixed system any individual SMD outcome does not really matter, in the sense that each party's seat total depends entirely on its list vote, and this also creates scope for insincere voting in the SMDs. In a close SMD race some voters, even if primarily party-oriented, might opt to vote for whichever of the leading candidates they think will make the better constituency representative, especially if the other one appears high on a party list and will thus be elected regardless of whether they win the SMD. For example, a supporter of the SPD in Germany, having given their list vote to the SPD, is free to vote for the CDU candidate in the SMD, knowing that this will not damage the SPD but will simply increase the likelihood that one of the CDU's seats will be taken by the local SMD candidate rather than by a list candidate who might be from another part of the Land.

Difficulty of finding laws

While we should not underestimate the progress that has been made towards finding robust relationships between electoral systems and party systems, it must be admitted that most such 'laws' carry with them an impressive array of get-out clauses. A particular electoral system, we are told, tends to lead to a particular type of party system—unless.... Why is it apparently so difficult to find laws that govern the impact of electoral systems upon party systems?

First, it is clear that country-specific factors will play a part in shaping a party system. No one could imagine that political science will discover deterministic country-blind laws linking electoral and party systems but, even allowing for this, the role of country-specific factors may sometimes be underestimated. As many of the chapters in this book show, there can be a striking amount of variation over time in countries whose electoral system remains the same (for example, in Canada, India, Hungary, Israel, Austria, and Belgium). In addition, the same electoral system does not produce the same party system everywhere. PR-STV in Ireland has produced a parliament containing representatives of (currently) seven parties plus several independents; in Malta, the same system has consistently produced a pure two-party system.

Second, party systems evidently have a durability and a lifeblood of their own that insulates them to a degree from moulding by other forces. Just as the historical–sociological determinism of the Lipset–Rokkan framework underplays the ability of political actors to shape their own fortunes, so there may be a tendency to overestimate the extent to which institutions such as electoral systems can remould an existing party system. Chile provides a good example of this; in the wake of the dictatorship the main components of the pre-Pinochet party system have largely re-emerged even though the current binomial electoral system would not have been expected to produce such a constellation of parties if the party system were starting from scratch (Chapter 21). Studying a number of Latin American countries, Coppedge (1997) concludes that the impact of the electoral system in shaping a party system is 'slight' in comparison with that of the 'underlying patterns of politicization in society'.

In Chile, and also in Italy (Chapter 12), larger parties have done deals with smaller ones rather than use the majoritarian tendencies of the new system to attempt to eliminate them, even though some proponents of those new systems had hoped that these would significantly reduce the number of parties. The parties 'proportionalize' the majoritarian aspects of the system, as D'Alimonte puts it (Chapter 12). The large parties in these two countries either do not trust Duverger's law to have the desired effect and kill off the smaller parties, or else they feel that if the law does work this would only be in the long run—and in the long run, as we know, we are all dead. Consequently, they come to the kind of arrangements that keep the smaller parties alive. In a rather similar way, parties in Belgium that are threatened by the 5 per cent constituency-level threshold imposed by the new electoral system have simply formed alliances with each other and have continued an otherwise independent existence rather than either merge or be eliminated by the threshold (Chapter 20). The electoral system, as elsewhere, does have an impact on the behaviour of parties within a given party system, but it does not necessarily determine the configuration of the party system. As Grofman and Lijphart (2002: 3) put it: changes in electoral

systems may give rise to equilibrating forces as actors adapt their behaviour to the new institutional environment 'so as to partially restore significant elements of the status quo ante'. All of these cases testify to the autonomy of political actors: to the ingenuity of parties in utilizing the electoral system to their advantage rather than simply being passively shaped by it.

A third reason why electoral systems do not always have the expected effect is that politics is much less concentrated on a single level—that of national government—than used to be the case. Increasingly, elections take place at multiple levels and perhaps under different electoral systems. The point is made by D'Alimonte in Chapter 12 (p. 267) that even though most parliamentary seats in Italy are decided by SMP, other elections take place under PR, so many small parties are kept alive even though SMP alone might kill them. The way in which different electoral systems exist at different levels within a country and affect each other can be seen as 'cross-level contamination', analogous to the 'cross-tier contamination' in mixed systems that we mentioned on p. 549. Likewise in France, the FN might not survive and thrive if the only elections were the SMD-based elections to the National Assembly, but the party is given regular boosts by PR elections for the European Parliament and for regional parliaments (and even by presidential elections, though it has no hope of winning these). The plethora of electoral systems existing at different levels in Britain (Chapter 8) has brought about multiparty systems at subnational and EP level, but it remains to be seen how much of an impact this can make upon the Westminster party system. In Chile, the existence of presidential elections, and the blackmail potential wielded there by small parties in close contests, is one reason why the large parties do not try to use the small district magnitude parliamentary electoral system to crush their smaller rivals. This 'cross-level contamination' makes the political world a more complicated place than it was when Duverger's laws were first formulated.

The impact of electoral system change upon a party system whose roots are deep may be muted, then, but there is clearly greater scope for shaping a party system in the process of formation, at which stage it is still pliable. Knowing about new gradually emerging norms in postcommunist countries enables us to identify clear electoral system effects. When a competitive democratic system is being brought into existence, the choice of electoral system has far more potential to make a decisive difference to the outlines of the party system (Birch 2003*a*). In Poland, for example, a 5 per cent threshold was introduced before the 1993 election and 40 per cent of the votes were wasted on parties that failed to reach this; both voters and parties learned from this, and in 1997 only 12 per cent of votes were cast for parties that fell below the threshold. The threshold had precisely the predicted and intended effect of reducing fragmentation. However, such 'engineering' has its limitations; using a nationwide PR constituency in Russia has delivered centralized parties, as it was intended to, but has led to a party system from which many citizens feel alienated (Chapter 15).

IMPACT OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS UPON POLITICAL PARTIES

As we indicated in Chapter 1, electoral systems seem to have the potential to affect not just the way in which parties interact with each other but also parties' internal lives. Some systems might, in principle anyway, empower the grass roots, strengthen the hand of the party leader, or entrench the position of individual MPs. Trying to identify the locus of power within parties is a topic worthy of a book in its own right, and in this book we have focused particularly on the candidate selection battleground as a key arena to examine.

Of course, the electoral system does not necessarily have any impact upon this, and so country chapters address the question of whether the candidate selection process is discernibly affected by the electoral system. As Table 26.5 shows, in only five of the twenty-two countries is the electoral system seen as having a strong impact. In Finland it is seen as constraining the power of the national leadership, but in the other four cases it is perceived to strengthen the leadership. In Chile and Hungary, the power of the centre derives not solely from the electoral system but more precisely from the interaction between the electoral system and the party system. Because, as we saw earlier, in both countries larger parties do deals with smaller ones rather than try to render them irrelevant, there is a need for the kind of interparty deal-making that can only be done at national level. In South Africa the electoral system—closed list with a small number of large constituencies—facilitates control by the centre and minimizes involvement not only by voters but also by party members. There is an interesting contrast here with Israel, whose rather similar system also excludes the voters from any choice of individual representatives. Whereas in South Africa there is no significant pressure to reduce the power wielded by the party centres, in Israel the central control made possible by the electoral system has led to a reaction and, given the near-impossibility of opening up the electoral system, the result has been an increase in intraparty democracy in the candidate selection process. The interaction between the electoral system and political culture, rather than the electoral system on its own, has an effect on candidate selection in these two cases. We cannot, therefore, suggest that a closed list system leads to intraparty democracy—rather, that a closed list system coupled with a political culture that values participation may lead to pressure for increased intraparty democracy.

Electoral systems are not seen by the country authors as a source of lack of cohesion within political parties. Despite fears in closed-list or single-member constituency countries that a move towards giving the voters power to choose among candidates of one party would open up a Pandora's box of internal party dissent and fractiousness, very few parties actually operating under open list or PR-STV are seen as incohesive.[6] For the most part, parties operate as near-unitary actors

[6] Here and elsewhere in this chapter we are using 'open-list PR' for stylistic elegance to refer to all those systems in which the voters can cast effective preferences for individual candidates—in other words, as a synonym for those systems termed 'preferential' in Chapter 2.

Table 26.5 Impact of electoral system upon nature of, and power within, parties

Country	Impact on nature of parties	Nature of impact
Australia	Weak	
Canada	Medium	Strengthens autonomy of constituency associations vis-à-vis centre (though federalism also contributes to this)
France	Weak	
India	Weak	
UK	Weak	
USA	Medium	SMDs and large numbers of uncompetitive districts produce strong incumbency advantage and (along with federalism) contribute to near autonomy of incumbents within party and weakness of extra-parliamentary organization
Germany	Weak	
Hungary	Strong	Reinforcement of centralized control
Italy	Medium	Creates need for centralization within parties in order to come to interparty agreements on SMD candidatures
Japan	Medium	Reinforcement of decline of factions within LDP
New Zealand	Medium	Strengthens position of leader in small parties
Russia	Weak	
Israel	Medium	Lack of accountability supplied by electoral system has led to pressure for intraparty democracy in candidate selection in reaction
South Africa	Strong	Strengthens power of party leaderships
Spain	Strong	Strengthens power of party leaderships
Austria	Weak	
Belgium	Medium	Strengthens power of party leaderships
Chile	Strong	Strengthens power of party leaderships
Denmark	Medium	Limits power of party leadership in candidate selection
Finland	Strong	Weakens power of party leaderships
Netherlands	Medium	Allows party leadership to control nomination process, although in some parties regional bodies have been significant at times
Ireland	Medium	Strengthens position of incumbents in candidate selection

Impact on nature of parties judged by country experts to be strengthening (or weakening/constraining) power of specific actors.

in parliamentary votes and offer the kind of policy packages at elections that are as coherent as parties under systems that do not offer the voters intraparty choice. Whatever may be the theoretical dangers that empowering voters to choose among candidates of a party might raise, in practice parties operating under such systems appear to have learned how to cope.

IMPACT ON PARLIAMENT

In Chapter 1 we identified two aspects of parliament to which the electoral system might make a difference, both concerning representation. First, some electoral systems might be more likely than others to produce parliaments that look something like a cross-section of the population and second, different electoral systems might affect MPs' own primary focus of representation.

Regarding the first of these, the most easily measurable aspect of microcosmic representation is the proportion of women among MPs. Table 26.6 shows the female percentage of parliament in our twenty-two cases after the most recent election, and confirms that there are indeed more women in parliaments elected under PR (a mean of 24 per cent among the 16 cases) than when single-member constituency systems (a mean of 17 per cent among the six cases) are used (the same conclusion is reached in Norris 2004: 179–208). It is conventional to test this further by examining the mixed systems more closely, to see whether women are more successful in securing election via the PR component than via the SMD component. As Table 26.6 shows, this is generally but not always the case. Sometimes, as in Germany, within-party comparisons show that the list route is more propitious for female candidates. In other cases, such as New Zealand, it seems that party is a key intervening variable: if there are more women elected via the lists, this is primarily because the parties that win most of their seats through the lists are more 'women-friendly' than those that dominate the SMD tier. In postcommunist countries with mixed systems, women fare slightly better in the SMD than the list component, leading to the conclusion that the electoral system in such countries is not an important determinant of female representation in parliament (Moser 2001).

Table 26.6 also makes it clear that there are many other factors at work, given the large variation within both categories: from 8 to 25 per cent in SMD systems; from 7 to 33 per cent in mixed systems; from 15 to 36 per cent in closed list systems; and from 12 to 38 per cent in open list systems. No one would suggest that the high levels of female representation in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, for example, are caused simply by the electoral system. Electoral systems may act, to borrow Sartori's terminology again, in a strong and constraining manner or in a feeble and enabling manner. When political culture is receptive to, or demands, something approaching gender equality, then open list PR or PR-STV (the 'enabling' systems, in this context) will allow the views of the population to prevail and result in a high proportion of women in parliament. When it is conservative, though, closed list systems are more likely to boost female representation, since only such systems allow party elites to determine the composition of the parliamentary party. Thus, it

Table 26.6 Female representation in parliament and impact of electoral system

Country	% women in parliament	Impact of electoral system
Australia	25	In past, electoral system seen as one reason for low levels of female representation
Canada	21	Often alleged to have negative effect, but uncertain, disputed
France	12	Electoral system seen as one cause of low level of female representation
India	8	Uncertain. Persistent calls to introduce legislation to reserve a proportion (such as a third) of seats for women candidates
UK	20	Electoral system seen as one cause of low level of female representation, though voters' lack of intra-party choice enables parties to increase female representation if they choose
USA	15	Limited in comparison with other factors such as decentralized candidate selection and importance of political entrepreneurship in candidacy
Germany	33	Some parties use closed lists to increase level of female representation. More women elected via lists than via SMDs
Hungary	9	Women have higher success rates from lists than from SMDs
Italy	12	Electoral system only a minor cause of low female representation. Women much more successful among list MPs (19%) than among SMD MPs (9%)
Japan	7	Low female representation attributed mainly to factors other than electoral system
New Zealand	28	New electoral system has made for more socio-demographically representative parliament. No significant difference between female representation via lists and via SMDs
Russia	10	Low female representation attributed mainly to factors other than electoral system. Slightly more women elected via SMDs than via lists
Israel	15	Not seen as important causal factor
South Africa	33	Facilitates parties wishing to increase number of female MPs
Spain	36	Has contributed to relatively high level of female representation
Austria	34	Not seen as important causal factor
Belgium	35	Not seen as important causal factor
Chile	12	Small district magnitude contributes to low female representation
Denmark	37	Facilitates high levels of female representation through opportunity for voters to cast votes for individual candidates; parties also put forward female candidates in order to attract such votes
Finland	38	Not seen as important causal factor
Netherlands	37	Not seen as important causal factor
Ireland	14	Not seen as important causal factor

Source for % women MPs: www.ipu.org, 3 May 2005; Women and Equality Unit (UK), July 2005. Due to changes over time, some figures may differ slightly from those in country chapters.

seems likely that in South Africa and Spain, for example, the number of women in parliament is higher than it would be if those countries employed open-list systems (cf. the experience of the Dominican Republic—see Sagás 2003: 798). However, using closed lists does not guarantee a higher percentage of women, as the examples of Israel, Italy, Japan, and Russia show. The decisions taken within parties are what really matter, though these decisions can be affected by the nature of the electoral system.

In most cases, country chapters do not identify the electoral system as a significant determinant of turnover levels. However, the fullest cross-national study of the subject concludes that the electoral system is an important variable, with turnover rates being markedly higher in PR systems than in SMD-based systems. Among PR systems, surprisingly, it is lower where voters have a chance to cast preference votes for individual candidates (Matland and Studlar 2004: 103–4). As the authors of the study note, there is scope for further research in this area.

Turning to MPs' activities, we could expect these to be systematically related to the electoral system because of the different nature of accountability provided by different systems. Under a closed-list system, for example, MPs seem to be entirely dependent upon their party's candidate selectors and could afford to disregard the voters; under an open list system or PR-STV, MPs need personal support from the voters and can be expected to be very responsive to them. It has been argued that legislators elected via lists in mixed systems may be even less responsive to voters than MPs in a pure closed-list system (Bawn and Thies 2003). Under single-member constituency systems we could expect MPs to be indifferent to voters, given that voters have no opportunity to express any intraparty choice, though some students of such systems nonetheless assume that these systems heighten the personal responsiveness of MPs to their constituents. Norris (2004: 238–43) examined survey data from thirty countries relating to citizens' recollection of the names of election candidates and the extent of their contact with MPs, and grouped these by electoral system category. She concludes that constituency service is highest in SMD-based systems and lowest in closed-list systems. However, the data revealed that within-category variation was much greater than between-category variation, which could suggest that the electoral system has only a limited effect on constituency service.

Table 26.7 shows there are detectable patterns, though these are least pronounced for the single-member constituency systems. In Canada, the UK, and the USA, the

Table 26.7 Impact on behaviour of MPs

Country	Impact on behaviour of MPs	Nature of impact
Australia	Strong	Prioritization of loyalty to party
Canada	Strong	Prioritization of constituency-related activity
France	Weak	
India	Weak	
UK	Moderate	Attributed responsibility for significant attention to constituency-related activity
USA	Strong	Prioritization of constituency-related activity
Germany	Moderate	Slightly more constituency focus by MPs elected from constituencies
Hungary	Moderate	Reinforces tendency towards strong party loyalty
Italy	Strong	Reorientation of focus of MPs away from clientelist representation towards prioritization of loyalty to party
Japan	Moderate	Reduction in independence of MPs
New Zealand	Weak	
Russia	Moderate	Greater constituency focus by MPs elected from constituencies
Israel	Moderate	Recent increase in individualistic behaviour by MPs—but probably unrelated to electoral system
South Africa	Strong	Leads to high degree of party loyalty and to complete disregard by MPs of constituency- or casework-related activities
Spain	Strong	Prioritization of loyalty to party and leadership, deprioritization of constituency-related activity
Austria	Medium	Slightly more constituency focus by MPs elected from constituencies
Belgium	Weak	Extent of constituency-related activities unrelated to electoral system
Chile	Medium	Reinforces tendencies both to party cohesion and to high attention to constituency-related activities
Denmark	Medium	Reinforces tendencies both to party cohesion and to high attention to constituency-related activities
Finland	Strong	Significant attention to constituency-related activity (though primary focus is on national legislation)
Netherlands	Strong	Prioritization of loyalty to party and of parliamentary activity, deprioritization of constituency-related activity
Ireland	Strong	Gives MPs strong incentive to respond to exogenously generated high demand for constituency-related activities

Impact on behaviour of MPs judged by country experts to be high / low regarding: focus on national parliamentary duties, loyalty to party generally, loyalty to party leaders, focus on constituency-related activity.

electoral system is perceived to shoulder a large part of the responsibility for ensuring that MPs keep in close touch with their voters. In Australia, the effect is seen as confirming loyalty to party as the prime concern for MPs, while in France, though *députés* undoubtedly do attach great importance to constituency representation, this is seen as resulting from factors other than the electoral system (Chapter 6).

Among PR systems, the broad expectations are clearly confirmed, with greater emphasis on constituency-related activities where open lists or PR-STV (the systems that produce intraparty electoral competition) are used than where the lists are closed. In some cases where MPs are elected by more than one route, those elected from small constituencies (Germany, Russia, Austria) seem to take more interest in constituency activities than those elected at higher tiers. The Italian case is notable because of the significant change in MPs' behaviour brought about by a change in the electoral system. Under the previous open-list PR system MPs were very active in locally related activities—though they were usually not praised for being assiduous constituency workers but, rather, criticized for what was seen as dysfunctional clientelistic behaviour. With the power to exercise intraparty choice removed from Italian voters by the post-1993 electoral system, MPs have become highly detached from their constituencies, to the extent that before each election many MPs are switched from one SMD to another where they are unknown (Chapter 12).

Three cases serve to remind us that the electoral system is not the only determinant of MPs' relationship with their voters. In Belgium, the volume of MPs' constituency work declined greatly during the 1990s, not because of a change in the electoral system but because the introduction of federalism meant that voters now had regional representatives to take their problems to. In the UK, MEPs elected under a closed list system in the 1999–2004 European Parliament undertook more constituency activity than their counterparts in open list countries, highlighting 'the importance of cultural differences in how the role of a representative is understood and practised' (Farrell and Scully 2003: 27). And in Israel the recent rise in legislator behaviour designed to appeal to particular groups of voters, such as the growth of private members' bills, cannot be directly attributed to the electoral system—though it might be indirectly attributed, in that, as we noted when discussing candidate selection, the lack of accountability by MPs to the electorate has led to pressure for a democratization of parties' internal candidate selection processes and in that way has provided MPs with recognizable and sizeable groups with whom they hope to curry favour by their behaviour as MPs. Israeli MPs behave under a closed-list system, then, much as critics of open lists expect open list MPs to behave, by promoting sectional rather than national interests, because of the open candidate selection process. Evidently, there is interaction between the electoral system and the candidate selection process: if both are closed or both are open we have a reasonable idea as to what to expect, but if candidate selection is entirely closed and controlled by the elite while the electoral system is open, or vice versa, our predictions can be less confident.

Despite these caveats, we can identify a clear relationship between electoral systems and MPs' behaviour, one that conflicts with Bogdanor's conclusion that

Table 26.8 Impact of electoral system upon cohesion of parliamentary party

Country	Level of cohesion	Impact of electoral system
Australia	High	Contributes to high cohesion
Canada	High	Not seen as a major factor
France	High	Limited in comparison with effect of other factors
India	Variation over time	Indirect
UK	Still high though declining slightly	Contributes to high cohesion
USA	Low	Electoral rules (not SMP specifically) seen as largely responsible
Germany	High	Not seen as important
Hungary	High	Contributes to high cohesion
Italy	Medium-high after initial fluidity	Contributing factor
Japan	Medium	New electoral system contributing to increase in LDP's previously very low cohesion
New Zealand	High	Not seen as important. Cohesion strong under previous electoral system and has remained so under current one—some splits and mergers during transition period
Russia	High—though parties have fluid boundaries	Electoral system has not increased cohesion to extent hoped by proponents
Israel	High though declining	Measures taken to bypass lack of MP accountability in electoral system have contributed to declining cohesion
South Africa	High	Closed list electoral system contributes to high cohesion by facilitating leadership control
Spain	Very high	Closed list electoral system contributes to high cohesion
Austria	High	Not seen as important
Belgium	Very high	Party leaders retained considerable control via almost closed lists. No detectable decrease in cohesion since adoption of open lists in 2003
Chile	High	Contributing factor
Denmark	High	Contributing factor, though the open list system used by most parties has a qualifying effect
Finland	Medium	Preferential voting seen as contributory factor to slightly less than complete cohesion
Netherlands	Very high	Contributing factor
Ireland	High	Not seen as important

Table 26.9 Government formation

Country	Characteristic form of government	Identifiability of government options during election campaigns
Australia	Single party or coalition between two near-permanent allies	Very high
Canada	Single-party government	Very high
France	Coalition between allies	High
India	Multiparty coalition dominated by one party	High identifiability of core options, though precise composition of alternative governments unclear
UK	Single-party	Very high
USA	N/a (presidential system)	—
Germany	Two-party coalition	High (though possibility remains of a grand coalition)
Hungary	Two-party coalition	High
Italy	Multiparty coalition	New electoral system responsible for great increase in identifiability of options
Japan	Two-party coalition	Incumbent coalition is identifiable option but potential alternatives are not (though are becoming clearer)
New Zealand	Single-party minority government or two-party coalition	Reasonably high but lower than under previous SMP system
Russia	N/a (presidential system)	—
Israel	Multiparty coalition	Low, partly due to high degree of party system fragmentation, itself partly attributable to electoral system
South Africa	ANC-dominated coalition	Very high, though not due to electoral system (no credible alternative to ANC-dominated coalition)
Spain	Single-party minority or majority government	Very high
Austria	Two-party coalition	High
Belgium	Multiparty coalition	Low
Chile	Multiparty coalition between near-permanent allies	High
Denmark	Multiparty coalition	Low
Finland	Multiparty oversized coalition	Low
Netherlands	Multiparty coalition	Low
Ireland	Two- or three-party coalition	Varies from high at some elections to low at others

Identifiability refers to voters' ability to identify the options for government and to choose between them.

'the electoral system is not a fundamental cause of variations in the focus of representation' (Bogdanor 1985: 299). The evidence from this book is consistent with the hypothesis that, other things being equal, open list PR and PR-STV encourage greater attention by MPs to constituency-related activities, closed list PR encourages MPs to prioritize party loyalty rather than constituency-related activities, and single-member constituency systems are broadly neutral in their effects.

The cohesion of parties in parliament is more of a constant than a variable (see Table 26.8). In nearly every case parliamentary party bloc voting is the norm (this is built into the rules in the Netherlands). Where cohesion is lower, as in the USA and Japan, the electoral system specifically is not seen as the prime cause. That is not to disregard the possibility of a link: closed lists in Spain, and open ones in Finland, are identified as factors contributing to very high, and not quite so high, levels of cohesion respectively. In Israel the relationship is, again, a complex one: the lack of accountability provided by the electoral system has led some of the parties to open up their candidate selection processes to a vote of all members, and this is held responsible for an increase in individualistic behaviour by MKs, eager to appeal to particular groups of members. There is, then, some degree of support for the hypothesis that when voters can choose among candidates of a party parliamentary cohesion tends to be lower—but, equally, there is no doubt that there are many other factors at work.

IMPACT ON GOVERNMENT FORMATION

Much conventional wisdom maintains that there is a definite link between electoral systems and government formation. PR—or so it holds—leads to coalitions, while single-member constituency systems lead to single-party government. Under the latter systems, the voters choose their government; under the former, government composition is decided after the election by negotiations among party leaders. In non-PR countries, the election results mark the end of the competition to form the next government; in PR countries, they merely mark the start of the second and probably more important phase of the government formation process. Identifiability—in other words, the voters' ability to identify the options on offer—is therefore seen to be affected by the electoral system (Powell 2000: 69–88). Under non-PR systems it is high, under PR systems it is often low—according to conventional wisdom.

Table 26.9 shows that, like most conventional wisdom, this is neither wholly true nor entirely groundless. In the non-PR systems, single-party government is indeed the norm, although even here there is variation. Whereas coalitions are unknown, and minority governments are rare, in Canada and the UK, both Australia and France have considerable experience of coalition government. It is true, though, that in both these cases the coalitions involve parties that are virtually joined at the hip (as in Australia) or, at least, have displayed an enduring pattern of alliance. In India, in contrast, there has been no single-party majority administration since Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government of 1984–9. In each of these five non-PR countries, though, identifiability of government options is high. Voters in most cases know in advance what the alternatives are and need not fear the emergence of a government

that they never realized was a possibility. Even in India, with around forty parties winning seats at elections, the options boil down to a BJP-dominated coalition or a Congress-dominated coalition.

Turning to the PR systems, coalition is certainly standard. Only in Spain are single-party governments the norm, though they have occurred occasionally in Japan and New Zealand and, some years back, in Austria and Ireland. In South Africa, since democratization one party has always won a majority of seats but, for political cultural reasons (a spirit of inclusiveness during a democratic transition), has preferred to take coalition partners, as explained in Chapter 17. Identifiability varies greatly between and occasionally within countries. In Germany, for example, at recent elections the voters have been faced with a clear choice between an SPD–Green government or a CDU–CSU–FDP one. Since one of these alternatives has won a majority of seats at every election for over twenty years, the voters have not been presented with any unpleasant surprises—though at each election there is speculation that if neither does win a majority (because of seats won by the still uncoalitionable PDS, for example) a grand coalition between the two main parties could yet emerge. Despite the stereotype that is painted by opponents of the very principle of coalition, there are quite a number of other PR countries in which the identifiability of the alternatives when the voters make their choice is reasonably high.

In other cases, the voters (and indeed the parties) are in the dark about what options are on offer. In Denmark, for example, the parties are deliberately vague about their coalition preferences, so that they can keep their options open whatever the seat distribution in the new parliament turns out to be (Chapter 22). The voters accept that they can only contribute to the strengthening of their party's voice in any negotiations; they cannot determine the partners it might choose to coalesce with. In situations where the voters do not grant their chosen party this much freedom of manoeuvre, the consequences can be serious. In 1996, the unexpected decision of New Zealand First to ally with National rather than, as expected, with Labour led to a short-term decline in the legitimacy of the new electoral system. Since then, though, voters have had a pretty clear idea of the alternatives. In Ireland Labour's decision to coalesce with Fianna Fáil after the 1992 election in which it had vehemently criticized that party brought about an abiding slump in its support—yet at other Irish elections the alternatives on offer are clearly identifiable. Another dimension of variability could be termed 'asymmetric' identifiability (following Powell 2000: 74): in some countries, such as Japan, one potential government option is clear but alternatives are not. Overall, then, PR is indeed much more likely to be associated with coalition government than plurality or majority systems are, and the identifiability of options does tend to be lower, but there is considerable variation among PR countries.

THE POLITICS OF ELECTORAL REFORM

It is often assumed that one obstacle to changing an electoral system is that those elected under the existing system are likely both to wield a decisive influence over

the issue of change and to have a strong attachment to the system that saw them elected. As Richard Katz has pointed out in Chapter 3, the second assumption in particular is simplistic; there are several rational (and some irrational) grounds on which parties that are successful under one electoral system might still prefer a different one.

Still, those parties that benefit from an existing system and fear that they would fare worse under an alternative can be expected to resist change. In Hungary, for example, the large parties benefit from the system, and since it cannot be changed without their support it seems likely to endure. In the UK, the government party, almost by definition, will be the main beneficiary of the huge seat bonus that the SMP system usually gives to the largest party, and can thus be expected to see the merits of the system much more clearly than its defects; as pointed out in Chapter 8 (p. 174), the power to change the system and the will to do so are inversely related. Certainly the Labour Party was much more exercised by the injustices of the system while it was enduring eighteen years of Conservative rule than when, from 1997 onwards, it started winning over 60 per cent of the seats on less than 45 per cent of the votes. In Israel, in contrast, it is the small parties that resist change; despite the plethora of outside voices urging the kind of reform that would reduce the country's chronic multipartism, minor parties are unlikely to vote themselves into oblivion. In both Israel and Germany, and perhaps elsewhere too, an element of the prisoner's dilemma has been identified: each of a group of parties for whom change would be rational, and who collectively have the power to bring it about, do not press for it out of a fear that other members of the group would defect and present themselves as the friends of those parties that stand to lose by such change. The result is that in most cases there is little or no likelihood of electoral system change (see Table 26.10).

Another barrier to change in most cases is the electorate. Electoral systems, alas, are not always at the forefront of the public's mind. In very few countries does the electoral system become a high salience issue; usually the public regards the subject as essentially technical and sees other issues as more worthy of attention from elected officials. Electoral reform is, perhaps, more likely to become a public concern in non-PR countries where the consequences of the existing system—most notably, high levels of disproportionality—are more obvious than where some kind of PR is used. The public may also start to care if the existing electoral system does not provide much personal accountability from MPs to voters. Moving from less accountable systems (such as closed list) to more accountable ones (such as open list or PR-STV) is always likely to be acceptable to the voters, but there is a kind of 'ratchet effect' under which it will be very difficult to persuade the electorate ever to consent to a change designed to give it less power to choose its representatives. Italy in 1993, when the voters not only accepted but all but demanded an electoral system that would deprive them of intraparty choice (Chapter 12), is the exception to this. Similarly, while attempts have been made to establish the conditions under which elites are likely to favour a move from an SMD system to PR (e.g. Boix 1999), there is hardly any movement in the other direction to explain (Lijphart

Table 26.10 Electoral reform as a political issue

Country	Prospects for electoral reform	Comments
Australia	Low	Low salience for public, little discontent among parties
Canada	Medium	Persistent low-level pressure but elite opposed to change; some movement at provincial level
France	Medium	Major reform favoured by left; quite high likelihood of minor reform by right
India	Low	Low salience for parties and public
UK	Medium	Creeping proportionalization of voting systems, many actors favour PR—but government of the day invariably opposed
USA	Low	Status quo favoured by parties and incumbents
Germany	Low	No significant actors proposing change
Hungary	Low	Many proposals, but largest parties opposed to fundamental change
Italy	Medium	Pressure from government parties for change in more majoritarian direction
Japan	Low	Gradual party adaptation to current system
New Zealand	Medium	Strong partisan opposition continues; future referendum likely
Russia	Medium	Generally a low salience issue for parties and people—though open presidential preference for abolition of SMD component and adoption of pure closed list system with high thresholds
Israel	Low	Untouchable institution in eyes of many actors; attempts to provide accountability tend to be made by circumventing electoral system
South Africa	Medium	Continuing extra-parliamentary pressure for reform that would increase accountability of MPs
Spain	Low	Low salience issue for parties and people
Austria	Low	Little discontent with present system
Belgium	Low	Electoral reform debates culminated in adoption of current system, no further reform likely soon
Chile	Medium	Reform favoured by the left, but institutional barriers to change are high
Denmark	Low	Hardly any discontent with current system
Finland	Low	Little discontent with current system
Netherlands	High	Agreement among major parties on need to provide geographical representation
Ireland	Low	Low salience issue, high institutional barriers to change

1994: 52; Colomer 2004). However, Shugart argues that the pressure for change will not be in only one direction (towards greater proportionality and more accountability by individual MPs). He suggests that an existing electoral system that is 'extreme' (too far from the centre), in whichever direction, on one or both of two dimensions (which he terms interparty and intraparty), is 'inherently prone to reformist pressures' (Shugart 2003: 25).

The durability of many electoral systems is also aided by high barriers to change. In some countries the electoral system is constitutionalized, requiring either a supermajority in parliament or the consent of the people in a referendum to change it. Even when this is not the case, so the electoral system law can in principle be changed as easily as any other law, there may be political–cultural impediments. Parties that try to change the ground rules for partisan advantage may be punished by the electorate. Changing the electoral system may be a step that, by general consent, requires the agreement of a significant proportion of the opposition as well as of the government bloc (this was the case in Italy and Japan), or it may need a referendum even if this is not prescribed in writing anywhere (UK). In France, it is true, governments have changed the system for blatantly partisan motives without causing indignation among the electorate, but the demos in most other countries is less indulgent.

Still, electoral systems are sometimes changed. Occasionally this happens after a thorough and open debate and with the full participation of the people, as in New Zealand. More commonly, party elites manage the process of change, perhaps in response to some prodding from the public (Italy, Japan, Netherlands) or as virtually autonomous actors (France). A national electoral system may be 'reformed from below'—like woodworm undermining the structure of a sideboard, leaving the surface apparently unaltered, before suddenly the whole thing caves in. This may be happening in the UK, where many subnational units are moving away from SMP, and there are similar rumblings in Canada, leading to the possibility that the national parliamentary electoral system will become an anomaly in each country and finally undergo change itself.

As our earlier discussion emphasized, the consequences of electoral systems are to some degree country specific. This is another reason why reformers encounter resistance: it is never possible to be certain just what effects a particular electoral system change may have. As Table 26.11 shows, the record is mixed. Whether a reform has the intended effects or not depends largely on how realistic the aims were. Attempting to adjust the shape of the party system by increasing or reducing the likely degree of disproportionality is more achievable than goals that entail completely reshaping the party system, eliminating corruption, or changing the style of political competition.

WHICH ELECTORAL SYSTEM IS BEST?

For those people—perhaps around 99.9 per cent of the world's population—who regard electoral systems as simply a tool to do a job, the only question they really

Table 26.11 Consequences of electoral system changes within established regime

Country	Year	Substance	Initiated by	Aim of reformers	Outcome: had intended effect?
France	1951	Introduction of coexistence system (different rules in different parts of country)	Centre, governing parties	Boost governing parties and penalize communist party in particular	Yes in 1951, but not in 1956
France	1958	Reversion to two-round system	President	Militate against disciplined parties, favour local notables and centrist parties	Yes, for a while at least, though parties proved more disciplined than de Gaulle expected
France	1986	Replacement of two-round system by PR	Government party	Minimize government party's seat losses at following election	Yes
France	1988	Reversion to two-round system	Government party	Give winning party(-ies) large seat bonus; penalize far-left and far-right parties	Yes
Italy	1994	Introduction of mixed system	Voters, many parties	Bring about alternation of governments, reduce number of parties, abolish intraparty electoral competition	Largely, but no reduction in number of parties
Japan	1996	Introduction of mixed system	Most political parties	Reduce corruption, promote party-centred rather than candidate-centred elections, produce two-party system with alternation in government	Only to very limited degree
Malta	1987	Rule preventing any party other than largest in votes from obtaining overall majority of seats	Government party under opposition pressure	Re-establish legitimacy of election process	Yes
New Zealand	1996	Replacement of SMP by mixed system	Popular pressure, smaller parties	Increase accuracy of representation	Yes

Note: The year refers to the first election held under the new system.

want to know the answer to is: which one is best? If any of those people are consulting this book, indeed, they may have skipped the previous 567 pages and turned first to this page in the hope of finding the answer without having to wade through a lot of information that they do not feel they need to know. A potential purchaser of a mobile phone, after all, does not want to have to suffer an instruction course in telecommunications theory before being equipped to buy one—they simply want a quick guide to the best one.

In their hearts, though, even such readers are probably already aware that the answer to the question cannot be a simple one. If there really was one 'best' electoral system, this would surely have been adopted nearly everywhere. Indeed, the same is true where almost any kind of choice is concerned. Anyone going into a shop and asking for the 'best' mobile phone on the market will soon find that things are not quite so straightforward. Quite apart from considerations of cost, some phones do better on some criteria (such as the range of functions they possess) and others do better on other criteria (such as compactness or aesthetic appeal). In short, when making any kind of choice we have to decide on the criteria that we will employ in order to reach a decision, and assess each option with respect to each criterion. If we are dealing with a non-trivial topic, we can expect to find that there will be trade-offs between different criteria. In other words, which electoral system is 'best' depends on just what we want from an electoral system.

Not surprisingly, those who study electoral systems are not in agreement about which if any is the 'best' system. David Farrell, reviewing the preferences of electoral systems specialists, observes that there is considerable variation (Farrell 2001: 181–3, 207). He identifies writers such as André Blais and Louis Massicotte as favouring single-member constituency systems, while Donald Horowitz and Ben Reilly have expressed sympathy for AV and Giovanni Sartori is a supporter of 2RS. He himself, along with Andrew Reynolds and Rein Taagepera, can see particular merit in PR-STV, while Matthew Søberg Shugart and Martin Wattenberg regard mixed systems as at least holding out the promise of providing the best of both worlds (Shugart and Wattenberg 2003*a*: 595). Arend Lijphart, the doyen of the field of electoral systems research, regards the Danish system (open-list PR) as the closest to his ideal, even though he would prefer its lists to be a little less open than they are (see his Foreword to this book). Analysing survey responses from 170 electoral systems specialists, Bowler et al. (2005) found that compensatory mixed systems were the most highly ranked, closely followed by PR-STV with open list PR third. SMP was one of the more lowly ranked systems despite having a hard core of strong supporters, while SNTV was by a long way the least highly regarded.

What criteria should we employ when evaluating electoral systems? This is ground over which both eminent academics and practical policy-makers have trodden, and in Table 26.12 we summarize the criteria identified by a number of those approaching this task. It should be borne in mind that our summary of the criteria concentrates on what we judge to be the most important criteria identified by the authors and that in some cases it paraphrases the authors' own words. It should also be emphasized that the authors in question are not necessarily endorsing the

Table 26.12 Criteria for judging electoral systems

Mackenzie (1958: 69–71)
- quality of MPs elected
- close links between MPs and constituents
- effective parliament (including sustaining stable government)
- disciplined parties
- accurate representation of opinion
- is perceived by public as legitimate

Lakeman (1974: 28)
- accuracy of representation
- government according to wishes of majority
- election of MPs well suited to function of government
- strong and stable government

Royal Commission on the [New Zealand] Electoral System (1986: 11–12)
- accuracy of representation of voters' preferences
- microcosmic representation
- parties that play integrative role and take account of national interest
- effective representation of constituents by MPs
- effective government
- effective parliament that can scrutinize government
- effective, cohesive parties
- system and its outcomes regarded as legitimate by voters

Katz (1997: 280–96)
- stable and effective government
- cohesive, disciplined parties
- governments command majority electoral support
- accuracy of representation of voters' preferences
- personal accountability of MPs
- opportunity for voters to eject governments from office
- maximizes participation opportunities for voters

Sartori (1997: 55–69)
- stable effective government
- quality of MPs
- links between MPs and constituents
- penalizing extremist and anti-system parties
- accuracy of representation

Independent Commission on the Voting System (Jenkins Report) (1998: 1*)
- broad proportionality
- need for stable government
- extension of voter choice
- maintenance of a link between MPs and geographical constituencies

(*Continues*)

Table 26.12 (*Continued*)

Powell (2000: 10–17)
- opportunity for voters to eject governments from office
- enable voters to fix responsibility for government decisions
- enable voters to identify government options
- cohesive parties
- take into account views of as many voters as possible
- accuracy of representation of voters' preferences

Independent Commission on PR (2003: 29–32)
- proportionality
- voter choice
- voter support for electoral system
- microcosmic representation
- turnout
- behaviour of MPs
- accountability of government to electorate

Shugart and Wattenberg (2003*b*: 582)
- government stability
- identifiability of government options
- accuracy of representation of voters' preferences
- representation of local interests
- personal accountability of individual MPs
- nationally-oriented parties
- coherent and disciplined parties

* These four criteria were prescribed for the Jenkins Commission by the British government.

criteria they identify; they merely observe that these are criteria by which electoral systems have been, or might reasonably be, judged.

Within these multiple lists of criteria, a number recur with particular frequency or at any rate seem indisputably to be positive qualities. We list these in Table 26.13.[7] Some deal with process, others with outcomes. Accuracy of representation (proportionality) is virtually universally identified as a key criterion upon which electoral systems should be judged. A second desirable feature of an electoral system is that it

[7] Some readers may be alarmed at the lack of justification that we offer for this list. We can say only that a full discussion of the criteria that should be employed when deciding upon a list of the criteria to be employed to evaluate electoral systems would not only raise problems of infinite regress but would warrant book-length treatment in itself. (Those readers in search of such a discussion could very profitably read Katz 1997; Lijphart 1999; and Powell 2000.) In addition, the list is not particularly contentious: few people would object to an electoral system that was guaranteed to maximize all the qualities listed, could such a system be found. Of course, everyone wants an electoral system to be 'fair', but defining this in measurable terms is not straightforward—see Blau 2004. It should also be noted that the task of designing an electoral system for a transitional or democratizing political system might require rather different criteria (see, for example, Reynolds and Reilly 1997; Reilly 2001; Birch et al. 2002; Sisk and Reynolds 1998; Lijphart and Waisman 1996).

Table 26.13 Eight key criteria for evaluating electoral systems

- accuracy of representation of voters' preferences
- socio-demographic representation in parliament
- personal accountability of MPs to constituents
- maximization of participation opportunities for voters
- cohesive and disciplined parties
- stable effective government
- identifiability of government options
- opportunity for voters to eject governments from office

promotes microcosmic representation by increasing the likelihood that parliament will contain roughly the same proportion of members of gender, ethnic, and other groups as these make up in the population as a whole. Personal responsiveness and accountability by MPs to constituents rather than to party apparatchiks are widely considered to be virtues in moderation—though we should note concerns about hyper-personalism (Shugart 2003: 29). Enabling voters to participate as fully as possible in choosing their representatives is another widely cited criterion. The promotion of cohesive and disciplined parties rests on the assumption, which is difficult to dispute, that parties are essential components of a modern democracy, despite the dreams of writers such as Moisei Ostrogorski about the possibility of politics without parties (Ranney 1954: 113–33; Lipset 1969: 363–411). The idea of strong, stable, and effective government is, along with the desire for broad proportionality, just about universally cited as an important criterion, even if each of the adjectives is open to subjective interpretation. Voters' ability to identify the options for government and make a meaningful choice on this basis is also generally seen as a desideratum. Finally, the other side of the coin of identifiability is 'ejectability', the voters' ability to 'throw the rascals out' if they wish.

Any attempt to 'score' each type of system on each of these criteria is bound to be crudely simplistic, inadequately justified, and highly contentious. Still, since we have come this far we may as well attempt the exercise, and Table 26.14 seeks to sum up the position.

On the first criterion, proportionality, the SMD systems fare worst because of the high number of votes that are 'wasted' on losing candidates, though the record of AV in Australia is not quite as poor as that of SMP and 2RS where they are used. Under any kind of PR the number of wasted votes is relatively small, provided district magnitude is not too small and the threshold is not too high. Mixed parallel systems are 'worse' in this respect than mixed compensatory ones, since the allocation of the list seats takes no account of the disproportionalities created by the single-member tier. All PR systems score well on this criterion, though PR-STV may warrant a slightly lower score since in practice it seems to require the use of relatively low district magnitude, which, as we know, is itself a prime source of disproportionality.

Table 26.14 Ratings of eight electoral system types on eight criteria

Criterion	SMP	AV	2RS	Mixed compensatory	Mixed parallel	Closed list PR	Open list PR	PR-STV
1. Accuracy of representation of voters' preferences	– –	–	– –	++	+	++	++	+
2. Socio-demographic representation in parliament	o	o	o	o	o	+	o	o
3. Personal accountability of MPs to constituents	+	+	+	o	o	– –	++	++
4. Maximization of participation opportunities for voters	– –	–	–	o	o	– –	+	++
5. Cohesive and disciplined parties	o	+	o	+	+	+	o	o
6. Stable effective government	++	++	o	o	o	o	o	o
7. Identifiability of government options	++	++	++	+	o	o	o	+
8. Opportunity for voters to eject governments from office	++	++	++	+	o	o	o	o

Note:
++ = strongly positive effect
+ = positive effect
– = negative effect
– – = strongly negative effect
o = neutral, or too much variation within category to make meaningful judgement, or effect seen as minor in comparison with that of other factors.

On the second criterion, it seems that electoral systems may have less significance than is sometimes assumed. Single-member constituency systems are generally seen as unfavourable to women, but in practice there is considerable variation among the countries using these systems. As we noted earlier (pp. 555–7), whether open list or closed list systems are more favourable to women will depend mainly on whether elite political culture is more conservative or less conservative than that of the public as a whole. On the assumption that party elites are unlikely to be less keen to see a diverse parliamentary group than party voters are, and may well be more keen, we suggest that on balance closed list systems are the most likely to promote a diverse parliamentary group, but with the important proviso that the impact will vary from case to case.[8]

The accountability of individual MPs to voters varies markedly. Under closed-list systems there is little scope for such accountability: incumbents' re-election chances depend entirely on where the candidate selectors place them within the party list. However, there are a couple of qualifications to this. First, when district magnitude is very small it will be clear which specific individual candidates are in contention for the last seat, thus giving candidates an incentive to be responsive to voters, as is the case in Hong Kong (Ma and Choy 2003: 360, 362; see also Table 2.1 above and associated discussion). In addition, the candidate selectors' ranking of individuals on the list may well be influenced by perceptions of their appeal to voters. We know that under list systems that allow voters to express a preference but are de facto closed (in the sense that voters' preferences have little or no chance of affecting the outcome), attracting preference votes at one election helps to secure a higher place on the list at the next one—this occurs in Austria, for example (see Chapter 19). Thus, voter appeal, and hence accountability, of MPs may still play a part even under electoral systems that seem to make it irrelevant.

In single-member constituency systems MPs might appear to be largely unaccountable, in that each party can be seen to be offering a one-candidate closed list, allowing voters no opportunity to make a choice among its nominees. However, as we have seen, it is striking that some analysts often do regard such systems as encouraging a focus on the constituency MP, and it might be argued that if MPs themselves believe (many political scientists' views notwithstanding) that their prospects of re-election depend significantly on the voters' evaluations of them personally and act accordingly, this constitutes personal accountability. For this reason, mixed systems also supply a degree of personal accountability, given that some MPs are elected from single-member constituencies—though since others are elected from closed lists (see note 8) they cannot overall be seen as either positive or negative on this criterion. Open-list PR and PR-STV rate highly on this dimension.[9]

Opportunities for voters to participate fully are lowest under SMP and closed list systems, where the voter can merely say 'Yes' to one option and 'No' to the rest. The voters' input is slightly greater under the other SMD systems, though many voters' preferences will have no impact on the outcome. Under mixed systems voters do at least get to express a choice for a constituency MP and for a party list. Open-list systems extend the participation opportunities, while PR-STV scores highest of all on this dimension, allowing the voter to convey rich information on his or her

[8] For this reason, mixed systems are also likely to be favourable because in practice all mixed systems covered in this book employ closed lists. However, since the lists used in mixed systems could in principle just as well be open lists (as they are in Lithuania, for example), we give mixed systems a neutral ranking.

[9] Assuming that other factors do not operate to negate this accountability by weakening the relevance of the voters' choice. An example is the tendency of elected Belgian MPs not to take up their mandate, which instead passes on to a candidate not selected by the voters. As shown in Chapter 20 (p. 423), thirty-seven of the 150 MPs elected in Belgium in 2003 did not serve. Of course, that is not a problem that arises only under open list systems: in South Africa under closed-list PR, a quarter of the MPs elected in 1994 had 'resigned', not always voluntarily, by 1998 (Chapter 17).

preferences. Empirical evidence suggests that, other things being equal, PR increases the likelihood of voter participation (Blais and Carty 1990). One estimate, based on a survey of postcommunist countries, is that a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of seats elected by PR leads to a 1 per cent increase in turnout (Kostadinova 2003: 754). Whether preferential voting specifically makes a difference remains an open question: one study concludes that it depends on the resources (education, income, interest in politics) that citizens have, in that it increases the likelihood of voting among 'advantaged' citizens and reduces it among 'disadvantaged' ones (Anduiza Perea 2002: 663–4).

Cohesion and discipline within parliamentary parties—the section of parties where discipline really matters—is almost universally high, and in most cases this is attributed mainly to factors other than the electoral system, as we have already discussed. Still, those systems based on closed lists may be even more likely to promote loyalty by MPs to the party line than other systems.

Stable and effective government, too, may not be so closely linked to the electoral system as some of the arguments of the mid-twentieth century assumed. It is true that governments in SMP systems (apart from India) and in Australia are nearly all single-party majority administrations that survive for full terms. Mid-term government collapses or early dissolutions are more likely to occur under other systems, but it would be hard to point to any kind of electoral system that seems to promote governmental instability. It is true that coalition is the norm under PR systems, but few argue any more that coalitions are inherently ineffective or unstable, and indeed the empirical evidence suggests that there is not, as was once believed, a trade-off between stability and proportionality (Farrell 2001: 204–6). Lijphart concludes that coalition government, far from being less effective than single-party government, actually performs better on almost every dimension (Lijphart 1999: 258–300; see also Powell 2000).

Identifiability of government options is a criterion on which single-member constituency systems rate highly. Characteristically, at elections under such systems, voters know exactly what the alternatives are. Two kinds of PR systems, namely mixed compensatory and PR-STV, give parties an incentive to form alliances before the election and thus make it more likely that voters will be confronted with discernible alternatives. Under mixed compensatory systems a certain amount of implicit 'vote-swapping' occurs—in other words, some supporters of small parties give their SMD vote to the candidate of the large party that is their ally, while some supporters of large parties give their list vote to their allied small party to help it over the threshold. Under PR-STV, the seat totals of a group of allied parties can be significantly affected by whether they have, or have not, called on their supporters to award lower preferences to other parties in the alliance. Even in these cases, though, there is always the possibility that neither of the identifiable pre-election options wins a majority of seats, in which case the voters may end up with a government that hardly anyone expected. Under other kinds of PR, there is considerable variation.

Finally, and in much the same way, it is much easier for voters to root out unpopular governments in their entirety under single-member constituency systems than under PR (with the partial and contingent exception of mixed compensatory systems). When single-party government is the norm, every government must by definition be re-elected or rejected. When coalition is the norm, though—and especially when identifiability is low—governments are not unitary actors, and there is a good chance that even when a government as a whole fails to secure re-election, it is succeeded by one containing some of the parties that made up the old one.

So, after all that, which is best? Needless to say, there is no simple answer to the question. Quite apart from the scope for disagreement as to how different electoral systems rate on these criteria, there will be no consensus as to how to rank order the criteria themselves. Some might argue that other criteria, not considered here, are more important than some we have included. In addition, as we have pointed out throughout this chapter, the effects of electoral systems on politics are sometimes difficult to distinguish from the other factors affecting it, and a system that has a certain effect in one society at a given time may not have the same effect in another context.

Still, even allowing for these and other qualifications, Table 26.14 does offer some scope for conclusions. The single-member constituency systems tend to score very high on some criteria and very low on others; just as they are accused of discouraging consensus within their host societies, so these systems are more likely to be loved or hated by analysts than regarded as an acceptable compromise or a happy medium. In contrast, mixed compensatory systems and PR-STV score very highly on some dimensions while avoiding the negatives attached to most other systems. Mixed parallel systems, though, do not emerge as an attractive option, having no discernible advantages over compensatory ones.

Our conclusion, then, must lie somewhere between, on the one hand, a firm declaration that a particular electoral system is 'best' and, on the other, a shrug of the shoulders and a retreat into complete relativism. Just as with mobile phones, it is impossible to say 'whatever you're looking for, this one is best'. On the other hand, it *is* possible to say: 'if you want something that is likely to produce certain specified outcomes, this is the model that best fits your prescription'. Those who value stable and ejectable government, and identifiability of alternatives, above all else, even at the expense of performance on several other criteria, will be attracted by a single-member constituency system. Those for whom a high degree of proportionality and disciplined parties are the transcendent virtues will favour a closed-list system in a nationwide constituency. Those prioritizing proportionality, a high degree of voter participation, and personal accountability of MPs will logically gravitate towards PR-STV or open-list PR. Mixed compensatory systems score well on nearly every criterion. Beyond doubt, the choice of a particular electoral system will make certain patterns of politics more likely and make others less likely. As we asserted at the start: electoral systems matter. The contributions to this book enable us to understand more clearly in what ways they matter.

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Appendix A

The mechanics of electoral systems

Although virtually every country's electoral system has some unique characteristics, a few common ideas underpin the great majority of seat allocation methods. There are many different ways of classifying electoral systems, and one of the simplest is to distinguish those based entirely on single-seat constituencies and those based either wholly or partly on multimember constituencies.

1 SINGLE-SEAT CONSTITUENCIES

These may be filled by any of a range of different methods, but three predominate. These are:

(i) the single-member plurality (SMP) system, also known as first-past-the-post, as used in four of the countries covered in this book: Canada, India, the UK and the USA;
(ii) the alternative vote (AV), also known as instant run-off, as used in Australia;
(iii) the two-round system (2RS), also known as the double-ballot or run-off system, as employed in France.

We shall describe each of these in turn.

1.1 SMP system

This can be seen as the simplest and most straightforward method of filling a single seat. Voters cast a vote by indicating their support for one of the candidates, and the seat is awarded to whichever candidate receives a plurality of the votes—in other words, has more votes than any other candidate, whether or not this amounts to a majority of all votes.

For example, overleaf is the result of the St Ives constituency in the British general election of 2001.

Here, the Labour candidate is elected, by virtue of having received more votes than any other candidate.

This system is simple and straightforward, but is liable to lead to the election of candidates who do not have majority support, and it produces parliaments in which the distribution of seats may not reflect particularly closely the distribution of votes at the election. In addition, some voters may conclude that there is no point voting for their most-preferred candidate, since this would amount to a wasted vote as the