

Choosing Electoral Systems

David Farrell

University of Manchester

[David.Farrell@man.ac.uk]

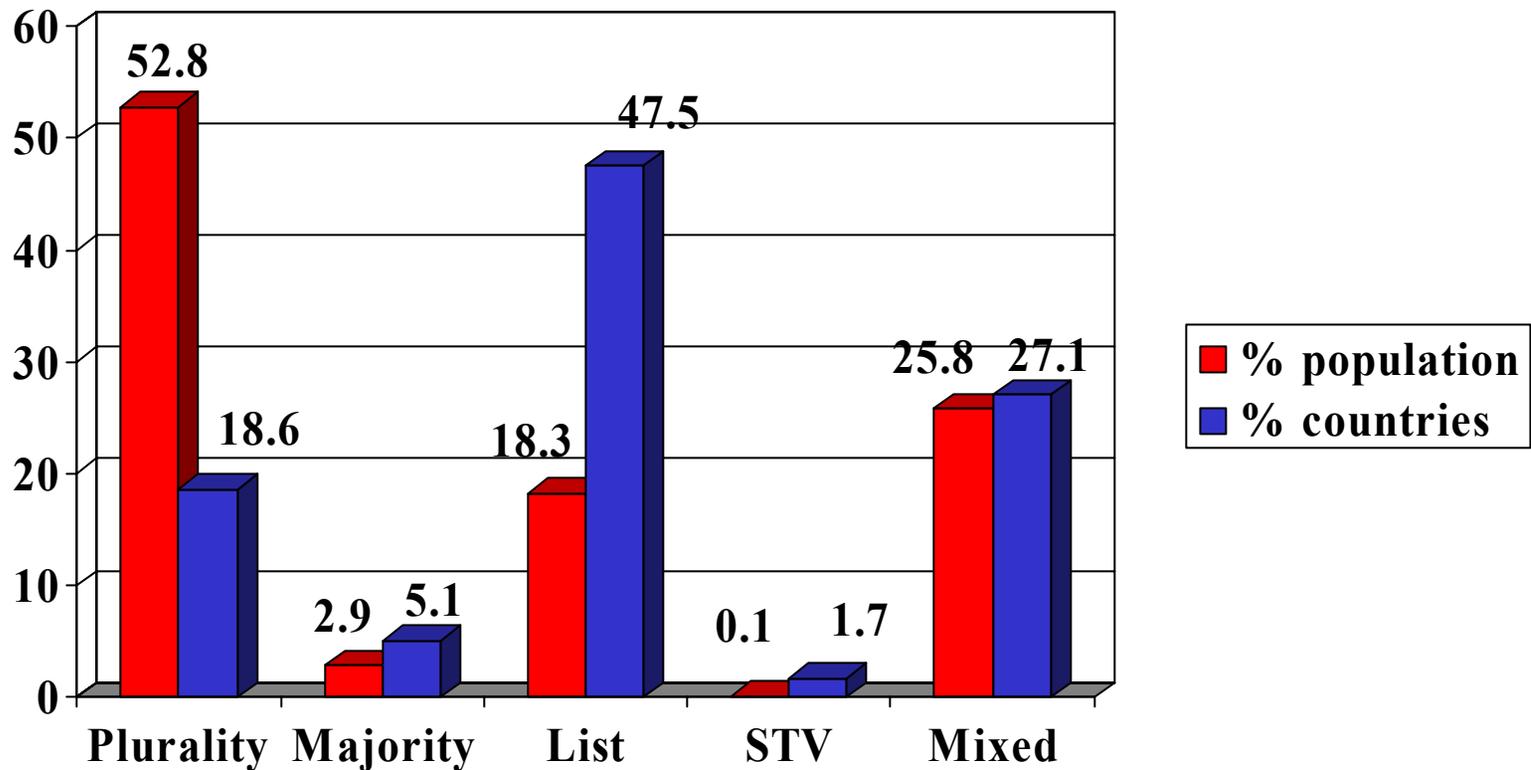
Structure of Presentation

1. Electoral systems and change
2. Electoral system design in post-Communist democracies
3. Electoral system reform in established democracies
4. Choosing new systems
5. Have the new systems worked as expected

1.) Electoral systems and change

- Used not be much to see or say
- Now...
 - New democracies
 - Electoral reform in established democracies
 - Experimentation with new electoral systems

The Popularity of the 5 Electoral System Families



2.) Electoral system design in the post-Communist democracies

- Context
 - Zero-stage/tabula rasa
 - Focus on contestation, not participation
 - Parties weakly institutionalized
 - Uncertainty over outcomes
- Decision-making processes
 - Wide list of actors
 - Inclusive process (round tables)
 - Some reference to the public (Slovenia)

Evolution of Electoral Systems in Post-communist Europe

	<i>First election</i>
Albania	Maj.
Bosnia	List
Bulgaria	Mixed
Croatia	Mixed
Czech Rep	List
Estonia	STV
Hungary	Mixed
Latvia	List
Lithuania	Mixed
Macedonia	Maj.
Moldova	List
Poland	List
Romania	List
Russia	Mixed
Slovakia	List
Slovenia	List
Ukraine	Maj.
Yugoslavia	List

- Issues

- Help ‘parties’
- Facilitate minorities
- Nature of parliamentary representation

Evolution of Electoral Systems in Post-communist Europe

	<i>First election</i>	<i>2002</i>
Albania	Maj.	Mixed
Bosnia	List	List
Bulgaria	Mixed	List
Croatia	Mixed	List
Czech Rep	List	List
Estonia	STV	List
Hungary	Mixed	Mixed
Latvia	List	List
Lithuania	Mixed	Mixed
Macedonia	Maj.	Mixed
Moldova	List	List
Poland	List	List
Romania	List	List
Russia	Mixed	Mixed
Slovakia	List	List
Slovenia	List	List
Ukraine	Maj.	Mixed
Yugoslavia	List	List

Subsequent reforms

‘Sticky’ systems

Vested interests &
lesson learning

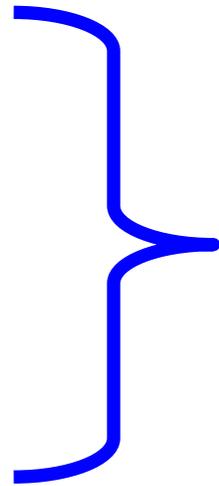
Use of Legal Thresholds in Post-communist Europe

	<i>First election</i>	<i>2002</i>
Albania		2.5%*
Bosnia		
Bulgaria	4%	4%
Croatia	3%	5%
Czech Rep	5%	5%*
Estonia		
Hungary	4%	5%
Latvia	4%	5%
Lithuania	4%	5%
Macedonia		
Moldova	4%	6%
Poland		5%*
Romania		5%*
Russia	5%	5%
Slovakia	3%	5%*
Slovenia		4%
Ukraine		4%
Yugoslavia	5%	5%

* Higher levels for coalitions

Election Outcomes in Post-Communist (List) Systems

	Dispropor.	Eff. no. parl. parties
Bosnia	4.86	7.29
Bulgaria	7.09	2.92
Croatia	5.48	2.71
Czech R.	4.44	3.70
Estonia	4.52	5.50
Latvia	4.82	5.49
Moldova	16.29	1.85
Poland	6.36	2.94
Romania	8.50	3.57
Slovakia	2.92	4.76
Slovenia	1.49	4.55
Yugoslavia	13.20	3.12

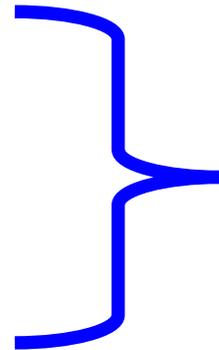


Av. Dispropor. = 6.7

Av. no. parl. Parties = 4.1

Election Outcomes in Post-Communist (Mixed) Systems

	Dispropor.	Eff. no. parl. parties
Albania	8.04	2.07
Armenia	5.37	3.97
Georgia	9.93	2.36
Hungary	7.65	4.00
Lithuania	7.18	6.51
Macedonia	14.93	3.95
Russia	6.10	4.76
Ukraine	9.49	5.49



Av. Dispropor. = 8.6

Av. no. parl. Parties = 4.0

3.) Electoral system reform in established democracies

- Large scale electoral reform used to be a rarity
 - Dieter Nohlen (1984): occurs only in ‘extraordinary historical circumstances’
 - There were some exceptions to this norm (e.g. France)
 - Suddenly, all changed in the early 1990s: New Zealand, Italy, Japan, Venezuela (and Israel’s directly elected prime minister)
 - Regional electoral reform: UK, Canada

- New Zealand
 - Unpopular governments; economic recession; anomalous election results
 - 1986 Royal Commission proposes MMP
 - Referendums in 1992 & 1993
- Italy
 - Political scandal in 1980s/90s
 - 1993 (abrogative) referendum changes Senate system to mixed
 - Government changes lower house system to mixed
- Japan
 - Political scandal in 1980s/90s
 - 1989, LDP's advisory committee proposes a mixed system
 - 1994, new coalition government changes system to mixed

- Commonalities?
 - Referendums in 2 cases (but for different purposes)
 - Role of a commission/committee in 2 cases
 - All happen within months of each other: NZ (1993); Japan (1994); Italy (1993)
 - Different starting points
 - NZ: SMP (non-proportional); Italy: PR (proportional); Japan: SNTV (semi-proportional)
 - Result: similar but different
 - All mixed systems; but only NZ is proportional

- Causes?
 - Electoral change (weakening of voter alignments)
 - Government failures; political scandals
 - Lesson-learning from new democracies

- Goals
 - Reduce hold of dominant parties
 - Italy: strengthen government stability (‘become British’)
 - Japan: reduce candidate-based corruption
 - New Zealand: open up the system

- Consequences

- Parties

- PR produces more parties in NZ; no change in Italy.

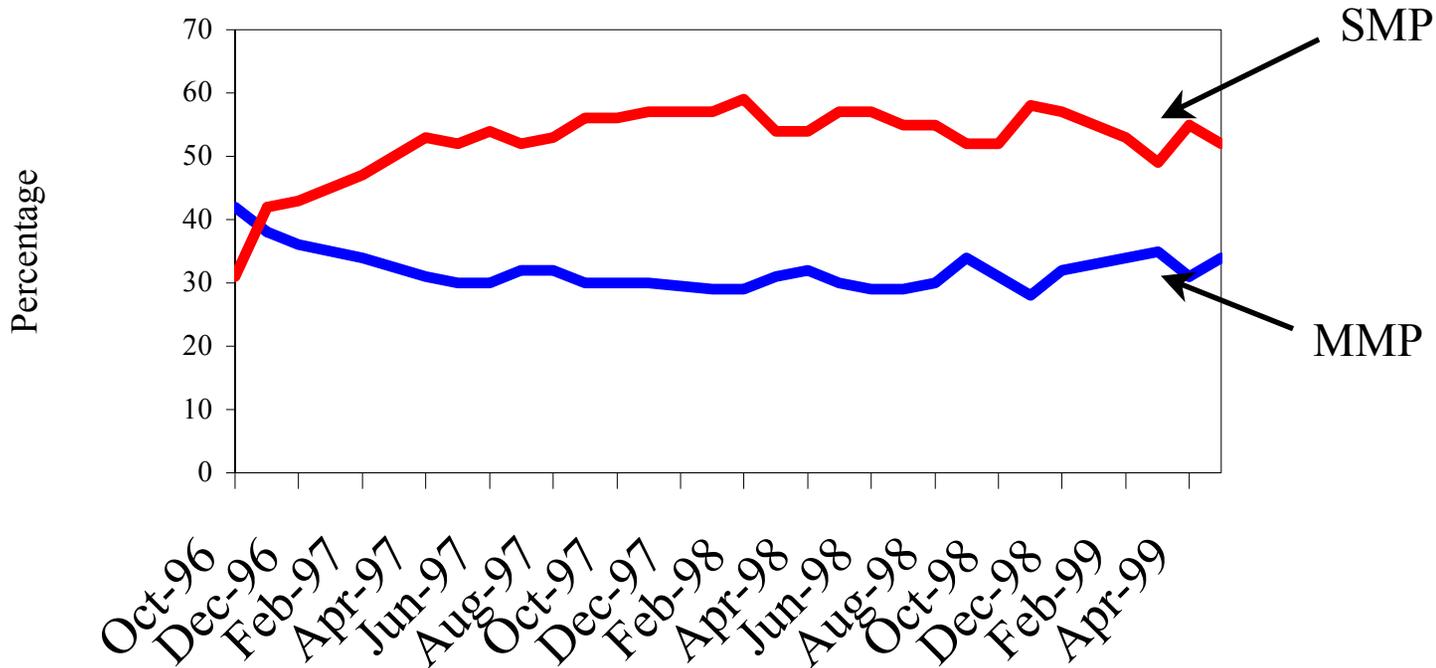
- Government

- Shift to coalition government in NZ; Italian governments as unstable as ever.

- Are the changes popular?

- No ??

Support for MMP and SMP in New Zealand, October 1996–May 1999



'Mixing' Electoral Systems: The British Case

	System	List seats %
Euro. Parliament	List	
N.Irl Assembly	STV	
London mayor	AV	
Scot. Parliament	MMP	43
Welsh Assembly	MMP	33
London Assembly	MMP	44
Hse. of Commons	SMP	

a Legal threshold of 5%

Causes?

...Party tactics

Objectives?

Particular objectives in each case explain why variations in systems

Consequences?

Voters not confused; more parties; coalition governments; (in mixed systems) two classes of politician

House of Commons reform?

- The Jenkins Commission 1997
 - Government sets down four criteria
 - ‘Broad’ proportionality
 - Extension of voter choice
 - Stable government
 - The constituency link

Jenkins invents ‘Alternative Vote Plus’, mixing

- German mixed system (constituencies and lists)
- Belgian ordered lists (ranking candidates in list election)
- Australian alternative vote (ranking candidates in constituency election)

4.) Choosing new systems

- Why change?
 - System shock resulting from scandal, crisis, or revolution
 - Change by countries with PR systems: the ‘accountability’ of politicians
 - Change by countries with non-PR systems: system stress resulting from electoral change

- The process of reform
 - Giving voters a sense of ownership of the process
- Issues to consider in electoral system design
 - Government stability
 - Need to incorporate minorities
 - Link between politicians and voters
 - Keep it simple

Tradeoffs:

Proportionality vs. stability

Proportionality vs. constituency link

	Stability	Minorities	Voter link	Simplicity
District magnitude	Small districts; or legal thresholds	Large districts	Small districts	Small districts
Electoral formula	Non or semi-PR	PR	STV	Non-PR (SMP)
Ballot structure	Closed lists	STV or open lists	STV or open lists	Closed lists

5.) Have the new systems worked as expected?

Yes

- Expected proportional consequences
 - Seats for small parties; proportions of women and minority MPs
- Politicians and voters learn quickly

Not really

- Politicians and voters often want fresh changes
- Two classes of MP in mixed systems

Are mixed electoral systems really the only option?

Conclusion: The Uniqueness of the British Columbia Process

- Electoral reform in an existing democracy
- Final decision by voters
- No criteria imposed by political elite
- Proposed alternative system to be designed by a Citizens' Assembly