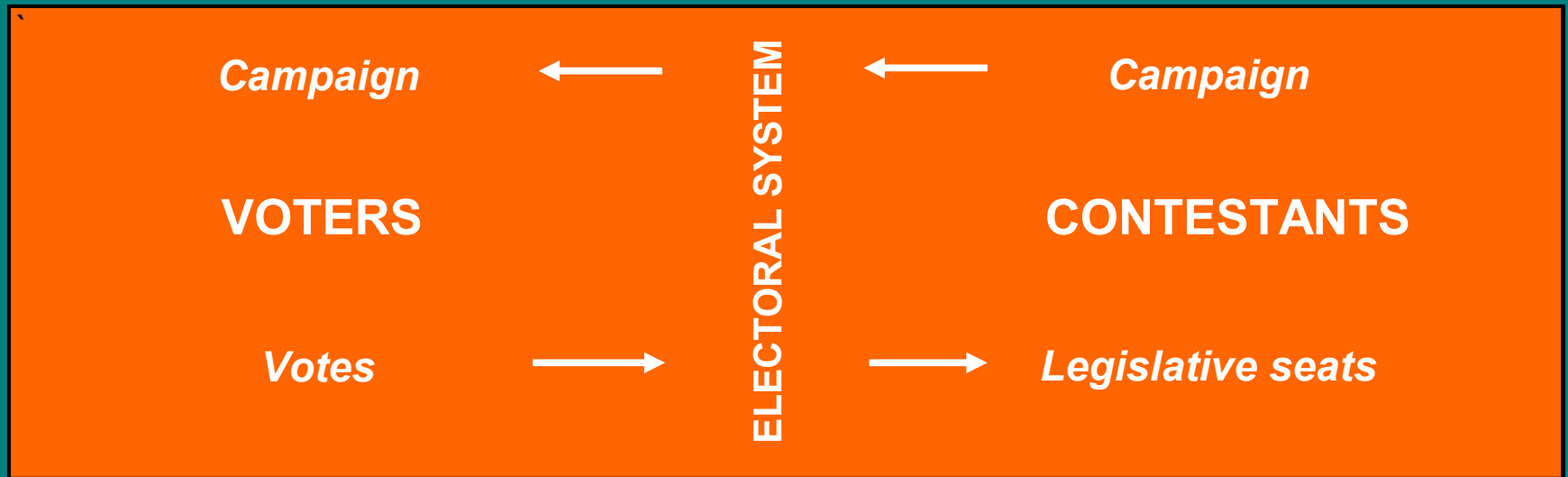


# Democratic Electoral Systems

Weekend 3 : Session 1

# The Electoral Process



# How to think about Elections

- One big contest?
- A set of simultaneous contests?
- Contests between:
  - political parties
  - individual candidates
- For the contestants or the voters?
- For those who are elected?

# The Elements of an Electoral System

- ***District Magnitude***
  - the number elected from an area
- ***Ballot Structure***
  - the choices voters are faced with in the polling place
- ***Electoral Formula***
  - the mathematics of turning votes into seats

# District Magnitude

- From 1 to the total number of seats contested  
*e.g. Canada: 1, Denmark: 6, Austria: 20, Holland: 150*
- Proportionality requires a DM greater than 1
- Increasing DM will improve proportionality
- DMs do not all need to be the same
- Districts can be piled on top of one another
- Voter-Politician connection shifts as DM changes

# Ballot Structure

- Voters may indicate a single choice (for party or candidate)
- Voters may indicate a set of preferences
- Voters may vote for one party but the candidates of another (*panachage*)
- Voters may weight their vote

# Ballot Choices

## Extent of Choice

*Limited & Simple*

*Indicate Preferences*

Nature of  
Choice

*Candidate*

Single-Member  
Plurality (*India*)

Single  
Transferable Vote  
(*Tasmania*)

*Party*

Closed List  
(*Sweden*)

Open list  
(*Holland*)

# Ballot Structures

- Influence the balance between parties and voters as to who actually gets elected
- Will influence internal party decision-making with respect to nominations
- Control of nominations and election prospects can shape party discipline



# Electoral Formula

- The mathematics for deciding how many votes are needed to obtain a seat
  - the *quota*
- May specify some minimum electoral success before any seats are won
  - the *threshold*
- 3 Basic principles:

***PLURALITY    MAJORITY    PROPORTIONAL***

# Plurality Systems

- The person with the most votes should win
- Simple & transparent voting and counting processes
- DM can vary, but most frequent now in single-member districts
- The system most widely used in Canada

# Majority Systems

- Candidates should be elected only if they have the support of the majority of the voters
- May require more than one vote or a preferential ballot if no candidate has a majority
- Once used in British Columbia (1952 & 1953)

# Proportional Representation (party list) Systems

- Parties are the contestants and their seat shares should reflect their vote shares
- Requires multi-member electoral units (proportionality increases with DM)
- Counting and seat determination processes are usually complex and not very transparent

# Single Transferable Vote System (PR-STV)

- Voters rank preferred candidates and parties get proportional seat numbers
- Proportionality modified by need to keep DMs manageable for voter choice and geography
- Counting processes are complex
- Party voting -> competition between running mates of the same party

# Mixed Systems

- Combinations of two (or more) of the other 4 basic systems within a single one
- Generally designed to introduce some element of proportionality
- May mix with different families across a county OR with different types in different parts or different places
- Can produce representatives with different constituencies, mandates and roles

# Historical Trends

- Early systems based on plurality system
- Majority systems adopted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- PR (list) adopted in early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, often to ensure no one won a majority
- PR made little headway in Westminster parliaments (*STV exceptions*)
- Revival of electoral system interest at end of 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Recent growth in adoption of mixed systems

# Reviewing the Families

1. The Basic Principles
2. Key Elements
3. The extent of variations
4. How the systems work
5. Evaluation of electoral systems impacts (W1:S3)
  - on the working of parliament & government
  - on the voters
6. Assessment of trade-offs in a system
7. What might it look like in BC