



Fourth Edition

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN MODERN EUROPE

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CHAPTER 11

ELECTIONS, ELECTORAL SYSTEMS,
AND REFERENDUMS

Elections are central to representative government in Europe. Their significance is both practical and symbolic. In practical terms, they play a large role in determining who becomes part of the political elite. In addition, they have a major bearing on the formation of governments, although, given the frequent complexity of government formation in modern Europe, their impact in this respect may be only indirect (see Chapter 12). As we saw in the previous chapter, elections have become the focal point of activity for most European parties.

Elections are also important symbolically in most competitive party systems, legitimizing a country's political system in the eyes of its citizens. They offer a means of participating in politics at relatively low cost to the individual in time, money, and mental effort. For most people, indeed, voting in elections is their only active participation in the political process. Elections also give citizens the feeling that they are exercising choices about who should represent them in the national parliament and about who should form the next government, even though the vote of any individual elector is highly unlikely to have much impact on either matter.

Elections themselves consist everywhere of citizens casting votes for candidates and/or political parties, but there is considerable variation across Europe in the precise set of electoral laws that determines how the votes that are cast are transformed into seats in the legislature in each country. In this chapter, we consider the variations in electoral systems in some detail, because these variations can have a significant bearing on some of the major differences between party politics across Europe. A country's electoral system can affect the nature of its party system, the sociodemographic composition of its parliament, the accuracy with which voters' preferences are reflected in the composition of the legislature, and the likelihood that governments will be formed by a coalition of parties rather than by just a single party.

Elections decide which parties and which candidates hold seats in parliaments, but they do not necessarily reflect a judgment on issues. At general elections, it is usually the case that many different issues are discussed during the course of the campaign, and even if a particular party pays particular attention to one particular issue, the degree of popular support for that party cannot necessarily be interpreted as the voters' verdict on the issue in question. In a number of European countries, therefore, referendums are used precisely to obtain the voters' decision on a specific issue. To some, the use of referendums is a good thing because it provides for greater popular participation in the decision-making process; to others, it raises the fear that existing political institutions such as parliaments, governments, and

political parties will be weakened. Therefore we end this chapter by assessing the role of referendums in modern European politics and asking whether use of the referendum amounts to "direct democracy" and in this sense constitutes a challenge to representative government.

Before looking in detail at the nature and impact of electoral systems and the effects of referendums, we briefly outline some central aspects of the legal framework regulating elections in Europe, specifically the nature of the electorate and the timing of elections.

→ WHO VOTES?

Elections in all European states are now held under a universal adult franchise. In most countries, universal male suffrage had been won by the time of World War I and female suffrage by World War II, although women did not receive the vote until immediately after World War II in Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, and Malta and until the 1970s in Switzerland. Evolving legal definitions of adulthood have lowered the voting age in many countries, characteristically to 18, although in a few countries it remains at 19 or 20. Certain categories of citizens are disfranchised in many countries, including people serving prison sentences and those confined to mental institutions. Generally speaking, the qualifications needed to be an election candidate are the same as those for being a voter (for details, see Katz, *Democracy*, pp. 246-61; Bowler et al., pp. 97-100).

In European countries it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that the electoral register—the list of eligible voters—contains the names of all who are entitled to vote. This means that European electoral registers tend to be far more accurate than those in the United States, for example, where the onus is on individuals to register themselves as voters. The proportion of the voting-age population that turns out to vote is higher in Europe than in the United States, in most countries reaching between 70 and 85 percent. It is particularly low in Poland and Switzerland (usually below 50 percent in both cases), and especially high in Italy and Malta along with some countries where voting is or has been compulsory (Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Austria), in all of which turnout at many elections since the war has approached or even exceeded 90 percent. Since the late 1970s, however, turnout has been decreasing at elections all across Europe (see Table 9.8).

→ WHEN DO PEOPLE VOTE?

In most countries, the law or constitution prescribes a maximum period between elections but not a minimum; the maximum is four years in most European countries and five years in the rest (see Table 2.2). Within the prescribed limits, the timing of parliamentary elections is usually, on paper at least, at the discretion of the government of the day. To be precise, governments, or sometimes specifically the prime minister, typically have the power to recommend the dissolution of parliament to a head of state, who almost invariably takes this advice. In France, it is the president who has the right to call parliamentary elections at any time—even against the wishes of the government, which may be of a different political complexion—though not more than once a year. (We discussed this power of the French president in detail in Chapter 2.) French presidential elections are held at fixed five-year intervals (the term was seven years prior to 2002), and in a few European countries parliamentary elections too take place at set intervals: In Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, parliaments have a fixed life span of four years.

Most European governments have complete legal freedom of action as to exactly when they call an election, subject to specified maximum terms. We might thus expect that governments tend to dissolve legislatures at times when they expect to do well in the subsequent election. This can undoubtedly make the timing of elections an important strategic variable. In a few European countries, Norway and Sweden, for example, the timing of elections is fixed by law, as it is in the United States; in others it is more or less determined by practice and convention, so all political actors have a pretty good idea several years in advance as to when the next election will be held. For example, in Luxembourg it has become accepted that elections take place every five years, on the same day as elections to the European Parliament. In other countries, however, election dates are decided either by the government of the day or by events outside its control, such as a collapse in the government's parliamentary support, matters that we turn to in greater detail in Chapter 12. (For a comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis of strategic election timing in Britain, see Smith; see also Strøm and Swindle.)

Parliamentary elections, of course, are not the only opportunity that people have to vote in modern Europe. In all countries there are also elections for local councils (these are quite important in Scandinavia), and in several there are regional or provincial elections (for example, in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom), as we saw in Chapter 6. The twenty-five member states of the European Union (EU) hold elections to choose members of the European Parliament; these elections, which we discussed in detail in Chapter 5, take place every five years. In a number of countries, as we noted in Chapter 2, the president is directly elected by the people: besides France, this occurs in Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In addition, as we shall see in the last section of this chapter, the referendum is employed in a number of European countries.

→ TYPES OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM

In this chapter we concentrate mainly on parliamentary elections, the most important political contests in every European country with the possible exception of France. In particular, we concentrate on electoral systems, the mechanisms that turn the votes cast by people on election day into seats to be occupied by deputies in the parliament. The electoral system structures the choices that the voters can make and then converts these choices into a legislature.

A wide variety of electoral systems are in use across Europe, and there is an equally wide selection of literature describing and tracing the history of these systems (see Carstairs, Delwit and De Waele; Farrell; Gallagher and Mitchell). This variety reflects in part the different weights attached to different criteria in different countries. It also reflects the fact that the electoral law a country adopts is usually determined by the political elite of the day, some of whose motivations may be partisan. In addition, electoral reformers have devised a plethora of systems and formulas, some of which have captured the imagination of politicians in various countries at various times.

Electoral systems in western Europe have been fairly stable since 1945; only in France and Greece could the electoral system be said to have been used as a political football (Cole and Campbell). Even in Greece, the electoral system has to some extent been depoliticized as an issue by a constitutional amendment in 2001 stipulating that any future change would come into effect not at the next election but at the one after that (Alivizatos and

Eleftheriadis, p. 70). In postcommunist Europe the picture varies: In some countries there has been stability and continuity (Slovenia, Hungary, and the Baltic states); in others (such as Poland and the Czech Republic) the electoral system has been the topic of constant political battles, with many attempts to make changes, some of them successful (Birch et al.).

For all this diversity, there are several systematic patterns in the profusion of electoral systems to be found across the continent. One vital distinction is between proportional representation (PR) systems on the one hand and plurality or majority systems on the other. The former put more stress on the concept of proportionality, the numerical accuracy with which the votes cast for parties are translated into seats won in parliament. Under a PR system, if a party receives, say, 25 percent of the votes, it can expect to win close to 25 percent of the seats. If every party participating in an election was guaranteed exactly the same share of seats as it won of the votes, we would describe that system as perfectly proportional, although this would not necessarily mean that the system was "perfect" in a normative sense. In practice, no electoral system can guarantee perfect proportionality, but PR systems attach greater priority to getting somewhere close to this goal. Plurality systems do not, of course, set out deliberately *not* to achieve high proportionality, but by prioritizing other criteria they accept a certain level of disproportionality as inevitable. For an overview of European electoral systems in these terms see Table 11.1.

→ PLURALITY AND MAJORITY SYSTEMS

Throughout the nineteenth century, elections in most countries were held under plurality systems, but a combination of factors led almost all countries to adopt some form of PR in the twentieth century. At the moment, only two European countries do not use an electoral system that has at least an element of PR: the United Kingdom and France.

The electoral system used in the United Kingdom is the least complicated of all systems. It is the same as that employed for most elections in the United States, Canada, and India, for example. The country is divided into 659 areas known as constituencies or districts, each of which returns one member of parliament (MP) to the House of Commons. Within each constituency, the candidate with the most votes, whether or not this number is a majority over all others combined, wins the seat. The system is best named the single-member plurality (SMP) system, though it is often called "first past the post," in a rather dubious analogy with horse racing, or simply "the British system." Voters, on entering the polling station, are given a ballot paper listing all the candidates, and they write an X next to the name of the candidate they wish to vote for. An example of the operation of the system in the Taunton constituency in Somerset, in the west of England, in the 2001 general election is shown in Table 11.2.

This system has the merit of simplicity for voters. It is also defended on the ground that as the MP, in this case Adrian Flook, is the only representative for the constituency, responsibility for its interests lies unequivocally with him. This, it is claimed, helps forge a bond between an MP and his or her constituents that would be lost if several MPs were responsible for the same constituency. In terms of the national impact, as we discuss later, the system is praised for its tendency to produce single-party majority governments.

But the plurality system has many critics. Three of the main points made against it are illustrated by the Taunton result. First, Flook was elected despite winning little more than 40 percent of the total votes; in fact, 58 percent of the voters were not represented by a candidate of their favored party. It is probable that most Labour voters

Electoral Systems in Europe, 2005

Country	Basic Category	Members of Lower House	Number of Constituencies (districts)	Significant Changes Since 1945/1990 ^a
Luxembourg	PR list	60	4	None
Malta	PR-STV	65	13	Winner in votes guaranteed majority of seats since 1987
Netherlands	PR list	150	1	Minor increase in effectiveness of preferential voting in 1998
Norway	PR list	169	20 ^b	Change of formula from DH to MSL in 1953; addition of 8 national seats before 1989 election (increased to 19 before 2005 election)
Poland	PR list	460	41	Changes prior to three of first four postcommunist elections
Portugal	PR list	230	20	First democratic election in 1975
Slovakia	PR list	150	1	Replacement of 4 subnational constituencies by 1 national constituency prior to 1998 election
Slovenia	PR list	90	9 ^b	Introduction of 4% threshold prior to 2000 election
Spain	PR list	350	52	First democratic postwar election in 1977
Sweden	PR list	349	29 ^b	Change of formula from DH to MSL in 1952; introduction of higher-tier seats in 1970; introduction of meaningful preference voting in 1998
Switzerland	PR list	200	26	None
United Kingdom	Non-PR (plurality)	659	659	None at national level

^a In the case of postcommunist countries, only changes since 1990 are noted.

^b The country has "complex districting"—that is, higher-tier constituencies to iron out discrepancies arising from lower-level constituencies.

^c Electoral formulas: DH—P'Hondt; MSL—modified Sainte-Laguë; STV—single transferable vote.

Source: Mackie and Rose; Rose and Munro; annual updates in the *Political Data Yearbook of the European Journal of Political Research*; Birch.

would have preferred the election of the Liberal Democrat candidate to the actual outcome, and so in a straight fight between the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat, the latter would have won. Therefore, the British system is criticized for not necessarily producing the MP who would be most representative of the voters' wishes and, worse, for producing results that are in some sense arbitrarily determined by the nomination of "vote-splitting" losing candidates.

Electoral Systems in Europe, 2005

Country	Basic Category	Members of Lower House	Number of Constituencies (districts)	Significant Changes Since 1945/1990 ^a
Austria	PR list	183	43 ^b	Introduction in 1992 of a third tier, increase from 9 to 43 districts, and minor expansion of effectiveness
Belgium	PR list	150	11	of preferential voting
Cyprus	PR list	56	6 ^b	Abolition of higher tier, and significant expansion of effectiveness of preference voting, prior to 2003 election
Czech Republic	PR list	200	14	This replaced "reinforced PR" in 1995
Denmark	PR list	175	18 ^b	Abolition of higher tier before 2002 election
Estonia	PR list	101	12 ^b	Change of formula from DH to MSL in 1953 ^c
Finland	PR list	200	15	Abandonment of STV after 1990 election ^c
France	Non-PR (2-round)	577	577	None
Germany	Mixed compensatory	598	300 ^b	Many (see text account) Minor changes in 1953, 1956, 1984 and 1990
Greece	PR list	300	56 ^b	Many changes, usually designed to benefit the government of the day
Hungary	Mixed partially compensatory	386	197 ^b	None
Iceland	PR list	63	7 ^b	Changes in 1987 and 2000
Ireland	PR-STV	166	42	None
Ireland	Mixed partially compensatory	630	476 ^b	Abandonment in 1993 of previous highly proportional list system
Italy	PR list	100	5	Threshold raised from 4% 1995
Jamaica	Mixed parallel	141	72 ^b	Threshold raised from 4% 1996; in single-member constituencies, two-round system replaced by single-member plurality for 2000 election

Continued

TABLE 11.2

The British Electoral System in Operation, Taunton Constituency, 2001 Election

Candidate	Votes	% of Votes
Adrian Flook (Conservative)	23,033	41.7
Jackie Ballard (Liberal Democrat)	22,798	41.3
A. Govier (Labour)	8,254	14.9
M. Canton (UK Independence Party)	1,140	2.1
Total	55,225	100.0

Second, the Taunton contest presented Labour supporters in particular with a tactical choice: Should they vote for the Labour candidate, or should they vote for the Liberal Democrat in order to keep the Conservative out? If they vote sincerely, in accordance with their true preferences, then this might have the effect of helping to bring about the election of the candidate they like least. Although no electoral system is completely "strategy-proof," the plurality system is almost guaranteed to force at least some voters to think strategically if there are more than two serious candidates.

Third, if the pattern of the Taunton result, with nearly 60 percent of the votes wasted on losing candidates, were repeated over the entire country, the House of Commons could be very unrepresentative of public opinion. In practice, the lack of "fairness" in individual constituencies evens itself out to some extent across the country; an overall election is never as "unfair" as a sample constituency outcome repeated 659 times over (Gallagher and Mitchell, *app. C*). Consequently, between 1945 and the 1970s, when nearly all the votes were won by the two main parties, Labour and the Conservatives, the national outcome in terms of seats was not grossly unrepresentative. But when a third party (the Liberals in 1974 and 1979, the alliance between the Liberal and the Social Democratic Parties in 1983 and 1987, the Liberal Democrats from 1992 onward) began winning significant support, the national outcome fell much farther short of perfect proportionality, and the third party was the main victim. This outcome is illustrated by the result of the 2001 election (see Table 11.3). In this election, just as in 1997, what appeared to be an overwhelming Labour win in parliament was in fact "manufactured" by the electoral system, as nearly three out of every five voters voted against Labour. The capriciousness of this electoral system was perhaps best illustrated by an election held outside Europe: The Progressive Conservatives in Canada, who had won a large majority of the seats on 43 percent of the votes in the 1988 election, found themselves reduced to just two seats in parliament after winning 16 percent of the votes in the October 1993 election.

Although the plurality electoral system may seem very firmly entrenched in the United Kingdom, it has come under increasing challenge in recent years. Indeed, the country now employs a variety of different electoral systems in different settings (Mitchell; Independent Commission on PR). Elections to the Scottish parliament and the Welsh assembly are held under a mixed-member system (we discuss this and other systems later in the chapter) comparable to that used in Germany. Elections to the Northern Ireland

TABLE 11.3

Votes and Seats in the United Kingdom General Election of 2001

Party	% of Votes	% of Seats
Labour	40.7	62.5
Conservatives	31.7	25.2
Liberal Democrats	18.3	7.9
Others	9.3	4.4
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: See source note of Table 7.1.

assembly, like all other elections in the province (other than those to the Westminster parliament), are held under the single transferable vote, which is used in the Republic of Ireland. The elections to elect Britain's MEPs take place using a closed-list system like the one used for parliamentary elections in Spain. The country is divided into eleven constituencies; the other three MEPs from the United Kingdom, those representing Northern Ireland, are elected under the single transferable vote. After its 1997 election victory, the incoming Labour government set up a commission, headed by the former minister Roy Jenkins, to examine the case for a new electoral system, with the idea of putting its recommendation to a referendum. The Jenkins commission reported in favor of a mixed system, but plans for a referendum were put firmly on the back burner by the government.

One relatively modest modification that has been suggested by some British electoral reformers is the introduction of ordinal voting rather than "X" or "nominal" voting. Voters would rank the candidates in order of preference by placing a number (1, 2, etc.) next to each name. The counting process would no longer finish with the counting of the first preferences. Instead, if no candidate had a majority, the lowest-placed candidate would be eliminated, and his or her votes would be transferred to the other candidates in accordance with the second preferences marked on the ballots. So, in Taunton (see Table 11.2), first the UKIP candidate and then the Labour candidate would be eliminated. Assuming that a majority of Labour voters gave their second preference to the Liberal Democrat candidate rather than to the Conservative, the Liberal Democrat would almost certainly be carried above the Conservative and would therefore win the seat. This electoral system is known as the *alternative vote*, or the single transferable vote in single-member constituencies (in the United States it is known as "instant runoff"). It is a majority system, as opposed to the British plurality systems, because the counting process continues until one candidate has a majority (50 percent plus 1) over all other remaining candidates.

No European country uses the alternative vote to elect its parliament (though it is employed in Australia), but a system that has some of the same properties is used in France. There, as in Britain, deputies are returned from single-member constituencies, but there is provision for two rounds of voting, on successive Sundays. If a candidate wins a majority of votes in the first round, he or she is elected, but that occurs in only a small minority of constituencies. Otherwise, the first round of voting is followed by a second round, which only the top candidates are allowed to enter (see Box 11.1). The

Box 11.1 ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

France

France does not use proportional representation to elect deputies to the National Assembly. Instead, it employs a two-round or "double-ballot" system. Metropolitan France is divided into 555 single-member constituencies (the overseas territories and departments return an additional 22 deputies). Within each constituency there can be two rounds of voting on successive Sundays. If a candidate wins an overall majority in the first round, he or she is elected as the deputy for the constituency, but in the great majority of constituencies, no candidate achieves an overall majority, and the second round takes place a week later. Only candidates whose first-round votes exceeded 2.5 percent of the electorate (which on the basis of the votes cast) are permitted to participate in the second round, unless the operation of this rule would leave fewer than two candidates entitled to take part, in which case the top two are both allowed through. In a second round the candidate with the most votes, whether or not the tally amounts to a majority, wins a seat. Hence the system is sometimes described as "majority-plurality," in that a majority in the first round, or a plurality in the second, suffices for election.

Germany

The German electoral system provides two routes to the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag. When voters enter the polling booth, they are faced with a ballot paper with two columns. One gives them a vote for the election of a member of parliament (MdB) for a local single-member constituency; half of the 598 members of parliament are elected from single-member constituencies in exactly the same way as in the United Kingdom. The second column enables them to cast a list vote; the other half of the parliament is elected from party lists. The overall allocation of seats in the Bundestag is decided by these list votes. The party is awarded as many list seats as it needs to ensure that its total number of seats (constituency seats and list seats combined) is proportional to the number of list votes it received. However, parties do not receive any list seats unless they have either won at

least 5 percent of the list votes or won three constituency seats. If a party wins more constituency seats within any Land (province) than it is entitled to on the basis of its list votes, it is allowed to keep these extra seats (which are termed *Überhangmandate*), and the size of the Bundestag is expanded accordingly. At recent elections these *Überhangmandate*, which represent a distortion of proportionality, have significantly increased the size of the government's majority: from 2 to 10 in 1994, from 8 to 21 in 1998, and from 6 to 9 in 2002.

Italy

From the end of World War II until 1993, Italy had a very proportional type of PR system. Seats were awarded within large constituencies (average district magnitude was around thirty), with a higher tier to balance up the number of seats awarded to parties that had received less than their "fair share" in the constituency. The system was a preferential form of PR—that is, voters for a party could indicate preferences for specific candidates on that party's list, thus generating competition for preference votes between candidates of the same party. Within the Christian Democrats (DC) in particular, various factions and affiliated interest groups all tried to motivate voters to cast preference votes for their particular candidates. Politicians found guilty of corruption were inclined to blame the electoral system for forcing them into clientelistic vote-buying exercises of one sort or another, so the electoral system moved to the top of the hit list of Italy's political reformers and was fundamentally altered in 1993. The new system was a compromise between those who wanted to adopt the British single-member plurality system and those who wanted to retain PR. It is a mixed system that is partially compensatory, in that the share-out of list seats takes some but not full account of the seats that parties win in the single-member constituencies. Just over three-quarters of the deputies (475 out of 630) are elected from single-member constituencies, and the rest are elected from national lists and shared out among parties that pass the qualifying threshold of 4 percent of the national vote.

Latvia

Latvia's 100 members of the Saeima are elected from five multimember constituencies whose size ranges from 14 to 28 seats. Seats are awarded to parties by the Sainte-Laguë highest average method, which is completely fair as between large and small parties (and, perhaps not surprisingly, is used in very few countries). However, no party receives any seats unless it has won at least 5 percent of the votes nationally. Voters can cast not only a positive preference vote for individual candidates; they can even award a negative preference by crossing out the candidate's name (a hangover from the old Soviet system), which counts against the candidate. These preference votes are decisive in determining which candidates take the seats, though the Latvian parties have a habit of running candidates in more than one constituency. This means that the candidates who receive the most preference votes in a given constituency do not necessarily take their seat there, reducing the voters' power to choose their representatives.

Netherlands

The Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) contains 150 deputies, and when it comes to awarding seats to parties, the whole country is treated as one 150-member constituency. Each party presents a list of candidates, and the parties receive seats in proportion to their votes. The seat allocation formula used is the *D'Hondt* highest averages method. Parties receiving fewer than two-thirds of 1 percent of the total votes cast do not qualify for any seats; this is the lowest threshold, as a share of the national vote, employed by any country in Europe. It rarely happens that the threshold debars a Dutch party from receiving seats. Voters can cast a preference vote for a candidate on a party list, but in practice the casting of preference votes in the Netherlands has had very little impact on the composition of the parliament. Because there are no subnational constituencies, the system is sometimes criticized for being impersonal. In response, the government that took office in 2003 outlined plans for a mixed system that would see half of the deputies elected from small multimember constituencies and the other half from a national list.

Poland

The 460 members of the Sejm are elected from forty-one constituencies in which seats are awarded to parties by the modified Sainte-Laguë method. Parties require 5 percent of the votes nationally to qualify for any seats; (coalitions need 8 percent). Voters can cast preference votes for individual candidates on a party list, and these preferences determine which candidates are elected. Poland's electoral system was changed before the elections of 1991, 1993, and 2001; since the end of communism only the elections of 1993 and 1997 have taken place under a common electoral system, and the 2001 system is not regarded by many political actors as final.

Spain

The Congress of Deputies is elected from fifty-two constituencies, each of which is based on a province and returns on average only seven deputies, a relatively small figure for a PR electoral system. Within each constituency the D'Hondt highest averages formula is employed; this tends to favor the large parties rather than the small ones. There is no higher-tier allocation to compensate parties for any underrepresentation in the constituencies. Voters have no choice of candidate; they simply cast a vote for one of the party lists that are offered.

Sweden

The Riksdag has 349 members and is elected by proportional representation based on two tiers. The lower tier consists of twenty-eight constituencies covering the country, which between them return 310 deputies. The remaining 39 seats are held back for allocation at the second tier. They are distributed among the parties in such a way as to ensure that the total number of seats received by each party comes as close to its proportional share as possible. However, a threshold discriminates against small parties. Those receiving fewer than 4 percent of the national votes are not awarded any of the 39 higher-tier seats. There is provision for voters to indicate a preference for an individual candidate on a party list. Until 1998, the initial ranking order of the candidates on each party's

Continued

Box 11.1 ELECTORAL SYSTEMS (Continued)

List was in practice almost immune to alteration by the voters, but since then a rule change has meant that the preference votes that are cast can have a real impact on the outcome. Candidates who receive preference votes from at least 8 percent of their party's voters now leapfrog candidates who were placed above them on the list but receive fewer preference votes. In characteristic Swedish style, this reform was made not by a transient parliamentary majority in order to secure partisan advantage but on the basis of careful study of the subject. In the 2002 election about 26 percent of voters availed themselves of the option to cast a personal vote, and an estimated 106 of the 349 MPs owed their election to the personal votes they received.

United Kingdom

The UK employs the single-member plurality system. The country is divided into 659 constituencies, each returning one member of parliament (MP) to the House of Commons. Within each constituency the candidate winning the most votes, whether or not the tally amounts to a majority, becomes the MP. Other forms of PR, either mixed compensatory systems (the institutions of devolution in Scotland and Wales) or single transferable vote (the Northern Ireland system) or a closed PR list system (the 75 members of the European Parliament elected from England, Scotland, and Wales).

candidate with the most votes (a simple plurality) in the second round wins the seat, even if he or she fails to achieve an overall majority. (French presidential elections are held under the same system, except that only the top two candidates from the first round are allowed to proceed to the second, thus guaranteeing that the eventual winner will emerge with an absolute majority.) This system is also used in Lithuania to elect 71 of the 141 MPs, as we discuss later; as in French presidential elections, only the top two candidates are allowed to proceed to the second round.

This two-round double ballot system has some advantages over the British system, for it gives supporters of losing first-round candidates a chance to switch their second-round votes to one of the serious contenders. The first of the two rounds could also be used by the two main blocs as quasi-primaries, but the established right-wing parties, the Gaullists and the UDF, generally agreed on a single right-wing candidate in each constituency before the first round, sharing the constituencies out between them. The 2002 merger between the Gaullists and most of the UDF into the UMP has simplified matters on the right-hand side of the political spectrum. On the left, in contrast, the two main parties, the Socialists and the Communists, usually nominate a candidate each in every constituency for the first ballot, and the one with fewer votes then stands aside for the stronger on the second ballot. Over the years this has increasingly benefited the Socialists more than the Communists; the latter's first-ballot votes have steadily fallen, to the extent that many more Communist candidates stand aside for Socialists than vice versa, and, in addition, Communist voters switch to Socialist candidates on the second ballot more solidly than Socialist voters switch to Communist candidates.

But even if the French system does have the potential to give a slightly greater choice to the voters, like the British system it does not overcome the problem of disproportional overall results. In 2002, for example, the UMP won only 33 percent of the

votes but 63 percent of the seats. Like the British system, the French two-ballot system assists the largest parties and penalizes smaller ones. In addition, it benefits parties close to the center, such as the UMP and the Socialists, and works against more extreme parties, such as the Communists (PCF) or the far-right Front National (FN). Such parties, even if their candidates make it into the second round, are very unlikely to win the runoff against a more centrist candidate, and so they win a smaller share of the seats than of the votes. The PCF has some scope for deal making with the Socialists, albeit on the Socialists' terms, and thus wins some seats, but the FN is generally treated as a pariah by the other parties and usually ends up with few or no seats; in 2002, for example, it received 11 percent of the votes but won none of the 577 seats. For supporters of the double-ballot system, this pronounced penalization of "antisystem" parties is a definite merit (Sartori, p. 67).

One disadvantage of the two-round system when compared to the alternative vote is that the candidates whom it allows through to the second round may not be the most popular. This was dramatically illustrated at the French presidential election of 2002, when almost everyone expected that the second round would be fought between the main right-wing candidate, the incumbent Jacques Chirac, and the Socialist leader Lionel Jospin. Instead, due to fragmentation of the left-wing vote, Jospin was pushed narrowly into third position by the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, whom Chirac defeated by 82 percent to 18 percent in the second round. Under the alternative vote, vote transfers from the lower-placed candidates of the broad left would have taken Jospin into second or perhaps even first place by the end of the count; under the two-round system this counted for nothing because his first-round votes were slightly fewer than Le Pen's.

In France, more than in any other country, the electoral system has been manipulated by ruling parties for their own benefit (for details, see Cole and Campbell; Elgie). The two-round system was used for most of the period between 1831 and 1939, though other systems were often tried for short periods. After World War II, a PR system was briefly used, but in the early 1950s a new system was introduced, with the clear aim of discriminating against the Communist Party. The double ballot was brought back under de Gaulle in the late 1950s. The Socialists replaced it with PR for the 1986 election, partly to minimize their electoral losses, but the incoming right-wing administration promptly reintroduced the double-ballot system, under which subsequent parliamentary elections have been held.

→ PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Discontent with the anomalies produced by plurality or majority systems, combined inevitably with self-interested calculations by those parties that were faring, or seemed likely to fare, badly under such systems, led to discussion of electoral reform throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. As the franchise expanded to include the working class, the prospect of seeing left-wing parties sweep the board under the existing system brought about a sudden appreciation of the principle of PR among the existing conservative and liberal parties in most countries. By the end of World War II, nearly all countries had electoral systems based on PR. The key element in any PR electoral system is the multimember constituency. Seats are allocated to

TABLE 11.4

Features of European Electoral Systems, 2005

Electoral System	Constituency-Level Seat Allocation Formula ^a	Higher-Tier Seat Allocation? (formula)	Threshold (for participation in higher-tier seat share-out unless otherwise specified) ^b	Choice of Candidate Within Party?
<i>List Systems</i>				
Austria	Hare	Yes (DH)	1 constituency seat or 4% of votes nationally	Yes, but largely ineffective
Belgium	DH	No	5% needed within a constituency for any seats there	Yes
France	Hare	LR-Hare	1.8% national vote	Yes
Germany	DH	No	5% of votes nationally for any seats	Yes
Denmark	MSL	Yes (LR-Hare)	2% of votes nationally needed for parliamentary representation	Yes
Finland	Hare	Yes (DH)	5% of votes	Yes
France	DH	No	—	Yes
France	DH	Yes (LR)	3% of votes nationally needed for parliamentary representation	Yes
France	DH	Yes (DH)	5% of votes nationally	Yes, but largely ineffective
France	SL	No	5% of votes nationally for any seats	Yes
France	DH	No	—	Yes
France	DH	No ^c	0.67% of votes nationally needed to qualify for seats	Yes, but largely ineffective
France	MSL	Yes (MSL)	4% of votes nationally	Yes, but largely ineffective
France	MSL	No	5% needed for any seats	Yes
France	DH	No	—	No
France	LR-Droop	No ^c	5% needed for any seats	Yes, but largely ineffective
France	Droop	Yes (DH)	4% of votes	Yes, but largely ineffective
France	DH	No	—	No
France	MSL	Yes (MSL)	4% of votes nationally or 12% in one constituency needed for parliamentary representation	Yes
Ireland	DH	No	—	Yes

Continued

Features of European Electoral Systems, 2005

Electoral System	Constituency-Level Seat Allocation Formula ^a	Higher-Tier Seat Allocation? (formula)	Threshold (for participation in higher-tier seat share-out unless otherwise specified) ^b	Choice of Candidate Within Party?
<i>Mixed Systems</i>				
Germany	Plurality	Yes (LR-Hare)	5% of votes or 3 constituency seats	No
Hungary	2-round	Yes (DH)	5% of votes nationally	No
Italy	Plurality	Yes (LR-Hare)	4% of votes nationally	No
Lithuania	2-round	Yes (LR-Hare)	5% of list votes	No
<i>Other PR Systems</i>				
Ireland	STV	No	—	Yes
Malta	STV	Yes ^d	See note ^d	Yes
<i>Non-PR Systems</i>				
France	2-round	No	—	No
United Kingdom	Plurality	No	—	No

Source: See source note of Table 11.1.

^a Electoral formulas: DH—D'Hondt; LR—largest remainders; MSL—modified Sainte-Lagué; SL—Sainte-Lagué; STV—single transferable vote.

^b In some countries, especially postcommunist ones, there are higher thresholds for coalitions.

^c There is only one (national) constituency.

^d In Malta, whichever of the two main parties wins a plurality of first-preference votes is awarded extra seats to give it a bare overall majority of seats, if it has not won an overall majority from the constituencies. This is the only situation in which there is any higher-tier allocation.

parties within each constituency in broad proportion to the votes each party receives. Proportional representation systems cannot be based on single-member constituencies, because a single seat cannot be divided up proportionately, no matter what method is used to allocate it. As a general rule, indeed, the larger the district magnitude (i.e., the number of members returned from each constituency), the more proportional the national election result is likely to be. This, it should be stressed, applies only when a PR formula is used. If a plurality or majority formula is employed in multimember constituencies, as when American public representatives are elected from "at-large" districts, the result is highly disproportional, being even more crushing to minorities than a series of single-seat constituencies.

There are important variations between PR systems, but basically they can be grouped into three categories: list systems, mixed systems, and the single transferable vote.

List Systems

The basic principle of a list system is that each party presents a list of candidates in each constituency. Each list usually contains as many candidates as there are seats to be filled in the constituency. The seats are then shared out among the parties in proportion to the

votes they win, in accordance with a predetermined formula. Although PR is scarcely used at any level of elections in the United States, Americans were the first to think about ways of achieving proportional representation. They were interested not in the proportional allocation of seats to parties in accordance with the votes that each party receives but in the proportional allocation of seats in the House of Representatives in accordance with the population of each state. Most of the PR methods used in Europe today were either used or discussed in the United States long before Europeans thought of them (Balinski and Young).

List systems differ from one another in a number of respects, and we discuss them in sequence. They include

1. the formulas used to award seats to parties within each constituency
2. the matter of whether or not there is a second, higher, tier at which seats are awarded to override any imbalances that may arise at the constituency level
3. the existence of thresholds
4. the degree of choice, if any, given to voters to express a preference for one or more specific candidates on the party list

The picture is summarized in Table 11.4.

Electoral Formulas

A number of different methods are used to decide how seats are shared out among parties. The most common are largest remainders (using the Hare or Droop quota), highest averages using the D'Hondt method, and highest averages using the modified or pure Sainte-Laguë method. In the United States, largest remainders with the Hare quota is known as the Hamilton method and D'Hondt as the Jefferson method, used for apportioning seats in the House of Representatives from 1790 to 1830. The "pure" Sainte-Laguë method is known in the United States as the Webster method; the modified version used in some Scandinavian countries and in Poland has the effect of making it more difficult than under the pure version for small parties to win seats.

We do not elaborate the differences between these formulas in any detail here (the mechanics are explained in Farrell, ch. 4; Gallagher and Mitchell, app. A), because these differences are less important than the similarities. However, it should be noted that of these five methods, both pure Sainte-Laguë and largest remainders with the Hare quota are completely even-handed between large and small parties; modified Sainte-Laguë and largest remainders with the Droop quota tilt the balance slightly toward larger parties; and the D'Hondt method favors large parties even more (Lijphart, *Electoral*, pp. 96-97). All variants of PR are essentially similar in that they set out to award seats as "fairly" as possible to each party according to how many votes it won, although they are based on slightly different ideas as to exactly what is meant by the concept of "fairness" (Gallagher, "Proportionality"). They share a common attachment to the idea of proportionality, and in this they differ fundamentally from the plurality method, where other criteria take priority.

District Magnitude and Higher Tiers

The seat allocation method is just one factor determining how proportional the distribution of seats will be in relation to the way votes were cast. A second and often more

important factor is district magnitude. If the average district magnitude is small, an election outcome is unlikely to be highly proportional, no matter what allocation formula is used. When France introduced PR for the 1986 election, the D'Hondt formula was used in constituencies that returned only six deputies on average, so although the outcome was much more proportional than the outcomes of elections held under France's usual single-member constituency system, it was less proportional than under most PR systems. In Spain, too, this has an impact: Spain employs relatively small constituencies (district magnitude averages seven seats), and in addition its rural areas are significantly overrepresented in parliament (Hopkin). Consequently, the major parties derive a sizable bonus, and there is usually significant deviation from perfect proportionality, albeit not on the same scale as in countries using the British plurality system.

One way of overcoming the problem is to use larger constituencies, averaging around twelve seats or more, as in Cyprus, Finland, and Latvia. This is taken to the extreme in the Netherlands and Slovakia; in each case, the whole country forms one giant constituency. Employing large constituencies is sometimes criticized on the grounds that voters are likely to feel remote from their deputies. Another method is to have a second level of allocation at which disproportionalities arising at the constituency level can be ironed out (Taagepera and Shugart, pp. 126-33). In some countries, a certain proportion of seats is set aside at the start for this purpose: about 20 percent in Denmark and Iceland, and 11 percent in Norway and Sweden. These "higher-tier" seats are then awarded to the parties in the appropriate numbers to compensate them for any shortfall in the seats they won in the constituencies and thereby bring the overall distribution of seats as close to perfect proportionality as possible. In other countries, such as Austria, the number of higher-tier seats is not fixed in advance, but the effect is the same. What happens is that each party's "wasted" votes from the constituencies—that is, the votes it has not used to earn seats—are pooled on a national or regional basis, and a distribution of the unallocated seats takes place in accordance with each party's unused vote totals. This ensures that very few of a party's votes are wasted.

Mixed Systems

The wisest investment in electoral systems futures markets in the late 1980s would have been in mixed systems, because these have been the real growth area in recent years (for mixed systems see Shugart and Wattenberg; Farrell, ch. 5; Gallagher and Mitchell, chs. 10-15; Massicotte and Blais). Much of the growth has been outside the region we are covering (Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, and Russia are the most prominent examples), but four of the twenty-eight countries covered by this book now employ a mixed system. The essence of these systems is that MPs can be elected by two different routes. There is a wide range of possible (and even actual) variants, but the most widely employed is the one where the voter has two votes: one to choose a local constituency MP, the other to choose a party list. There is terminological profusion when it comes to naming this kind of system: It is known not only as "mixed" but also as "mixed member," "additional member" (particularly in Britain), or "personalized PR" (particularly in Germany).

The link between the two types of seat—constituency and list—is made in two different ways in different types of mixed electoral system. In some, termed "compensatory"

mixed systems, the list seats are awarded to parties to ensure that their overall seat total (list seats plus constituency seats) is proportional to their list votes. Thus, if a party has been underrepresented at the constituency level, which is usually the case for small parties, it is allocated relatively more list seats to "compensate" it and bring it up to its overall "fair" share. The other type of mixed system is "parallel," where the list seats are shared out purely on the basis of list votes, without taking any account of what has happened in the constituency component. Parallel mixed systems produce a less "fair" overall outcome than compensatory ones, because the list seats are not used to counterbalance the disproportionalities produced in the constituency component.

Germany's is the archetypal mixed system (Saalfeld). The country is divided into 299 single-member constituencies, in each of which the seat goes to the candidate with the most votes, just as in Britain. The sharing out of the national seats is then carried out in such a way as to ensure that each party's total number of seats (constituency seats plus national seats) is proportional to its share of the list votes—in other words, it is a compensatory system (see Box 11.1). Usually, the two main parties, the SPD and the CDU-CSU, win over 99 percent of the constituency seats, the PDS wins the others, and the Greens and FDP win none at all. Consequently, the last two parties are reliant on the list seats to achieve their overall fair share.

In contrast, Lithuania employs the other type of mixed system, the parallel version. There are 71 single-member constituencies, in which the French two-round system is used, and a list component with 70 seats. Once again, each voter has two votes, one in the constituency and one for a list. Because it is a parallel system, the list seats are awarded entirely on the basis of the list votes won by each party, without regard to what happened in the single-member constituency component. This is better for the large parties, which, given the 5 percent threshold for qualification for list seats, get a bonus from the list section to add to the one they already got from the single-member constituency component. In 2000, for example, the social democratic coalition in Lithuania took 40 percent of the list seats with just 31 percent of the list votes—having already won 32 percent of the single-member constituencies with just 20 percent of the votes.

Mixed systems have grown in popularity in recent years because they can be perceived as offering "the best of both worlds" (Shugart and Wattenberg). Citizens have an individual MP to represent them, as they would under a non-PR system, but the provision of a list component means that, overall, the relationship between seats and votes is much closer than it would be under a non-PR system. This combination of proportionality and local representation is what has made mixed systems the alternative of choice for electoral system reformers and designers in a number of countries. At the same time, while no one would describe them as "the worst of all worlds," some of the claims made for them can be criticized. In particular, the impression that voters have a local MP who is in some way accountable to them can be misleading. In most countries that employ mixed systems, constituency candidates also stand on party lists, and if they are defeated in the constituency this makes no difference to their fate provided they have been placed in a high position on the list, as they will be elected anyway. Thus, even for a constituency MP, it can make more sense to concentrate on being given a high place on the party list at the next election than on serving his or her constituents.

Thresholds

Even PR electoral systems, despite their name, sometimes have features that give a built-in advantage to larger parties. This is due either to self-interest on the part of the larger parties (who usually make the rules), or to a disinterested concern that perfect proportionality could lead to a proliferation of small parties in parliament and thus to difficulty in forming a stable government—or to a combination of both factors. It is common, therefore, for electoral systems to employ a threshold that a party must overcome before it qualifies for seats. The best known example is the German system, which allows only those parties that have either won at least 5 percent of the second votes, or won at least three constituency seats, to share in the national list allocation. Only once has a party qualified for list seats without winning 5 percent of the list votes. This occurred in 1994 when the former communists, the PDS, qualified via the three-constituencies route due to their strength in east Berlin. In order to prevent fragmentation and to encourage the consolidation of a coherent party system, postcommunist countries generally impose higher thresholds than their west European counterparts: Often parties must reach 4 or even 5 percent of the vote in order to qualify for any seats (see Table 11.4). The impact has generally been to create somewhat more disproportionality than is found in most PR systems, exaggerating the impact of vote changes (Moraski and Loewenberg, p. 168). Some countries apply a threshold at the level of individual constituencies. For example, in Belgium no party can receive any seats within one of the multimember constituencies unless it has won at least 5 percent of the votes there.

Thresholds are usually employed to limit the degree of proportionality achieved and if set too high could significantly distort the election outcome. For example, in the 1980s the Greek electoral system imposed a threshold of 17 percent for qualification for higher-tier seats, which gave a sizable bonus to the large parties. This was termed "reinforced PR"—it was also used in Cyprus—but in fact it was not proportionality but the parliamentary strength of the largest parties that was reinforced (Dimitras, p. 160).

The effect of thresholds can be seen most starkly in Poland. At its first postcommunist election, in 1991, there were no thresholds and an amazing twenty-nine different parties won seats. For the next election, in 1993, thresholds were introduced (5 percent within constituencies and 7 percent to qualify for national list seats). This time, only seven parties won any seats, and 40 percent of the votes were cast for parties that won no seats. By the time of the following election in 1997, parties and voters showed that they had learned the lesson of the threshold: The fragmentation of the vote and overall disproportionality both plummeted, and only 12 percent of votes were wasted on parties that failed to reach the threshold. Like several other postcommunist countries, Poland imposes two thresholds: one for single parties and a slightly higher one (8 percent in this case) for coalitions.

Which Candidates Get the List Seats?

So far, we have been discussing the ways in which the seats are divided up among the parties under list and mixed systems. Once this has been decided, a second question arises: Which candidates on the party's list are awarded the seats that the party has won? This is dealt with in different ways. In some countries, the order of candidates drawn up by the party organization is a fixed ranking that the voters cannot alter. These systems are termed

nonpreferential, with *closed* or *blocked* lists. In a second group of countries, in contrast, there is no default order—the voters alone decide which candidates are elected. These systems are termed *preferential*, with *open* or *unblocked* lists. Under such systems there is intraparty electoral competition, because candidates of the same party are competing against each other for personal votes. In between these two are cases where the party's ranking may stand as a default ordering but can be overturned if enough voters combine against it. These cases may in practice be either essentially preferential or essentially nonpreferential, depending on what degree of coordination is needed among voters to overturn the ordering decided on by the party organization. In some countries it is very easy for voters to do this, and in others it is nearly impossible. The systems in operation are listed in Table 11.4 (for a more detailed analysis, see Marsh; Katz, "Intraparty"; Slugart).

There are relatively few examples of PR list systems where the lists are completely closed. Countries in this category include Portugal and Spain; the lists used on the one recent occasion when France used PR, in 1986, were also closed. In all of these cases, the order of candidates' names on the list is decided by the parties, and voters cannot alter it. Moreover, where mixed systems are used, the lists are usually in practice closed (as in Germany, Hungary, and Italy). In these countries, then, candidate selection plays an especially important role in the political recruitment process, as we saw in Chapter 10, because the selectors are in effect choosing the MPs.

Countries in the second category, employing genuinely open lists where the voters determine which of a party's candidates are elected, include Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, and Switzerland. In Finland the voters are all-powerful; they are obliged to express a preference for one specific candidate, and, within each party, those candidates receiving the most preferences win the seats. In Switzerland and Luxembourg, voters express as many preferences as there are seats in the constituency. They can cast a "list vote" for a party, which has the effect of giving one preference vote to each of the party's candidates, or they can cumulate two preference votes on one candidate. They can give their preferences to candidates on more than one party's list, an option known as *parachage*, which is confined to these two countries. Candidates near the top of the lists tend to receive the most preference votes. This could be either because the candidate selectors place the most attractive candidates in the most prominent positions, or because being near the top of the list attracts votes from party supporters who do not know much about individual candidates. Most likely, both factors operate. Thus, in Poland, about a third of all preference votes go to the candidate placed at the top of the list, and around 40 percent of these list-heading candidates are elected—though in 2001 one candidate placed as low as thirty-eighth on a list also won enough preference votes to be elected (Millard, pp. 93–94).

Turning to the third category, we find that in most cases the party candidate selectors draw up a list on which the candidates appear in a particular order, and the voters have a greater or lesser degree of power to overturn this order. Sometimes, the voters can cast either a "list vote" endorsing the order drawn up by the party or a "personal vote" for an individual candidate on the list; what varies is how likely these personal votes are to make any difference to the outcome. A number of postcommunist countries chose such systems, under which a degree of coordination by voters is needed to disturb the order drawn up by the party. As a result, whereas in open-list countries all MPs owe their election to preference votes, and in closed-list countries no MP does, in this third category of countries a proportion of MPs are elected because of the impact of preference

votes. In Estonia around 15 percent of MPs are elected thanks to preference votes, while in the Czech Republic the proportion is smaller—5 percent in 2002 (Millard, pp. 92–95). The Estonian electoral system is particularly complex, being based on three tiers of voting, and because the highest tier is based on closed lists, voters can end up frustrated with the outcome. Quite frequently, "a popular candidate will receive thousands of votes, but will not be elected due to low placement on the national list, while unheard-of candidates get into parliament thanks to their prominent list position" (Petrai and Kreuzer, p. 111). However, a change made prior to the 2003 election reduced the number of MPs elected via the national list and thus increased the weight of preference votes (Sikk, pp. 5–6). In Sweden preference votes had little impact prior to 1998, but then the rules were changed (see Box 11.1); even so, only around 3 percent of MPs in 2002 were elected due to preference votes (Widfeldt, p. 784). Under the Danish system, the parties can choose how to present their lists; some forms give considerable choice to the voters, whereas others restrict it, and the degree of voter choice can vary from party to party as well as between and even within constituencies. In practice, it is the voters who wield the decisive voice (Elkitt). The list component of Lithuania's mixed system used to employ lists that were in effect closed, but the rules were changed before the 2000 election to give preference votes more weight, and 15 of the 70 list candidates elected then owed their success to preference votes (Millard, p. 96).

In certain other countries, though, there are systems that in theory offer the opportunity for preferential voting for candidates but in practice are such that voters' preferences rarely overturn the ordering set by the parties. In Norway, personal votes have never made any difference to the personnel elected because they have been unable to have an effect unless at least half of a party's voters made exactly the same change to the list, and in Iceland no candidate has been elected due to preference votes since the mayor of Reykjavik managed this in 1946 (Aardal, p. 189; Kristjánsson, p. 403). Although the Norwegian rules were changed slightly in 2003, the impact is expected to be minimal (Aalberg, p. 1102). In Austria, similarly, even though a change to the electoral law in 1992 was supposed to make preferential voting more effective, only two candidates were elected out of list order in the four elections since then (Müller, p. 409). The system in the Netherlands differs in some of the details, but the essential feature is the same: The party supplies a default order of candidates, and such a high degree of concerted action by voters has been needed to overturn it that the party's rank ordering has almost always stood. Only three candidates were elected because of preference votes between 1945 and 1994. A recent change liberalized the position slightly, but at the three elections since then only five candidates were elected out of list order (Andeweg, p. 494). Even this limited opportunity has been resented by the Dutch parties, which sometimes demand pledges from their candidates that if they are elected "out of order," owing to preference votes, at the expense of a candidate higher on the list, they will resign their seat in favor of the candidate whom the party organization had placed higher on the list.

The Single Transferable Vote

The STV electoral system was devised in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century, and enthusiasm for it has been largely confined to English-speaking countries. It is used to elect the parliaments of Ireland and Malta, and it was employed to elect Estonia's

parliament at the 1990 election (for assessments of STV see Bowler and Grofman). In Ireland, the largest party, Fianna Fáil, has twice (in 1959 and 1968) attempted to have the system replaced by the British plurality system, mainly because it believed it would fare better under the latter, but on each occasion the electorate rejected the proposed change in a referendum. Like list systems, STV aims to give proportional representation to the shades of opinion within the constituency. Unlike them, it does not presuppose that those opinions are organized in terms of parties.

Voters cast a vote by ranking as many as they wish of the candidates, regardless of party, in order of their preference; they place a "1" next to the name of their favored candidate, a "2" next to the name of their second favorite, and so on (for detailed explanations of how STV works see Farrell, ch. 6; Sinnott, pp. 112–16). The counting of votes revolves around the Droop quota. This is calculated as the smallest whole number greater than $[v/(s+1)]$, where v is the number of valid votes and s the number of seats in the constituency. The Droop quota is therefore one more than a quarter of the votes in a three-seat constituency, one more than a fifth in a four-seater, and so on. Any candidate who achieves the Droop quota is certain of election and does not need votes over and above this number, which are surplus to requirements.

Any candidate whose total of first-preference votes equals or exceeds the Droop quota is declared elected. Unless it should happen that sufficient candidates are elected at this stage, the count then proceeds by distributing the surplus votes of the elected candidate(s)—that is, the votes they possess over and above the quota. These votes are transferred to the other candidates, in proportion to the next preferences marked for them. If this were not done, some votes would be "wasted" by remaining in the possession of a candidate who did not need them. If no candidate has a surplus, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and his or her votes are transferred to the other candidates, again in accordance with the next preferences marked. This process continues until all the seats have been filled.

What are the pros and cons of STV when compared with other proportional representation systems? Its advocates emphasize several points. First, PR-STV gives voters the opportunity to convey a lot of information about their preferences; they may rank all the candidates in order of choice, whereas under almost every other system they are limited to expressing a "Yes" verdict on one (or a few) and "No" on the rest. Second, when ranking candidates, voters are not constrained by party lines. They vote for candidates, not for parties, and STV works perfectly well—some say better—in nonpartisan elections. Some voters' preferences are not determined primarily by the candidates' party affiliations. These might be voters whose main concern is with an issue that cuts across party lines (such as abortion, European integration, or nuclear power); or voters who want to affect the social composition of parliament and thus wish to vote, say, for women or young candidates across party lines; or voters who want to elect a representative whose home base is in their own area of the constituency. Such voters can give their first preference vote to, say, a pro-EU candidate from one party and their second preference to a pro-EU candidate from a different party. List systems do not offer this opportunity, and the apparent exceptions—those of Switzerland and Luxembourg, which offer *panachage*—are not really comparable.

This is because of the third argument in favor of STV—namely, that voters control the way their votes will be used. No vote can help a candidate unless it expresses a preference for him or her. This sets STV apart from all list systems, where a preference given to one candidate of a party might end up helping another candidate of the same

party—a candidate whom, perhaps, the voter does not like. Under STV, voters can continue to give preferences after their first, knowing that a preference given to a candidate can never help that person against a candidate to whom the voter gave a higher preference. This is not the case under *panachage*; the voter giving a preference to a candidate of one party does not know which candidate of that party it will ultimately help, as it is added to the party's pool and could benefit any of its candidates.

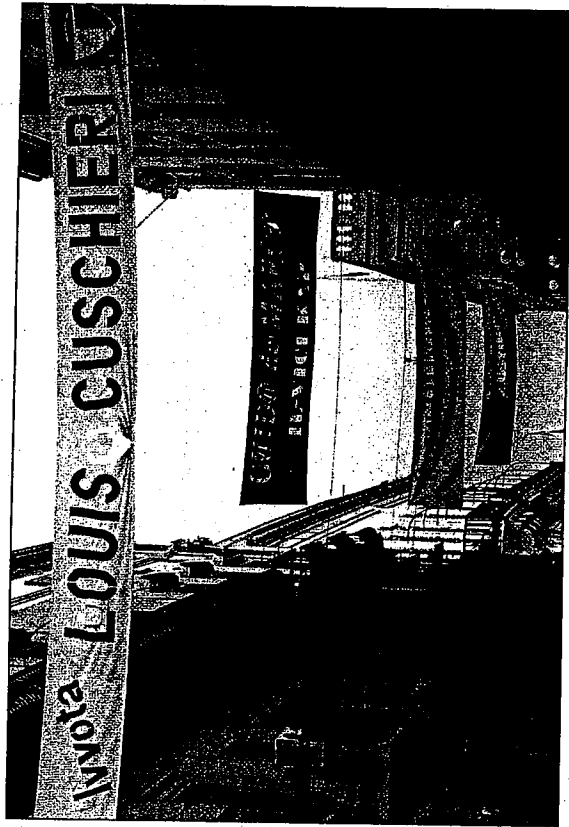
Fourth, STV gives voters the opportunity to express an opinion as to the direction their party should take. If there is more than one tendency or faction within a party, voters can express higher preferences for candidates from the one they favor and affect the composition of the parliamentary group accordingly. STV shares this quality with preferential list systems and American primaries. In addition, voters can, by the way they order candidates of other parties, send signals about the coalition partner(s) they would like their own party to take, and indeed help designated partners to benefit from their vote if their own party cannot make use of it.

Fifth, STV ensures that voters can vote sincerely, knowing that even if their first-choice candidate is unpopular, the vote will not be wasted, as it can be transferred to another candidate in accordance with the second preference the voter has marked on the ballot paper.

But STV also has its critics, which explains why it has inspired so little enthusiasm on the European mainland, although it has been seriously considered in Sweden (Pettersson et al., p. 114). They make three points in particular.

First, they are not impressed with the opportunity it gives voters to cross party lines. On the contrary, they feel that this might weaken the internal unity of parties and make them less cohesive. In elections, candidates of one party, rather than being able to concentrate on propagating party policies, must be alive to the possibility of attracting lower preferences from other parties' supporters. This might make the parties "fuzzy at the edges" as candidates adopt bland positions for fear of alienating any voter who might possibly give them a lower preference. Critics of STV argue that modern democratic politics, certainly in parliamentary systems, needs strong, cohesive parties to work properly, a subject that we discussed in Chapters 3 and 10, and that the idea of voting for candidates rather than parties, though all very well for other kinds of elections, is inappropriate for parliamentary elections. This argument is difficult to evaluate, because STV is used in too few countries for us to be able to tell whether it will tend to weaken parties. But it must be said that there is no evidence at all that parties in either Ireland or Malta are any less cohesive and disciplined than parties anywhere else (Gallagher, "Ireland," pp. 524–5). And even though Irish politics do tend to be relatively consensual, with few clear policy differences between the two main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the opposite is true in Malta, where the bitter rivalry between Labour and the Nationalists sometimes spills over into low-level violence.

The second criticism is that STV can realistically be used only in relatively small constituencies, thus raising the prospect of disproportionality (lack of complete correspondence between parties' shares of the votes and the seats). For example, STV is difficult to operate in constituencies larger than about ten seats, because the ballot paper could then contain thirty to forty names and most voters' preferences will become meaningless after the first half dozen or so. In both Ireland and Malta, the largest constituency size now used is five seats. Because votes are assumed to be cast



Under the STV electoral system, candidates have to appeal for personal support from the voters. The picture shows election banners for four candidates of the Nationalist Party in the Valletta constituency (district 1) in the Maltese election of 1996. In effect, these candidates were competing against each other as well as against candidates from the rival Maltese Labour Party. Guido de Marco and Austin Gatt were both elected, but Louis Cuschieri and Paul Borg Olivier were defeated. Courtesy of John C. Lane/State University of New York at Buffalo

for candidates rather than for parties, it is impossible, without contradicting the principles on which STV is based, to have higher-tier seat allocation (without the use of a second vote as in Germany), although, as Table 11.4 explains, Malta does have such an allocation in reserve. In practice, though, the possibility of disproportionality does not seem to be a major problem, as election results in Ireland and Malta have been as proportional as those of other PR systems.

Third, it has been argued that STV facilitates the election of independent candidates, who may be able to wield undue power over a government that lacks a secure majority. Independents, like center party candidates, stand to benefit from an electoral system in which voters can rank order the options as, precisely because they do not have a party label and thus do not alienate anyone, they may well be the second choice of many voters. Empirically, it is true that the election of independents is quite common in Ireland (thirteen were elected in 2002 and six in 1997), whereas elsewhere in western Europe independent members of parliament are virtually unknown. In times of minority government in Ireland, some independent deputies have been able to extract concessions from the government on local matters. Sinnott argues that STV thus makes possible circumstances in which independents wield disproportionate power and create a potentially serious underlying threat to the stability of government (Sinnott, p. 120). However, no independent has been elected to the parliament of Malta since independence in 1964.

→ WHY ELECTORAL SYSTEMS MATTER

The plethora of electoral systems used across Europe suggests that there is no simple answer to the question "Which is the best electoral system?" But although there has been no trend toward a uniform electoral system, the great majority of countries have systems based on PR. Only Britain and France use systems that do not embody the principle of PR. All the remaining countries that we are looking at employ some type of PR: In twenty countries a list system is used, four employ a mixed system, and Ireland and Malta have the single transferable vote. We have already reviewed the arguments about the relative merits of list systems and STV; we must now look at the wider question of the advantages and disadvantages of PR systems generally in comparison with plurality systems (for general discussions of the consequences and merits of different electoral systems, see Cox; Gallagher and Mitchell; Katz, *Democracy*; Lijphart, *Electoral*).

One obvious criterion for judging electoral systems is proportionality: How closely does the distribution of seats in parliament reflect the preferences of the voters as expressed in an election, and are some electoral systems better than others on this dimension? Another criterion is stable effective government. This is sometimes argued to be in conflict with the first, in that a very proportional electoral system might lead to a highly fragmented parliament from which it is difficult to put together a majority government, while a system that gives the largest parties a sizable seat bonus is less proportional but more likely to produce stable government. Others, though, are not convinced that government stability is any lower under PR systems. Other criteria, too, could be taken into account in an assessment of the merits of electoral systems. Do some systems give a better chance than others to women and minorities to win election to parliament? The overall picture, based on the most recent election in each of our twenty-eight countries, is summarized in Table 11.5.

Proportionality

The proportionality of election results—the degree to which parties' shares of the seats correspond to their shares of the votes—does indeed tend to be significantly greater under PR than under plurality systems. Table 11.5 shows clearly that there was a large difference between the plurality systems of Britain and France, on the one hand, and all PR systems, on the other hand, at the most recent elections. Among PR systems, there is some variation. The most proportional outcomes occur in countries that use large district magnitudes (Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Sweden), and also in Malta, despite its small district magnitude of just five seats per constituency. Although Germany, Latvia, Poland, and Slovakia also award seats in large districts, their employment of a 5 percent national threshold creates disproportionality because a significant number of people vote for parties that fail to reach the threshold. Disproportionality is also likely to be high when thresholds or small district magnitude assist the large parties and penalize small ones, as in Greece and, usually, Spain (Anckar). The pattern in Table 11.5 matches that found by Lijphart (*Electoral*, pp. 96–97) for the period 1945–90.

The Number of Parties

The formulation of the best-known causal relationship in the study of the effects of electoral systems is attributed to Maurice Duverger. It holds that the single-member plurality

TABLE 11.5

Aspects of Electoral Outcomes in Europe

Country	Most Recent Election	Disproportionality	Effective Number of Parties (elective level)	Effective Number of Parties (legislative level)	% of Parliament Seats Held by Women
Austria	2002	1.3	3.0	2.9	34
Belgium	2003	5.2	8.8	7.0	35
Cyprus	2001	3.8	3.6	1.6	16
Czech Republic	2002	6.3	4.8	3.7	17
Denmark	2005	1.8	5.2	4.9	37
Estonia	2003	3.5	5.4	4.7	19
Finland	2003	3.2	5.7	4.9	38
France	2002	21.9	5.2	2.3	12
Germany	2002	4.6	4.1	3.4	33
Greece	2004	7.4	2.7	2.2	14
Hungary	2002	7.6	2.8	2.2	9
Iceland	2003	1.9	3.9	3.7	30
Ireland	2002	6.6	4.1	3.4	14
Italy	2001	—	6.3 ^a	5.3	12
Latvia	2002	7.4	6.8	5.0	21
Lithuania	2004	—	5.8 ^a	6.2	22
Luxembourg	2004	3.4	4.3	3.8	23
Malta	2003	1.8	2.0	2.0	9
Netherlands	2003	1.1	5.0	4.7	37
Norway	2001	3.4	6.2	5.4	38
Poland	2001	6.3	4.5	3.6	20
Portugal	2005	5.7	3.1	2.6	20
Slovakia	2002	7.0	8.9	6.1	17
Slovenia	2004	5.1	6.0	4.7	12
Spain	2004	4.3	3.0	2.5	36
Sweden	2002	1.8	4.5	4.2	45
Switzerland	2003	2.5	5.4	5.0	25
United Kingdom	2001	17.7	3.3	2.2	18
Mean		5.5	4.8	3.9	24

^a "Disproportionality" refers to vote-seat disproportionality as measured by the least squares index (Gallagher and Mitchell, app. B). The scale runs from 0 to 100, 0 representing full proportionality and 100 representing total disproportionality. "Effective number of parties" at the elective level and the legislative level refers to the level of fragmentation of votes and seats respectively (Laakso and Taagepera). The "actual number of parties in parliament" excludes independent deputies.

it votes only.

For election results, see the source note of Table 7.1. For women in parliaments, see the Web site of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (www.ipu.org). All other figures are authors' calculations.

system favors a two-party system, the double-ballot majority system tends to produce multipartism tempered by alliances, and PR tends to lead to the formation of many independent parties (Duverger, p. 70). PR might be associated with a multiparty system either because it allows parties representing existing minorities to be viable or, as Duverger sees it, because it artificially "multiplies parties in an otherwise dualistic world, while plurality ... conforms to that natural dualism" (Taagepera and Shugart, p. 53). Under the French double-ballot system, many parties may contest the first round of voting, but there are strong incentives for parties to form alliances for the second-round contests. The British-style SMP system is associated with a two-party system because of both mechanical and psychological effects, as Duverger terms them. The mechanical effect is simply that smaller parties with support spread across the country do not reap a proportional reward in seats for their share of the votes. Whereas under a PR system a party winning, say, 10 percent of the votes in every part of the country would end up with about 10 percent of the seats, under an SMP system such a party would probably win no seats because it would not be the strongest party anywhere. The psychological effect comes about precisely because voters are aware of the mechanical effect. They know that if they cast their vote for a small party, this vote is likely to be wasted, and therefore the votes for such parties do not reflect their true level of underlying support. We saw in the earlier discussion of the Taunton result in Britain in 2001 (see Table 11.2) that the electoral system compelled supporters there of Labour and the UK Independence Party to decide whether to waste their vote on a candidate who was almost certain to lose or to vote instead for one of the two candidates who had a real chance. In this example, Labour was the main party affected, but in most constituencies the Liberal Democrats are the third party and hence the main losers.

The precise meaning, status, and accuracy of Duverger's predictions have been the subject of an extensive literature (see, for example, Sartori, pp. 27–52; Taagepera and Shugart, pp. 142–55; Cox, pp. 13–33), and this is not the place to explore these issues fully. However, we can examine the evidence to see whether there are indeed fewer parties under non-PR than PR systems. In order to do this, we need some satisfactory measure of the number of parties. Simply counting the number of parties is not sufficient; for example, in the British House of Commons around eight or ten different parties are usually represented (there were nine in 2001), but Britain has never had anything like a genuine nine-party system. To deal with this, Laakso and Taagepera devised a measure that takes into account not only the number of different parties but also the relative size of each, which they call the "effective number" of parties. It is essentially a measure of fragmentation, registering the extent to which strength is concentrated or dispersed. The intuitive meaning to be put on an effective number of, say, 3.6 parties, is that there is the same degree of fragmentation as if there were 3.6 equal-sized parties (Laakso and Taagepera). This number can be calculated both at the elective level, by measuring the degree to which votes are dispersed among the parties, and at the legislative level, by measuring the degree to which seats are dispersed among the parties.

Table 11.5 shows that the pattern of party competition in Europe in the period 2001–4 corresponded well to Duverger's predictions. In the two plurality countries, Britain and France, the reduction from the elective to the legislative level, brought about by the "mechanical" effect of the electoral system, is very marked. In Britain, something like a three-party system at the elective level is reduced to a two-party system in parliament. In

France, the votes at elections are spread among many more parties than in Britain, but partly because of the alliances and deals that Duverger predicts, parliamentary strength is far less fragmented than this. In PR systems, the fragmentation in parliament is only marginally less than that seen at the electoral level, as we would expect.

However, it is not invariably the case that PR is associated with multipartism. Certainly, this is true in some countries, most notably Belgium, where fragmentation has reached remarkable levels; at the 2003 election, the strongest two parties received only 28 percent of the votes between them. In Italy, Latvia, Norway, Slovakia, and Switzerland, too, the effective number of parties in parliament exceeds five. Yet in some other PR countries (Greece, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, and Spain) parliamentary strength is little if at all more fragmented than in France or the UK, with their plurality systems.

Two cases in particular show that the relationship between electoral systems and party systems is not a deterministic one. In Malta, the party system since independence has been the purest two-party system in Europe; since the start of the 1970s, the combined vote share of Labour and the Nationalists has averaged over 99 percent, neither party has fallen below 46 percent of the votes, and no other party has won a seat. This shows that while PR systems may well give parliamentary expression to a multiparty system if other factors, such as the number of political or social cleavages, cause voters to create one in the first place, PR does not by itself bring a multiparty system into being. Another interesting counterexample is Italy, where the change in the electoral system that was made in the mid-1990s, from a highly proportional version of PR to one in which three-quarters of the seats are filled by plurality contests in single-member constituencies, was expected to reduce the number of parties and present the voters with a clear choice between alternative governments. The second of these aims was met, in that since the change voters have been able to identify a right-wing and a left-wing option for government. But the effective number of parties in parliament actually rose, because the parties chose to "proportionalize" the plurality element of the new system, doing deals that mean that small parties that are part of an alliance get a clear run in a few constituencies (D'Alimonte). This shows that a preexisting party system can adapt to a new electoral system and will not necessarily be reshaped by it.

Electoral systems, then, do play a major part, albeit not a deterministic one, in influencing the shape of party systems. If Britain and France adopted PR systems, seats in their parliaments would be much less concentrated in the hands of the two main parties. In France, if we assume that French voters would behave in more or less the same way after the electoral system had been changed, the far-right FN would be a much more powerful presence in the National Assembly, and government formation might require alliances between the left and the mainstream right. In Britain, again assuming that voters would behave in the same way if the electoral system were changed, smaller parties such as the Liberal Democrats and perhaps the Greens and the anti-EU UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) would win both more votes and more seats, and single-party government might well become a thing of the past. The plurality electoral system may be all that has kept Britain (and, indeed, the United States) looking like a two-party system since the 1970s, and it has certainly been the key to two-party domination of the legislature.

A plurality electoral system, with its tendency to produce competition between just two large parties, reflects the view that a majority should prevail over a minority. This

in itself is an impeccable democratic principle. But it encounters problems in societies that are divided into a number of segments or interests, and on issues where there are more than two positions. When there is no majority to represent, plurality systems tend to produce outcomes that favor inordinately the larger minorities and discriminate against the smaller ones. PR systems, in contrast, seek to reflect in parliaments the divergences that exist in society.

Coalition or Single-Party Government?

One common argument against PR systems is that the very accuracy with which they reflect parties' electoral strengths in parliament creates problems when it comes to forming a government. It is extremely rare, under any type of electoral system, for one party to win a majority of the votes cast, so a single-party majority government is likely only if the largest party receives a bonus of seats that takes it over the magic 50 percent mark. Obviously, this is most likely to happen under a plurality system, where proportionality is lower and the largest party often wins a substantial bonus. For example, in Britain's 2001 election, Labour received only 41 percent of the votes but won 63 percent of the seats, a bonus of 22 percent (see Table 11.3). Under a PR system, assuming that disproportionality is not introduced as a result of small district magnitudes, no party's seat bonus is very large. Consequently, a single-party majority government is possible only if one party actually wins a majority of votes or comes very close to it so that it needs only a small bonus to achieve a parliamentary majority. A survey of the record in twenty countries found that although single-party majority governments were formed after only 10 percent of elections held under PR, such governments emerged after 60 percent of elections held under plurality or majority electoral systems (Blais and Carty, p. 214).

Having said this, we should be clear that the relationship between electoral systems and government types is not entirely straightforward. It is true that in countries with the most fragmented party systems, such as Belgium, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Switzerland, all or nearly all governments are coalitions. It is also true that Britain, owing to its non-PR electoral system, has not had a coalition government since 1945. However, the British electoral system has not always produced a stable majority government. Some British elections—the most recent being that of February 1974—produced no overall parliamentary majority for any party, and between 1976 and 1979 the minority Labour government was able to survive in office only because of the support of the Liberals, under the terms of an arrangement known as the "Lib-Lab pact." In France, too, the plurality system did not produce a majority government in either the 1988 or the 1997 elections, and indeed, bearing in mind that the RPR and UDF were separate (albeit allied) parties, the Fifth Republic has had very few single-party governments (see Box 11.2). Likewise, in countries using PR systems, even though coalitions are far more common, there are still many cases of single-party government. The Austrian Socialist Party, Ireland's Fianna Fáil, the Norwegian Labor Party, the Swedish Social Democrats, and both Labour and the Nationalists in Malta have all had long spells in office alone, and other countries with PR have experienced single-party government for periods.

Some defenders of non-PR systems have argued that even if these systems do not produce proportional representation in any given parliament, they are likely to produce proportional tenure in government over a series of parliaments. The rationale for this is

Box 11.2 THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

France

As in Britain, the electoral system, being based on single-member constituencies, greatly favors the large parties. Single-party majority government, though, is uncommon; only three times in the post-1958 Fifth Republic has one party won a majority of seats (the Gaullists in 1968, the Socialists in 1981, and the UMP in 2002). The potential of single-member constituency systems to produce startling results was demonstrated by the March 1993 election, one of the most disproportional ever to have taken place in any country. The right-wing parties won 460 of the 577 seats in parliament despite having attracted only 38 percent of votes in the first round of voting (which under a "pure" PR system would have earned them just 221 seats). The main beneficiaries of the high disproportionality that is characteristically produced by the French system are the mainstream right-wing parties and, to a lesser extent, the Socialists. The main losers are small parties, together with the "extreme" parties: the Communists on the left and the FN on the right.

Germany

Under the Weimar Republic established after World War I, Germany had highly proportional election results and very unstable governments. The electoral system adopted after World War II is often seen as having produced the best of both worlds: Election results are still highly proportional, but there is no problem of government instability. The threshold that parties need to reach before qualifying for list seats has prevented the development of a situation where a multitude of small parties hold the balance of power. During the 1960s and 1970s, only three parties (the SPD, the CDU/CSU, and the FDP) were represented at the West German Bundestag, before they were joined by the Greens in the 1980s and the PDS in the 1990s.

Italy

Italy's pre-1993 electoral system guaranteed a high degree of proportionality, and a large number of minor parties usually gained representation. Voters' ability to indicate a preference for individual candidates

on their chosen party's list generated considerable intraparty competition in and between elections; this was especially pronounced within the Christian Democrats and reinforced the highly factionalized nature of that party. The new system adopted in 1993 was designed to have a very different impact. It is inherently less proportional than the previous system, and the element of intraparty competition for preference votes from the electorate has been eliminated. The first three elections held under this system have all been less proportional than previous Italian elections had been. For example, in Italy's 2001 election, Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing coalition won 45 percent of the constituency votes and 50 percent of the list votes yet received 58 percent of the seats. Although the new electoral system had been expected—and, by many, hoped—to reduce the number of different parties in parliament, this number actually rose, because the major parties prefer to make deals with the smaller parties that are close to them on the political spectrum rather than try to use the majoritarian tendency of the plurality seats to crush them. Nonetheless, the electoral system has encouraged the formation of two large pre-election alliances between parties, giving Italians for the first time a clear choice between a center-right or a center-left government.

Latvia

The high degree of proportionality that could be generated by Latvia's large district magnitudes (an average of 20 seats per constituency) is not realized because of the 5 percent national threshold that a party must reach in order to receive any seats. Quite a number of votes (16 percent in 2002) are cast for parties that do not reach the threshold. Latvia's party system was highly fragmented in the 1930s, with as many as twenty-seven parties represented in parliament at one stage. The postcommunist party system was also very fragmented initially—its 1995 election was remarkable for the fact that even the strongest party won only 15 percent of the votes—but the fragmentation within parliament is much lower because of the threshold. Turnout has consistently exceeded 70 percent at postcommunist elections.

Netherlands

Because the Netherlands returns all its members of parliament in one nationwide constituency, proportionality is high, with the largest parties receiving a negligible bonus of seats over and above their share of the votes. The absence of any subnational constituencies has led to some complaints that citizens do not have any local constituency representatives with whom they can identify and to whom they can take casework problems. Over the years there have been attempts to counteract this by introducing provisions under which "personal votes"—that is, preference votes cast for individual candidates—would be more effective in determining which individual candidates are elected, and a change made before the 1998 election made it slightly easier for these personal votes to have an impact. Under the existing system, though, connections between citizens and MPs are weak, leading to pressure for electoral reform.

Poland

The first free election, that of 1991, was remarkable for the numbers of parties that competed (111) and won seats (29). The success of the Polish Friends of Beer Party (Polska Partia Przyjaciół Piwa), which won 16 seats, gained news coverage around the world (though it was claimed that the party had a serious anti-alcoholism message and was aiming to wean drinkers away from the harder stuff). Thresholds introduced for subsequent elections have drastically reduced the number of parties securing representation in the Sejm and have consequently increased government stability. Parliamentary strength now shows only moderate fragmentation. Despite the degree of activism and protest under the communist regime (higher than in other communist countries), turnout levels are low; only one postcommunist election brought more than 50 percent of the electorate out to vote.

Spain

Spain's electoral system is a version of PR, but it does not produce highly proportional outcomes, mainly because of the low number of members returned from the

average constituency, together with malapportionment (the deliberate overrepresentation of rural areas). In consequence, the largest parties receive a significant bonus from the electoral system and are able to govern without the need for coalition partners. In 2000, for example, the right-wing Popular Party received 52 percent of the seats for 45 percent of the votes, and in 2004 the Socialists won 47 percent of the seats with 43 percent of the votes. Small parties with a strong regional base also fare well, but small parties whose support is spread thinly across the country are invariably underrepresented.

Sweden

The Swedish electoral system gives highly proportional results. Consequently, the largest party, the Social Democrats, rarely wins an overall majority of seats even though its average share of the votes makes it one of Europe's strongest parties. By international standards, women are strongly represented in the Riksdag. Following the election of September 2002, Sweden had the highest proportion of women in parliament of any country in the world, 146 women out of 349 MPs.

United Kingdom

The single-member constituency electoral system gives a large bonus of seats to the two largest parties, Labour and the Conservatives, which regularly win nearly all the seats in parliament even though smaller parties may take up to a third of the votes. An observer sitting in the gallery of the House of Commons would infer from the distribution of seats among the parties that Britain has something close to a two-party system, but this impression is largely created by the electoral system. If Britain adopted a proportional electoral system, small parties, especially the Liberal Democrats and the UK Independence Party, would win many more seats in the Commons, and the likelihood of single-party majority government, currently the norm, would be greatly reduced. Electoral reform is often discussed, but neither of the major parties, especially when it is in power, is keen on a move to proportional representation.

that a large party winning, say, between 40 and 50 percent of the votes, will have all the government power for about half the time, whereas under PR, it is argued, small centrist parties may be almost permanent fixtures in government, thus earning tenure in government way above their electoral support. However, empirical analysis does not support the claim that non-PR systems perform better on this criterion than do PR ones (Vowles). Under both kinds of electoral system, large parties' share of time in office tends to be greater than their share of electoral support, while "extreme" parties fare badly. The supposed bias toward centrist parties under PR largely disappears when account is taken of the (usually small) share of cabinet seats they occupy while in office.

Defenders of majoritarian systems also claim that the identifiability of government options is lower under PR systems, where voters may not know in advance of the election what government possibilities are on offer given that the government will be put together by interparty deals after the election (we discuss this in detail in Chapter 12). Empirical research shows that this is, indeed, the case. However, while majoritarian visions of democracy score well on identifiability, proportional ones score better when it comes to the representation of voters (Powell, pp. 87, 112–13). In other words, while single-party government gives some voters pretty much all of what they want and takes no account of the views of the others, coalitions give many voters at least some of what they want.

The Backgrounds of Parliamentarians

Proportional representation elections produce parliaments that differ from those produced by plurality elections. This is true not just as far as the representation of parties is concerned; it also applies to the profile of the individuals who sit on the parliamentary benches.

This is especially obvious when we look at the proportion of women in legislatures around the world. Table 11.5 shows that the average for Britain and France, the two countries that do not use PR, is a mere 15 percent, compared with 24 percent for the other twenty-six countries. In ten countries, 30 percent or more of parliamentarians are women; the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands lead the way. Of course, these countries have a progressive attitude toward female participation in politics and in society generally (see the Gender Empowerment Index in Table 1.1), but the broad tendency remains true even when we look at less progressive countries. Thus, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Portugal, where the relatively traditional nature of society and the strength of Catholicism might suggest that women would find it hard to gain entry to the political elite, and Switzerland, where women were denied the vote until the 1970s, all had more women in their national parliaments than Britain until 1997, when positive action by the Labour Party, which deliberately chose women candidates in a number of safe and marginal seats, led to a great increase in the number of female British MPs.

While the variation among the PR countries shows that many factors beside the electoral system affect the strength of women in the legislature, it is well established that, other things being equal, PR facilitates the election of women to parliament (Norris, pp. 179–208). The explanation is to be found primarily in the multitember constituencies necessitated by PR. Under a single-member constituency system, the candidate selectors might be reluctant to pick a woman as the party's sole candidate, using the excuse,

genuine or otherwise, that they believe some voters will be less likely to vote for a woman than for a man. But when several candidates are to be chosen, it is positively advantageous for a ticket to include both men and women, for an all-male list of three or more candidates is likely to alienate some voters.

The evidence as to whether, within the PR group, either STV, open-list systems, or closed-list systems give any special advantage to women is inconclusive. In closed-list systems, where the voters cannot alter the candidate selectors' rankings, the selectors could, if they wished, bring about gender equality in parliament by employing the "zipper" system of alternating women and men on the list—placing a woman first, a man second, a woman third, and so on. But in countries where the selectors might wish to do this, it is quite likely that the voters too will believe in gender equality and will not use their preference votes specifically against women candidates. If this is the case, an open-list system and PR-STV will neither assist nor damage women's electoral chances. The empirical evidence is inconclusive. Table 11.5 shows that the three countries with most women (Sweden, Denmark, and Finland) all employ open-list systems, while in the next three (Netherlands, Norway, and Spain) the voters have little or no opportunity to alter the rankings of the candidate selectors. The number of women elected in the two PR-STV countries is even lower than in the plurality countries (the averages are 11 percent and 15 percent respectively), but this may be due less to their use of STV and more to the fact that both countries, Ireland and Malta, are very Catholic; it is clear that, other things being equal, attitudes toward a political role for women are more favorable in Protestant countries.

There is less research on other underrepresented groups, but the same argument applies. Those who pick the party's candidate in a single-member constituency may be reluctant to take the risk of selecting a representative of an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority, but candidate selectors in a multitember constituency will usually feel it wise to ensure that the ticket includes a cross section of the groups to which the party is hoping to appeal. Legislatures produced by PR elections thus tend to be more representative of the population that elects them, both in the backgrounds of the parliamentarians and in the relationship between votes won and seats received by political parties.

→ REFERENDUMS

Elections are archetypal institutions of representative democracy, but in a number of countries the people make certain decisions themselves, by means of the referendum. In a referendum the people decide directly on some issue, rather than electing representatives to make decisions on their behalf. In the great majority of European countries, a referendum can be triggered only by one of the institutions of representative government, such as the government, a parliamentary majority, a specified minority in parliament, or the president. In just five countries—Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Switzerland—the people themselves can bring about a popular vote by means of provisions for the initiative (Ulmer, "Introduction," p. 12), without needing the endorsement of any other political actor.

The use of the referendum varies hugely across Europe. Between 1945 and 1995, around 400 referendums took place in western Europe—and one country, Switzerland, was responsible for 300 of these (Gallagher, "Conclusion," p. 231). Referendums are

relatively common in Italy (40 cases during the same period), Ireland (17), and Denmark (14). In contrast, Germany and the Netherlands held no national referendums, Belgium, Finland, and the UK held one each, and Austria and Norway had two. The use of referendums worldwide increased steadily during the course of the twentieth century (LeDuc, p. 21).

Most commonly, referendum issues are ones that cut across party lines, and given that party systems are usually based on the left-right spectrum, as we saw in Chapter 8, socioeconomic issues are not usually the subject of referendums (Bogdanor, pp. 91–95). Instead, questions that concern national sovereignty or moral issues are often seen as particularly suitable for a direct vote by the people. In relation to sovereignty, sixteen countries have held referendums on membership of the European Union. Of the first fifteen members, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden held a referendum before joining, and nine of the ten 2004 entrants (Cyprus was the exception) did the same (Szczerbiak and Taggart). Several other countries have held referendums on aspects of European integration, as we saw in Chapter 5.

Iceland and Norway held referendums on independence—in each case there was near unanimity in favor—as did the three Baltic states in the early 1990s (the votes were heavily in favor, but there was strong opposition from Russians living in these countries).

The people of Cyprus, too, voted on a sovereignty issue in April 2004, when a simultaneous vote was held in both parts of the divided island on a EU plan to reunify the island. If both sections had voted in favor, the island would have been reunited and would have joined the EU a week later as one political entity. Turkish Cyprus supported the proposals (65 percent were in favor), but Greek Cyprus voted three to one against. The outcome was that only the Greek part of Cyprus joined the EU—leading to some unhappiness among other EU member states, who felt that the Greek Cypriots had in effect prevented Turkish Cyprus from gaining EU entry.

Moral issues occasionally feature as referendum topics. In Italy, after parliament had legalized divorce in 1970, opponents of this measure brought about a popular vote in 1974 to try to strike it down, and the people's decision to retain the divorce laws confirmed the liberalizing trend in Italian society. In Ireland, too, the legalization of divorce required the approval of the people in a referendum; in 1986 the vote was against change, but when a further referendum was held in 1995, there was a slim majority in favor, thus opening the door to the provision of divorce. Both Italy and Ireland have also held referendums on abortion.

Several postcommunist regimes made provision for the referendum and also for the initiative, allowing a number of citizens to promote laws or to challenge existing ones. This was taken furthest in Lithuania, whose number of referendums soon reached double figures (Møller, Krupavicius and Zvalauskas). One of the proposals in 1996, very unusual for a referendum topic, was to amend the constitution to specify that at least half of the annual budget should be spent on social welfare, health care, education, and science. However, very high thresholds—proposals must be supported by at least half of the electorate, which is much more difficult to achieve than the support of half of those actually voting—have led to a low acceptance rate. It is clear that some proposals have been promoted by parties more in order to impress or mobilize a group of voters than in any serious expectation of seeing their proposals passed.

The impact of the referendum, not surprisingly, has been greatest in Switzerland, where, by signing a petition, fifty thousand people can launch an initiative and bring about a popular vote on any bill recently passed by parliament. Over the years only about 7 percent of bills have been challenged in this way; about half of these bills have been endorsed by the people and the other half have been rejected (Trechsel and Kriesi, p. 191). The impact on policy making is to incline the individuals drawing up legislation to consult widely in order to bring aboard any group that might otherwise launch an initiative against the bill.

In Italy, too, the use of the referendum has been very significant. Here, most popular votes have been “abrogative initiatives”—that is, they are launched by a petition signed by a prescribed number of voters, and they have the aim of repealing an existing law (Ulteri, “Italy”). In the early 1990s, two popular votes on aspects of the electoral system dealt hammer blows to the corrupt political establishment dominated by the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Socialists (PSI). The overwhelming support for both reforming measures was interpreted as an expression of popular disgust at the behavior of the ruling elite, which bowed to public pressure and left power, leading to a change in the electoral system used for elections to the lower house and to elections held three years ahead of schedule in March 1994. The Constitutional Court, which we discussed in Chapter 4, plays an important gatekeeper role by deciding whether questions may be put to a vote of the people. In the past it disallowed a high proportion of proposals, though by the mid-1990s it was more often criticized for allowing too many, and too trivial, questions through (Volcansek, pp. 91–115).

The rules in Italy require that for a law to be struck down by a referendum, there must be not only a majority of votes in favor of such a proposal but also a turnout of at least 50 percent. Consequently, if public opinion is known to be strongly supportive of some proposal, opponents are best advised not to vote at all in the hope of thereby invalidating the result by preventing turnout reaching the 50 percent threshold. In 1991 the Italian prime minister Bettino Craxi (later disgraced and indicted for corruption) advised Italians to “go to the beach” rather than vote on a change to the electoral system (most of them defied him and voted). However, no referendum since 1995 has generated a turnout as high as 50 percent (Ulteri, *Referendum*, p. 323).

The disadvantages of imposing thresholds in referendums are manifold (Kobach, pp. 303–06), yet several postcommunist countries adopted very similar rules (Albi, pp. 65–69; Brunner, pp. 222–23). The most common requirement is a turnout of at least 50 percent, a hangover from the days of communism when this threshold was nominally in place for all elections. Some countries complicate matters more by having different thresholds for different kinds of referendum (for example, “ordinary” referendums or constitutional amendment referendums). Only a few postcommunist countries have no such high hurdles: Estonia and the Czech Republic, where a simple majority suffices, and Hungary, where the majority supporting a proposal must amount to at least a quarter of the electorate. The result of these requirements, coupled with declining turnout in most postcommunist countries, is that “more than half of referendums within recent years have failed to meet these high quorums” (Albi, p. 66).

The referendum is an institution that might seem to be inherently in conflict with the system of “representative government” that this book is about. Indeed, some critics of the referendum argue against it precisely on the grounds that it will weaken or

Box 11.3 THE REFERENDUM

France

France has a long history of referendums, going back to 1793. Most of its pre-1945 referendums were widely seen as dubiously democratic, being used by authoritarian rulers to legitimize their positions. More recently, the transition from the Third to the Fourth Republic was achieved by referendums in the mid-1940s, and in 1958 voters approved the inauguration of the Fifth Republic. The character of the Fifth Republic was transformed by the referendum called by Charles de Gaulle in October 1962 on direct election of the president. De Gaulle had been made president in 1958 by the established parties, and by 1962 he had fulfilled the tasks they had hoped he would undertake. They may have planned to dispense with his services once his term ended, but de Gaulle outflanked them by his decision to call a referendum. The people voted in favor of the change, and this outcome considerably enhanced the power and prestige of the president, at least when the president's party holds a parliamentary majority, as we saw in Chapter 2. In 1969, though, a referendum brought about de Gaulle's downfall. He had tied his continuation in office to the success of an administrative reform proposal, and when the people rejected this measure, he resigned from office. From then to the end of the century there were only three more referendums. The September 2000 referendum on reducing the term of the president produced a turnout (valid votes) of only 25 percent—the lowest for any national vote since records began.

Germany

Two referendums were held under the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, and another four took place under the Nazis in the 1930s. Needless to say, the last four were not in any way democratic exercises, and Hitler's use of the referendum brought the institution into lasting disrepute in Germany. The postwar German constitution makes no mention of national referendums, and one has been held since 1938, although referendums occur at state level. Despite exaggerated fears, dating from the Nazi era, about the possible undemocratic overtones of referendums, there was even some dis-

ussion for awhile about the possibility of putting the draft European constitution agreed to in June 2004 to a national referendum.

Italy

Italy is second only to Switzerland in the number of popular votes that take place. It is one of the few European countries where the voters themselves can bring about a popular vote by means of the initiative, without needing the agreement of the government, parliament, or political parties. Some Italian referendums have been particularly important. In 1974 Italians voted to retain the laws permitting divorce, which the Catholic Church and conservative groups had hoped would be struck down by the referendum, and in the early 1990s the votes to reform the electoral system constituted decisive blows against the corrupt and tottering political establishment. The rule that a referendum result is not valid unless turnout reaches 50 percent allows opponents of popular proposals to thwart them by not turning out.

Latvia

The Latvian constitution provides numerous possibilities for referendums—they are obligatory in some areas and can also be initiated by citizens—but only four have been held so far. One was on independence, one concerned citizenship, one was about pensions, and the fourth, in 2003, was on EU membership. The citizenship referendum (in 1998) liberalized citizenship laws dating from 1994 that were seen by the EU as discriminatory against Latvia's substantial ethnic Russian population. As in most other postcommunist countries, in Latvia there is a turnout requirement to make the result valid: Turnout must reach half the number of electors who voted in the previous general election—an unusual requirement.

Netherlands

Prior to 2005, the Netherlands was unique in western Europe in never having held a national referendum. Despite this, or possibly because of it, the question of whether referendums support or damage democracy is

debated more intensively in the Netherlands than nearly anywhere else. A number of referendums have been held at the local level on an experimental basis, and in the late 1990s there were moves to introduce legislation that would allow national referendums for the first time. The first national referendum was scheduled to take place in June 2005 on the subject of the proposed EU constitution.

Poland

The political space (unique in the communist world) that was won in Poland during the 1980s by the Solidarity movement saw the holding of two referendums in November 1987 on political and economic reforms proposed by the regime. That they were not mere formalities was shown by the fact that neither set of proposals won the support of as many as 70 percent of those voting and, moreover, a further 30 percent heeded Solidarity's call to boycott the referendums. Only three referendums have been held in postcommunist Poland. In 1996, only 32 percent bothered to vote in a referendum on privatization. Second, in 1997 the people voted narrowly (53–47) to adopt a new constitution, and in 2003 they voted by nearly four to one in favor of joining the EU. Referendum results are not binding unless turnout reaches 50 percent (if it does not, the referendums are deemed merely "consultative"). Given that Poland's citizens have proved difficult to mobilize politically—the country has consistently low turnout—opponents of change have the same opportunity as that provided by a similar rule in Italy—that is, the chance to block a popular proposal by simply not voting.

Spain

Spain has used the referendum institution sparingly. Two nondemocratic referendums took place under the authoritarian Franco regime. After Franco's death in 1975, two more referendums authorized the transition to democratic politics, with a vote in favor of the political reform program in 1976 and approval of a new constitution in 1978. The only national referendums since then came in 1986, when the people voted narrowly in favor

of Spain's remaining within NATO, and in 2005, when on a low turnout there was a strong vote in favor of the proposed EU constitution. In addition, a number of referendums have taken place at the regional level.

Sweden

Sweden held only five referendums during the twentieth century, on a rather eclectic range of subjects including the prohibition of alcohol and even the side of the road on which motorists should drive. The most important referendum took place in 1994, when Swedes voted by a narrow margin in favor of their country joining the European Union. In September 2003 the country voted against joining the European monetary union, a vote overshadowed by the murder a few days earlier of the popular foreign minister Anna Lindh.

United Kingdom

Only one national referendum has taken place in the United Kingdom, that was in 1975, when by a two-to-one majority the people voted to remain within the European Community, which the UK had joined in 1973. However, the referendum has been used rather more within the component parts of the United Kingdom. In 1979 and 1997 there were referendums in Scotland and Wales on the devolution of powers. In each nation, the 1979 proposals did not receive enough support, but the 1997 proposals did, and they led to the creation of the Scottish parliament and the Welsh assembly that we discussed in Chapter 6. In addition, the package of proposals agreed to by political leaders in Northern Ireland in April 1998 (the "Good Friday Agreement") was put to the people of the province a month later and received endorsement by a margin of 71 to 29 percent. Whether a referendum is held on a given issue is decided by the government of the day, and the Labour government of 2001–5 declared that both the new EU constitution and any government decision that the UK should join the European monetary union would be put to referendums.

undermine representative institutions. Perhaps, whenever a difficult issue arises, governments and parliaments will pass the buck to the people and propose holding a referendum rather than take the responsibility themselves. Or, in countries where the people can launch an initiative against a law passed by parliament, governments and parliaments may avoid taking tough but necessary decisions for fear of a popular vote overturning them. Another risk is that people might vote for attractive ideas that can't really be implemented, or for expensive plans for which they are unwilling to pay (by, for example, increasing taxes), or for ideas that are so at odds with the overall program of the government that the government is prevented from following any coherent policy. There are also elitist concerns that the mass public, being ill-informed and easily manipulable, will thus be likely to endorse whatever proposals government leaders place before them without thinking deeply about the issues. In this rather far-fetched line of thought, the use of referendums could transform a representative democracy into a "plebiscitarian democracy."

Despite these fears, representative institutions have not been seriously challenged by the referendum. For one thing, in most countries that hold referendums elected representatives control access to them. Indeed, in most cases the government, acting by virtue of its support in parliament, determines the wording and timing of proposals to be voted on. Consequently, it is, as Butler and Ranney (p. 21) observe, "hard to believe that ... the referendum seriously subverts representative democracy." Qvortrup (pp. 152-61) argues that it is likely to strengthen rather than weaken representative government. In Switzerland representative institutions are by now well accustomed to operating in conjunction with the referendum. Only in Italy can the referendum be said to have had a destabilizing effect. Initiatives played a major role in bringing down the corrupt *partitocrazia* in the early 1990s and could in theory make life difficult for more credible political actors in future. Political parties may also be seen as under threat from the referendum, because during referendum campaigns the debate is often dominated by single-issue groups (or umbrella organizations covering a number of such groups), and parties, which may be internally divided on a referendum issue, become sidelined. Nevertheless, referendums can in fact be useful devices for parties, acting as a "lightning rod" by removing awkward issues from the party political agenda (Bjørklund, pp. 248-49).

The idea of replacing representative government by some kind of "direct democracy" in which citizens would vote on almost every issue is clearly completely unrealistic in a modern complex society. The sensible question to ask is thus not whether "direct democracy," which in any case is an ill-defined concept, is better than representative democracy. It is, rather, whether representative government and the referendum are inherently in conflict, or whether they can usefully complement each other. For the most part, the record in modern Europe suggests that the latter is the case.

→ CONCLUSION

Studies of electoral systems have come a long way in recent decades (Shugart). During the first half of the last century, some writers used to argue seriously that the adoption of PR in any country was virtually bound to lead to the collapse of democracy and

the establishment of a dictatorship. Others claimed that PR was almost a guaranteed recipe for harmony, enlightened government, and a contented citizenry. Expectations of the difference that electoral systems can make are now more realistic.

Even so, there is no doubt that electoral systems do matter. Proportional representation systems lead to parliaments that more closely reflect the distribution of votes than do plurality systems, are more likely to be associated with a multiparty system, and facilitate the entry of women and ethnic minorities into parliament. From a study of government performance in thirty-six countries, Arend Lijphart concludes that PR systems can make a bigger difference than this; they can have an impact on many aspects of public policy. In countries that are close to the model of "consensus democracy," of which a PR electoral system is a key component, the record of government tends to be "kinder and gentler" when it comes to welfare spending, protection of the environment, use of harsh penal measures, and aid to developing countries, than it is in "majoritarian democracies," which use plurality or majority electoral systems. When it comes to macroeconomic performance and control of violence, too, consensus democracies have a slightly better record (Lijphart, *Patterns*, pp. 258-300). Similarly, Powell shows that the policy positions of governments in countries employing the "proportional vision" of democracy are closer to the position of the median voter than are governments in countries using the "majoritarian vision." He concludes that in the twenty democracies he analyzed, "the proportional vision and its designs enjoyed a clear advantage over their majoritarian counterparts in using elections as instruments of democracy" (Powell, p. 254).

One of the areas in which electoral systems have their most visible consequences is government formation. PR formulas are much less likely than a plurality or majority system to manufacture single-party governments. Because it is very uncommon for a single party to win a majority of the votes cast, PR systems tend to be characterized by coalition government, the subject to which we turn in Chapter 12.

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