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Electoral reform in Europe since 1945

Article

Supplemental Material

online supplement

Renwick, A. (2011) Electoral reform in Europe since 1945. West European Politics, 34 (3). pp. 456-477. ISSN 1743-9655 doi: 10.1080/01402382.2011.555975 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/21318/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.
Published version at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402382.2011.555975
To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2011.555975

Publisher: Routledge

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Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945

***West European Politics* 34:?, ??–??**

Online Supplement:

Details of Categorizations Used in and Sources Used For Tables

This supplement provides additional details regarding the criteria for including and classifying cases of electoral system change and lists the principal sources used for each country.

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Abbreviations

MMM	mixed-member majoritarian
MMP	mixed-member proportional
PR	proportional representation
SMP	single-member plurality
STV	single transferable vote

Criteria Used to Identify and Categorize Cases

Countries Included

The sample used for this article includes European countries since 1945. Only independent countries that had, as of December 2009, achieved consolidated democracy are included. Membership of the European Union is taken as an indicator that democracy in a country is widely viewed as consolidated, but I also include three further cases in Western Europe that have clearly had consolidated democracy throughout the period studied: Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland. Only the most recent democratization episode is included, excluding, therefore, the short democratic interludes in some East European countries immediately after 1945 and attempts at democratization in Greece before 1974.

Eleven of the countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) were already democratic at the start of the period (periods of foreign occupation during the Second World War are not counted as breaks in democracy). Four (Austria, France, West Germany, and Italy) democratized in the years immediately following the start of the period (France is included in this category because it underwent a process of democratic refoundation). Malta enters the sample upon independence in 1964. Four countries (Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Spain) experienced transition during the 1970s (as explained in the text, Cyprus is included only from 1970). Among the countries of Eastern Europe, four (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania) held their first democratic and independent legislative elections in 1990, Poland followed suit in 1991,

Estonia, Lithuania, and Slovenia did so in 1992, and Latvia completed the set in 1993. Finally, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are included from their split in 1993.

Political System

The year of transition is defined as the year of the first democratic elections during the democratization episode. (In the case of Hungary, the electoral system used for those elections was enacted in the previous calendar year, and I therefore allow for a two-year transition.) The year of transition is thus:

- before 1945: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom
- 1945: Austria, France
- 1946: Italy
- 1949: Germany
- 1958: France
- 1970: Cyprus
- 1974: Greece
- 1975: Portugal
- 1977: Spain
- 1989–90: Hungary
- 1990: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania
- 1991: Poland
- 1992: Estonia, Lithuania, and Slovenia
- 1993: Latvia

The ten years following the transition year are counted as the "1st decade" of the democracy and the next ten years as the "2nd decade" (in some cases these are amalgamated into the category of "new" democracy). All subsequent years count as "old" democracy.

Electoral System Changes Included

The criteria used for deciding which electoral system changes to include and which to exclude are based on Lijphart's widely recognized criteria for significance. These are:

- any change in the electoral formula (in multi-tier systems, only changes in the decisive tier);
- any change of at least 20 per cent in average district magnitude (in multi-tier systems, only changes in the upper tier);
- any change of at least 20 per cent in the national legal threshold, "or the adoption of such a threshold where none existed before";
- any change of at least 20 per cent in assembly size (Lijphart 1994: 13).

Lijphart later elaborates on what he means by the "decisive tier" in multi-tier systems: in systems with allocation of remainders at the upper tier, the lower-tier formula does count as significant; in systems with adjustment seats at the national tier, the lower-tier formula is not significant (Lijphart 1994: 32–6); in the non-compensatory multi-tier system used in past Greek elections, all tiers are significant (Lijphart 1994: 42–5).

I supplement Lijphart's criteria in two ways. First, with respect to the proportionality of the electoral system, his criteria do not entirely determine which cases should be included. I make the following additions:

- Several countries in Eastern Europe use differentiated thresholds, where different thresholds apply to parties running independently and coalitions of parties running jointly. Lijphart did not encounter such thresholds in his case set. I err here on the side of inclusion, allowing changes of at least 20 per cent in any one of a ladder of differentiated thresholds to count as significant.
- Lijphart's rules cover systems of multi-tier districting (including MMP), but they do not tell us how to deal with mixed–independent systems (Massicotte and Blais 1999). The issue with such systems is what proportion of seats need to be affected by a change for it to be considered significant. Lijphart rightly ignores the abolition of the STV system that, before 1948, was used to elect 1.4 per cent of the seats in the UK House of Commons: the UK system had not been mixed in any serious sense. But how many seats must be involved before a system becomes mixed? We could apply the 20 per cent rule to this question. But this would exclude, for example, the reform in Bulgaria in 2009, which replaced a pure list PR system with a system in which just fewer than 13 per cent of the seats are elected by SMP. To exclude such a change while including adjustments in PR formulas that shift only a handful of seats would be perverse. We need a lower threshold here than for the other criteria that Lijphart considers. I therefore follow Massicotte and Blais (1999: 345) and say that, in mixed–independent systems, a change in electoral system type affecting at least 5 per cent of the seats should count as significant.

My second extension of Lijphart's criteria is the inclusion of changes that may leave proportionality unaltered but that affect personalization. I define personalization as the degree to which the electoral system focuses voters' attention and choices upon political parties or upon individual candidates. Drawing on existing literature (e.g., Carey and Shugart 1995; Karvonen 2004, 2010; André et al. 2009), I identify four aspects of electoral systems that influence personalization:

- *preference voting*: opportunities to express preferences across individual candidates within a party;
- *seat allocation*: the weight given to these preference votes in determining which candidates are elected;
- *vote pooling*: whether a vote for a particular candidate can help a party's other candidates secure election;
- *district magnitude*: the number of seats available in a district.

For two of these aspects, their relationship to personalization is unambiguous. First, regarding *seat allocation*, the greater the weight attached to preference votes in determining who is elected, the greater is the personalization of the election. It is common to distinguish between closed list systems, semi-open list systems, and fully open list systems. In the first case, voters have no say over the order in which a party's candidates are elected, while in the last, voters entirely determine that order. In the case of semi-open list systems, preference votes can influence the order, but parties' prior orderings matter too. Thus, any shift from closed lists to semi-open lists or from semi-open lists to fully open lists constitutes an increase in personalization. In addition, we

must allow for variation among semi-open list systems: these vary widely from systems in which it is very difficult and rare for voters to change list order to those in which party orderings exist but are frequently subverted. Semi-open list systems in Europe fall into two categories: in some, a candidate must secure in preference votes a certain percentage of the party's total vote in order to rise to the top of the list; in others, votes cast for a party list without expression of preferences are counted as votes for the ordering decided by the party and are counted alongside preference votes when determining each candidate's level of support. In analogy to Lijphart's approach, I count as significant any shift between categories (closed list, semi-open list, and open list) and, among semi-open systems, any change of at least 20 per cent in the thresholds required before preference votes change list order or in the weight attached to non-preference votes.

Second, the greater is vote pooling, the weaker is the personalization of the electoral system. Thus, systems with pooling (list systems, whether proportional or majoritarian and whether open or closed) are, other things being equal, less personalized than non-list systems. (Perplexingly, Carey and Shugart [1995: 421] see pooling as occurring in single-member-plurality systems and in single transferable vote, but I follow [Karvonen 2004: 207] in categorizing these as systems without pooling.) Pooling can also occur below the level of a party's whole list, thereby allowing candidates to rise up the list on the basis of another candidate's popularity. Such was the case in Finland before 1954. Like pooling at the level of the party, intra-party pooling reduces personalization.

The remaining two aspects of personalization are more problematic. The difficulties associated with *district magnitude* are well known: as Carey and Shugart

(1995: 430–432) argue, the value of candidates' personal reputations falls as district magnitude rises in closed list systems, but it may rise in open list systems. The same is likely to apply to the idea of personalization employed here, which focuses on the voters' perspective. Given, however, that there is a continuum between entirely closed and fully open lists, we need to ask at what point on that continuum personalization stops falling as district magnitude grows and where it starts to rise. This is no straightforward matter.

Preference voting is also somewhat ambiguous. Clearly, personalization is greater where voters can express intra-party preferences than where they cannot. The candidate-centric literature adds that the value of personal reputations is at its greatest when voters can express a preference for just one candidate and somewhat lower when they can vote for multiple candidates. This makes sense from the candidate perspective. From voters' perspective, however, it seems at least as plausible that they would see multiple preference votes as allowing them to express their views on candidates more fully than a single preference vote.

Further conceptual work is required to disentangle these complexities, and this broad survey article is not the place to do that. I therefore operationalize a limited view of personalization, taking account only of changes in *seat allocation* and *vote pooling* as described above. By including the difference between closed and semi-open or open lists under the heading of seat allocation, I necessarily capture any change in whether voters can cast intra-party *preference votes*, but I do not take account of the number of preference votes. Nor do I allow for district magnitude, though shifts between single- and multi-member districts will often count as significant because they affect seat allocation and/or vote pooling.

Changes in Proportionality

Table 1 in the article shows the direction of reform in cases where there was a pre-existing democratic electoral system. Where there was no such system, it shows the nature of the new system adopted. In the cases of countries gaining independence (the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia, and Malta), I include comparison with previous democratic elections for republic-wide (in the Maltese case, dependency-wide) legislative bodies. (Cyprus, however, had no island-wide legislative elections before 1960.)

In respect of new adoptions, I classify systems into three categories: proportional, intermediate ("mid"), and majoritarian. Proportional systems include list PR, STV, and MMP systems. Majoritarian systems include SMP, block vote, and two-round systems. In the intermediate category I include MMM, bonus-adjusted systems, and the Greek system of "reinforced PR".

The classification of the direction of change in cases where there was a pre-existing democratic system requires further elaboration. Proportionality is usefully thought of as comprising two elements: the height of the threshold that a party must pass in order to enter the legislature; and the degree to which seats are distributed in proportion to votes among the parties passing this threshold. Any electoral system change that counts as significant in terms of proportionality by the criteria above and that either reduces the threshold of inclusion or increases proportionality among included parties without causing an opposite effect on the other dimension clearly increases proportionality. Thus, increases in assembly size or district magnitude or reductions in legal thresholds all increase proportionality. In order to establish the direction of change

in proportionality implied by a change in electoral formula, I employ the ranking of proportional electoral formulas offered in Gallagher and Mitchell (2005: 589). Thus, among the systems encountered in this case set, the most proportional systems are those employing either the Hare quota with largest remainders or the pure Sainte-Laguë method; modified Sainte-Laguë comes next, followed by the Droop quota with largest remainders, followed by d'Hondt, followed by the Imperiali quota with largest remainders.

Problems arise when a package of reforms has mixed effects. In some such cases, the overall effect is clear. In others, it is not, and I describe their effects on proportionality as "mixed". The following complex cases may be noted:

- The reform enacted in Austria in 1992 changed the district structure and introduced a new threshold. According to Müller (2005: 400), it "was meant to strengthen the accountability of MPs while maintaining roughly the current level of proportionality". I therefore classify it as having mixed effect.
- The Bulgarian reform of 1991 replaced the MMM system used in 1990, which comprised 200 seats elected by PR and 200 elected by SMP, with a pure PR system electing 240 seats. The change increased proportionality by removing the large majoritarian component, but also reduced it by sharply reducing assembly size. The overall effect was, however, to increase proportionality.
- The Danish reform of 1953 introduced a variety of changes, but the most important all restricted the upper compensatory tier, thereby reducing proportionality (cf. Elklit 2002: 43–6).

- The German reforms of 1953 and 1956 both had mixed effects. The first raised the 5 per cent threshold from the *Land* to the national level but also allowed voters two votes rather than one. The second raised the alternative threshold from one district seat to three, but also allowed parties to pool remainder votes nationally.
- Lijphart (1994: 45) suggests that the Greek reform of 1985 increased proportionality by eliminating a 17 per cent threshold. But Clogg (1987: 200) points out that this change had the effect of reducing the number of seats allocated at the second tier of distribution and increasing the number allocated at the third tier, which was markedly disproportional. Overall, the reform lowered the threshold of inclusion for small parties but also increased the seat bonus of the largest party (Clogg 1987: 199). I therefore classify it as mixed.
- The Greek reform of 2004 replaced Greece's traditional multi-tier "reinforced PR" system with a bonus-adjusted system. Given that the reinforced PR system was often treated as a form of PR, this change might appear to have reduced proportionality. But the disproportionality of reinforced PR was so great that the change in fact increased proportionality (e.g., Patrikios and Karyotis 2008: 357).
- The reform in Iceland in 2000 introduced a number of conflicting changes. Hardarson (2002: 151) implies that these were designed to compensate each other, such as to leave proportionality unchanged. I therefore count this as a mixed case.
- The Italian reform of 2005 increased proportionality among the parties of the winning coalition and among all other parties, but it introduced the possibility of significant disproportionality between the winning coalition and all other parties

by guaranteeing a majority for the largest coalition. I therefore categorize it as mixed.

- The reform in Slovenia in 2000 introduced several changes, but the most important was an increase in the threshold from around 3.2 per cent to 4 per cent. I therefore treat it as having reduced proportionality.
- The Swedish reform of 1969 both raised the threshold of inclusion (by creating a 4 per cent national threshold) and increased proportionality among included parties (by introducing an upper tier of distribution). I treat it as mixed.

Finally, where a reform is not significant in terms of proportionality, I describe proportionality as "unchanged".

Changes in Personalization

As in the case of proportionality, Table 1 shows how each reform affected personalization where there was a pre-existing democratic electoral system; where there was no such system, it shows the level of personalization in the system adopted.

In respect of new adoptions, I allow three categories: personalized, intermediate ("mid"), and non-personalized. The first of these includes open list systems and non-list systems (such as STV and SMP), the second includes mixed systems (MMP and MMM) and systems with semi-open lists or mixtures of closed and open lists, while the third includes closed-list systems.

As outlined above, I count only two sorts of change as constituting significant changes in personalization: changes in the weight of preference votes in determining the order in which a party's candidates are elected; and changes in whether there is vote

pooling at the party or sub-party level. Any increase in the weight of preference votes or reduction in vote pooling that counts as significant by the criteria above increases personalization. I categorize only one reform as having had mixed effects. This was the Italian reform of 1993, which replaced open-list PR with semi-compensatory MMM. This change eliminated pooling for the 75 per cent of seats that were to be elected in single-member districts, but also replaced open lists with closed lists for the remaining 25 per cent of seats that continued to be elected through PR. (A reform passed in 1991, which does not count as significant in terms of the criteria used here, had already cut the number of preference votes that voters could cast.) Many reforms, finally, leave personalization unchanged.

A note is required on the Estonian reforms of 1994 and 2002. The second of these is clearly significant: it introduced an element of list openness at the national allocation tier, where previously lists had been entirely closed. The 1994 is more marginal: it involved a relatively small change at district level. Its effect was, however, to limit vote pooling only to those candidates with significant personal following, and I therefore include it as a significant increase in personalization.

Categorization of Reform Processes

Where possible, I place each case of reform within the types of electoral reform process defined in the text of the article. This is done largely on the basis of the existing secondary literature, though in some cases I draw also upon primary sources and contemporaneous newspaper reporting. Clearly, such categorizations are open to interpretation and debate. Indeed, there is significant disagreement in the literature on some cases, such as the introduction of MMP in West Germany in 1949 and the reforms

in Poland in the early 1990s, as to the processes that underlay them. In such cases, I seek in my categorization to reflect the balance of debate. In most cases, however, such sharp disagreements do not arise.

As the text of the article indicates, some of the categories of reform process identify pure types that are unlikely to exist in undiluted form in practice. Table 1 categorizes cases according to the type that fits them most closely, but in some cases also indicates that they show elements of one or more other types. Subsequent tables categorize cases according to the single dominant type (the first category mentioned in Table 1). The one exception is that Table 2 continues to allow for cases that appear to mix aspects of elite settlement and elite bargain (or where the degree of settlement versus bargain is impossible to identify from the sources available).

There are nine cases where I have been unable to find sources that allow the reform process to be classified. I would welcome suggestions on these. Indeed, as I have emphasized, I acknowledge that some of the categorizations shown may miss key aspects of particular reform episodes. I hope that country specialists will feel free to contest the categorizations that I have provided.

Sources Used to Identify and Categorize Cases

Several broad surveys of electoral system changes already exist, but none is adequate for the tasks pursued here. The most detailed and comprehensive is Matt Golder's database of electoral systems (Golder 2004, 2005), but this makes no mention of legal thresholds or list openness and ends in 2000. Lijphart (1994) covers changes in proportionality but not in personalization, and is now twenty years old. Colomer (2004: 74–6) provides a survey of changes, but gives little detail. Likewise, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) provides a broad overview of systems currently in force, but does not detail within-type reforms (IDEA n.d.; Reynolds, Reilly, and Ellis 2005: 166–73). The Inter-Parliamentary Union's Parline Database contains much useful material, but is not systematic and often does not provide all necessary details (IPU n.d.). Johnson and Wallack's *Database of Electoral Systems and the Personal Vote* (2007) focuses directly on aspects of the electoral system relating to personalization, but relies on the problematic IPU database and does not give detail on, for example, degrees of list openness. Furthermore, none of these sources gives any evidence on processes of reform.

While drawing on these general sources, the survey in Table 1 of the article therefore supplements them with further sources on particular cases. These are listed below.

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