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978-1-107-02542-4 - Electoral Systems and Political Context: How the Effects of Rules Vary Across New and Established Democracies

Robert G. Moser and Ethan Scheiner

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## Electoral Systems and Political Context

*How the Effects of Rules Vary Across New and Established Democracies*

*Electoral Systems and Political Context* illustrates how political and social context conditions the effects of electoral rules. The book examines electoral behavior and outcomes in countries that use “mixed-member” electoral systems – in which voters cast one ballot for a party list under proportional representation (PR) and one for a candidate in a single-member district (SMD). Based on comparisons of outcomes under the two different rules used in mixed-member systems, the book highlights how electoral systems’ effects – especially strategic voting, the number of parties, and women’s representation – tend to be different in new democracies from what one usually sees in established democracies. Moreover, electoral systems such as SMDs are usually presumed to constrain the number of parties irrespective of the level of social diversity, but this book demonstrates that social diversity frequently shapes party fragmentation even under such restrictive rules.

Robert G. Moser is Associate Professor of Government at the University of Texas, Austin, and the author of *Unexpected Outcomes: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Representation in Russia* (2001). He has co-edited (with Zoltan Barany) *Russian Politics* (2001), *Ethnic Politics after Communism* (2005), and *Is Democracy Exportable?* (2009). His articles have appeared in *World Politics*, *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *Electoral Studies*, and *Post-Soviet Affairs*.

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# Electoral Systems and Political Context

*How the Effects of Rules Vary Across New and Established Democracies*

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*University of Texas, Austin*

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*To our families:*

*Linda, Sam, Jake, and Zach Moser*

*and*

*Melanie Hurley, and Casey and Serena (aka, Percy) Scheiner*

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Abbreviations

AV	Alternative vote
ENEC	Effective number of electoral candidates
ENEG	Effective number of ethnic groups
ENEP ( $N_v$ )	Effective number of electoral parties
FPTP	First-past-the-post
LSq	Least-squares index of disproportionality
M	District magnitude
MMD	Multimember district
MMM	Mixed-member majoritarian (“unlinked system”)
MMP	Mixed-member proportional (“linked system”)
$N_{cands}$	Mean effective number of candidates per SMD
$N_{parties}$	Mean effective number of PR parties per SMD
$N_s$	Effective number of legislative parties (i.e., parties winning seats)
$N_v$ (ENEP)	Effective number of electoral parties (i.e., parties winning votes)
PR	Proportional representation
SMD	Single-member district
SNTV	Single nontransferable vote
STV	Single transferable vote

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## Glossary of Key Terms

**Alternative vote (AV):** a single-member district electoral system (used primarily in the Australian House of Representatives) in which voters rank the different candidates on a single ballot. Candidates who are ranked first by the smallest numbers of voters are removed from the competition and their votes are redistributed to other candidates according to the voters' rankings. Vote transfers of this kind continue until one candidate has a majority.

**Closed-list PR:** proportional representation electoral system in which parties control the rank order of their nominees on their party lists.

**Compensation seats:** seats allocated in mixed-member systems to parties to reduce or eliminate disproportionality (typically emerging as a result of seats won in the SMD tier).

**Controlled comparison:** a research design that uses cases that differ with regard to the variables the researcher wants to investigate, but are similar with regard to all other important variables that may affect the dependent variable(s). As a result, the research can isolate the influence of variables of interest by holding constant other potential causes.

**Disproportionality:** the extent to which parties' seat shares deviate from their share of the vote.

**District magnitude (M):** the number of seats available to be won in an electoral district.

**Duverger's Law:** the expectation that first-past-the-post electoral systems will tend to have two principal candidates per district.

**Duvergerian:** having the character and quality of two-party or two-candidate competition, driven by strategic defection from smaller parties to larger ones in reaction to incentives provided by restrictive electoral systems (especially first-past-the-post systems).

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**Effective number of candidates:** an index for measuring the number of candidates within a single-member district that is weighted by the share of votes each candidate receives.

**Effective number of ethnic groups:** an index for measuring the number of ethnic groups that is weighted by the share of the population made up by members in each group.

**Effective number of parties (N):** an index for measuring the number of parties that is weighted by the share of votes or seats each party receives.

**Effective threshold:** the percentage of votes at which a party or candidate can expect to win seats.

**Established democracy:** a democracy that experienced its democratic transition before 1978.

**First-past-the-post (FPTP):** a single-member district electoral system in which the candidate with the most votes – even if less than a majority – wins the seat. Also called a *plurality system*.

**Gender quota:** rule that promotes the election of women by mandating that parties follow specific nomination patterns. Gender quotas may be established by law for all parties in a country or established by individual parties in their own bylaws.

**Institutionalized party system:** a party system in which parties structure the vote; parties dominate the nomination process and independent (i.e., non-party-affiliated) candidates receive few votes.

**Least-squares index of disproportionality (LSq):** an index for measuring the degree to which parties' share of the vote deviates from their share of seats.

**Legal threshold:** a legally mandated vote percentage required for a party to win seats in a proportional representation election.

**Linked tiers system:** a mixed-member electoral system that provides seats from the PR (or compensation) tier of the system to parties to overcome disproportionality created by the SMD tier of the system. "Linked tiers" might be used by some analysts to refer to any mixed-member system (such as Italy's) in which outcomes in the SMD tier affect outcomes in the PR tier. However, our definition of linked tiers is founded on the presence of compensation seats in the PR tier (see Chapter 2).

**M + 1 rule:** the expectation that the effective number of parties that will emerge in an electoral contest will be equal to the district magnitude plus one.

**Mechanical effect:** the formulaic translation of votes into seats.

**Mixed-member electoral system:** an electoral system that provides voters with two ballots, one for a candidate in a single-member district and one for



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a party in a proportional representation contest. (This definition of mixed-member systems is narrower than that promoted by some scholars; see Chapter 2.)

Mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system: a mixed-member electoral system in which no compensation seats are used to make up for disproportionality created by results in the SMD tier. Also called an “unlinked” system.

Mixed-member proportional (MMP) system: a mixed-member electoral system that provides seats from the PR (or compensation) tier of the system to parties in order to overcome disproportionality created by the SMD tier of the system. Also called a “linked” system.

Multimember district: a district in which more than one seat is up for election.

Multiparty system: a party system with more than two parties.

New democracy: a democracy that experienced its democratic transition in 1978 or later.

Noninstitutionalized party system: a party system in which parties do not structure the vote; parties do not dominate the nomination process and independents (i.e., non-party-affiliated candidates) receive a large share of the SMD vote.

Open-list PR: a proportional representation electoral system in which, in addition to a vote for a party, voters are allowed a preference vote for a candidate that determines the rank order of the nominees on party lists; may also refer to systems (such as that of Brazil) in which voters may cast ballots for individual candidates, rather than the party, to determine both the share of votes won by parties and the candidates that win the seats for those parties.

Party magnitude: the number of seats a party wins in a multimember district.

Party system institutionalization: the degree to which political parties are well developed and dominate the electoral process.

Permissive electoral systems: electoral systems that tend to allow even parties with a small share of the vote to win office – typically through the use of high district magnitudes and low legal thresholds of representation.

Placement mandate: a gender quota that requires that female candidates be nominated in particular (“winnable”) slots on a party list.

Plurality system: electoral system (usually single-member district) in which the candidate with the most votes – even if less than a majority – wins the seat. Also called a *first-past-the-post system*.

Preference vote: an electoral rule that provides voters with the opportunity to rank their preferences for more than one candidate. In open-list PR systems,

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preference votes allow voters to change the rank order of candidates on a PR party list.

Proportional representation (PR): electoral system typically designed to give each party a share of seats that roughly matches its share of the vote. For example, in its ideal form, a party that wins 10 percent of the vote will also win roughly 10 percent of the seats. District magnitude and legal thresholds of representation can affect the extent to which PR systems allow parties' share of seats to match their share of the vote.

Psychological effect: electoral behavior by voters, parties, candidates, and other elites in anticipation of the mechanical effect of the translation of votes into seats.

Pure electoral systems: electoral systems with only one tier and thus only one ballot using a single electoral rule, be it PR, FPTP, AV, STV, SNTV, etc.

Restrictive electoral systems: electoral systems that tend to allow only parties or candidates with a larger share of the vote to win office – typically through the use of low district magnitudes or high legal thresholds of representation.

SF ratio: an index calculated by dividing the vote won by the Second loser by the vote of the First loser in an electoral district. (In first-past-the-post SMD districts, this is the third-place vote divided by the second-place vote. In two-round majority SMDs, it is the fourth-place vote divided by the third-place vote.) The SF ratio index is used to explore the existence of strategic defection from lower-placing candidates to higher-placing ones. SF ratios approaching zero suggest high levels of strategic defection, whereas SF ratios significantly different from zero suggest the absence of strategic defection.

Single-member district (SMD): a district with a district magnitude of one; only one representative gains election.

Single nontransferable vote (SNTV) system: electoral system in which each voter casts a ballot for a single candidate, and no votes are redistributed as they are under STV. The seats then go to whichever candidates receive the most votes – or, more specifically, the number of candidates who receive the most votes, up to the number of seats in the district. When district magnitude equals 1, SNTV simply refers to first-past-the-post systems. Most commonly, therefore, SNTV refers to the multimember district context.

Single transferable vote (STV) system: a multimember district electoral system in which voters rank their preferred candidates on their ballots, low-ranking candidates are dropped, and their votes (along with the “excess” votes of winning candidates) are redistributed according to rankings expressed by the voters until all the seats are allocated.

Strategic defection: voters and elites shifting their support from their most preferred electoral contestant to a more competitive alternative in order to affect

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the outcome of the race. (Strategic defection can include parties or candidates dropping out of unwinnable races.)

Strategic voting: voters shifting their votes from their most preferred electoral contestant to a more competitive alternative in order to affect the outcome of the race – typically, to try to help the “lesser of two evils” to win.

Two-party system: a party system with only two major parties.

Two-round majority system: a single-member district electoral system that requires that the winner obtain a majority (rather than plurality) of votes to win the seat. If no candidate wins a majority in the first round of balloting, a second round runoff is held between the top vote getters from the first round.

Unlinked tiers system: a mixed-member system with no compensation seats to overcome disproportionality created by the SMD tier of the system. In this book, we usually use the term “unlinked” to describe even systems (such as in Italy) that penalize parties for seats won in the SMD tier by taking away votes in the PR tier, even though there is some linkage between the tiers. (See Chapter 2.)

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## Acknowledgments and Note on the Online Appendix

Before acknowledging the generous contributions and support of family, friends, and colleagues, we would like to highlight the book's supplementary online appendix, which can be found by following the links at [www.ethanscheiner.edu](http://www.ethanscheiner.edu). To shorten the book, we cut a number of pieces of less directly relevant analysis and responses to potential counterarguments and placed them in the online appendix.

Now, the fun stuff! This book is the culmination of a collaboration between the two authors that began (more than) 10 years ago and was brought about by the happy coincidence of a common interest in electoral systems, complementary area specializations in two very different countries (Russia and Japan) that came to adopt remarkably similar electoral systems, and the fact that we overlapped briefly in the PhD program at the University of Wisconsin and thus vaguely knew each other. Over the years, our joint efforts evolved and expanded from a few co-authored papers to this book project. It is sort of a running joke that we have actually seen each other in person only a handful of times over these years, mostly at conferences, which is probably the secret behind our long-running collaboration. Whatever the reason, we both have benefited from the countless e-mails and phone calls working and reworking the arguments presented in this book. One thing is certain: whatever the flaws of our analysis, it is truly the joint and integrated effort of the two of us, as we grappled with the issues of the effects of electoral systems operating in decidedly different political contexts.

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Portions of some chapters borrow heavily with permission from our previously published work: “Strategic Voting in Mixed-Member Systems: An Analysis of Split-Ticket Voting,” *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2009): 51–61; “Strategic Ticket Splitting and the Personal Vote in Mixed Systems: A Reconceptualization with Data from Five Countries,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. XXX (2005): 259–276; and “Mixed Electoral Systems and Electoral System Effects: Controlled Comparison and Cross-National Analysis,” *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2004): 575–599. Although some of the ideas and arguments are similar between the chapters in this book and our previous articles, there are important differences that inspired the writing of this book. First and foremost, we have developed a larger framework in the book, in which we seek to highlight our central point about how context conditions electoral rules. We have also refined the theorizing about party institutionalization and new democracies much more in the book, fleshing out these concepts and the causal connections between these crucial variables and electoral system effects. Finally, we have new data, better variable measurement, and better methods that mark a significant improvement in our analyses and findings.

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*Acknowledgments and Note on the Online Appendix*

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