

Chapter 1 – Online Appendix

Advantages of work on electoral system

The study of electoral systems is marked by several distinct advantages. First, its most prominent hypotheses involve important political outcomes, but are not so ambitious as to strain credibility. Although scholars at times make broad claims about the impact electoral systems can have on, for example, the survival and quality of democratic regimes, the empirical research on electoral systems usually sticks to the examination of mid-range hypotheses that tend to explain rather narrowly defined phenomena.¹ The subfield's most famous hypothesis, Duverger's Law – which states that first-past-the-post systems lead to two-party systems – is a case in point. The purported effect, a two-party system, admittedly has a variety of definitions or at least operationalizations, but it is relatively straightforward when compared to more complicated concepts like democratic consolidation.²

Second, the study of electoral systems benefits from a collection of well-defined and intuitively attractive theories that specify how electoral rules influence specific political behaviors that, in turn, produce certain purported outcomes. That is, electoral system analysis tends to be based on fairly simple mechanisms for how rules affect behavior, and tends to be most successful when based on relatively direct links between the electoral rule and the outcome it is meant to explain (Scheiner 2008). For example, plurality (FPTP) electoral systems tend to constrain the number of parties winning seats in the legislature through a “mechanical” effect

¹ This is not always the case, of course. Scholars have investigated how electoral systems affect the level of democracy in transitional regimes (Birch 2005), popular faith in the electoral process (Norris 2004; Birch 2008), the ideological character of the regime (Iversen and Soskice 2006), the level of corruption (Persson et al. 2003), as well as government spending and economic policy (Persson 2002).

² For the debate on defining and operationalizing democratic consolidation, see, for example, Schedler (1998).

that ultimately punishes small parties through diminished representation and rewards large parties. Duverger's Law argues that this mechanical effect then drives strategic defection away from uncompetitive parties by voters who do not want to waste their votes and elites who do not want to waste their scarce resources. To give another example, closed-list PR electoral systems are expected to promote disciplined legislative parties because in such systems parties are the dominant force that determines legislators' likelihood of getting elected. Increased influence over nominations under PR provides parties with additional leverage over individual legislators, which results in greater adherence to the party line. In both the SMD and PR examples here, the causal mechanism is clear and the set of assumptions regarding actors' motives and preferences are relatively limited.

Importance of enforcement of rules

A number of studies note that institutions may not have the strong effects often attributed to them because the rules are not effectively enforced (see especially Helmke and Levitsky 2004). For example, scholars studying electoral system gender quotas point to the important role that enforcement mechanisms, such as penalties for non-compliance, play in producing the expected effects of these rules (see Dahlerup and Freedenvall 2005, Jones 2009). Arguably, enforcement of electoral system rules that govern the translation of votes into seats is less controversial and thus easier to enforce than rules that require or forbid certain actions by elites.

Others who have discussed the conditionality of electoral rule effects

Of course, we are not the first to discuss the conditional nature of electoral system effects on electoral outcomes. As already noted, Cox (1997) and Matland (1998) make explicit several

necessary conditions for electoral systems to have their expected outcomes. Moreover, Taagepera (2007: 112) highlights that the effects of electoral systems are much more consistent and discernible for the distribution of seats among parties (the so-called “mechanical effect”) than the distribution of votes (the “psychological effect”). Grofman, et al. (2009) also highlight the frequency of non-Duvergerian outcomes in the three of the four major democracies that utilize plurality electoral systems – Great Britain, Canada, and India – arguing that only the United States consistently follows Duverger’s Law.

Comment on contamination

Singer finds that average levels of party system fragmentation in plurality tiers of mixed-member electoral systems are not different (at commonly accepted levels of statistical significance) from those of pure plurality elections, once postcommunist states are excluded from the analysis. This finding supports our contention that contamination – the mutual influence of the PR and SMD tiers on the dynamics of the other – does not preclude meaningful comparisons of PR and SMD tiers within mixed-member systems. In Chapter 2, we analyze Singer’s data set to highlight the lack of systematic difference in the number of district-level parties between pure FPTP systems and mixed-member systems.