

Electoral Systems

The Political System of the United Kingdom

Intro

Electoral Systems

Electoral Reform in the UK

Fairness and the British Case

Conclusion



Current Events

- ▶ Labour leadership struggle
- ▶ UKIP leadership struggle
- ▶ Government formation & priorities

Last week's class discussion

- ▶ Outcome of the election
- ▶ *Bias*

Today: Electoral System and Electoral Reform

- ▶ What is an electoral system?
- ▶ Why is there a demand for electoral reform in the UK?
- ▶ What has (not) been achieved – and why?

Why Elections?

- ▶ Representation of citizens in an assembly, provide a channel for input
- ▶ Creates a link between citizens and those who govern
 - ▶ Symbolic
 - ▶ Incentive for politicians to be responsive

Purpose of Electoral Systems?

- ▶ Translate votes into seats
- ▶ Two conflicting aims
 - ▶ Avoid disproportionality (bias)
 - ▶ Avoid fragmentation
- ▶ No system is perfectly representative
- ▶ Normally very stable (why?)

What is an Electoral System?

- ▶ More specific than electoral rules
- ▶ Regulates
 - ▶ How people can cast their vote (*ballot structure*, PR)
 - ▶ The *magnitude* of the electoral constituency
 - ▶ How votes are translated into seats (*electoral formula*)

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 - ▶ Party/candidate winning most of the votes wins all the seat(s)
 - ▶ Simple, tried & tested
- ▶ PR
 - ▶ Seats allocated to proportion of votes won
 - ▶ Threshold, tiers, and other complications

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- ▶ Electoral formula really a continuum – Plurality in large districts could be more proportional than PR in small districts
- ▶ Voting under PR party-based, voting under SMP candidate based – or maybe not?

Ballot Structure

- ▶ One vote (for candidate/list)
- ▶ Two votes
 - ▶ Constituency vote + list vote
 - ▶ Various variations
 - ▶ Germany, New Zealand . . .
- ▶ As many votes as seats
- ▶ Many votes but fewer than seats (“limited vote”)
- ▶ Half-open or open lists

Alternative Vote (Instant Runoff)

- ▶ Voters rank candidates
- ▶ If no candidate has *majority*
 - ▶ Remove candidate with fewest first preferences from race
 - ▶ Use 2nd preferences from these ballots
 - ▶ Repeat until one candidate has a majority
- ▶ Used in Australia (House of Representatives), Ireland (presidency), and some other countries

Common Problems: Malapportionment

- ▶ Voters do not want to waste their vote – each vote should carry same weight
- ▶ Malapportionment: huge (and systematic) variation in the size of constituencies (in terms of electors)
- ▶ Unequal representation
- ▶ Even worse if parties have different geographical bases → “gerrymandering”

Common Problems: Gerrymandering

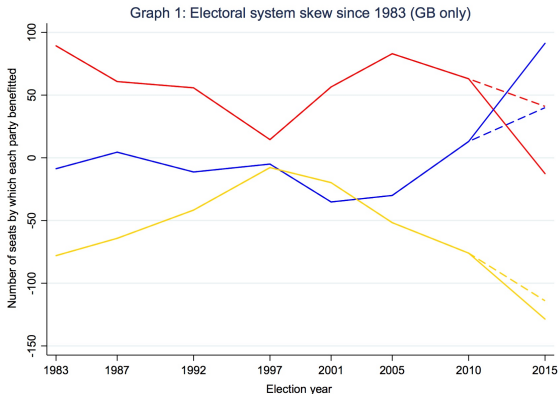


- ▶ District boundaries drawn in non-obvious ways to favour a single party
- ▶ Packing and Cracking
- ▶ Named after Massachusetts Governor E. Gerry (1812)

Bias

	%Votes	%Seats
<hr/>		
1951		
Lab	49	45
Con	48	55
<hr/>		
1983		
Lab	28	32
Lib/SD	25	4
<hr/>		
2001		
Lab	41	64
Con	32	25
Lib	18	8

Bias



Source: Tom Lubbock,

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/generalelection/the-new-skew-of-the-electoral-system-in-2015/>

Bias

	%Votes	%Seats
2015		
Con	37	51
Lab	30	36
UKIP	13	0.153
LibDem	8	1.2
SNP	5	9

Ignorance. . .

- ▶ British Political Science has for a long time ignored the effects of electoral systems
- ▶ . . . has ignored party system change
- ▶ . . . has ignored changes to the system
- ▶ British public even more oblivious

Change since 1997

- ▶ Scotland and the Scottish Constitutional Convention
- ▶ Implications for Wales
- ▶ Labour didn't like STV or full PR, others worried about areas of Labour domination:
 - ▶ Glasgow/Edinburgh belt
 - ▶ South Wales
- ▶ Compromise between Labour, LibDems (and regional parties) before the 1997 election

Change since 1997

	Scottish Parliament	Welsh Assembly	London Assembly	Jenkins Comm. 'AV+' system
Assembly size	129	60	25	659
Mix of Local: top-up seats constituency members (%)	57: 43	67: 33	57: 43	83: 17
Elected by	Plurality rule in 73 Westminster constituencies	Plurality rule in 40 Westminster constituencies	Plurality rule in 14 double or triple borough areas	Supplementary vote in 543 redrawn Westminster constituencies
Top-up areas used	8 former Euro constituencies	5 former Euro constituencies	Greater London	80 counties in England; top-up areas in Scotland and Wales; 2 new areas in N. Ireland
Top-up seats per area	7	4	11	1 or 2
Effective district magnitudes	15 to 17	11 to 13	25	5 to 11
Inclusion threshold	4.8	5.9	3.6	7.1
Exclusion threshold	5.6	7.1	3.8	8.3

Change since 1997

- ▶ Labour/LibDems quite close in 1997 (vs. 1992)
- ▶ Mixed System for Scotland, Wales, Greater London
- ▶ PR for EU elections
- ▶ Alternative system for the House of Commons proposed

MMP/AMS in Scotland

- ▶ 73 MSPs elected by FPP in single-member constituencies
- ▶ Second ballot (list vote) for 56 MSPs (“additional members”)
 - ▶ 8 top up areas
 - ▶ 7 seats per area
 - ▶ Relatively high effective threshold

The Jenkins Proposal

- ▶ “AV+”
 - ▶ $\approx 80\%$ of MPs elected in single-member constituencies using AV
 - ▶ Small number of additional list MPs to provide some proportionality
 - ▶ Would have resulted in a relatively high effective threshold
- ▶ Resistance from cabinet and parliamentary Labour party, finally ditched by Blair in 2001
- ▶ Referendum (2011) rejected AV
- ▶ (No elected House of Lords (2012), no Boundary reform)
- ▶ At the moment, six different voting systems used (probably)

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- ▶ At the moment, six different voting systems used (probably)
- ▶ **But FPP at the Westminster level, and who would want to change that?**

Different notions of “fairness”

1. *Equality*: each citizen/party should be treated equally
2. *Populist*: voters, not parties should chose government
3. *Winner-takes-all*: party winning the election should not be forced to share power/spoils
4. *Majority*: majority of voters should be able to win and govern
5. *Plurality*: largest group of voters should be able to win and govern

Is Blau really talking about fairness?

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- ▶ Minorities of voters underrepresented, wasted vote
 - ▶ But: normally, a single vote doesn't make much of a difference anyway
 - ▶ Are voters even aware of disproportionality?
- ▶ Then again: plurality voting does not even guarantee
 - ▶ That the Condorcet winner gets elected
 - ▶ That government has the support of a majority of votes
 - ▶ That government has the support of a plurality of votes (cf 1951, 1974)

Votes → power

- ▶ Evaluation depends again on notion of fairness
- ▶ Does PR give too much power to small parties?
- ▶ Government without support of a plurality bad from any point of view
- ▶ Fairness not necessarily equality (?)
- ▶ Fairness an appropriate yardstick?

Conclusion

- ▶ After at least a century of debate, some electoral reform
- ▶ But not for Westminster elections
- ▶ FPP bad in terms of equality
- ▶ Also bad in other respects?

Class questions

- ▶ How do electoral systems shape party systems?
- ▶ Why are there now so many voting systems in the United Kingdom?
- ▶ What kind of electoral system *should* the UK have?