CAPITULOS 2 e 3

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS:
A COMPARATIVE
INTRODUCTION

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2

The Single Member Plurality System and its Cousins

This electoral system has been given a range of different titles, such as 'relative majority', 'simple majority', 'single member simple plurality' and the more colloquial 'first past the post'. In this chapter we will refer to it as single member plurality (SMP) as this best reflects the essence of the system. For its supporters the beauty of this system is its simplicity: to get elected a candidate must win a 'plurality' of the vote. This does not mean that the candidate has more votes than all the other candidates combined. It is not necessary to win an overall majority of the vote: providing the candidate has at least one vote more than each of the other candidates, then he or she is declared the victor.

SMP is used for elections in the USA, the UK, Canada and India. Among the other countries using it are Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Zambia, and a host of other smaller countries, many of them former British colonies. Since the early 1990s the trend has been away from plurality and towards proportional systems (as will be evident in later chapters), although as we saw in the previous chapter, in population terms SMP remains the most commonly used system (thanks in large part to India's vast population which tends to skew the figures). In the 1990s, SMP was replaced by a mixed system in New Zealand, and by list PR in South Africa. In this context, it is also worth noting that none of the newly emerging democracies, in Mediterranean Europe (that is, in Greece, Portugal and Spain) in the 1970s or in East and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union in the 1980s, adopted SMP as the new electoral

system. Without exception they have all opted for list systems, or some form of mixed system (more on this in later chapters).

In discussions about SMP and its possible reform, three main themes resonate: simplicity, stability and constituency representation. First, the system is undoubtedly easy to understand; it is simple and straightforward. In the polling booth, all the voters have to do is mark an 'X' (or in some countries, pull a lever) next to their preferred candidate. The result is also simple to understand: whoever gets the most votes – that is, whoever gets a plurality of the votes, or is, as they say, 'first past the post' – wins. This point about simplicity is particularly apt when, as we see later, comparisons are drawn with the ordinal ballots used in single transferable vote elections, or the 'Droop quota', or the concepts of largest remainders or highest averages.

Second, the argument is usually made that SMP produces stable government and, by extension, a stable political system. For instance, British governments generally enjoy large parliamentary majorities. Indeed, for some time, this distortive tendency in SMP was said to have law-like status, referred to as the 'cube law' on how votes are translated into seats. Coalition government is virtually unknown, unlike under PR systems where the norm is coalition governments. Under SMP the government, so the argument goes, is not hostage to the vagaries of relying on small (often extremist) parties for legislative support. The voters know that the party with the most seats forms the next government, unlike the situation common, say, in the rest of Western Europe where governments are formed as a result of agreements struck between party leaders in smoke-filled rooms after the election. The 'result' (that is, the determination of who forms the government) is more democratic and fairer.

Third, a central feature of political life under SMP is constituency representation. (Note that here 'representation' is taken in its 'principal–agent' conception rather than the 'microcosmic' conception.) Each member of the parliament represents a constituency. Each voter has a constituency MP who can be approached. This is in stark contrast to the situation in, say, Israel where the entire country is one vast constituency, where there may be a concentration of MPs from certain parts of the country, and where certain areas (especially rural, underpopulated areas) are essentially 'unrepresented' (in the sense that there is no single recognizable MP serving the area).

The practice which is being followed in this and subsequent chapters is to focus predominantly on one case as the main source for examples – and in this case the focus will be on Britain. We start, in section 2.1, with a description of how SMP works there, and with what consequences for the nature of British electoral politics. Section 2.2 provides a historical review of the debate over electoral reform in the United Kingdom, a debate which achieved considerable prominence over the 1990s. Section 2.3 extends the coverage to include four additional countries: Canada, India and the USA, which have always used SMP, and New Zealand – formerly seen as the preeminent example of the 'Westminster model of democracy' (Lijphart 1984) – which abandoned SMP in 1993. What have been the experiences of these countries with the system, and what evidence, if any, is there of a rise in demand for electoral reform in Canada, India or the USA? Needless to say, of course, SMP does have its variants. There are versions of it which incorporate multi-member constituencies; there are also versions – such as the limited vote and cumulative vote – that provide greater scope for small parties to win seats. These will be dealt with in section 2.4.

2.1 The Single Member Plurality System in Practice

This is such an easy system to understand that it requires little explanation – and certainly nothing like the detailed explanations required for the other systems in later chapters. To aid comparison with the other systems dealt with in this book, SMP's main points will be described according to the three main features of electoral systems which were outlined in Chapter 1: *district magnitude*, *ballot structure* and *electoral formula*.

First, the principal characteristic of SMP is that it incorporates single-member constituencies (that is, a district magnitude of one, or DM = 1). For instance, the United Kingdom is divided into 659 constituencies each electing one MP. This is *the* central feature distinguishing proportional and non-proportional systems. Single-seat constituencies do not produce proportional results, as shown by the fact that there are large numbers of voters who do not support the winning candidate. Proportional results require multi-seat constituencies as well as a proportional electoral formula. Basically – as we see in later chapters – the larger the district magnitude (that is, the more seats, or MPs, per constituency), the more proportional the

result. It is important to note, however, that this rule only applies in PR systems. In plurality and majoritarian electoral systems the relationship can actually be reversed: the more seats per constituency the less proportional the result.

Second, the election contest in each constituency is between candidates, not (as happens in list systems) between parties. The voting act consists of a voter placing an 'X' (in some countries, colouring in a box, or even pulling a lever) next to the name of their preferred candidate (usually representing their preferred party). The voter can place only one 'X': they can declare a preference for just one candidate. In Figure 2.1 we see an example of a British ballot paper. The

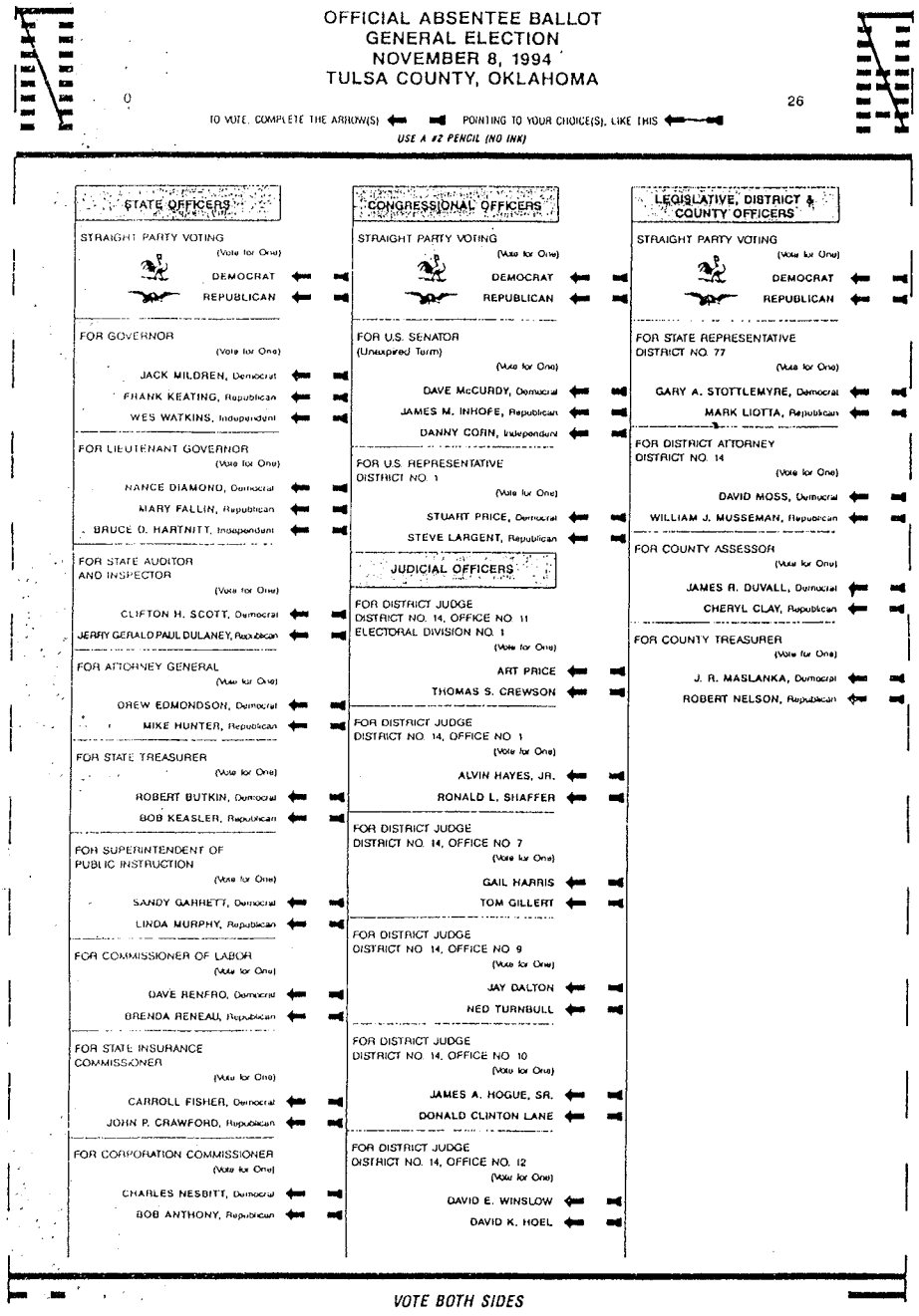
VOTE FOR ONE CANDIDATE ONLY

1	**GRIFFIN** Theresa Griffin of 16 Dovedale Road, Liverpool L18 1DW Labour Party	
2	**MORRIS** Richard James Morris of 46 Croxteth Road, Liverpool L8 3SQ Liverpool Green Party	
3	**MUIES** Gabriel Muies of 26 Loudon Grove, Liverpool L8 8AT Independent	
4	**PRIDDIE** Hulbert Llewelyn Priddie of 10 Lesseps Road, Liverpool L8 0RD Liberal Democrat	
5	**ZSIGMOND** Carol Ann Zsigmond of 43 Rodney Street, Liverpool L1 9EW Conservative Party Candidate	

Figure 2.1 A British SMP ballot paper

act of voting is short and sweet. The voter marks 'X' next to the appropriate candidate and then pops the ballot paper into the ballot box. The whole exercise requires barely a minute to complete. In the jargon of the electoral systems literature the fact that the voter has only one choice means that the SMP *ballot structure* is 'categorical' (an either/or choice), not 'ordinal' (where a preference can be declared for more than one candidate on the ballot paper). Figure 2.2 provides an example of a recent ballot paper from Tulsa county, Oklahoma in the USA.[1] Note how here the voting act consists of 'completing the arrows', and while in this case the process of voting may be as simple as in British parliamentary elections, there is one very important difference – Oklahoma voters are voting for more than twenty different offices at the same time (from governor down to county treasurer), which puts a much greater burden on Oklahoma voters than on British voters. At the heart of the matter is the meaning of a 'general election'. In the UK (as in many other countries) it means that all parliamentary seats are up for election. In the USA, it means that all (or mostly all) of the national, state and local offices are up for election. That difference has an enormous consequence for the nature of US politics, not least in terms of the numbers of voters who bother to turn out (as we shall see in Chapter 9).

The third main feature of SMP relates to how a candidate wins: the successful candidate is the one who receives most votes. Note that the candidate does not have to win an overall majority of votes, they must only have more votes than anybody else, or a plurality of support. Therefore the *electoral formula* is a plurality election. The 1992 British election provides one of the most fascinating recent examples of the difference between 'plurality' and 'majority'. As Table 2.1 shows, in the constituency of Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, Sir Russell Johnston was elected despite having only 26 per cent of the total vote in the constituency (when we allow for those who did not vote, this represents just 19 per cent of the electorate). He had a plurality of support, but not by any means an overall majority. In fact, he had just 458 votes (0.9 per cent) more than his nearest rival. To look at this from another angle, 74 per cent of those who voted in Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber did not vote for the 'winning' candidate; 81 per cent of the electorate (that is, including those who did not vote) did not show support for him. In the 1992 British general election as a whole, 40 per cent of MPs were


OFFICIAL ABSENTEE BALLOT
GENERAL ELECTION
NOVEMBER 8, 1994
TULSA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

0 26

TO VOTE, COMPLETE THE ARROW(S) ← → POINTING TO YOUR CHOICE(S), LIKE THIS ←→
USE A #2 PENCIL (NO INK)

STATE OFFICERS

STRAIGHT PARTY VOTING (Vote for One)
DEMOCRAT
REPUBLICAN

FOR GOVERNOR (Vote for One)
JACK MILDREN, Democrat
FRANK KEATING, Republican
WES WATKINS, Independent

FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (Vote for One)
NANCE DIAMOND, Democrat
MARY FALLIN, Republican
BRUCE D. HARTNITT, Independent

FOR STATE AUDITOR AND INSPECTOR (Vote for One)
CLIFTON H. SCOTT, Democrat
JERRY GERALD PAUL DULANEY, Republican

FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL (Vote for One)
DREW EDMONDSON, Democrat
MIKE HUNTER, Republican

FOR STATE TREASURER (Vote for One)
ROBERT BUTKIN, Democrat
BOB KEASLER, Republican

FOR SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Vote for One)
SANDY GARRETT, Democrat
LINDA MURPHY, Republican

FOR COMMISSIONER OF LABOR (Vote for One)
DAVE RENFRO, Democrat
BRENDA RENEAU, Republican

FOR STATE INSURANCE COMMISSIONER (Vote for One)
CARROLL FISHER, Democrat
JOHN P. CRAWFORD, Republican

FOR CORPORATION COMMISSIONER (Vote for One)
CHARLES NESBITT, Democrat
BOB ANTHONY, Republican

CONGRESSIONAL OFFICERS

STRAIGHT PARTY VOTING (Vote for One)
DEMOCRAT
REPUBLICAN

FOR U.S. SENATOR (Unexpired Term) (Vote for One)
DAVE McCURDY, Democrat
JAMES M. INHOFE, Republican
DANNY CORN, Independent

FOR U.S. REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT NO. 1 (Vote for One)
STUART PRICE, Democrat
STEVE LARGENT, Republican

JUDICIAL OFFICERS

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE DISTRICT NO. 14, OFFICE NO. 11 ELECTORAL DIVISION NO. 1 (Vote for One)
ART PRICE
THOMAS S. CREWSON

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE DISTRICT NO. 14, OFFICE NO. 1 (Vote for One)
ALVIN HAYES, JR.
RONALD L. SHAFFER

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE DISTRICT NO. 14, OFFICE NO. 7 (Vote for One)
GAIL HARRIS
TOM GILLERT

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE DISTRICT NO. 14, OFFICE NO. 9 (Vote for One)
JAY DALTON
NED TURNBULL

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE DISTRICT NO. 14, OFFICE NO. 10 (Vote for One)
JAMES A. HOGUE, SR.
DONALD CLINTON LANE

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE DISTRICT NO. 14, OFFICE NO. 12 (Vote for One)
DAVID E. WINSLOW
DAVID K. HOEL

LEGISLATIVE, DISTRICT & COUNTY OFFICERS

STRAIGHT PARTY VOTING (Vote for One)
DEMOCRAT
REPUBLICAN

FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT NO. 77 (Vote for One)
GARY A. STOTTLEMYRE, Democrat
MARK LIOTTA, Republican

FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DISTRICT NO. 14 (Vote for One)
DAVID MOSS, Democrat
WILLIAM J. MUSSEMAN, Republican

FOR COUNTY ASSESSOR (Vote for One)
JAMES R. DUVALL, Democrat
CHERYL CLAY, Republican

FOR COUNTY TREASURER (Vote for One)
J. R. MASLANKA, Democrat
ROBERT NELSON, Republican

VOTE BOTH SIDES

Figure 2.2 A US SMP ballot paper

Table 2.1 Winning with a bare quarter of the vote: the British constituency of Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber in 1992

	Number of votes	*Per cent vote*
Johnston, Sir Russell (Liberal Democrat)	13,258	26.0
Stewart, D. (Labour)	12,800	25.1
Ewing, F. S. (SNP)	12,562	24.7
Scott, J. (Conservative)	11,517	22.6
Martin, J. (Green)	766	1.5
Total vote	50,903	
Turnout		73.3%

Source: Electoral returns.

elected without having an overall majority of the votes in their constituency. In the subsequent 1997 election, this figure rose to 47 per cent. Such an outcome is quite normal in Britain, as evidenced by the trends over time shown in Table 2.2. Here we see that the most striking results were in the two 1974 elections when almost two-thirds of MPs were elected with less than half the total vote in their constituencies.

When the figures are aggregated across the country as a whole, it is possible to see the levels of distortion that can be produced under SMP. Table 2.3 gives the percentage of votes and seats for the three main parties in postwar British elections. The trend to follow is the percentage difference between the share of votes received and the share of seats won by each of the parties. A plus sign implies the party gained a greater share of seats than its share of the vote; a minus sign implies it received a lesser share of seats.

Clearly the most striking trend is that for the Liberals/Liberal Democrats. This party has consistently won fewer seats relative to its total vote. The starkest example, as we saw in Table 1.1, was in the supposedly 'mould-breaking' election of 1983, when despite having almost as many votes as Labour (25.4 per cent compared with 27.6 per cent), the SDP/Liberal Alliance won a far smaller share of seats (3.5 per cent compared with 32.2 per cent): a vote–seat difference of 21.9 per cent. To show this discrepancy in another way, in 1983 on average each Conservative MP represented 32,777 voters; each

Table 2.2 British MPs elected with less than 50 per cent of the vote, 1918–97

	MPs elected with a minority of votes	*Minority MPs as % of all MPs*
1918	97	14.5
1922	173	30.0
1923	203	35.2
1924	124	21.5
1929	310	53.8
1931	34	5.9
1935	58	10.1
1945	174	29.0
1950	187	29.9
1951	39	6.2
1955	37	5.9
1959	80	12.7
1964	232	36.8
1966	185	29.4
1970	124	19.7
February 1974	408	64.3
October 1974	380	59.8
1979	207	32.6
1983	334	51.4
1987	283	43.5
1992	258	39.6
1997	310	47.0

Sources: Punnett (1991); election returns.

Labour MP represented 40,464 voters; while each Alliance MP represented a grand total of 338,302 voters.

The large discrepancy in Liberal Democrat seats and votes is caused by the fact that the party's support is spread thinly across the country; it does not have the same levels of concentrated support in particular parts of the country that the two larger parties enjoy. The Conservative Party's electoral base is in the South of England; Labour's electoral base is in the North, and in Scotland and Wales.[2] Similarly the small regional parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland benefit from a strong local focus in support and, on the whole, they tend to win an appropriate share of seats relative to their share of the vote.

Table 2.3 British election results, 1945–97: vote and seat percentages

	Conservatives			*Labour*			*Liberals/Liberal Democrats*[a]		
	Vote (%)	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*
1945	36.8	31.1	−5.7	48.0	61.4	+13.4	9.0	1.9	−7.1
1950	43.4	47.7	+4.3	46.1	50.4	+4.3	9.1	1.4	−7.7
1951	48.0	51.4	+3.4	48.8	47.2	−1.6	2.6	1.0	−1.6
1955	49.7	54.8	+5.1	46.4	44.0	−2.4	2.7	1.0	−1.7
1959	49.4	57.9	+8.5	43.8	41.0	−2.8	5.9	1.0	−4.9
1964	43.4	48.3	+4.9	44.1	50.3	+6.2	11.2	1.4	−9.8
1966	41.9	40.2	−1.7	48.0	57.8	+9.8	8.5	1.9	−6.6
1970	46.4	52.4	+6.0	43.1	45.7	+2.6	7.5	1.0	−6.5
Feb. 1974	37.9	46.8	+8.9	37.2	47.4	+10.2	19.3	2.2	−17.1
Oct. 1974	35.8	43.6	+7.8	39.3	50.2	+10.9	18.3	2.0	−16.3
1979	43.9	53.4	+9.5	36.9	42.4	+5.5	13.8	1.7	−12.1
1983	42.4	61.1	+18.7	27.6	32.2	+4.6	25.4	3.5	−21.9
1987	42.3	57.8	+15.5	30.8	35.2	+4.4	22.6	3.4	−19.2
1992	41.9	51.6	+9.7	34.4	41.6	+7.2	17.8	3.1	−14.7
1997	30.7	25.0	−5.7	43.2	63.4	+20.2	16.8	7.0	−9.8

Notes: Percentages do not add up to 100 because not all parties are included. In the 'Diff.' columns a positive sign implies that the party gained a greater share of seats than its share of the vote, a negative sign implies it received a lesser share of seats.
[a] Includes the Social Democratic Party in 1983 and 1987.
Sources: Mackie and Rose (1991); election results.

The other point to note about the trends in vote–seat per cent differences in Table 2.3 is that the differences have become larger in recent decades, starting with the elections in the first part of the 1970s. This reflects the fact that the Liberal surge in votes coincided with a decline in the total vote for the two larger parties. What this demonstrates is that SMP works best in a two-party system. In a multi-party system – as the 1983 results indicate – there are bound to be some gross anomalies. Of course, the political parties are well aware of this, and do their level best to try and increase the 'efficiency' of their vote, in particular by focusing their campaign efforts on marginal seats and encouraging voters to vote tactically. In recent elections, the focus of such campaigns has been on trying to unseat electorally vulnerable Conservative MPs (for example, GROTT –

Get Rid of the Tories – in 1997). Media coverage of the 1997 election headlined some prominent cases of where MPs were unseated in the light of such campaigns. Subsequent analysis of the aggregate voting trends (and as also is implied by the final entry in Table 2.3) confirmed the successes of Labour and the Liberal Democrats in steering their votes tactically, thereby ensuring that, on this occasion, much of the 'bias' in the SMP system was at the expense of the Conservatives (Johnston *et al.* 1999; Rossiter *et al.* 1999b).

A third point to be noted about the figures in Table 2.3 is that the system can also produce unusual election results in terms of who 'wins' office. In 1951 the Conservative Party won more seats than Labour despite having fewer votes. In February 1974 it was Labour's turn to benefit, winning more seats than the Conservatives despite having fewer votes. As for the point about strong government, the only example of a 'hung' parliament (where no single party had an overall majority) was in February 1974. We have to go back to before the Second World War to find other examples (1929, 1923, twice in 1910). However, there have been a number of governments with very small majorities, where the practice of 'strong' government has been somewhat curtailed. The most prominent example was as a result of the October 1974 election when Labour had only a majority of three. By April 1976, due to resignations and by-election losses, the government had lost majority status and for the remainder of its term it relied on the support of smaller parties, especially the Liberals. (This was the period of the 'Lib–Lab pact'.) Other close election results were in 1950 (when Labour had a majority of five seats) and 1964 (when Labour's majority was four). The Conservative government elected in 1992 had a majority of just 21 seats. Due to a process of attrition (primarily death and subsequent loss of by-elections, and in some cases desertion to other parties) the government's majority was gradually whittled away, leaving it vulnerable to backbench revolts.

On the basis of the UK experience, to what extent does SMP meet the requirements of simplicity, stability and constituency representation which were introduced at the start of the chapter? It cannot be disputed that it is simple, both to use and to understand, and this fact will be ever more evident as we examine the other main electoral systems in use. But is simplicity really the issue? It is all very well being able to understand what is going on, but what do I actually gain from this if my preferred candidate (and my preferred party) is

resoundingly defeated election after election, perhaps because I happen to live in a non-marginal constituency? In other words, the benefit of simplicity can be (and is often) at the cost of fairness – fairness to smaller parties and to the supporters of smaller parties, fairness to those voters 'trapped' in seats which are safely held by parties they do not support.

Why should the question of simplicity be any more important for British voters than for any other voters? It clearly has not been seen as a relevant factor by those countries which have recently adopted proportional systems: in Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe, Japan or New Zealand – the latter replacing SMP with a mixed system. Indeed, it is hard to find any evidence of higher levels of voter confusion in other countries. For instance, there are no perceptible differences in the numbers of spoiled or invalid votes (see below, pp. 202–3). For that matter, when Northern Ireland voters moved towards the more complex single transferable vote system (which we deal with in Chapter 6) for local elections in the 1970s, 'the system [did not] prove complicated for voters': the numbers of invalid votes did not rise (Bogdanor 1981: 147).

There are a number of issues to consider under the rubric of government 'stability', and we will be returning to this, in far more detail, in Chapter 9. For the moment, let us deal with one aspect which is prominent in the British debate, namely the argument that the plurality system has an in-built mechanism to produce single-party parliamentary majorities and hence 'strong' government. For some time this used to be formalized as a 'cube rule' (Butler 1963; Kendall and Stuart 1950), which can be summarized as follows: if the ratio of votes that two parties receive is A : B, then this will result in the following ratio of seats, $A^3 : B^3$. In other words, the plurality system is said to exaggerate the winning party's lead, making it easier to win a clear majority of the seats, and hence promoting greater parliamentary stability. With the onset of electoral volatility from the 1970s, and the declining hold of the two larger parties (particularly as a result of the electoral rise of the Liberals/Liberal Democrats), it has been far less easy to predict the relationship between votes and seats, leading Vernon Bogdanor (1981: 180; also Butler 1983; Curtice and Steed 1982; though see Norris and Crewe 1994) to conclude that 'the cube law has ceased to hold in Britain'. This is confirmed by analysis of recent elections which shows no perceptible evidence of vote–seat distortion (Curtice 1992). Needless to say, if

the electoral system can no longer guarantee a parliamentary majority for the party winning the most votes (as evidenced by the 1974 results), then this raises doubts about the utility of the argument that it promotes stable government.

Despite the evident demise of the cube rule, of course it can be argued that the record of postwar British electoral politics speaks for itself. British governments have tended to be long-lasting and stable, in contrast to the record of other European countries. Here attention is paid to the instability of coalitions and the dangers that can hold for political system stability (Pinto-Duschinsky 1999). The common examples cited are Fourth Republic France (1946–58), Weimar Germany (1919–33) and postwar Italy. More recently, there have been references to the frequency of elections in Ireland since the early 1980s, especially the three elections held over an eighteen-month period in 1981–2. Here 'stability' is taken to mean 'longevity': that is, the length of time governments remain in office. While it is easy to refer to unstable cases like Italy – which has tended to change government virtually every year – it is also quite easy to find examples of countries, like Luxembourg or Sweden, where coalition governments are the norm and yet where governments enjoy long lives. We will return to this issue in Chapter 9, when dealing with international comparisons and with other meanings of the word 'stability'.

The third requirement of an electoral system, which is particularly prominent in the British debate, is that it should incorporate constituency representation. Just like the legend of the 'bobby on the beat', there tends to be a certain nostalgic imagery attached to the idea of the constituency politician, to the idea that voters throughout the land have constituency representatives promoting their special interests and needs.

But how significant a factor is constituency representation? For instance, to what extent can one argue that Sir Russell Johnston had a proper mandate to represent his constituency, when only 19 per cent of the electorate actually voted for him? Similar questions can be raised about those 47 per cent of MPs elected in 1997 without an overall majority of support in their constituency. Furthermore, what significance has constituency representation in a parliamentary party system which discourages independent action; where MPs are whipped into the voting lobbies? There is not exactly great scope for individual constituency representation in the legislature when MPs

are expected to toe the party line. This is not to deny the fact that constituent contact with MPs is significant and increasing and that MPs are making ever increasing use of parliamentary question time to promote constituency concerns (Cain *et al.* 1987; Franklin and Norton 1993), and that such activities clearly affect the personal vote of MPs (Norton and Wood 1990). But parliamentary questions represent only a part of the work of the Commons; it is in the area of legislation – in the legislative role of MPs – that questions could perhaps be raised. A politician who pays attention to constituency concerns may not have quite so much time to devote to legislative details (Bowler and Farrell 1993; Cain *et al.* 1987).

There are other questions worth raising over the issue of constituency representation. For instance, there is a question mark over the representation of those voters who backed a losing candidate: for example, to what extent are the interests of a Conservative supporter being served by a sitting Labour MP? Finally, there is the issue of whether, in fact, constituency representation is compatible with stable government. Almost by definition a good constituency MP (particularly if from the governing party) is not necessarily a good team player in parliament. For instance, in cases in which specific constituency interests conflict with party policy, such an MP may be unwilling or unable to toe the party line. Given the right circumstances, this could threaten government stability (Whiteley and Seyd 1999).

2.2 Britain's Long Road to Electoral Reform

The question of electoral reform has gained a certain prominence in Britain, particularly since the election of a new Labour government in 1997 which has placed electoral reform high on its agenda. As an examination of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British history reveals, however, this is not the first time electoral reform has had such prominence (Bogdanor 1981; Butler 1963; Hart 1992). Indeed, on one occasion – in 1918 – the single transferable vote was very nearly adopted as the method of election for a third of parliamentary constituencies. Furthermore it is interesting to note how the main themes of the debate have not changed a great deal over time.

Because the issue of electoral reform in Britain has been so closely

bound up with the process of democratization, much time has been spent on areas of electoral law which are unrelated to voting rules. In particular, attention has focused on the process of enfranchisement – on the gradual extension of voting rights to men and later to women – and on constituency boundaries and their revision (Butler 1963). These issues are not dealt with here, as we are more concerned with the electoral system itself: that is, the voting rules used in British elections.

The first main period of debate was from the mid-nineteenth century through to the early 1930s. A series of attempts – in 1867, 1884, 1910, 1917 and 1931 – were made to change the voting rules for election to the House of Commons. This coincided with the development of democracy, mass enfranchisement and the origins of the existing party system. Three electoral systems featured in these debates: the limited vote, the alternative vote and the single transferable vote (STV). It was the latter of these which attracted the most attention, particularly among those pushing for change. STV originated in the writings of Thomas Hare from the 1850s onwards. His work – particularly his *Treatise on the Election of Representatives, Parliamentary and Municipal* (1859) – greatly affected people like the philosopher John Stuart Mill, who at the time was a Member of Parliament (Hart 1992). Mill sought unsuccessfully to have Hare's single transferable vote system ('hare-brained', as it was dubbed by critics) introduced in the 1860s. Later, in the 1880s, the Proportional Representation Society was formed with the principal aim of lobbying for STV.

Looked at from the perspective of the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is something quite familiar about a number of the aspects of these early debates. First, there is a close similarity in the nature of the people calling for electoral reform. In the 1880s and early 1900s the Proportional Representation Society featured prominently, working in coalition with minority groupings in the major parties. Similar coalitions between groups within the main parties and organizations such as the Electoral Reform Society (the successor to the PR Society) are prominent in the current debate. Second – and seemingly in stark contrast to the 'founding fathers' of the USA (McLean 1992) – there is not a lot of evidence that British politicians took much trouble to study electoral systems and to understand them. Jennifer Hart's (1992) review of the earlier debates shows how little critics of electoral reform seemed to know about the workings of electoral systems. Similar observations are not uncommon in the contemporary debate.

Finally, there are evident similarities in the themes which featured in both debates. In both cases the principal theme has been strong government. However, in the earlier debates, whereas there was a concern to protect minority interests, this was not in the sense we would understand this today, where PR is often proposed to facilitate the representation of ethnic minorities, but rather in the sense that the position of the minority elite was seen as endangered by the process of mass enfranchisement. The elite faced the prospect of losing power to the masses, and in this sense 'strong government' was under threat. In addition – and for much the same reasons – there was a desire to limit the power of parties, to control the dangers to democracy of factions and caucuses (particularly as, it was felt, these have a tendency to encourage extremes).

These questions were behind one significant change in the electoral system (in the 1860s) and several more ambitious proposals for change which were all defeated in the Commons. The change in 1867 was the adoption of the limited vote for thirteen three-seat constituencies and one four-seat constituency introduced by the Reform Act of that year. Prior to the Reform Act, most of the parliamentary constituencies elected two members, which tended to exaggerate the bias in favour of larger parties inherent in SMP. Under the limited vote system, electors were given three votes in a four-seat constituency and two votes in a three-seat constituency. As Bogdanor (1981: 101) observes, its intention was to 'allow [a] minority to be represented on as little as one-third of the vote'. While there is some evidence that the system did help to protect minority interests, it did not do so consistently (Lakeman 1974: 83–4). Furthermore, it 'encouraged the development of a party machine whose purpose it was to ensure that only majorities were represented' via elaborate vote management strategies (Bogdanor 1981: 104).

The Third Reform Act of 1884–5 abolished the limited vote and with it went most of Britain's multi-seat constituencies: the single-seat constituencies date from this period. One main consequence of the experiment with the limited vote was that it weakened the case for further attempts at electoral reform. There was little appetite for another experiment. This reluctance was clear in each of the subsequent pushes for electoral reform: in 1910, 1916–17 and 1931. Each of these episodes is dealt with in detail in the available histories

(Bogdanor 1981; Butler 1963; Hart 1992). It is worthwhile spending a moment on the 1916–17 Speaker's Conference proposals, however, particularly as this was the one occasion when the electoral reformers came enticingly close to getting their way. In 1916 a Speaker's Conference was established to come up with proposals relating to franchise extension and its consequences. Its 1917 report proposed STV for borough constituencies – about a third of the constituencies – and the alternative vote (used in Australia, and discussed in Chapter 3) for the remaining (predominantly rural) constituencies. It was the STV proposal which attracted the bulk of attention. Here was a clear attempt to protect the minority elite from the dangers of mass enfranchisement, particularly in urban areas where the Labour Party stood to make great gains. The proposal attracted widespread support in the subsequent parliamentary debate, particularly among those members not affected by it. Ultimately, it was rejected, but only after a series of votes in the Commons and the Lords in which the proposal was repeatedly rejected and reintroduced. Indeed, its initial rejection, in the first Commons vote, was by only a narrow margin. Just eight votes prevented the adoption of STV for one-third of constituencies. The result could hardly have been closer. With the rejection of the proposal, and 'as a rather picturesque anomaly' (Bogdanor 1981: 129), STV was only introduced in four of the seven university seats (representing university graduates; see Blackburn 1995: 70–1). Otherwise the electoral system remained unchanged.

With the exception of one more push for electoral reform in 1931 – when the alternative vote was the system being promoted – nothing much was heard on the question until the early 1970s, when Britain entered into its second main period of debate over electoral reform. A number of factors coincided to drive electoral reform back on to the agenda. The most significant of these was the growing instability of the British voter as revealed by the 1974 election results (Farrell *et al.* 1994). As was discussed above when examining Table 2.3, the patently unfair result for the Liberal Party in that year, whose large votes in both elections were not translated into large numbers of seats, and the disproportionate benefit in seats for Labour in February 1974 (when the party received more seats than the Conservatives despite having fewer votes), once again raised questions about the electoral system. By the mid-1970s, the advocates of electoral reform were no longer being dismissed as 'harmless and rather amusing

cranks, like nudists or the eaters of nut-cutlets' (Lord Avebury cited in Hart 1992: 279). Indeed, they received a further fillip from three more developments in the 1970s: the outbreak of the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland, Britain's accession to the European Community, and the debate over regional devolution.

First, with the collapse of the devolved political system in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, and in an effort to reduce communal tensions in the province, the British government reintroduced the single transferable vote for all elections other than Westminster elections (STV had been used there in the 1920s before being abolished by the Unionist-dominated government). Subsequently in 1979 STV was further extended to European Parliament elections in Northern Ireland. Second, Britain's accession to membership of the European Community in 1973 coincided with the move towards the first Community-wide election of the European Parliament (in 1979), and the question over whether there should be a uniform electoral system across the Community. In a House of Commons vote in 1977 on whether a PR list system (see Chapter 4) should be adopted, Labour (in a free vote) divided and the Conservatives voted against, thereby leaving Britain (that is, excluding Northern Ireland) as the only part of the European Community to elect its MEPs under SMP (Bowler and Farrell 1993). Third, the mid-1970s debates over Scottish and Welsh devolution included questions over what system to use for the new regional assemblies to be elected if devolution were successful. Despite pressures from smaller parties, however, the Labour government came out against the use of a PR system, and the devolution proposals were ultimately defeated, albeit by a technicality, in a referendum.

The coincidence of electoral instability, and the regional and EC debates, meant that electoral reform was high on the political agenda. In 1975 the Hansard Society established a Commission on Electoral Reform, chaired by the historian and Conservative peer, Lord Blake. Its report in the following year proposed a mixed electoral system (that is, a version of the system used in Germany; see Chapter 5), with three-quarters of the Commons elected in single-seat constituencies and the remainder elected on regional lists. Coinciding with this report, an all-party National Committee for Electoral Reform was established, chaired by Lord Harlech. This was designed to coordinate the various organizations calling for reform, and it too attracted a great deal of attention. After several years of

appearing neutral as to which PR system to promote, it eventually came down firmly in favour of STV.

Largely as a result of the activities of the National Committee and its influential backers, electoral reform remained on the agenda of British politics into the 1980s. However, the fact remained that, for the most part, electoral reform was the concern of smaller parties and small minorities within the larger parties. Neither the Conservative nor Labour hierarchies were prepared to embrace electoral reform, fearing that this would endanger their chances of forming single-party majority governments. By the end of the 1980s, however – and after having lost three elections in succession – the Labour Party began to show signs of a new emphasis. The view was being expressed more frequently within party ranks that it could no longer hope to defeat the Conservatives by itself, that some form of coalition was inevitable. Given the long-held view of the Liberals (now Liberal Democrats) in favour of PR, this meant that any future coalition arrangement with them would be likely to have to include an agreement on electoral reform.

The Labour Party's Damascas-like conversion to favouring electoral reform involved a number of key stages, starting with the work of an internal working party (the Plant Commission) in 1991–3, followed soon after by high-level negotiations with the Liberal Democrats, and culminating, in 1997, in election manifesto promises to introduce PR for European Parliament elections, and for elections to assemblies which would be established under a new round of regional devolution proposals. Most significantly, the 1997 Labour manifesto also included a promise to hold a referendum on electoral reform for the House of Commons.

And if the doubters might have expected the party to quietly drop these proposals (especially the latter) in the euphoria of dramatic electoral victory in 1997, any such doubts would very quickly have been dispelled. With lightening speed, the new Labour government rushed through its devolution proposals, including the adoption of mixed electoral systems for the new assemblies in Scotland, Wales (both elected in 1999) and London (elected in 2000); introduced a PR list system for European Parliament elections (first used in 1999); and in December 1997 established an Independent Commission on Electoral Reform, chaired by Lord (Roy) Jenkins, which was given the brief of recommending an electoral system to be offered to voters, in a referendum, as an alternative to SMP (Farrell 2000). The

Jenkins Commission produced its report in October 1998, proposing a complicated new system known as 'Alternative Vote Plus' – in essence a mixed electoral system (see Chapter 5, especially p. 114; Farrell 2000; Margetts and Dunleavy 1999). At the time of writing (January 2000), the Jenkins proposals are still being debated over, and the current belief is that, if there is a referendum, it will not be until after the next general election.

2.3 The Electoral Reform Debate in Other SMP Countries

To broaden the treatment somewhat, it is worthwhile reviewing the debates over electoral reform in a series of other SMP countries, namely Canada, India, New Zealand and the USA. Of the four countries selected for inclusion here, just one (New Zealand) has actually abandoned SMP, but not all of the others have been entirely immune from debate over change.

Clearly, in recent years, the most dramatic case has been New Zealand, whose electors voted in 1993 to replace SMP with a mixed system (Denemark 2000; see also Chapter 5 below). This vote was the product of a long process of national debate which dates from the end of the 1970s when the parliament established a Select Committee on Electoral Law whose main purpose was to assess the operation of the existing electoral system. The committee's scope also included the right to assess the question of electoral reform. Its report in 1980 did not favour replacing SMP with PR, but significantly this conclusion was not supported by the Labour minority on the Committee, who called for the establishment of a wide-ranging Royal Commission on Electoral Reform. When next in government, in 1985, the Labour Party went ahead and established such a Commission, and in its report in December 1986, the Commission recommended the replacement of SMP with what it called a 'mixed member proportional' system.

Not much else happened on this issue until 1990 when, in a highly disproportionate election result, Labour was flung out of office and the new National government (with 48 per cent of the vote, but 69 per cent of the seats), elected on a manifesto of reform and change, had little choice but to take on the question of electoral reform (Vowles 1995). In 1992 an 'indicative', or non-binding, referendum was held. This consisted of two parts. In part A, voters were asked

whether the current SMP system should be retained, or replaced by another electoral system. If they rejected SMP, in part B, they were offered a choice of four other electoral systems to choose between: a 'supplementary member system' (somewhat akin to the British Hansard's proposals of the mid-1970s); STV; the mixed system; and the alternative vote system as used in Australia.

Given the general levels of disquiet about the political system (as revealed in the opinion polls) and the close attention which had been paid to the mixed system (not least by the 1986 Royal Commission report), the results of the 1992 referendum were not that surprising in the sense that voters showed a clear desire to change towards the mixed system. What was surprising was the size of the vote for change. Just short of 85 per cent of voters rejected SMP, and two-thirds of voters (65 per cent) were in favour of the mixed system (Harris 1992).

This result was non-binding. It triggered another referendum campaign, with the voters being offered a clear choice between the existing SMP system and the favoured alternative of the mixed system. This time the result would be binding. After a long, informative and somewhat heated debate, the referendum in November 1993 produced a result, which, while not exactly overwhelming, was certainly conclusive enough to ensure that the system would be changed. On a turnout of 83 per cent, 53.9 per cent voted for the mixed system and 46.1 per cent voted for SMP (Harris 1993; Vowles 1995). The first election under the new mixed system was held three years later, in October 1996 (Vowles *et al.* 1998b).

Electoral reformers (and scholars) in other SMP countries have followed the New Zealand developments with keen interest, and nowhere more closely than in Canada. Much like we saw above in the case of Britain, over the years the question of electoral reform has arisen from time to time in Canadian debate. For instance, in the 1920s there was a failed attempt to adopt the alternative vote. Prior to the 1960s there was some experimentation with the single transferable vote at provincial level. In 1979 a Task Force on Canadian Unity recommended the adoption of a mixed system to replace SMP at national level, but its proposals were rejected by the Trudeau government. Similarly, proposals by the leader of the New Democratic Party and other scholarly suggestions around that time (for example, Irvine 1979) were also ignored.

The problem was that for a long time the political elite tended not to pay much attention to the issue. This is most dramatically shown by the case of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (the Lortie Commission), set up in 1989 to carry out a root-and-branch survey of the Canadian electoral process and how it might be reformed. Despite its supposed remit of 'electoral reform', the Commission was specifically excluded from examining the electoral system. Its 1991 report, consisting of four volumes, incorporating 23 commissioned academic studies and totalling thousands of pages, covered just about every subject area imaginable under the rubric of electoral reform and party finance, with the singular exception of the Canadian electoral system. According to Donley Studlar, this 'represents a historic missed opportunity to analyze the potential of alternative electoral systems' (1998: 55).

In the early 1990s, as part of the negotiations over constitutional and regional reform in Canada, there were indications that the political elite might finally be considering the question of electoral reform at least for elections to the upper chamber. However, with the failure of the Senate reform proposals in 1992, electoral reform was left on the back burner, where it has remained ever since despite the protestations of some pressure groups, smaller parties and much of the Canadian political science community (see Flanagan 1998; Milner 1998; Studlar 1998; Weaver 1998), and despite the fact that the two elections which have occurred since 1992 have been probably among the most disproportional in Canadian history (Milner 1998: 42–3).

Table 2.4 provides some evidence of the degree of disproportionality in recent Canadian elections, revealing the same kind of double-digit 'difference' proportions as we saw in the British case (Table 2.3). Much attention has been given to the 'electoral earthquake' of 1993 (Erickson 1995) which saw the governing Progressive Conservative Party's number of parliamentary seats plummet from 169 (and an overall majority) to just two. Having enjoyed a 14.3 per cent advantage in seats over votes in 1988, the Progressive Conservatives' meltdown was not helped by a highly disproportional deficit of 15.2 per cent in its seat proportion relative to its vote. And this vote–seat deficit was not greatly improved in the subsequent 1997 election.

Another SMP case which, so far at any rate, has resisted any moves towards electoral reform is India, the world's largest democracy with some 600 million voters. In its first thirty years of independence

Table 2.4 Disproportionality in recent Canadian elections

	Bloc Québécois[a]			*Liberal Party*			*New Democrat Party*			*Progressive Conservatives*			*Reform*		
	Vote (%)	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*
1988		–n.a.–		31.9	28.1	–3.8	20.4	14.6	–5.8	43.0	57.3	+14.3	2.1	0.0	–2.1
1993	13.5	18.3	+4.8	41.3	60.0	+18.7	6.9	3.1	–3.8	16.0	0.8	–15.2	18.7	17.6	–1.1
1997	10.7	14.6	+3.9	38.4	51.5	+13.1	11.0	7.0	–4.0	18.9	6.7	–12.2	19.3	19.9	+0.6

Notes: Percentages to not add up to 100 because of the exclusion of independents. In the 'Diff.' columns a positive sign implies that the party gained a greater share of seats than its share of the vote, a negative sign implies it received a lesser share of seats.
[a] The party was first established in 1990.
Source: Election results.

India followed an impeccable SMP tradition in the sense that the Congress Party secured safe parliamentary majorities, on the basis of consistent pluralities (but never majorities) of the vote. Throughout this period the party faced a divided opposition. Things changed dramatically in 1977 when the opposition parties formed a common front against Indira Gandhi's state of emergency (her government had set aside constitutional rights in 1975–7). Congress's vote fell by more than one-third to 35 per cent, and this was magnified by the SMP electoral system to the extent that its seat proportions fell by more than half (56 per cent) to a then all-time low of 28 per cent (Rangarajan and Patidar 1997). (This low point was beaten in 1996 when Congress's seat proportion dropped to just under 26 per cent.) Congress won power again in 1980 and held it through much of the 1980s, but the spell of Congress supremacy had been broken. Congress's hold of power has been interrupted by periods of coalition government in 1977 and 1989, and an unstable government in 1996 which lasted barely two years.

The cases of Canada and India share a few traits in common, not least the tendency for some dramatic turn-arounds in electoral fortunes for prominent parties (the Progressive Conservatives and Congress) and the consistently disproportional results for small parties. On the face of it, there does not appear to be much to distinguish these cases from New Zealand or Britain whose politicians have, since the early 1990s, revealed themselves to be more amenable to discussing (and in New Zealand's case implementing) electoral reform. No simple explanations can be provided for these differences, apart from the obvious sort of points, such as the fact that a large proportion of India's population remain illiterate, which might be seen as a reason for ruling out more complex electoral systems (though this same fact did not prevent post-apartheid South Africa adopting PR list), or the ability of the federalized nature of both systems to provide a 'safety-valve' of regional assemblies where smaller parties can win some influence. One point which certainly does seem significant in at least partially explaining why there is a reluctance to attempt electoral reform in Canada and India relates to what might be called a delicate institutional balance which some fear might be endangered by too much tinkering with the system. In the Canadian case this relates to the perceived dangers of regional parties and the separatist debate, to 'a general sense of institutional vulnerability as far as the federal distribution of power is concerned

– an unarticulated fear that tampering with electoral institutions would only exacerbate the situation' (Milner 1998: 50). According to Rangarajan and Patidar (1997: 35), SMP has retained support in India 'due in part to the practice of reserving seats for socially underprivileged groups' (scheduled castes and tribes, and in the future possibly also women).

When compared with the recent process of electoral reform in New Zealand and the steady-state positions of Canada and India, the USA can be seen as representing something of an in-between case, in the sense that there are signs, particularly since the 1990s, of a willingness to embrace electoral reform, but only at local or at most state level. At federal level the USA remains steadfastly resistant to change, nor for that matter is there much if any mainstream discussion about the possibility of change. And this is not just in terms of public debate; the academic community has also remained largely immune from discussions of electoral reform. Indeed, it is ironic that while much of the academic literature on electoral systems focuses on the US case, very little of this actually deals with the voting system used in the United States. For the most part the attention is on issues of redistricting and voting rights (as we saw in Chapter 1). As Douglas Amy has observed: 'the American voting system is the aberration. Ours is one of the few developed countries that continues to cling to a plurality system, and among those few, ours is the only one in which no public debate over the desirability of this system is occurring' (Amy 1993: 4; also Dunleavy and Margetts 1995). As Amy's comprehensive study points out, in those instances where electoral reform at federal level is raised there are the standard battery of objections ready to shoot it down. Other systems are said to be too complex, promoting the dangers of unstable government, fringe parties and the loss of constituency representation, and giving too much power to the party elites. But the most significant reason why electoral reform does not appear on the American national agenda seems to be a basic lack of interest on the part of the voters (and presumably by implication, the elite). In other words, while people may think there are problems with the system – as shown most particularly by the low levels of esteem for politicians generally and, perhaps, by very low turnout – there is no great groundswell of opinion in favour of electoral reform as one possible means of changing things. Another factor which undoubtedly contributes to

the lack of concern about the electoral system is the fact that the US government tends to be 'divided', in the sense that it is common for one party to control the presidency while another controls Congress. This is quite different from the British case where one party can control all of government for extended periods, and where it is recognized that a major reason for this is the distorting effects of the electoral system. Finally, the nature of the US party system is an important factor in explaining the lack of concern about electoral reform in the USA. This is revealed both by the weakness of US parties (Wattenberg 1998), which ensures little attention to national vote trends, and also by the fact that the USA 'now stands alone in the world as the homeland of a system that is almost perfectly two-party . . . [and] if only two parties run candidates than even a plurality rule system may operate quite proportionally' (Dunleavy and Margetts 1995: 24).

But the USA has not been entirely devoid of any attention to other electoral systems, and this is where it parts company with Canada and India. For instance, in the earlier part of the twentieth century there were notable efforts to adopt STV at local government level, with some success. As Leon Weaver (1986: 140) notes: 'PR systems have been used in approximately two dozen cities (for city councils and school boards). These cases might conceivably be counted as five dozen if one wishes to count the school communities in Massachusetts PR cities and in the New York City community school boards as separate cases.' Lest we take this to mean that STV was on a dramatic growth curve in this period, it is well to note Weaver's important qualifier that 'PR systems have constituted a very small sample – a fraction of 1 per cent – when compared with the total number of electoral systems in this country'. Moving into the second half of the twentieth century the use of STV in American local government was on a steep decline. At the time of writing, STV is used only in Cambridge, Massachusetts (for city council and school committee elections) and in New York City (for community school board elections). The USA also makes relatively widespread use of the two-round system (such as used in France; see Chapter 3). In some southern states (notably Louisiana) the two-round system is even used in congressional elections.

In the light of recent Supreme Court decisions which have raised doubts over the long-term viability of 'majority–minority'

constituencies (discussed on p. 16 above), alternative means will have to be found to help protect and promote the interests of ethnic minorities, particularly in the southern states. According to a review of recent trends by Richard Engstrom (1998), prominent among these alternative means has been a growing interest in new electoral systems. At least 40 local governments in five states have adopted limited voting in recent years, while close to 60 local governments in five states have adopted some element of cumulative voting. (These systems are dealt with in the next section.)

As we shall see below, cumulative and limited voting are members of the plurality family of electoral systems. Across the USA there is also some evidence of a growing interest in proportional electoral systems, particularly among smaller parties, single-issue candidates and significant lobbying organizations. 'A decade ago', according to two proponents of electoral reform, proportional representation 'sounded foreign and probably unconstitutional to many Americans . . . Today, hundreds of publications (including our largest-circulation newspapers and magazines) regularly discuss voting system reform' (Ritchie and Hill 1998: 101).[3] In the 1990s both Cincinnati and San Francisco held referendums on proportional systems (offering the single transferable vote, also known as 'choice voting', as the alternative), which in each case garnered the support of four in ten voters. There has been some discussion in Congress about the possibility that states might once again be able to use PR to elect their Congressmen (Cynthia McKinney's Voter's Choice Act). New Mexico and Vermont have recently held debates over the introduction of the alternative vote (also known as 'instant runoff'). 'Overall, PR activism in the United States is greater than at any time since before World War II' (Ritchie and Hill 1998: 102).

2.4 Other Plurality Systems

As with many of the electoral systems explored in this book, SMP offers scope for variation, in this case around the common theme of 'plurality'. One of the most obvious alternatives is the use of plurality systems in multi-member constituencies, with voters being given as many votes as there are seats to be filled (generally free to vote across party if desired). As with SMP, in these 'block vote' systems the victors are those candidates winning the plurality of the votes in the constituency. According to Reynolds and Reilly's recent review of comparative trends (1997), block systems are currently used for the following elections: the Palestinian Authority, Bermuda, Fiji, Laos, the US Virgin Islands, Thailand, the Maldives, Kuwait, the Philippines and Mauritius. It is also used for some local government constituencies in the United Kingdom.

Jordan and Mongolia abandoned block voting in the early 1990s because of unease over the disproportionality of the result. And this is the basic point that needs to be stressed about this system. For while it may apparently give a greater say to voters (greater personal choice) in deciding which candidates of their preferred party they may wish to vote for, the fact is, however, that most voters vote the straight party ticket. In consequence the system greatly exaggerates the disproportionality of the plurality system. In other words, the maxim which will be stressed throughout this book, that the larger the district magnitude the greater the proportionality of the system, is reversed in the case of block systems: the more seats to be filled per constituency in a block system the greater the disproportionality.

Two further variants of the plurality family get around the disproportional tendencies of the block system while retaining the multi-member constituencies, one by reducing the number of votes that a voter can cast, the other by allowing voters the right to express more than one vote against a candidate. These systems, known respectively as the limited vote and the cumulative vote, are generally categorized as 'semi-proportional' due to the fact that they make life a bit easier for small parties.

The limited vote first came to prominence in debates over electoral reform in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, where, as we have seen, it was used between 1867 and 1885. For a time it was also used in Gibraltar. It is still in use for the election of the Spanish Senate, and for local government elections in five US states. The objective behind the limited vote is simple: allowing the voter fewer votes than the number of seats to be filled reduces the chance for a large party to have its full slate of candidates elected (which, as we have seen, is the danger with the block vote system); there is more chance for a candidate of a smaller party to be elected.

The cumulative vote emerged at around the same time as the limited vote as another means of trying to reduce the disproportional tendencies of the block voting system. Under this system the voter

retains the same number of votes as seats to be filled, only in this case they can give two or more votes to one candidate: that is, the votes can be 'cumulated'. The obvious advantage of this system is that it allows a voter to express a very strong preference for an individual candidate while at the same time being able to vote for other candidates.

The cumulative vote was first used in the Cape Colony in the 1850s, where it remained as the system for electing the Legislative Council until the early twentieth century. It was also used towards the end of the nineteenth century for the election of schools boards in the UK (Bowler *et al.* 2000). But its widest use, particularly of late, has been in the USA. It has had a long history in Illinois where it was used for elections to the state House of Representatives from 1870 to 1980. As we saw above, cumulative voting has become more popular in recent years as a means of furthering the representation of minorities: it has so far been adopted in five US states for the election of all or part of their governing boards.

Under these systems there is some scope to increase the 'proportionality' of the result. In contrast to the block vote system, under the cumulative and the limited systems as district magnitude increases so does overall proportionality (Lijphart *et al.* 1986). Engstrom (1998: 233) shows this by way of example (for limited voting taking the case of where a voter has just one vote): when there are two seats to be filled a candidate requires 33.3 per cent of the vote; in a three-seat constituency the proportion falls to 25 per cent; in a four-seat constituency it falls to 20 per cent, and so on.

An additional means of increasing proportionality is available in the limited vote system, whereby as the vote becomes more 'limited' the vote proportion required to win a seat decreases (Lakeman 1974; Lijphart *et al.* 1986). For instance, as Engstrom shows (1998: 232–3), in a four-seat constituency if a voter has three votes, a candidate needs 42.9 per cent of the vote to be elected; if a voter has two votes, the proportion drops to 33.3 per cent; and if the voter has just one vote, it drops to just 20 per cent. This last case, where a voter has just one vote in a multi-seat constituency, was the system used by Japan from 1948 to 1994, where it was given the title of single non-transferable vote (SNTV). In 1994 Japan switched to a mixed system (as discussed below in Chapter 5). Currently SNTV is used in Jordan (after it abandoned the block vote), Vanuatu, and for 125 out of 161 seats in the Taiwanese parliament (Reynolds and Reilly 1997).

The fact is, of course, that the limited (SNTV) and cumulative vote systems are at best semi-proportional; while they can be used to make life a bit easier for smaller parties, life will never become that easy. The experience of their use in a range of contexts demonstrates how smaller parties are far from guaranteed greater representation: a major calculation has to be made in determining the correct number of candidates to run in order to win seats without danger of diluting the vote too much. Among the reasons Japan switched from SNTV to a mixed system in the mid-1990s was because the system was credited with having encouraged candidate rivalry, and having discouraged the parties from appealing to a broader spectrum of voters. Overall, then, while these systems may represent some improvement on SMP in terms of helping smaller parties win seats, PR proponents will always argue that they do not go far enough.

2.5 Conclusion

SMP (and its plurality cousins) remains one of the most commonly used systems in the world, certainly in terms of per head of population (although India alone accounts for a large proportion of that total). While some countries are showing signs of a possible willingness to change to an alternative electoral system (and, in one case, New Zealand, has actually changed), equally there are prominent cases where electoral reform remains firmly off the agenda.

It should become steadily more apparent as we progress through this book that there is no such thing as the perfect electoral system, even if some systems have certain advantages over others. This chapter has shown some of the obvious disadvantages of SMP: it produces disproportional results; smaller parties are underrepresented; supporters of smaller parties waste their votes. But, as we have seen, SMP does also have a number of apparent advantages, particularly in terms of its promotion of single-party, stable government; the central role of constituency representation; and its much trumpeted simplicity. In attempting to weigh up the pros and

cons of this (or, indeed, any) system we can only go so far when we treat the system in isolation. A full analysis can only be made on the basis of comparisons with other systems. We start in the next chapter with consideration of SMP's close neighbour, the majoritarian systems.

3

Majoritarian Electoral Systems: Two-Round Systems and the Alternative Vote

As we saw in the previous chapter, Sir Russell Johnston (Liberal Democrat) won the seat of Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber in the 1992 British general election with just 26 per cent of the vote. It is results like this that give the single member plurality (SMP) system a bad name. One view often expressed in political circles is that if it were possible to clear up these sorts of anomalies – but without 'destroying' the 'essential' character of SMP – then the system would not receive such a bad press. The ideal compromise is said to be one where the electoral system is still easy for the average voter to understand; where it produces strong and stable government; where there still is a single MP representing a single constituency; and, in addition, where that MP enjoys the support of the majority of his or her constituents. The critical new ingredient, therefore, is that each MP is elected with an overall majority, as opposed to the situation which prevailed in the 1997 British election when only 53 per cent of MPs were elected with an overall majority of all the votes in the constituency, a not uncommon result (Punnett 1991).

In terms of the three main features of electoral systems introduced in Chapter 1, the main point of distinction between the majoritarian systems and SMP is over the 'electoral formula'; there are also some differences over 'ballot structure'. The electoral formula distinction may appear quite simple, but it is seen as crucial by the

proponents of majoritarian systems. Instead of requiring only a *plurality* of votes (that is, more votes than any of the other candidates but not necessarily an overall majority) in order to win the seat, a candidate must get an overall *majority* (that is, at least 50 per cent plus one), hence the title 'majoritarian' systems.

The ballot structure distinction really only relates to the Australian majoritarian system, known as the alternative vote. As we shall see, under the alternative vote, voters rank-order all the candidates on the ballot paper: in other words the ballot structure is 'ordinal'. Things are not quite so straightforward under the two-round system (such as used in France) which, as we see in section 3.1, consists essentially of two 'categoric' ballots on different polling days either a week or a fortnight apart. Both majoritarian systems share in common with SMP a 'district magnitude' of one: the country is divided into a series of one-seat constituencies (though multi-seat constituencies have been used). Once again, in other words, we are dealing with non-proportional electoral systems: proportionality on a seat-by-seat basis can only occur when there are multi-seat constituencies and a proportional electoral formula.

Majoritarian electoral systems are seen as a compromise by those people who wish to see improvements to the SMP system, but who are not in favour of the adoption of proportional representation. Whether, in fact, it is correct to view majoritarian systems as a compromise is dealt with later. But first we need to examine the two main types of majoritarian systems in use. We start, in section 3.1, with a discussion of the two-round system, with particular emphasis on France. Section 3.2 outlines the alternative vote system which is most closely associated with Australia where it is used for lower house elections. The chapter concludes, in section 3.3, with an assessment of the majoritarian electoral systems.

3.1 The Two-Round System

As ever, this system has several possible names: run-off, two-ballot, second ballot. In this book, the term 'two-round system' will be applied to those systems which require voters to vote on two separate occasions. As we shall see, of course, there are variants of this system. Two-round systems are common in many of those countries with directly elected presidents (Blais and Massicotte 1996; Jones

1995, 1997). Counted among these are Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Finland, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Poland, Portugal, Russia and Ukraine. This system is far less common in the case of legislative elections. It is most closely associated with France where it was used for elections to the Chamber of Deputies from 1928 to 1945; it was readopted by the French Fifth Republic in 1958, and has also been used for presidential elections (Cole and Campbell 1989). From time to time it has been replaced, most recently in 1986–8 by proportional representation (also France has opted for a PR system for its European Parliament elections).

In the first part of the twentieth century many European countries passed through a two-round stage for parliamentary elections, *en route* from plurality to proportional electoral systems, among them Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland (in some of these cases using multi-member constituencies). Two-round systems have gained a certain popularity in a number of the post-Soviet bloc states, among them Belarus, Kyrgystan, Macedonia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Ukraine used a two-round system in 1994 before abandoning it for a mixed electoral system in 1998 (Birch 1997). Albania, Hungary and Lithuania have incorporated two-round systems as part of their mixed systems (see Chapter 5 below). According to Reynolds and Reilly's survey of comparative trends, two-round systems are used for legislative elections in over thirty countries. Apart from the countries already mentioned, most of the remainder share in common the fact that they are 'territorial dependencies of the French Republic, or have been historically influenced in some way by the French' (1997: 43). Two-round systems have also been used quite widely in the USA for lower-level elections, and in some southern states even for Congressional elections.

The remainder of this section focuses on the French case, whose presidential and legislative electoral systems rather neatly encapsulate the two forms of two-round systems. As we have seen, the central feature of this system is two rounds of voting taking place on two different polling days. The principal objective is to ensure (or at least increase the likelihood) that the candidate elected will have an overall majority of support in the constituency, more than 50 per cent of the votes cast (in single-seat constituencies). France uses a *majority–plurality* version of two-round voting for its legislative elections and a *majority–run-off* version for its presidential elections.

In both cases the first stage is deceptively like an SMP election: the French voters simply select their preferred candidate. If a candidate receives an overall majority of the votes – such as happened in 22 per cent of cases in the 1988 French legislative elections and 12 per cent of cases in 1993 (Cole and Campbell 1989: 191; Goldey 1993) – then they are deemed elected and there is no need for a second ballot. Where no candidate receives an overall majority, then a second round of voting takes place, one week later for legislative elections, two weeks later for presidential elections. It is at this point that the two French systems vary.

In the case of legislative elections, using the majority–plurality version of the two-round system, only those candidates who receive a minimum percentage of votes are allowed to proceed to the second ballot. This minimum is set at 12.5 per cent, not of those who voted, but of the registered voters.[1] In other words, in the 1997 legislative election when 68.5 per cent of the electorate turned out to vote in the first round, on average candidates needed more than 18 per cent of the total vote in order to qualify for the second round. This minimum figure is designed to reduce the number of candidates in the second ballot and therefore to increase the likelihood that the MP finally elected has an overall majority of votes. Note that it does not *guarantee* a majoritarian result. This is because there is always the possibility that more than two candidates receive 12.5 per cent of the vote in the first round – in theory anything up to seven or eight candidates could receive 12.5 per cent of the vote – and once there are more than two candidates, then there is no guarantee of a majoritarian result; indeed, in this round all a candidate requires to get elected is a plurality of the vote. Only with two candidates can a majoritarian result be guaranteed. Of course, often candidates who manage to receive the minimum percentage of votes in the first round pull out of the race anyway so as to increase the chances for a particular candidate from another party (such as when there is a coalition bargain). (Indeed, it used to be possible for candidates to enter the race for the first time in the second round. Since 1958 all candidates must have been on the first ballot to qualify.) According to Cole and Campbell (1989: 168), in the 1988 legislative elections there were nine 'triangular contests' in the second ballot. In 1993 there were fifteen triangular contests, representing 3 per cent of all constituencies (Goldey 1993).

An unusual feature of the French electoral process is that the

ballot papers are produced by the parties themselves, not by the state. There are a set of regulations which govern the style and content of the ballot paper: it should measure approximately 10 cm × 15 cm; it should have the candidate's name (and that of the replacement, thus avoiding the need for a by-election) and party affiliation; it can contain further information as desired, such as a party's slogan or symbol, or background on the candidate (Holliday 1994). Each party provides its own ballot paper. To vote, the elector chooses the appropriate ballot paper of the party they support, places it in the envelope provided, and pops it into the ballot box. An example of a ballot paper for one of the French Green parties is provided in Figure 3.1.

The electoral rules for presidential elections are simpler. In this majority–run-off version of the two-round system, only the candi-

Figure 3.1 A French majority–plurality two-round ballot paper

Table 3.1 The 1995 French presidential election

	First round (24 April) (%)	*Second round (7 May) (%)*
Lionel Jospin (Socialist Party)	23.3	47.4
Jacques Chirac (Rally for the Republic)	20.8	52.6
Edouard Balladur (Rally for the Republic)	18.6	
Jean-Marie Le Pen (National Front)	15.0	
Robert Hue (Communist Party)	8.6	
Arlette Laguiller (Workers' Struggle)	5.3	
Philippe de Villiers (Another Europe)	4.7	
Dominique Voynet (Greens)	3.3	
Jacques Cheminade (Federation for a New Solidarity)	0.3	
Turnout	78.4	79.7
Invalid votes	2.2	4.7
Valid votes	76.2	82.0

Source: Mackie and Rose (1997).

dates with the highest and second highest number of votes are allowed to run in the second round; all other candidates are excluded. There being only two candidates left in the race, the final result is majoritarian. Technically speaking, of course, the final result often does not actually represent a majority of the electorate because only a certain percentage actually turn out to vote and therefore it is only a majority of the voters which determines the result. This point is even more significant in the cases where the turnout is lower in the second round of voting, as happened in 1965 and 1969. For instance in 1969 turnout dropped from 77.6 per cent in the first round to 65.5 per cent in the second. As a result General de Gaulle's 'majority' over François Mitterrand of 52.2 per cent represented in reality just 45.3 per cent of the French electorate.

The 1995 French presidential election result is given in Table 3.1. This provides a good example of the strategic nature of the system. On the face of it, this election was a battle between the Left and the Right, with the Socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, taking up the mantle from the extremely unpopular François Mitterrand, who was retiring from politics. Underlying this battle was an even more bitter strategic struggle between the two main candidates of the Right, the

former prime minister and long-standing mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, and the then prime minister, Edouard Balladur, who had entered the race as hot favourite.

At the start of the campaign there were predictions that Jospin would be defeated in the first round, leaving the second round to be fought over by the two candidates of the Right. This was seen as a potentially dangerous scenario, and one of the weaknesses of the two-round system. If it had actually occurred, then the supporters of left-of-centre parties would have been denied the right to vote for any candidate of their persuasion in the second round. In the event, and despite the fact that his campaign started late, Jospin managed to produce a dramatic recovery in the Socialist vote, and topped the poll in the first round with 23.3 per cent of the vote. Meanwhile, Chirac, who fought a blistering campaign, pushed Balladur into third place and out of the race.

In the second round, a fortnight later, Chirac emerged the victor with 52.6 per cent of the vote. But it should be noted that this second-round election saw an unprecedented 5 per cent of voters who spoiled their votes. As a result, Chirac received the active support of less than half the total French electorate.

3.2 The Alternative Vote System

The alternative vote electoral system was devised in the 1870s by W. R. Ware, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As Jack Wright (1980: 54) points out, in the debates of the late nineteenth century about Australian independence and the setting up of the federation, considerable interest had been shown in the merits of preferential voting. This interest continued into the early years of the new federation. The basic argument was that SMP – the system first adopted – risked a situation where parties would suffer unfairly from vote-splitting. This point was illustrated by a by-election in Western Australia, when a Labor candidate was elected with 35 per cent of the vote, reflecting the fact that the support of the non-Labor side was split between three other candidates. Soon after that, in 1918, what was known as preferential voting, or majority preferential voting, was introduced for elections to the Australian House of Representatives. (In fact, the first use of a version of the alternative vote system in Australia was in the state of Queensland in 1892.)

Most Australian states also use the alternative vote for state lower house elections.

According to Reynolds and Reilly (1997: 37), the alternative vote offers 'a good example of the regional diffusion of electoral systems . . . the past, present and likely future use of [the alternative vote] has all occurred within the Oceania region'. Other countries in the region which have used or are considering the alternative vote include Nauru, Papua New Guinea (1964–75; see Reilly 1997a) and Fiji (recommended as the next electoral system by the 1996 Constitution Review; see Lal and Larmour 1997). The alternative vote is not exclusive to the Oceania region, however. Ireland uses it for presidential and parliamentary by-elections; it was used in parts of Canada from the 1920s to the 1950s (Alberta, Manitoba, and for a brief period in British Columbia; see Flanagan 1998); Sri Lanka has used a version of it for presidential elections since 1978; the US state of Alabama used what it called a 'second-choice' system between 1915 and 1931, before reverting back to a two-round system (Reilly 1997b); in Britain the new London mayor was elected in 2000 by a system called the 'supplementary vote'.

In short, then, the alternative vote has been applied in quite a range of different electoral arenas; however, inevitably most attention has been devoted to its use in Australia. Although outside Australia this electoral system is usually referred to as the alternative vote, preferential voting is a more appropriate title.[2] 'Alternative' implies an either/or system – such as the two-round system, for instance – whereas, in reality, the voters are being asked to rank-order a number of candidates 1, 2, 3 and so on. Indeed, in Australia, voters have to rank-order *all* the candidates on the ballot paper; otherwise, their vote is declared invalid. An example of an Australian ballot paper is provided in Figure 3.2 for the electoral division (that is, constituency) of Moore. In essence very similar to an SMP ballot paper, the big difference is that voters vote in order of preference for all the candidates, in this case all five candidates. (Note the non-alphabetical ordering of candidates' names; in Australia the parties determine the order of the candidates.)

Table 3.2 provides an illustration of how the alternative vote system can produce a result quite different from one obtained under SMP. In the Hinkler division of Queensland, in the 1998 Australian federal elections, there were six candidates running for one seat, and there were 72,356 valid votes. The first count consisted of the sorting

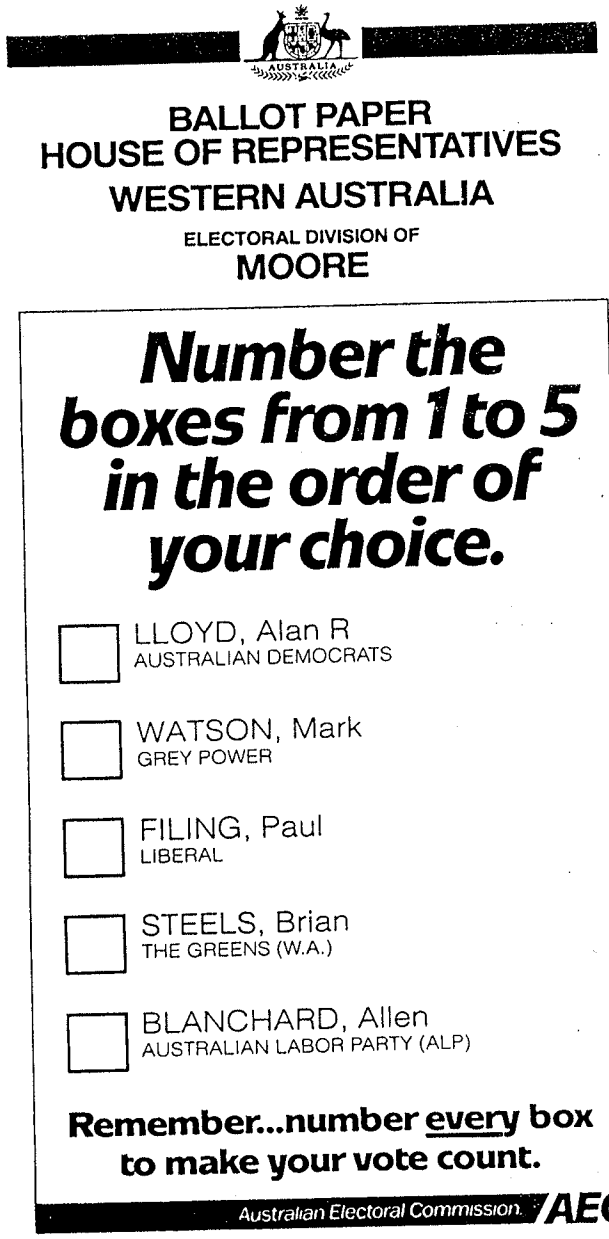


Figure 3.2 An Australian alternative vote ballot paper

Table 3.2 An alternative vote election result: division of Hinkler (Queensland) in the 1998 Australian federal elections

	Count one	*Next count*	*Count two*	*Next count*	*Count three*	*Next count*	*Count four*	*Next count*	*Count five*	
Paul Neville (National)	26,471	+45	26,516	+223	26,739	+807	27,546	+8,877	36,423	Elected
Cheryl Dorron (Labor)	29,021	+39	29,060	+353	29,413	+987	30,400	+5,533	35,933	
Ray Pearce (Green)	1,139	+48	1,187	Excluded						
Marcus Ringuet (Hanson's One Nation)	13,739	+61	13,800	+169	13,969	+441	14,410	Excluded		
Lance Hall (Australian Democrats)	1,677	+116	1,793	+442	2,235	Excluded				
Cindy Rolls (Citizens Electoral Council)	309	Excluded								

Source: Australian Electoral Commission.

of the ballot papers in order of the first-preference votes. Under SMP, Cheryl Dorron (Labor Party) would have been elected as the candidate with the most votes (a respectable 40 per cent of the valid vote, as compared to 37 per cent for her nearest rival, Paul Neville of the National Party). However, under the alternative vote system, a candidate must receive more than 50 per cent of the vote (that is, at least 36,179 votes in this case). Therefore, it was necessary to 'exclude' the candidate with the fewest votes, Cindy Rolls (Citizens Electoral Council), and re-sort her 309 ballot papers according to the second preferences of the voters.

Rolls's votes transferred pretty evenly to the other candidates, with a bit over a third going to Lance Hall of the Australian Democrats, and the rest divided between the remaining candidates. Unsurprisingly, given the small amount of votes being transferred, the result of this second count was inconclusive: still none of the candidates had an overall majority. The third count, therefore, consisted of the exclusion of the next weakest candidate – this time Ray Pearce (Green – 1,187 votes). Again more than a third of the preferences transferred to the Australian Democrats, just under a third went to the Labor candidate, and the other two candidates shared the remainder. The margin separating the top two candidates remained largely unchanged, and still no candidate had more than 50 per cent of the vote, so a fourth count was required, involving the exclusion of Lance Hall and the transfer of his 2,235 votes. The bulk of these were shared evenly by the top two candidates, and yet again no single candidate emerged with an overall majority, although Labor's Cheryl Dorron (42 per cent) still held a healthy lead over Paul Neville of the National Party (38 per cent).

The fifth and final count, therefore, consisted of the exclusion of Marcus Ringuet, the candidate representing the far-right One Nation party of Pauline Hanson. Since only two candidates were left in the race this meant that one of them had to be elected in this round; one of them had to get an overall majority. Despite the fact that Dorron had been leading from the outset, the final victory went to Neville, who received 62 per cent of Ringuet's transfers – understandable given that National is positioned closer on the political spectrum to Hanson's One Nation than is Labor – giving him a final vote tally of 36,423 (50.3 per cent) as against 35,933 votes (49.7 per cent) for Dorron.

Another good example from 1998 of where the alternative vote

produced a very different result to SMP was provided by the Blair division in Queensland, where Pauline Hanson was the candidate expected to win – a cause of some trepidation to the mainstream parties which balked at her extremist policies. If this had been an SMP election, Hanson would have been the clear winner, with 36 per cent of the first-preference vote, beating her nearest rival, Cameron Thompson of Labor, who had just 22 per cent. In the event, however, it was Thompson who would emerge as the winner, after eight counts, with a final vote of 53 per cent, against Hanson's 47 per cent.

It should not be assumed that the Hinkler and Blair cases – where the transfer of preferences can produce results different to what would be obtained under SMP – are typical. In his review of trends since the 1970s, Clive Bean (1997) observes that, on average, this happens in only about 5–10 per cent of constituencies, and therefore rarely has any significant effect on the national election result. Indeed, Bean's research suggests just two occasions, 1961 and 1969, when the national election result would have been very different had SMP been the electoral system instead of the alternative vote (Bean 1986).

3.3 Assessing Majoritarian Electoral Systems

An assessment of the majoritarian electoral systems needs to consider two main aspects: their systemic consequences, particularly in terms of the parties' shares of votes and seats; and their strategic consequences, in terms of how the parties and the voters make use of the systems. Let us consider each in turn.

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 present percentages of votes, seats and vote–seat differences in France and Australia in postwar elections (only since 1962 in France, the first election held under the Fifth Republic). These tables provide easy comparisons with the trends in British elections which we saw in the previous chapter (Table 2.3). Overall, when drawing comparisons between SMP and the two majoritarian systems, the trends are strikingly similar. Table 3.3 reveals a systematic bias in the French system against the parties on the two extremes, reflecting the tendency – in the two-round system – for voters to gravitate towards the centre as the candidates of the extreme parties (more usually the Communists or the National Front) are excluded. The 1997 election was particularly interesting in this regard. For

Table 3.3 French legislative elections, 1962–97: vote and seat percentages

	Socialist Party[a]			*Communist Party*			*Gaullists*		
	Vote (%)	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*
1962	19.8	22.5	+2.7	21.9	8.8	−13.1	33.7	49.5	+15.8
1967	18.9	25.1	+6.2	22.5	15.3	−7.2	33.0	40.6	+7.6
1968	16.5	12.1	−4.4	20.0	7.0	−13.0	38.0	60.0	+22.0
1973	19.1	18.8	−0.3	21.4	15.4	−6.0	26.0	37.6	+11.6
1978	22.8	21.5	−1.3	20.6	18.1	−2.5	22.8	30.0	+7.2
1981	36.6	56.5	+19.9	16.1	9.2	−6.9	21.2	16.9	−4.3
1986[b]	31.3	35.6	+4.3	9.7	5.8	−3.9	26.8	26.3	−0.5
1988	36.6	46.8	+10.2	11.2	4.3	−6.9	19.1	22.2	+3.1
1993	19.0	10.0	−9.0	11.2	4.0	−7.2	19.7	45.0	+25.3
1997	23.5	41.8	+18.3	9.9	6.6	−3.3	15.7	23.2	+7.5

	Union for French Democracy			*National Front*		
	Vote (%)	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*
1978	22.0	26.2	+4.2	0.3	0.0	−0.3
1981	18.9	12.4	−6.5	0.2	0.0	−0.2
1986[b]	15.8	23.0	+7.2	9.8	6.3	−3.5
1988	19.0	23.4	+4.4	9.8	0.2	−9.6
1993	19.6	37.7	+18.1	12.7	0.0	−12.7
1997	14.7	18.7	+4.5	14.9	0.2	−14.7

Notes: Percentages do not add up to 100 because not all parties have been included.
[a] Including Radical Socialist Party from 1962 to 1968.
[b] PR election in 1986.
Sources: Mackie and Rose (1991, 1997); electoral returns.

instance, despite having its highest ever vote, the National Front (with 14.9 per cent of the vote) ended up with just one seat. The three mainstream parties all benefited from high vote–seat distortions in their favour, particularly the Socialists whose seat percentage was 18 points higher than their share of the vote. The single exception to this centrifugal trend was in 1986 when a PR electoral system was used. Note how in this case the percentage variations between votes and seats were much smaller across the board. Note also how the

Table 3.4 Australian House of Representatives elections, 1949–98: vote and seat percentages

	Labor Party			*Liberals*			*Country/National*		
	Vote (%)	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*	*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*
1949	46.0	38.8	−7.2	39.4	45.5	+6.1	10.9	15.7	+4.8
1951	47.6	43.0	−4.6	40.6	43.0	+2.4	9.7	14.0	+4.3
1954	50.0	47.1	−2.9	38.6	38.8	+0.2	8.5	14.1	+5.6
1955	44.6	38.5	−6.1	39.7	46.7	+7.0	7.9	14.8	+6.9
1958	42.8	36.9	−5.9	37.2	47.5	+10.3	9.3	15.6	+6.3
1961	47.9	49.2	+1.3	33.6	36.9	+3.3	8.5	13.9	+5.4
1963	45.5	41.0	−4.5	37.1	42.6	+5.5	8.9	16.4	+7.5
1966	40.0	33.3	−6.7	40.2	49.6	+9.4	9.7	16.3	+6.6
1969	47.0	47.2	+0.2	34.8	36.8	+2.0	8.6	16.0	+7.4
1972	49.6	53.6	+4.0	32.1	30.4	−1.7	9.4	16.0	+6.6
1974	49.3	52.0	+2.7	34.9	31.5	−3.4	10.8	16.5	+5.7
1975	42.8	28.4	−14.4	41.8	53.5	+11.7	11.3	18.1	+6.8
1977	39.6	30.7	−8.9	38.1	54.0	+15.9	10.0	15.3	+5.3
1980	45.1	40.8	−4.3	37.4	43.2	+5.8	8.9	16.0	+7.1
1983	49.5	60.0	+10.5	34.4	26.4	−8.0	9.2	13.6	+4.4
1984	47.5	55.4	+7.9	34.4	30.4	−4.0	10.6	14.2	+3.6
1987	45.8	58.1	+12.3	34.6	29.1	−5.5	11.5	12.8	+1.3
1990	39.4	52.7	+13.3	35.0	37.2	+2.2	8.4	9.5	+1.1
1993	44.9	54.4	+9.5	37.1	33.3	−3.8	7.2	10.9	+3.7
1996	39.2	32.4	−6.8	39.0	52.0	+13.0	8.2	12.2	+4.0
1998	40.0	44.6	+4.6	34.1	43.2	+9.1	5.3	10.8	+5.5

	Democratic Labor Party				*Australian Democrats*		
	Vote (%)	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*		*Vote (%)*	*Seat (%)*	*Diff. (%)*
1955	5.2	0.0	−5.2	1977	9.4	0.0	−9.4
1958	9.4	0.0	−9.4	1980	6.6	0.0	−6.6
1961	8.7	0.0	−8.7	1983	5.0	0.0	−5.0
1963	7.4	0.0	−7.4	1984	5.4	0.0	−5.4
1966	7.3	0.0	−7.3	1987	6.0	0.0	−6.0
1969	6.0	0.0	−6.0	1990	11.3	0.0	−11.3
1972	5.2	0.0	−5.2	1993	3.8	0.0	−3.8
1974	1.4	0.0	−1.4	1996	6.7	0.0	−6.7
1975	1.3	0.0	−1.3	1998	5.1	0.0	−5.1
1977	1.4	0.0	−1.4				
1980	0.3	0.0	−0.3				

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 because not all parties are included.
Sources: Mackerras (1996); election results.

smaller parties tended to fare much better, particularly the extremist National Front.

In Australia, smaller parties (the Democratic Labor Party and the Democrats) have never managed to win a seat (Table 3.4), even though in some cases they have more votes than the British Liberal Democratic Party which *does* win seats under SMP. This indicates how majoritarian systems can, and do, produce results which are even more inequitable than SMP (Dunleavy *et al.* 1998). The interesting case to note here is the National Party which consistently benefits from more seats than its relatively small vote warrants. This reflects the fact that, as a farmers' party, its vote is geographically focused in agricultural areas (McAllister 1992). Just as with SMP (as shown, for instance, by the Nationalist parties in Britain), a party benefits greatly from a good geographical concentration in its vote.

Apart from the unfair treatment of smaller parties, the majoritarian systems can also produce anomalous majorities, similar to those we saw with SMP in the previous chapter. For instance, in seven of the 21 Australian elections in Table 3.4 (that is, in 1949, 1955, 1958, 1963, 1975, 1977, 1980), the Liberal Party was awarded more seats than the Labor Party despite having won fewer votes. Then, for a period, from 1983 to 1993, there was a systematic bias in the seats-to-votes ratio for the governing Labor Party – a trend which bears a marked resemblance to that enjoyed for some time by the British Conservatives under SMP (see Table 2.3). This helped to explain the dominance of the Labor Party in Australian politics throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, a dominance which was shattered in 1996 (and when, for the first time in a decade, the party was awarded a lower share of seats than its vote warranted). In 1996 and 1998 the electoral system seems to have worked to the benefit of the Liberal Party.

In conclusion, the evidence from both majoritarian systems suggests electoral trends which are strikingly similar to those for SMP. Smaller parties are disadvantaged by the highly disproportional results; larger parties are advantaged; parties with a good geographical concentration in support tend to do better. In Australia, governments with a majority of seats are the norm; in France, while there have been very few instances of large single-party majorities in the National Assembly (the Gaullists in 1968; the Socialists in 1981), to a large degree this has been dissipated by the fact that generally stable coalitions (centre-right or centre-left) have been pretty easily formed.

When dealing with the strategic consequences of majoritarian electoral systems, it is useful to take each system in turn: as we have seen there are some quite significant differences between the two majoritarian systems, and this is particularly notable with regard to ballot structure. Let us start with the two-round system, dealing simply with the French case. The fact that polling takes place on two separate occasions has a number of consequences for the political system, some positive, some negative, some over which observers are divided. Among the obvious benefits is the fact that the system maintains the simplicity of SMP, requiring voters to do no more than simply tick a box or pick a ballot paper (of obvious advantage in highly illiterate societies). More significantly, the two-round system has been credited with an important role in encouraging a politics of 'centrism' in France – requiring parties to cooperate and form alliances in order to reap full benefit from its disproportional tendencies (Elgie 1997; Taagepera and Shugart 1989) – and in helping maintain coherent party organizations (Schlesinger and Schlesinger 1990, 1995). Of the two versions of the two-round system, Sartori (1997: 65–7) expresses a strong preference for the majority–plurality version, on the grounds that it encourages more serious bargaining between the parties, anxious to strike deals over which candidates will go through to the second round; by contrast, under the majority–run-off version, there is no incentive for the parties to engage in serious bargaining: smaller parties have nothing to lose from fielding candidates and seeking to outbid the established parties. In short, according to Sartori, majority–plurality systems are more effective than majority–run-off systems in encouraging a politics of centrism.

But, of course, the fact that voters have to return and vote on a second occasion (except where a candidate has actually achieved more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round) does also suggest some negative consequences. At an extreme, for instance, close, knife-edge election results in the first round may only feed a mood of 'electoral uncertainty', which in the wrong circumstances could have detrimental effects on system stability. More generally, the simple fact that voters have to vote twice places additional burdens (and costs) on electoral administrators (at least one reason why some two-round systems have switched to the alternative vote), on parties and politicians, and on voters. In the latter case, this can manifest itself in lower turnout in the second round, reflecting not only voter

exhaustion, but also perhaps a degree of disquiet over the reduced choice available: for instance, arguably the very high number of invalid votes in the second round of the 1995 election (Table 3.1) could, in part, reflect voters' dissatisfaction with the choices available. Domenico Fisichella (1984: 185) has coined the phrase 'orphaned electorate' to refer to those voters whose first choice of candidates are excluded in the second round. As we saw above, the 1995 presidential election very nearly offered an extreme example of this: if the Socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, had been excluded after the first round, this would have resulted in centre-left voters being forced to choose in the second round between two candidates both of the centre-right. Sartori profoundly disagrees with the sort of interpretation provided by Fisichella: he is in no doubt that the two-round system, which he refers to as the 'double ballot' system, has clear advantages over any other electoral system: 'All other electoral systems are one-shot; the double ballot, and the double ballot only, is a two-shot system. With one shot the voter shoots very much in the dark; with two shots he or she shoots, the second time, in full daylight' (Sartori 1997: 63).

At first glance, the alternative vote system seems fairer than any of the other systems considered so far, for a range of reasons. First, unlike SMP (and on occasions under the majority–plurality version of two-round voting), the candidate elected has more votes than all the other candidates combined; he or she enjoys majority support in the constituency, giving a greater sense of legitimacy to the electoral result. Second, this system also allows the voters more say over who they want to represent them: if it is not to be their first choice, then they can choose a second. Third, because voting takes place on one day, there is no possibility for the parties to adopt manipulative strategies to try and maximize their gains; there is no second round of voting a week or fortnight later. Fourth, and more fundamentally, some have argued that the alternative vote can play a useful role, particularly in emerging democracies, in helping to foster closer cooperation between parties, encouraging them to engage in 'preference swapping' and a politics of centralism (Horowitz 1997; Reilly 1997c). If true, this argument provides a powerful alternative to the more common position in the academic literature which holds that proportional representation systems are best suited to promoting a politics of accommodation (for example, Lijphart 1999a; see Chapter 9 below).

On the other hand, there are reasons for suggesting that the alternative vote is not always fairer than the other electoral systems so far considered. For instance, under the Australian electoral rules, a voter must vote for all the candidates on the ballot paper. Such a requirement is peculiar to Australia, and it is one major reason for the higher number of invalid votes in Australia than elsewhere (McAllister and Makkai 1993). Whether the requirement to complete all the preferences produces a 'more democratic' result is debatable. It adds considerable burden to the vote process; and it has opened the way for the party machines to make use of 'how to vote' cards to direct voters on how to complete preferences. Arguably it diminishes the whole point of preferential voting if the order of preferences is pretty much determined in advance by party strategists (Wright 1986).

Not all countries using the alternative vote system have this requirement that all preferences must be completed, although this in turn opens up the possibility of large numbers of non-transferable votes, in some cases resulting in the candidate finally elected not actually having the support of the majority of voters. In any event, there is still a large number of wasted votes under the Australian system: as we have seen 49.7 per cent of those who voted in the Hinkler division in 1998 did not support the winning candidate. In common with the two-round and SMP systems, therefore, a large proportion of voters remain unrepresented.

In some cases, steps have been taken to 'simplify' the alternative vote so as to help reduce the burden on voters (and also play a role in reducing the dangers of too many fringe candidates picking up stray preferences). This was certainly behind the decision to have the new London mayor elected by a system called the 'supplementary vote', in which the voter has just two preferences. If no candidate achieves an overall majority on the first count, all but the top two candidates are eliminated and their ballot papers are redistributed on the basis of second-preference votes – in effect, a majority–run-off election held on the same day. Credited as a 'British invention' (for example, Norris 1995a), in fact, as Ben Reilly (1997b) observes, this variant has a much longer and wider pedigree, versions of it having been used in Alabama in the first part of the twentieth century, and as long ago as 1892 in the Australian state of Queensland.

3.4 Conclusion

Majoritarian electoral systems have clear selling points, certainly so far as opponents of proportional representation systems are concerned. Like SMP, these systems maintain the tradition of constituency representation, with single seats. The two countries best known for using these systems, Australia and France (Fifth Republic), have good records of stable government, incorporating strong single-party, or at least cohesive coalition, majorities. There is little scope for voter confusion: both the two-round and the alternative vote systems are easy to use and easy to understand. While the Australian practice of requiring that voters turn out and complete all vote preferences may add to the burden of voting, there is no reason why such a practice needs to be followed elsewhere.

If the majoritarian electoral systems share the positive features of SMP, they also share most of the negative features. Smaller parties are disadvantaged, certainly small parties which lack geographic concentrations in their support bases. For the same reasons as apply under SMP, it is questionable how 'fair' such systems are to smaller parties, and to the supporters of smaller parties. These issues can only be resolved by a move towards some form of proportional representation. However, as we shall see in the following chapters, the introduction of PR cannot be achieved without some costs of its own.