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chapter
one

introduction: personal and party
representation

Josep M. Colomer



THE COUNTY ELECTION (1852), BY GEORGE C. BINGHAM

An efficient electoral system for a representative democratic government must include appropriate rules for both *party representation* and *personal representation*. Many classifications and analyses of electoral systems focus on the distinction between majority and proportional rules. By having this focus, they address only party representation, but neglect the second essential element of any electoral system: personal representation. Some basic elements of an electoral system, mainly district magnitude (or number of seats to be elected in each district) and the electoral formula, are tools to allocate *seats to parties*, that is, to produce party representation. The voting procedure as shaped by the ballot form, which is to be studied here, deals with the allocation of *seats to persons* in order to produce personal representation. An electoral system can include rules to allocate both seats to parties and persons in order to produce both party and personal representation.

The aim of this book is to clarify the importance of these two elements of electoral systems and, given that voting formulas for personal representation are under-studied, to present a basic analytical framework and a number of applied analyses on the following aspects: the different *procedures of voting for individual candidates*, their origins and consequences, their degree of compatibility with formulas for party representation, and the contexts, strategies and normative criteria for the choice of personal representation formulas.

The systematic study of procedures for personal representation, together with the previously accumulated knowledge on those for party representation, should advance the discussion about ‘the best’ electoral system. Of course, this discussion may never finish because it is strongly linked to different values and criteria held by different scholars, practitioners and voters (whether correspondence between votes and seats, political pluralism, government effectiveness, policy consistency or change, etc.). However, a fine analysis of the different formulas, their expected consequences, and the trade-off among them should reduce the disparity of evaluations, make some people reconsider their opinions or change their minds, and differ less on the basis of yet unsolved differences in scientific analysis than on difference of values.

THE ORIGINS OF PARTY REPRESENTATION

The origins of the tension between personal and party representation are remote. They can refer to the most primitive emergence of organised political factions, later called political parties, when they began to run in elections, which were conventionally organised with traditional rules favouring personal representation by means of the selection of individual candidates.

Traditional elections focus on the choice of the best individual representatives to defend the interests or values of the community or group. Cases include elections in small towns and communities, in local constituencies for ancient regime assemblies and parliaments, as many elections in current times for housing condominium-, school-, university-, professional organisation- and corporation-boards, and students’ and workers’ unions. This kind of election is conceived and broadly accepted in the intention to produce ‘personal representation’, that is the selection of the best individual representatives. This focus is based on the

assumption that there is broad agreement or consensus in the group regarding the common interests to be protected and the priority of public goods to be provided by the action of the elected representatives.

In particular, many elections in local communities or small groups were held in the past and are still held today by a set of rules composed of *multi-member districts*, *open ballot* and *majority rule*. Basically, people vote for the individual candidates they prefer and those with higher numbers of votes are elected. This set of electoral rules indeed appears as almost ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’ to many communities when they have to choose a procedure of collective decision-making based on votes, especially because it permits a consensual representation of the community. Many formulas are compatible with the essentials of the electoral system just mentioned, including oral or written ballot, assembly or booth voting, variants of approval voting, as well as plurality or second round rules.

The combination of multi-member districts with majority rule has been neglected in recent political science literature on elections. Virtually all studies of electoral systems distinguish two basic types: one combining single-member districts with majority rules and another combining multi-member districts with proportional rule. However, the type of traditional electoral system just mentioned was used very widely in local and national assemblies in pre-democratic or early democratic periods before and during the nineteenth century. It has survived in a number of local elections, and has also been adopted in a few new democracies in recent times.

Specifically, two- or three-seat districts by plurality rule were largely used in English shires, towns and boroughs from the thirteenth century onwards and for the election of the House of Commons until 1935. Multi-member districts have survived in most English local elections. The English model of elections in multi-member districts by plurality rule was adopted in all the British colonies in North America for the lower houses of their legislatures. With independence, it was used for most seats in state congresses, the U.S. Presidential College and the House of Representatives (in some cases until the 1960s). At state and local levels, most representatives have, most of the time, been elected in multi-member districts. In France, the tradition of using multi-member districts in indirect elections for municipalities and medieval provincial and general Estates was maintained for post-revolutionary national assemblies during most of the nineteenth century. This system has survived in small French municipalities with less than 3,500 inhabitants. It was also still evident in Spain, where multi-member districts with individual-candidate ballots were used in indirect elections of anti-French invasion Juntas in the early nineteenth century, and in the Spanish colonies in the Americas of the time, and in most constitutional elections until 1936. Nowadays, they are used for the election of the Spanish Senate, as well as in small towns with less than 250 inhabitants.

Variants of the above-identified electoral system with multi-member districts, vote for individual candidates and majority rule were also used in medieval German and Swiss communes and cantons, in Italian communes, as well as for the election of the single or lower house of state parliaments and assemblies in

some thirty countries in all parts of the world from the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. They are still widely used in local elections in a number of countries (see detailed data and sources in Colomer 2004, 2007).

The Emergence of Political Parties

The focus on personal representation in elections with traditional rules was challenged with the emergence of organised factions or political parties running lists of candidates and acting as compact groups in the subsequent councils and assemblies. In recent times, political parties emerged partly endogenously from the previously existing elections and assemblies, and partly exogenously to represent or promote the interests or values of different groups in new, larger and more complex societies.

In historical terms, voting ‘in block’ for a partisan list of candidates was not an institutionally-induced, but a strategy-induced behaviour. In the old-fashioned way, certain men who were judged to be distinguished for their professional or other activities were announced as being eligible by newspapers or offered themselves as candidates. Gradually, elected representatives moved to organise their supporters and present lists or tickets of candidates. The success of this new way may lie in the fact that ‘party’ candidacies and labels provide the voters with very cheap information about their candidates, which, in large constituencies and complex societies may be more difficult to obtain on those candidates who are not labelled in this way. This may move voters to vote in block rather than to choose their most preferred individual candidates.

Party inducements to voting in block were crucially aided in some countries and periods by the form of the ballot, which is, of course, an institutional feature of elections. In the earliest times alluded to above, oral voting or handwritten ballots facilitated the voting for individual candidates regardless of their possible grouping or factional allegiance. At some time, approximately the 1830s and 1840s for Britain, the United States of America and a few countries in Western Europe, the parties began to print their own ballots, listing only their own candidates. The voter needed only to cast the paper in the ballot box without marking any candidate in order to vote for the entire list (the ‘general ticket’). Typically, party ballots were of various sizes, colours and shapes, and thus distinguishable to the election officials, the candidates, the party organisers and the voters.

Still, splitting the vote between candidates from different parties was possible by crossing out and writing in names or by turning in multiple party ballots with votes marked on each. In fact, in nineteenth century England, about half of the districts with two seats rendered ‘split’ representation of two different groupings (Cox 1984). But in the United States of America, by about 1890, a single party swept all the seats in almost 90 per cent of elections in multi-member districts (Calabrese 2000).

The so-called ‘Australian ballot’ again made non-partisan voting for individual candidates relatively easier. The new ballot, which was now printed and distributed by the electoral authority, listed the candidates of all parties instead of only one. As its name indicates, this new form of ballot was first introduced in the British

colonies of Australia in 1856, expanded to New Zealand, Britain, Canada, Belgium, and several states in the USA during the second half of the nineteenth century, and was later adopted by most other countries with democratic experience.

The Australian ballot ensures a secret vote if the procedure includes a booth where the voter can mark the ballot unobserved. In some cases, the ballot requires the voters to vote for each candidate for whom they want to vote, which facilitates the choice of individual candidates regardless of their party affiliation; but in other cases it is also possible to vote for all candidates of a party with a single mark, which still favours block voting.

Initially, factions and parties tended to be loose and fluctuating groupings of individuals who joined together to support a particular leader or policy, but from the beginning they were viewed with suspicion as being destroyers of previously existing unity and consensus. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain and North America, there is much evidence of a considerable degree of hostility towards parties and partisanship. Political actors eventually acknowledged that in mass elections in large societies, where the homogeneity of interests and values that had prevailed in small, simple communities during the previous eras was decreasing, the formation of political factions was unavoidable and perhaps even necessary to make the political representation of a diversity of groups possible. Gradually, tension was developing between the recurring suspicion of partisan divisions and the seeming inevitability of partisan organisation. Parties were eventually conceived as ‘unavoidable evils’.

Under traditional electoral rules conceived for the selection of individual candidates, the formation of electoral factions or parties introduced biased and partial representation. In comparison with the open ballot system, ‘voting in block’ for a list could change election results radically, typically producing a single party ‘sweep’ based on a minority of votes, or two-party polarisation. Traditional formulas of voting and elections, using plurality rule, majority run-off or other procedures supposedly based on the majority principle, were unable to guarantee actual majority support from voters’ first preferences for the winner and, in a context of increasing social complexity and political pluralism, tended to produce minority winners and socially or ethnically strongly biased governments. In some crucial cases, it was largely as a consequence of this type of experience that different political leaders, candidates and parties began to seek alternative, less intuitive, or ‘spontaneous’ electoral rules likely to be less advantageous for the best organised faction or party. In more recent times, this has also induced some party members and politically motivated scholars to devise and choose new electoral and voting rules and procedures.

The Invention of New Electoral Rules

To the extent that parties and factionalisation were accepted as unavoidable, the re-establishment of broad voting support for the elected required the invention and introduction of new electoral rules different from the traditional system based on multi-member districts and majority rule. Different electoral rules and procedures for voting and elections were then invented to try to satisfy fair or suitable ‘party

representation'. Some of these new inventions managed to combine new party representation with traditional or new forms of personal representation. But others threw away the baby with the bath water and neglected or just discarded any form of personal representation.

Virtually all the new electoral rules and procedures that were created from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and that are widely used nowadays can be understood as innovative variations of the simple, traditional system identified above. They can be classified into three groups, depending on whether they changed the district magnitude, the ballot, or the rule.

The first group of new electoral rules implied a change of the district magnitude from multi-member to single-member districts, keeping, of course, both individual-candidate voting and majority rule. With smaller, single-member districts, a candidate that would have been defeated by a party sweep in a multi-member district could be elected. Thus, this system tends to produce more varied representation than multi-member districts with party block vote or closed lists, although less varied than multi-member districts with open ballot. However, when more than two parties or candidates run, single-seat districts can also produce minority winners. In addition, most candidates running in individual districts have tended to be nominated by political parties, thus replacing the traditional system of personal representation with one in which party representation strongly prevails.

The second group of new electoral rules implied new forms of ballot favouring individual-candidate voting despite the existence of party candidacies, while maintaining the other two essential elements of the traditional system: multi-member districts and majority rule. By 'limited vote', each voter can vote for a lower number of candidates than seats to be filled so that one party can sweep as many seats as the voter has votes, but it is likely that the rest of the seats will be won by candidates of different political affiliation. The 'cumulative vote', by which voters can give more than one vote to some candidates, can also permit minority voters to elect some representatives. This kind of procedure may produce some representation for minority candidates, whether they are presented by a party or not, but they cannot prevent a single party 'sweep'. They were experimented with in Spain, Britain and Brazil, among other places, in the second half of the nineteenth century, but in most cases were soon abandoned.

Finally, the third group of new electoral rules implied the introduction of proportional formulas, which permit the maintenance of multi-member districts and, in some variants, open or individual-candidate ballot as well. Contrary to what well-established classifications may suggest, it can be argued that majority rule and proportional representation are not opposite stances in terms of the most basic principles when political parties are central political actors. The two corresponding types of rule cover different stages of the electoral process. With elections by majority rule, the winning party takes all and can usually access government. In contrast, assembly elections by proportional representation are not usually able immediately to produce a winning board or government, but they are just the first step in a process including further negotiations among parties in parliament or council to create a multi-party majority and the corresponding

winner. Hence, in terms of general principles of governance, both majority and proportional electoral systems are based on the majority principle: both attempt to make the principle of majority government operational.

Actually, proportional formulas were invented in Europe in the late nineteenth century precisely with the aim of favouring majority rule. Traditional consensus vanished with the emergence of new political demands in large states and newly complex societies, the politicisation of new issues and the shaping of incompatible policy proposals, as alluded to above. Although proportional systems have been interpreted as a device to permit minority representation, they were strongly motivated by the aim of preventing actual minority rule as it could be produced by a single party sweep under usual procedures inspired in majority principle. It is precisely by including varied minorities in the assembly that proportional representation can facilitate the formation of an effective political majority to legislate and rule.

All these voting formulas – single-seat districts, limited or cumulative vote, proportional representation – and their variants, were invented at a time when electorates were enlarged and political parties emerged in a number of developed countries. They focus on party representation. The expected outcome of elections with the new rules was the production of an adequate representation of political parties in order to facilitate consistent, representative government.

However, many of these inventions, by focusing on party representation, neglected personal representation, which had been the only or main element in previous voting systems. This was particularly unfortunate, since the effects of ballot forms on personal representation, according to the analyses presented in several contributions to this book, would seem to be independent from the influence of electoral formulas on party representation. Reintroducing procedures for personal representation which can be compatible with fair party representation has therefore become a major challenge to achieving satisfactory electoral systems.

PERSONAL REPRESENTATION

Party representation is necessary in order to select the most relevant issues in the public agenda and to design public policy when different interests enter into conflict and people develop significantly different policy preferences. But, in turn, personal representation or the choice of individual representatives is also necessary to achieve a high quality of representation and effectively promote the preferences of the community once these are well defined.

For ‘personal representation’ we refer to the personal quality of representatives, that is, their reliability and ability to fulfil electoral promises and respond to voters’ demands. The presumption may be that fair party representation can be satisfactory for achieving consistent political parties and clear-cutting policy design, but adding some degree of personal representation can improve legislative and policy performance.

The personal quality of individual representatives has been a traditional concern for the quality of representative democracy. John Stuart Mill (1865), for instance, already referred by the mid-nineteenth century to the ‘grade of intelligence in the

representative body’, complained that ‘it is becoming more and more difficult for any one who has only talents and character to gain admission into the House of Commons’, and remarked on the importance of voting procedures, together with internal party rules in the selection of electoral candidates.

In order to fulfil the classic aspiration to be ‘governed by the best’, democracy requires that talented and skilful people should run in elections. In current times, the complexity of the public agenda, the concentration of political communication into unilateral messages from politicians through the mass media, and certain institutional complications have raised new concerns about the ‘distance’ between citizens and representatives and the quality of the latter. In certain democratic regimes, the decision to run for public office in elections, can largely depend on the potential candidate’s opportunity costs. Skilful individuals with alternative attractive jobs may decline a political career.

In many elections, the selection of candidates and likely office-holders greatly depends on a party’s internal procedures. Furthermore, both in single-seat districts, such as in Britain, and in closed party list systems with proportional representation, such as in Spain, most seats are ‘safe’, that is, they are always allocated to the same party in successive elections. This means that the choice of representatives by the voters is largely replaced with the nomination of candidates by internal party processes. With single-seat districts and closed lists, ‘party selection is equal to election’, as remarked by Nir Atmor, Reuven Y. Hazan and Gideon Rahat in Chapter 2 of this book.

From the point of view of citizens’ participation in the selection of representatives, therefore, the electoral ballot is crucial. It can be expected that the greater the opportunities for voters to choose individual candidates, the better the personal qualities of the elected can be. Some classifications and analyses of voting formulas for individual candidates have focused on the degree of either the party-centred or candidate-centred nature of elections and forms of ‘intra-party’ competition, the degree of either localistic issues or large-scale public goods that they tend to promote, and other aspects of the electoral *supply* (most notably Katz 1994; Shugart and Carey 1995; Grofman 2005). A different point of view from the *demand* side, that is, from voters’ opportunities to choose high-quality representatives, is adopted in this book. In this respect, procedures for personal representation can be classified for the opportunities of choice and the proportion of seats for which the voter can choose political parties and individual candidates.

Ballot Forms

We propose a new classification of voting procedures for its ability to produce different degrees of party representation and personal representation. Two elements of the ballot form can be taken into account: the number of choices available to the voter and the opportunity to vote for either political parties or individual candidates. Three groups of ballot forms can be distinguished, which can be called ‘closed’, ‘semi-open’ and ‘open’, respectively.

First, ‘closed’ voting procedures give voters only one choice, which is for a party candidacy. They include the single-seat system (like, for instance, the British

House of Commons), as well as some mixed systems permitting the voters to choose only one candidate (as in Mexico), and the party closed list system (as in Spain). All these systems, in spite of their differences, coincide in that they give the voters one single choice. It happens that the systems giving the voter only one choice always involves one party candidacy, since even if in the two first aforementioned forms of ballot the voter votes nominally for an individual candidate, in fact every candidate is appointed by a party, and the voter merely votes for the candidate appointed by the party. The voter chooses only a party, even if the names of the candidates might be written in the ballot. Actually in some cases the names of the candidates does not even appear in the ballot, both in single-seat systems (as, for instance, in some states in India) and in closed list systems (as in Portugal). Thus, ballot forms with only one choice implies the choice for a political party: all these procedures serve to produce party representation, but not direct personal representation of voters separated from party representation.

A second group of ‘semi-open’ forms of ballot gives the voters more than one choice, which always involves both a party and one or more individual candidates. Several procedures can be included in this category. The two-round system (as used, for example, in France) gives the voter two choices, separated in time, each for a candidate, typically nominated by a party. Likewise, the primary election system for the selection of candidates (as implemented in most states of the USA for most elections) also gives the voter two choices for individual candidates involving a party choice.

The other procedures we propose to include in this category give the voter two simultaneous choices for party and for candidate. The double vote (as in Germany and Hungary) gives the voter two choices, respectively, for a party and for a candidate who may not be of the party. Preferential list systems enable the voter to choose a party and one or more candidates from that party. Variants of this ballot form can be distinguished depending on whether voting for some individual candidate is compulsory (as in Finland) or optional (as in Belgium). But the two variants give the voter two choices, even if with the second variant a voter, whose preference order for individual candidates may coincide with the order in which they are presented by the party, exerts only one choice.

Finally, the ‘open’ systems offer the voter more than two choices for both party and individual candidates. In ordinal rank ballots (as in Australia and Ireland), the voters can order some or all of the candidates according to their preferences, regardless of the party for which they are presented. In some mixed systems, the voters can choose a party and a candidate who may not be of the party, but they can also select some candidates within the chosen party by a preferential list system (as in Lithuania). Finally, the open ballot (or ‘panachage’) allows the voter to choose as many candidates as seats up for election, regardless of the party to which they are affiliated (as in Switzerland). So, with all these forms, the voter can vote for more than one party and more than one candidate at the same time.

It should be noted that this classification of ballot forms is independent from the one usually derived from the elements for party representation mentioned above: district magnitude and electoral formula. ‘Closed’, ‘semi-open’ and

‘open’ ballots are compatible with ‘majority’, ‘mixed’ and ‘proportional’ rules. It happens that some majority rule systems, for example in Australia, can produce better results regarding the selection of candidates for personal representation than some proportional systems, for example in Spain, because the former example uses an ordinal rank ballot and the latter example uses a closed list. Likewise, a proportional system with a preferential list, like in Finland, can be better for personal representation than a majority rule single-seat system as in Britain, and so on. We are dealing, thus, with a two-dimensional issue, producing, in our simplified classification, up to nine categories, all with illustrative cases in current democratic regimes. As the studies collected in this book focus on assembly or presidential elections, the analysis could be extended to council, mayoral and other single-person office elections, and to new rules and procedures (as proposed, in particular, by Brams 2008). See Table 1.1 for the two-dimensional classification and Table 1.2 for data on forty-five major democracies.

Table 1.1: A two-dimensional classification of electoral systems

Personal representation		Party representation		
		<i>Majority</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Proportional</i>
<i>Open</i>	Ordinal rank (all candidates) Australia, San Francisco	Open mixed (1 candidate + some party candidates) Bavaria, Lithuania	Open ballot (all candidates) Luxembourg, Switzerland	
<i>Semi-open</i>	Two rounds (1 party candidate +1 party candidate) France, United States	Double vote (1 candidate + 1 party) Germany, Hungary	Preferential list (some party candidates) Brazil, Netherlands	
<i>Closed</i>	Single seat (1 party candidate) Great Britain, Canada	Single candidate (1 party candidate) Mexico, Senegal	Closed list (1 party) Israel, Spain	

Note: Along the horizontal axis, electoral systems are classified for their formulas in favour of party representation, whether based on majority, mixed or proportional rules. The vertical axis classifies electoral systems for their different ballot forms for personal representation, whether closed, semi-open or open.