

THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE IN PRACTICE

STEPHEN HERBERT

This paper has been prepared at the request of the Local Government and Transport Committee as part of its pre-legislative consideration of the Draft Local Governance (Scotland) Bill. The paper provides an overview of the experience of Australia, Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta, Isle of Man and Estonia of using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system.

SPICe Briefings are compiled for the benefit of the Members of the Parliament and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with MSPs and their staff who should contact Stephen Herbert on extension 85373 or email stephen.herbert@scottish.parliament.uk. Members of the public or external organisations may comment on this briefing by emailing us at spice.research@scottish.parliament.uk. However, researchers are unable to enter into personal discussion in relation to SPICe Briefing Papers.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in SPICe briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

www.scottish.parliament.uk



The Scottish
Parliament

CONTENTS

KEY POINTS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
AUSTRALIA	5
INTRODUCTION.....	5
HARE-CLARK STV.....	6
SENATE STYLE PR	7
COMPULSORY VOTING	9
OVERVIEW.....	9
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.....	11
BACKGROUND	11
CHANGES TO THE OPERATION OF STV IN IRELAND.....	12
EFFECTIVENESS OF STV IN IRELAND	14
Proportionality.....	14
Governmental Stability.....	15
Party Cohesion and Localism.....	16
Composition of the Dail.....	18
NORTHERN IRELAND	19
MALTA.....	21
BACKGROUND.....	21
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STV IN MALTA	21
PERFORMANCE OF STV.....	22
The Polarisation of Maltese Party Politics	22
Intra-Party Competition.....	23
Proportionality.....	24
Electoral Reform	24
ISLE OF MAN	25
INTRODUCTION	25
THE INTRODUCTION OF STV IN THE ISLE OF MAN	26
THE OPERATION OF STV IN THE ISLE OF MAN	26
THE DEMISE OF STV IN THE ISLE OF MAN.....	27
ESTONIA	28
OVERVIEW.....	29
SOURCES	31

KEY POINTS

- Research evidence relating to STV tends to concentrate on the operation of STV at the national level. Accordingly the paper focuses mainly on the operation of STV at the national level.
- STV is an electoral system which has tended to be used only in countries which have, at some point in their history, been governed by the United Kingdom.
- Australia is noted for the range of electoral systems it uses. STV is used to elect roughly 27% of politicians at federal and state level in Australia.
- The use of STV in Australia varies considerably between Parliaments in terms of factors such as ballot paper design, transfer of surpluses and how many preferences voters are required to offer. Two main versions of STV operate in Australia. These are termed 'Hare-Clark' and 'Senate Style STV'.
- Hare-Clark tends to emphasise the role of the candidate over party. Senate Style PR provides considerable power to parties principally through the use of 'ticket voting'.
- In the Republic of Ireland STV produces reasonably proportional results and stable government although in recent years coalition government has become the norm. STV in the Republic is frequently criticised for creating a localist political culture. However whether STV can be viewed as the causal factor or that Irish political culture more generally is responsible is a moot point.
- In Northern Ireland STV is used for local government, Assembly and European Parliament elections. Voting is highly polarised between the nationalist and unionist communities with very minimal transfer of votes across this divide. At the last Assembly election there was some limited evidence of cross-community transfer of preferences.
- In Malta voting is highly polarised between the two main parties. Malta has moved from having a multi-party system to a two-party system. This suggests that STV does not inevitably result in multi-partism but rather that voters determine the party political structure.
- The variation in the implementation of STV across locations suggests that STV is more accurately described as an evolving family of vote counting rules than a single system.
- Whilst voters tend not to have difficulty voting in STV elections there have been situations where concerns have been raised with regard to the extent to which the general public understand how results are arrived at.
- STV tends to produce reasonably proportional results, be effective in maintaining linkages between politicians and communities (and in some cases, perhaps too effective) and lastly tends to encourage intra-party campaigning.

INTRODUCTION

This paper, which has been prepared at the request of the Local Government and Transport Committee for its pre-legislative consideration of the [Draft Local Governance \(Scotland\) Bill](#), provides an overview of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system in the countries in which it operates. Studies of STV have tended to focus on its operation at the national level and accordingly this paper considers STV primarily as it functions at the national level. STV is used to elect local government in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Malta¹. The actual electoral rules and formulae which underpin STV are not considered in this paper. However a description of these can be obtained from the [Electoral Reform Society website](#). Gallagher (1998) summarised the perceived benefits and criticisms of STV as:

“Proponents point principally to the power that it [STV] gives to voters: to convey rich information about their preferences; to give primacy when voting on issues that cross party lines; to maximise their power to choose their representatives; or to influence the direction that their favoured party should take, by supporting particular candidates rather than others or by endorsing, through the use of lower preferences, possible alliances between their favoured party and another party. Critics are concerned about possible adverse effects on party cohesion, about the absence of any guarantee that parties will be represented in proportion to their votes, and about the effects it might have on the behaviour of parliamentarians” (p.2).

The use of STV is closely associated with former British countries. Indeed one social scientist went so far as to suggest:

“we still have a perfect social science law without any major exceptions – very rare in the social sciences – linking political culture with forms of PR. When Anglo-American countries use PR, they always choose STV; in other countries, the choice is list PR” (Lijphart 1987, p.100).

This ‘law’ still generally² holds true today with STV currently operational at a national level in Australia (and some State legislatures), Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Malta. In addition the paper also considers the experience of the operation of STV in the Isle of Man and Estonia where in both cases STV was used for a limited period of time.

¹ STV was used to elect education authorities in Scotland between 1919 and 1928 and in the early 20th Century to elect Woolston Borough and Christchurch City local authorities in New Zealand. There are proposals to reintroduce STV for local elections in New Zealand. In the United States, STV has been used, in the past, to elect city councils in approximately two dozen cities. STV is still currently in use in Cambridge, Massachusetts and for 32 community school boards within New York City. STV has also been used previously in Canada (Alberta and Manitoba), South Africa (the Senate), and Gibraltar (for the Legislative Council) (See Farrell, MacKerras and McAllister, 1996, p.27).

² Although New Zealand has adopted a Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) system for elections as has the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly. The UK has also adopted a List system for elections to the European Parliament.

AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

Australia has a federal structure of government with federal power vested in the bi-cameral [Australian Parliament](#) with a further 8 State Parliaments (six of which are bi-cameral – see Table One below). The [Australian Constitution](#) sets out the delineation of functions between federal and state levels. Australia is noted for the extent to which the country (both at federal and state level) has been innovative with electoral systems. Noting the extent of Australia's experimentation with electoral systems Farrell and McAllister (2003c) comment:

“Australia is (rightly) proud of its long and distinguished contribution to the development of electoral institutions, and this probably is best shown by the imaginative and bold steps taken by electoral engineers in designing the country's preferential electoral systems” (p.3).

The only form of proportional representation used in Australia is STV. The timing and reasons underpinning the introduction of STV varied across Australia. Farrell and McAllister (2003b) identify three main factors which lay behind the introduction of preferential systems in Australia, namely “electoral reform debates in Britain; the role of Australian activists; and state-level experiments in Australia” (p.288).

The system used for the majority of elections in Australia is the majoritarian ‘Alternative Vote’ system. STV is used to elect 226 of Australia's 842 parliamentarians or 26.8% of the total number of politicians at federal and state level (see MacKerras 1998). STV is mainly used for elections to the upper houses of legislatures although two lower chambers, in the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, are elected via STV. There are significant differences in the forms of STV used for elections to lower and upper houses. Accordingly, the system of STV used for lower houses of Parliament is known as the ‘Hare-Clark³’ system whilst the system of STV used for upper houses is known as ‘Senate style PR’. Table One summarises the electoral systems used in Parliaments in Australia.

³ ‘Hare-Clark’ refers to Thomas Hare who is partly attributed with ‘inventing’ STV and to Andrew Inglis Clark who was a Tasmanian Attorney General who modified Hare's original method.

Table One – Electoral Systems of Australian Parliaments by House						
Parliament	Upper House – number of members	Electoral system used	Lower House – number of members	Electoral System		
Commonwealth	76	Senate STV	148	AV		
New South Wales	42	Senate STV	99	AV		
Victoria	44	Senate STV ⁴	88	AV		
Queensland	-	-	89	AV		
South Australia	22	Senate STV	47	AV		
Western Australia	34	Senate STV	57	AV		
Tasmania	19	AV	35	Hare-Clark STV		
Northern Territory	-	-	25	AV		
Australian Capital Territory	-	-	17	Hare Clark STV		
Total	237		605			

Source: MacKerras (1998) p.68

The differences between Hare-Clark and Senate Style PR are considered below.

HARE-CLARK STV

The ‘Hare-Clark’ voting system is used to elect the Tasmania House of Assembly (lower house) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Legislative Assembly (lower house). The system has been used continuously in Tasmania since 1907 and for ACT elections since 1995 (the first election being in 1989 with PR-List used prior to 1995). The Hare-Clark system is notable for the limited influence it affords political parties. The ballot paper lists candidates alphabetically by party (prior to 1941 names were listed alphabetically regardless of party). Since 1979 the names of candidates are rotated on each ballot paper in order to avoid ‘ballot position’ effects. The position of parties and candidates classed as ‘ungrouped’ is determined by lot. Voters are required to provide as many preferences on the ballot paper as there are seats to fill. Prior to the rotation of names on the ballot paper candidates whose names were located towards the top or bottom of the ballot paper (or on a party list of names) were more likely to be elected by what were termed ‘donkey votes’. The effect of rotation has been to stop or at least even out ‘donkey voting’ across all ballot papers. The [Tasmanian Parliament](#) web-site explains the rationale for the rotation of names on the ballot paper as:

“an attempt to even out the donkey vote (simply voting up or down the ballot) which is said to favour surnames early in the alphabet, or candidates early in the list. This system of rotation was championed by Hon. Neil Robson, MHA, and is often known as the ‘Robson rotation’” (Tasmanian Parliament Library 2003).

The effect of this system is to reduce the influence of political parties as they are unable to offer position on the ballot paper (the equivalent of a safe seat) as a means of maintaining party unity / loyalty. Accordingly Hare-Clark puts a premium upon name recognition and the public profile of candidates as well as shifting the focus of campaigns away from parties towards the candidates as individuals and emphasises intra-party campaigning. Newman (1998) comments on Tasmanian election campaigns as follows:

⁴ Note that Victoria has only recently introduced STV and have not yet used it for an election. Prior to this Victoria used AV.

“Hare-Clark encourages Tasmanian candidates to campaign on a personal rather than party basis. That is, they often campaign against colleagues for first preferences as well as against opponents from other political parties. In addition they need to campaign against first-time party colleagues. Indeed, many of the new candidates are chosen because of their high media profiles, which often equates to votes or at least name recognition. As a result, while Hare-Clark has generated stable governments, the candidate turnover rate within political parties is quite high. At some elections over a dozen of the 35 members are replaced” (p.40).

Party campaigns tend to focus on party leaders and encourage voters not to express preferences for a number of parties in the election. Hare-Clark tends to produce minority governments which are reliant for support upon minor parties or Independents. The five governments elected to the ACT Legislative Assembly have all been minority governments (see Chalmers 2002). Hare-Clark tends to produce moderately proportional results (in that STV is more proportional than majoritarian systems but less so than some List-PR systems) although the relatively low district magnitude (number of seats to be filled in each constituency) limits the proportionality of results. In Tasmania five seats are filled in each constituency⁵.

SENATE STYLE PR

In contrast to the limited influence which Hare-Clark offers political parties, Senate Style PR is a form of STV which affords significant influence to political parties. The actual processes used vary slightly between Senates in Australia. Table Two lists the main characteristics of the STV system used to elect Senates⁶ (and also includes details of the Hare-Clark systems used in ACT and Tasmania). There are significant variations across states with regard to the number of members elected per constituency, the organisation of ballot papers, the methods used for transferring surpluses, and how to deal with casual vacancies (i.e. when seats are vacated before an election). However the main systemic difference between Senate-Style PR and Hare-Clark relates to the use of ‘ticket voting’ (see below).

⁵ Based on information provided by the Australian Parliament’s Information and Research Services.

⁶ Whilst Victoria has recently adopted STV it has not yet been used in an election and therefore is not included in Table Two.

Table Two – Main Features of STV in Australia’s Upper (UH) and Lower Houses (LH)			
Characteristics	Commonwealth (UH)	New South Wales (UH)	South Australia (UH)
District Size	6-12 members per seat	21 members per seat	11 members per seat
Ballot Paper Design	Across = Party groupings (by lot) Down = candidate names (party choice)	Across = Party groupings (by lot) Down = candidate names (party choice)	Across = Party groupings (by lot) Down = candidate names (party choice)
Transfer of Surpluses	All ballots at fractional value (Inclusive-Gregory method)	Surplus ballots only, at full value	All ballots at fractional value (Inclusive-Gregory method)
Preferences	Express preferences across all candidates or ticket vote	Express preferences for at least 15 candidates or ticket vote	Express preferences across all candidates or ticket vote
Casual Vacancies	State parliament selects someone from same party	Joint sitting selects someone from same party (generally from same party)	Joint sitting selects someone from same party
Characteristics	Western Australia (UH)	ACT (LH)	Tasmania (LH)
District Size	Range 5-7	Range 5-7	5
Ballot Paper Design	Left = party groupings (by lot) Right = candidate names arranged in columns (party choice)	Across = party groupings (by lot) Down = candidate names (by rotation)	Across = party groupings (by lot) Down = candidate names (by rotation)
Surplus Transfer	All ballots at fractional value (inclusive-Gregory method)	The last parcel of ballots at fractional value (Gregory method)	The last parcel of ballots at fractional value (Gregory method)
Preferences	Express preferences across all candidates or ticket vote	Express preference for at least one candidate	Express preference equivalent to the number of seats available (i.e. 5)
Casual Vacancies	Count back from previous election results	Count back from previous election results	Count back from previous election results
Source: Farrell and McAllister (2003c) Ch3, p.11			

Senate Style PR requires that voters express a preference for every candidate on the ballot paper (or in the case of New South Wales for at least 15 candidates – see Table Two) which results in voters being required to express preferences for a large number of politicians. Prior to 1983 candidates were listed by party group with the position of names within the party group being at the discretion of political parties. In order to assist voters with the task of voting, political parties produced ‘how to vote cards’ which would list the order in which political parties wished to see their candidates ranked by voters. Farrell and McAllister (2003c) account for this process as follows:

“The rational strategy for an average voter, being forced to the polling station as a result of compulsory voting laws, was to follow the instructions on the ‘how to vote’ cards, cascading their preferences down the line” (Ch6, p.11).

The complexity of the voting process, due to the number of preferences which voters were required to provide, allied to compulsory voting (see below) contributed⁷ to high levels of invalid ballots which prior to 1983 accounted for roughly 10% of votes cast. Voters at Senate elections currently have a choice whereby they can either vote ‘above the line’, which involves selecting

⁷ Farrell and McAllister (2003a) highlight a range of factors leading to high levels of invalid voting in Australia including compulsory voting, the complexity of ballots, the regularity of elections and, variations in what voters are expected to do at the polls at different elections (Ch6, p.24-25).

the party ticket with the order of the candidates selected being determined by the political party concerned, or vote 'beneath the line', where individual preferences have to be selected in line with pre-1983 practice. The introduction of ticket voting enables parties to order the preferences made by voters (in effect institutionalising the previous use of 'how to vote' cards) and therefore provides parties with considerable power over candidates. Accordingly, the aspiration of candidates seeking election is to obtain a favourable position on the party list of candidates rather than focus on appealing to the electorate. Farrell and McAllister (2003c) comment on the impact of ticket voting as follows:

"Ticket voting ... facilitates a high degree of control by the party elites both over individual candidates and over the voters, ensuring that the party elites can direct the flow of candidate preferences, and adding considerable burdens to those voters wishing to deploy their preferences strategically for particular candidates. Clearly, the rational strategy for the average voter, under these circumstances, is simply vote the ticket, by voting 'above the line'" (Ch6, p.14).

However, as a result of the introduction of ticket voting the level of invalid voting fell considerably suggesting that "many of these invalid votes has less to do with compulsory voting as such, and rather more to do with the complexities of the ballot process prior to 1983" (Farrell and McAllister, 2003c, Ch6, p.24). Ticket voting is now the norm in Australia, for example, in elections to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly 96% of voters used the ticket vote (See Farrell and McAllister 2003c).

COMPULSORY VOTING

An additional feature of Australian elections, albeit not linked to STV as an electoral system, is compulsory voting. Compulsory voting was introduced in Australia for Commonwealth (i.e. the whole of Australia) elections in 1911 and was quickly adopted by other States. The move to introduce compulsory voting in Australia had cross-party support at the time with major parties aware "that it would obviate the need to maintain large organisations to mobilise the vote" (Farrell and McAllister 2003b, p.299). As a result of the move turnout at elections increased considerably. The introduction of compulsory voting was accepted by the general public at the time and public opinion has generally supported the policy since, as Farrell and McAllister (2003a) note:

"Support for the system increased gradually during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, peaking at 76 percent in a survey conducted in 1969. This gradual increase is most likely a reflection of the large number of voters who have grown up under the system, together with the absence of any political debate concerning its advantages or disadvantages. Support declined slightly in the 1970s and early 1980s, but in recent years has strengthened" (Ch6, p.22).

Compulsory voting has been generally perceived as being a cause of the high rate of invalid voting in Australia although that the proportion of spoilt ballots has declined with the introduction of ticket voting.

OVERVIEW

Analysis of the proportionality of Australian elections indicates that STV in Australia "compares very favourably with other PR systems" (Farrell and McAllister, 2003a, Ch4, p.21) although

proportionality is lower in elections to parliaments with a lower number of seats in each constituency to be filled, such as in Tasmania. STV tends to be associated with voter choice and limited party political power. However the Australian case tends not to fit this categorisation because of the rules which are applied to implement STV at Senate elections. Despite the variety of electoral systems, regular frequency of elections (Australians are required to vote on average every 18 months) and the compulsory nature of voting there is no evidence of widespread discontent with the electoral system in Australia. Farrell and McAllister (2003a) comment that:

“The fact that the vast bulk of Australian voters tend to let the parties determine the flow of their preferences, combined with the other elements of control over the act of voting (compulsory enrolment, compulsory turnout, complex ballot process), would seem to provide many of the ingredients for voter alienation, as might be manifested through high levels of invalid voting and survey evidence of voter disengagement. However, ... the indications are that this has more to do with confusion on the part of some voters than widespread alienation” (Ch6, p.26).

As the Jenkins Commission commented with regard to Australia:

“The Australian electorate and politicians appear at ease with their electoral systems, which have on the whole worked effectively since 1919” (Independent Commission on the Voting System, 1998, p.22).

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

BACKGROUND

The introduction of the Single Transferable Vote system to the Republic of Ireland predates the Republic's existence. The Single Transferable Vote system was strongly advocated by electoral reformers in Britain and Ireland during the 19th Century. A Proportional Representation Society of Ireland was established during the 19th Century with Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Fein, amongst the first members of the organisation. In 1919 STV was used for elections to Sligo local authority. The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 included STV as the system to be used for the future Parliaments in 'Northern' and 'Southern' Ireland. As noted by the Independent Commission on the Voting System (1998) the introduction of STV in Ireland was:

“fostered by the British in the last days of London rule mainly as a form of protection for the Protestant minority, but was in no way resisted by the new Irish government” (p.14).

The selection of STV as the appropriate electoral system for Ireland occurred not because other PR systems were considered disadvantageous, but instead because there was a lack of awareness that other systems existed. Gallagher (2003) comments on the adoption of STV in the following terms:

“The explanation seems to be, simply, that few if any of those making the decision were aware of the potential range of electoral systems from which they could have chosen. PR-STV was by now familiar; list systems were not, despite the efforts of an early student of the subject to make the case for them and against STV. STV was not specified in the 1922 constitution, not because TDs (members of the Dail) wished to keep their options open but because they did not realise that STV was merely one method, and an unusual one at that, of attaining PR (p.4).

As the use of STV forms part of the Irish Republic's constitution it would be necessary to have a referendum in order to change the electoral system. Two referenda have been held in the Republic on the electoral system in 1959 and 1968. On both occasions referenda were proposed by Fianna Fail which, as the largest party in the Republic, claimed that “PR makes it difficult to achieve stable government and thus weakens democracy” (Gallagher 2003, p.5). On both occasions all the other Irish political parties opposed the proposals fearing that a move to a majoritarian electoral system would only serve to entrench further the political dominance of Fianna Fail within the Dail. In 1959 the margin in favour of STV was 52 : 48. In 1968 the margin was 61 : 39 per cent in favour. Since 1968, whilst there have been debates concerning changes to the electoral system no firm proposals have been brought forward. However in the mid-1990's a Constitution Review Group was established, by Fianna Fail, part of the remit of which was to consider the electoral system. The report of the Group concluded:

“The present PR-STV system has had popular support and should not be changed without careful advance assessment of the possible effect” (Ellis 1998, p.75).

An all party committee of the Irish Parliament was then established to consider reform of the electoral system. A survey of Irish MPs, known as Teachtaí Dála (TDs), was conducted which found that of the 38% of TDs and Senators who responded 69% wanted to retain STV whilst 26% wanted to replace it. Those who favoured STV emphasised the value of close contact between representatives and constituents and the power which the system gives voters to choose their representatives. Critics of STV highlighted what they considered to be the disadvantages of STV with regard to intra-party electoral competition (see Gallagher 2003). The Committee concluded that it was:

“not convinced that the weaknesses of PR-STV are as considerable as might be claimed, or, put otherwise, that PR-STV is itself responsible for all of the failings that have been laid at its door Finally, and decisively, there is no evidence of serious or widespread public discontent with the existing system: on the contrary, there is in our view a strong and enduring attachment to it. The fundamental and insurmountable argument against change is that the current Irish electoral system provides the greatest degree of voter choice of any available option. A switch to any other system would reduce the power of the individual voter. For all of these reasons, we recommend against any change in this aspect of the Constitution” (All-Party Oireachtas Committee, 2002, p.29).

CHANGES TO THE OPERATION OF STV IN IRELAND

The operation of STV in the Republic has been modified considerably since 1922. Voters can vote for as many or as few of the candidates as they wish. However there have been changes to the detail of implementing the system. At present 166 TDs, are elected from 42 constituencies to the Dail Eireann (lower house of the Irish Parliament (known as Oireachtas)). TDs are elected from 3, 4 or 5 seat constituencies. The Irish constitution contains provisions ensuring that no fewer than 3 TDs can be elected from one constituency. However pre-1948 TDs were elected from constituencies which contained 7, 8 or 9 members.

The drawing of constituency boundaries has been a contentious issue in Ireland with allegations of ‘gerrymandering’ or within the Irish context ‘tullymandering’⁸. In Ireland this tended to involve arranging the number of seats per constituency in order to suit assumed levels of support for a particular party or parties. This was possible until 1980 as the responsibility for the number of candidates per constituency and for boundaries lay with the incumbent government. Sinnott (1999) describes this process in the following terms:

“the rule of thumb was to create three-seat constituencies in areas in which the governing party or parties were presumed to be strong (around 50 per cent of the votes) and four-seaters where support for the government was only moderate (around 40 per cent). Since the quota is 25 per cent in a three seater and 20 per cent in a four-seater, the expected outcome of such an arrangement was two out of three (or 67 per cent of the representation) in a three seater and two out of four (or 50 per cent of the representation) in a four-seater, thus maximising the representation gained (p.114-115).

⁸ ‘Tullymandering’ refers to an example of gerrymandering which backfired after the change in voting patterns meant that the expected levels of assumed support did not materialise resulting in significant losses for the party which organised the ‘gerrymander’. The name of the Minister responsible for the constituency revisions was James Tully.

Since 1980 responsibility for the drawing of constituency boundaries has been de-coupled from the Irish political process with the establishment of an independent boundary commission.

Ballot papers in the Irish Republic list candidates alphabetically and do not group candidates by party. Originally the Irish system did not recognise the existence of political parties as parties were not mentioned on ballot papers. Irish electoral law was changed in 1963 so that the party affiliations of candidates (if they had one) could be mentioned on the ballot paper. In recent years candidate photographs and party logos have also been included on the ballot paper (see Gallagher 2003).

Traditionally Irish General Elections required a financial deposit before a candidate could put their name forward for election. However the 2002 General Election saw this requirement dropped. Instead candidates were required to have “evidence of one’s nomination by a registered party, or the support of 30 ‘assentors’ from the constituency” (Weeks, 2003, p.216). There were concerns that this change in procedure would result in a proliferation of ‘dubious’ candidates however the 2002 General Election actually witnessed a decline in the number of candidates from 484 in 1997 to 463 in 2002.

A further innovation for the 2002 General Election was the introduction of polling station-based electronic voting in three constituencies (Dublin North, Dublin West, and Meath). The performance of e-voting systems in the election received a mixed response. Weeks (2003) comments on this as follows:

“The predicted efficiency did not transpire, as the results took up to five hours to produce. The results of all counts were announced simultaneously, thus giving the losing candidates no time to prepare for the disappointment of defeat. This dehumanising aspect of the electronic count was bitterly criticised by all candidates, a mood encapsulated by the emotional response of former Fine Gael deputy leader, Nora Owen, when her twenty-one years service in the Dail came to an end in ‘one brutal moment’. She declared ‘it was like being stabbed very quickly’” (p.223).

Concerns were also raised regarding the potential for fraud with e-voting. The pilot constituencies did not experience an increase in turnout as a result of e-voting. Indeed exactly the opposite was the case as the decline in turnout was greater in the three pilot constituencies than across the rest of Ireland. Nevertheless the Irish Government has stated that it intends to introduce e-voting nationally for local and European Parliament elections in 2004. With regard to turnout more generally, turnout rates have declined from a high of 76.9% in 1969 to 62.6% in 2002. The rate of decline has become more pronounced since the late 1980’s (see Table Three).

Table Three – Turnout in Irish General Elections, 1948-2002			
Year	Turnout	Year	Turnout
1948	74.2%	1981	76.2%
1951	75.3%	1982-1	73.8%
1954	76.4%	1982-2	72.9%
1957	71.3%	1987	73.3%
1961	70.6%	1989	68.5%
1965	75.1%	1992	68.5%
1969	76.9%	1997	65.9%
1973	76.6%	2002	62.6%
1977	76.3%		

Source: Coakley and Gallagher (1999) p.367; Weeks (2003) p.219.

EFFECTIVENESS OF STV IN IRELAND

STV has tended to be criticised on a number of grounds which can be summarised broadly as proportionality, government stability, party cohesion and that the system results in developing a localistic political culture. Each of these issues are considered with regard to the operation of STV in Ireland.

Proportionality

As noted above, the operation of STV and the extent to which it is proportional rests upon a balance between obtaining proportional results and maintaining a local connection between representatives and their constituency. Constituency size in Ireland varies from between three to five representatives per constituency. As a general rule the lower the number of members returned per constituency (or 'district magnitude') the less proportional the system becomes (Gallagher 2003). Accordingly, the level of district magnitude in Ireland is relatively low suggesting that the system tends towards less proportional outcomes. However, comparative studies of proportionality have suggested that the Irish system produces reasonably proportional outcomes. For example a study analysing Irish electoral results between 1948 and 1989 found that Irish elections:

“emerge as much more proportional than those held under first past the post electoral systems. Compared to elections held under PR list systems, they were more proportional than some but less proportional than others held under PR list systems in, for example, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden” (Sinnott 1999, p.114).

Alternatively another survey of the proportionality of electoral systems in thirty-seven countries found that Ireland ranked as fifteenth in terms of proportionality. In an evaluation for the Irish Constitution Review Group, Gallagher (1996) summarised the performance of STV in Ireland as follows:

“PR-STV in Ireland delivers a high degree of proportionality, virtually as high as that produced by electoral systems that have the achievement of proportionality as their sole aim” (p.519).

In general, the larger parties in Irish politics – Fianna Fail and Fine Gail – have tended to receive more seats than a strict proportionate allocation of their votes to seats would afford.

This 'bonus' in seat number has tended to come at the expense of smaller parties (see Sinnott, 1999, p.114).

Governmental Stability

A criticism frequently made of proportional representation is that it leads to a proliferation of parties and thereby to coalition government and potentially creates instability. The number of elections held over a period of time provides an indication of the potential of an electoral system to cause governmental instability. Since 1945, there have been 16 General Elections in Ireland roughly equating to an election every three years. This compares to 15 General Elections in the UK over the same time-period (see McBride 1998). However the number of coalition governments in Ireland has increased post-1945. All governments elected between 1922 and 1948 in Ireland were one party government's. However since 1948, coalitions have formed the Irish government for 52% of this period. In addition:

"No party has won an overall majority since 1977 or been able to form a single-party government since 1987. Moreover, minority government is increasingly common, occupying office for 34 per cent of the time from 1948 to 2002" (Gallagher, 2003, p.18).

The Independent Commission on the Voting System (1998) commented on the stability of Irish government as follows:

"On the whole there has been no excessive frequency either of elections or of changes of government. Indeed, particularly in the long de Valera years, the greater charge against the Irish system was that it produced a dead hand of immobilism" (p.15).

The issue of the increasing occurrence of minority government has led to concerns that such governments come to rely overly on independent candidates for support. The Dail is unusual in comparison to other West European Parliaments for the number of independent candidates that are elected to it. Indeed, the number of independent candidates elected to the Dail can often be greater than that elected to all the other West European Parliaments. The influence of Independents, which an incumbent government may be reliant upon, tends to raise concerns that 'pork barrel politics' may be required to ensure that the relevant Independents vote for government policies. Weeks (2003) comments on the role of Independents within the context of the 2002 General Election result as follows:

"Most of them were elected on local issues, with many focussing on the state of the health services, which is, according to opinion polls, a key concern for voters. They won 7 more seats than in 1997, because their supporters believed that an independent could secure more bounties for their constituency than a backbench TD. Such reasoning was based on the benefits independent TDs had delivered for their regions in the previous Dail in exchange for their support for the minority government. With the new government not needing such support from independents, the current crop of 13 non-party TDs have a more redundant role in the new Dail" (Weeks, 2003, p.221).

Sinnott (1999) suggests that STV adds to the possibility of minority governments relying on Independents through facilitating their election and thus making their support a more attractive

option for a minority government than finding another party with which they could enter into a coalition. Sinnott (1999) comments that STV:

“facilitates the election of independents by focussing on individual candidates, by encouraging competition in the provision of local benefits and, through the mechanism of the multi-seat constituency, by lowering the threshold of representation to a point at which it is within the reach of non-party candidates. In short, while it is true that PR-STV does not lead to unstable government by causing a multiplicity of parties or by diminishing party discipline, it does increase the probability of government reliance on independent deputies whose support may be delivered only at a disproportionate price and even then may not be durable (p.117).

Nevertheless despite the increasing number of coalition and minority governments in recent years these governments have on the whole tended to stay in power for as long as single party governments in previous years (see Farrell 2001).

Party Cohesion and Localism

In general, STV puts a greater emphasis on the candidate rather than the political party at elections in comparison to other electoral systems such as list systems. Moreover, the operation of STV may require that candidates compete for election not only against opponents from other parties but also against candidates from within their own party. Accordingly, STV has been criticised for having a propensity to diminish party unity (see Katz 1980). Despite these concerns regarding the potential for party disunity TDs tend to vote en bloc for a party position. For example, Gallagher (2003b) comments:

“Deviations from party solidarity are very rare and are met with a draconian response, typically expulsion from the parliamentary party. Fianna Fail, indeed, has a rule that any of its TDs who even abstain on a measure, never mind vote against the party line, automatically incur expulsion from the parliamentary party” (p.109).

Nevertheless a considerable threat to an incumbent comes from candidates in the same party running in the same constituency. Gallagher (2003) found that “over the years, around 56 per cent of Fianna Fail TDs, and 37 per cent of Fine Gael TDs, who suffer defeat at an election lose to a running mate rather than to a candidate of another party” (p.15). On the other hand incumbent candidates very rarely fail to secure re-election due to the local political base and networks they are likely to have developed during their time as a TD. Accordingly, whilst party affiliation acts as the most significant determinant of voting behaviour local factors are an important influence. It is also evident in Ireland that “in other types of election, notably EP [European Parliament] but also local elections, the candidates matter more” (Marsh 2003, p.130). Intra-party rivalry may be reflected more not as party disunity but rather by the wish of TDs to be seen as effective constituency representatives who are able to secure resources and outcomes for their constituents (Gallagher 2003).

Irish election campaigns also demonstrate the need to balance localist and national issues. This can demonstrate itself in differences between the national party and local candidates over candidate selection and tactics at an election. Marsh (2003) commented on this issue as follows:

“The national party will want to nominate at least as many candidates as there are seats it might win. However, the assessment of likely vote is never certain. In a case where the party has one seat and thinks it might win two, it will wish to nominate a second candidate. The incumbent deputy might be happy to take a running mate where two seats are certain but may fear to do so where they are not, because two people would then be fighting for the same seat and the incumbent might lose what seemed to be a sure thing” (p.122).

Moreover studies of Irish voting patterns also indicate that candidates from a local area will receive more votes from that part of the constituency in which they live (Farrell 2001). Accordingly Irish political parties have developed sophisticated vote management and election strategies. These tend to involve ensuring that:

“candidates are picked from different corners of the constituency and voters in each locale are actively encouraged to vary the ordering of their preferences so as to maximise the efficiency of the party vote. The basic idea is that the more equal the spread of first preferences across the different party candidates, the greater chance that more will be elected” (Farrell 2001, p.146).

It is also important to note that a degree of co-operation will exist between parties during election campaigns. For example, some parties may signal their intention to work together in coalition prior to the election with the result that voters backing a particular party may then place lower preferences with the potential coalition partner party. For example, Kennedy (2002) found that:

“when relations between two parties are ‘favourable’, at least from the point of view of one of the two parties, the proportion of transfers flowing from one party to the other is significantly greater than when relations are ‘unfavourable’” (p.292).

The issue of localism is frequently cited as a criticism of the operation of STV in Ireland. Farrell (2001) summarised these criticisms as follows:

“the heavy emphasis on constituency casework, faction-fighting between candidates from the same party, a focus on constituency, localist matters in election campaigns and parliamentary work, ‘friends and neighbours’ voting, are all seen as resulting – at least in large part – from the candidate-centred, preference voting of STV” (p.146).

Accordingly this emphasis upon maintaining the interests of the constituency can be seen as inhibiting the ability of politicians to take a national perspective on policy issues. Alternatively a number of other reasons for what is considered to be the heavy constituency workload of TDs can also be provided. For instance, Ellis (1998) highlights that “the weak role of local government in Ireland has a direct influence on the constituency work-loads of TDs” (p.75). Gallagher and Komito (1999) also highlight the relatively weak status of the Irish Parliament in relation to the executive and comment that the Irish Parliament:

“is not very strong, backbench deputies cannot easily establish a reputation as outstanding parliamentarians and fight internal party battles on this terrain. So, once the demand for brokerage activity arises, they feel they have to respond to

it, even though many of them wish there was less of it” (Gallagher and Komito 1999, p.219).

Equally in a small society, such as Ireland, the role of the TD as a key local stakeholder within the local community who is accessible to voters may increase constituency workloads. It is also important to note that backbench TDs can also be local councillors and they may also contribute to a localist attitude where TDs also hold office as local councillors. Accordingly, the representation of constituency interests does not have to be viewed as detrimental but rather a key task of an elected representative. Therefore the extent to which STV is responsible for constituency demands is debateable or as Gallagher and Komito (1999) comment:

“The electoral system gives deputies a strong incentive to respond with alacrity to the demand that they do constituency work, but it doesn’t really explain where this demand comes from in the first place” (p.220).

Alternatively some commentators suggest that it is not the electoral system which is responsible for a localist emphasis amongst TDs but rather Irish political culture. For example, Farrell (2001) comments:

“The fact is that Irish political culture is personified by a high degree of localism and it would be disingenuous to suppose that somehow this would dissipate if the electoral system were changed” (p.146).

Whether STV is responsible for the development of a localist political culture would therefore appear to be a moot point with other socio-cultural factors also likely to be causal influences.

Composition of the Dail

The backgrounds of TDs are “not especially different from other west European parliaments” (Gallagher 2003, p.16). TDs tend to have strong local connections and were frequently county councillors before becoming TDs. Notably, a considerable proportion are following on from relatives who previously represented their constituency suggesting a degree of inheritance of a local political base by some TDs (see Gallagher 2003). With regard to the representation of women in the Dail the proportion of women elected compares rather poorly with other parliaments in EU member states. For example:

“In 1998 it [the Dail] shared eleventh place out of the fifteen EU member states, alongside Belgium and ahead only of France, Italy and Greece” (Galligan 1999, p.298).

Similarly women’s involvement in local government is low with participation rates similar to that in the Dail (see Galligan, 1999). However to suggest that this lack of participation is a consequence of STV would be to neglect wider societal factors. However, it does also indicate that the presence of STV has not acted as a significant stimulus to increasing the representation of women in politics. Galligan (1999) comments on this issue as follows:

“Ireland ranks close to the bottom of the European scale in terms of women’s representation in political life, yet there is no discernible bias among the electorate against women candidates. Women remain under-represented as election candidates, although parties are making some progress towards redressing this imbalance. The number of women candidates has increased

providing research and information services to the Scottish Parliament

over the years, but is still fewer than 20 per cent of all candidates in national elections. This is due to a combination of social and structural factors that inhibit women's political activity, and to a resistance within the parties to giving serious consideration to providing gender balance on candidate tickets" (p.316-317).

NORTHERN IRELAND

As in the Republic of Ireland the introduction of STV for elections to Stormont and local authorities formed part of the provisions of the Government of Ireland Act (1920) which introduced partition and thereby created the province of Northern Ireland. Whilst the introduction of STV in Southern Ireland was uncontroversial, and had the support of senior nationalist politicians as a useful means of protecting the rights of the minority Protestant community, a similar situation did not apply in Northern Ireland. Instead "many unionists in what became Northern Ireland were opposed to proportional representation and strongly favoured retaining the 'traditional British' plurality system" (Mitchell and Gillespie 1999, p.67). As a result the Northern Ireland Government abolished STV for local government elections in 1922. However STV was used for elections to Stormont in 1921 and 1925.

The 1921 election returned a secure unionist majority to Stormont, whereas the 1925 election witnessed the loss of 8 unionist seats within the 52 seat legislature to Independents, and the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). The emergence of the NILP as a party not centred upon the ethno-nationalist divide in Northern Ireland (albeit pro-partition), suggested that STV was assisting with a de-fragmentation of the party political spectrum in the early years of Stormont. By the next election in 1929, Northern Ireland had returned to First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) to elect Stormont. Mitchell and Gillespie (1999) account for this change in electoral systems as follows:

"Fearing the continuation of such a trend [the loss of unionist seats at the 1925 election], unionists decided to revert to plurality rule. Although there is some unresolved debate concerning whether the change was principally designed to weaken Labour and independent candidates or to further undermine the strategic position of nationalists, there is no doubt that the reversion to plurality elections entrenched the dominance of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) (p.68).

In effect the return to FPTP acted to reinforce in party political and institutional terms the divide between the ethno-nationalist groups in Northern Ireland. Elections to Stormont were conducted via FPTP until the introduction of direct rule from London in 1973. Northern Irish elections to Westminster are conducted by FPTP. The introduction of direct rule also brought the return of STV for local government elections whilst STV is also used for European Parliament elections and for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The rules used for STV in Northern Ireland are the same as those contained in the draft 'Local Governance (Scotland) Bill (2003)'.

Local authorities in Northern Ireland were reorganised in the early 1970s into twenty-six district councils. Local authorities in Northern Ireland have fairly limited responsibilities. Councils are responsible for the direct provision of minor services such as environmental health, cleansing, litter, parks, cemeteries, sport, culture, enforcement of building regulations, licensing premises for public safety purposes and the registration of births, marriages and deaths. These limited powers have resulted in a public perception which "derisively dismisses district councils as having responsibility solely for 'bins, bogs and burials" (Lucy 1994, p.1).

Local government elections are held every four years. Candidates stand for elections in District Electoral Areas (DEAs) which comprise a number of wards. Between 5 and 7 councillors are elected per DEA. Responsibility for local authority and DEA boundaries rests with the [Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland](#). Perhaps partly as a consequence of this lack of powers turnout in local authority elections has been in decline since the early 1980's. For example, turnout in the local authority election of 1973 was 68.1% compared to 53.6% in 1997⁹. In 2001, the local authority elections were held on the same day as the UK General Election resulting in a turnout of 68%. As was the case in the Republic of Ireland the evidence from Northern Ireland local elections tend to show that whilst election results are more proportional than under FPTP larger political parties tend to obtain a larger number of seats than their proportion of the votes would entitle them to. For example, Lucy (1994) commenting on the 1989 local election results noted:

“The UUP in 1989 secured a more modest bonus compared to that in 1993 but the DUP bonus was greater. The SDLP received a modest bonus of two rather than being penalised. As in 1993 both the Alliance and Labour achieved exact proportionality. Sinn Fein once again was the party most adversely affected, securing twenty seats less than proportionality” (p.161-162).

A factor underpinning the underperformance of Sinn Fein in turning votes into seats and the UUP's over performance lies in the pattern of preference transfer between parties. STV is an electoral system which is 'information-rich' in that it enables the analysis of vote transfers and thereby of the relationship between parties in terms of preferences. Accordingly, political parties can try to engage in implicit election coalitions with parties or at least indicate preferences in order to attempt to guide the preferences of voters. However Sinn Fein tended not to benefit from transfers from other parties, principally the SDLP, and this contributed to Sinn Fein receiving fewer seats. In contrast transfer rates between Unionist parties were significant and assisted in additional seats being obtained. Mitchell (1999) commented on this pattern during the 1980's as follows:

“The greater extent of vote-splitting amongst nationalists reflected deeper divisions between the SDLP and SF than among the unionist parties. The two nationalist parties are divided in their electorates, policies and tactics. The polarisation of their electorates is revealed in STV elections by the very low transfer rates between the parties” (p.106).

The party structure of Northern Ireland politics is frequently referred to as a dual system with competition between parties for votes within their own community (either nationalist or unionist) rather than across the whole electorate. For example Mitchell (1999) comments:

“At each election, it is only a mild exaggeration to say that two simultaneous but largely separate elections take place. Each community holds its own discrete election to decide who will represent the community in dealings with the ethno-national rivals: Unionist and nationalist parties do not, thereby, meaningfully compete for each other's electorate since very few such floating voters exist” (p.93).

⁹ Information provided by an academic from Northern Ireland.

Part of the rationale for using STV for the Northern Ireland Assembly elections is that the system provides voters with the opportunity to cross party divides. Analysis of the 1998 Assembly election results led Mitchell (2001) to conclude that there was:

“evidence of significant changes in voting behaviour, Some of the voters of pro-Agreement candidates displayed a new-found willingness to cross the communal divide in order to support each other with lower preferences. Most dramatically, UUP votes transferred to the SDLP at a rate of 34 per cent” (p.44).

Accordingly, whilst STV may have the potential to facilitate cooperation within divided communities, the transfer process may also assist parties which have allies or partners. Mitchell (2001) notes that:

“While the adoption of STV – or any other electoral system – cannot in itself do much to end protracted conflicts, it does provide electoral rewards to those who engage in accommodative behaviour. Parties with electoral partners, other things being equal, win more seats. In addition, in order for parties to attract a greater number of lower preferences, they need to appeal to voters identified with other parties, and hence STV can exert a moderating dynamic” (p.34).

MALTA

BACKGROUND

Malta was a colony within the British Empire until 1964 when it became an independent state within the Commonwealth. In 1974, Malta attained its current constitutional status as an independent Republic. STV has been the electoral system used in Malta since 1921. The Maltese Parliament, known as the House of Representatives, is a unicameral legislature consisting of 65 members. The Maltese Government is drawn from the largest party in the Parliament. Elections in Malta must be held at least once every five years. Local government in Malta is a relatively recent innovation having been created in 1993. There are currently 67 local councils in Malta which are also elected using STV consisting of between 5 and 13 local councillors per council depending upon the community's size. The powers of local authorities are limited to the handling of minor services within local communities such as street maintenance and the upkeep of local amenities. Councils cannot levy their own taxes with budgets being obtained via central government grants. Councils are elected every three years with a third of councils being elected every year (See Hirczy de Mino and Lane, 2003).

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STV IN MALTA

At present the 65 members of the Maltese Parliament are elected via 13 districts consisting of five members each. Electoral districts must be of the same population size within a margin of 5%. There are a number of rules in place which distinguish the operation of STV in Malta from that in other countries. Firstly, the Maltese Constitution provides that the party which obtains the majority of first preference votes must have a majority of the seats in Parliament (see discussion on proportionality below). Secondly, it is common practice for a candidate to stand in

more than one district at an election. However a successful candidate can only take up their seat in one constituency and resign from any other seats for which they have been elected. Lastly, where casual vacancies (i.e. by-elections) occur, for example because a candidate was elected in more than one seat, vacated seats are filled using a recount of the ballot papers from the original election. A successful candidate is required to obtain 50% of the votes. Accordingly, the manner in which STV is implemented in Malta is distinct from that adopted in other locations.

PERFORMANCE OF STV

The Polarisation of Maltese Party Politics

STV tends to be theorised as a system which offers the opportunity for a broader range of parties to be elected than would be the case under a majoritarian system such as First Past the Post. However the Maltese experience has been that the country has moved from being a multi-party system in the 1950s and 1960s to becoming a two-party system since the early 1970's. Whilst Maltese party politics has always been dominated by the Maltese Labour Party (MLP) and the Nationalists (PN) there were initially a number of smaller parties although most were short-lived. Currently the third party in Maltese politics is Alternattiva Demokratika (AD) but the party has never been able to win a seat in the Maltese Parliament. Maltese politics is therefore highly polarised around the two major political parties. The results of the last two Maltese General Elections in 1998 and 2003 (see Table Four) demonstrate the extent of this polarisation.

Party	1998			2003		
	Seats	Votes ('000)	Votes %	Seats	Votes ('000)	Votes %
PN	35	137	51.8	35	146	51.8
MLP	30	124	47.0	30	134	47.5
AD	-	3	1.2	-	2	0.7
Turnout		95.4%			96.2%	

Source: Fenech (2003) p.164.

Table Four demonstrates that the turnout in the 1998 and 2002 General Elections was extremely high. Turnout has been rising consistently in Malta since the post-war period with a low of 73.9% in 1950 comparing to levels of participation around 95% to 96% being the norm since the mid-1970s. In large part this extremely high level of turnout can be attributed to the highly polarised nature of Maltese politics. There are also extremely low proportions of invalid ballots, typically around 1% of all ballots in Malta, suggesting that voters understand the voting process (Hirczy de Mino 2003, p.191). At local government level, turnout is lower probably because of the limited powers of local councils, as Hirczy de Mino and Lane (2003) note:

“Probably as a consequence of these limited powers and financial resources, the voter turnout for local elections has lagged far behind that for national elections. In the first election cycle, only 65 percent of the eligible voters cast valid votes, and this declined to 61 percent in the second cycle of elections” (p.187).

Given the polarisation of voting patterns between the two major parties, the minor parties and Independents are squeezed in Maltese politics. In effect, to stand as an independent in Maltese politics is “a virtual invitation to electoral defeat” (Hirczy de Mino and Lane 2003, p.190). The

polarisation of Maltese politics is reflected in the lack of cross-party transfer of preferences by voters. Maltese voters tend to stop ranking candidates when they have voted for all of the candidates of their preferred party. In this way, Maltese voters ensure that other parties cannot benefit from their vote. In Maltese elections the “percentage of cross-party transfers is about 1% on ballots” (Hirczy de Mino and Lane, 2003, p.192). Despite the dominance of the two main parties the barriers to standing as a candidate are few. In order to stand for election a Maltese voter needs only to self-nominate, have four supporting signatures and pay an election deposit of roughly \$100 which is refundable if the candidate obtains 10% of the quota in the district in which the election is taking place. Accordingly the dominance of the two parties appears to result not from the electoral system and the rules which underpin it but rather from the choices made by Maltese voters.

Intra-Party Competition

As was noted in the case of Republic of Ireland, intra-party competition forms a key component of STV and this is also true of Maltese politics. Because voting patterns are fairly stable and largely predictable the major threat to candidates tends to be from other candidates within the same party. In comparing the causes of defeat to candidates in Ireland and Malta, Gallagher (2003b) makes the following comments:

“For incumbents of Ireland’s largest party, Fianna Fail, the main threat comes from within party ranks; for other incumbents, the main danger lies without. In Malta the balance is quite different. Defeats to opponents are rare, and by far the most common cause of defeat is at the hands of a running mate” (p.110-111).

This situation is exacerbated not only by candidates standing in more than one seat but also by parties putting up either five or more candidates in districts which have only 5 seats available in them. Given the polarisation of party politics in Malta, most districts tend to be split 3:2 between the two main parties whilst no party has ever won all five seats within a district. Hirczy de Mino and Lane (2003) account for the over-nomination of candidates by Maltese parties as follows:

“Because there is a long-standing pattern of most transfers benefiting other candidates of the same party, there is little risk in offering substantially more candidates than a party could possibly hope to elect in a district. In fact, a greater range and diversity of candidates may benefit a large party because it puts it in a position to attract voters through the candidates’ own personal networks of family and friends. It also allows them to cater to any conceivable taste or predilection among its potential constituency as long as a suitable candidate can be found” (p.188).

Given the small population of Malta it is perhaps not surprising that personal networks form a key component of political dealings. Hirczy de Mino and Lane (2003) comment on this aspect of Maltese politics as follows:

“Many voters expect candidates to promise to be helpful in obtaining some of the numerous favours that a government in Malta can provide. More than one-third of the work force is employed by the government directly or by government-controlled enterprises; there is a sizeable supply of public housing and a host of licensing laws – all of which provide tempting targets of political

favouritism. One idealistic, and unsuccessful, MLP candidate in 1987 complained that ‘the vote has become a negotiable instrument – a bill of exchange – rather than something that is based on principles and the party programme. If someone asks me to try to get them a job or a flat or whatever, I often get very irritated’ (p.190).

Proportionality

Maltese General Elections tend to be closely contested, given the dominance of the MLP and PN within the Maltese political system, with support for the two parties being fairly evenly split. Because STV combines proportionality with maintaining a local connection a degree of disproportionality, as compared to other forms of PR such as list systems, does occur. In a political system, such as Malta, where competition between two parties is close this can result in significant ramifications. In the 1981 General Election the MLP won 49.1% of first preference votes and 52.3% of the seats in Parliament. In contrast, the PN had won 50.9% of first preference votes. As a consequence the Nationalist Party refused to accept the outcome of the election and boycotted the Parliament. The situation was defused by a revision to the Maltese Constitution which provided that a party which obtains a majority of first preference votes, but only a minority of parliamentary seats, will obtain sufficient ‘bonus seats’ to ensure that the party concerned has a majority in the Parliament. Accordingly, the Maltese Parliament can consist of more than 65 members depending upon the election result. In effect, a vote in Malta now has two functions. Firstly, to elect a government and, secondly, to elect an individual candidate (see Hirczy de Mino and Lane, 2003).

Electoral Reform

Since the crisis following the Maltese General Election electoral reform has been an issue in Maltese politics. A Maltese Government [White Paper on Electoral Reform](#), issued in 1990, proposed a number of reasons for electoral reform. These included the evolution in party organisation which had occurred since 1921, the need to take account of modern technology in order to modernise electoral procedures and to enhance the provisions making legal guarantees against electoral fraud. However, the main focus of the White Paper was upon providing a ‘more’ proportional system of election reflecting concerns following the 1981 election. The White Paper commented that:

“The principle aim of the proposed reform is the introduction of a new method of counting of votes to ensure a much stricter proportionality between the votes polled by a particular party on a national basis and the seats assigned to that party in Parliament” (p.3).

The White Paper went on to propose the d’Hondt electoral system. A later ‘Commission on the Electoral System’ established by the Maltese Government in 1994 was unable to reach agreement on the issue of proportionality, although it did make some recommendations which were subsequently agreed to that were designed to speed up the vote counting process. However the proposals of the Government were not implemented as:

“no agreement could be reached between the two major parties because although they seemingly agreed that governability was more important than proportionality, they differed on such issues as the disposition of votes cast for losing minor party candidates” (p.201).

ISLE OF MAN

INTRODUCTION

The political development of the Isle of Man is distinctive, although closely linked to, that of the United Kingdom (UK). The Isle of Man has managed to retain its own separate political identity over the course of the previous Millennium at no stage being fully assimilated into an external political system. Ultimate authority for the island has rested with Norway, Scotland, England and the UK but nevertheless considerable power remained devolved to Isle of Man institutions. The existence of [Tynwald](#), the Manx Parliament, since the 10th Century is emblematic of the separate political identity of the island. During the course of the 20th Century the Isle of Man was a Crown dependency whose relationship with the UK moved from one of strict UK control to virtual autonomy as far as purely internal matters were concerned (Kermode 2001).

The UK Government is represented by a Lieutenant Governor who is technically the head of Government. However in recent years this post has become largely symbolic as power has passed to Tynwald and the Executive branch of Tynwald (Executive Council / Council of Ministers). The Tynwald Parliament consists of the House of Keys and the Legislative Council. The House of Keys is the lower house of Parliament and consists of 24 directly elected members. Elections are held every 5 years. The Legislative Council, or upper house of Parliament, is appointed and consists of the President of Tynwald, Attorney General, Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man, 3 ex officio members and 8 members elected by the House of Keys. These two houses of the Tynwald Parliament consider legislation separately with Bills being passed if they receive a majority vote in each House.

The most noticeable feature of politics in the Isle of Man is the absence of a party political system. Tynwald is dominated by Independents and although there have been attempts to organise political parties, notably the Manx Labour Party, Independents have consistently formed the majority of representatives within Tynwald (Kermode, 2002). Elections to the House of Keys are conducted via First-Past the Post (FPTP) using one, two and three member constituencies¹⁰. Kermode (2002) describes the political culture of the Isle of Man in the following terms:

“Individual personalities and achievements rather than political parties determine the outcomes of Manx elections. Policy differences between candidates are often so small that the choice for electors is one between personalities. Even where parties have contested elections, there is evidence that particular candidates succeed or fail despite their party label. On occasions when parties fielded more than one candidate in a two- or three- member constituency, where electors have as many votes as there are seats, the performance of candidates has varied widely, suggesting voting for the individual rather than the party” (p.693).

Whilst the Isle of Man currently uses FPTP for elections, the island introduced STV for elections to the House of Keys and for local government in 1982. The Isle of Man reverted to using FPTP

¹⁰ At present there are 15 constituencies electing 24 representatives to Tynwald. There are 8 single member constituencies, 5 two member constituencies and, 2 three member constituencies.

for all elections in 1994. The reasons for the introduction of STV, the experience of it on the Isle of Man and the reasons behind its replacement are the subject of the following sections. Given the lack of evidence concerning the use of STV in local government elections the following sections focus upon the use of STV to elect the House of Keys.

THE INTRODUCTION OF STV IN THE ISLE OF MAN

In 1979 the Isle of Man Executive Council appointed a Commission, chaired by Professor David Butler, to investigate representation in, and elections to, the House of Keys. The terms of reference for the Commission were:

“to investigate and report within one year on how the principle of ensuring that the Manx electorate have absolute equality in choosing the representatives they seek can be implemented and thus reflect the wishes and desires of the majority of the electorate” (Butler 1980, p.1).

As the remit of the Commission suggests there was a perception that there was a lack of equality amongst voters as some voters could vote for up to three representatives whilst others could elect only one representative. Butler (1980) also highlighted variations in the number of electors per constituency and concerns over constituency boundaries as being reasons for the Commission being established. The Commission recommended that STV be introduced using 3 member constituencies. STV was viewed, by the Commission, as particularly suitable for the Isle of Man given the absence of party politics on the island. In addition the Commission had received evidence indicating general support for the use of multi-member constituencies, which were already in use on the island. From the Commission’s perspective they had the advantage that:

“an elector with a problem can turn to the representative of his choice, and, if he is not available, to another” (p.13).

The Commission received evidence indicating that STV would ensure that the voter was not wasting their vote which was a particular concern with FPTP particularly as the number of candidates at elections increased. For example, in the House of Keys elections of 1976, 43% of votes went to unsuccessful candidates whilst in one constituency the figure was 62% (Butler, 1980, p.16). The STV system was also seen as beneficial as it would avoid the problem of ‘plumping’ (where a voter expresses a preference for only one candidate despite having the opportunity to cast a number of preferences). Accordingly, Butler recommended that voters should cast at least as many votes as there were seats available to be filled. ‘Plumping’ had been a cause of concern to voters in multi-member seats under FPTP in the Isle of Man. With regard to the potential complexity of the system Butler (1980) commented:

“We see no reason to believe that voting under the STV system would prove difficult for the voter; if it presents no problem to the Irish or the Australians, it will certainly not baffle the Manx” (p.23).

THE OPERATION OF STV IN THE ISLE OF MAN

The recommendations of the Commission were initially not accepted by the House of Keys in 1981 but a later private members Bill, which enacted the Commission’s recommendations,

providing research and information services to the Scottish Parliament

successfully passed through Tynwald in 1982. STV operated in the Isle of Man for the 1986 and 1991 elections to the House of Keys. However, three member constituencies were not implemented across the Island. Instead there remained a mix of one, two and three member constituencies. In 1986, of the 15 constituencies 2 were three member constituencies, 5 were two member constituencies and the remainder were one member constituencies.

The 1986 election to the House of Keys was the first to use STV. In total 74 candidates stood for election with 14 of the 15 seats being contested (there was only one candidate in the remaining seat). Of the 74 candidates, 63 were Independents and 11 were party candidates. The two parties being represented were the Manx Labour Party (MLP) fielding six candidates, and the newly established Manx Democratic Party (MDP) with five candidates. The MLP won three seats and the MDP none resulting in 21 Independents being elected. In terms of the number of counts required to determine who was elected (discounting the unopposed candidate) 12 candidates achieved the quota at the first count, four after a second count, one after a third, two after a fifth, two after a seventh and two after an eighth count. Kermode (2001) commented on the election result as follows:

“Interestingly, in every case, the one, two or three candidates with the most first preference votes were elected, leading some critics to argue that the results would have been identical under the old system. While that may have been true of the eight single member constituencies, it is impossible to be sure in the case of the seven constituencies where the electorate would have had two or three votes” (p.319).

Prior to the next election to the House of Keys in 1991 a Member of the House of Keys (MHK), Dominic Delaney, was successful in getting legislation passed which allowed for plumping to take place (i.e. voters could vote for only one candidate regardless of the number of seats within a constituency). In the 1991 election there were 73 candidates and contests in 13 of the 15 constituencies. There were five party candidates. The three sitting Manx Labour Party candidates successfully defended their seats. Two candidates from the Manx Green Party lost their deposits. Whilst one seat required ten counts before all the candidates were elected the maximum number of counts required in any of the other constituencies was six. Ten candidates were elected after the first count. As in 1986 the successful candidates in the 13 contested constituencies were those with the most first preference votes after the first count (Kermode 2001).

THE DEMISE OF STV IN THE ISLE OF MAN

In 1994 Tynwald voted for a return to FPTP. Kermode (2001) summarises this outcome in the following terms:

“In January 1994 Tynwald approved a resolution moved by David Corlett declaring that STV was inappropriate for the Island; it was carried by 15 votes to seven in the Keys and unanimously in the Legislative Council. Corlett condemned STV as unpopular, misunderstood and mathematically complicated and sought a return to the first-past-the-post system. He achieved this goal by moving a successful amendment to the consolidation legislation being promoted by the Council of Ministers and which became law as the Representation of the People Act 1995. As a result the Island returned to the inequality of voting opportunities associated with the mixture of single, two and three member

constituencies, with each voter having as many votes as there were seats in the constituency” (p.310-311).

The opening statement by David Corlett in the House of Keys on the motion to remove STV provides a flavour of the objections which were raised by critics of STV on the Isle of Man. Mr Corlett spoke to his motion in the following terms:

“So what are the most obvious shortcomings of our present system? Firstly, it is complicated for the voter. Secondly, it is unwieldy and it is certainly complex for the returning officer. Thirdly, it is quite possible that it does deter some people from voting. It is often misunderstood in that voters may feel that they are entering an order of preference for more than one seat. In fact, they are showing preference for the candidate who will receive their one and only vote. Fifthly (sic), an elector has to vote for every candidate, including those he or she does not wish to see returned, but the fact that this has been waived now also invalidates the procedures” (Tynwald Court 1994, T285).

The demise of STV in the Isle of Man can also be attributed to factors other than those mentioned above. Firstly, the implementation of STV was done in a piecemeal manner. The Butler Commission had recommended STV alongside a reform of constituency boundaries and the establishment of 3 member constituencies. Instead, STV was largely grafted onto the pre-existing constituencies which elected a range of one to three representatives. Accordingly, problems regarding the ‘equality’ of votes between constituencies in the Isle of Man continued with the introduction of STV. Secondly, the reintroduction of ‘plumping’ led to a recurrence of problems which had existed prior to the introduction of STV.

The Isle of Man has now returned to holding elections under FPTP with multi-member constituencies. However, a select committee established by the Isle of Man Legislative Council is currently considering the electoral system for Isle of Man elections.

ESTONIA

It is worth mentioning the use of STV in Estonia as the country was, for a short time, the exception to the rule that STV was only used in countries with a British imperial background. STV was used for local elections in December 1989 and for a national election in 1990. The use of STV clearly occurred at a time of significant social, political and regime change within Estonia and Eastern Europe more generally. The choice of STV for elections was a compromise decision made by the major political parties in Estonia at that time. These were: the Communist Party of Estonia (CPE), Popular Front of Estonia (PFE), and the Joint Council of Work Collectives (JCWC). Taagepera (1998) comments on the reason for this compromise as follows:

“It [STV] was adopted because it satisfied the Communist need to avoid party lists and labels while still leading to vague proportional representation. The district magnitude (seats per constituency) was left to the discretion of local powerholders, which satisfied the JCWC, because they could and did chose one-seat districts in the north-east, reducing STV to Australian-type alternative vote” (p.30).

The rules surrounding the use of STV also varied from those used in other countries. As noted in the above quote, the number of candidates elected in each constituency varied from one to five candidates with the number of candidates from each seat being determined by local county and local authorities. A legacy of the Soviet era was that a turnout of at least 50% was required before an election result could be considered valid. In addition, the electoral rules also required that:

“a candidate must attain 50% of the first place votes in order to win election. If not, then a runoff election was to be held in which the top two contenders were to be pitted against one another (if there were ties between three or more candidates for first place and two or more candidates for second place, then the number of second place votes received acted as a tie breaker, and so on” (Ishiyama 1996, p.493).

In the context of the socio-political upheaval in Estonia during the time-period when STV was used it is not entirely surprising that the electoral system was changed. A number of reasons have been posited for this decision. Taagepera (1998) notes that some parties criticised STV for weakening emerging party structures whilst also commenting:

“many Estonians were uneasy about their inability to figure out how the votes were converted into seats, and they suspected opportunity for fraud, although no formal complaints were lodged” (p.31).

Ishiyama (1996) also notes that STV was perceived as inhibiting the emergence of political parties and noted that this made STV “dangerous for a country beset by regionalism and the potential for ethnic conflict” (p.499).

OVERVIEW

Consideration of the practice of using STV demonstrates the wide range of variation in both the rules underpinning STV and of the differing electoral outcomes which STV has produced in different settings. As Farrell and McAllister (2003c) note, STV “is probably more accurately described as an evolving family of vote counting rules rather than a single rule” (p.6). The limited number of cases of countries using STV and the variations in how STV has been applied ensures that caution should be exercised when seeking to make generalisations regarding the operation of STV. In addition, the review of the locations where STV has been used demonstrates that particular outcomes are not determined by STV. For example, multi-partism can develop in Ireland whilst a two-party system flourishes in Malta. In this sense, the electoral system does not determine particular outcomes but rather how voters use the system which will vary from location to location. As Gallagher (1998) observes:

“STV tends to arouse strong feelings among both supporters and opponents. The evidence suggests that its advocates may be unduly optimistic about the consequences expected to flow from the adoption of STV, while few if any of the fears of critics have much substance” (p.6).

Nevertheless, some limited areas of commonality can be suggested from the consideration of the previous cases. Firstly, STV tends to produce reasonably proportional results and certainly more proportional results than FPTP. Secondly, STV appears effective at maintaining linkages between politicians and local communities and indeed it is often criticised for fostering too

localistic a political culture. Thirdly, whilst voters appear not to have any difficulty voting in STV elections there have been cases, for example in the Isle of Man, where the issue of whether voters understand how results are arrived at has been of concern. Lastly, electoral campaigns under STV can also involve intra-party campaigning as well as inter-party campaigning although evidence of party coherence and governmental stability does not appear to be affected.

The limited application of STV to former British empire countries is related to the connection which the system makes between obtaining relatively proportional results and maintaining a connection between elected representatives and constituencies. However part of the reason for the limited uptake of the system appears to rest on the power which STV provides to voters at the expense of political parties. This position can be summarised as follows:

“STV, unlike other PR systems, does not guarantee (though in practice it delivers) proportional representation of parties. Indeed, unlike PR list systems, it does not presuppose the existence of political parties, and underpinning the arguments of some of its most avid proponents one can detect a degree of hostility to the idea that cohesive, disciplined parties should be at the centre of modern democratic politics. Given that in practice electoral rules are decided by parties – or at least, parties control the options that get onto the agenda – it is perhaps not surprising that no established democracy has switched from another electoral system to STV” (Gallagher 1998, p.5).

SOURCES

All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution. (2002) *Seventh Progress Report: Parliament*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Australian Constitution [Online]. Available at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/general/constitution/index.htm> [Accessed 30 October 2003]

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland [Online]. Available at: <http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/>

Butler, D. (1980) *Report of the Commission on the Representation of the People Acts*. Isle of Man: Tynwald.

Chalmers, J. (2002) *Australian Capital Territory Election of 20 October 2001*. Australian Journal of Political Science 37(1) 2002, p 165-168.

Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. eds. (1999) *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*. London: Routledge.

Draft Local Governance (Scotland) Bill: Consultation. (2003) Edinburgh: Scottish Executive. Available at: <https://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/localgov/dlgsc-00.asp>

Electoral Reform Society [Online]. Available at: <http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/votingsystems/STV>

Ellis, T. (1998) *Elections to the Dail Eireann: Reflections on the Report on the Irish Constitution*. Representation 34(1) 1998, p 70-75.

Farrell, D. (2001) *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Farrell, D. and McAllister, I. (2003a) *The Place of Preferential Voting: Electoral System Design and Voting*. [Forthcoming].

Farrell, D. and McAllister, I. (2003b) *Electoral Systems*. In: McAllister, I., Dowrick, S. and Hassan, R. eds *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Sciences in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Farrell, D. and McAllister, I. (2003c) *The 1983 Change in Surplus Vote Transfer Procedures for Australian Senate and its Consequences for STV*. Australian Journal of Political Science [Forthcoming].

Farrell, D., MacKerras, M. and McAllister, I. (1996) *Designing Electoral Institutions: STV Systems and their Consequences*. Political Studies 44 1996, p 24-43.

Fenech, D. (2003) *The Maltese EU Referendum and General Election*. West European Politics 26(3) 2003, p 164.

Gallagher, M. (1996) *Electoral systems*. In: Constitution Review Group. *Report of the Constitution Review Group*. Dublin: Irish Stationery Office.

- Gallagher, M. (1998) *The Single Transferable Vote – An Assessment*. Representation 34(1) 1998, p 2-6.
- Gallagher, M. (2003a) *Ireland: the Strange Fascination of PR-STV*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Gallagher, M. (2003b) *The (Relatively) Victorious Incumbent under PR-STV: Legislative Turnover in Ireland and Malta*. In: Bowler, S. and Grofman, B. *Elections in Australia, Ireland and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Gallagher, M. and Komito, L (1999) *The Constituency Role of TDs*. In: Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. eds *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.
- Galligan, Y. (1999) *Women in politics*. In: Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. eds *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.
- Hirczy de Mino, W. and Lane, J. (1999) *Malta: STV in a Two-party System*. In: Bowler, S. and Grofman, B. *Elections in Australia, Ireland and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Independent Commission on the Voting System. (1998) *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System*. CM 4090. London: Stationery Office. Available at: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm40/4090/4090.htm>
- Ishiyama, J. (1996) *Electoral Systems Experimentation in the New Eastern Europe: The Single Transferable Vote and the Additional Member System in Hungary*. East European Quarterly 39(4) 1996, p 487-507.
- Katz, R. (1980) *A Theory of Parties and Electoral Systems*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Kennedy, F. (2002) *Elite Level Co-ordination of Party Supporters: an Analysis of Irish Aggregate Data, 1987-1997*. Representation 38(4) 2002, p 284-293.
- Kermode, D. (2001) *Offshore Island Politics: the Constitutional and Political Development of the Isle of Man in the Twentieth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Kermode, D. (2002) *Government in the Isle of Man: Tynwald and the Manx Council of Ministers*. Parliamentary Affairs 55(4) 2002, p 682-698.
- Lijphart, A. (1987) *The Demise of the Last Westminster System? Comments on the Report of New Zealand's Royal Commission on the Electoral System*. Electoral Studies 6 1987, p 97-103.
- Lucy, D. (1994) *Northern Ireland: Local Government Election Results 1993*. Lurgan: Ulster Society Publications.
- Malta. (1990) *Government White Paper of 1990: Reforming Malta's Electoral Laws*. Available at: <http://www.maltadata.com/white.htm>
- Marsh, M. (2003) *Candidate Centred but Party Wrapped: Campaigning in Ireland Under STV*. In: Bowler, S. and Grofman, B. *Elections in Australia, Ireland and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.

- MacKerras, M. (1998) *Single Transferable Vote Systems in Australia*. Representation 34(1) 1998, p 62-69.
- McBride, J. (1998) *Positive Aspects of PR-STV for the Irish Political System*. Representation 34(1) 1998, p 7-12.
- Mitchell, P (1999) *The Party System and Party Competition*. In: Mitchell, P. and Wilford, R. eds *Politics in Northern Ireland*: Queens University Belfast, Westview Press.
- Mitchell, P. (2001) *Transcending an Ethnic Party System? The Impact of Consociational Governance on Electoral Dynamics and the Party System*. In: Wilford, R. ed *Aspects of the Belfast Agreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, P. and Gillespie, G. (1999) *The Electoral Systems*. In: Mitchell, P. and Wilford, R. eds *Politics in Northern Ireland*. Queens University Belfast: Westview Press.
- Newman, T. (1998) *Tasmania's Unique Electoral System*. Representation 34(1) 1998, p 37-42.
- Parliament of Australia* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/>
- Parliament of Tasmania* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/>
- Sinnott, R. (1999) *The Electoral System*. In: Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. eds *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.
- Taagepera, R. (1998) *STV in Transitional Estonia*. Representation 34(1) 1998, p.29-36.
- Tasmanian Parliamentary Library. (2003) *House of Assembly Elections* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/backg/HA Elections.htm>
- Tynwald [Online]. Available at: <http://www.tynwald.org.im/>
- Tynwald Court. (1994) *Representation of the People – Single Transferable Vote System: Transcript of Proceedings, 18th January 1994*. Isle of Man: Tynwald.
- Weeks, L. (2003) *The Irish Parliamentary Election, 2002*. Representation 39(3) 2003, p 215-225.