The Question of Electoral Reform in Established Democracies

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What is ‘electoral reform’?

• A change in some feature of electoral system design
  – A reduction in district magnitude (M)
  – Redesign of the ballot paper (BS)
  – A shift from one divisor to another (EF)

• A fundamental shift from one electoral family to another
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<th>Plur/maj</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
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Sub-national reforms in Anglo-Saxon democracies….
- Australia: ACT moves from List to STV
- New Zealand: shift from SMP to STV for local elections
- UK: regional parliaments by MMP; Scottish local elections shift from SMP to STV
- Canada’s provinces adopt MMP or (potentially) STV systems
How not to run an electoral reform process

• Case 1: The Netherlands
• Motivation?
  – “Accountability” of politicians
  – Coalition stitch-up?
• Proposed system
  – Mixed system (MMP)
  – SNTV for district seats
  – Open list for list seats

Subsequent Citizens’ Assembly looks like recommending “no change”

Started for the wrong reasons?
Designed by civil servants
Lack of consultation
Late engagement with experts
Stupid system (too complex)
How not to run an electoral reform process

• Case 2: United Kingdom
• Motivation?
  – “Fairness” of election result, or
  – Coalition stitch-up?
• Terms of reference
  – “broad proportionality”
  – Stable government
  – Voter choice
  – MP-voter link
• Proposed system
  – Mixed system (MMP) (17.5% list seats)
  – AV for district seats
  – Semi-open list for list seats
The proposed ballot paper

Germany

Australia

Belgium
How not to run an electoral reform process

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Started for the wrong reasons?
Restrictive terms of reference
Weak consultation
Poor use of experts
Stupid system (too complex)
Why change?

Reform of new ‘non-sticky’ systems
PR cases: concerns over accountability
Non-PR cases: concerns over ‘fairness’
Corruption scandal

How to change?

Who sets the agenda?
Who drafts the new system?
What scope to amend the draft?
Ultimately who decides?

Change to what?

Path-dependency?
Elite control of the agenda?
Role of ‘experts’?
Fashion?
… and what do the electoral system specialists think….

Expert rankings of electoral systems

Conclusions?

• How ‘value’ driven is the process?
• Significance of…
  – Circumstances
  – Actors
  – Expediency