

# Political Parties Working Group

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# 1. Members

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## 2. Research question

- What is the impact of electoral systems on political parties?
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# What is the role of political parties?

- 1) generating or collecting ideas and turning them into a coherent, comprehensive *political platform*
- 2) getting their *candidates elected* to public office to implement that platform
- 3) encouraging *public debate* on policy options by giving voice to citizens
- 4) *ensuring that they are ready to govern* when and if they're called to do so.

Source: Rethinking political parties Graham Fox, 2005, pg 13.

## 3. Main issues

- Impact of electoral system on
  - A) Candidates**
    - i) Number of parties
    - ii) Presence of independents and smaller parties
  - B) Campaign Focus**
    - Focus of campaign 1) national vs. local  
2) ideology vs. candidate
  - C) Campaign Style: Conflict**
    - Conflict between parties
    - Conflict within parties

# A) Candidates: # of parties

## i) # of parties:

### We thought greater # of parties:

- would increase voter choice.
- would also change the structure of the campaign.
- expressed concern about possibly opening up legislature to extremist fringe parties

### Key Research Findings:

- Certain electoral systems produce more effective parties
- There are key variations within electoral systems

# Candidates: # of parties cont.

Number of parties:

-PR systems produce more effective\* parties

Average # of parties in electoral families\*\*:

PR systems      3.6

FPTP              2.0

Majoritarian    2.8

\*"effective" measurement takes number of and relative size of party into account. There are other measurements of parties.

\*\*Comes from Lijphart's 1994 study of advanced, industrialized democracies

# # of parties cont.

- Variation within electoral family:
  - Within PR: party list has more effective parties than STV.
  - # is affected by design elements within Electoral systems:  
i.e. Spain and Poland are both party list PR but have low # of parties because of
    - DM:** Spain low DM= # of effective parties <3
    - threshold:** Poland high at 7%=# of effective parties 3
  - Geography:** smaller parties can do well in FPTP if they're regionally concentrated (i.e nationally Bloc Quebecois)

# Candidates: independents/small parties

## **Independents and smaller parties**

We thought:

- Independents/ special interest parties were generally positive as they increase amount of voter choice
- expressed some concern about the effect of overly radical special interest parties in the legislature

## **Research Findings:**

- STV most likely to produce independents because candidates are more likely to run. Ireland has 15 (9%) independents in parliament.
- PR encourages smaller parties/independents to run because they're more likely to get elected
- FPTP smaller parties and independents less likely to run, because less likely to get elected

## B) Campaign Focus

- National or Local  
Local campaigns

We thought:

Pro:     -local campaigns would promote higher engagement in  
democratic process

-know who candidate is, easier to contact

con:     -Possibly too narrowly focused

# Campaign focus cont:

## National campaigns

We thought:

- Pro:        -broader scope, wider perspective  
              -Lots of issues may not need regional basis, i.e  
              value based decisions, possibly healthcare.
- Con:        -local issues could easily get ignored

# Campaign Focus cont.

- **Research findings: Regional Focus and ideology**

Regional focus:

- PR systems tend to have more nationally focused campaigns:  
i.e. When New Zealand changed to MMP had more national campaign than under FPTP
- Regionally, FPTP campaigns tend to focus on marginal seats rather than safe seats

## **Ideology vs. candidate based focus**

- PR systems tend to have more ideologically based campaigns whereas FPTP has a more candidate centered campaign

# C) Campaign Style: Conflict

- Conflict in Campaign

Can be between parties and within parties

-can be positive (outlining different views on issues, platforms)

-can be negative (personality focus, name calling)

What we thought:

-expressed huge dissatisfaction with name calling, dirty campaigns, dishonest of politicians, broken campaign promises

-thought that charismatic leadership was an important factor in campaigning

-competition within parties could produce better candidates (more voter choice)

-competition within parties could also produce less effective parties

# Campaign Style: Conflict Cont.

- Research Findings on Campaign Conflict

Any open list system (PR, STV) can lead to conflict within parties because there's competition for seats between party members.

-FPTP, because of focus on national leaders, tends to emphasize party coherence (vs. divergent views)

# Political Culture

- Electoral system NOT the only factor
- Political culture is an important variable

The incentives that parties and voters are used to still tend to affect voter and party behaviour even when a new system appears.

i.e. New Zealand: when they moved to MMP people were uneasy with concept of coalition government; they did want more proportional results but also wanted majority government

# Parties affect electoral systems too!

- Parties can also affect the operation of the political system
    - through *political culture*
    - positive and negative campaigning a factor of political culture. Culture is a major factor in the degree of party conflict.
    - through *quotas* (affects representation of Women and other groups)
- Some electoral systems increase party influence:
- PR systems are more party focused so parties get power in selecting candidates (especially closed list PR)

# Parties affect electoral systems too!

## -coalition intentions

if parties announce coalition intentions *during campaign*  
people are less uneasy with electoral systems that  
produce coalitions (the New Zealand example)

## 4. Research Overview

- Electoral systems provide incentives for parties
  - Run for office
  - To focus on national or local issues
  - To engage in positive or negative campaigning
  - To campaign against fellow party members
- Impact of electoral system on:
  - Number of parties
  - Independents and smaller parties
  - Campaign Focus: Regional vs. national/Ideology vs.candidate
- Impact of political culture

## 5. Discussion Questions

-Questions for CA members and to take to our communities:  
Consultation questions

Do we *value*:

- **larger or smaller number of parties?**
- **giving voice to independents and smaller parties?**
- **regional or national campaigns?**
- **competition within parties? Between parties?**
- **stronger parties or weaker parties?**
- **special interest parties or brokerage or umbrella parties?**

# Now What?

**Further Discussion?  
Questions/Comments?  
Through the Discussion Board!**