2
LOCAL ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Michael Cole

Introduction
This chapter considers a variety of systems used to choose elected local representatives across
the globe, initially through four core themes. First, proportionality, the extent to which the
proportion of votes and seats obtained by each party equates and the presence or otherwise of
mechanisms to facilitate such alignments. Second, magnitude, the number of representatives
elected from each division and the implications for the proportionality of the outcomes. Third,
capacity to choose between candidates nominated by the same party; for example, through
varying the order on party lists or use of primaries to select candidates. Lastly, issues relating to
use when executive authority is vested in one individual, often a mayor. This discussion also
considers the deployment of run-off elections; an intensification of the focus on the personal
qualities of candidates; tendencies for such campaigns to focus on strategic rather than parochial
concerns; and the probability that they will diminish the influence of smaller political parties.

These themes are used to illuminate discussion of the main electoral systems deployed for
electing local representatives, which are classified as proportional; mixed; and non-proportional.
First, two proportional systems, the single transferable vote (STV) and party lists, are discussed:
the second category is sub-divided into open and closed lists, while variations within both sub-
categories, for example the Panachage model, are also addressed. Second, use of the additional
member system (AMS), which is a mixed model, is considered and variants on the core theme
of combining proportional and non-proportional elements are addressed. Third, the analysis
encompasses six non-proportional systems. Three of them, first past the post (FPTP), the block vote
(or multiple non-transferable vote, MNTV) and the single non-transferable vote (SNTV), lack mecha-
nisms to transfer votes between candidates. Alternatively, the other three non-proportional
systems, the alternative vote (AV); the supplementary vote (SV); and the second ballot, are preferential
systems constructed on the basis of transferring support from unsuccessful candidates to those
that are still competitive. This discussion is illustrated through a wide range of international
examples, which reference experience in many of the world’s most prominent democracies,
for example the USA, UK, France, Germany, India and Australia. It also draws on cases from
smaller established democracies such as Belgium and Switzerland; and uses examples from less
prosperous countries where democracy is often less well entrenched, for example Brazil, Papua
New Guinea, Colombia and Zambia.
Michael Cole

Discussion of the various electoral models also connects with broader themes of local government management because the choice of an electoral system has important implications for the operation of local governments. Most obviously, decisions to adopt specific systems have political governance effects, particularly through altering the probability of one party or multi-party administrations. There are also (of course) impacts on governance processes in terms of altering the capacity of one political elite to impose agendas and policies. Electoral systems will thus affect the operation and organisational cultures of local government.

There are also significant implications for how precisely the electorate is represented by politicians. Here, a core distinction is through magnitude, for example single member divisions are often praised in terms of creating a direct connection with voters, with one elected politician clearly obliged to represent the electorate in that area. Conversely, multi-member entities can dilute a sense of personal responsibility and accountability among representatives, but give constituents a choice of whom to approach. The capacity of elected politicians to represent distinctive and meaningful territorial communities is typically diminished or removed through the use of list systems.

Selection of electoral systems might additionally be interpreted as indicative of the democratic values and assumptions within which local governments operate. For example, non-proportional models are often justified in terms of facilitating the emergence of strong leadership with enhanced capacity to implement difficult decisions. Alternatively, mixed or proportional systems can be interpreted as reflective of aims to facilitate voter choice and promote fairness to both the electorate and political parties. Similarly, allowing voters to cast additional preferences can be perceived as facilitating voter choice and decision-making authority, in terms of ensuring that winning mandates are constructed on the basis of wider electoral support.

Overall, this chapter makes two core contributions to scholarship. First, and primarily, through identifying and assessing the main systems deployed for elections to local governments and illustrating this usage through a diversity of comparative examples from across the globe. Second, in terms of assisting in the development of a genuine comparative understanding of local electoral systems, for example in relation to usage variations and contemporary changes.

Electoral system themes

Proportionality

Electoral systems can be categorised into proportional, mixed and non-proportional groupings (see Table 2.1). Proportional (and mixed) electoral systems strive, at minimum, to ensure a reasonable approximation between the percentage of votes and representatives won by, at least, each of the main parties. Such systems incorporate mechanisms to push outcomes towards proportionality, for example D’Hondt counting procedures to determine allocation of seats among party lists; and regulations for transferring votes from eliminated or elected candidates towards those still engaged with the count. These arrangements have long been advocated on the basis of fairness and as a corrective to the tendency, as documented through Duverger’s Law (Cole 2005), of non-proportional systems to disadvantage small parties. Similarly, these electoral systems have been justified through increasing the number of people casting votes, or additional preferences, that contribute towards the election of a candidate.

Perhaps the most well-known non-proportional system is FPTP, where the candidate with the highest number of votes is elected. Alternatively, the process can continue through a second ballot run-off between the top two candidates. Similarly, systems such as the AV and SV oblige electors to rank candidates in order of preference so that support can be transferred without
Local electoral systems

Table 2.1 Main electoral systems

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<th>Categories</th>
<th>Specific electoral systems</th>
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<tr>
<td>Proportional</td>
<td>Single transferable vote (STV)</td>
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<td>Party lists</td>
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<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Additional member system (AMS)</td>
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<td>Non-proportional: non-transfer</td>
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<td>Block vote (multiple non-transferable vote, MNTV)</td>
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<td>Single non-transferable vote (SNTV)</td>
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<td>Non-proportional: transfer</td>
<td>Alternative vote (AV)</td>
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<td>Supplementary vote (SV)</td>
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<td>Second ballot</td>
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Staging a second ballot. What these and other non-proportional models (here the MNTV and SNTV) have in common is that voting occurs without recourse to procedures designed to improve alignments between each party’s votes and representation.

Limits on proportionality are, however, recognised explicitly in some proportional and mixed systems, particularly through minimum thresholds of support required for parties to secure at least one seat under list systems, which are usually established significantly above the level of mathematical proportionality. Such arrangements are typically justified in terms of preventing parties with allegedly fringe or extremist perspectives from securing representation and or reducing the chance of often maverick individuals obtaining seats and perhaps holding the balance of power between rival parties or coalitions. These thresholds can be substantial: for example, 5% in Germany and New Zealand in parliamentary elections (with an alternative of winning three constituency seats in Germany, or one in New Zealand), which use the mixed AMS model. Significant thresholds also emerge as informal statistical consequences of STV elections, the levels dependent on the number of representatives elected from each division and reflective of local concentrations of support. The electoral backing required to secure even one representative under STV can be substantial. For example, a four member constituency, assuming use of a Droop model, would have an electoral quota of 20% of the vote + 1, although not all winning candidates reach that level, even after the transfers have been completed. Parties with evenly distributed support notably below quota thus struggle to secure representation under STV.

Electoral systems also involve voters in tactical considerations, typically how to stop specific individuals/parties and or secure election of the best realistic option, rather than their preferred candidate. Such considerations are well documented concerning FPTP, for example in UK elections (Johnston and Pattie 2011). Tactical calculations also affect voting decisions under other models, for example through guesses about which candidates have enough support to reach run-off elections or secure AV or SV transfers; estimates regarding who is likely to benefit most from first preferences under STV; or speculation about the probable distribution of list seats and so how an individual’s vote might be most effective.

Magnitude

Magnitude concerns the number of representatives allocated to a distinctive geographic area and ranges from single-member divisions to lists covering the whole territory governed by the parliament, assembly or council. Magnitude has significant implications for the proportionality of electoral outcomes and the number of parties securing representation.
Michael Cole

For example, moving from FPTP to the Block Vote typically diminishes proportionality; in such circumstances dominant parties can often exploit aggregate strength to increase further their share of representatives. In contrast, parties with concentrations of support across smaller geographic areas often find their enclaves overwhelmed and struggle to win seats. Alternatively, under proportional systems, larger magnitudes increase outcome proportionality. As Gallagher (1991: 44) commented: ‘as district magnitude approaches infinity, so the outcome produced by every PR formula approaches perfect proportionality’.

Intra-party choice

Electoral systems vary in terms of whether they allow voters to select between candidates of the same party. A notable mechanism of such intra-party choice is the primary contest to choose party nominees for specific offices. For example, in the USA normally all voters registered as Republican or Democrat, and sometimes those designated as Independents, can participate. Elsewhere, as in selecting some Conservative candidates prior to the 2010 and 2015 UK parliamentary elections, the choice involved the whole local electorate (Sparrow 2009); the UK not having electoral registration incorporating party affiliation. Intra-party choice can also occur through, for example, the block vote, where several representatives are chosen for a division at one election. Choice arises specifically from the frequent tendency of some parties to run more than one candidate. However, given the inclination of many voters to identify closely with one party, such choice can seem illusory as many feel an imperative to support all the candidates from their preferred party in order to maximise its representation.

List systems vary in terms of intra-party choice. Many operate as closed arrangements, whereby voters are presented with a pre-determined ranking and invited to endorse the whole list and so the candidates high enough to have a realistic chance of election. Alternatively, open systems enable voters ‘to indicate a preference for one candidate (or sometimes several candidates) on their party’s list’ (Gallagher and Mitchell 2009: 10). STV also allows voters choice between candidates of the same party, albeit within two recurrent constraints. First, parties often encourage supporters to rank candidates in a designated order to prevent unfavourable distributions of first preferences, and subsequent transfers, diminishing their representation. Second, fear of splitting their first preferences, and lack of enthusiasm among some supporters to rank large numbers of candidates, often means that parties stand the maximum number of individuals they might expect to elect rather than contest all the vacancies, thus constraining voter choice. Both of these effects are evident in elections in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. As Mair and Laver (1975: 492) commented, when ‘votes begin to “leak” away from it during the transfer process . . . nomination strategy becomes crucial’.

Executive elections

There are also distinctive issues when the election conveys executive authority on one individual, often a directly elected mayor. Such executive mayors can be contrasted with ceremonial mayors; who lack significant powers and who are often selected on the basis of length of service. As well as having substantive relevance for core governance themes, such as the location of political authority and effectiveness of accountability and scrutiny structures, there are notable implications for the electoral process. First, mayoral elections often involve some form of run-off mechanism, either in terms of an instant process or a second ballot (see, for example, Cole 2001b). Second, vesting executive authority in one individual places an emphasis on the qualities, charisma and profile of the candidates that, for some voters at least,
Local electoral systems

can eclipse policy agendas. Individuals can thus be elected in territories with demographic profiles and psephological records favourable to rival parties. The triumph of Boris Johnson twice (2008 and 2012) in London is a recent example. Similarly, this spotlight on individuals can facilitate election of independents; an effect heightened through contemporary scepticism of, and hostility towards, established political elites. Third, mayoral contests can instinctively draw attention towards themes relevant to the whole authority and away from controversies affecting only parts of the territory. This interpretation implies, therefore, a dynamic favouring articulation of strategic agendas over more parochial matters. Fourth, mayoral elections can diminish substantially the influence exercised by small parties. Vesting executive authority in one individual typically means that power is concentrated into the hands of a politician from one of the larger parties. This reform thus removes, or substantially reduces, the possibility that executive decisions will result from bargains among politicians of different parties operating in a council where no one party has a majority. In other words, the mayoral model places executive authority into the hands of one person.

Some of these themes are also relevant to other cases in which individuals with personal executive authority are chosen, for example police and crime commissioners in England and Wales and a plethora of local contests in the USA. In particular, considerations of the strategic over the parochial are relevant alongside heightened electoral impacts derived from the personal qualities of specific candidates. Such contests routinely use some form of run-off mechanism.

Electoral systems

The single transferable vote

STV elections are conducted through multi-member electoral divisions. Voters are invited to rank each candidate in order of preference; individuals are elected when they reach a quota of votes determined through the number of seats and turnout. Alternatively, candidates are often elected at the end of the counting process without reaching quota provided they cannot be overtaken by a sufficient number of rivals. Each elector has one vote, which is allocated initially to their first preference. When candidates are elected their surplus votes (the number above quota) indicating a preference for a candidate still in the contest are transferred. Similarly, when candidates are eliminated all their votes are transferred unless a preference has not been expressed for any of those candidates still contesting a seat.

STV is advocated in terms of diminishing the alleged quantity of wasted votes that do not contribute to the election of any candidate; generating more proportional correlations between votes and seats secured by each party; and enabling voters to exercise intra-party choice. Divisional magnitudes often range from four to perhaps ten; the larger end of the spectrum typically achieves more proportional outcomes. STV is not applicable for elections conveying executive authority on one individual; STV applied to a single member division or office is AV.

Use of STV in local elections is most prevalent where it is also deployed for higher tier authorities. The most obvious case is the Irish Republic, which uses STV throughout its governmental structures. Here, local STV elections are through Local Election Areas (LEAs) which return six to ten councillors. The City of Cork, which also has four and five councillor LEAs, is the exception. In Malta, a tradition of using STV for parliamentary elections since 1921 was reflected in the adoption of STV for local elections following enactment of legislation, in 1993, which enabled local councils to be established.

In New Zealand, contemporary use of STV at local level was reflective of a reform agenda, instituted through the Local Electoral Act (2001), which made STV mandatory for District
Health Boards and enabled local authorities to adopt the system, although few made the shift. In 2016, STV was used by eight out of 78 local councils including Dunedin City, Palmerston North City and Wellington City. Implementation of STV was not, however, inspired by parliamentary elections, which had used FPTP until 1996 and then a mixed (AMS) system. This reform might, however, be interpreted as reflective of a limited tradition of STV in early twentieth century local elections, for example STV was used by Christchurch City Council (1917–1933). Similarly, in Australia STV is deployed for local elections in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

In Northern Ireland, STV was used from 1921 for elections to the Stormont Parliament until 1929, when the Unionist Government introduced FPTP for elections to the House of Commons, a decision intended to reinforce partisan advantage. STV was, however, retained for electing Senators, which occurred through votes in the House of Commons. STV was re-introduced into Northern Ireland in 1973, in response to the re-emergence of armed conflict, and has been deployed for elections to devolved assemblies, the European Parliament and local authorities. UK experience with STV was augmented from 2007 with its implementation for Scottish local elections (Bennie 2006).

Elsewhere, STV has been used in Canadian local elections, specifically in parts of Alberta (Calgary, Edmonton and Medicine Hat) between 1926 and 1955; and Manitoba, for example Winnipeg, from the 1920s until 1958. In the early twentieth century, STV was adopted by over 20 US cities including Cleveland (Ohio), Hamilton (Ohio), Cincinnati (Ohio), Boulder (Colorado), Lowell (Massachusetts), Sacramento (California) and New York City, a reform instrumental in challenging the Tammany Hall political machine. STV had, nevertheless, mostly been abandoned by 1960, although in New York the Community School Boards retained STV until their abolition in 2002.

Currently, STV is restricted to two US municipalities. Since 1941, STV has been used in the City of Cambridge (Massachusetts), currently for elections to the Council and the School Committee, while STV was adopted in 2009 for elections to the Estimate and Taxation; and Park and Recreation Boards of the City of Minneapolis (Minnesota). In recent decades, campaigns to introduce STV elsewhere in cities such as Cincinnati and San Francisco have been unsuccessful. However, experience in Cambridge remains a beacon for US electoral reformers, change, for example, advocated through effectiveness in securing representation for ethnic minorities and women (Douglas 2013).

**Party lists**

Candidate lists are presented by each party and seats allocated according to vote share, although proportionality is often diminished through minimum vote percentage thresholds below which parties fail to secure representation. There are substantial variations concerning intra-party choice, open systems allow voters to alter candidate rankings; closed models specify a fixed order. Similarly, list magnitudes vary significantly, for example some covering the whole territory, others a quite small geographic segment. Scale variations can affect proportionality. Lists are not suitable for electing one person with executive authority, such as a mayor.

Both open and closed lists are in widespread use, with some countries applying elements of both approaches. For example, in Colombia, municipal councillors are chosen through an optional open list with the parties determining whether their lists are open or closed. Alternatively, in Brazil genuinely open lists are deployed in elections at federal, state and local tiers, although often those lists reflect coalition agreements between two or several parties. A variation on open lists is the Panachage model whereby electors have more than one vote
for each contest and are able to distribute them across individuals on contrasting party lists. Panachage was used for Belgium municipal elections until 1976. Similarly, in Switzerland local and other elections give voters a substantial degree of choice. As well as the ability to write the name of candidates from another party onto their preferred list, electors can delete names from that list and or insert names twice. However, amended lists may not contain more names than seats being contested.

Closed lists are in widespread use: for example, in Croatia members of county, city and municipal councils are elected through a closed list the size of the entire territory. However, constitutional obligations to ensure representation of minorities meant that electoral committees are required to determine whether the relevant ethnic quotas have been reached and, if not, to appoint individuals from the appropriate groups to the authority from the pool of defeated candidates. Similarly, closed lists apply for elections to French communes with more than 1,000 inhabitants in a hybrid model that also involves a second ballot if no list wins an absolute majority in the first round. In South Africa, lists, used as components of a mixed member system, contain the party name and a picture of the party leader but not identities of specific candidates. These arrangements deny voters both intra-party choice of candidates and knowledge of candidate identities, but can facilitate election of minority candidates who might struggle under more transparent processes. Closed party lists are also used to elect representatives to councils of the municipalities and communes in Albania and local and county councils in Romania.

**Mixed systems**

The model combines proportional and non-proportional elements in a two stage process and is often discussed as the additional member system (AMS). Electors have two votes, one for a FPTP constituency representative and one for a party list. List support determines the overall allocation of party representation, and operates as a corrective mechanism to rectify disproportionality derived from the constituency results. Candidates are elected from the lists to secure the overall proportionality of the outcome, procedures that can mean that the most popular parties return few or no list representatives. Reliance on the lists to create broadly proportional outcomes, means that the quantity of representatives selected through those lists is important. For example, election of two-thirds of Welsh Assembly Members (AMs) through FPTP constituencies has meant that the list corrective is too small to effectively counterbalance Labour’s disproportionate strength in those FPTP constituencies (Cole 2001a; McAllister and Cole 2014). Alternatively, in South Africa a 50–50 split between list and constituency representation means that its local electoral system has a greater capacity to diminish disproportionality arising from FPTP contests. Individual list magnitudes can be quite substantial in both absolute and percentage terms, for example the single list used in London Assembly elections covers the whole Greater London area and returns 11 members, almost half of the total.

Reflective of arrangements at higher tiers, in German county and municipal elections mixed systems are used. Councillors are elected through FPTP constituencies and as party list representatives. Representation through these lists has not, however, generally been dependent on obtaining minimum thresholds, particularly as the Constitutional Court has been keen to strike them down as constitutional violations, for example in relation to a 5% threshold in Schleswig-Holstein (Kommers and Miller 2012: 262). In some other mixed (AMS) systems minimum list thresholds have not been perceived as desirable or necessary, for example for the London Assembly, despite the election of a British National Party (BNP) AM in 2008. In contrast, Lesotho has used a mixed system at local level since 2005, within the context of a 2004 reform which reserved 30% of the seats in each council for women.
Non-proportional and non-transfer systems

Candidates who obtain the most votes are declared the victor regardless of the proportion of the vote they acquire. Under FPTP and the block vote, the number of votes allocated to each elector reflects the number of representatives to be elected at that specific election. FPTP concerning the election of one representative, block vote contests involving election of two or more individuals. Both FPTP and the block vote can generate highly disproportional outcomes, however intra-party choice is usually possible under the block vote.

These models are used for almost all local elections in England, Wales and the USA. Coverage is also extensive in Canada, where they are deployed to elect single tier and lower tier councillors. However, members of the regional tier, which is inserted between provincial and municipal governments in provinces such as Ontario and Quebec, are seldom directly elected but selected from municipal mayors and councillors. Alternatively, in Cyprus FPTP elections for mayors are an anomaly in an otherwise proportional electoral system (Kolasa-Sikiaridi 2016).

These models have, however, been adopted extensively in many developing Commonwealth countries, for example for parish elections in Jamaica. In Zambia, use for local government was reflective of a uniform approach to the country’s elections, contests for the president, MPs and councillors being part of a tripartite process, all held on the same day. India elects all its local councillors through such contests, while institutionalising one-third of reserved seats for women, stipulated through a constitutional amendment and increased to 50% in some states, as well as guaranteeing representation for specific castes and tribes, which is determined on a local basis. In Botswana, local elections use a standardised FPTP system, where all the country’s local representatives are chosen from single member wards. Furthermore, in 2003 the block vote was introduced in the smaller Luxembourg municipalities (Van der Kolk 2007: 163).

Despite significant usage, the main narrative surrounding FPTP and Block Vote elections has concerned their deficiencies, for example through alleged wastage of votes, negative impacts on representation of women and minorities and distortion of popular preferences (see, for example, Lakeman 1982). Such criticisms have created significant reform movements in some countries, debates conducted on rarefied democratic and technical levels but also within contexts of partisan advantage and operational acceptability. These latter effects can be appreciated through reform in the UK. The introduction of STV for Scottish local elections (Clark and Bennie 2008) can, for example, be explained through a partisan interpretation: a reform reflecting the agenda of the Liberal Democrats and Labour’s need to reconstruct the coalition following the 2003 election. The change was also introduced as part of a deal among political elites and without popular endorsement through a referendum.

In contrast, the decision to re-constitute London-wide local government in 2000, after a 14 year hiatus, reflected an assumption that governance incorporating a pluralistic system of AMS was important to gain public assent, in a referendum, for reconstituting a tier of elected politicians. Operational acceptance can also be deployed to interpret the shift to STV in Northern Ireland in 1973; reform reflective of requirements to replace the previous model where gerrymandered ward boundaries and partisan franchise restrictions consolidated unionist dominance. Electoral reform was, therefore, a component of the wider response to the Troubles aimed at persuading at least some nationalists of the legitimacy of governing institutions.

Replacement of FPTP and the block vote has been a recurrent element of institutional and constitutional reform across the globe. For example, in South Africa the mixed (AMS) local electoral model was introduced as part of the negotiation processes that ended Apartheid and created a genuine multi-racial democracy. Similarly, in 1981 reforms in Cyprus meant that FPTP is restricted to mayoral contests, while, as discussed earlier, in 2001 New Zealand
Local electoral systems

passed legislation to compel district health boards and enable local authorities to switch to STV. A parallel reform occurred in Papua New Guinea which, in 2008, replaced FPTP with limited preferential voting (LPV), a transfer-based non-proportional system which gave voters three preferences.

The third distinctive electoral system is the SNTV. As under FPTP and the block vote, candidates are elected simply on the basis of securing more votes than their opponents. SNTV doesn’t, therefore, incorporate any mechanisms to generate proportional electoral outcomes or allow votes to be transferred between candidates. Like the block vote, SNTV relates to divisional magnitudes of greater than one and so potentially facilitates intra-party choice. However, in contrast to FPTP and the Block Vote, SNTV combines one vote with election of several representatives. These arrangements often present voters with major dilemmas concerning how to maximise representation of their favoured party. Similarly, parties can face parallel dilemmas about what strategies they can adopt to get the maximum number of their candidates elected. SNTV typically poses more acute tactical problems than are noted in relation to STV (Grofman et al. 1999), where transfers diminish negative impacts from splitting a party’s first preference votes between candidates. Perhaps for such reasons, SNTV is seldom used in local elections; the most prominent contemporary examples are for Japanese prefectural and municipal assemblies.

Non-proportional, transfer systems

These models enable voters to rank more than one candidate and procedures to transfer lower preferences to other candidates are integral to the process. There is no mechanism to compensate for disproportional outcomes accruing from amalgamation of results from many disparate contests and so no guarantee of even a rough equation between the percentage of seats and votes obtained by specific parties. In the three common variants, intra-party choice is absent given restriction to magnitudes of one. Capacity to indicate rankings of candidates and transfer votes, in the absence of proportional mechanisms, mean that these models can also be categorised as non-proportional preferential systems.

The main formats are the alternative vote (AV), the supplementary vote (SV) and the second ballot. Under AV, electors are permitted to vote for one candidate, and allowed to rank the remaining candidates in order of preference. Candidates securing more than 50% of the vote are elected outright, otherwise the candidate with fewest votes is eliminated and their preferences allocated to those that remain. Sometimes, several lowly ranked candidates are simultaneously eliminated provided that the sum total of their votes is less than that of the next lowest ranked candidate. This process continues until one candidate has passed the 50% threshold or the preferences from all apart from the top two candidates have been re-distributed. SV is a shortened version of AV in which voters indicate only first and second preferences. If no candidate obtains more than 50% of the vote on the basis of first preferences, the leading two candidates proceed to the second stage, the others are eliminated and their support transferred. Alternatively, in some systems voters are allowed to rank a higher but limited number of candidates.

Such preferential models are widely favoured for mayoral elections, where the level of personalised governmental authority being contested facilitates a consensus that victors need to be endorsed (at least through lower preferences) by more than a plurality of those who vote. This logic can be appreciated, for example, in the adoption of SV for choosing directly elected mayors in various English local authorities. Furthermore, SV has been introduced for the directly elected police and crime commissioners, which were established in England and Wales in 2012. Non-proportional preferential voting methods are also used widely in Australian states such
Michael Cole

as New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria to elect both councillors and mayors. Similarly, in Canada, Ontario has legislated to permit its municipalities to allow voters to rank candidates in local elections from 2018 (see, for example, Jones 2016).

AV contests could also emerge as a by-product of STV because AV equates to STV when only one candidate is to be elected. In by-elections for one representative in a multi-member constituency STV systems are, therefore, reconfigured into AV contests. However, co-option of substitutes, to retain the proportional balance from the previous contest, is often preferred, although such appointments can reflect a pre-determined hierarchy of defeated candidates from the relevant party. Co-option of individuals from the same party as the former member has been used to fill vacancies, for example, in local government contests in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Elsewhere, for example in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Malta, the countback system is deployed. Here, the ballot papers from the previous contest are examined to re-run the count excluding the former member. Alternatively, similar vacancies for one representative in Scottish local authorities and the Irish Dail, which also uses STV, are filled though AV by-elections. In New Zealand, AV is used where one councillor is to be elected in municipalities, such as Kapiti Coast District Council, which have adopted STV for multi-member wards but retain some single-member wards.

Similar electoral systems are deployed in US local government. In 2002, San Francisco passed an initiative establishing a model for most city-wide elections, whereby voters were able to rank three candidates for each position. It was first used in 2004 for selecting the student representative to the city’s school board (Hill and Richie 2005). It is now deployed for electing the board of supervisors, the mayor, the sheriff, the district attorney, the city attorney, the treasurer, the assessor-recorder and the public defender. Minneapolis uses a non-proportional preferential voting system to elect, for example, the mayor and the city council, a model introduced in 2009, following the passage of an initiative in 2005. Similarly, in 2008 Telluride (Colorado) adopted similar preferential voting arrangements for three subsequent mayoral elections from 2011 onwards (Slosson 2015).

Second ballot models typically involve voters casting one vote for their favoured candidate and, if nobody obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast, a second ballot is held usually two to three weeks later involving the top two candidates from the first round. This process is similar to AV and SV; however, voters are given more time for reflection than under AV or SV where the run-offs are instant and incorporated within the initial election.

Second ballot elections are deployed in the French communes, through the hybrid model which combines two ballots with party lists. Similarly, Brazil has provisions for second ballots in its municipal elections, however it reserves this option for cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants, which includes every state capital, for example Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Vitoria, plus 59 other cities. In contrast, Italian mayoral elections in cities with populations over 15,000 are conducted through the second ballot model, which is also used to determine which party or coalition receives a majority-bonus of seats on the council.

A distinctive format of second-ballot voting can be found in US primary elections, which were discussed earlier. A variant is the Louisiana jungle primary, through which all candidates for an office run together in one initial plurality contest, a mechanism normally giving Democrats and Republicans intra-party choice. If no candidate wins an absolute majority, the top two candidates, who might represent the same party, contest a second ballot.

Pure second ballot systems lack a proportional mechanism, although, in common with AV and SV, they ensure that the victor has a broader endorsement than, for example, FPTP can guarantee. This system is typically restricted to magnitudes of one, although as the Italian and French hybrids show, alternative scale applications have evolved. It has also been used widely
for electing individuals with personal executive authority, but seldom affords intra-party choice, unless primary elections are incorporated.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored some of the core themes relating to the electoral systems used in local elections across the globe, namely their proportionality; the contrasting representational magnitudes, capacity for intra-party choice; and use to elect one individual with personal executive authority, typically a directly elected mayor. Next; various electoral systems have been outlined, related to those themes and discussed in the context of examples from across the world.

This study illustrates the substantive variations in the type of systems used for local electoral contests and, therefore, implies notable divergences in the values and assumptions of local governance among democratic countries. Some models prioritising choice and fairness, others more readily interpreted as facilitating strong authority-wide leadership. Particularly, the analysis illustrates the substantive variations in voter choice, for example contrasts between open and closed lists; and capacity to signify preferences among all the candidates under STV, against ability to cast just one vote without further preferences in FPTP contests. Perhaps a core theme is that while some systems allow voters to choose between candidates of the same party, others only allow voters to choose between lists or individuals representing different political parties.

The chapter also highlights notable variations in the extent to which different electoral systems are deployed, for example while the use of STV is quite restricted, both open and closed lists are operational in a wide range of countries. Furthermore, while non-proportional systems remain widespread for local contests, particularly among countries with a clear Anglo-Saxon inheritance, there is a global reform trend to replace such models. This shift has been identified in countries as diverse as South Africa, Cyprus and New Zealand. It is also evident in the UK, where proportional models have been introduced for local elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the London Assembly, while FPTP has been eschewed in favour of SV for electing directly elected mayors and police and crime commissioners across England and Wales.

In illustrating the variety of contrasting electoral systems in use at local level, this chapter also supplies a potential tool for reformers by illustrating alternatives. Furthermore, by discussing the international trend to replace, in particular, FPTP and the block vote for local electoral contests, the analysis illustrates a significant change agenda. In addition, electoral reform might also be facilitated through evidence, presented here, of co-existence of several local electoral systems within a single country. In summary, this chapter has potential to stimulate debate on electoral reform.

References


