



Symposium Introduction

Elections Under the French Double-Ballot System: An Introduction

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The genesis of this mini-symposium was a conference on 20-23 June 2004 on 'Majoritarian and Runoff Electoral Systems' at the Château de la Bretesche in Missillac, Bretagne sponsored by the Albert and Elaine Borchard Foundation.¹ Additional support was provided by the University of California, Irvine's Center for the Study of Democracy² as part of its ongoing study of the operation and political consequences of the major electoral systems of the world.³ The conference was co-organized by Bernard Grofman (University of California, Irvine), Shaun Bowler (University of California, Riverside), and James Adams (University of California, Santa Barbara).⁴ Earlier versions of all four of the papers in this mini-symposium were given at the conference.⁵

Comparative elections research is a burgeoning topic in political science. The dramatic growth in the number of democracies, and the efflorescence of numerous variants of electoral rules used to elect national parliaments and other political leaders at all levels of government, has heightened interest in seeking to understand how voting rules operate, and their implications for voter choice, for candidates and political parties, and for governance and public policy outputs, more generally. Strong claims have been made about the effects of electoral systems on other variables such as party proliferation, strength of parties, government stability, minority representation, and incentives for localized and pork-barrel politics; and claims have been made that particular electoral rules are beneficial (or not) for the effective functioning of democracy, or appropriate (or not) for use in racially and ethnically divided societies.⁶

Double-ballot methods are used for parliamentary and presidential elections in France as well at the local level, for example in departmental and municipal contests. These methods, while important in their own right, also can be usefully viewed in comparative perspective as a close relative of the first-past-the-post (plurality) and runoff methods used around the world, most commonly in English-speaking nations. To understand the place of double-ballot

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rules in the family of electoral systems, several distinctions among electoral systems are helpful.

One useful distinction has to do with how many seats are filled in any given constituency: one or more than one.⁷

A second has to do with whether voters are asked to simply provide one or more *x*'s to indicate preferences, or whether they are required to rank order the candidates or parties. Systems with just *x*'s include simple *plurality*, plurality applied in multimember districts (known as *plurality bloc voting*), the *single non-transferable vote*, *approval voting* and *pure list proportional representation* (PR) where voters may only cast a party vote — like plurality, the latter two methods may also be used in both single seat and multiseat electoral constituencies. The two most important systems with rankings required are the *single transferable vote* (and its single seat special case, the *alternative vote*),⁸ and the *Borda count*.

A third distinction has to do with how many rounds of balloting might be required: never more than one, or sometimes more than one. Most voting rules can be completed in a single round; the French double-ballot system require two rounds of election, as do most other *runoff methods*; while there are a few runoff methods that require more than two rounds, such as the multiround sequential elimination procedure (MRSE).

Fourth, we may distinguish electoral systems in terms of their *threshold of exclusion*, the largest vote share a party (or candidate) can get and still be denied a seat in the legislature. The threshold of exclusion can be taken to be a measure of how proportional a voting rule is when viewed from a purely theoretical perspective. For a national legislature, the threshold of exclusion varies from a low of roughly $1/(S+1)$, where *S* is the number of seats in the legislature, which obtains in list PR systems that elect nationwide, to a maximum value of $1/2$, which applies to a national election under plurality bloc voting. However, calculating a threshold of exclusion is not always straightforward, since in some countries there are complex tiering rules that establish different degrees of proportionality at different levels of aggregation; while in others there are special thresholds of required nationwide support that affect eligibility to win seats locally.

A final distinction is whether an electoral system is *homogeneous*, that is, all of one type, or *mixed*, that is, with disparate elements, such as a combination of single member districts electing by plurality and a 'topping up' or supplementary procedure that uses proportionality criteria to select from party lists.

The French double-ballot systems, like simple plurality and the alternative vote and simple Borda, operate in the context of single seat elections. Like plurality, SNTV, and list PR, voters are asked to indicate preferences with *x*'s, rather than requiring alternatives to be ranked. Like simple plurality, and most

other methods, the French double-ballot systems are homogeneous systems. Unlike plurality and unlike most other methods, as well, in France a second round is required. Like plurality, the first round has a threshold of exclusion of $1/2$.

However, even among runoff methods that have the same threshold of exclusion and that involve two rounds of balloting there are important differences. One dimension of difference is in how many candidates advance to the second round. Here a variety of different rules apply in runoff elections around the world, including the 'top three' rule used in the US Electoral College in the absence of a candidate winning an Electoral College majority, and the 'top two' rule used in runoff elections in the US to select political party nominees in party primaries in many Southern states. In France, of course, in the parliamentary elections, only those candidates who have received at least one-eighth of the vote are eligible to advance; while in French presidential elections, only the 'top two' candidates may advance. A second dimension along which two-round runoff methods can be differentiated is in terms of the triggering condition for the second round. In France, and in runoffs in most countries, a runoff is required if no candidate gets a majority of the vote on the first round. In some countries, however (e.g. Cost Rica, for presidential elections), a runoff is required only if no candidate gets at least 40% of the vote.⁹

Since the double-ballot system for the presidency and that for the parliament differ in an important way, we believe it makes more sense from a comparative politics perspective to talk about double-ballot systems in France, rather than the double-ballot system. When we look at the double-ballot systems in France we may compare them to other systems in numerous ways;¹⁰ we can model incentives of voters, candidates, and parties from a rational choice perspective; and we can also do some natural experiments within the double-ballot context, by comparing behavior of both voters and candidates on the first and second rounds, on the one hand, or by comparing incentive structures in presidential and parliamentary elections, on the other. Also, we can look at interactions between elections at local or regional levels and national level elections. Various papers in this mini-symposium make use of each these strategies.

The Laurent-Dolez paper considers one of the classic questions in the electoral systems literature, the translation of votes into seats. It looks at how French double-ballot elections compare with patterns that have been found elsewhere, in particular the cube law. After careful testing, they reject the cube law in favor of a vote-to-seats equation that follows the fourth power law. Further, they argue that the French runoff system is effectively similar to a plurality system in the way it amplifies seats from votes.

The Fauvelle-Aymar and Lewis-Beck paper looks at how parties wishing to win elections can balance off incentives from first and second rounds. In particular they focus on how the introduction of the National Front into the

French parliamentary election equation changes the dynamics of France's classic bipolar multipartyism pattern. Traditional party coalitions of the left, in their effort to blunt FN support on the first round, do manage to decrease FN vote share, thus reducing its chances of going on to the next round. However, traditional right coalitions, unexpectedly, increase FN vote share in the first round. Such findings suggest that the strategy of the Gaullists (now the UMP) in seeking to form a catch-all party on the right has built-in limitations.

The Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziani paper looks at influences on French regional elections. They take up question of whether national or local issues are more important determinants of the vote, concluding the former dominate, particularly measures of unemployment and the Prime Minister's credibility. Surprisingly, the management character of the regional government seems to have no significant impact.

The Adams, Merrill and Grofman paper takes advantage of the natural experiment feature of the French double-ballot system to consider whether candidates appeared to have changed policy locations from the first to the second round, and attempts to deduce whether and how French politics might have been changed had the double-ballot system at the presidential level been replaced by a single-stage election. Examining the policy incentives for 1988 presidential candidates Barre, Chirac, and Mitterrand, they arrive at the provocative conclusion that the policy incentives of these competitive candidates would not have altered significantly, if the election had been one stage.

In sum, by covering a variety of different aspects of French elections, the four papers give us a multifaceted view of the French election process. The double-ballot system in France does appear to make for certain important differences in outcome. Party coalition incentives may become maddeningly problematic, as the National Front case illustrates. However, there are some unexpected similarities to single-ballot systems. The vote-to-seats equation may take a unique form, but its substantive consequences in terms of bias do not appear unusual. Despite the recent introduction of the second ballot into regional elections, the outcomes in those contests continue to be driven by essentially the same national political economic variables. Even the possibility of changing presidential elections from two ballots to one may not change the moderating incentives of the leading candidates very much. Of course, the last is a speculative counterfactual. The broader topic itself — the consequences of one vs two ballots — merits much more study. The papers at hand provide a good springboard for that additional study.

Notes

¹ We are deeply indebted to William Belling, Director of the Borchard Foundation, for hosting the conference at the Foundation's headquarters in the Chateau, and to his wife and daughters for

their role in facilitating the camaraderie and informal interchanges that made this such a delightful conference in which to participate.

² We also acknowledge our gratitude for the encouragement provided by Russell Dalton, then Director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, to carry out this project.

³ This work is reported by Grofman *et al.* (1999), Bowler and Grofman (2000), Shugart *et al.* (2001) and Grofman and Lijphart (2002). Conferences that will become the basis for a fifth volume, on plurality-based elections, are planned for 2005 and 2006 at the University of Montreal (under the direction of André Blais) and at the University of California, Irvine (under the direction of Shaun Bowler and Bernard Grofman).

⁴ We further acknowledge the helpful comments on the papers provided to the authors by Ian Budge (University of Essex), a conference attendee; and the invaluable conference logistic support provided by Professor Grofman's secretary, Clover Behrend.

⁵ The papers given at the conference on topics others than the double ballot system are being published elsewhere.

⁶ See for example, Lijphart and Grofman (1984); Grofman and Lijphart (1986); Taagepera and Shugart (1989); Lijphart (1994) and Cox (1997).

⁷ The number of seats up for election in any given constituency is called the *district magnitude*.

⁸ This method has recently been referred to in the US as the *instant runoff*.

⁹ In some former Soviet bloc countries, a majority of eligible voters were required, but where it is still in place that rule is now a leftover of the days of one-party dominance.

¹⁰ For example, the French double-ballot rules may be compared to the alternative vote method or to runoff rules used in other countries.

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