

# IRISH ELECTORAL POLITICS

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## ABSTRACT

*Why might South and Southern Africans find the Irish electoral experience especially relevant and instructive? Firstly, they may identify parallels with their own recent political history. Ireland's political institutions are the result of a post-colonial settlement and were designed to accommodate an ethnic minority. They survived a long period of one-party rule. Historically they were specially suited to the political predispositions of a mainly rural society. Secondly, Irish electoral arrangements offer to Southern Africans useful lessons for any effort to make political representatives more accountable to citizens. For better or for worse downwards accountability is an especially pronounced feature of Irish politics. This paper will explore Irish electoral experience and the insights it offers to advocates of electoral reform in Southern Africa.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ireland's electoral system was instituted in 1920, when the British established self-government in the territory. The British were concerned that the Protestant community should be adequately represented and hence adopted the single transferable voting system (STV) as a form of proportional representation. The system was preserved in the Irish Free State after the War of Independence in 1922 and its use in parliamentary and local authority polls was entrenched in the 1937 Constitution. With Malta and Estonia, Ireland is one of a very small group of countries that organise their parliamentary elections on the basis of STV. The system is also used for local and regional elections in Northern Ireland, in New Zealand municipalities and in certain state elections in Australia.

## POLITICAL LINEAGES

The two main Irish political parties, Fianna Fail (FF) and Fine Gael (FG), can trace their genealogies to the Irish civil war that followed the 1922 peace settlement with Britain. The treaty established an Irish Free State within the British Commonwealth partitioned from the six predominantly Protestant counties in Northern Ireland. The new dominion would maintain constitutional links to the British crown, allow the British navy to retain docking and supply facilities, and continue to pay for compensation of former landowners. The treaty split the Irish nationalist movement, with Sinn Fein, the party that had predominated in the 1921 election, taking every seat in Parliament. For the next decade the pro-treaty faction would constitute the Irish government. The anti-treaty faction, under the leadership of Eamonn de Valera, resumed guerrilla operations in a bitter fratricidal conflict that lasted for two years. In 1926 de Valera formed FF to contest the impending elections on an anti-treaty platform, leaving behind a more hard line Sinn Fein group that continued its commitment to a revolutionary war against partition. FF won a majority of parliamentary seats in 1932. Their opponents, the pro-treaty Cumann na nGaedheal, renamed themselves Fine Gael in 1933. De Valera's 1937 Constitution established a Republic, accorded to the Roman Catholic Church a special influence in public affairs, and included in its clauses commitment to eventual reunification with Northern Ireland.

Fianna Fail controlled Irish administrations until the 1950s, since which it and Fine Gael have alternated in and out of office with FG collaborating with coalition partners from its first entry into government and FF managing to win majorities of seats until 1982. An Irish Labour Party, the political wing of the trade union movement, founded in 1912, has occasionally assumed a junior role in coalitions. At present FF governs with the help of the Progressive Democrats, a party formed in 1985 by dissident FF politicians seeking a more liberal dispensation with respect to the availability of contraception. Sinn Fein, which began to contest Irish elections again in the 1980s, and the environmentalist Green Party, formed in 1981, each has single figure representation in the lower house of Parliament and, in the event of the predicted close outcome between FF and FG in next year's elections, might join government. At present Parliament also accommodates 13 independent delegates.

The four main oldest parties, Labour included, share histories intertwined with the development of Irish nationalism: all of them were founded by key personalities in the 1916 rebellion. Partly for this reason the policy differences between the three main parties have never been very wide. During the 1940s and 1950s FF outflanked Labour with its institution of a fairly comprehensive welfare system and through the 1990s successive governments that have included

representatives of FF, FG and Labour have committed themselves to corporatist agreements between labour, business and agriculture over wages, social policy, and foreign trade. Meanwhile Sinn Fein today seeks to expand its urban working class support with mildly socialist economic proposals and quite justifiable criticisms of the shortcomings in government social services, especially in the domain of public health. Two factors favour an expansion of Sinn Fein's representation in next year's general election. One is that it is likely to become a coalition partner in the Northern Ireland administration and the other that within the Republic it now receives substantial funding from Irish-Americans, to the extent that it is the second-best-financed party.

Historically, near-universal adherence to Roman Catholicism and, through much of the 20th century, a low rate of industrialisation, helped to maintain consensus over conservative social values. For example, abortion remains illegal in Ireland and the constitutional ban on divorce was overturned through a referendum only in 1995. Ireland is changing swiftly, though. Socially regressive taxation policies (low income and corporate taxes) helped to encourage inflows of foreign investment into pharmaceutical, software and service industries in the 1990s, resulting in growth rates of between 7 and 10 per cent. With the cessation of emigration the population has become younger and more female. Rapidly expanding university enrolment and heavy investment in secondary education help to reduce the appeal of nationalist political conventions and customary social values. European agricultural subsidies have failed to protect smallholder farmers and the rural population is shrinking rapidly as younger people move to the cities. Even the smaller towns also host a new influx of East European immigrants and African asylum seekers. Through most of the last century Ireland was generally poor, relatively egalitarian, and culturally homogeneous. In the past two decades it has become much more affluent, more socially unequal, and more culturally differentiated.

### THE IRISH ELECTORAL SYSTEM

When Irish electors vote in national and local elections they choose between candidates and parties. One hundred and sixty-six *Teachta Dalas* (TDs) represent 41 constituencies in the *Dail*, the lower house of the *Oireachtas* (Parliament). There is also an upper house, the *Senead*, mainly elected by panels composed predominantly of local councillors. TDs are grouped in three- to five-member constituencies. Voters write numbers opposite the names of the candidates listed on their ballot papers in the order of their preferences. They can support candidates across party lines or they can confine their choices to a single party or a single candidate. Parties can nominate candidates for every seat in each constituency.

At the end of polling papers are counted in one centralised location in each constituency. Counting officers establish a quota by dividing the number of total ballots cast by the number of seats plus one, adding a further one to the result of the division. Officials then count the totals of first preference votes for each candidate. Any candidate with votes exceeding the quota is immediately declared elected. The next successful candidate is identified by taking from the first candidate's ballot papers those papers at the top of the pile that are in excess of the quota (in effect a random sample). These excess papers are then distributed between the remaining candidates according to the second preferences indicated by voters. Any second preference candidates who exceed the quota are elected. If vacant seats remain the ballots belonging to the candidate with the lowest number of votes are divided between the remaining candidates according to the voters' third preferences. This process is repeated until all the seats are filled. Results are often very close between the leading candidates because of the effects of preferential votes. As can be imagined, counting can take a very long time: in 1992 it took nine days to obtain an undisputed result in a Dublin constituency in which the individual tallies were very close.

The use of single transferable voting in relatively small multi-member constituencies results in representation that is, at best, approximately proportional to the parties' electoral support. Within single constituencies, of course, it is possible that candidates with the largest number of first preference votes might not obtain a seat if their tallies fail to exceed the quota and they score poorly in the subsequent rounds of counting. More occasionally a party can win a plurality of votes across the system and yet obtain less representation in the *Dail* than its competitors. With three- to four-person constituencies the most successful party can win a disproportionate number of seats if is successful in attracting second and third preferences. In a three-seat constituency a party can win two of the seats with less than 50 per cent of the overall vote. Larger constituencies with about eight members would make such inconsistencies very unlikely and would benefit smaller parties, though, of course, they would require very long ballot papers to accommodate all the candidates. Understandably the larger parties prefer the constituencies as they are and have successfully resisted proposals to enlarge them.

A key consideration for party strategists is how voters use their choices. Parties may wish to encourage their supporters to confine their choices to their own party candidates. In the case of popular and well established candidates reasonably certain of achieving tallies well in excess of the quota, they may encourage a specific number of their supporters to give their first preference votes to another candidate from the same party contesting the same constituency. Similarly, parties may attempt to 'manage' the voting by nominating fewer

candidates than the locally available seats and advising their supporters to support with their second or third preference votes for another party with which they may hope to form a coalition. Voters can, of their own volition, try to encourage the formation of coalitions by splitting their support between parties. Trends in inter-party vote transfers can indicate relative depth of voter loyalty to political parties and can sometimes also demonstrate voter motivation with respect to particular policy issues.

### THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE SYSTEM

Very broadly, STV has shaped Irish politics in three ways: it has affected the evolution of the party system, it has reinforced local and parochial considerations in political life, and it has tended to promote conservatism and continuity at the expense of reform and innovation.

With respect to the configuration of political parties, a fairly even split in the nationalist movement during the civil war reflected divergent socio-economic interests. The more conspicuous treaty supporters tended to be urban middle class or, if they resided in the countryside, were grouped around larger landowners producing for export markets who favoured the maintenance of economic ties with Britain. Treaty opponents, and subsequently Fianna Fail's main support, were located in the western part of the country where small-holder farming was most extensive, as well as more generally among farm labourers and the rural landless. Small multi-member constituencies favoured the consolidation of the two main parties, each of whom could expect to find substantial pockets of support in each other's heartlands and in the politically more heterodox towns. Denied office for 30 years, Fine Gael was able to preserve a substantial parliamentary base partly because, as we shall see, as a consequence of the electoral system parliamentarians, irrespective of their party affiliation, exercise power and influence as local notables.

The opportunities for ballot management fostered by preferential voting stimulated FF's early development of strong neighbourhood-level branch organisations. Its local support structures intersected with the networks left over from guerrilla warfare as well as with the voluntary movements associated with earlier generations of nationalist activity, especially sports clubs grouped in the Gaelic Athletic Association. Fianna Fail's national presence was sustained by funding from the Irish-American diaspora, which helped to establish a daily newspaper, the *Irish Press*. The newspaper has ceased publication but Fianna Fail still relies on constant fundraising operations to maintain the formidable electoral machine embodied in its branch organisations, the *cumann*; as many as

40 in each constituency. An approximate degree of proportionality in parliamentary representation, at least for the larger parties, and the possibility of party alliances afforded by the electoral system helps to encourage the formation of coalition administrations. Fianna Fail still tends to discourage its supporters from transferring their votes but after the 1950s its near hegemonic hold on voter behaviour weakened as the symbolism associated with the war of independence became less potent and the country's economy began to modernise. Since 1992 vote transfer patterns have indicated a trend of weakening voter identification with Fianna Fail (Farrell 1997, p 125).

Coalition governments have sometimes been short lived and unstable: for example, between 1973 and 1998 there were 12 changes of government and in the two-year period 1981-1982 there were three general elections. More recently, though, coalitions have served full terms and the instability of the 1980s may have been a consequence of unusual economic difficulties and the political crises and scandals associated with them. FF's success in retaining its hold on government through successive terms does not suggest a system prone to instability. Its electoral victories have been attributable chiefly to its success in attracting second preference votes; in only two elections in its history has it won majorities of voters' first choices: this is not and never has been a dominant party system. The decisive effects of voters dividing their support between parties represent an important incentive for parties to adopt moderate policies and help to explain the extent of ideological convergence between the major groups.

Finally, with respect to the party system, transferable voting, because of the way in which it enhances localised personality-related considerations in voter behaviour, opens up room for the inclusion in Parliament of independents and very small parties. These are often breakaways from the larger formations, often a consequence of the intra-party competition between candidates in multi-member constituencies. Here well-entrenched local politicians can mobilise networks established through local systems of patronage that operate more or less independently of local party organisation.

Irish parliamentary politics is intensely local. Face-to-face encounters between the candidate and voters continue to play a decisive role in electioneering. This keeps campaign expenditure down to comparatively modest levels – a median expenditure of E1 502 per candidate in the 1999 local government elections, for example (Benoit and Marsh 2003, p 567). Most donor funding to political parties is directed at individual candidates and relatively small sums can have a decisive effect on electoral outcomes. During the 30 weeks or so that the *Dail* is in session TDs will devote a major proportion of their three working days in Dublin each week to attending to requests and problems raised by their local constituents and even Cabinet ministers cannot escape the obligations of constituency-related

work and will accompany ordinary TDs to their constituency every long weekend to hold 'clinics' on Saturdays. Residents in Limerick, for example, can meet one of their TDs, the Minister for Defence, Willie O'Dea, on Saturdays at the FF offices and on at least four other more convivial occasions when the minister hosts evening consultations in neighbourhood pubs.

In this vein much of the work the TDs undertake is useful enough: advising citizens about their rights and entitlements, sorting out misunderstandings with government officials, helping constituents with dependents in trouble in other countries. People who fall foul of Irish law will also contact their TDs, though it is no longer acceptable to ask deputies to approach the *garda* (police) to arrange for the withdrawal of speeding charges (Hannon 2004, p 56). Until the mid-1990s most TDs wrote letters almost every day on behalf of constituents who were attempting to obtain United States visas and there was a public outcry when the US consular authorities announced that such letters would no longer be acceptable as proof of the applicant's intention to return to Ireland (Hussey 1995, p 61).

There are different explanations for the surprisingly persistent general conviction that authority is best approached through a person of influence. Roman Catholicism may, possibly, supply a theological foundation for an 'intercessory' political culture. More plausibly, colonialism and civil war may have contributed to popular perceptions of central government as hostile and intrusive. Most importantly, in local settings politicians historically exercised considerable influence as patrons and, to an extent, they still function in this way. Until reforms in the 1950s a variety of welfare payments were issued as a result of discretionary decisions by local government officials, themselves holding their posts through an appointments procedure in which local councillors participated (Busteed 1990, p 163). Substantial proportions of TDs used to double up as elected local councillors – two-thirds during the 1990s. This practice has now ended but in its place family partnerships often represent the same districts at parliamentary and municipal levels. Welfare grants are today allocated in a fairer and more impersonal fashion and most local government employment is undertaken by means of a professional procedure, but TDs and councillors still influence the filling of less significant part-time posts.

Irish local government is mainly centrally funded and undertakes quite a limited range of functions. Elected councillors chiefly exercise influence over land zoning and comparable planning decisions where they can veto or amend proposals from the professional municipal managers. TDs also often intervene in local planning decisions, requesting planning officials to rezone land to allow a farmer to sell it to a property developer (Hannon 2004, p 58). Widespread popular belief in planning as a corrupt developer-driven procedure, whether justified or

not, probably contributes to the influence councillors and TDs enjoy as brokers (Collins 1999, pp 71-72). Opinion polls suggest that citizens acknowledge that civil servants are honest but a steady succession of political scandals ensures that such benign perceptions do not embrace elected representatives. FF appears at present to be especially vulnerable to allegations of illicit payments to its officials and to its campaign funds from house-building firms (Cullen 2006; Sheahan 2006).

A letter from the minister, personally addressed to a particular constituent and explaining an official procedure, is often sufficient proof of a TDs ability to get things done (Hannon 2004, p 60). In fact, it is common for politicians to claim rather more influence than they actually exercise, as on the occasions when they line up for the photo opportunities and political capital afforded by occasions such as the opening of a new wing of the local nursing home or the construction of a rural post office. A significant proportion of the voting population views the various services TDs undertake as intermediaries between citizens and central government as their most important duty (Sinnot 1995, p 170; Hannon 2004, p 126). And, to be fair, the role politicians play as 'customer advocates', helping citizens obtain their entitlements, especially in the fields of health, social welfare and housing, and checking local abuses of official authority, is probably a generally positive one (Collins 1999, p 43).

In a setting in which the accessibility of parliamentary representatives is such an important public expectation local connections and reputations are a crucial consideration in the selection of electoral candidates. Parties often choose family members to replace incumbents who retire or die in office, especially in by-elections: this habit provides the most frequent route to public office for the few women who obtain seats in the Dail. Nearly a quarter of the TDs elected in 1997 were the offspring of former TDs. In 1982 four of every five TDs were born in the constituencies they represented, though outsiders have become more common since then. A similar proportion of TDs today are present or former local councillors. Analysis suggests that networks of friends and, more widely, residents in the same neighbourhoods shape local voting patterns decisively; not really surprising in constituencies where political relationships can be so personalised. Constitutionally, in each constituency there has to be one TD for every 30 000 people, comparatively a very low ratio: an experienced TD will probably know a substantial number of his constituents by name. Multi-member local government districts can accommodate as few as 3 000 voters.

Parties often seek to prevent competition between their candidates by assigning to each of them the local government districts or 'bailiwicks' within the constituency inside of which they cultivate their own support bases, though in those constituencies in which inter-party competition is fierce candidates will 'poach' support from rivals in the same party, particularly if they are relative



outsiders. Candidates are selected and reselected by STV secret ballots at constituency conventions; festive three-day events attended by several hundred delegates, usually held in the year before general elections. National executives can 'parachute' their own candidates onto the constituency lists but these cannot replace the local selections and such externally imposed candidates often encounter fierce resentment from their running mates (Collins and Cradden 2001, p 38).

Conservative cultural assumptions keep the numbers of women in Parliament very low: in the 2002 elections, only 22 women were elected as TDs, seven of them for Fianna Fail. The most common occupational background among the TDs elected in 2002 was school teaching – teachers enjoy the right to return to their jobs. Farmers and lawyers were also well represented, especially within the FF caucus. Auctioneers and publicans outnumbered trade unionists and manual workers (Kennedy 2002). The average age of TDs is about 50, a reflection of the time it takes to become a notable.

What are the effects of this very parochial emphasis in public life? One is that a significant proportion of deputies are relatively uninterested in policy matters, though, since the revitalisation of the parliamentary committee system in 1993, this is less the case than it used to be. The various portfolio and standing committees offer substantial financial incentives for their whips and chairpersons – there are about 30 of these positions – and they represent, of course, the first stepping-stones to higher office.

Given a working week in Dublin of two-and-a-half days (compared to three working days, Saturdays included, in constituencies) committee work imposes a punishing schedule. In the first 100-day session of the *Dail* after the 2002 election debate had to be guillotined on 12 of the modest total of 33 new Bills. In such circumstances parliamentary committees and backbenchers more generally are often unassertive in their treatment of the executive unless they are under pressure from their constituents to challenge government policies.

A good example of such pressure was in the 1980s when a court judgement deemed the existing system of local taxes on farmers to be unfair because it was still based on a 1860s survey, so farmers' rates were abolished. The Fine Gael-led government tried to replace them with a farm tax but had to withdraw the proposal after a rebellion by its own rural deputies, who were responding to representations from farmers in their constituencies. As a consequence local government lost a major source of independent revenue (Collins 1999, p 12). Such eruptions are unusual, though. A succession of corruption scandals in the late 1980s and early 1990s involving senior figures in government confirmed a generally weak predisposition among parliamentarians to exercise their oversight functions (Collins 1999, p 79).

Ireland's *laissez-faire* political culture reinforces conservative social trends. Placed on a left-right political spectrum Irish political parties used to be conspicuously more right wing than their counterparts in most other Western European countries, including the United Kingdom, though with a more general shift to the right in Europe this is probably less the case today (Sinnot 1995, p 67). This ideological conservatism is attributable mainly to historic social structure: the relatively small size of the working class, the prevalence of small property ownership since the late-19th-century land reforms, slow rates of urbanisation until the 1980s, and the continuing role of the church in public life, in maintaining public education for example. However, an electoral system that renders Parliament very amenable to constituents and pressure groups produces a politics that tends to be defensive and protective with respect to local hierarchies of power and influence and existing values and etiquette.

The tiny number of women present in the *Dail* is symptomatic of a more general unwillingness among politicians to challenge conventional social beliefs as well as their susceptibility to widely shared prejudices. In a country with very low crime rates public alarm about law and order has elevated crime into a critical policy issue. When a farmer was jailed for six years for killing a Traveller trespassing on his premises, Fine Gael's leader, Enda Kenny, joined in the tumult articulated by a 'Justice for Pádraig' agitation, whose supporters maintained that the sentence was too harsh. Campaigning during a recent referendum on citizenship law featured even Cabinet ministers pandering to popular racist anti-immigrant sentiment. Because of the unusual degree of exposure of elected representatives to public pressure major planning initiatives are very difficult to implement. For example, in 2001 a National Spatial Strategy was unveiled. This was an ambitious plan intended to check Dublin's rapid expansion by designating Cork and Limerick as national growth centres and five other towns as regional centres in which investment and infrastructure would be concentrated.

The project began to be subverted almost as soon as it was unveiled, as politicians and ministers called in favours to ensure that their own constituents would be among the beneficiaries of the strategy. By 2002 the strategy's 'gateway' and 'hub' centres had expanded to 20 towns. In December 2003 the government announced the dispersal of eight civil service departments to 53 towns across 25 counties. Civil service resistance has subsequently prompted the government to modify its decentralisation proposals. Meanwhile, though, an initially sensible plan to achieve more regionally balanced development has been sacrificed to clientelist considerations (McDonald and Nix 2005, pp 72-94). As noted above, building contractors and property developers are major contributors to party electoral expenses. Fiana Fail in particular has attracted derision as 'the political wing of the building industry' (Fitzgibbon 2006).

### LESSONS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

Internationally, STV is quite rare, its usage limited to very small countries or to sub-national elections in larger states. In Ireland in the immediate aftermath of civil war it probably helped to create support for the new kinds of political authority as it may have done more recently with its introduction since 1998 in elections for the Northern Irish Assembly. Accessible public representatives enabled many citizens to benefit from a system of rights and entitlements that was often elusively discretionary and unfairly arbitrary. The political dynamics arising from vote transfers helped to moderate hostilities generated by civil war and nationalist conflict.

Less positively, in modern Ireland deputies' susceptibility to constituent pressure has adversely affected development planning and resource allocation. The effects of this amenability to pressure are accentuated by the influence parliamentarians can exercise over zoning decisions in very weak local authorities. More positively, though, in Ireland party leaders have tended to use the spoils system within Parliament to instil discipline in their caucus; the logic of the system tends to reinforce backbencher independence of the executive. More generally, STV encourages consensual politics.

What lessons can Southern Africans derive from Ireland's experience? A wholesale adoption of STV in, say, South Africa might significantly transform the party system. The possibility of people expressing their second preference could conceivably inflate the representation of parties such as the Pan Africanist Congress which have strong 'liberation' credentials but appeal to the same core constituency as the African National Congress. STV might well strengthen opposition politics more generally, given its capacity for facilitating electoral alliances. At present South African opposition parties have no real incentive to join forces, even during electoral campaigns.

STV also prompts parties to build strong local organisations in contrast with national list PR, in which it is possible, as in South Africa, for a party to win at least a seat or two without any local organisational presence at all. If STV were to be introduced in South Africa it would be unlikely that the existing distribution of parliamentary seats between government and opposition would change, though it might make the career of an opposition backbencher more rewarding as a consequence of the local status it concedes to MPs as influential notables. In a context in which, as in mid-20th-century Ireland, opposition parliamentarians may have very limited prospects of joining government this is an important consideration. Because of the importance of personal contact between candidates and voters in STV elections, they probably require less expenditure on the more costly kinds of electoral advertising; this too might open up fresh prospects for

opposition parties at present restrained by the relatively high expenses of electioneering in South Africa.

Specifically, the Irish example suggests that successfully instituted STV politics can foster political stability, encourage the development of at least two long-lived and substantial political parties, and, in the long term, induce cooperation and collaboration between them. In the past 30 years it has helped to foster policy convergence through the imperative to govern through coalition. The electoral system encourages representatives, for better or for worse, to be very attentive to the people who vote for them: at best this encourages officials to correct anomalies and abuses; at worst it means that certain groups or individuals receive privileged treatment or special favours. A system that places such a high premium on accountability and accessibility would probably not be an ideal arrangement in a setting in which a government aims to achieve urgent social reforms and in which it has to allocate scarce resources. In such circumstances an electoral system that insulates representatives and officials from sectional pressures might seem a more sensible option. The virtue of STV politics, though, is that elected politicians immediately become aware of shortcomings in their policies as soon as they are implemented.

Experts on post-ethnic conflict electoral reform generally favour systems that strengthen party leadership, empowering them to make the kinds of inter-ethnic compromises that may not be popular but are indispensable for political stability (O'Leary 2001, p 69). In the immediate aftermath of South Africa's conflict the adoption of party list proportional representation made good sense. Today, interracial elite bargaining may have become more dispensable and the necessity for party leadership autonomy may have lessened. However, a move to a more constituency-based system in which representation becomes more personalised would, to judge from the Irish experience, probably reduce the existing presence of women and racial minorities in Parliament.

Introducing a STV system into lower levels of government might be an attractive option, especially in the case of local authorities that need to acquire public legitimacy before they can start functioning effectively. South African municipal administrations are a case in point. Judging by the complaints during the 2006 local election campaign, even after the adoption of ward-based representation in 2002 councillors remained aloof from the people who had voted from them. STV in this context would intensify competitive pressures on elected officials, probably beneficially.

Accountable councillors who readily assist people to claim their rights from uncooperative officials could decisively improve the quality of service provided by government agencies. There may, of course, be practical objections to using STV; for example, making the counting procedure generally intelligible might be

a major challenge for voter educators. Even so, it would surely be useful to add the Irish experience to the range of options under consideration by electoral reformers if only to demonstrate just how profound and widespread are the consequences of choice of a particular electoral system.

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