

# **Individual Legislators and Electoral System Change: Results from a Survey of Irish MPs.**

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**Lidia Núñez, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)**

**Séin O'Muineachain, Trinity College**

**Matthew Wall, Swansea University**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to provide an in-depth examination of the electoral system preferences of a set of individual legislators. To do so, we employ data generated by a survey of Members of Parliament (Teachtaí Dála or TDs) in the Republic of Ireland. The survey was specifically designed to measure of TDs' evaluation of the status quo electoral system. Our analysis combines data from this survey with objective data on TDs' electoral histories and prospects. We find that partisan affiliation conceals considerable internal variation in the preferences of TDs with regard to electoral reform. We also observe that evaluations of the functioning of democracy appear to outweigh electoral considerations in explaining TDs' satisfaction with the current electoral system expressed by individual legislators.

Keywords: Electoral systems; Electoral reform; Elite survey; Ireland.

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, electoral systems are portrayed as highly stable institutions in representative democracies (Dunleavy and Margetts 1995). Indeed, many studies treat electoral systems as quasi-permanent features of a given political system, meaning that scholars have devoted considerably greater attention to the effects of electoral rules than to their origins (Benoit 2004; Katz 2005; Shugart 2005). However, the assumption that electoral systems are a fixed feature of political systems has become less tenable in recent years, following major electoral system reforms in several established democracies (including Italy, New Zealand and Japan) in the 1990s and given the willingness of many new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe to experiment with multiple electoral systems. In this context, it is unsurprising that the politics of electoral system change has attracted growing scholarly attention. Nevertheless, as Katz (2005) points out, electoral reforms in established democracies are still relatively rare, and are difficult to explain – as the parties who bring such reforms about have themselves come to power via the status quo electoral system.

Electoral system reform thus remains a nascent field of study, and many substantively important aspects of the electoral system reform process are currently underexplored. One notable lacuna in the field is the absence of empirical research focusing on the motivations and opinions of individual legislators in electoral reform debates. Research on electoral system change often ignores intra party heterogeneity of preferences by assuming that parties can be treated analytically as unitary actors, who interact with each other in order to negotiate changes to the electoral rules. This approach has the advantage of offering analytical tractability to the study of electoral system change – a complex process that frequently also involves non-partisan actors. However, we cannot ignore the fact that parties are internally complex organizations, formed by individuals whose interests may diverge (McElwain 2008).

Members of Parliament (MPs) face divergent incentives in any electoral reform debate – depending on their individual performances in past elections and their likely places on putative party lists. This intraparty heterogeneity of preferences may prevent parties from putting forth proposals for change. Even in the event that a

party does push through a proposal for electoral reform without the full-blooded support of all MPs, defection by individual legislators, or even a lack of commitment to campaigning on the issue, may be sufficient to block any significant change to the status quo being achieved. Hence, we hold that the assumption that parties can be treated as unitary actors in accounts of electoral system reform is questionable. Furthermore, we argue that it is necessary for scholars of electoral reform to study the factors that may have an impact on individual parliamentarians' positions and behaviours.

In this article, we address the issue of individual legislators' attitudes towards electoral system change using legislator survey data from Ireland, which, along with Malta, is one of the two countries in the world that currently employ the PR-STV electoral system to elect their lower house of Parliament. We examine several factors that may have an impact on parliamentarians' positions on electoral system change through an analysis of the responses of Irish Members of Parliament (Teachtaí Dála, or TDs) to a number of survey items designed to measure their evaluations of the current electoral system. In the first part of this paper, we provide some contextual information about our case: discussing previous efforts to implement electoral reform in Ireland and summarising the main arguments made in favour of electoral system reform in the ongoing debate on the topic. We then outline several propositions as to the factors that may have an impact on individual TDs' preferences on electoral system reform. Evidently, accounts of electoral system reform that treat parties as unitary actors assume that all individual-level variation is explainable by partisan affiliation – however, we provide evidence that party affiliation has relatively small explanatory power in our dataset. Having established that party affiliation provides little leverage over TDs' electoral reform preferences, we develop a set of individual-level hypotheses. We examine the role of several rational-choice based incentives, including TDs' personal electoral security and constituency-level patterns of competition. We also discuss how TDs' ideas about the role of an elected representative, their evaluations of the overall functioning of democracy and their ideas about how the electoral system in place is functioning may help to explain their attitudes towards replacing their electoral system. We put forth a set of formalised theoretical expectations based on these considerations.

Finally, we report the results of the analysis of the survey data, examining their fit with our theoretical propositions.

## 2. The Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) electoral system

In this section, we outline the Proportional Representation by Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) electoral system, and explain how it has been applied in legislative elections in Ireland to date. We also detail the main pitfalls that observers of the PR-STV electoral system have identified, and elaborate on how electoral reform debates have developed historically in Irish politics.

Originally proposed by both Carl Andrea and Thomas Hare in 1857, PR-STV is currently in use for major elections in four countries: Australia<sup>1</sup>; Ireland<sup>2</sup>, Malta<sup>3</sup>, and the United Kingdom<sup>4</sup> (Bowler and Grofman 2000:22). It was also used in Estonia for 1990 elections<sup>5</sup> and it has been used in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (Gallagher 2005:511). Besides these cases, PR-STV is also used for a number of sub national parliaments, city councils<sup>6</sup> and private associations<sup>7</sup>. Due to its multi-member districts and proportional seat allocation mechanism<sup>8</sup>, PR-STV has been traditionally catalogued as a proportional electoral system. PR-STV's most notable feature is that it 'allows for the expression of a complex range of voter preferences' (Sinnott, 1995: 14). Voters are allowed to rank-order their candidate-preferences and can thus express their preferences both across party lines and among candidates of the same

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<sup>1</sup> Senate, upper houses of New South Wales, South Australia; Tasmanian lower house, the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

<sup>2</sup> Lower and upper houses; local and European elections.

<sup>3</sup> Legislative elections for the unicameral assembly.

<sup>4</sup> Northern Ireland elections since 1973, Assembly and European elections.

<sup>5</sup> See Taagepera (1996)

<sup>6</sup> For more details about the use of STV in city councils in the United States, see Barber 1995, Engstrom 1990

<sup>7</sup> For an account of the details of different STV systems see Bowler and Grofman (2000)

<sup>8</sup> The allocation of seats to individual candidates is based solely on the basis of the number of preference votes each candidate has gathered. To be elected, each candidate has to surpass the election quota. Both in Ireland and Malta, the Droop quota is in use.

$$\text{Droop Quota} = \frac{\text{Total number of valid votes}}{\text{Number of seats} + 1} + 1$$

party. PR-STV's main strong point is its capacity to combine a certain degree of proportionality of votes to seats with an individualised mandate for each elected representative. It appears that these features of PR-STV are appreciated by electoral systems scholars: in 2005, an expert survey of electoral systems experts showed that STV was the second highest ranked system, with Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems in first place (Bowler et al., 2005).

Richard Sinnott (2005) argues that the historical context of the Irish independence movement is important for understanding why PR-STV was originally adopted: 'in the early years of the twentieth century, the problem of minority representation in the event of Home Rule seemed to make PR particularly important in Ireland' (p. 107). The adoption of PR-STV (rather than a list-PR system) has been explained as a result of Ireland's physical and cultural proximity to the UK – where PR-STV was the preferred system of electoral reform advocated by the British Proportional Representation Society. A visit to Dublin by Lord Courtney of Penwith, the president of that Society, in 1911 is held to have been particularly influential, as Lord Courtney persuaded then Sinn Féin leader Arthur Griffith of the merits of the system during his visit – with Griffith among the founding members of the Proportional Representation Society of Ireland (Sinnott, *ibid.*). Several scholarly accounts of the process of electoral system choice in post-independence Ireland (Gallagher 2005; O'Leary 1961; Sinnott, 2005) point to a lack of knowledge among those deciding regarding possible alternatives to STV for PR systems. While the 1922 constitution specified only that elections had to take under PR rules, PR and STV were seen as synonymous in Irish political life, with Gallagher arguing that 'STV was not included in the 1922 constitution only because TDs (...) did not realise that STV was merely one method, and an unusual one at that, of attaining PR' (p. 513). The Electoral Act of 1923 specified that PR-STV as the specific system to be used to achieve PR in Ireland, and the 1937 constitution (Article 16.2.5) enshrined PR-STV as the method of election for the Irish lower house (Dáil).

This constitutional entrenchment of PR-STV entails that it can only be changed via a referendum. Two such referendums have been held in Ireland, in 1959 and in 1968, both on a proposal to replace PR-STV by First-Past-the Post (FPTP). The first referendum was only narrowly defeated with 48% voting to change and 52% voting to retain PR-STV. The second referendum, however, was more decisive, with only

39% voting in favour of change and 61% voting to retain PR-STV. These proposals failed in spite of having been put forth by the government party (Fianna Fáil – who, as Ireland’s largest party at the time, would have benefitted enormously from the adoption of FPTP). It is interesting to note that the arguments put forward in support of a move from PR-STV to FPTP focused on traditional ‘weaknesses’ of PR systems – namely party system fragmentation and a consequent difficulty of forming single-party majority governments. For instance, in his second stage speech in the Dáil on the Third Amendment to the Constitution Bill 1958, the then Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Éamon De Valera made the following point:

‘With the present system, there is a multiplicity of Parties, each little group trying to get some support, knowing full well that they have not the slightest chance, independently, of being the Government. Yet they can go out and promise for that very reason, knowing that it will get them some votes’ (Dáil Debates, 26 November 1958, col. 997).

However, a concern about the effects of PR-STV on Irish party system fragmentation is not notable in more recent debates about the merits of the system. Instead, the primary criticism of the PR-STV system in contemporary Irish politics centres around the intraparty competition that PR-STV generates, and the pressures that it places on TDs to gain and retain individualised support in their constituencies. Gallagher (2000:97) posits that nearly 56% of Fianna Fáil TDs and 37% of Fine Gael’s lost their seats to a co-partisan. Marsh finds that while 64% of the candidates surveyed in 2007 thought that their main competitor came from another party, a non-negligible 22% thought it was one of their co-partisans and that 14% thought the threat came from both sides (Marsh 2011). PR-STV’s detractors in Ireland argue that, due to the pressures inherent in facing party colleagues in individualised counts, TDs focus disproportionately on servicing their constituencies, which leaves them with insufficient time to devote to their parliamentary duties such as scrutiny of the executive and the passage of legislation (Bowler et al 2000:18, Bax 1976, Chubb 1963, Sacks 1976). Many senior politicians agree that STV imposes high costs to the political process concerning the pressure TDs suffer due to a system that ‘*enslav(es) politicians to local, client-bound, pressures*’ (Willie O’Dea Sunday Independent, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1997, cited in Laver 1998), and the late former Fine Gael Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Dr. Garrett Fitzgerald was also a notable advocate of this argument.

However, the extent to which PR-STV is to blame for TDs' focus on constituency service is questionable. Constituency focus appears to be on the extremely important to Irish voters. When surveyed about the factors that are more important when deciding their vote, voters usually prefer to vote for someone to represent the area<sup>9</sup> (between 40 and 50% of the respondents (Marsh 2011:145). Furthermore, Gorecki and Marsh (2009) have proved through survey analysis<sup>10</sup> that geographical proximity to the candidate was an important factor in determining first preference votes.

Besides the two failed referendums to change the electoral systems in 1959 and 1968, there have been frequent debates on the issue – though no subsequent referendums to change the Irish electoral system have been put forward. Instead, several parliamentary committees have addressed the issue of altering the PR-STV system, though none have issued a recommendation that it be replaced. The most recent such committee report, issued by the Joint Committee on the Constitution in 2010, recommended that the subject of electoral system reform be considered by a Citizens' Assembly, and at the time of writing it is envisioned that an Irish Citizens' Assembly will consider electoral system reform in 2013 (though it is unclear whether and how the Assembly's recommendations will be enacted in case it recommends the adoption of an alternative system).

### **3. Theory and hypotheses**

In developing our theoretical propositions we are somewhat limited by the type of data that our survey makes available. While a large number of TDs responded to questions as to whether they were satisfied with the functioning of the PR-STV electoral system and on whether they supported a change to that system, very few indicated what alternative system they would like to see in place, making inferential statistical analysis of this question impossible. As such, we frame our discussion and hypotheses around factors that can account for willingness to contemplate changing the status quo electoral system, rather than seeking to explain the types of

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<sup>9</sup> Voters were given several options: the Taoiseach, the ministers, policies, and voting for someone to represent their area.

<sup>10</sup> 2002 Irish National Election Study

alternatives that individual legislators may support. We would argue that this is a valid approach, as a first criterion for implementing any sort of electoral system reform is a willingness to reject the status quo system.

### *3.1 Parties as unitary actors*

In a very parsimonious model, Benoit (2004) explained that a 'change in electoral institutions will occur when a political party or coalition of political parties supports an alternative which will bring it more seats than the status quo electoral system, and also has the power to effect through fiat that institutional alternative' (Benoit, 2004,363). On the basis of seat maximization, policy and office-seeking assumptions, the study of electoral reforms in recent years has witnessed the emergence of a predominant current which, under rational choice assumptions, argues that electoral reforms are the result of strategic calculations among elites. Party elites are considered to be the actors who ultimately dominate the electoral process and it is assumed that their objectives in the electoral system choice game can be effectively reduced to a desire to maximize party seat profits or minimize party seat losses (Benoit 2004, Boix 1999, Benoit 2004, Colomer 2005, Blais and Shugart 2008). However, this rational choice approach, to date the most influential approach to explaining episodes of electoral reform, fails to account for some of the major cases of this kind of institutional change that occurred in the nineties, such as the Italian and Japanese reforms, nor is it able to adequately explain an important and widely noted historical characteristic of electoral rules: their stability.

The intraparty dimension of electoral system change is largely neglected in research that has adopted this perspective. Considering parties as unitary actors with one voice and one opinion is common. However, parties are complex organizations in which individuals may not have convergent positions over a range of issues. Electoral reform is one of these issues in which intraparty heterogeneity may be more acute. Gaxie (1990) pointed out the convenience of making the distinction between the interest of the party as a whole and the individual interests of politicians. In electoral reform processes there are distributional asymmetries (McElwain 2008). It is very possible for a party overall to expect to be better-off under a new set of electoral rules, while some individual MPs in that party run a high risk of not being re-

elected under the same new rules. This tension between the party as a whole and such parliamentarians may prevent the party from taking a unitary stance in the issue and, as a result, can cause the end of the reform process. As McElwain (2008) posited, for electoral system to change, a party must present a reform proposal which *ex ante* requires intraparty consensus in its favour. The fact that those proposals which do not gather internal consensus seldom reach the parliamentary floor vote is for McElwain (2008) one of the main explanations accounting for the lack of major electoral system changes. Luebbert (1986) posited that there is a critical disjuncture between party leaders and rank-and-file politicians. The former would be primarily interested in maximizing the aggregate party seat share whereas for the latter the main concern would be assuring their personal re-election and only secondarily the performance of the party as a whole.

A simple test of the unitary actor assumption can be performed on our data by evaluating the extent to which TDs' positions on electoral reform are congruent with those of their co-partisans. We perform such an analysis in the first part of the 'Data and Analysis' section below. At risk of spoiling the surprise, we find no evidence (in terms of the expressed opinions of party members) that would indicate that parties are unitary actors in terms of electoral reform. We do note that responding to a survey item is somewhat different from defying a party whip on any issue. Nonetheless, the data clearly indicate low intra-party congruence on the issue of electoral reform. Consequently, we face a problem with two levels of analysis: the party and individual legislators, with the latter having received nearly no attention in the extant literature. In the subsequent sub-sections we therefore develop several hypotheses regarding the preferences of individual legislators with regard to electoral reform.

Electoral system change is often analysed on the basis of the strategic choices made by parties, but the study of individual legislators and their role in the process is usually sidestepped. This constitutes a striking lacuna since scholars studying other processes linked to electoral rules have often taken into account the roles of individual legislators. This is the case for example in the literature analysing the consequences of electoral norms, which often assumes that parliamentarians' main motivation is assuring their re-election (Mayhew 1974, Fenno 1978, Cain et al. 1987, Taagepera and Shugart 1989, Carey and Shugart 1995, Heithusen et al 2005).

Guaranteeing re-election is seen for this body of literature as an instrumental objective that may differ from the ultimate goals that can be diverse: policy influence, private gains, political career, etc.). Besides, scholars focusing on the study of the politics of coalitions have given alternative visions on what MPs' motivations are. Laver and Schofield (1990) argued that the possible conflict between parliamentarians and the party as a whole stems from the fact that backbenchers are more concerned with ideology and less in 'line with the other spoils of office' and tend to dislike the compromises that are necessary to enter coalition.

### *3.2 Unveiling individuals' motivations for electoral system change*

As we argue above, preferences for electoral reform are contingent upon levels of satisfaction with the prevailing system. Parties and individual legislators should prefer to alter the rules when they are not satisfied with them. However, satisfaction is a broad concept and two are the main approaches we can apply to explain TDs' positions on electoral reform. The first is based on rational grounds: candidates should be in favour for the system that maximizes their own chances of being elected. The second approach derives from examining legislators' ideas and values, their ideals of what democracy and representation should be and their perceptions as to how well the electoral system responds to these normative ideals.

#### *3.2.1 Instrumental motivations*

Electoral system change is often characterised as an insiders' choice (Norris 1995). Reeve and Ware (1992) claim that one of the factors explaining the stability of electoral systems is the conflict of interest that underlies the process of electoral reform. The same political elites that have been elected under the current system are the ones that must legislate in support of change. As a consequence, it may be difficult to expect that politicians act against the rules of the game that helped them to be elected (Leyenaar and Hazan 2011, Shepsle 2006, Katz 2008). Following this argument, individual legislators would be risk-averse actors, whose main motivation is maintaining their seat in parliament. Under this approach, MPs would not have any

incentive to change a system that has helped them to be in power and, as a consequence, institutional stability would prevail.

However, the picture is not so straightforward. Not all the TDs are elected with the same levels of electoral support and hence not all of them can feel that their re-election is equally secure. Those who have been elected with more popular support (and thus have a higher margin of political 'safety' in future elections) have more vested interests in maintaining the current system. As a result, we hypothesize that,

H1: The larger a TD's percentage of the quota in first preferences, the more likely they will be in favour of maintaining the prevailing system.

As discussed above, it has been posited that STV fosters intraparty competition. In Ireland, the larger parties typically nominate multiple candidates in each district. In this kind of situation, candidates face a 'product differentiation problem' (Cox and Thies 1998; 271) because the party label is not enough to prompt voters to decide who to vote for. Though there are a number of strategies that parties can implement to limit unwanted intraparty competition - such as the encouragement of 'friends and neighbours' voting behaviour dividing the districts between the candidates<sup>11</sup> (Bowler and Grofman 2000:26) - the empirical analysis of Irish electoral turnover has indicated that an important proportion of TDs that lost their seat lost it to a fellow party member (Gallagher 2000:97). Furthermore, it is this aspect of extreme intra-party rivalry that is most often discussed in debates about reforming PR-STV, thus we could anticipate that TDs are aware that such competition would not be engendered under several potential alternative systems. Consequently, we expect that:

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<sup>11</sup> Irish parties make use of the STP ('Spread the preferences') system, which refers to the bailiwick politics found in this system. Since the main parties tend to overnominate- on average two or three candidates per constituency (Gallagher 2005:523, Laver 1998)- districts are divided up among the party's candidates and each of them focuses in a part of the district boosting what has been called 'friends and neighbours' voting behaviour (Bowler and Grofman 2000:26)

H2: TDs will be more in favour a change in the electoral rules as the number of co partisans that they faced in the in the same district in the previous election increases.

Finally, we note that constituency size is not constant in Irish PR-STV – the constitutionally-mandated minimum size for a constituency is 3, and while historically constituencies of as many as 9 seats have existed, in modern Irish politics constituency size ranges from 3 to 5. For the group of TDs surveyed in this research, the electoral system designated a total of 43 constituencies with 18 three-seaters, 13 four-seaters and 12 had five-seaters. We thus include a variable controlling for constituency size as a control in our analysis.

### *3.2.2 Ideals and values: Satisfaction with democracy*

There is a group of scholars who have claimed that reformers are not always guided by power interests and have looked into the question from other standpoints, namely concerns to do with the quality of democracy. In Katz's words (2005:74), 'democratic values matter'. Birch et al. (2002) posited that in Central and Eastern Europe 'justice maximizing' considerations were also present in the reform processes. Scarrow (2001:58) argued that during the process of adoption of MMP in Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) considered the issue as a matter of principle not just of tactics. Bowler et al. (2006) claimed that the puzzle between principle and self-interest has the character of 'received wisdom' that has rarely been put to the direct test. In this sense, using survey data from four countries (Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand), they found that candidates' positions towards proposals of change were dependent on whether they were winners or losers in the last elections, and that, what is more important, self-interest motivations were attenuated by ideology and attitudes about democracy. Ka-Lok, analysing the Polish electoral system choice, posited that '(t)he making of the 1993 electoral law thus revealed a rich mixture of the law-makers' normative concerns for the quality of democracy and their concerns for their partisan interests' (2001;86). These findings refute Kellner (1995:23) when he says that '(i)n politics, when principle collides with self-interest, principle tends to retreat with a bloody nose'.

Furthermore it has been posited that electoral reform processes are sometimes triggered by institutional crisis. Corruption scandals<sup>12</sup>, loss of confidence in institutions (Martin 1997, Farrell 2001) or economic crisis<sup>13</sup> may trigger institutional reforms such as electoral system changes. In short, electoral reform may sometimes be the response to a generalized malaise concerning the quality of democracy and its institutions. Hence, we may expect that MPs positions on the issue may also be mediated by their concerns on the quality of democracy. Furthermore, even if TDs themselves are satisfied with the operation of the democratic system, they may support a change to the electoral rules to restore public faith in the functioning of the system if they believe that there is an ongoing crisis of trust in the system. Finally, we anticipate that TDs' perceptions of the extent to which the electoral system itself either facilitates or impedes the practical functioning of democracy should bear strongly on their propensity to consider alternative systems. As noted above, a key critique of PR-STV in ongoing debates in Irish politics is that intense constituency-level competition forces TDs to engage in excessive constituency work, to the detriment of their national-level responsibilities. To the extent that TDs associate PR-STV with poor performance at the national level, we anticipate that they will be more likely to support proposals for electoral system change. We therefore expect that:

H3: The likelihood of a TD supporting a change of electoral system increases when their satisfaction with the current functioning of democracy is low.

H4: The likelihood of a TD supporting a change in the electoral rules increases when they perceive that citizens' level of trust in the system is low.

H5: TDs who think that the STV does not allow for legislators to be effective in their work and hold members of the government to account are more likely to in favour of a change of system.

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<sup>12</sup> Corruption has been said to have had an impact in the Japanese (Reed and Thies) and Italian cases (Donovan 2005).

<sup>13</sup> In New Zealand, it was the lack of confidence in the main parties' and the institutions' capacity to redress the economic crisis that has been pointed out as the main reason behind the reform that took place in the 1990s (Vowles 1995)

### *3.3.3 Candidates' attitudes towards constituency work.*

PR-STV's small district magnitudes in Ireland and the fact that votes are cast on a candidate basis may encourage district-based representation typical of the principal-agent theory of representation. According to this view, representatives are 'personally elected for representing a particular constituency, which is usually defined geographically' (Felsenthal and Machover 2012; 5). This leads us to analyse the question from the two sides of the Mandate independence debate initiated by Edmund Burke in 1774. The most famous normative types of representation are the two sides of this controversy: 'should deputies act according to the will of their constituencies or according to their own mature judgement?' (Thomassen 1994:238). However, Burke's controversy needs to be delimited since it is a mixture of two different phenomena: the focus and the style of the representation. The style of representation refers to 'the question of whether representatives should act as agents who take instructions from their constituents, or act according to their own 'mature judgement'' (Thomassen 1994:239). On the other hand, the focus of representation refers to 'the interest representatives must defend: local interests of their constituencies, or those of one nation' (Thomassen 1994:239). STV's focus of representation tends to fall in the first of the categories. It has been claimed that one of the most damaging consequences of the electoral systems is the one derived from the candidates' need to secure their re-election. Their electoral survival depends on the amount of constituency work and this has been said to weaken parliamentary activity.

Gallagher and Komito (2010) argued that the constituency focus in Irish politics was not a distinctive characteristic of this country's system and that in a series of different systems parliamentarians also allocated much of their time in constituency work. Nevertheless, not all the electoral systems encourage constituency work in the same extent. Mayhew (1974) claimed that electoral systems were important in determining legislators' behaviours- the constituency focus- since they would choose to act in the benefit of those who have more influence in their re-election. In the case of STV systems, constituency focus appears to be extremely important to voters. In Ireland, when surveyed about the factors that are more important when deciding their vote, voters usually prefer to vote for someone to represent the area (between 40 and 50% of the respondents (Marsh 2011:145). Besides, Gorecki and Marsh

(2009) have proved through survey analysis that geographical proximity to the candidate was an important factor in determining first preference votes.

A first type of constituency work seeks to secure benefits that are related to the collective social and economic interests of the constituency (Searing 1985). This kind of constituency service generally includes gathering resources to promote road works, hospitals or schools in the constituency (Pork barrel). A second type of constituency work, typically called 'casework' or 'errand running' (Searing 1985:355; Parker and Davidson 1979) refers to the help legislators provide to citizens when dealing with public authorities, such as applying for subsidies, speeding up procedures, etc. (Fenno 1978, Searing 1985, Müller 2006, Mezey 2008). We anticipate that the more TDs engage in such either 'constituency lobbying' or 'casework', the less likely they should be to advocate an alternative electoral system, as PR-STV provides the greatest rewards for this investment of time, of, formally:

H6: The more importance that TDs attribute to lobbying on behalf of the general interest of their constituency, the less likely they will be in favour of a change of system.

H7: The more time that TDs attribute to carrying out constituency casework, the less likely they will be in favour of a change of system.

#### **4. Data and analysis**

For the analysis of the above-mentioned hypotheses we employ a survey of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas which was undertaken by the Joint Committee on the Constitution Data were gathered in the winter of 2010.<sup>14</sup> This survey included questions on TDs' day-to-day workload and their opinions of the representative role that a TD should perform. Evaluations of the current electoral system's performance and their preferences for electoral system reform were also compiled.

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<sup>14</sup> The response rate for the Irish Lower House was 45,5%. Besides, it is also important to note that respondents were self-selected and not randomly selected.

The underlying assumption of this paper concerning the non-unitary nature of parties with regard to electoral reform is clearly confirmed. Furthermore, an identical survey carried out in the winter of 2010 by Mr. Hermann Schiavone in the Maltese parliament, under the supervision of Professor David Farrell, reflects a similar picture when looking at intraparty coherence of positions regarding the need of an electoral reform. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that, according to these data, legislators' positions on the necessity of an electoral reform do not depend on the political party they belong to.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Legislators' reported levels of satisfaction with the electoral system also defy the unitary party assumption dissatisfaction with the electoral systems is a logical basis for the preference of a change in the electoral rules and it is therefore not surprising that the two variables (support for changing the system and satisfaction with the system) are strongly correlated across the Irish and Maltese data (Nagelkerke R square: 0.547; Cramer's V: 0.690, sig.000). Since parliamentarians' positions on whether the system should be reformed and their satisfaction with the electoral system show that parties are internally divided on the issue, we need to get to grips with the factors that have an impact on the individuals' preferences for electoral reform.

For the in-depth analysis of the determinants of legislators' satisfaction with electoral rules we have focused on the evaluation of the Irish legislators' responses because information on some of the dimensions was not available for the Maltese cases. In order to test the hypotheses we have formulated, we have employed two different techniques, logistic regressions and a discriminant analysis, to analyse the impact of the different independent variables in the dependent variable. The small size of the dataset implied a risk of obtaining results that lacked robustness and the use of the two different techniques allowed us to limit this potential pitfall. First, we will report the results of the different logistic regression models we have performed to

test the different set of hypotheses and, second, we will summarize the results of the discriminant analysis that, as we will see, confirm to a large extent the first findings.

Our sample is divided in two groups (our dichotomized dependent variable): one group is comprised of those who are extremely or somewhat satisfied with the electoral system (value=0) and, the other group is composed of those TDs/MPs who are extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with the electoral system (value=1). In our first analysis, we employ logistic regression which takes TD's score on this item as its dependent variable. We have run a separate model for each set of hypotheses, as well as a model that combines variables from all three sets of hypotheses. . We present the coefficient estimates (with standard errors in parentheses) for each of these models in table 3. In the Appendix, table 6 provides information on the specific measurement of each of the independent variables.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Legislators' instrumental motivations measured through our independent variables account for 30% of the variance which confirms the importance of the usual rational choice arguments when explaining positions for electoral system reform. Increases in constituency size and the fact of running with copartisans in the same district significantly increase the likelihood of being dissatisfied with the system. The variable 'marginality of election' reflects the TDs' percentage of the quota in first preferences and has a slightly significant though weak impact on the dependent variable.

The second model accounts for those explanations related to the concerns on the quality of democracy. Legislators' satisfaction with the electoral system seems to be strongly related to their perceptions of the degree of citizens' trust in democracy: the less they believe the system is supported by the citizens, the more likely they are dissatisfied with the electoral rules. However, the strongest and most significant predictor for dissatisfaction with the electoral system is the variable measuring the effect of STV on legislators' effectiveness and their capacity to hold the members of

the government to account. Overall, this model accounts for twice the variance (60%) compared to the one focusing on instrumental motivations.

The third model analyses the impact of those variables related to the focus of representation. Neither the time legislators spend working on individual constituents' cases nor the importance they attribute to lobbying on behalf of the general interest of the constituency have an impact on the dependent variable.

The fourth model reflects the joint impact of all of the hypotheses. The picture that results from this analysis is that both instrumental motivations and concerns on the quality of democracy have an important and significant impact on the likelihood of being dissatisfied with the electoral rules. The size of constituency is the most important predictor, followed by the consideration of STV as the cause of legislators' ineffectiveness in their work. Concerns on the lack of citizens' support for the functioning of democracy have also an important and significant impact, though less than the other two variables.

Due to the limited number of cases the dataset contains, we have opted for a discriminant analysis as a way to increase the robustness of our findings. This technique investigates differences between groups on the basis of the attributes of the cases, by indicating the attributes that contribute most to the separation between groups. It identifies the linear combination of attributes known as canonical discriminant functions (equations) which contribute maximally to group separation. For this analysis, we have kept the same coding of the dependent variable: one group is comprised of those who are extremely or somewhat satisfied with the electoral system and, the other group is composed of those TDs/MPs who are extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with the electoral system. The independent variables included in the model account for the same hypotheses that we have tested through the logistic regression models.

The model resulting from the discriminant analysis is able to account for 46% of the overall variance of the dependent variable and the Wilks' lambda indicates that it is a highly significant function ( $p < .001$ ). In other words, the function is able to differentiate between the two groups of the dependent variable on the basis of the independent factors.

#### TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

In Table 5 below, the second column shows the structure matrix. These values are the correlations of each variable with the discriminate function. They are Pearson coefficients whose role is to serve like factor loadings in factor analysis. The largest loadings correspond to those variables that have more importance in differentiating between the two groups of the dependent variable. In the same fashion as factor loadings, 0.30 is seen as the cut-off between important and less important variables. Consequently, we can determine that the three first variables are the ones that are more influential in distinguishing between those legislators who are satisfied from those who are not satisfied with the electoral system. Interestingly, this table reflects that the factors related to the satisfaction with democracy (ineffectiveness of legislators' work due to STV and low citizens' trust in democracy) and instrumental motivations (size of constituency) are the ones that have more impact on determining the satisfaction with the electoral system.

The third column includes the values of the Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients. These coefficients can be interpreted in a similar way to standardized regression coefficients in OLS regression. The values provide information on the strength of the effect of each variable whereas the sign indicates the direction of the relationship. We can affirm that the main determinant of TDs' dissatisfaction with the electoral system seems to be the concern about the negative effects of STV on parliamentary work. In addition, dissatisfaction with the electoral system seems to be related to the number of seats in the constituency: holding everything else constant, the higher the number of seats in the constituency the more likely the candidates will be dissatisfied with the electoral rules. Interestingly, perceptions over the lack of citizens' trust in the system and the number of seats in the district have a similar influence which indicates that instrumental motivations are not the main drivers of dissatisfaction with the status quo electoral system but that concerns on the quality of democracy are at least equally important. In consequence, these results are coherent with those obtained above through the logistic regression models.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Discriminant analysis allows for a confusion matrix analogous to the one usually done for logistic regression. In our case, the function provides for a correct classification of 83.3% of the cases in the sample, with comparable results for each value of the dependent variable (see table 7 in the Appendix).

## **5. Conclusion**

Rational choice approaches to the study of electoral system change tend to assume that parties are unitary actors, hence sidestepping the fact that legislators may have divergent incentives and preferences around this issue. In the analysis we present here we find evidence that challenges this view. Forty per cent of the respondents were in favour of a change of the electoral system and our analysis demonstrated that legislators had stances on the issue that were not contingent upon their partisan affiliation. As a consequence, parties appear to be internally divided on the issue of electoral reform, at least for the countries studied here.

Our findings show that instrumental explanations do help to account for legislators' satisfaction with the electoral system. Intraparty competition increases when the size of the constituency is bigger and this factor appears to be the strongest predictor of dissatisfaction with the electoral rules, therefore, confirming the expectations of part of the existing literature that depicts legislators as being mainly motivated by their own-re-election. However, our results nuance this kind of explanation. In line with several studies that have previously highlighted the role of attitudes about democracy in processes of electoral reform (Birch et al. 2002, Bowler et al. 2006, Ka-Lok 2001), we have found that satisfaction with the electoral system seems to be very influenced by the legislators' assessments of the functioning of democracy. On the one hand, the deficiencies in the parliamentary work caused by an excessive weight of constituency focus seem to be one of the main factors leading to dissatisfaction with the electoral norms. On the other hand, dissatisfaction

with the electoral rules appears to be very much related to the perceptions legislators have of public confidence in democracy. According to these results, changes of electoral rules would therefore be seen as a way to improve public trust in democracy and the political institutions. Interestingly, concerns on the citizens' lack of confidence in democracy and STV's failure to allow for an effective work outweigh those factors related to instrumental motivations.

The findings presented here call into question the common view of parties as having unitary positions on electoral reform and the one of legislators as being mainly motivated by the need to assure their re-election. These results make clear that further research is needed to unveil the motivations of individual legislators. In order to advance our understanding of both electoral system stability and change, more individual level research is therefore required. In so doing, more nuanced explanations of legislators' behaviours and attitudes vis-à-vis electoral reforms will allow research to disentangle the impact of self-interest and values in these processes.

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**Table 1: TDs' positions on electoral reform by party in Ireland<sup>15</sup>**

		Ireland					
		Party A (n=29)	Party B (n=22)	Party C (n=2)	Party D (n=3)	Party E (n=10)	Total (n=68)
Do you believe the electoral system should be changed?	No	60%	59.1%	0%	66.7%	70%	60.3%
	Yes	40%	40.9%	100%	33.3%	30%	39.7%

**Table 2: Legislators' positions on electoral reform by party in Malta**

		Malta		
		Labour Party (n=21)	Nationalist Party (n=22)	Total (n=43)
Do you believe the electoral system should be changed?	No	57.1%	59.1%	58.1%
	Yes	42.9%	40.9%	41.9%

<sup>15</sup> Due to pre-survey agreements with the Irish political parties, we are not allowed to identify the parties.

**Table 3: Logistic regression on legislators' satisfaction with democracy**

	MODEL 1: Instrumental motivations	MODEL 2: Satisfac tion with democrac y	MODEL 3: Focus of representatio n	MODEL 4
Marginality of election	.033* (.019)			.051 (.035)
Size of constituency	1.397** (.557)			2.380** (1.193)
Did candidate from the same party run in the same district	1.755** (.822)			.324* (1.257)
c15 STV discourages intra-party competition.	.198 (.324)			.269 (.537)
b1 Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Ireland		.643 (.604)		.994 (.846)
b52 Our democracy is about to lose the trust of the citizens.		-.861** (.421)		-1.120* (.622)
c11 STV allows for legislators to be effective in their work, and hold members of the government to account.		1.779*** (.500)		1.394** (.587)
a1b4 Working on individual constituents' cases			-.022 (.019)	-.030 (.031)
a21 Lobbying on behalf of the general interest of your constituency			.348 (.222)	.150 (.473)
Constant	-11.116** (3.842)	-6.188** (2.346)	-.879 (.810)	-20.274** (9.787)
Nagelkerke R Square	.303	.601	.081	.691
-2Log likelihood	52.875	38.391	69.846	28.631
N	58	63	63	54

\*p<.10,\*\*p<0.05;\*\*\* p<0.01

**Table 4: Performance of the discriminant analysis for satisfaction with the electoral system in Malta and Ireland**

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	.851	100.0	100.0	.678
Test of Function(s)	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	.540	29.239	9	.001

**Table 5: Discriminant analysis for satisfaction with the electoral system in Ireland**

	Structure Matrix	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients
It allows for legislators to be effective in their work, and hold members of the government to account.	.709	.771
Number of seats in the constituency	.472	.334
Our democracy is about to lose the trust of the citizens.	-.431	-.369
Marginality of Election	.196	.121
satisfaction with the way democracy works in Ireland	.140	.473
Lobbying on behalf of the general interest of your constituency	.138	.160
Did a candidate from same party run in constituency?	-.100	-.186
It discourages intra-party competition.	-.109	.133
Working on individual constituents' cases	-.167	-.124

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## Appendix

**Table 6: Measurement information for each of the independent variables**

	Value labels
STV ensures that those who are elected represent a microcosm of society.	1 = PR-STV achieves this very well, compared to other systems. 2 = PR-STV achieves this to a certain degree, compared to other systems. 3 = PR-STV is no different from other systems, in relation to this criterion. 4 = PR-STV does not achieve this, compared to other systems. 5 = PR-STV does not achieve this at all, compared to other systems.
Lobbying on behalf of the general interest of your constituency	1 = This activity is extremely important to me. 2 = This activity is quite important to me. 3 = This activity is important to me. 4 = This activity is somewhat important to me.

	5 = This activity is not important to me at all.
Working on individual constituents' cases	(Continuous) % of constituency time working on individual constituents' cases
STV discourages intra-party competition.	1 = PR-STV achieves this very well, compared to other systems. 2 = PR-STV achieves this to a certain degree, compared to other systems. 3 = PR-STV is no different from other systems, in relation to this criterion. 4 = PR-STV does not achieve this, compared to other systems. 5 = PR-STV does not achieve this at all, compared to other systems.
Special interests have too much influence on law making.	1 = I strongly agree. 2 = I agree. 3 = I neither agree nor disagree. 4 = I disagree. 5 = I strongly disagree.
STV allows for legislators to be effective in their work, and hold members of the government to account.	1 = PR-STV achieves this very well, compared to other systems. 2 = PR-STV achieves this to a certain degree, compared to other systems. 3 = PR-STV is no different from other systems, in relation to this criterion. 4 = PR-STV does not achieve this, compared to other systems. 5 = PR-STV does not achieve this at all, compared to other systems.
STV allows for a strong link between the voter and the representative.	1 = PR-STV achieves this very well, compared to other systems. 2 = PR-STV achieves this to a certain degree, compared to other systems. 3 = PR-STV is no different from other systems, in relation to this criterion. 4 = PR-STV does not achieve this, compared to other systems. 5 = PR-STV does not achieve this at all, compared to other systems.
Our democracy is about to lose the trust of the citizens.	1 = I strongly agree. 2 = I agree. 3 = I neither agree nor disagree. 4 = I disagree. 5 = I strongly disagree.
Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Ireland	1 = very satisfied 2 = fairly satisfied 3 = not very satisfied 4 = not at all satisfied.

**Table 7: Proportions of Correct Classifications by the Discriminant Function**

IRELAND	Percent correctly predicted
Satisfied with the electoral system	79.5% (n=31)
Non satisfied with the electoral system	93.3% (n=14)