

**Presentation to Special  
Committee on Electoral  
Reform, House of  
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# Electoral systems

## PR or not PR?

### Positives of PR:

PR means much closer relationship between seats and votes

Parliamentary groups of main parties have MPs from right across the country

Fewer votes wasted, more people represented by MP of the party they voted for

Possibly MPs more socio-demographically representative of the population as a whole

### Negatives:

Ridings would need to be much larger than at present, both in population and area

Single-party governments unlikely to come about, government formation a more difficult and complicated process

# PR or not PR?

Less clear that a change of electoral system can be expected to affect deeper aspects of politics

‘Greater civility and collaboration in politics, enhance social cohesion’  
– unrealistic to expect any electoral system change to affect this

Generally, unwise to attribute too much power to electoral system when we try to explain a country’s political life

# Proportional representation electoral systems

Many different versions

PR: the principle of proportional representation, not a method

Lots of different ways of implementing the principle, which differ on factors such as the amount of choice given to voters over which individual candidate they want to be represented by

PR almost universal in Europe, but hard to find two countries that have exactly the same system

# Proportional representation electoral systems

Electoral system designers have a lot of choice

How proportional do you want your system: highly proportional at any cost, or willing to trade off some proportionality against other merits?

Should voters be able to choose among candidates of their favoured party?

Is territorial connection between MPs and constituents important?

# Proportional representation electoral systems

Most common type in Europe is open-list PR:

- parties present lists of candidates in multi-member constituencies
- voters choose a party and can choose a particular candidate within that party
- seats are awarded to parties in proportion to votes
- within parties, seats go to those candidates who received most preference votes from voters
- thus, there is intra-party electoral competition; which evidence suggests does not make parties internally incohesive despite some expectations that it will have this effect

# PR–STV in Ireland

Ireland employs one specific method of PR, proportional representation by the single transferable vote (PR–STV)

PR-STV aims to:

- achieve proportionality;

- give maximum choice to voters;

- avoid wasted votes;

- retain territorial connection between voters and TDs.

# PR-STV for the voter

Simply rank 1, 2, 3 etc in order of preference, without being constrained by party lines

**TREORACHA**  
 Feach chugha go dtí an marc oifigiúil ar an bpaipéir.  
 Marraíl an figiúr 1 sa bhloic le hainm ghréagach nó ciallúil arís sa bhloic leat, marraíl an figiúr 2 sa bhloic le hainm ghréagach nó ciallúil arís sa bhloic, agus mar sin de.  
 Fill an paipéir lena n-ádhúlú ar do vótáire (príobáid) oifigeach ceannais, agus cuir sa bhloic ballóide.

**INSTRUCTIONS**  
 See that the official mark is on the paper.  
 Mark 1 in the box beside the photograph of the candidate of your first choice, mark 2 in the box beside the photograph of the candidate of your second choice, and so on.  
 Fold the paper to conceal your vote. Show the back of the paper to the presiding officer and put it in the ballot box.

**DE BÚRCA - GREEN PARTY**  
 (DEIRDRE GEARÓDÍN DE BÚRCA of 137 Hollybrook Park, Southern Cross, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Psychologist)

**FOX - NON-PARTY**  
 (MILDRED FOX of Lower Calary, Kilmacanogue, Co. Wicklow)

**HYLAND - NON-PARTY**  
 (BARBARA MARY HYLAND of 9 Dancairn Terrace, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Waiwú, G.A.P.)

**JACOB - FIANNA Fáil**  
 (JOE JACOB of Main Street, Rathfriland, Co. Wicklow; Minister of State)

**KEANE - SINN Féin**  
 (MAREAD KEANE of 14 Thornhill View, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Sinn Féin Activist)

**KEARNS - NON-PARTY**  
 (ROBERT KEARNS of 4 Castle Park, Wicklow, Co. Wicklow; Carpenter)

**KEDDY - NON-PARTY**  
 (CHARLIE KEDDY of Sea Road, Kilmock, Co. Wicklow; Plumber)

**KELLY - THE LABOUR PARTY**  
 (NECKY KELLY of "Aite", Highfield Avenue, Arklow, Co. Wicklow; Full Time Public Representative)

**KENNEDY - SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY (S.W.P.)**  
 (CATHERINE KENNEDY of 31 Gnd Court Drive, Bray, Co. Wicklow)

**KENNY - NON-PARTY**  
 (BRIAN KENNY of 17 Heatherwood, Roghill Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Sales Manager)

**McMANUS - THE LABOUR PARTY**  
 (LIZ McMANUS of 1 Merrido Terrace, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Full Time Public Representative)

**O'ROURKE - FINE GAEL**  
 (RAYMOND JOHN O'ROURKE of 5 Cuala Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow)

**O'SHAUGHNESSY - THE LABOUR PARTY**  
 (JIMMY O'SHAUGHNESSY of Woodside, Rathfriland, Co. Wicklow; Public Representative)

**ROCHE - FIANNA Fáil**  
 (EDCK ROCHE of 2 Herbert Terrace, Herbert Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow; University Lecturer and Public Representative)

**TIMMINS - FINE GAEL**  
 (BILLY GODFREY TIMMINS of Ballyglass, Co. Wicklow; Public Representative)

# Counting the votes

Detailed blow-by-blow explanation would make it sound more complicated than it is

Principle is clear:

if a popular candidate has more votes than they need to secure election, their 'surplus' votes are passed on to other candidates in line with the second preferences marked;

if a candidate has so few votes that they have no chance of election, their votes are passed on to other candidates in line with the second preferences marked

counting continues until all seats are filled.

Most counts completed within 24 hours, but counting process can take several days to be completed

# Political impact of PR-STV in Ireland

## **1 Accuracy of representation**

average proportionality by standards of European PR systems, much more proportional than non-PR systems such as Canada or UK

## **2 Government stability**

29 elections 1922–2016 inclusive, so no record of instability

though current government has smallest ever parliamentary strength (58 seats out of 158), took over 2 months to be formed, and has uncertain lifespan

# **Political impact of PR-STV in Ireland**

## **3 Participation by electorate**

voters have high involvement in choosing MPs to represent them, can choose on basis of any criterion voter wants

turnout not high: 65% in 2016 (though turnout levels are influenced by many factors)

## **4 Cohesion of parties, especially parliamentary parties**

solidarity of parliamentary blocs is very high, very rare for an MP to defy the party whip

# Political impact of PR-STV in Ireland

## 5 Links with constituents

these are very strong in Ireland

critics in the commentariat say too

strong and PR-STV is to blame for this

academics more likely to say the causes

go well beyond PR-STV and that strong

constituency links are not a bad thing

anyway

main point is that PR-STV gives every MP

a strong incentive to respond to voters'

wishes, and in Ireland voters expect

MPs to be active on behalf of

constituency and constituents

# PR-STV in Canada

338 MPs elected from around 70–90 multi-seat ridings, each returning 3–7 MPs

For example:

Newfoundland and Labrador, currently 7 single-seat ridings, becomes one 7-seat riding or one 3-seat and one 4-seat riding

PEI, currently 4 single-seat ridings, becomes one 4-seat riding

New Brunswick, currently 10 single-seat ridings, could become two 5-seat ridings

Or 'special treatment' could mean that Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon remain as single-seat ridings

Drawing of riding boundaries becomes much less contentious because fewer boundaries to be drawn

**Thank you**

**Merci beaucoup**

# Presenters' biogs

Professor Michael Gallagher is Head of the Department of Political Science at Trinity College Dublin and co-editor of *The Politics of Electoral Systems* (Oxford University Press, 2008)

Professor Michael Marsh is Professor Emeritus at Trinity College Dublin, principal investigator of recent Irish National Election Studies, and the leading authority on voting behaviour in Ireland