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STRATEGIC INCENTIVES IN UNCONVENTIONAL ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Daniel Bochsler and Julian Bernauer

The study of strategic behaviour and the impact of institutions on elections has mainly focused on simple and conventional electoral systems: list-proportional electoral systems (PR) and the plurality vote. Less conventional systems are not on the agenda of comparative studies, even though no less than 30% of countries use unconventional electoral systems for their national parliamentary elections, such as the Single Transferable Vote, PR with majority bonuses, or mixed electoral systems. Often, they provide for unusual combinations of different institutional incentives, and hence to particular actor strategies.

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Why should we look at the anomalies? Research on electoral systems and their consequences for actors' strategies (such as competing, party positioning or candidate positioning) usually investigates the most widespread electoral systems, proportional, list-electoral systems (PR) and the plurality vote, and occasionally also the majority vote (Katz and Vowles 2007; Steven 2008). This focus is convenient for large-N comparisons of cases, which can easily be classified (Taagepera 2007), but it comes at certain costs. First, other, *unconventional electoral systems* might be compelling institutional solutions for attaining goals which cannot be achieved with PR or the plurality vote, and thus offer interesting insights for electoral engineering (e.g., Farrell and Gallagher 1998). Second, while the institutional incentives of PR and the plurality vote tend to be clear and straightforward, this special issue shows that the strategic incentives set by unconventional systems are often more nuanced, and sometimes contradictory, so that they lend themselves to the study of complex and diverse strategies. Third, the restriction to simple electoral systems comes at the cost of neglecting some 30% of the countries worldwide, which use unconventional systems for the election of their first chamber of parliament. Besides this 30%, many countries which elect their parliaments through conventional systems amend them with unconventional elements, which can quite substantially affect the election mechanism.

Conventional systems, i.e., list-PR and plurality vote, constitute only 59% of the election rules for national parliaments worldwide (first chambers; see Table 1). An additional 11% of parliaments are elected under majoritarian rules, which have found—to a lesser degree—their place in the literature (cf. Cox 1997; Grofman et al. 2008).[1] Besides these three families, all around the world we find exotic, unconventional electoral systems, which have been largely neglected by the comparative literature. They include the single (non-)transferable votes (STV/SNTV), mixed electoral systems, or the Borda Count, to give a few examples.

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TABLE 1
Occurrence of unconventional systems

System	Worldwide occurrence (Reynolds et al. 2005: 30)	Unconventional rules (state and sub-state elections) and unconventional forms of standard systems in Europe
PR	70 (35%)	*List apparentments*: Belgium, Switzerland, Germany (local) *Territorial registration requirements*: Georgia *Multi-tiers*: Denmark, Poland *Panachage*: Switzerland
Plurality vote	47 (24%)	
Majority vote	22 (11%)	*Runoff in parliament*: Estonia (presidential)
Other families	60 (30%)	*STV*: Ireland, Malta, Estonia (historical), Northern Ireland, Scotland (local) *Mixed systems*: Armenia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Scotland, Wales *PR with majority bonus*: Greece, Italy *Borda Count*: Slovenia (reserved seats for ethnic minorities) *Limited vote*: Gibraltar *Block vote* in several micro-states

Increasingly, some unconventional systems are being considered as part of electoral reforms (Norris 1997). A selective overview of the European cases shows that the inclusion of sub-state elections further contributes to the diversity of the electoral systems in use (see Table 1). Furthermore, even among the main families, there is considerable variation within the PR, plurality and majority vote systems, which is barely addressed in the literature.

Some of the unconventional systems are not more complicated than the PR, majority and plurality systems, and render voting decisions very straightforward for the voter, sparing them the complex strategic considerations that need to be made under PR or the plurality vote. For political actors at the elite level, however, such unconventional systems open a wide field of little studied, but very sophisticated strategies.

Strategic actions are possible, in most cases, due to the unusual combination of different institutionalised incentives. The conventional electoral systems (in particular list-PR and plurality vote) are usually associated with clear and well discussed forms of representation (Powell 2000). However, if elements of electoral systems are mixed in unconventional ways, the clear picture of institutional incentives becomes blurred. Mixed electoral systems, the STV, or the SNTV, which combine rules of (partisan) proportionality with direct candidate elections spring to mind. Alternatively, proportional representation with a majority bonus results in a combination of very representative elements of electoral law and a low entry threshold for political parties with special advantages for the largest political parties.

This special issue studies actors' strategies in unconventional electoral systems at the elite level, and how they affect the outcomes of the electoral system. As the institutional incentives call for very different strategic tactics, a broad set of actors and strategies are considered. The focus of the articles comprising this special issue includes political actors, such as political parties, candidates or members of parliament. It looks at nomination strategies of political parties, which are crucial for the representation of women, or for a party's electoral success,

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and at the formation of pre-electoral party coalitions. It looks at candidates and members of parliament who can either orient themselves towards a local or a national constituency of voters, and who can switch this role during their period in parliament.

Strategic behaviour does not only affect the chances of candidates or parties of being elected, it can also affect the nature of representation (Cox 1997; Powell 2000). Very similar electoral rules can sometimes lead to different outcomes. For instance, the same electoral system can lead to a highly fractionalised party system in one society, but in a different country or region it may lead to the formation of large electoral blocs. Alternatively, the same electoral rules can produce candidates that oscillate between displaying very party-oriented behaviour and being party rebels, and between patterns of local and national representation. In many of the unconventional systems, the resulting form of representation is not clearly predetermined, and depends to a high extent on the elite actors' strategies.

The remainder of the introduction discusses the relevance of research on unconventional electoral systems. It explains the focus of the special issues on strategic incentives and behaviour at the elite level and its consequences for the nature of representation. Finally, the contributions to the special issue are discussed in parallel and conclusions are drawn.

Towards a Definition: Beyond Common Typologies

Most typologies of electoral systems consider PR and the plurality vote as the two main families (Renwick 2010: 3; Reynolds et al. 2005).[2] This is also reflected in most large-N studies, which tend to operationalise the electoral system with a dummy variable for PR systems, or with district magnitude. Majoritarian electoral systems either constitute a third family (Blais and Massicotte 2002: 43–5), or are a sub-type of the plurality vote. But this leaves a variety of electoral systems and unconventional forms of common electoral systems unconsidered. Mostly, they are lumped together as mixed electoral rules, combining characteristics of list-PR and the plurality/majority vote (Norris 2004: 39–65), as intermediate (Lijphart 1994: 39–46) or semi-proportional systems (Katz 1997: 107–18), or as outliers. We find such a classification to be insufficient, as there are important differences between these systems, but also as they are currently growing in popularity:

- The Single Transferable Vote is not only used in elections in Ireland, Malta, and (historically) in Estonia (see the article by Farrell and Katz in this issue), it has recently been introduced for local or regional elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is frequently discussed among scholars of electoral systems for divided societies (Reilly 2001).
- Mixed electoral systems have spread from Germany—where the system has been used since the Second World War—to several dozens of countries and regions around the world. They are often introduced if lawmakers want to move from pure plurality or majoritarian systems towards a more proportional form of election (see the articles by Ohmura, Stoffel, Zittel, Bernauer and Munzert in this issue)
- Proportional list electoral systems with a number of bonus seats for the largest party combine proportional and majoritarian elements of electoral systems in a more nuanced form (Bedock and Sauger in this issue).
- There are many other, somewhat rare forms of electoral systems. Examples include the limited vote, where voters have fewer votes to express than there are seats to fill in an electoral district (e.g. Gibraltar) and the Borda Count, where voters rank candidates. In positive or negative vote transfer systems, candidates are elected in single-seat districts, but votes

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for non-elected candidates count for the result of their party (e.g., Hungary, historical examples in Italy; Bochsler in this issue). This is enriched by many very specific forms of electoral rules, such as a preferential voting rule to determine simultaneously the candidates and their rank order in party primaries in Iceland (Indridason in this issue).

Here, however, we do not suggest a new typology, but instead seek to explain why any endeavour to construct a typology needs to deal with severe problems. Ideally, we would suggest classifying electoral systems according to a variety of properties, and plea for a clear distinction of rules and (expected) outputs. Several of the factors which distinguish PR from plurality systems can also help to characterise unconventional electoral systems. From an interparty perspective, this includes the questions of whether the system is open for smaller political groups, and represents them proportionally to their vote share, or whether it generates or even assures single-party majorities. From an intraparty perspective, the local orientation of the election, or the personalisation of the vote are significant (Carey and Shugart 1995; Powell 2000; Shugart 2001).

Nevertheless, any attempt to locate electoral systems along a single dimension of proportional versus majoritarian ones brings with it a number of problems. Some of the unconventional systems can be easily classified on each of the previously mentioned characteristics of electoral systems. However, elements are combined in a way so that the system neither resembles PR, nor the plurality vote (see also Gallagher 1996; Grofman and Bowler 1996). Bedock and Sauger (in this issue) discuss *proportional systems with majoritarian bonuses*, which are open for small parties, but still create parliamentary majorities. *Mixed-member proportional systems* (MMP) allow for the election of local representatives and personalisation of the elections, but they also allow for small parties to access the parliamentary arena. To cover such unusual combinations of features, we need to conceptualise the world of electoral systems as a multi-dimensional space, rather than as a single dimension.

For some systems it is unclear where they should be located on some of the factors sketched out. Often, unconventional systems, such as the Single (Non-)Transferable Vote, or MMP systems are related to the dominant dimension of electoral system typologies, based on their expected outcomes (Grofman and Bowler 1996), for instance based on their effect on the degree of proportionality. This allows us to consider them as sub-types of PR and the plurality vote (e.g., Powell 2000: 25). Farrell and Katz, and Bochsler (in this issue) show that the frequent assumption that MMP systems and the STV lead to proportional results is not always accurate. Their analyses of the STV, and of the *positive vote transfer system*—a special variant of MMP systems—highlight that the same electoral rules can lead to very different outcomes with regards to proportionality, depending on the strategic behaviour of political parties, candidates and voters (see also Farrell 2001: 5). Therefore, any classification which includes the expected consequences (outputs) of electoral systems is on rather shaky ground. Hence, the output-related aspects, which are often part of single- or multi-dimensional typologies of electoral systems, especially the proportionality criterion, might be less useful for the classification of unconventional systems.

Some of the systems are difficult to classify on any dimension, as they apply different rules side by side. This mainly regards mixed-member electoral systems (MMM and MMP). The contributions in this issue (Stoffel, Zittel, Bernauer and Munzert, Ohmura) argue that these systems are more than just intermediate cases between the two rules which they combine. The simultaneous application of different logics of elections and representation

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leads to contamination effects on the actors' strategy. This creates a completely new strategic environment, which goes beyond the combination of elements of PR and the plurality vote.

Last but not least, the duality between PR and the plurality vote neglects the dimension of preferential versus single-preference ballots. Under list-PR and the plurality vote, voters express only one preference, whereas rank-ordered ballots, such as under STV or the Alternative Vote, or the party primaries in Iceland (Indridason in this issue), allow voters to express several alternatives. Only rarely are these systems considered different enough to constitute a distinct type from PR and the plurality vote (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005: 19). This persists, despite considerable interest in the Social Choice literature for different types of preference-ordered ballots (Black 1958; Saari 1995).

A solution for properly locating unconventional systems needs inevitably to be more complex than previous attempts. The classification cannot be located on a single dimension, spanning from PR to the plurality vote. We would aim for a multi-dimensional space (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005: 8–9), consisting of a variety of characteristics, and acknowledging that the very same rules can lead to different results, and we would define such a space based on the input-side (rules), rather than on its outcomes (political consequences).

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The Role of Strategy in Unconventional Electoral Systems

The accent of this issue is on one particular aspect of unconventional systems, the role of actors' strategies. Political actors—such as parties, candidates or voters—are responsible for the heterogeneous outcomes under the same electoral systems, as Sartori (1986) has convincingly argued. However, under unconventional electoral systems, the consequences of strategic behaviour go beyond the well-known and studied form of strategic behaviour under simple electoral systems. This special issue both addresses complex strategic interactions under rules which offer multiple incentives, and investigates the impact of actors' strategies on the outcomes.

As with simple or conventional electoral systems (Powell 2000), unconventional electoral systems provide for incentive structures which affect the behaviour of the political elite. Not only are patterns of representation expected to differ from those found under simple electoral rules, but unintended effects on the quality of representation could also occur, or the systems might offer 'holes' for strategic manipulation (Black 1958: 182; Bochsler 2012). This can manifest itself in changes in the focus of substantive or policy representation. For example, mixed electoral systems combine a more local, versus a more general, orientation of representatives, but this depends on their specific electoral situation in both the PR and the majoritarian tier.

All electoral systems are subject to strategic behaviour. Still, this does not exceed the degree of variation of outcomes that can be reached under unconventional systems. Under simple electoral systems, some basic characteristics are fairly clear. For instance, the plurality vote strengthens larger parties (or large coalitions of parties), and inversely affects smaller parties, whereas in PR with large district magnitudes, these inequalities vanish. In single-seat districts, MPs are closely tied to and accountable to the voters in their own district, whereas under PR with large districts, MPs rely on a larger segment of voters, which can be geographically more spread. Unconventional electoral systems tend to be much less clear-cut as they combine different, sometimes contradictory, institutional incentives. For instance, in mixed electoral systems, the role of the MPs (e.g., how directly they are linked to their local constituency) can take completely new forms if the losers of elections in a single-seat district are able to enter parliament through their party list, and therefore act as shadow MPs for their local

districts. In a different scenario, under the STV, elections might be very proportional and similar to open-list-PR, provided that parties establish a strong party discipline among their voters, whereas the very same electoral system under a much more candidate-focused competition tends towards a majoritarian character. Last but not least, a list-PR system with a bonus for the largest party leads to incentives for parties to build large alliances in order to win the seat bonus, while still allowing small parties to run and to win seats.

The mixture of institutional incentives under unconventional electoral systems would also explain why a considerable part of the literature struggles to debate whether and how these systems can be located in output-based typologies of electoral laws. Essentially, this asks the question whether they belong to the proportional or rather to the majoritarian family (Grofman 2008; Lakeman 1974; Lijphart 1999)—or whether they have an intermediate position on this dimension (Bochsler 2007; Kostadinova 2002; Shugart 2001).

For all unconventional electoral systems dealt with in this special issue, the key question of whether the system allows for a proportional allocation of seats, or leads to disproportionalities, relies on assumptions about the strategic behaviour of political actors. Earlier research has shown that the Single Non-Transferable Vote, a seemingly candidate based and non-party based electoral system, works very much as a partisan electoral system, and leads to a proportional allocation of seats once the political parties manage to nominate their candidates in a strategically sophisticated way (Christensen 1996; Cox and Niou 1999).

The same can be said about the unconventional systems discussed above. The systemic and behavioural consequences of STV, mixed electoral systems and preferential systems can vary to a wide degree, and are therefore not easily predictable. This particularly applies to the proportional-majoritarian dimension, but similarly also to other systemic (pre-electoral coalitions, disproportionality, etc.) and behavioural (pork-barrel politics, individualised representation, etc.) results at the elite (parties, legislators or candidates) level.

For instance, under the single-transferable vote, the exchange of second-order preferences can affect electoral results (e.g., Farrell and McAllister 2005; Gallagher 2005; Laver 2000; Karvonen 2004), and therefore parties develop particular campaign strategies, which in turn change the nature of the electoral system (see Farrell and Katz in this issue). While mixed electoral systems are viewed in some parts of the literature as a happy medium between the two extreme types of electoral rules (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001), they also open up the possibility of contamination between the different parts of the system. This can also lead to new representation strategies by candidates and members of parliament. For example, in mixed electoral systems, if several candidates who have been running for the same district mandate are elected, they may start shadowing each other in their parliamentary behaviour.

Content of the Special Issue

The articles assembled in this issue highlight the consequences of unconventional electoral systems for the nature of representation.[3] A first set of papers looks at electoral systems and their impact on proportionality. They argue that the consequences of electoral rules depend heavily on the strategic behaviour of actors, so that on the interparty dimension, the same systems can simultaneously appear as majoritarian, semi-proportional or fully proportional.

David Farrell and Richard Katz provide an analysis of strategy under the STV, and the consequences for their proportionality profiles. This covers the strategic behaviour of party elites and voters, mainly regarding the coordination between parties on vote transfers and the

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number of candidates nominated, but also—and relatedly—institutional design, in particular the question of whether voters can cast a straight party ticket. Quantitatively analysing elections in Australia, Malta and Ireland, the tentative findings reported by Farrell and Katz are that the proportionality of the outcomes of STV elections are not simply determined by district magnitude. Rather, the nomination strategies, transfer tactics and institutional rules shape the proportionality of these elections.

Dealing with one of the rarest electoral systems, the positive vote transfer, a variant of MMP systems, Daniel Bochsler comes to very similar findings. With single-seat districts in one tier, and a second tier of compensation mandates, the positive vote transfer system is commonly thought to produce a proportional seat allocation. However, this is contingent on the institutional details and actors' strategies: the degree of strategic coordination in the single-seat districts especially affects the proportionality profile of these systems. The findings rely on a formal model and statistical evidence from Hungarian elections. Low coordination of candidates (many candidates in the electoral districts and no strategic voting) produces disproportional results, whereas with high degrees of coordination and sufficient compensation mandates, the system's interparty outcomes are highly proportional.

Two articles look at the political consequences on the intraparty dimension. Michael Stoffel formally and empirically analyses the incentive structure created by MMP systems. He presents a methodology, based on probit modelling and prior electoral results, for estimating re-election probabilities for MPs parametrically in a both non-linear and continuous fashion. The unified measures of the re-election probabilities in the district and list tiers of the mixed electoral system can be flexibly combined to capture the overall incentive structure, transferred into say the level of district competition, and generally provide an excellent starting point for the analysis of strategy in mixed electoral systems. In the Icelandic multi-candidate preferential primaries, voters do not only indicate which candidates they opt for, but they simultaneously indicate their preferences for at which list rank they would wish a candidate to run. (In list-PR elections, for which the primaries are held, the list rank is crucial for the chances of getting elected.) For the candidates, this leads to complex consideration, for if they aim for higher-ranked seats, they risk being in competition with more prominent candidates, while aiming at lower-ranked seats makes a nomination more likely, but not being elected. Indriði Indriðason and Ásdís Sigurjónsdóttir investigate to what extent gender explains different strategies in this system.

The remaining papers deal with unconventional electoral systems with mixed strategic incentives, and actors' reactions, both from an intraparty and an interparty perspective. A third set of articles analyses the strategic positioning of candidates and MPs. They investigate different strategies candidates and MPs can pursue under mixed electoral systems.

Thomas Zittel focuses on the outcomes of alternative strategic positions within this incentive structure, in the tradition of studies of pork-barrel politics. Using data on a recent military reform in Germany, the article shows which MPs (seek to) prevent cuts in their constituencies, and it highlights the mixed incentives the electoral system leads to. Regarding results, MPs elected in the nominal tier are more prone to join the defence committee. However, not only the locally elected district representatives, but also those who did not win their district but were elected from party lists contribute to the representation of the district interests in the military reform. Government membership and the number of incumbents in a district have a more systematic influence than defence committee membership.

In her article, Tamaki Ohmura investigates the roll-call behaviour of MPs in the German Bundestag, and defections from the party vote. Her study does not show significant differences

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between MPs elected in the alternative tiers. Instead, there are some differences due to the more complex incentive structure created by dual candidacies. While pure list and dual (list and district) candidates are not systematically different with regards to their roll-call behaviour, pure (safe) district candidacies appear to drive the most deviating cases.

Along similar lines, Julian Bernauer and Simon Munzert analyse the relative positioning of candidates in the policy space. Using candidate and voter survey data, the empirical analysis shows that candidates appear to react individually to their joint electoral situation across the tiers of the electoral system. In particular, candidates in close district races, but without a secure list backup, appear to position themselves relatively close to the district. The electoral incentive structure, more precisely the chances of re-election in the PR tier, and the closeness of the district race, interactively shape the strategic choice among candidates to place themselves closer to their party or their constituency.

The articles in this block take the full incentive structure across different tiers of the mixed electoral system into account, or in other words, 'contamination' between the tiers (Ferrara 2004). They provide some alternative takes on candidate and MP strategy in the German compensatory mixed electoral system, with conclusions potentially extending to non-compensatory (parallel) mixed electoral systems as well. To varying degrees, they show that there are a) ways of discerning the incentive structure provided by the electoral system in terms of mandate and/or candidacy, and b) that some evidence exists that MPs consider this incentive structure strategically when casting their votes in parliament, joining instrumental committees, or taking policy positions. In particular, those individuals involved in (in some variants of the theory close, unsafe or just any) district races are expected to juggle the influences of party, parliamentary and district politics in their career outlook. Yet, results are not clear-cut. This may be due to the methodological diversity, or, as Ohmura puts it in her analysis of roll-call voting, it may shed some doubt on the motivational foundations of deviations from the party line. Zittel discusses some of the ambiguities of personalistic strategies, some of which might be supported outright by the party leadership as they serve their interests.

A final article in the special issue deals with mixed strategic incentives on the interparty dimension. Camille Bedock and Nicolas Sauger study this question with a focus on proportional systems with majority bonuses. While they set a low threshold for party entry into the electoral competition, they have a strong majority-formation component. To circumvent these contradictory strategic incentives, parties in France and Italy have resorted to the formation of pre-electoral coalitions, and bipolarisation of the party system. Parties thus react by still diversifying the electoral choice, but the majority bonus incentivises the formation of two large political blocs.

Conclusion

This special issue offers fresh perspectives on a range of unconventional electoral systems, with a focus on the strategic behaviour of parties and MPs. The contributions cover a range of unconventional systems, including the STV and other preferential vote systems, proportional systems with a majority bonus, positive vote transfer systems, and mixed electoral systems.

A central joint conclusion is that unconventional electoral systems are a different kind of animal to PR or the plurality vote and should not be forced into one of these categories. The strategies of elites (and voters), and the nature of the representation resulting from them, can vary widely even within variants of unconventional systems. Results, in line with this general conclusion, can be found under all unconventional systems, which were discussed in this issue.

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- The proportionality profiles produced by the STV depend on the way the actors play the rules and institutional details such as the option to vote a straight party ticket. Positive vote transfer systems can lead to different proportionality profiles, due to variation in the number of compensation seats available, and the vote-seeking strategies of parties.
- Mixed electoral systems create a continuous, complex incentive structure for candidates and MPs to pursue individualistic strategies regarding roll-call votes, position taking, and pork-barrel politics.
- In multi-seat preferential primaries, candidates need to balance the two goals of being nominated and obtaining a high-ranked (safe) seat on the party list, as often the two cannot be achieved simultaneously.
- Majority bonuses invite pre-electoral coalition building.

As a further conclusion, these observations demonstrate that strategy matters for the representation profile of unconventional electoral rules.

The studies in this special issue include some unconventional electoral systems which recently have experienced a considerable interest from political practitioners. Still, the focus on empirical examples in stable democracies means that other, very rare systems, such as the limited vote, the Borda Count, or the (not that rare) alternative mixed electoral system are inevitably left out. For further research, a closer connection of the study of unconventional electoral systems with the Social Choice literature might provide a fruitful avenue. There is still a wide gap between the Social Choice literature on electoral systems and the empirical, comparative study of electoral systems. The accent of the Social Choice literature on formal models and simulations of electoral institutions often comes at the cost of a lack of correspondence in PR or plurality voting systems. Many unconventional systems contain elements which would allow Comparative Politics and Social Choice to find common grounds. Future research could try to bridge the gap between the two literatures, as well as shed more light on the voter perspective and other questions left open by the contributions in this special issue.

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NOTES

1. Considering that the majority vote is often put into the same category as the plurality vote in an overly simplifying fashion, and that many sub-forms of the majority vote exist, a case could be made to define the majority vote as an unconventional electoral rule as well.
2. Taagepera (2007) discusses them as 'simple electoral systems'.
3. This implies setting aside the voter perspective, where further behavioural consequences of unconventional electoral systems could be studied, such as strategic voting behaviour.

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