

ELECTING AN ALL-PARTY COALITION

The de Borda Institute

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Abbreviations

AV	= IRV/STV	alternative vote
BC		Borda count
CDU		<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i> , Christian Democratic Union (Germany)
FDP		<i>Freie Demokratische Partei</i> , Free Democratic Party (Germany)
FPP		first-past-the-post
GOAT		government of all the talents
GNU		government of national unity
IRV	= AV	instant run-off voting
MBC		modified Borda count
PR		proportional representation
QBS		quota Borda system
SPD		<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , <i>Social Democratic Party</i> (Germany)
STV	= AV	single transferable vote
TD		<i>Teachtaí Dála</i> —member of <i>Dáil Éireann</i> , the Irish Parliament

INTRODUCTION

Western democracy is very adversarial. As originally conceived, however, democracy was for everybody, not just a/the majority. Therefore, just as a parliament should represent *all* the people, so too any government should represent the *entire* parliament. Alas, in practice, many parliaments divide into two, with the slightly bigger ‘half’ then having all the power while the rest are left in impotent opposition.

Having first questioned this behaviour, the current text suggests a methodology by which an elected chamber might elect a government of national unity, (GNU): an executive such that a) every individual minister in that cabinet will be, in the consensus of the parliament, the best person for the job, while b) the government overall shall represent the parliament in proportional due.

This methodology, known as the matrix vote, could also be used by an association to choose its executive committee of chairperson, secretary, treasurer etc.; by a parliamentary party in a single-party administration or those of a majority coalition to elect its government; by an opposition party to elect its shadow cabinet; or even by the fans in a football club to choose a team of goalie plus backs plus forwards. In this text, however, consideration will be given only to the formation of an all-party coalition.

MAJORITY RULE

In many elected chambers, decisions are taken by (simple, weighted, twin, qualified or consociational) majority vote. As a consequence, even the most complex of debates is reduced to a dichotomy or a series of dichotomies. Instances where such a procedure have led to an artificial situation are almost too numerous to count. One obvious example was the recent referendum in the UK between first-past-the-post (FPP) and the alternative vote (AV), i.e., between David Cameron’s first preference and his second. Unfortunately, there are all too few who question this form of democracy by which a few, or even only one, can determine the agenda. “The public is deeply imbued with the mystique of the majority.” (Dummett 1997: 81) But it is not only the public: “there is a surprisingly strong and persistent tendency in political science to equate democracy solely with majoritarian democracy and to fail to recognize consensus democracy as an alternative and equally legitimate type.” (Lijphart 1999: 6)¹

So the majority vote is often a means by which those who set the question thereby exercise control. Little wonder, then, that while many dictators have seen the need to change an electoral system and/or ban other political parties, none have found it necessary to change the majority vote. The record extends from Napoleon Bonaparte via Mussolini and Hitler to Duvalier, Khomeini and Saddam Hussein.

It is not only dictators, however, who abuse – or rather just use – this methodology. In 2002, a really complicated issue was debated in the UN Security Council: Iraq. The question involved the possibility of fewer or more sanctions,

¹ Lijphart is here talking of consociationalism, whereby decisions are still based on dichotomies. A more consensual polity would rely on a multi-optional procedure.

diplomatic efforts, inspections and/or threats of force. Yet only one resolution was ‘on the table’ – 1441. France did not like the phrase “serious consequences” but yet, when it came to the vote, France voted in favour.² Why? Was it because it was better than nothing? Was it because of some other consideration like a perceived need for international solidarity? Or was it because the methodology of majority voting only allowed one resolution to be debated and voted on?

Majority voting is also used in parliaments, of course, and there are countless incidents where what should have been a multi-option question was turned into a majority vote or a series of such binary ballots. One incident is well worth recalling. In 2003, the UK’s House of Lords held a debate on reform. There were five options ‘on the table’. Lord Meghnad Desai suggested (though he did not name) a Borda count (BC). (*Hansard*, 22.1.2003) But no: democracy is majority rule, they say; so they took five majority votes... and lost the lot! So the late Robin Cook MP tried to introduce multi-option voting, but that “would have involved the technological development of a pencil and a piece of paper, which was far too big a step for our parliament and its medieval procedures.”³

The basic idea of majority rule as being so much better than any form of minority rule is not in doubt. What must be questioned, however, is the notion that a majority opinion can be determined by use of a majority vote. It cannot; and not least because that majority opinion has to be pre-determined if it is to be already on the ballot paper. So “however democratic simple majority decision initially appears to be, it cannot in fact be so.” (Riker 1988: 65)

MULTI-OPTION DECISION-MAKING

Apart from the two-option majority vote, there are, of course, lots of other voting procedures by which decisions can be made: these range from adversarial methodologies like plurality voting and two-round voting, via AV, approval voting and serial voting, to Borda and Condorcet counts. Only the last two allow the voter to rank the options listed, and not for this reason alone, ‘there are two defensible procedures for aggregating votes: the Condorcet rule and the Borda rule’ (McLean and Shepherd 2004, W11.)

In many voters’ profiles, the social choice (if not also the social ranking) will be the same or very similar under both Borda and Condorcet counting procedures. In a somewhat similar fashion, the winner of a football league, the team with the most wins (and maybe a few draws), is usually the team with the best goal difference as well. But not always; there can be different outcomes. In short, Condorcet still relies on a majoritarian interpretation whereas in a BC, the outcome depends upon the cast preferences of every voter.

If, therefore, democracy were to be non-dichotomous; if it were to be defined in a more inclusive manner; if majority rule and decision-making by majority vote were to be replaced by more accurate decision-making procedures, there would no longer be any justification for majority rule, for the elected chamber to split into two sides, government versus opposition.

SELECTING A GOVERNMENT

Current democratic practice allows for many forms of governance: it can be a minority administration (as quite often happens in Canada, for instance); single party majority rule (the more usual UK variant); majority coalitions (as in Ireland and Finland); grand coalitions (which sometimes occur in Germany); or an all-party coalition (the Swiss model). Other variations of a fully inclusive democratic structure include a no-party state, which is what George Washington and others had hoped would emerge in the USA – as he said in his farewell address of 1796 when referring to the British two-party system, ‘the alternate domination of one faction over another... has perpetrated the most horrid enormities [and] is itself a frightful despotism’. There are also some better forms of one-party state, and here reference should be made, not to the Soviet system but rather the early Tanzanian model, or the form that is used in Guernsey, Tuvalu and Nunavut. Finally, there are the various forms of all-party power-sharing that have been devised in post conflict zones like Bosnia, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Northern Ireland (NI) and Zimbabwe.

In many countries, forming a majority, grand or all-party coalition takes weeks if not months of often tortuous negotiations. Iraq, for example, took 249 days. Belgium is taking even longer: 365 days, and still counting. One reason why it is so problematic can be explained by the underlying belief in majority rule: in any multi-party democracy, this can cause problems. Take, for example, the situation which emerged in Germany after the 2005 elections.

The results were as follows: CDU/CSU 225, SPD 222, FDP 61, The Left 54 and the GP 51. A majority of 307 could be achieved either in a *grand* coalition (225 + 222) or in any one of six *majority* coalitions {either 225 or 222 + (61 + 54) or (61 + 51) or (54 + 51)}. In other words, there were seven possible minimum coalitions, all of which were different, yet for those who believe in majoritarianism, all were *totally* democratic.

² In Article 13, the Security Council “*Recalls...* that the Council has repeatedly warned Iraq that it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations.”

³ From an interview conducted in February 2005. <<http://www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/2-robin-cook.pdf>> Accessed 23 May 2011.

In those jurisdictions where there are lots of parties, the combinations and permutations can be even more numerous. In India, for example, after the 2009 election, 44 parties were represented in parliament. The United Progressive Alliance, a coalition of eleven parties, formed an even larger coalition with four other smaller parties, so to command a majority of 322 seats of the 543 total. A few years earlier, one ruling coalition consisted of 24 parties!

ELECTING A GNU

Be it in Germany or India, the process by which the people elect the *parliament* is open and transparent. The procedure by which that parliament then concocts a majority administration is often the very opposite, a protracted series of talks behind closed doors. Some jurisdictions have therefore devised a special selection procedure. Switzerland uses a *Zauberformel* or “magic formula” of 2:2:2:1 to form a government of seven ministers chosen from the top four parties, and thus far, it has worked fairly well. In former conflict zones, any formula tends to be rather more complex. In Lebanon, for example, as per the Taif Accords, certain positions in government are reserved for individuals of particular confessional beliefs, while NI’s Belfast Agreement interprets party strengths by a d’Hondt procedure. Both of these formulas tend to entrench that which they were designed to overcome: sectarianism.

Thus far, then, no country uses an election. In theory, however, a parliament could indeed elect a power-sharing government. Just as in many countries the people use PR to elect a parliament, the latter could also use a form of PR to elect a government. That this does not happen is partly because no-one has yet devised a means by which that election also determines the portfolio of each minister.

Hence the matrix vote. If adopted, this more inclusive and transparent voting procedure would allow every MP (who so wished) to be a candidate for some or all of the ministerial positions; and every MP to vote, in their order of preference, not only for those whom they wished to be in government, but also for the particular post in which they wished each nominee to serve. There would be no need for any party labels let alone designations, such as are used in the NI Assembly. The outcome of such a ballot would invariably be an all-party coalition GNU in which each of the appointed candidates would serve in the particular ministry for which, in the consensus opinion of parliament, they were most suited.

A party with, say, 30% of the parliament could probably expect to win about 30% of the seats in cabinet. Any member of that party would therefore be incentivised, having cast his/her top preferences for party colleagues, to cast any lower preferences for those whom he/she considers to be the best candidates from other parties. In effect, therefore, the very voting procedure would encourage the sort of inter-party dialogue and exchange which are common to some of today’s all-party committees but alas so uncommon on the floor of the House.

THE MATRIX VOTE

A description of the matrix vote is available in detail (Emerson 2007: 61-85), while an analysis of an experiment in this methodology has been published in *Voting Matters* (Emerson 2011: 1-11). In outline, it works like this: consider a government of ten ministers. The appropriate ballot paper would be as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The ballot paper

MINISTERS	Names of candidates in order of preference									
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
Prime Minister (PM)										
Deputy PM										
Minister of <i>A</i>										
Minister of <i>B</i>										
Minister of <i>C</i>										
Minister of <i>D</i>										
Minister of <i>E</i>										
Minister of <i>F</i>										
Minister of <i>G</i>										
Minister of <i>H</i>										

If the first voter decides to nominate the following persons – a Messrs J, T, L, C, F, U, K, D, M and B – in this order of preference, then he/she could fill in the ballot paper as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 The voter’s nominees

MINISTERS	Names of candidates in order of preference									
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
	Ms J	Ms T	Mr L	Ms C	Mr F	Mr U	Mr K	Ms D	Ms M	Mr B
PM										
Deputy PM										
Minister of <i>A</i>										
Minister of <i>B</i>										
Minister of <i>C</i>										
Minister of <i>D</i>										
Minister of <i>E</i>										
Minister of <i>F</i>										
Minister of <i>G</i>										
Minister of <i>H</i>										

The voter then identifies the particular portfolio in which he/she wants each of these nominees to serve, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The completed ballot

MINISTERS	Names of candidates in order of preference									
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
	Ms J	Ms T	Mr L	Ms C	Mr F	Mr U	Mr K	Ms D	Ms M	Mr B
PM	1									
Deputy PM							7			
Minister of <i>A</i>			3							
Minister of <i>B</i>										10
Minister of <i>C</i>		2								
Minister of <i>D</i>					5					
Minister of <i>E</i>								8		
Minister of <i>F</i>				4						
Minister of <i>G</i>									9	
Minister of <i>H</i>						6				

As in Table 3, a full ballot would contain one entry in each row and one in each column, although, as in other forms of voting, a single first preference would still be regarded as valid.

The matrix vote consists of two counts: the first is an election to identify the ten most popular individuals and these then form the cabinet; the second election determines which of these ten shall then be appointed to which ministry.

The two election counts

The first election should be conducted according to the rules of a proportional and preferential system, and of the two most appropriate systems, PR single transferable vote (PR-STV) and the quota Borda system (QBS), (Emerson 2007: 39-60) the latter is recommended; this is not least because while the former *allows* the voters to cast a full ballot, the latter actually *encourages* them so to act. (Emerson 2010: 207)

The second election is based on a form of BC called the modified Borda count (MBC). Appointments are made in descending order from the number of points cast for each of the successful ten candidates for each of the ten ministries. More of this in a moment.

The first election

The QBS election is conducted in stages, with progress to a subsequent stage taking place if seats are still to be filled. In a simplified form of QBS, stage i) elects any single candidate gaining a quota of first preferences. Stage ii) elects both candidates in any pair which gains two quotas of first/second preferences.⁴ In stage iii) any pair of unelected candidates

⁴ If x voters give Ms K their first preferences and Mr T their second preferences; if y voters give Mr T their first and Ms K their second preferences; and if $x + y \geq 2$ quotas, then the (Ms K/Mr T) pair is said to have 2 quotas.

gaining a single quota is awarded one seat, with the seat going to the more popular of the pair. And in stage iv), all remaining seats are awarded to candidates on the basis of their MBC scores only.

The second election

In a BC on n candidates, points are normally awarded to (first, second ... last) preferences according to the rule $(n, n-1, \dots 1)$ or more usually $(n-1, n-2, \dots 0)$. This, however, makes no provision for partial voting. Accordingly, the MBC works as follows: in any vote on n options/candidates, the voter who casts m preferences, where $1 \leq m \leq n$, points shall be awarded according to the rule $(m, m-1, \dots 1)$. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that this is what Jean-Charles de Borda actually wanted – he was, after all, highly critical of the plurality vote, (de Borda 1781) which is what the BC could deteriorate into if partial voting were to be allowed under either of the first two rules.⁵ (If every voter casts full ballots, there is, of course, no difference to the social choice/ranking outcomes between any of these three rules.)

The count

Once the QBS election has been completed, it will be possible to portray the results as in Table 4.

Table 4 The first election results

MINISTERS	Successful candidates in order of popularity									
	Ms N	Mr L	Mr G	Ms M	Mr F	Mr X	Mr A	Ms Q	Ms R	Ms C
PM	203		160							
Deputy PM			40		70		140			
Minister of <i>A</i>	12	187						23		
Minister of <i>B</i>	42			180				25	30	20
Minister of <i>C</i>								22		
Minister of <i>D</i>		66			110			24		20
Minister of <i>E</i>	30							23	30	20
Minister of <i>F</i>								21		24
Minister of <i>G</i>									50	25
Minister of <i>H</i>						155				
QBS results	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th =	4 th =	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
MBC scores	287	253	200	180	180	155	140	138	110	109

These ten elected candidates are now appointed to the ten as yet vacant ministries according to the highest cell totals, in descending order. The highest cell total is 203, as shown in tint, and this appoints Ms N to be PM. The next, 187, sees Mr L become Minister of *A*. The third highest cell total, 180, is also unambiguous: Ms M is now the Minister of *B*. With the next highest total, 160 (in yellow), the post of PM has already been filled; Mr G nevertheless remains in cabinet. According to the original set of rules, further appointments are made if there is no doubt as to the consensus of parliament: so, in the above example, cell totals of 155, 140, 110, 50, 24 and 23, all in tint, would mean that Messrs X, A, F, R, C and Q would become Ministers of *H*, Deputy PM, *D*, *G*, *F* and *E*. The final appointment would be for Mr G to be the Minister of *C*.

The final results, therefore, the consensus of parliament, could be represented as in table 5.

Table 5 The final results

MINISTERS	Successful candidates in order of popularity									
	Ms N	Mr L	Mr G	Ms M	Mr F	Mr X	Mr A	Ms Q	Ms R	Ms C
PM	203									
Deputy PM							140			
Minister of <i>A</i>		187								
Minister of <i>B</i>				180						
Minister of <i>C</i>			0							
Minister of <i>D</i>					110					
Minister of <i>E</i>								23		
Minister of <i>F</i>										24
Minister of <i>G</i>									50	
Minister of <i>H</i>						155				
QBS results	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th =	4 th =	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
MBC scores	287	253	200	180	180	155	140	138	110	109

⁵ See (Saari, 2008: 197n)

A better format

One person in the example above, and three individuals in an experiment conducted in Dublin in 2009, were appointed to ministries for which they had received no points. One possible improvement is to suggest that, in those instances where an individual has received a good number of points for a portfolio which has already been filled, that those points should be transferred to the second ministry for which those voting nominated that individual. In the above example, Mr G's 160 points would be transferred to his second cell total of 40, thus giving him 200 points for the post of deputy PM, with ripple effects for some of the other appointments, most notably that of Mr A.

A further variation would allow each voter to express up to, say, three preferences as to which post he/she wanted the said nominee to be appointed to. In this latter scenario, a completed ballot paper would be as shown in Table 6. In this ballot, the voter has expressed three preferences for most of the nominees; with Ms C, however, the voter has cast only two preferences while for Mr F the voter has cast only one.

One could allow the voters to cast even more preferences, but that would probably be unnecessary. As in Germany and even as in NI, the various parties would probably engage in negotiations prior to the vote, so most appointments would almost certainly be made on the basis of the candidates' highest cell totals. Initially, then, the second election would be based on the voters' first preferences only. If at any stage of the count, a cell total were found to have been superceded – as in Mr G's 160 for PM – then and only then would reference be made to those 160 votes, to see for whom the 160 voters had cast their second preferences.

Table 6 A completed ballot

MINISTERS	Names of candidates in order of preference									
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
	Ms J	Ms T	Mr L	Ms C	Mr F	Mr U	Mr K	Ms L	Ms M	Mr B
PM	1						2			
Deputy PM	2			2			1	3		
Minister of <i>A</i>		3	1			3				
Minister of <i>B</i>						2				1
Minister of <i>C</i>		1						2		
Minister of <i>D</i>	3				1				2	
Minister of <i>E</i>								1	3	
Minister of <i>F</i>		2		1			3			2
Minister of <i>G</i>			3						1	
Minister of <i>H</i>			2			1				3

PROSPECTS

In a majority coalition in which, say, a party with 45 per cent of the power joins with a smaller partner of but 10 per cent, the opposition of 35 per cent (not to mention the press) will often turn their wrath on what they consider to be the Achilles heel of the coalition, namely, the 10. So the junior partner suffers: the Greens in Ireland and the Lib-Dems in the UK are just two examples, but this trend has also been seen with the Greens in Germany.

There is, however, little logic in a system which allows one small party to be in government while other not so tiny parties are left out in the cold. Indeed, in some instances, a minority of only one – the king maker – can make or break a government. In Ireland's case, it was Tony Gregory TD who, by mathematical chance, enjoyed a measure of power which was quite beyond his proportional due. A matrix vote, in contrast, would allow every party that share of power which was its fair share: no more, no less.

A power-sharing administration could work well if all concerned, despite their differences, managed to work together. Just as in international negotiations where different countries have to come to some sort of compromise, so too, in any consensual democracy, especially on any controversial issue, decisions would best be taken on the basis of a multi-option procedure. Majority voting could still be used on any relatively simple matter but, in any debate which was complex and/or contentious, resort would best be made to an MBC. Two other reforms would therefore be necessary as well: all votes would be free; secondly, collective responsibility would apply, not just to the cabinet, but to the whole parliament.

On any one particular vote, Hansard would maintain a copy of all the preferences cast. Come the next election, voters would be able to see how the various candidates had cast their preferences while nevertheless accepting the final outcome. If, then, in the election, the mood of the country were to change by a small percentage in, let us say, a Green direction, then the next parliament would be a little greener by roughly the same percentage and, in an elected power-sharing cabinet, so too would the government.

The matrix vote, then, could be part of a more peaceful, evolutionary democracy. If, that is, we can move beyond the medieval and introduce, not only some pencils and paper, but electronic consensus voting in both decision-making and

in the appointment of an inclusive, all-party, power-sharing coalition GNU, a government of all the talents (GOAT). The GOAT is a GNU.

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