

THE ELECTORAL EFFECTS OF THE DOUBLE BALLOT: FRANCO-AMERICAN EXPERIMENTS

Michael S. Lewis-Beck

The impact of electoral rules has special relevance today, because of the birth of so many new democracies. Considerable cross-national work has been, and continues to be, done (Cox, 1997; Grofman and Lijphart, 1986; Lijphart, 1994; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989). The general question is how the rules for electing leaders influence vote choice, turnout, coalition behavior, or government policy. At first blush, it may seem that the rules should not matter much, as long as they are “democratic,” which usually implies some sort of majority rule. However, there is a growing body of scholarship which shows that, depending on the “democratic” method of election employed, the actual results of the contest can be very different. In a telling example, Shepsle and Boncheck (1997, 167-172) demonstrate how six different voting methods, including the popular simple plurality (most votes) rule can, on occasion, produce outcomes that a majority does not favor.

Election rules may be classified along various dimensions, including: district magnitude, categorical v. ordinal voting, homogenous v. mixed systems, and number of rounds of balloting (Blais and Massicotte, 2002). The French (and American) electoral system is usual in that constituencies are single seat, the vote is categorical (i.e., no ranking is required), and the rules are homogeneous. The French electoral system is unusual in that it normally requires two rounds of balloting. Moreover, within the double ballot system, there are two important variables: the second ballot signal and the second ballot candidate number. For both presidential and legislative elections, the second ballot is signaled when no majority is received on the first ballot. On that second ballot, in a presidential contest, only the top two vote-getters from the first round may compete. However, in a legislative (National Assembly) contest, any candidate who got 12.5% of the vote on the first round is able to compete.

Our overriding research question is the impact of the double ballot. This question has an historical pedigree, beginning with the work of Duverger (1951), and his discussion of the multiparty tendencies of two ballots. His proposition was put to empirical test, with differing results, in the classic works of Rae (1967) and Lijphart (1994). An illustrative issue is the effect on coalition formation. Supposing the ideal “Bipolar Multipartism” of Duverger (1986), equilibrium would prevail and there would be no coalitions. Of course, we in fact observe considerable coalition activity in French legislative elections. For example, in 2002, traditional parties on the right, basically Gaullist or UDF, coalesced behind one candidate in 402 of the 555 first-round contests. According to Cox (1997, pp.134-135), these coalitions might be explained by “Lopsided Bipolar Multipartism,” where three major parties on the right face two major parties on the left. That is, the two traditional right parties join against the third (extreme right) party, in order for the traditional right to be represented on the second round. Schlesinger and Schlesinger (2000), however, disagree with such an argument. They say that the Gaullists and the UDF unite on the first ballot because that is where they want to maximize support; in contrast, the Socialists and the Communists want to maximize support on the second round.

Regardless of the rationale behind the coalition formation pattern across the two ballots, it does appear to influence voter decision. This issue was directly addressed in a recent paper symposium on the French double ballot system (Grofman and Lewis-Beck, 2005). For example, Fauvelle-Aymar and Lewis-Beck (2005) show, rather surprisingly, that traditional right coalitions on the first round of legislative voting actually increase the National Front vote. Dolez and Laurent (2005), in their contribution, contend that the double ballot system operates basically like a plurality system, in the way it translates votes to seats. Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziari (2005) explore dual ballot dynamics in regional elections. Finally, Adams, Merrill and Grofman (2005) conduct a natural experiment, using 1988 presidential election survey data. Their results suggest, intriguingly, that the policy stances of the ideological policy distance between the leading candidates would not have altered, if the ballot had been one round, instead of two rounds.

In terms of theory, there are conflicting arguments for the impact of different rules. Shepsle and Boncheck (1997, 168) label the typical American voting system “simple plurality”, where the candidate with the most votes on one ballot wins. The French voting system, in particular for president, they classify as a “plurality runoff”, where the top two candidates on the first ballot compete in a second. They, along with Cox (1997), suggest that the outcomes with these two methods should be similar, much more similar than they would be if one were a proportional representation (PR) system. André Blais (2004), however, sharply disagrees. From his observational analysis, he concludes that the French double ballot actually operates like a PR system, thus producing large differences in outcome when compared to single ballot systems.

We wish to explore experimentally this important but unresolved question— Do the number of ballots make a difference for election outcomes? The proposal at hand is part of a larger, comparative study of ballot effects, being carried out by American, Canadian, and French scholars. Funding for the French component, which includes collection of a large data base (2006-2008), a public opinion survey (2007-2008), and laboratory experiments (2006-2007), has already been awarded by the French Ministry of Research (Laurent and Dolez, 2005). Herein we only seek funding for a pilot test of the American, experimental component. On the basis of these results, we will approach the National Science Foundation for substantial funding for a large number of double ballot experiments, with systematically varying treatment conditions. The design and procedure for this pivotal pilot experiment is outlined below.

The Double Ballot Experiment: Design

While most political science research is nonexperimental, traditions of experimentation have been established, and are gaining widespread use (Gerber and Green, 2003; McDermott, 2002). Recently, important field experiments have been conducted on voter behavior (Gerber and Green, 2000; Shocket, Heighberger, and Brown, 1992). Further, laboratory experiments have been conducted on the impact of voting in sequence (Morton and Williams, 2001). In principle, our design is straightforward. It is a between-subjects design, with subjects are randomly assigned to two independent voting groups, each with different ballot rules. The general analysis approach is ANOVA, which reduces to a simple t-test to see if, after ballot manipulation, mean election outcomes are significantly different. The outcomes of interest are as follows: effective number of candidates, candidate ideological distance (between top two), voter ideological distance (between median voter and winner).

The expectation would be that, on all these dependent variables, Group Two (the second-ballot treatment) will receive significantly higher scores than Group One (the single-ballot treatment). That is, the experiment would demonstrate that two-ballot presidential election rules generated more candidates, greater ideological distance between the top candidates, and greater ideological distance between the median voter and the winner. In Table 1 these hypotheses are summarized, for Two-Ballot v. One-Ballot Presidential Contests. (We intend to develop a parallel design for legislative contests elsewhere).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The Double Ballot Experiment: Procedure

Sixty-six subjects are recruited from the university student population. They are asked to participate in a voting experiment, for which they will be compensated. (They will each receive \$10 for showing-up, plus an opportunity to win a cash prize of \$500). To control for subject bias, the students are simply told the study is about “voting in a democracy.” The students fill-out a brief background questionnaire, covering basic socio-economic and political characteristics, including left-right ideology and party affiliation. Then, students are randomly assigned, thirty-three each, to Group One and Group Two. The subjects will act as voters, and have the opportunity to select from an array of five candidates. Total time for the experiment will be approximately two hours.

The subjects read a brief (one-page) text on a central policy issue -- the role of the government in managing the economy. Then, they read a one-paragraph campaign statement from each of five presidential candidates (Baker, Edwards, Jones, Miller, and Smith). The statements vary in the degree of commitment to government intervention in the economy. Each candidate has a distinct position, from a very left-wing position (i.e. strong support for government economic intervention), to a very right-wing position (i.e., strong opposition to government economic intervention). Numerically, their positions can be represented on a scale (with +10 indicating the most extreme support for government intervention, 5 = neutral, and 0 indicating the most extreme opposition to such government intervention). Specifically, the assigned candidate scores are as follows: Baker = 1, Edwards = 3, Jones = 4, Miller = 7, Smith = 9.) The meaning of this numerical left-right scale, and how it relates to the candidates, is explained. They are also informed that they themselves, as a group of voters, have the following distribution of scores on the same scale. There are three of them at each of the points – 0, 1 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—for a total of 33 voters. Each voter is informed of his or her individual score on this scale.

This information, along with the candidate information, they use in deciding for whom to vote. They have thirty minutes to campaign for the candidate of their choice. Before the campaign begins, they may ask the

experimenter informational questions, including questions about the payoff function and the voting procedure, described below. After the campaign begins the experimenter cannot answer such questions, and generally cannot intervene. During the campaign, they are free to talk and interact with other voters (or not).

Voters are awarded lottery tickets according to their performance. The closer the voter is to the left-right policy position of the winning candidate, the more lottery tickets the voter receives. If voter position = winning candidate position, then the voter receives the maximum of 11 tickets. For every point voter and winning candidate position disagree, one ticket is taken away, until the minimum of one ticket is reached, e.g. voter position = 0 and winning candidate position = +10. At the end of the experiment, there is drawing from the lottery tickets, and the winner receives \$500.

There are two ways in which a winner is selected. Group One selects a presidential winner (the top vote-getter) in one secret pencil-and-paper ballot. Group Two has two ballot opportunities to select a winner. Assuming Group Two does not produce a majority on the first ballot, a second ballot is signaled. Since it is a presidential contest, only the top-two voter-getting candidates go on to the second ballot. Among those two, the candidate receiving the most votes in a second secret pencil-and-paper ballot is the winner. At the end of the balloting, a brief exit questionnaire will be administered, asking whether the voter voted for his or her preferred candidate in the first (second) round, who the voter guesses will win, and the voter's own ideology score. Voter are free to abstain from voting (or vote a blank ballot) if they choose; however, in that case, they will receive no lottery tickets at all.

Eight electoral outcomes will be measured: number of viable candidates (i.e., number of candidates with more than fifteen percent of the vote on the first ballot); number of viable coalitions (i.e., number of coalitions with more than fifteen percent of the vote on the first ballot); party ideological distance (i.e., the left-right policy distance between the candidate with the most votes and the second-most votes); voter ideological distance (i.e., the left-right policy distance between the winner and the median voter); supporter ideological distance (i.e., the left-right policy distance between the supporters and the winner); turnout (i.e., the number who voted, rather than abstaining or voting blank); the number of sincere voters (i.e., the number of voters who voted for their first preference on the first round); the number of accurate forecasters (i.e., how many correctly forecast the winner).

Finally, the experiment will be repeated four times (not on the same day), in order to establish the extent of learning effects. Further, the voters will have new scales positions assigned to them in each trial.

Summary and Conclusion

The impact of electoral rules is being studied with renewed interest. The French case has been receiving special attention, in part because of interest in the double ballot, a comparatively uncommon system that, at least in the eyes of some, promises "more democracy" than other sets of rules. While theoretical work on the French case has been path-breaking, the empirical results from observational tests are inconclusive. The experiments we propose offer a new approach. Real manipulations of the rules, in a field laboratory setting, may permit us to see to what extent the two-ballot system makes a difference. The protocol will motivate realistic voter behavior in two ways. The first draws on the voter's long-term commitment, measured by their score on the left-right scale. The second relies on the voter's short-term interest in economic gain. These two forces, ideology and economics, will inter-play, moving voters to select their optimal candidate. While both groups will be subject to these same forces, thus holding them constant, one group will face a single ballot opportunity, another group a double ballot opportunity. This treatment difference will tell the tale.

The findings will have obvious implications for the study of French elections. But they also will have implications for other democratic polities, old and new, which employ, or choose not to employ, the double ballot. The national comparison we particular want to is with the United States. Perhaps the oft-sighted differences between the two systems -- the US having fewer parties, more ideologically homogenous candidates -- can be attributed to the contrasting system of balloting. These results will go some way to resolving this question.

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Table 1. Two-Ballot Versus One-Ballot Presidential Election Experiment.

Outcome	Independent Variable.	
	Two-Ballot	One-Ballot
No. of Candidates	>	
No. of Coalitions	>	
Party Ideological Distance	>	
Voter Ideological Distance	>	
Supporter Ideological Distance	<	
No. of Sincere Voters	<	
No. of Accurate Forecasters	<	
Turnout	<	