

A NEW
ELECTORAL SYSTEM
FOR IRELAND?

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A NEW ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR IRELAND?

Michael Laver

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in association with

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on the Constitution

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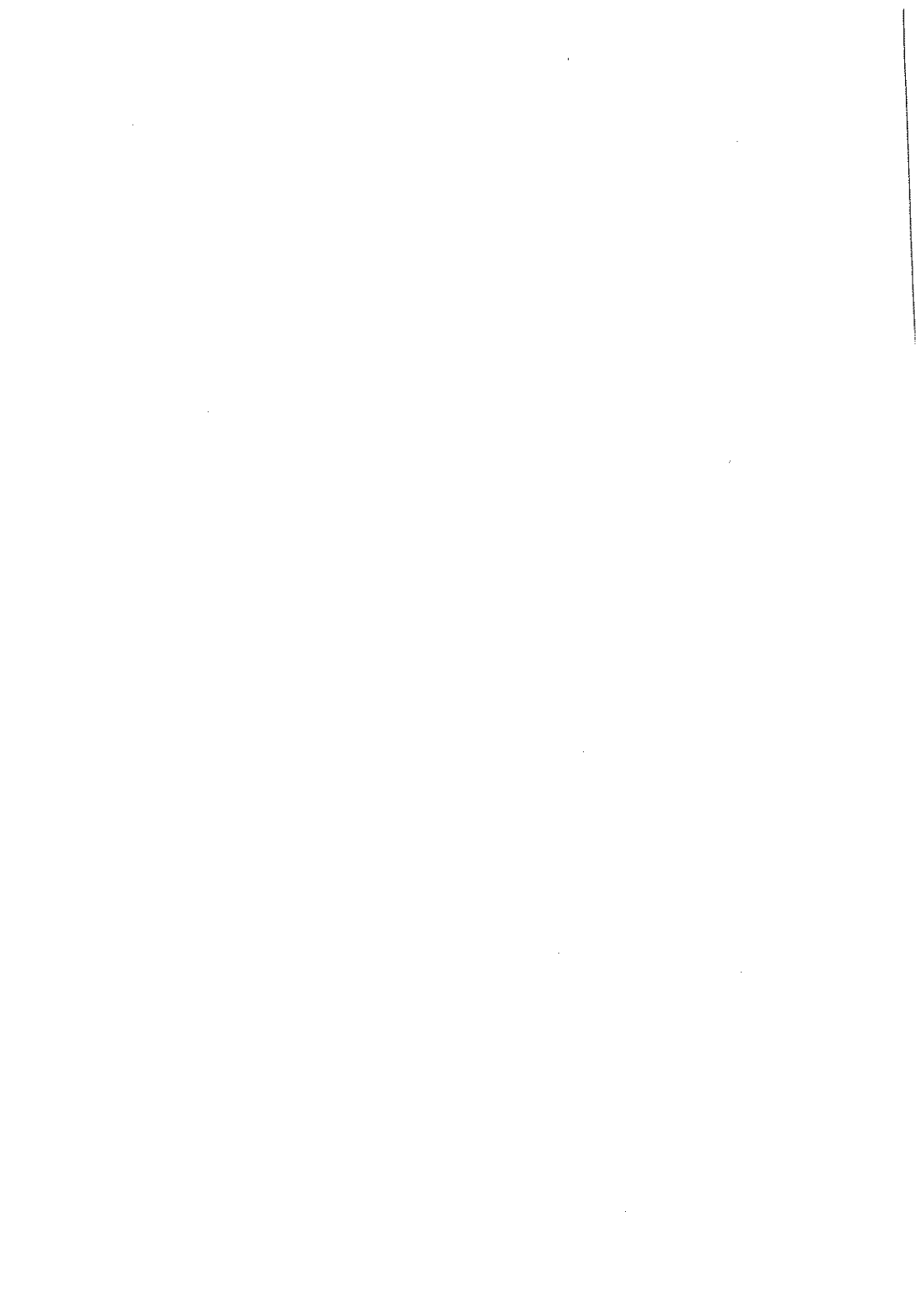
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Executive summary

- This study investigates one way of responding to the persistent complaints of Irish politicians about the current Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system — the replacement of STV with the front-running alternative, the “Additional Member System” (AMS). The AMS system
 - uses single-seat constituencies to fill a substantial number of seats, while at the same time having a list-PR element to deliver proportional representation in the legislature as a whole
 - has been the system of choice for electoral reform over the past fifty years or so, for example in Germany and New Zealand
 - has been supported by a number of senior Irish politicians.
- Other alternatives to STV have major drawbacks, either in terms of disproportional election results or overly large constituency sizes.
- One important decision will concern whether to introduce a threshold for party representation in the list-PR element of the election.
 - A 5 per cent national threshold, as used in Germany, would almost certainly result in a “manufactured” Dáil majority for Fianna Fáil, over-representation of Fine Gael and Labour, and the effective destruction of smaller political parties, including the PDs, Democratic Left, the Greens and Sinn Féin.
 - Using a 2 per cent national threshold, the allocation of seats between parties would be quite similar to that generated by STV in the 1997 election, though few independents would succeed.

- The allocation of seats between parties is only one aspect of an election result. A striking feature of AMS is that it creates deputies of two types — constituency deputies and deputies elected from party lists.
 - In order to participate in the list-PR element of the election, all Irish parties would need to find some way to draw up national or regional lists of approved candidates and place these in strict rank order. This would have fundamental implications for the internal life of Irish parties.
 - Party list deputies would be more dependent for their positions in public life on their party organisation, but would face much less pressure from the electoral system to take on heavy burdens of constituency work.
 - Constituency deputies, in contrast, might be more independent of their parties, given their local electoral base, but would have clear electoral responsibility for constituency work in their local areas.
- The hypothetical election results discussed below explore a range of assumptions about constituency boundaries; such assumptions will have to be made in any serious analysis of electoral reform in Ireland.
 - Under almost any assumption, Fianna Fáil would win most of the constituency seats under AMS, with other parties typically winning their seats from the list-PR element of the election.
 - Thus, on almost any reading of likely AMS election results, Fianna Fáil TDs would be the ones with the clearest electoral responsibility for constituency work.
 - List TDs, representing most other parties and all of the smaller ones, would be freed from the electoral pressures of engaging in high levels of constituency work, although their political lives might be much more explicitly under the control of party organisations.

- Overall, the AMS system would provide a feasible way of retaining proportional representation in Ireland while getting rid of multi-seat constituencies. Furthermore, if a 2 per cent threshold were used, there would be a likely allocation of seats between parties in more or less the same way as the current STV system. The price to be paid would be the parallel existence of two types of TD, and the likelihood that TDs from different parties would be subject to different types of local and national pressure.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

On behalf of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution I welcome this study, *A New Electoral System for Ireland*, by Professor Michael Laver.

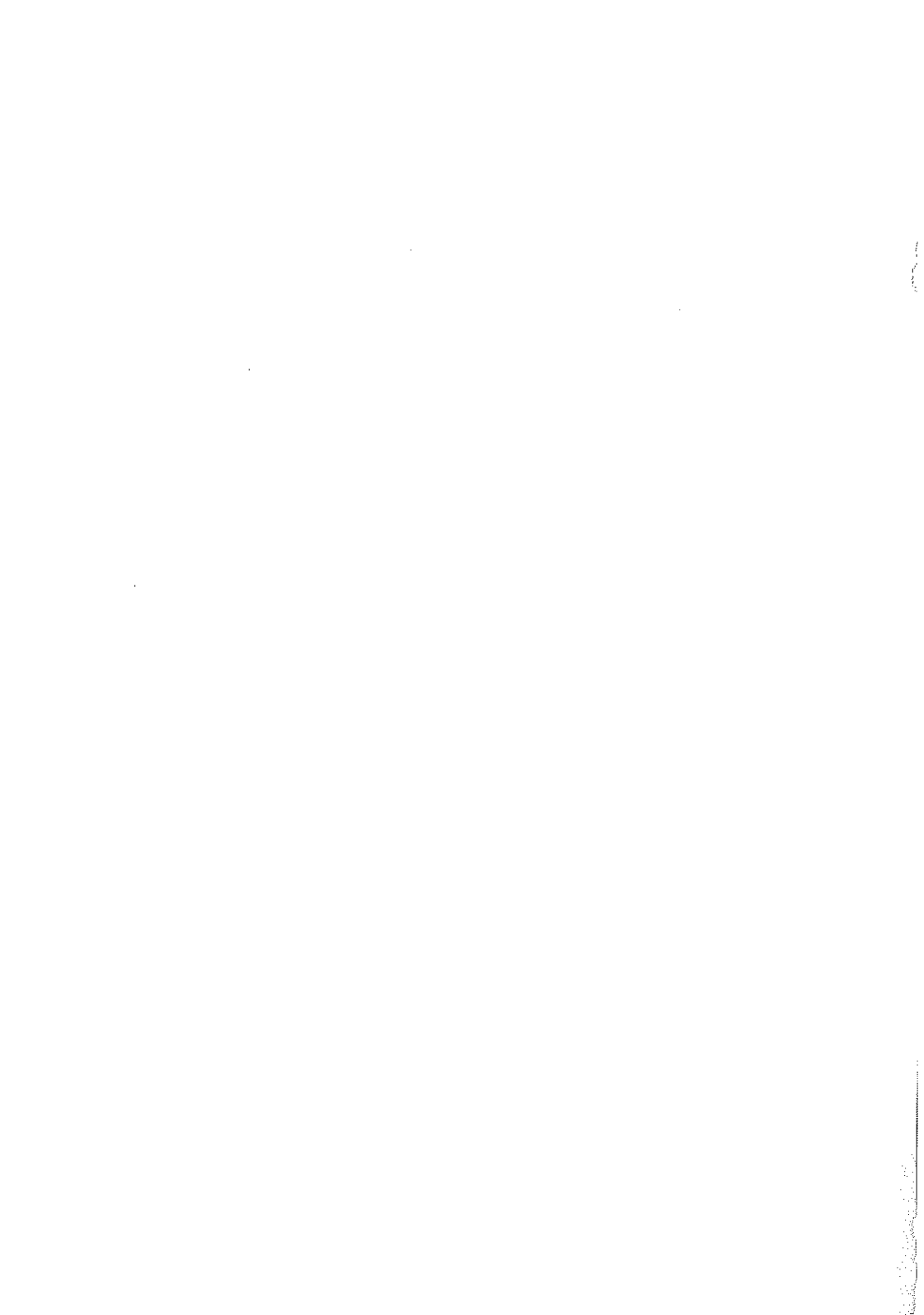
The committee has embarked on a review of the institutions of the state. *A New Electoral System for Ireland* deals with an important element of this review. It is an analysis of a major alternative to our present system of proportional representation and provides a well-informed basis for discussion of the electoral system.

The All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution is pleased to sponsor the publication of this study as a valuable contribution to public debate of the issues.

Brian Lenihan, TD

Chairman

All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution



Introduction and background

This study sets out to explore the possibility of reforming the Irish electoral system by analysing the potential impact of different electoral systems in modern Ireland. Such an exploration is intended as a constructive contribution to a long debate on the Irish electoral system, which has prompted two failed attempts to change the system by constitutional referendum, and has given rise to extensive discussion of electoral reform by two constitutional review committees, as well as countless newspaper articles and speeches on the subject by politicians and others.

The debate must be seen in the context of the absolutely central role played by electoral systems in shaping the politics of any democratic country. We know from the experience of electoral reform in other countries that changing the electoral system can have far-reaching effects. We thus know that changing the Irish electoral system will almost certainly have major consequences for party competition in Ireland. We clearly need to explore these consequences very carefully before embarking upon fundamental electoral reform.

The debate on electoral reform has been fuelled by long-standing dissatisfaction on the part of many Irish politicians with the Irish electoral system of proportional representation (PR) using the single transferable vote (STV). Many TDs, particularly those from the two largest parties, blame STV for the punishing constituency workloads that they often face. Their argument is that multi-seat constituencies — which are essential for STV to work as a proportional representation system — create strong competition between candidates of the same party. Because of the fear of losing their seats to party rivals, and election results do demonstrate that this fear is justified in the case of the two main parties, public representatives feel that they are forced to spend too much time in their constituencies attending to minor complaints from constituents, leaving them with too little time to deal with important matters of national policy in Dublin.

This is a problem mostly for the two larger parties. In contrast to smaller parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael typically field a selection of candidates in each constituency, and therefore face much starker

problems of intraparty competition. It is much less of a problem for the smaller parties, who also have much more to lose by any move away from proportional representation in Ireland. The Progressive Democrats (PDs), the Labour Party and Democratic Left all made formal submissions to the Constitution Review Group, which looked in some detail at the electoral system in its final report published in May 1996. Although making comments on details of the electoral system, not one of these parties recommended a shift from STV. Indeed the PDs explicitly favoured the retention of STV in the *Constitution for a New Republic* which they submitted.

While neither Fianna Fáil nor Fine Gael made formal submissions on the electoral system (or indeed on any other matter) to the Constitution Review Group, we can be in no doubt whatsoever that the STV system has become a *bête noire* for quite a few Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael politicians, who have argued against it time and time again. The case was recently and lucidly put by Fianna Fáil's Willie O'Dea:

... reality is the multi-seat constituency that forces politicians to expend energies locally rather than nationally; one that means the winning of a medical card for a constituent is more valuable to the politician than any finely-crafted or well-motivated speech in the Dáil... [m]any politicians spend more time going to local funerals than they do preparing for Dáil debates. This is not because they prefer to do so. It is because they know better than anyone the meaning of the old phrase "all politics is local"... [I]n Ireland we have institutionalised this core reality into a straight-jacket that binds politicians and constituents together... [W]e need to devise a system that ensures... accountability without enslaving politicians to local, client-bound, pressures. (*Sunday Independent*, 30 November 1997)

Members of Fine Gael have also been vociferous in their objections to STV, with former senior politicians John Boland, Garret FitzGerald and Gemma Hussey all vigorously arguing that the constituency pressures imposed upon TDs by the STV system are highly counter-productive (Boland 1991:42; FitzGerald 1991:49-50; Hussey 1993: 57-61).

The political reality is that electoral reform continues to appeal to Irish politicians as a potential solution to the problem of what they regard as punishing constituency workloads. Not only, many

TDs clearly feel, do these workloads make their lives a misery in the obvious way but, by distracting politicians with local issues when they should be concerning themselves with matters of national concern, STV's critics argue that the present electoral system has potentially damaging consequences for the nation as a whole.

Despite this ongoing fascination with the possibility of electoral reform, almost no serious thought has been given to how any possible alternative electoral system would actually work in Ireland. Apart from an evident gut feeling that almost anything would be better than the present system, none of the advocates of change has actually thought through the implications of what any particular alternative electoral system would do to politics and party competition in Ireland.

The purpose of this study is thus to work through in some detail what would be involved in changing the Irish electoral system to one of the more likely alternatives. It explores the likely impact of such a change on party competition, on the representation of voters' interests, and on the administration of elections. It does this in a number of stages. The next chapter looks at the operation to date of the STV electoral system in Ireland and sets out the arguments for and against keeping it. Chapter 3 describes and evaluates the main alternative types of electoral system that might be considered for Ireland. Chapter 4 explores in considerable detail the implementation in Ireland of probably the most plausible alternative to STV — the German-style "additional member system" (AMS). This combines the single-seat constituencies, which many Irish politicians clearly crave, with the proportional representation that Irish voters have twice proved in referendums that they value. Versions of the additional member system, furthermore, represent the current system of choice for electoral reformers in other parts of the world, having recently been introduced in some form or another in Italy, Japan and New Zealand. We present our conclusions in chapter 5.

Single transferable vote elections in Ireland

2.1 Brief history

The STV system was originally devised in the mid-nineteenth century and advocated in Ireland by Sinn Féin's Arthur Griffith, among others. The reason it was supported was because the STV system is far better able to ensure the representation of minorities than the British single-seat "first-past-the-post" system, which developed in a pre-literate age to allow voters to express their choice by marking an "x" on the ballot paper. For this reason the introduction of STV was a significant element in the constitution of the newly independent Irish state, seen as a safeguard for southern protestants, and was specified by the Electoral Act 1923. For similar reasons, STV was also specified as the original electoral system for the Stormont Parliament in Northern Ireland, but was quickly replaced, in a provincial parliament dominated by unionists, by the British first-past-the-post system.

De Valera proposed the inclusion of STV in the 1937 constitution, which also set the minimum constituency size at three seats to ensure that STV could deliver a reasonable level of proportional representation, at least between the main parties. Dissatisfaction with the system was crystallised, however, by the fragmentation of the party system that resulted in the formation of the multi-party coalition governments of 1948-51 and 1954-57 which led, in a country where coalitions were still alien, to criticisms of STV as the begetter of multi-party politics and unstable coalitions.

Shortly after Fianna Fáil returned to power following the second of these coalitions, it made the first formal proposal to change the electoral system. This was actually the very first proposal to reform the 1937 constitution which was put to the people by referendum. Proposed by de Valera in 1959, the amendment involved a shift from STV to the British "first-past-the-post" system. The 1959 referendum was held on the same day as the presidential election contested by de Valera, a decision that was in itself controversial. Despite the timing of the referendum and de Valera's successful election to the presidency, the proposed change to the electoral system was rejected

by a narrow 52-48 per cent margin.

The electoral system remained on the policy agenda, however, and was dealt with at some length in the 1967 *Report of the Committee on the Constitution*, which noted the popular rejection of the first-past-the-post system and went on to canvass the arguments for and against the Alternative Vote (AV) system used in Australia. The AV system in effect involves holding STV elections in single-seat constituencies, in pretty much the same way that bye-elections are currently held in Ireland. As with almost all other aspects of its deliberations, the 1967 *Report* came to no firm conclusions, confining itself to setting out arguments for and against change.

Notwithstanding this, a second attempt was soon after made to replace STV, not with the alternative vote, but once again with the British first-past-the-post system, in a constitutional referendum held in 1968. This second proposal was rejected by a much larger margin than the first, 61-39 per cent, and no subsequent attempt has been made to introduce the constitutional change that would be needed to replace Ireland's PR-STV electoral system.

The Constitution Review Group comprehensively revisited the entire issue of electoral reform for Ireland in its final report, published in May 1996 (Constitution Review Group, 1996: 51-64). The Review Group discussed the relative merits of a range of electoral systems. As well as the non-proportional first-past-the-post and alternative vote systems, these included the list systems of PR used in many continental European countries, and the "additional member" (AMS) systems that involve augmenting single-seat elections with a regional or national list-PR element that creates overall proportionality. Such systems are used, for example, in Germany, Japan and New Zealand. (We will return below to describe and discuss different types of electoral system in more detail.) Having done this, the Constitution Review Group recommended that any proposal for a change in the electoral system

... should be guided by the following principles:

- 1 the present PR-STV system has had popular support and should not be changed without careful advance assessment of the possible effects
- 2 if there were to be change, the introduction of a PR-list or AMS system would satisfy more of the relevant criteria than a move to a non-PR system. (Constitution Review Group, 1996: 60)

The debate over electoral reform was revived at government level in 1997 with the appointment of Noel Dempsey as Minister for the Environment, the minister whose department is responsible for the electoral system. Dempsey has been a vocal critic of STV and after his appointment was quoted as being "absolutely committed" to replacing the STV system with a form of "single-seat PR" (*Sunday Business Post*, 16 November 1997). Earlier proposals for electoral reform which he had made while on the opposition front bench closely resembled the German-style additional member system.

The All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, which had been considering possibilities for constitutional reform in the light of the report of the Constitution Review Group, was reconvened in November 1997, chaired by Fianna Fáil's Brian Lenihan. The All-Party Committee will doubtless produce proposals on the electoral system at some stage in the future.

2.2 The Irish implementation of STV

Ireland and Malta are the only two sovereign states in the world that use the STV electoral system in national elections. The Australian province of Tasmania uses STV for provincial elections and the system has been used since 1973 for elections to assemblies and district councils in Northern Ireland. It is also used for election to certain US city councils, for example the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, as well as for elections to the councils of very many professional organisations. No two versions of the STV system are identical in every detail and, even within Ireland, different rules are employed for counting votes under STV in Dáil and Seanad elections. This paper is not about STV, and thus does not go into extensive detail on the system, assuming readers to be familiar with its basic mechanics. Here we simply summarise the key features of the implementation of STV for Dáil elections in Ireland. (Those who want to learn about the basics of the STV system in Ireland should consult the excellent reviews in Chubb, 1992; Coakley and Gallagher, 1996; or Sinnott, 1995.)

The key feature of STV at issue in the present context is the system of multi-seat constituencies that it requires if it is to deliver proportional representation. We have already noted that any form of the PR electoral system requires multi-member constituencies for the distribution of at least some of the seats in the legislature. (The AMS system we consider below is popularly thought to rely upon single-member constituencies, but these are in practice supplemented

by much larger, typically national, constituencies for the proportional allocation of list seats.)

The Irish constitution safeguards at least minimal PR in Ireland by requiring that the smallest number of TDs per constituency is three. Pushed to its extreme, if the country was divided only into three-seat constituencies, then the net result could be very disproportional, since a party must come close to gathering a quarter of the votes at some stage in the count to win a seat in a three-seat constituency. In practice, there was a long trend towards three-seaters after the first introduction of STV in 1922. The result was the disappearance of large constituencies such as the Galway nine-seater of 1923, and the steady consolidation since 1947 of the system of three-, four- and five-seater constituencies that we see today. Average constituency size was steadily reduced, to the clear benefit of the larger parties.

The trend reached its most extreme in 1969 when there were only two five-seaters, 14 four-seaters and 26 three-seaters. This pattern was reversed after 1979 when the job of drawing boundaries was handed over to the independent commission that today has the task of revising Dáil constituencies. There was an immediate shift to a configuration of 15 five-seaters, 13 four-seaters and 13 three-seaters, a configuration that was more or less unchanged for the 1997 election, with 14 five-seaters, 15 four-seaters and 12 three-seaters.

2.3 Proportional representation and STV

Despite what are typically considered to be very small constituency sizes for a PR voting system, STV in Ireland has typically delivered very proportional election results. The most significant distortions since the adoption of independent constituency commissions arose in 1997, when Fianna Fáil won 77 out of 166 seats, 46 per cent of the total, while winning only 39 per cent of the first preference votes. This was a "bonus" of 12 seats over a perfectly proportional result. Fine Gael was also significantly over-represented in 1997, winning 54 seats, 33 per cent of the total, with only 28 per cent of the votes — a bonus of 8 seats. Labour was accurately represented by the STV system in 1997. The losers in 1997 were most of the smaller parties. All of these, with the exception of Democratic Left, won significantly fewer seats than they were due under proportional representation. The Progressive Democrats won 4 seats rather than the 8 they were due; the Greens won 2 seats rather than their proportional share of 5; Sinn Féin won only one seat, when pure proportional repre-

sentation would have given the party 4. (See Appendix, Table A1.) In general, however, the Irish implementation of STV has generated much more proportional results than might be expected from the small sizes of its constituencies. Failure to deliver proportionality has never been advanced as a reason to change the STV electoral system in Ireland.

2.4 Coalition government

Since the STV system in Ireland has been relatively proportional, it has tended to result, especially since the introduction of independent boundary commissions, in coalition governments. No party, in fact, has won a majority of seats since 1977, the last election to be held before boundaries were drawn by an independent commission. This is hardly surprising, since it is very rare indeed in modern Europe for any party to win over 50 per cent of the votes cast. Even Fianna Fáil, consistently one of the most successful political parties in Europe, measuring success in terms of share of the popular vote, has only twice in its history broken the 50 per cent barrier (in 1938 and 1977). Given proportional representation therefore, coalition government should be the norm in Ireland, as it is throughout most of continental Europe. Only in countries such as Britain and Greece, with highly disproportional electoral systems, does the method of counting the votes in effect "manufacture" a legislative majority from a vote share that typically falls very far short of 50 per cent of the total.

So STV in Ireland, given impartially drawn constituency boundaries, is very likely to produce coalition governments. Indeed opposition to STV on these grounds was one of the main arguments used by senior Fianna Fáil figures, including Eamon de Valera and Charles Haughey, in the referendum debates over the proposal to change to the British first-past-the-post system. As recently as the 1992 election, Fianna Fáil campaigned against the "lethal cocktail" coalition of its main opponents, with prominent press advertisements attacking the alleged weakness and instability of coalition government per se. It was only in the 1997 election that the concept of coalition was finally adopted by all of the main Irish parties, with a campaign fought by two rival coalitions, between them comprising the five main parties in the outgoing Dáil. Attacks on the STV system as the begetter of weak and unstable coalitions have thus not been much heard during the past few years.

2.5 Candidate selection

Electoral systems have a major bearing upon the process of candidate selection. In a PR-list system, as we shall see, candidates must not only be selected but must also be placed in some sort of order by the party they represent. STV, however, in common with the British first-past-the-post electoral system, takes no official notice of political parties whatsoever, not even requiring party names to be on the ballot paper (although this is now allowed in both jurisdictions). Both systems thus make it very easy for independent candidates to run. Indeed independents, only very rarely to be found at all in continental Europe, are a long-standing feature of the Irish political scene. The possibility of running as a credible independent in turn makes it very easy for disappointed local hopefuls from the national parties to run against the official party candidates — something that is also quite a common practice in Ireland.

For this and other reasons, candidate selection in Ireland tends to take place at the local level. The national parties set general terms of reference for the selection process — often specifying the number of candidates to be nominated, for example — but leave the choosing of particular candidates to constituency conventions dominated by local party activists. Attempts are sometimes made by national party executives to “parachute” a nationally-approved candidate into a constituency against local wishes. Given the firm *de facto* control of local activists over the local party machine however, such attempts to thwart local wishes often end in tears.

2.6 Intraparty politics under STV

All Irish TDs, as we saw in section 2.2, represent citizens who live in three-, four-, or five-seat constituencies. Given the range of party strengths in Ireland, this has typically meant that each constituency has had from one to three Fianna Fáil TDs, one or two Fine Gael TDs, and either one or no TD from each of the smaller parties. Very occasionally, only twice in the Labour surge of 1992 for example, the Labour Party has been in a position to win more than one seat in a constituency, but it is almost always only Fianna Fáil and, to a much lesser extent, Fine Gael that have the luxury of multi-seat representation in single constituencies.

Labour and the smaller parties, mindful of the damaging prospect of imperfect vote transfers between party candidates, usually nominate only a single candidate in each constituency. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael tend to nominate one or two more candidates

than they expect to elect, trusting in their ability to manage vote transfers between party candidates, and hoping to use candidates with different local bases to mobilise the party vote in every corner of the constituency. Thus we normally find between two and five candidates from each of the two larger parties slugging it out for votes in any given constituency.

The STV system ensures that it is the preference votes given by voters that decide which of these party candidates is elected. The result is that Irish voters have considerable power over the selection of public representatives, not just between parties, but *within* their chosen party. This sets up the possibility of what can often be very intense competition between candidates of the same party for the preference votes of party supporters in their constituency.

It is this competition that gives rise to what has become the main argument, at least the main argument articulated quite intensely over a number of years now by TDs of the two largest parties, in favour of changing the STV electoral system in Ireland. Their point was succinctly summarised by Michael Gallagher in his expert report on the electoral system for the Constitution Review Group. "The essential points of the argument are that PR-STV, mainly because of the intraparty competition that it generates, compels TDs to concentrate upon their constituency work in order to retain their pool of first preferences and, in consequence, to neglect their parliamentary duties" (Gallagher, 1996: 509). Irish TDs do not usually boast of neglecting their parliamentary duties, but they do complain vociferously about the drudgery and pressure brought about by the need to do so much constituency work, leaving them with less time than they would like to spend upon affairs of state in Leinster House.

Michael Gallagher meticulously reviews the arguments linking STV to intraparty competition and thence to high constituency workloads in his expert report for the Constitution Review Group, and this review is essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in the subject. He shows that Fianna Fáil TDs are indeed more likely to be beaten by party running mates than by candidates from rival parties, that this is also a common pattern for Fine Gael TDs, and that it is of no relevance whatsoever for candidates of rival parties. This aspect of the argument — that TDs from the two larger parties have a good chance of being beaten out of their seats by party rivals — does stand up to scrutiny.

Whether this is a bad thing for anyone other than the losing TD, however, is another matter. The list of prominent Irish politicians

who have fought their way into politics by unseating a party rival is quite impressive. It includes Jack Lynch, Charles Haughey, John Bruton, Michael Noonan, Nora Owen and Ivan Yates. It might well be argued, therefore, that giving the two main parties a way to refresh their ranks with hungry new talent is actually a major advantage provided by STV.

We must also recognise the inevitability of tough competition over candidate selection between politicians of the same party, whatever the electoral formula. As Gallagher puts it, "there will always be intense competition to enter parliament among actual or would-be candidates of a party, which will surface at different places under different electoral systems" (Gallagher, 1996, 512). Under STV, part of the process of candidate selection is in effect performed by voters, who choose between a short-list of candidates presented to them by the two big parties. The short-list of party hopefuls is somewhere to be found in all other systems of course — this is just a fact of political life — but in other systems some other group controls the selection process. The candidate selectors may be the party hierarchy or local party activists, but this obviously does not mean that the potential for party in-fighting is any less. As long as able people want to represent their chosen party in national politics, there will be stiff competition within that party for scarce places on the party ticket.

The big question therefore is not whether STV fosters intraparty competition, but whether there is something about the particular type of intraparty competition brought about by STV that leads to especially gruelling constituency workloads. Having looked extensively at the international experience in this regard, Gallagher is ultimately unconvinced by this argument. There is indeed little evidence from other countries to support it.

In Britain for example, the country with the first-past-the-post electoral system seen by many Irish TDs as their salvation from the drudgery of constituency work, constituency workloads are still very heavy indeed. Most British MPs spend most of their time dealing with constituency work. Furthermore MPs in safe seats have been shown to do as much constituency work as those in marginal seats, where we might on the face of things expect to find a higher incentive to work hard wooing local voters (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995: 230). Indeed one of the main defences of the British system, to set against its gross disproportionality, is that single-seat constituencies make the sitting MP unambiguously responsible for all work in the

constituency. Single-seat constituencies in Britain are seen to focus work on sitting MPs, rather than to deflect work away from them. In the end, after his review of the situation in countries with other electoral systems, Gallagher concludes that the urge to take even very minor local problems to national legislators is a matter of political style rather than of the electoral system, and that the evidence is that changing the electoral system does little to change this style (Gallagher, 1996: 512).

To this argument we might add another that seems to have escaped those who attack the constituency workloads allegedly caused by the intraparty competition fostered by STV. This is that the alleged effect of multi-seat constituencies is quite irrelevant for TDs from all of the smaller parties, whom long experience has shown face little or no threat of being evicted at elections by rivals from the same party. They may face threats from party rivals in getting onto the ballot paper in the first place, but this will be true under any electoral system. They do not in any sense face the same pressures of intraparty competition for preference votes however, as their big party rivals. Yet no one has ever argued that TDs from the smaller parties face a much less gruelling constituency workload than other TDs. Indeed there are many examples of TDs from small parties who are without doubt extraordinarily hardworking local representatives, despite facing none of the intraparty pressures that the STV system allegedly brings to bear upon them.

There is little systematic evidence, therefore, that it is the STV system, rather than the intensely local political culture so characteristic of Ireland, that is the root cause of punishing constituency workloads. The fact remains however, that many members of the two larger Irish parties do sincerely believe STV to be the culprit in this regard. There is strong and frequently expressed hostility to STV among a substantial part of the Irish political elite, and a strong feeling that there is a need to change the electoral system. In terms of applied policy analysis, therefore, it is important to advance this debate by reviewing realistic alternatives to the current STV electoral system in Ireland.

Alternatives to STV

3.1 First-past-the-post and double ballot

As we have already seen, the British first-past-the-post system, technically the single-member plurality system (SMP), has twice been put to Irish voters in a referendum and twice rejected. Outside Britain its use is mainly confined to former British colonies, including the USA, Canada and, until recently, New Zealand. New Zealand voters have, however, recently opted in a referendum to adopt a version of the Additional Member System (see below) and the first elections under the new system were held in 1996.

The mechanics of the first-past-the-post system could not be more simple. The country is divided into single-seat constituencies. Candidates are nominated in these constituencies, and voters cast a ballot by marking an "x" beside the name of their most preferred candidate. The candidate with more votes than any other is declared the winner. If there are only two candidates, then this means the winning candidate must have a majority of votes. If there are more than two candidates, then the winner may have much less than a majority of the votes. Theoretically, if ten candidates contested the election and all polled very evenly, then the winning candidate might have just over 10 per cent of the vote, being declared elected despite the fact that about 90 per cent of voters had been shown to prefer other candidates.

The French "two ballot" version of this system involves two rounds of elections, one after the other. The first round is a British-style plurality election. If no candidate wins a majority in the first round, then the second is contested between candidates who won more than 12.5 per cent of the electorate in the first round. In the second round, the candidate with more votes than any other is the winner.

The scope for disproportional and paradoxical results under both single and two-ballot plurality systems is simply massive. In the French general election of 1993 for example, the UDF party won 215 seats with 19.6 per cent of the vote, while the Socialist party won 57 seats with 19.1 per cent of the vote. The two right-wing parties won

39.8 per cent of the vote between them, and were awarded 81.8 per cent of the seats. In Britain, every one of the recent "landslide" victories by either Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair, delivering governments with huge legislative majorities, has been achieved with much less than a majority of the votes cast. In fact the Labour Party won more votes in 1951 than the Conservatives, despite which the Conservative "won" the election, forced Labour out of office, and governed for four years. The tables were turned in February 1974 when Edward Heath was forced out of office by a Labour Party who had won fewer votes in the general election than the Conservatives.

Given these wild disparities between the pattern of votes cast in a first-past-the-post election and the winning and losing of seats, which would be even more exaggerated in a multi-party system such as in Ireland, it is difficult to imagine people with any knowledge of electoral systems recommending a shift to first-past-the-post as a cure for any nation's ills. Combining this with the double rejection of the system by Irish voters, we do not consider it further in what follows.

3.2 Alternative vote

The alternative vote system applies the STV voting system in single-member constituencies. It is thus in effect already in operation in Ireland, being used for both Presidential elections and for bye-elections. Since it relies entirely on single-member constituencies, it cannot be seen as a proportional representation system in practice. It is just not possible to represent more than one group of voters in a single constituency and, unlike the additional member system to which we will shortly return, there is no regional or national allocation of seats to counteract the disproportional effects of the system.

This electoral system is used for national elections in only one country in the world, Australia. Australian election results do indeed confirm that the system is in practice highly disproportional and liable to perverse results, in which parties gain votes but lose seats and vice versa. In the Australian general election of 1993 for example, the Labor Party won 80 out of 147 seats (about 55 per cent) with about 45 per cent of the votes. At the same time the Liberal Party gained vote share and lost seats, while the National Party lost vote share and gained seats. These results are typical — in 1990 the Australian Labor Party won a clear majority of the seats (53 per cent), with only 39 per cent of the vote. In the 1987 election the Labor Party

won 58 per cent of the seats with 46 per cent of the vote.

We can thus see that, in the only country in which it is used, the alternative vote system has a tradition of awarding a major seat bonus to the largest party. Since the position of Fianna Fáil as significantly the largest party in the Irish party system is really quite similar to that of Labor in Australia, there is every reason to suppose that a similar pattern would be repeated in Ireland. A switch to the alternative vote system in Ireland would often result in "manufactured" Fianna Fáil majorities, to the enormous detriment of all other Irish parties. In the light of this specific political implication, on top of the generally very high levels of disproportionality generated by the system, it seems most unlikely that the alternative vote system would survive close scrutiny as an alternative to STV in Ireland.

3.3 List-PR systems

The basic principles of list-PR electoral systems, which many regard as providing the "purest" form of proportional representation, are very simple. Within a given electoral area, parties nominate lists of candidates, ranked in order. In the simplest version of list-PR, each voter votes for one of these party lists. The proportions of votes for each party list are calculated. Seats are allocated to each party in proportion to the share of votes that the party list received in the election. The particular candidates to be elected are chosen in rank order from the party list. In other words, if a party is due ten seats, then the top ten candidates on the list are elected. If a party is due only five seats, then the top five candidates on the list are selected, and so on. There is no need for bye-elections in this system. In the event of the death or resignation of a member of parliament, the next highest candidate on the list takes the departing deputy's place as a substitute.

Party list electoral systems are the overwhelming norm in continental Europe, used by the vast majority of Ireland's EU fellow members. As always, almost every system is different, there being several important dimensions of difference between systems.

The first, and for our purposes probably the most important, difference concerns whether or not voters have any say over the ordering of candidates on a party list. In a "preferential" list system, used for example in Austria, Denmark and Finland, voters are either forced or given the opportunity to express a preference for one or more of the candidates on a party list. Party candidates winning more preference votes have a greater chance of being elected than

those with fewer preference votes. Except for the system of allocating seats between parties, this system thus shares many similarities with the STV electoral system. The key similarity is that candidates of the same party are in competition with each other for the preference votes of their constituents, the very thing that has been cited as the main reason to move away from STV. In the light of this, there seems little point in further considering preferential list-PR voting systems as an alternative to STV in Ireland. In what follows, we will therefore consider only "non-preferential" list systems, as used for example in Belgium, Norway, Spain and Sweden.

The second, and for present purposes a less important, dimension of difference between PR list systems concerns the precise formula used to allocate seats between parties. This is an issue because any precise proportional formula will allocate fractional seats to all parties — the pattern of votes cast will indicate 8.5 seats for one party, 10.3 seats for another, and so on. Different formulae, mostly differing in terms of how they handle these fractional seats, are used to ensure that the final allocation distributes whole seats to each party. Specialists in electoral systems have lengthy discussions of the relative merits of these formulae, and the differences are important because some formulae are kinder to large parties than others, for example. The most widely used formula is the d'Hondt method, which typically favours larger parties. A more proportional formula, recently introduced in New Zealand, is the St Laguë method. (See Lijphart, 1994, for a discussion of various seat-allocation formulae.) In terms of the big picture of electoral reform in Ireland, however, the choice of formula is a secondary issue, to be engaged only after a decision in principle has been taken to use a list-PR system at all.

A third dimension of difference concerns the size of the constituencies that are used. We must remember that proportional representation is only possible if multi-seat constituencies are used at some point in the seat allocation process. It is a simple logical point and a clear empirical pattern that, the larger these constituencies, the more proportional the election result can be. In a five-seat constituency, it is possible to give seats to only five parties, and parties winning less than about 15 per cent of the vote are very unlikely to win any seat at all. In a 150-seat national constituency, as in the Netherlands, it is possible in theory to give seats to very many different parties, even parties winning less than one per cent or less of the national vote. Very proportional seat allocations therefore become possible.

There is a wide variation of average constituency sizes between different European countries. Sizes range from 150, as we have just seen, in the Netherlands, through averages of about 10 or 15 in countries such as Denmark or Finland, to even smaller constituency sizes, as low as 5 or 6, in a country such as Greece. Countries using PR-list systems in smaller constituencies do in practice have less proportional election results.

A closely related matter concerns whether or not there is an electoral "threshold", below which parties receive no seats at all. In Greece, for example, parties must win 3 per cent of the national vote before receiving any seats at all in the national allocation. (Previous thresholds in Greece have been as high as 17 per cent of the national vote!) In the Netherlands, by contrast, the threshold is as low as 0.67 per cent of the national vote. Higher thresholds obviously generate less proportional election results, by denying all representation to smaller parties and in effect reallocating to larger parties the seats that smaller parties would otherwise have been due.

In considering the possibility of using a non-preferential list-PR voting system in Ireland therefore, decisions would have to be taken on the precise electoral formula to be adopted, the average size of the multi-seat constituencies that would be used (bearing in mind that these would almost inevitably be larger than those used at the moment), and whether or not to impose a threshold below which parties would receive no votes at all.

Perhaps the biggest practical political impact of introducing a non-preferential list-PR voting system in Ireland, however, would be on the political parties themselves, and in particular on how they choose their candidates. The non-preferential list would oblige parties to draw up lists of candidates and rank-order these. The parties' rank-ordering of candidates would then decide precisely who would be elected to the Dáil. Put in a specific Irish context and imagining a single national constituency, we could imagine in the 1997 election that Fianna Fáil would have nominated a list of about 100 candidates. The top 50 Fianna Fáil candidates on the list would have been as certain to be elected as anything can be in this life. The next 10 candidates would have been nearly certain to be elected, only worried about failure if they were particularly paranoid. The bottom 15 or so candidates on the list would have had no chance whatsoever of being elected, and would probably have been young hopefuls or old has-beens, included on the list for one reason or another. The election would thus really have been about whether

Fianna Fáil was due 65, 70, 75, 80 or so seats, in a general area of support forecast by the opinion polls. Only those candidates who found themselves in this general area on the list would have had anything to worry about during the election campaign.

Even if a series of more local multi-seat constituencies is used rather than a single national constituency, the ranking of candidates on party lists is an utterly vital and hotly-contested part of any list-PR election. Given the current very decentralised system for nominating party candidates in STV elections in Ireland, and given the need for larger constituencies if effective list-PR systems are to be used, this would represent a major change for Irish parties. It would significantly increase the control over party candidates by their party organisations. Positions on party lists would be determined by some process of internal party politics, and a deputy moved down the list as a result of this process could be effectively sacked at the next election. Candidates who won out in the internal party ranking process could be promoted high up the list, and effectively guaranteed a seat at the expense of more long-serving colleagues, even if they were coming to politics for the very first time.

An important consequence of this would be that electoral competition between candidates of the same party at constituency level, the main objection to the STV system, would indeed be completely eliminated. Voters would have no say at all over which party candidates were elected, so there would be no incentive for party hopefuls to compete for the favours of voters on the basis of gruelling levels of constituency work. Instead, it would be party insiders who would have control, by their ranking of the party list, over the political futures of party candidates. Competition between party candidates would thus be transferred from a competition for votes to a competition for the favours of party insiders. But intraparty competition over party candidacies, almost certainly very vigorous competition, would certainly not go away.

The introduction of a non-preferential PR-list system would therefore tackle head-on the main objection to the current STV system in Ireland. It would do so at the expense of introducing into Irish parties what could be a very intense internal process of candidate selection, coupled with larger multi-seat constituencies. These changes might well be seen as disadvantages, and are probably the reason why a system that combines some of the advantages of the PR-list system with some of the advantages of single-seat consti-

cies, the "additional member system", has emerged as the front-running electoral mechanism to be considered as a replacement for STV in Ireland. It is to this system that we now turn.

3.4 Additional member system

The additional member system (AMS) was in effect devised by political scientists and constitutional engineers as a solution to the problems of electing a stable legislature for the former West Germany in the period immediately after the second world war. It has emerged over the past twenty years or so as the system of choice for electoral reformers, recently introduced in New Zealand for example, while the principles of the system have been very influential in framing the new constitutions of a number of former Warsaw Pact countries.

Essentially the AMS system is a hybrid of first-past-the-post and list-PR electoral laws. A number of the seats, typically one-half or somewhat more of the total in the legislature, are allocated on the basis of first-past-the-post elections to single-member constituencies. The remaining seats are allocated on the basis of a list-PR election. In Germany, for example, 328 members of parliament are elected from single-seat constituencies and 328 from party lists. In New Zealand, 65 are elected from single-seat constituencies and 55 from party lists. The allocation of the list-PR seats is done in a way that ensures that, taking all seats together, the allocation of seats at a national level is proportional. Thus if one party were to win say 50 seats in the single-seat elections, and be due say 60 seats on the basis of overall national proportionality, then the list-PR allocation would give that party another 10 seats. If another party won no seats at all in the single-seat constituencies but was due say 20 seats on the basis of national proportionality, then it would receive all of the 20 seats it is due from the list-PR element of the election.

The electoral system used for the first time in Japan in 1996 has some similarities to the AMS system, in using both single-seat constituencies and party lists. There are 300 single-seat constituencies and 200 list seats. This is not strictly an AMS system however, since the list seats are not used to create overall proportionality in the legislature. Instead, single-seat and list-PR elements of the election operate quite independently. For this reason the system is known in Japan as the "parallel" system, and carries no guarantee of overall proportionality.

The type of AMS system used in Germany and New Zealand however, would allow PR elections to be held in Ireland while at the

same time introducing single-seat constituencies. This is no doubt why the system has come to appeal to politicians who blame multi-seat constituencies and the STV vote-counting system for the excessive constituency burdens that they face. The rest of this paper is therefore devoted to exploring in greater detail the implications that would flow from making a decision to implement the additional member electoral system in Ireland.

Implementing AMS in Ireland

As we have seen, the Additional Member System (AMS) combines elections to single-seat constituencies, which will inevitably generate disproportional election results, with party list-PR elections that can guarantee proportional representation between parties at either regional or national level. This system has been in place in Germany since the introduction of the post-war German constitution in 1949, and has recently been introduced in New Zealand.

No two electoral systems are exactly the same, and AMS systems differ, at least in theory, on several dimensions. The first concerns the relative numbers of list-PR and constituency seats. A second has to do with whether the list-PR element of elections is organised at a regional or national level. The third concerns the threshold vote share, if any, that is required before a party is awarded seats in the list-PR element of the election. A fourth potential issue has to do with the method of election in the single-seat constituencies, which might be first-past-the-post, as in all current working versions of AMS, or the Alternative Vote (AV), which is a theoretical possibility since the AV system is of course designed for use in single-seat constituencies.

Once the mechanics were settled of how an AMS election would actually operate in Ireland, attention would then turn to how the new voting system would affect future elections and party competition. Detailed forecasts about this depend upon knowing the precise locations of the boundaries that would have to be drawn for the new single-seat constituencies, which we do not of course now know. We can make some attempt to estimate these, however, by working from the current set of constituency boundaries for Dáil and European Parliament elections. Different precise boundaries may have different precise effects, but we can get a good idea of the big picture from hypothetical calculations, if we assume that the different boundaries that might be drawn will not systematically favour one party or another.

4.1 The balance between constituency and list seats

All versions of AMS that are actually used in practice offer each voter

two ballots at each election, one for a single-seat constituency and one for a national list of candidates. The balance of constituency and list seats varies from system to system. In Germany, half of the legislators are elected from single-seat constituencies and half from national lists, although Germany's federal structure introduces some added complexities. A somewhat different balance can be found in New Zealand, as we have just seen, with 65 single-seat constituencies and 55 list-PR seats.

While the overall size of the Dáil is an important matter, it is a matter quite distinct from the electoral formula used to elect it, and should be considered as a completely separate issue. In what follows, therefore, it is assumed that the number of TDs would remain at 166. If a German-style 50-50 split between constituency and list seats is settled upon, then this would involve 83 single-seat constituencies and 83 candidates elected from national lists. If the New Zealand model were to be adopted, then this would involve 90 single-seat constituencies and 76 seats filled from party lists.

4.2 National or regional lists?

List-PR systems do not need to operate at the national level however, and in fact pure list-PR systems rarely do. Among western democracies, this is the case only in Israel and the Netherlands. For pure list-PR systems, it is more common to have lists for sub-national or regional constituencies. The smaller these constituencies of course, the harder it is to guarantee the proportional representation of small parties. One obvious set of sub-national units for Ireland would be the four European Parliament constituencies — Dublin, Munster, Leinster and Connacht-Ulster. The 166 seats could be allocated to these constituencies in the same proportion as they are currently allocated for Dáil elections. For the 1997 election this would have resulted in the allocations set out in Table 1.

The advantage of having regional constituencies such as these for the list-PR aspect of the election, as opposed to a single national list, is that the politicians elected from such lists would retain some regional identity and responsibility. Indeed they would have the same constituency sizes as current MEPs. The gap between the roles of a TD elected from a single-seat constituency and a TD elected from a party list would thus be less if the list was regional rather than national.

Table 1: Proportional allocation of 166 list seats to "regional" constituencies, 1997

<i>"Regional" constituency</i>	<i>Seats in 1997 election</i>
Connacht-Ulster	33
Dublin	47
Leinster	38
Munster	48
Total	166

The clear price to be paid for having regional rather than national lists will be in less proportional election results. The European Parliament constituencies are the largest that are feasible short of a single national constituency. While these may seem large enough to ensure reasonably high levels of proportional representation in each regional constituency, it is still the case that using list-PR in a 40-seat constituency does mean that any party getting less than about 2 per cent of the votes in each region will not be represented. Defining regional constituencies at this level is thus broadly equivalent to imposing a 2 per cent regional threshold on party representation (see section 4.3), a conclusion confirmed by the hypothetical election results to which we return below.

4.3 Thresholds

In addition to the de facto threshold that we have just seen might be imposed by constituency size upon proportional representation, electoral law may also impose a formal threshold. In Germany and New Zealand, for example, only parties winning over 5 per cent of the national vote, or three constituency seats (one in New Zealand), are eligible to win seats in the list-PR element of the election. The German three-seat provision had never been brought into play until the East-German PDS, the former communists, won three seats in Berlin and thus became eligible for a national seat allocation with only 4 per cent of the vote. The 5 per cent threshold has in practice had a dramatic effect on pruning the German party system, which has "shrunk" from a large and diverse set of parties in the immediate post-war period to one in which there are two large parties and two or three much smaller ones, continually teetering on the edge of the threshold.

In the Irish context, past election results suggest strongly that a 5 per cent threshold would make it extremely difficult for parties other than Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour to win seats over any extended period of time. Only these three parties passed 5 per cent of the vote in the 1997 election, which would quite likely have given no representation at all to any other party if a 5 per cent threshold had been in place. Irish realpolitik therefore makes it very unlikely that an electoral system with a national 5 per cent threshold would be implemented — the public furore over the destruction of all of the smaller parties would almost certainly be just too great.

This might suggest a lower threshold, but we would need to go down to a 2 per cent threshold to accommodate the mainstream Irish smaller parties that are currently represented in the system. Deciding on a higher threshold would in effect be deciding to get rid altogether of parties such as Democratic Left, the Greens and Sinn Féin, and would put the PDs continually under the gun, struggling to survive by keeping ahead of the threshold. While TDs from the three larger parties might lick their lips at this prospect, and even if referendum voters were prepared to pay the price in terms of a less proportional electoral system, it is difficult to imagine the circumstances in which a decision in effect to hand everything on a plate to the larger parties would actually be taken in cold blood.

4.4 First-past-the-post or AV constituency elections?

There are also decisions to be taken about the single-seat element of an AMS electoral system. The German system, in common with all other existing AMS systems, uses first-past-the-post elections to elect candidates from the single-seat constituencies. While familiarity might make this seem the natural choice, it is not the only one. The Alternative Vote (AV) system can also be used in single-seat constituencies, as it is in Australia — though there it is used with no allocation of “additional members” to correct disproportionalities. While the AV system does ensure that candidates elected from single-seat constituencies typically receive at least 50 per cent of the vote, it does in practice produce quite disproportional results as we have seen. Furthermore, as we shall see in section 4.8, many of the effects of the AV system are likely in practice to be delivered by the first-past-the-post system, if supporters of the smaller parties behave as strategically as many clearly do in Britain, for example. The combination of using an untried system within AMS with the likelihood that it would make little practical difference does not present us with

much of an argument for using the AV rather than first-past-the-post for the single-seat element of AMS elections.

4.5 Drawing constituency boundaries

The introduction of AMS elections in Ireland would involve a fundamental redrawing of constituency boundaries. This would be needed to create 83, or 90 (or whatever number was finally settled upon) single-seat constituencies with as far as possible the same number of voters, as opposed to the 41 multi-seat constituencies, with varying electorates, that exist at present.

This would have a number of consequences. Clearly, the 83 (or 90) single-seat constituencies would each be geographically smaller than the 41 multi-seat ones. The geographic spread of the responsibilities of a TD elected from a single-seat constituency would be less than at present, though all of the work from the constituency would become the responsibility of a single TD.

The need for constituencies with the same population would mean that the geographic size of constituencies would vary directly with population density, as it more or less does in Britain. Densely populated urban constituencies would be very much smaller geographically than sparsely populated rural ones. It would not be possible, as it is at present, to respond to low population densities in rural constituencies by having three- rather than five-seat constituencies, in this way keeping the geographical size of the constituencies down. Furthermore, and most significantly, the need to redraw constituency boundaries to reflect population movements would be greatly exacerbated by having around twice as many single-seat constituencies. This is because movements within the present larger multi-seat constituencies leave the constituency electorate unchanged, while it is not possible to respond to population movement by adding or subtracting seats from a single-seat constituency.

It is also important to bear in mind that the precise location of constituency boundaries has a very great bearing upon the way in which first-past-the-post elections translate votes into seats. A graphic illustration of this can be seen in Figure 1. This shows two ways of dividing a large area into two equal constituencies. There are two groups of voters. One, living in the top part of each figure, supports the Dot Party; the other, living in the bottom part of the figure, supports the Dash Party. In one election, the Dashes are doing slightly better than the Dots. If the area is vertically divided into two equal constituencies, A and B, as on the left, then the small overall

majority for the Dashes means that they win both seats. If the area is divided horizontally into two constituencies, X and Y, as on the right, then the result will be that one seat (X) is won by the Dots, while the other seat (Y) is won by the Dashes. This is a much more proportional election result.

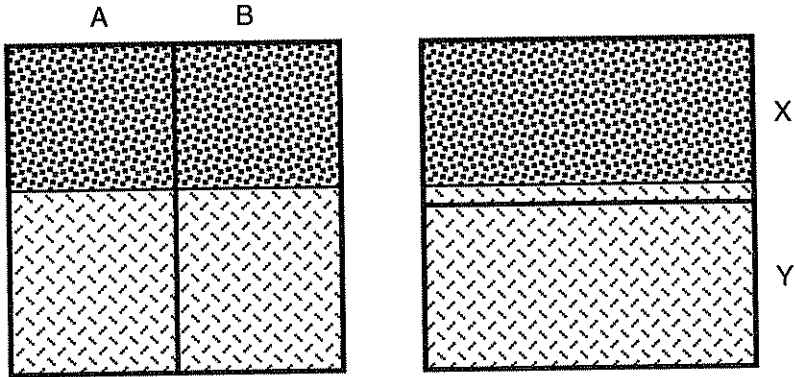


Figure 1: Alternative equal-sized constituencies in the same area, with radically different effects in a first-past-the-post election

Thus the precise location of constituency boundaries has a huge effect on the result of a first-past-the-post election. This is why first-past-the-post elections are so easy to gerrymander for the benefit of one party or another if constituency boundaries are not drawn by a wholly impartial commission. In the same way, the precise location of constituency boundaries would have a huge effect on the first-past-the-post element of an AMS election in Ireland.

But where "should" the boundaries be drawn in Figure 1, given that in each case we have two identical-sized constituencies? Note that, in order to guard against the possibility of gerrymandering, those who draw constituency boundaries — the Boundary Commission in Ireland — are specifically excluded from taking into account the political consequences of their actions, and must rely solely on geographical criteria for setting boundaries. What this means is that the political impact of the boundaries that are drawn by an impartial commission is in effect a geographically-driven lottery. The hope and expectation is that, if there are enough constituencies, then boundaries that help one party in one area will be balanced by boundaries that help another party in another area.

The implications of constituency boundaries for an AMS election in Ireland are less dramatic however than for an election relying solely on the first-past-the-post system. This is because, as in Germany and New Zealand, disproportionalities generated by the first-past-the-post element of the election are redressed in the list-PR element. The main impact of constituency boundaries under AMS therefore, is on the balance for each party between constituency TDs and list TDs. One set of boundaries might mean that most TDs for a party that benefited from any disproportionality would primarily be constituency TDs, meaning that many more TDs from other parties would be list TDs. Another set of boundaries, given an identical pattern of voting, would mean quite a different balance between constituency and list TDs for the parties concerned.

In general, but particularly since the balance between constituency and list TDs for any party will be an important feature of any AMS election result, the drawing of constituency boundaries will assume considerable significance, and this is a very important consequence of introducing this type of electoral system.

4.6 Candidate selection and list ordering

Any list system of PR requires each party contesting the election to present voters with an ordered list of candidates. As we saw in chapter 3, an important difference between list systems concerns whether voters have a chance to have an impact on which candidates from a party list are elected (preferential list systems), or whether the election of party candidates depends solely upon their position on the list (non-preferential list systems). Chapter 3 made the point that the main argument in favour of changing the present Irish electoral system is to get away from internal party competition for preference votes at an election. There seems to be little reason to change the system at all therefore, if the change is to a preferential list system.

If the PR element of an AMS election in Ireland were to operate on the basis of non-preferential lists, as in Germany and New Zealand, then parties would need to find a way to draw up lists of candidates and place these candidates in strict rank order. This is a major consequence of introducing the AMS electoral system into Irish politics. It would give considerable power to internal party decision-making structures, and might well be welcomed at this level, since it gives parties more control over their choice of party legislators. If a party knows it will certainly win 10 list seats for example, then

this opens up the possibility of placing its 10 most valued politicians at the top of the party list, and being absolutely certain that these people will be elected. It might be objected that this removes an important element of choice from voters, but this is a direct product of using a non-preferential list system. Note that reducing intraparty competition by removing voter choice between party candidates is the single most important reason why many Irish politicians want to change the STV electoral system in the first place.

Some element within each political party in Ireland therefore will need to rank party candidates on lists, and this is at the heart of the argument for shifting away from the STV system and thereby removing the incentives for local electoral competition between candidates of the same party. Different Irish parties will no doubt do this differently, but the introduction of the AMS system would present all parties with important new challenges on this front. Some parties might have party leaders or national executives do all of the rank ordering; others might find a way to involve local party activists, as at present; others again might involve the membership at large, perhaps in some form of primary election among all members that ranks candidates on lists.

Intriguing new challenges will therefore confront the parties, but the bottom line will be that list candidates will be unequivocally *party* candidates, and will have to engage in vigorous internal party competition in order to enhance their electoral prospects. So, as we have already seen, competition between party hopefuls will not go away with the introduction of AMS — this is an inevitable fact of political life — but will rather be transferred to an internal party political arena. The more that the local party grass-roots and supporters are involved in this competition, something which might in many respects be seen to be a good thing, the more the whole process begins to look like what happens at present under STV. It would become an intense intraparty contest based upon localistic considerations.

The alternative, placing the ranking of list candidates under the control of national party organisations, would remove the localistic intraparty competition that irks people about STV. It would do so at the price, of course, of placing the political careers of party TDs much more explicitly under the control of the party hierarchy, opening up the possibility of rewarding those who are in favour and effectively sacking those who are out of favour. These are obviously factors that the various parties will want to weigh very carefully, when

deciding upon what system they would use to choose and rank candidates on party lists in the event of the introduction of AMS.

The practical impact of ranking candidates on party lists will bear very differently upon different Irish parties, and will depend upon the extent to which the party is over- or under-represented in the single-seat constituencies. Parties that are over-represented at constituency level, typically larger parties, will have fewer members elected from the party list — possibly even none. In this case the ordering of the party list will have little or no practical effect on the selection of party legislators. In contrast, parties that are under-represented in single-seat constituencies, especially smaller parties winning no constituency seats, will have most or all of their parliamentary representation decided by the ranking of their party lists. Thus AMS gives some party organisations, particularly those of the smaller parties, much greater control than others over the precise composition of their parliamentary membership.

Anticipating the hypothetical AMS election results that we discuss below, for example, it seems very likely that few Fianna Fáil TDs would be elected from party lists — almost all of that party's TDs would be elected in constituencies. This would mean that the ordering of the Fianna Fáil list would not be hugely important, and that every Fianna Fáil politician who wanted to get elected would have to fight a constituency. In each of the other parties, in contrast, most of their TDs would come from party lists, so that party organisations, when ordering their candidates on lists, would have a huge say over precisely who can get into the Dáil.

4.7 Possible AMS election results in Ireland: assuming no strategic voting

Forecasting the impact on the Irish party system of introducing AMS elections is a complex matter for a number of reasons. One important factor is that there may well be incentives for strategic voting in single-seat constituencies that are not present under STV. This means that actual voting patterns may not be the same with a new electoral system, even for an identical underlying distribution of preferences in the electorate. We return to this possibility in the following section.

Another complexity is that, as we have seen, there would need to be a complete redrawing of constituency boundaries in Ireland before AMS could be implemented. The precise location of these boundaries would have a considerable bearing upon the balance between constituency and list TDs for the larger parties. (On almost

any assumption, all TDs for the smaller parties would be list TDs, whatever the boundaries.) The best we can do in this regard is to make some general assumptions about the impact of holding AMS elections in Ireland, building upon voting patterns within existing constituency boundaries.

There are currently 41 multi-seat constituencies in Ireland. Introducing AMS elections without increasing the size of the Dáil, on the basis of a German-style 50-50 split between constituency and list TDs, would thus involve creating 83 single-seaters. Using the New Zealand model, there would be 90 single-seaters. Either way, therefore, each of the existing multi-seat constituencies would be divided roughly into two. Thus the new single-seaters would be roughly half the size of the existing four-seaters. We can get some handle on the likely political implications of introducing AMS in Ireland if we assume that voting patterns in each of the smaller single-seat constituencies would be broadly similar to those in the larger multi-seat constituencies currently covering the same geographical area.

Given evident variations in voting patterns *within* the existing multi-seat constituencies, however, it is not enough simply to assume that single-seat constituencies drawn inside the existing multi-seat constituencies would each be "clones" of the larger constituency, with identical voting patterns. Doing this would almost certainly overestimate the ability of Fianna Fáil to win single-seat constituencies, in effect allocating them every single-seater drawn within a multi-seat constituency where Fianna Fáil currently gets more votes than any other party (that is, almost every constituency in the country, on 1997 voting patterns). Clearly, if Fianna Fáil only very narrowly beats the next largest party in a large five-seater, as in Wexford in 1997 for example, then only a very small number of possible constituency boundaries would have the effect that this slim majority would carry through to both of the single-seaters occupying roughly the same area.

We thus proceed as follows. First, we identify the party winning more votes than any other in each of the existing multi-seat constituencies and provisionally allocate to this party the seats in the single-seaters that would occupy the same area. We then check for constituencies in which the vote won by the largest party was less than 40 per cent higher than the vote won by the second largest party, and apply a correction to the hypothetical seat allocation in these constituencies. This takes account of the fact that, rather than both seats in this area going to the party with more votes than any

other in the area as a whole, certain constituency boundaries that might be drawn would allocate one seat each to the two largest parties. We picked the 40 per cent threshold for this correction because, if the largest party's lead is even larger than this, then there are far fewer possible boundaries that yield a seat for each party by piling most of the larger party's votes in one constituency, leaving it weak enough in the other constituency for the second largest party to beat it.

We can take Dublin South-Central in 1997 as an example to put some flesh on these bones. Fianna Fáil got just under 14,000 votes in this four-seater and Fine Gael just over 10,000 votes, so the Fianna Fáil vote was a little less than 40 per cent higher than that of Fine Gael — just below our threshold. To carve out two equal-sized single-seat constituencies in Dublin South-Central in which each party wins one seat each, it would be necessary to have Fine Gael win one constituency very narrowly, say by 6100 to 5900. Unless Fianna Fáil votes vanish into thin air, this leaves a whopping Fianna Fáil majority in the other constituency of 8100 to 3900. We assume that this is the largest scale of distortion that could arise when two adjacent constituencies in a small geographical area are defined by an independent boundary commission that is not trying to gerrymander the results.

This is admittedly a rather rough and ready correction, but it is clearly much better than doing nothing, and is quite possibly the best we can do without knowing the actual single-seat constituency boundaries that would eventually be drawn. If we do apply such a correction, then there are seventeen existing constituencies in which there seems to be a potential for both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to win one of the single-seaters that might be drawn in the same area. Twelve of these are constituencies in which Fianna Fáil would otherwise win all seats in the area: Cavan-Monaghan, Sligo-Leitrim, Longford-Roscommon, Dublin South, Dublin South-Central, Kildare North, Meath, Wexford, Cork East, Cork North-Central, Cork North-West, Cork South-Central. Five of them are constituencies in which Fine Gael would otherwise win all seats: Mayo, Dublin South-East, Dun Laoghaire, Cork South-West, Limerick West. The net effect of the correction would be to reduce by seven the number of constituency seats allocated to Fianna Fáil on the alternative assumption that the party with more votes than any other wins all seats in the area concerned. This allows us to specify a likely range of single-seaters that would have been won by each of the main parties in

1997, covering most possible sets of constituency boundaries that might have been drawn.

A series of tables in the Appendix presents our calculations on the likely effect of imposing a German-style AMS electoral system on the voting patterns of the 1997 Dáil election. We start from the simplest scenario, which is to have a single national distribution of the list seats. The calculations associated with this, based on 1997 voting patterns, can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. This shows

- the votes and vote share actually won by each party in 1997
- the actual number of seats won and the proportional allocation of seats, based on vote share (which shows the big seat bonus won by the large parties in 1997)
- a proportional allocation of seats between parties based upon applying three possible thresholds to representation — 2, 3 and 5 per cent
- an “uncorrected” allocation of 83 single-seaters based upon giving each of these to the party winning more votes than any other in the larger multi-seater in the same area
- an allocation of 83 single-seaters, “corrected”, as described above
- four hypothetical AMS election results based upon the preceding figures, assuming 2, 3 and 5 per cent thresholds, and a regional list based upon Euro-constituencies.

Tables A2 to A5 show similar calculations based upon the four Euro-constituencies, to show what would happen in each if regional party lists were used for the list-PR element of the election. A summary of the results of these calculations can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2 first shows the votes and seats won by each of the main parties in 1997. It then presents four hypothetical AMS results. The first three of these assume a national distribution of the additional list seats, imposing 2, 3 and 5 per cent thresholds respectively. The final hypothetical result assumes the PR-list element of the election

Table 2: Hypothetical seat distributions in Ireland under AMS, 1997 voting figures

	<i>Fianna Fáil</i>	<i>Fine Gael</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>PDs</i>	<i>DL</i>	<i>Green</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Other</i>
National per centage of vote 1997	39.33	27.95	10.40	4.68	2.51	2.76	2.55	9.82
Actual national seats 1997	77	54	17	4	4	2	1	7
Constituency seats	64-71	10-17	2					
National additional seats, 2% threshold	1-8	34-41	17	9	5	5	5	
Total national AMS, 2% threshold	72	51	19	9	5	5	5	
Constituency seats	64-71	10-17	2					
National additional seats, 3% threshold	8-15	39-46	19	9				
Total national AMS, 3% threshold	79	56	21	9				
Constituency seats	64-71	10-17	2					
National additional seats, 5% threshold	13-20	43-50	20					
Total national AMS, 5% threshold	84	60	22					
Regional constituency seats	64-74	10-17	2	0	0	0	0	
Regional additional seats	1-8	34-41	17	9	5	5	5	
Total regional AMS	72	51	19	9	5	5	5	

takes place in the Euro-constituencies, with no threshold. Many cells in the table give ranges of possible figures, given the changes that would be produced by variations in the precise location of constituency boundaries. All of the figures in Table 2 are no more than rough estimates, the best we can do without knowing the location of actual boundaries for the new single-seat constituencies. They should be seen as providing ball-park estimates of the likely effects of introducing AMS rather than detailed predictions, since detailed predictions are, quite simply, impossible to make.

Under each of the possible results generated by having a national list, very few independents seem likely to win a seat under AMS — none would have been entitled to seats under the national list element

of the system, and no independent would have been a first-past-the-post constituency winner in the 1997 election. It is obviously possible that some independents with big local votes — Neil Blaney or Tony Gregory, for example — would have campaigned in a much wider area and won seats under a regional list system. This is very difficult to make confident predictions about, however, without knowing how far their support would have extended beyond the local constituency that they actually contested in 1997. No guesses on such matters are hazarded here and Table 2, therefore, may be a little unkind to independents. It does however confirm a pattern that is very clear from countries such as Germany and New Zealand that use AMS; a shift to AMS in Ireland, indeed almost any shift away from STV, would be bad news for independents.

The results in Table 2 are particularly striking in terms of the impact of an electoral threshold. Using a 2 per cent national threshold, the final result under AMS would have looked quite like the actual Irish result under STV in 1997. The main differences would be that the two main parties, which were significantly over-represented in 1997, would have done worse under AMS, while the smaller parties, under-represented in 1997, would have done quite a bit better. Independents would disappear, as we have just seen.

The hypothetical AMS outcome with a 2 per cent national threshold is very similar to that which would have been seen had the PR element taken place using lists based on the regional Euro-constituencies. Indeed all parties except Fianna Fáil would have done the same under regional constituencies as under a national 2 per cent threshold, bearing out the point that the size of these regional constituencies amounts to a threshold of about 2 per cent on proportional representation.

In each of the hypothetical AMS election results with an effective 2 per cent threshold, the arithmetic of government formation would have been similar to that in 1997, with a Fianna Fáil-PD coalition just short of a majority. A very important impact on government formation, of course, would have arisen from the reduction in the number of independents, given the deep dependence of the government that formed after the 1997 election on the votes of independent TDs. This would have meant that a Fianna Fáil-PD coalition would have needed to attract the support of one of the smaller parties — DL, Greens or Sinn Féin — to take it over the winning threshold.

Sticking with these results, we also note the balance between

constituency and list seats for each party. As we hinted above, this balance is dramatically different for different parties, a phenomenon observed in other jurisdictions where AMS is used. In the Irish case, and under almost any assumptions about constituency boundaries, the result would be that Fianna Fáil representatives would mostly be constituency TDs, with only a tiny handful of them being elected from the list. Looking at this another way, nearly every voter in the country would have a Fianna Fáil TD as the only person officially available to do their constituency work. Conversely, most Fine Gael representatives, and in effect all representatives from all of the other parties, would be selected from lists rather than being constituency TDs.

This huge party imbalance between constituency and list TDs under AMS in Ireland is a startling consequence of the fact that, not only in 1997 but in most preceding elections, Fianna Fáil won a much larger share of the vote, both nationally and in most constituencies, than any single other party. Fianna Fáil is therefore likely to win most of the constituency seats if the AMS electoral system is adopted in Ireland, under a very wide variety of assumptions.

Assessing the effect of a New Zealand model, involving a split between 90 single-seaters and 76 list seats, is complicated by the fact that the new single-seat constituencies would be on average less than half the size of the existing multi-seaters. Nonetheless, a rough estimate of the effect of this format can be gained by taking the high end of the ranges given in Table 2 for the representation of the larger parties. The overall seat total for each party would be the same under either the German or the New Zealand models, since these overall totals would be generated by the list-PR element of the election. So having more constituency seats, as in the New Zealand model, would have the effect of giving the larger parties more constituency seats, and hence fewer list seats. This would exaggerate the differential effects of AMS on different parties in Ireland.

This differential effect is something that will have to be taken very seriously indeed in any decision about introducing AMS in Ireland. Fianna Fáil TDs may not be willing to take on the entire burden of local constituency work in Ireland, while their party rivals who for the most part will be elected from lists will be free to attend to matters of national concern. Members of the public may not want to find that, unless they are Fianna Fáil supporters, they have no constituency TD of their own party to turn to when they want something done.

Of course it may be the case in practice that TDs elected from party lists will also do constituency work in the area in which they live. For the larger parties, there may well be a strong incentive to do this, in order to build a base as a future constituency TD. (Though here we might well see the re-emergence of internal party competition for constituency seats.) For the smaller parties however, which have no realistic hope whatsoever of winning a constituency seat, there would be no incentive, other than common decency, for a list TD who happened to live in a particular area to take on local constituency work.

A further very great disparity between the parties would be that Fianna Fáil would be subject to quite different candidate selection pressures from those felt by the other parties. We have already seen that the list-PR element of an AMS election would require parties to come up with a ranking of all candidates on their lists, and that these rankings would be utterly crucial to the political futures of party candidates. Table 2 now shows us that this will bear very differently upon different parties. For all parties apart from Fianna Fáil the ranking of candidates by parties will be the main process that determines, for a given national vote share, which party candidates become TDs. For Fianna Fáil hopefuls the key gateway to the Dáil would become securing nomination as a local constituency candidate, since very few candidates will be elected from secure positions at the top of the Fianna Fáil list.

As Table 2 shows, such differences between the two main parties, at least, would be mitigated slightly by increasing the electoral threshold above 2 per cent, but this would happen, of course, at the cost of destroying the smaller parties. Imposing a 3 per cent rather than a 2 per cent national threshold would have wiped out DL, the Greens and Sinn Féin in 1997, with the gains going largely to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, which would each have won more list seats. As a result of this, a 3 per cent threshold under AMS would have given the Fianna Fáil-PD coalition a majority after the 1997 election, without forcing it to seek the support of other parties.

Imposing a 5 per cent threshold, as in Germany, would have left only Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour with seats in the Dáil after the 1997 election. It would also have left Fianna Fáil with an overall majority in a very finely poised election result, despite having won only 39 per cent of the popular vote. Once we impose a 5 per cent threshold, however, the clear possibility of strategic voting by supporters of the excluded parties is something we need to take very

seriously, and is a matter to which we return in the following section.

Overall, however, it is quite clear that, as is only to be expected, steadily raising the electoral threshold will essentially benefit the two larger parties at the expense of excluding the smaller ones from the Dáil altogether. The net result will be an increasingly dominant position for the largest party, Fianna Fáil, which would find it very much easier to secure an overall majority if a 5 per cent threshold is used.

This suggests quite strongly that, unless the aim is to help the larger parties at the expense of the smaller, then the threshold under AMS should be set at a low level. To achieve broadly the same level of PR as we find under the present STV system, either the maximum threshold should be set at 2 per cent, or four regional lists should be used, the size of the present Euro-constituencies with no threshold other than constituency size. To set a higher electoral threshold than 2 per cent seems likely to have devastating effects on some of the smaller parties who are currently established features of Irish party politics, and thus bring about a major transformation of the party system. This would benefit both large parties, but especially Fianna Fáil.

4.8 Possible AMS election results in Ireland, assuming strategic voting

We now turn to the thorny issue of strategic voting, which is important because there are incentives for strategic voting in the AMS system that are not present under STV. Incentives to vote strategically in AMS elections differ from those under first-past-the-post, but are important nonetheless. They arise from the desire to have a constituency TD who is as close as feasible to the voter's political affiliation. This may lead a voter to vote in the constituency election, not for his or her first choice candidate, but for the most-preferred candidate who is seen to have a chance of winning the constituency election. If, as in Germany, the voter is presented with two ballot papers, one for a constituency TD and one for a national or regional list, then there is no cost at all to the voter's preferred national party in voting strategically in the constituency election for the candidate of a different party. There is evidence, for example, that at least some "national" supporters of the small Free Democrat Party (FDP) in Germany did indeed vote in the constituency part of the election for the FDP's coalition partner, the Christian Democratic

Union (CDU), figuring that a constituency vote for the FDP was in effect a wasted vote.

There is thus a high incentive for strategic "split-ticket" voting in AMS elections. This makes it difficult for us to estimate the potential strategic effects of the single-seat aspect of an AMS election in Ireland. We can attempt to do this in a speculative way, however, and do so in what follows in the light of the electoral coalitions between parties that contested the 1997 Dáil election. Strategic voters are thus assumed in what follows to support the most popular candidate in their constituency *from their own party coalition*.

Thus, on one side of the election, strategic PD voters are assumed to support the Fianna Fáil candidate in their constituency — there was no case where it was the PD candidate who would have been expected to be the likely victor of the candidates from the Fianna Fáil-PD alliance. In addition, though this is never critical, 50 per cent of strategic voters who opted for Sinn Féin in the national list election were assumed to switch to the Fianna Fáil candidate in their constituency.

On the other side of the election, in all but the two Kerry constituencies, strategic voters for the outgoing Rainbow Coalition parties were assumed to support the Fine Gael candidate, who would always have been the front runner for the Rainbow. The two Kerry constituencies were the only ones in which Labour was running ahead of the other Rainbow parties and, in these, strategic Rainbow voters were assumed to switch to Labour. Once more, though this is never critical, 50 per cent of strategic Green Party voters were assumed to support the front-running Rainbow party in their constituency.

In both of the above cases, it is very important to re-emphasise that strategic voters would not be deserting their most-favoured party in the list-PR election, so that their party's national prospects would not be damaged by this strategic behaviour. The incentive for a strategic vote is in the constituency election, in order to have a local public representative with views as close as possible to your own.

The big problem, of course, is that we don't know how many Irish voters would vote strategically, given the new incentives that they would face to do so if AMS were to be introduced. STV offers far fewer incentives for strategic voting, so Irish voters will be unfamiliar with the calculations involved. Nonetheless, STV elections force Irish voters to make sophisticated choices at election time, so

there is every reason to suppose that many Irish voters would be quite likely to think in strategic terms if a new electoral system were to be introduced. Certainly in Britain strategic voting by Liberal Democrat and Labour supporters, against incumbent Conservative governments, has been an important feature of elections for some time.

We tackle the uncertainty about the potential number of strategic voters in Ireland by recalculating the results of the 1997 Dáil election assuming single-seat constituencies and using various assumptions about the level of strategic voting. These are

- no strategic voting
- 25 per cent of voters with an incentive to do so vote strategically
- 50 per cent of voters with an incentive to do so vote strategically
- 75 per cent of voters with an incentive to do so vote strategically
- every voter with an incentive to do so votes strategically.

This range of assumptions allows us to get some sense of the sensitivity of likely AMS results to strategic voting. The calculations we have performed are set out in Tables A6 to A10 in the Appendix. Table A6 gives the result of the 1997 Dáil election, assuming no strategic voting. The votes cast are thus the actual votes cast in 1997, and the single-seat constituencies within each of the existing multi-seat districts are each awarded to the party getting more votes than any other. These figures thus reproduce those for the constituency element of an AMS election, reported in Table 2 above, and show Fianna Fáil winning most of the single-seat constituencies, as we have seen. It should be remembered that calculations reported in Table 2 suggest that the Fianna Fáil total might need to be reduced by up to 7 out of 83 constituency seats, to take account of the possible impact of the different boundaries that could be drawn within the existing multi-seat constituencies.

Table A7 makes the assumption that 25 per cent of voters with an incentive to vote strategically actually do so in the way we have assumed. In this event, the votes in each constituency would be as set out in the table. The result would be that one set of constituencies — clones of the old Wexford multi-seater — would change hands from Fianna Fáil to Fine Gael as a result of strategic voting. All

strategic voting in the circumstances we are considering has this partisan effect, since in effect it reflects a consolidation of the anti-Fianna Fáil vote in an attempt to overtake the local Fianna Fáil candidate. Table A8 performs the same calculations assuming that 50 per cent of voters with an incentive to vote strategically actually do so. This causes clones of three more constituencies to change hands from Fianna Fáil to Fine Gael. These are Cork East, Kildare North, and Wicklow. Table A9 assumes 75 per cent strategic voting, almost certainly a much higher level than would be observed in practice. This causes three more sets of constituencies to change hands — Cork North-West, Dublin South-Central and Sligo-Leitrim. Finally, Table A10 makes the implausible assumption that every possible voter with an incentive to do so votes strategically. Only two more sets of constituencies fall under this assumption however. These are Tipperary South and Westmeath.

Table 3 summarises the impact of the various levels of strategic voting on the balance between the constituency and list-PR elements of an AMS election in Ireland, assuming the underlying voting patterns of the 1997 election and the application of a 2 per cent threshold at national level. (Diligent readers can recalculate the figures implied by seat distributions flowing from the different thresholds reported in Table 2!)

Table 3 shows that, even with truly massive levels of strategic voting, the result would be to switch about seventeen constituency seats from Fianna Fáil to Fine Gael. Taking what might still be a quite high estimate of about 50 per cent strategic voting, the effect would be to switch about eight first-past-the-post seats from Fianna Fáil to Fine Gael. Fianna Fáil would not lose these seats overall, of course, but would instead make them up from the list-PR element in the election. The bottom line here is that, taking 1997 as a baseline, not at all an historically high level of support for Fianna Fáil, and even assuming what may well be unrealistically high levels of anti-Fianna Fáil strategic voting, the introduction to AMS in Ireland would leave Fianna Fáil with most of the constituency seats, and other parties sharing most of the list seats between them.

Table 3: The impact of different levels of strategic voting on the balance between constituency and list-PR elements of a hypothetical AMS election in Ireland, applying a 2 per cent threshold

	<i>Fianna Fáil</i>	<i>Fine Gael</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>PDs</i>	<i>DL</i>	<i>Green</i>	<i>SF</i>
National seat allocations, 2% threshold	72	51	19	9	5	5	5
National seats, no strategic voting	71	10	2				
National list seats, no strategic voting	1	41	17	9	5	5	5
National seats, 25% strategic voting	69	12	2				
National list seats, 25% strategic voting	3	39	17	9	5	5	5
National seats, 50% strategic voting	63	18	2				
National list seats, 50% strategic voting	9	33	17	9	5	5	5
National seats, 75% strategic voting	57	24	2				
National list seats, 75% strategic voting	15	27	17	9	5	5	5
National seats, 100% strategic voting	54	27	2				
National list seats, 75% strategic voting	18	24	17	9	5	5	

Conclusions

This study has set out to investigate the impact of responding to the persistent complaints of Irish politicians about the current Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system by replacing it with an alternative. The alternative is the "Additional Member System" (AMS), chosen for several reasons:

- AMS provides a response to the main criticisms of STV from Irish politicians, in using single-seat constituencies, while at the same time delivering the proportional representation that represents "best practice" for any electoral system by accurately reflecting the wishes of voters in the final election result
- AMS has been the system of choice for countries reforming their electoral system over the past fifty years or so, for example Germany and New Zealand
- each of the other alternatives to STV has major drawbacks, either in terms of extremely disproportional election results (as with first-past-the-post, double ballot, or the alternative vote) or requiring party lists in larger than the existing constituencies that will distance Irish voters further from their public representatives
- AMS is currently under political consideration as an alternative to STV in Ireland, having been publicly supported by a number of senior political figures.

Any change of electoral system can have profound consequences for party politics in the country concerned. It should not be undertaken lightly, without careful advance research. This study has set out to begin this process by estimating the impact of introducing AMS into the current system of party politics in Ireland, taking the 1997 general election result as a baseline. Inevitably, this involves

making some bold assumptions about a number of matters, in particular the political impact of the boundaries of the new single-seat constituencies that would have to be drawn. The hypothetical results reported in Table 2 explore a range of possible assumptions about constituency boundaries.

A very important point to bear in mind in this regard is that a decision to replace the STV electoral system with any alternative will have to be taken in the light of hypothetical estimates of the likely political effects. It would clearly be grossly irresponsible to change an electoral system without doing this. The type of assumptions that have been made here are thus not a special problem for this study. They are an inevitable feature of any decision to change electoral systems, and will have to be made by anyone seriously interested in the problem of electoral reform in Ireland.

The headline results of the present study are those in Table 2. These set out in a systematic way what we might expect to be the results of introducing AMS in Ireland.

One important decision will concern whether or not to introduce a threshold for party representation in the PR-list aspect of the election. As Table 2 shows:

- using a 5 per cent threshold in Ireland, as in Germany and New Zealand, would almost certainly “manufacture” a legislative majority for Fianna Fáil and an over-representation of Fine Gael and Labour, at the cost of effectively destroying all of the smaller political parties, including the PDs, Democratic Left, the Greens, and Sinn Féin.

Table 2 also shows that:

- the result of using a 2 per cent threshold would be quite similar to that generated by STV in the 1997 election, with the important exception that there would very likely be few independents in the new Dáil.

The allocation of seats between parties is only one aspect of an AMS election result however. One striking feature of AMS is that it creates two types of public representative — constituency deputies and deputies elected from party lists.

Constituency deputies can be more independent of their parties,

by virtue of their local electoral base, and have unambiguous electoral responsibility for all constituency work in their area. Party list deputies are much more dependent for their positions in public life on their party organisation, or whatever body puts party candidates in order on the list, and have much less electoral responsibility for constituency work. Voters may of course take problems to list deputies who live in their local area. List deputies who have some hopes of winning a constituency seat in the future have an incentive to work hard in the local constituencies. But most list deputies will have no hope whatsoever of winning a constituency seat and will be free, if they chose to do so, to ignore constituency work entirely.

The salient feature of the Irish party system in this regard is the strong lead held by Fianna Fáil over each of the other parties for the past sixty years or so, and the relatively even geographical distribution of this support around the country. This means that

- under almost any assumption about the precise location of constituency boundaries, it seems likely that Fianna Fáil would win almost all of the constituency seats, with the other parties winning most or all of their seats from the list-PR element of the election.

This difference between the parties should be a very significant element in any decision on whether or not to introduce AMS elections to Ireland. On almost any reading of likely AMS election results, therefore

- Fianna Fáil TDs will be the ones bearing the brunt of constituency work.

The only exception will be a small number of well-placed Fine Gael hopefuls who might have a realistic expectation of winning a constituency seat from Fianna Fáil, and therefore will want to build a local constituency base.

- Almost all other TDs, representing most of the other parties and all of the smaller ones, will be freed from electoral pressure to engage in heavy constituency workloads.

The bottom line is that the AMS system, if a 2 per cent threshold is used, could do away with multi-seat constituencies in Ireland and at the same time allocate seats between parties in more or less the same proportions as the current STV system. Thus the main features of the contemporary Irish party system might well survive the shift from STV to AMS elections and the introduction of single seat constituencies. The main casualties of this change would be independents with local support bases, who would stand less chance of election unless they could build a national profile and in effect form their own political parties.

The price to be paid for the introduction of single-seat constituencies in Ireland under the AMS electoral system would be that TDs from one party, Fianna Fáil, would almost certainly find themselves under a very different set of electoral pressures from those felt by TDs of all other parties. Under almost any assumptions, as we have seen, this is a simple product of the fact that Fianna Fáil is likely to find itself the front-running party in very many of the single-seat constituencies that would be created.

There is no intrinsic reason why TDs from different Irish parties should not face different electoral pressures over candidate selection and constituency service. But, if a decision was made to introduce the AMS system in Ireland, it would be important for people to be aware that this is an important likely consequence.

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Appendix

Table A1: Hypothetical election results in Ireland: additional seats allocated nationally, no strategic voting

	<i>FF</i>	<i>FG</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>PDs</i>	<i>DL</i>	<i>Green</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total Vote	703682	499936	186044	83765	44901	49323	45614	175720
National percentage of vote	39.33	27.95	10.40	4.68	2.51	2.76	2.55	9.82
Actual national seats 1997	77	54	17	4	4	2	1	7
Pure PR national seats	65	46	17	8	4	5	4	16
Pure PR seats, 2% threshold	72	51	19	9	5	5	5	
Pure PR seats, 3% threshold	79	56	21	9				
Pure PR seats, 5% threshold	84	60	22					
National plurality seats	143	20	3					
50% national plurality seats	71.5	10	1.5					
Corrected 50% national plurality seats	64	17	2					
Additional seats, 2% threshold	8	34	17	9	5	5	5	
Total AMS, 2% threshold	72	51	19	9	5	5	5	
Additional seats, 3% threshold	15	39	19	9				
Total AMS, 3% threshold	79	56	21	9				
Additional seats, 5% threshold	20	43	20					
Total AMS, 5% threshold	84	60	22					
Total regional plurality seats	64	17	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total regional additional seats	8	34	18	9	5	5	5	0
Total regional AMS	72	51	20	9	5	5	5	0

Table A2: Hypothetical election results in Connacht-Ulster Euro constituency: no strategic voting

	Seats	Total Votes	FF	FG	Lab	PDs	DL	Green	SF	Other
Cavan-Monaghan	5	59544	22887	20643	2359				11531	2124
Donegal NE	3	35529	14855	6704	1948				2881	9141
Donegal SW	3	32440	12339	7453	1361			1366		9921
Galway E	4	42917	20858	13376	3400	3182				2101
Galway W	5	48212	22151	10710	4856	5914		1660	1209	1712
Longford-Roscommon	4	47280	22232	17452	699	2289				4608
Mayo	5	61858	26571	30158				938		4191
Sligo-Leitrim	4	45166	18250	16545	4905	745			3208	1513
Total Vote	33	372946	160143	123041	19528	12130		3964	18829	35311
<i>Percentage vote</i>			42.94	32.99	5.24	3.25		1.06	5.05	9.47
Actual Seats 1997	33		15	13	1	1	0	0	1	2
<i>Pure PR seats</i>	33		16	12	2	1	0	0	2	
<i>Pure plurality seats</i>	33		28	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>50% plurality seats</i>			14	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Corrected 50% plurality seats</i>			12	5	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Additional seats</i>			4	7	2	1	0	0	2	0
Total regional AMS seats			16	12	2	1	0	0	2	0

Table A3: Hypothetical election results in Dublin Euro constituency: no strategic voting

	Seats	Total Votes	FF	FG	Lab	PDs	DL	Green	SF	Other
Dublin C	4	35741	15307	5185	3035			1253	2377	8584
Dublin N	4	41158	15908	7813	5616	1431		5614		4776
Dublin NC	4	43165	20044	11235	2848	1424	1194	1650		4770
Dublin NE	4	37301	15147	7050	6433	2911	1381	1332	2212	835
Dublin NW	4	36699	17263	5726	4084		3701	1525		4400
Dublin S	5	57986	22394	16869	6147	5444		3539		3593
Dublin SC	4	40579	13970	10125	4224	2031	4586	1603	1937	2103
Dublin SE	4	36671	9456	10042	6113	4022		4296		2742
Dublin SW	5	41852	12529	6487	4070	5708	5094	1315	3725	2924
Dublin W	4	40074	13299	6788	4853	3050		1732	2004	8348
Dun Laoghaire	5	54253	14012	16799	4698	4636	7534	2762		3812
Total	47	465479	169329	104119	52121	30657	23490	26621	12255	46887
<i>Percentage vote</i>			36.38	22.37	11.20	6.59	5.05	5.72	2.63	10.07
<i>Actual Seats 1997</i>	47		21	12	5	2	3	2	0	2
<i>Pure PR seats</i>	47		19	12	6	3	3	3	1	
<i>Pure plurality seats</i>	47		38	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>50% plurality seats</i>			19	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Corrected 50% plurality seats</i>			19	5	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Additional seats</i>			0	7	6	3	3	3	1	0
<i>Total regional AMS seats</i>	47		19	12	6	3	3	3	1	0

Table A4: Hypothetical election results in Leinster Euro constituency: no strategic voting

	Seats	Total Votes	FF	FG	Lab	PDs	DL	Green	SF	Other
Carlow- Kilkenny	5	56449	23814	16476	8573	3184		3116		1286
Kildare N	3	31396	10944	8222	5964	2101	2762	1403		
Kildare S	3	28808	10830	7631	5834	3895				618
Laois-Offaly	5	58070	28945	16479	6741	3778				2127
Louth	4	45008	18010	12555	4725	2395		1403	3651	2269
Meath	5	56691	23742	20933	3695	1344	798	1103	2000	3076
Wexford	5	55686	21687	21481	9510		1454	938		616
Wicklow	5	52296	15619	10308	7217	1726	5226	1299		10901
Westmeath	3	32787	14973	8484	8037					1293
Total	38	417191	168564	122569	60296	18423	10240	9262	5651	22186
<i>Percentage vote</i>			40.40	29.38	14.45	4.42	2.45	2.22	1.35	5.32
Actual Seats 1997	38		17	13	6	0	1	0	0	1
<i>Pure PR seats</i>	38		16	12	6	2	1	1	1	
<i>Pure plurality seats</i>	38		38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>50% plurality seats</i>			19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Corrected 50% plurality seats</i>			16	3	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Additional seats</i>			0	9	6	2	1	1	1	0
Total regional AMS seats	38		16	12	6	2	1	1	1	0

Table A5: Hypothetical election results in Munster Euro constituency: no strategic voting

	Seats	Total Votes	FF	FG	Lab	PDs	DL	Green	SF	Other
Clare	4	46889	23614	14106	1684	3250		1682		2553
Cork E	4	43076	15696	12976	3500	1830	4622		1534	2918
Cork NC	5	44008	15635	13273	2321	3304	3146	1340	1654	3335
Cork NW	3	34763	16166	14294	2574					1729
Cork SC	5	55039	23455	16827	4908	2304		3622		3923
Cork SW	3	34995	13667	15462	2361			1221		2284
Kerry N	3	35779	9412	8689	10699				5691	1288
Kerry S	3	35496	11283	4888	4988					14337
Limerick E	5	49701	19741	13176	4568	6175	3403	802		1836
Limerick W	3	33614	10906	12502	1418	1406				7382
Tipperary N	3	39952	16894	4521	4126	1390				13021
Tipperary S	3	35260	13146	8494	5681					7939
Waterford	4	44797	16031	10999	5271	2896		809		8791
Total	48	533369	205646	150207	54099	22555	11171	9476	8879	71336
<i>Percentage vote</i>			38.56	28.16	10.14	4.23	2.09	1.78	1.66	13.37
Actual Seats 1997	48		24	16	5	1	0	0	0	2
<i>Pure PR seats</i>	48		21	16	6	2	1	1	1	
<i>Pure plurality seats</i>	48		39	6	3	0	0	0	0	0
<i>50% plurality seats</i>			19	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Corrected 50% plurality seats</i>			17	5						
<i>Additional seats</i>			4	11	4	2	1	1	1	0
Total regional AMS seats	48		23	14	6	2	1	1	1	0

