

**WHO REPRESENTS US BEST? ONE MEMBER OR MANY?**

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### Introduction

For the most part, one issue tends to dominate the debate about legislative electoral systems. It centres on the relative merits of 'fairness' and the production of a 'clear winner'. Advocates of proportional representation argue that the allocation of seats for each party in a legislature should be as proportional as possible to the votes that they win. This, they argue, ensures that the diversity of views of the electorate are faithfully and fairly reflected in the composition of the legislature. In contrast, advocates of majoritarian systems, such as first the post, argue that what matters is that elections should produce a clear winner. They argue that this characteristic ensures that it is the electorate than some shady backroom coalition deal that determines the partisan colour of the next government (Schumpeter, 1976).

This debate is primarily about the proper relationship between seats and votes across the country as a whole. But, important though it is, it is not the only issue at stake in the debate about electoral systems. There is also an argument about representation and the role of elected representatives. Deputies or MPs may well be elected to represent a particular ideological standpoint. But they may also be expected to act as intermediaries or advocates for individual citizens, representing their views to the state when those citizens have a problem with the operation or policies of some part of the bureaucracy (Bogdanor, 1985). After all, if the state is not to become overweening or arbitrary in its working then it may well need the counterweight of politicians acting on behalf of the citizens the democratic state is meant to be serving. What is disputed in the debate about electoral systems is whether some systems give elected representatives a greater incentive to act as citizen intermediaries than do other systems.

This paper addresses this second, relatively neglected debate. It does so using an important new resource, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project, which allows us for the first time to compare systematically across countries the relationship between voting systems and voters' behaviour, perceptions and preferences. We begin by examining the theoretical arguments deployed in this debate. In so doing we focus in particular on the arguments commonly deployed by advocates of majoritarian systems as to why the single member plurality system is more likely to ensure that elected representatives act as intermediaries on behalf of citizens, and why this is conducive to the effective operation of a democracy. As a result of this discussion we are able to develop a model of the relationship between electoral systems and citizen/politician contact and of the implications such contact supposedly has for attitudes towards and satisfaction with elected representatives in particular and democracy in general. We then proceed to test this model. We conclude by examining the implications of our findings for the debate about electoral systems.

## Who Represents us Best?

The claim that we are interested in then is that the single member plurality electoral system makes it more likely that elected representatives will act as citizen intermediaries. The first stage in this argument is to note that under single member plurality each and every politician depends for her re-election on securing sufficient support amongst a clearly defined body of voters, that is her constituents. Every constituent is potentially at least equally important to the representative in this endeavour. Each has a vote that can either be cast for the local incumbent or else for some other candidate. On the balance between those taking these two courses of action hangs a local representative's fate.

No multi-member system, it is argued, can make quite the same claim. Under a closed party list system, for example, representatives' fates may well depend on their ability to retain a high position on their party's list rather than on securing the votes of their constituents. That would appear to encourage service to the party rather than service to the citizen. But even under an open party list system, or indeed the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in multi-member constituencies, elected representatives would only appear to have an incentive to heed the concerns of some of their constituents rather than all of them. Under STV, for example, a representative needs just enough votes to satisfy the quota, which in a typical five-member constituency is but one-sixth of the vote. Meanwhile, given that in open party list systems a vote for a candidate also usually counts as a vote for her party, which individual candidates secure election would appear more likely to be determined by the preferences of the party faithful than of the electorate as a whole.

In short, it is argued that the single member plurality system encourages all elected representatives to take heed of the views of all their constituents in a manner that is not replicated by any multi-member proportional system. Their re-election depends not just on the judgement of the party faithful, but on that of the electorate at large. As a result elected representatives have an incentive to develop a reputation as an effective local advocate by taking up the problems of individual citizens, or indeed of the local community as a whole, with governmental officials. To fulfil this role they may hold local 'surgeries' or other events that enable citizens to bring them their problems. They will certainly make themselves available to be contacted. And they may write letters to civil servants, government ministers or even private organisations on behalf of those who come to them. If the matter appears important enough they may even take the opportunity to raise it at some forum within the legislature.

For the individual representative the aim of this activity is clear. It is that the development of a reputation as an effective local advocate will, come election time, give her a 'personal vote' that may assist in her re-election (Cain et al, 1987; Jacobson, 1997). For the democratic system itself there are said to be two benefits. First it means that elected representatives are made aware that there is a problem when the implementation of public policy runs into difficulties. If several constituents present an elected representative with the same issue, they will thereby learn that the relevant public policy is proving unpopular and will start lobbying decision makers to make a change. Thus the development of public policy is constantly informed by feedback on its performance on the ground. Second, the intermediary

work of elected representatives provides a vital mechanism for ensuring that government does not become arbitrary or overbearing. If citizens feel that they have been rendered an injustice in say, the administration of their social security payments, they know that there is someone to whom they can turn with authority to intercede on their behalf. And of course awareness on the part of bureaucrats that citizens may turn to their elected representatives for help gives them an incentive to ensure that their decisions are not considered arbitrary or overbearing in the first place.

In short, the single member plurality system supposedly encourages elected representatives to remain in contact with citizens and for citizens to feel that there is someone in the political system willing to act on their behalf. The result should be a citizenry that is satisfied with its elected representatives and indeed with the democratic system as a whole, thereby helping to foster the legitimacy of the political system. If correct these claims would certainly be an important argument for using such an electoral system.

True, these arguments would appear valid for any single member district system, including the alternative vote or the double ballot run-off, not just single member plurality. Indeed because candidates are more likely to have to appeal beyond their party's own supporters to be elected, the incentive to secure a reputation as an intermediary may be even stronger under such variants (Carey and Shugart, 1992). So in reality the argument is one about the relative merits of single member versus multi-member district electoral systems. But as the presence of at least some multi-member constituencies is an essential feature of any proportional system, in practice these claims are highly pertinent to the debate about the relative merits of proportional and majoritarian systems.<sup>1</sup> The only way of combining proportionality with single member districts is through Additional (or Mixed) Member Systems but even they of course require some members not be elected from single member districts (Shugart and Wattenburg, 2001)

But these claims do not of course go unchallenged. This challenge tends not to be about the importance of the role of elected representatives as citizen intermediaries. To that extent, and in contrast to the debate about the importance of 'fairness' versus a 'clear winner', there is agreement between the two camps about what is the desirable outcome of the political process. Rather the challenge is about the degree to which single member district systems do in fact provide a bigger incentive for elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries than do at least some kinds of multi-member district systems.

First it is suggested that the incentive provided by single member districts to elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries is not necessarily as strong as its advocates claim. After all some representatives represent constituencies that in recent electoral history at least their party has rarely if ever lost. What need do they have of a personal vote? Rather their political future would appear to depend on keeping happy the party activists who will decide whether they should be renominated as their party's candidate at the next election. In other words, their position is no different from that of a candidate in a closed party list system, which after all is arguably what the single member district system is a variety of anyway.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course multi-member systems are not necessarily proportional. Multi-member plurality and the Single Non-Transferable Vote are two obvious examples.

But even the degree to which those representing marginal seats have an incentive to act as citizen intermediaries may be overstated. In theory, they might hope to appeal to all voters for their support on the basis of their work as a local representative. But whether most voters will be willing to respond must be open to question. If it is party that primarily motivates their vote, then local work may make little difference. Certainly there seems little reason why an elected representative should go out of her way to act as an intermediary on behalf of those who prove to be committed supporters of an opposition party (who indeed may well be reluctant to approach her in the first place). Indeed it is precisely considerations like these that lead Carey and Shugart (1992) to suggest that the single member plurality system at least provides less incentive to secure a personal vote than virtually any other.

Consider in contrast the position of an elected representative in a multi-member constituency under an electoral system where voters can not only express a preference for a party but where they can also indicate a preference for at least one individual candidate above other candidates nominated by the same party (and where the distribution of individual candidate votes clearly has an impact on who is elected). No longer is partisanship a sufficient cue to guarantee the election of any individual representative. To be elected not only does a candidate's party need to do sufficiently well, but she as an individual needs to garner sufficient personal votes to secure one of the seats that may be won by her party. In other words, each individual candidate is in competition with the other candidates put up by her own party. By definition that competition has to be fought on the basis of the candidates' personal qualities rather than their partisanship. And one of the qualities at least that they might wish to try and sell to the electorate is their ability to act as citizen intermediaries.

In short, under multi-member constituencies with open lists (or indeed STV) the incentive for elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries may be thought to be greater than it is under single member district systems. No candidate after all has a safe seat. Each depends on her personal popularity as well as that of her party to secure election. True, they may not have much of an incentive to act on behalf of those who do not back their party. But if the electoral system is reasonably proportional in its allocation of seats between parties then every major segment of opinion in a constituency ought to have at least one incumbent representative who has an incentive to act in a way that will help her garner their personal votes at the next election. So, it is argued, there is every reason why citizens living in countries with open list multi-member systems should feel satisfied with their representatives and their political system as it is alleged that they are under single member district systems.

These arguments may indeed even be extended to closed party list systems. After all if it is the case that voters value elected representatives that act as intermediaries on behalf of their citizens, then parties have an incentive to put at the top of their lists candidates who have a reputation for performing that role. Otherwise they may fear that voters will prefer to back another list. So even here we may doubt whether the single member district system is likely to be particularly effective at providing an incentive to candidates to act as citizen intermediaries.

So both proponents of single member district systems and advocates of multi-member schemes can provide theoretical arguments as to why their preferred option is likely to represent voters best or at least as well as any other. What evidently is required is that the theories should be put to the test. Do single member districts prove in practice to be more effective at

promoting contact between citizens and their elected representatives, and does this have a favourable impact on citizens' evaluations of their political process? It is to the task of answering that question that we now turn.

## Data

If we are to test these theories adequately then one requirement is clear. We need to be able to compare the experience and reactions of voters under principal legislatures elected in single member districts with what happens under principal legislatures elected in multi-member districts. This almost inevitably implies using data collected from across more than one country. After all countries rarely change their electoral systems from one type to the other, and even when they do we can expect there to be a time lag in the reactions of elected representatives and voters to any new system.

Hitherto, survey research in electoral behaviour using data collected at the time of an election has been primarily a national affair, affording relatively few opportunities for systematic comparison between countries (but see Curtice, Carmines and Heath, 1996, Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995). Indeed while Carey and Shugart (1992) were able to construct an elegant model of how different electoral systems might differ in the degree to which they provide incentives to candidates to develop a personal reputation, including by acting as a citizen intermediary, they found themselves devoid of any data source with which they could test it. However between 1996 and 2000 the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project systematically included on national election studies a module of questions that was asked in a near identical format (bar translation) in all countries in the weeks immediately after a country's polling day.<sup>2</sup> The questions included in the module were designed to permit analysis of two main subjects. The first is the impact of electoral and political systems on how people vote. The second is what accounts for variations in people's evaluations of and satisfaction with the democratic process. Our subject is an example of the second of these questions.

### TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

In this paper we make use the results of the module for 30 countries.<sup>3</sup> A full list of these, together with details of how we have classified their electoral systems is to be found at Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> In four countries, Hong Kong, Mexico, Russia and Spain, the module was administered at two elections between 1996 and 2000. The two sets of data have been pooled in our analyses, except that, as explained below, Hong Kong has been omitted from our analyses.

<sup>3</sup> Note however that at present Belgium is only represented by data for Flanders. As noted above, the module was administered in Hong Kong at both the 1998 and 2000 election but this has been excluded because the 1998 election was the territory's first ever election under universal suffrage. The Hong Kong electoral system has therefore had insufficient opportunity to shape the relationship between citizens and elected representatives.

A few words about the basis of our classification are in order.<sup>4</sup> The most important distinction that we make is between those countries where at least a significant proportion of elected representatives are elected in single member districts and those where all (apart perhaps from an occasional rural or island constituency) elected representatives are elected from multi-member districts. If the arguments of the proponents of single member districts are correct those living in countries in the first group should be more likely than those in the second to report contact with their elected representatives and also as a result be more inclined to be satisfied with their representatives and democracy in general.

Within each group however we can make one further important distinction. In the case of those countries with single member districts, we can distinguish between those where all the seats in the principal legislature are elected in single member districts and those where only some are. The latter group comprise a variety of so-called 'mixed' systems, in which a multi-member allocation of seats is either used to 'correct' the disproportionalities generated by the overall outcome amongst single member districts or else is simply held in parallel to the single member contests. If single member districts do indeed have the benefits ascribed to them then we might anticipate that these would be somewhat less in evidence in those countries using such mixed systems than it is in those countries that only use single member districts.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, so far as those countries that use only multi-member constituencies are concerned, we distinguish between those that allow voters the opportunity, however limited, to express at least some preference for one or more individual candidates and those that do not provide any such opportunity. The latter are examples of the archetypal 'closed' party list system under which who is elected is solely determined by the order of the candidates on each party's list. The former however are far from necessarily being 'open' list systems where who is elected to represent each party depends entirely on the expressed preferences of the electorate. Most in fact are varieties of 'flexible' list systems where the order of the list determined by the party is only changed if a relatively large number of voters cast a (optional) personal preference for a lowly placed candidate. We also include in this group countries that give voters as many votes as there are seats to be elected, thereby giving them the opportunity to vote for one candidate nominated by a party but not necessarily any of her colleagues. Despite the heterogeneity of this group, however, if it is indeed the case that allowing voters to choose between candidates of the same party encourages elected representatives to act as citizen

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<sup>4</sup> Some readers may query our classification of Slovenia where although candidates are elected in multi-member districts each of which elects eleven representatives, each district is divided into eleven single member districts and the order of the candidates on each party's list is determined by their relative success in winning votes in the single member district to which they were assigned. Although this system means that parties do not have sole control over the order of the candidates on their list, it does not give individual voters the opportunity to express a preference between candidates on the same list. Meanwhile although elected representatives may be thought to have an incentive to act as citizen intermediaries in the particular single member district in which they stood, their re-election prospects will depend on the popularity of their party across the multi-member district as a whole rather than in just their own constituency. For further details see Cerar (2002).

<sup>5</sup> In both cases some of the countries use something other than the simple plurality rule to determine the outcome in the single member districts. There are however too few instances within each of the two groups to permit further sub-division along these lines.

intermediaries, as is claimed to be the case by advocates of open multi-member systems, then we should observe higher levels of contact and higher levels of satisfaction amongst this group than amongst those countries with closed lists – and perhaps indeed even than amongst those with single member districts.

Four of our thirty countries, however, are not straightforward to classify. In Japan, New Zealand, Sweden and Ukraine, the election at which CSES data were collected was marked by a change of electoral system. Japan, New Zealand and Ukraine switched to a mixed system while Sweden moved from closed to flexible lists. Our interest, however, is in the impact that a country's electoral system has had on levels of contact in between elections. This suggests these countries should be classified on the basis of the electoral system that was in place prior to the election at which the CSES data were collected rather than on the basis of the new electoral system. This is the procedure we have adopted in Table 1 and in most of our analyses. However, as it might be argued that the incentives created by the old electoral system might have been attenuated in anticipation of the different incentives offered by the new one, we have also run our analyses excluding these countries to check that our conclusions are robust. These results appear in the appendix.

Two other countries raise particular issues. In Mexico elected representatives are subject to a limit of two terms. This might be thought to reduce the incentive for elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries because many of them are no longer eligible for re-election. Meanwhile in the United States party nominations are determined by the outcome of primary elections rather than by the decisions of a small group of party activists. This means that even those elected representatives that represent districts that are safe for their party still have an incentive to perform the role of citizen intermediary because they could be challenged for their party's nominations (Carey and Shugart, 1992). We thus also take account of both these possibilities in our analyses.

## **Indicators and Model**

The CSES module provides us with two indicators of the degree of interaction between elected representatives and their constituents. The first is simply a measure of the degree to which voters have had contact with an elected representative. Respondents were asked:

*During the past twelve months, have you had any contact with a [elected representative] in any way?*

Note that the question was designed to tap any form of interaction that respondents themselves defined as meaningful contact. This might range from as much as a personal interview to as little as a direct mail shot. This means that the contact might not of course be in the form of the elected representative taking on the role of a citizen intermediary, and the interaction may have been initiated by the representative rather than the citizen. But if single member districts do

provide an incentive for elected representatives to interact with their constituents then we should find a higher level of contact reported in response to this question by voters in countries deploying such districts.

Our second indicator of interaction between citizen and representative is whether voters are actually aware of the names of any of the candidates standing in their constituency. As we have seen it is suggested that the incentive for elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries is the prospect of winning votes on the basis of their popularity. Yet there would seem little likelihood that voters are influenced in how they cast their vote by the personal characteristics or reputations of individual candidates if they do not at least know who those candidates are. So if personal voting is encouraged by the use of single member districts we should find a higher level of knowledge of candidate names in countries with such districts. The relevant question reads as follows:

*Do you happen to remember the names of any candidates who [ran/stood] in your [lower house primary electoral district] in the last election?*

Those who said that they did were asked to give up to three names whose accuracy was eventually checked against the official list of candidates.

The first step in our analysis is thus relatively straightforward. We need to examine whether those who live in countries with single member district systems are more likely to report contact with an elected representative and/or to remember the names of those who were standing as candidates in their constituency in the last election. This is our test of whether single member districts do indeed encourage more interaction between elected representatives and votes.

It is one thing to demonstrate that single member district systems encourage interaction between elected representatives and voters. It is however quite another to show that such interaction matters. Certainly if its existence is to be used as a justification for the use of single member district systems then we need also to demonstrate that such interaction has beneficial consequences for the political system. If it does, then the first thing that we might anticipate is that those voters who have had contact with an elected representative will have a higher regard for their elected representatives. But in addition we should find that even those living in countries with single member districts who have not themselves had any contact also have a relatively high regard for their representatives because the contacts that representatives have ensures that they remain in touch with public opinion.

Our measure of voters' evaluation of their representatives is as follows:-

*Some people say that [elected representatives] know what ordinary people think. Others say that [elected representatives] don't know much about what ordinary people think. Using the scale on this card, where would you place yourself?*

The card was a five-point scale with the first proposition scored one and the second five.

However, if the interaction supposedly encouraged by single member district systems is beneficial for democracy as a whole then not only should we be able to show that it results in a

higher regard for politicians in particular but also to greater satisfaction with democracy in general. To measure satisfaction with democracy respondents were simply asked:

*On the whole are you satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [country].*

Again, we are interested in testing two possibilities. The first is that any higher level of satisfaction with democracy in countries with single member districts is directly attributable to a higher level of citizen/representative interaction. We thus look to see whether those who report contact with an elected representative or those who can accurately name an individual candidate are more likely to be satisfied with democracy than are those who do not.

The second possibility is that single member districts generate a higher level of satisfaction with democracy not only among those with experience of contact with their representatives. As in the case of evaluations of elected representatives it may be argued the existence of a high level of citizen/representative interaction also affects the views of those without direct experience. They may, for example, be more satisfied with democracy because they believe that there is someone who would act as an intermediary on their behalf if they needed someone. Or it may be that the interaction that does occur has a sufficient impact on the quality of a country's governance that its citizens are more satisfied. In any event, we evidently also need to test for the possibility of a direct relationship between satisfaction with democracy and kind of electoral system independently of any individual level process of citizen/representative interaction.

Of course it would be naïve to believe that a country's electoral system will be the only influence on the level of satisfaction with democracy, if it is indeed an influence at all. One obvious candidate is the length of time that a country has been a democracy. Some of our countries are new democracies, others are long established. To test for the possibility that this may have an influence on satisfaction with democracy (and indeed the other variables in our model) we include (when it proves to be significant) an exogenous variable that dichotomises countries into mature democracies, that is countries that have been democracies for at least 20 years, and the remainder. Meanwhile, another possible influence on the variables in our model is the ratio of representatives to citizens. The fewer the number of citizens that a representative has to serve, the more likely for example it is that any individual citizen will have had contact with that representative. Where it proves to be significant we therefore also include this ratio (logged) in our models. And finally we might anticipate that both satisfaction with democracy and contact between voters and representatives are promoted or facilitated by economic wealth. This possibility is tested by including when it is significant a measure of GDP per head in our models.

FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

Figure 1 outlines our full model of the supposed benefits of single member districts. Of course it may still be objected that these far from exhaust the possible influences on evaluations

of elected representatives or the level of satisfaction with democracy.<sup>6</sup> Trouble is, pursuing this argument too far simply threatens to undermine the claims of advocates of single member districts. If the impact of single member districts on the level of satisfaction with democracy is too small to be discernible without a large number of controls then it is no longer clear that its benefits are of sufficient importance to be a basis on which to choose a country's electoral system. And it is after all the claim of the advocates of single member districts that those benefits are sufficiently important that they constitute an important reason as to why a country should use them.

But there are two features of the CSES data that we do have to take into account in evaluating claims about electoral systems. The first is that the CSES data must surely diverge strongly from the usual assumption that cases have been sampled independently of each other. Two Ukrainian cases obviously will have a great deal in common with each other, for instance, a commonality that neither shares with a Canadian case. In effect, our aggregation of country surveys is a massive, roughly accidental, cluster sample – which must produce strong spatial autocorrelation among our cases. It is true, of course, that we use standard statistics on cluster samples all the time in analyzing individual electorates. The difference is that we regard the dependence of subjects within clusters in a normal cluster sample as trivial and ignorable. Since the clusters in the CSES sample are countries with unique histories, cultures and institutions, we cannot make that assumption in this case.

Our solution to this problem is to deploy probit and linear regression (as appropriate) using robust standard errors with countries as clusters. Robust regression or probit produces exactly the same coefficients as standard regression or probit. But it does produce different standard errors. Unlike standard regression or probit, which proceed from a prior fixed model (the Gaussian assumptions) to assess the amount of uncertainty in the estimation, robust estimation of standard errors builds an empirical estimate of the reliability of the estimated slopes from the intercorrelation of case residuals. This gives it the attractive quality that it does not require the assumption that observations are independent (Greene, 2000: 462-465, 488-491, and 505-507).<sup>7</sup> It also does not require that a homoscedastic error structure be specified.

The second feature of the data that we have to address is that the sample sizes for each country vary significantly from country to country. Unless we correct for this our estimates will be biased towards the pattern found in those countries with the larger samples.<sup>8</sup> We have therefore weighted the country samples so that each country contributes equally to the analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> Note in particular that in contrast to Norris (2001) we do not include any individual level socio-demographic controls in our modelling. Such controls can of course only affect our estimate of the impact of electoral systems if their distribution is correlated with the kind of electoral system that a country has. Of Norris' controls, age and gender differ little by country, while the income measure in the CSES dataset is a measure of relative income within country and thus cannot differ by country – in contrast to our country level GDP measure. As for Norris' final control, education, whose incidence does vary by country we have found that including this variable makes no difference to our substantive conclusions.

<sup>7</sup> To quote Greene (p.465) “The [robust] estimators are becoming ubiquitous in the econometrics literature and represent major advances in the set of available techniques.” See also STATA (1985-99: 256-259 and Sribney (1998).

<sup>8</sup> The sample size prior to the equalisation of sample sizes between countries is 57,906. The cases have been weighted such that after equalisation the overall sample size remains the same.

Since what we are interested in is assessing the effect of variations in countries' electoral systems, this in effect allows us to treat each expression of our independent variable equally.

### **The Theory in Practice**

We have suggested that if the claims of the advocates of single member districts are correct, then those living in countries with at least some single member districts should be more likely to report contact with an elected representative and more likely to be able to recall the name of a candidate standing in their district at the last election. Moreover we should also find that as a result of this they should also be more likely to feel that their elected representatives are in touch with public opinion and more satisfied with the operation of democracy in their country. In table 2 we take a simple look at the extent to which the CSES data appear to support these claims by showing for each example of our four kinds of electoral system the proportion giving a positive report on each of our key indicators. We also show the simple mean of each indicator for each kind of electoral system.

TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

A few points immediately stand out. First, those people living in countries that use only single member districts are on average somewhat more likely to report contact with an elected representative than are those living in countries with other kinds of electoral system, including those with a mix of single and multi-member districts. To that extent at least the claims of the advocates of single member districts appear to be upheld, though it would seem that their validity does not extend to mixed electoral systems. In contrast however there is little evidence to suggest that those living in countries with single member districts are more likely to be able to name correctly at least one of the candidates standing in their district, let alone be more likely to believe that MPs know what ordinary people think or be satisfied with democracy. Indeed contrary to the claims of advocates of both single member districts and open lists, it is those living in countries with closed multimember lists that are most likely to be believed that their elected representatives are in touch with public opinion, even though it is the case that they are least likely to be able to name a candidate correctly. Moreover, we should also note the considerable variance on all four of our indicators between countries with the same electoral system, including in the level of contact reported by those living in countries that only use single member districts. So, even if it is the case that single member districts do on average encourage somewhat higher contact that influence appears to be small relative to the other factors that evidently must also affect the level of contact.

But this of course is no more than an informal analysis that makes no attempt to model what those other factors might be, let alone assess the statistical significance of our findings. So we now turn to the results of our more formal models. The first of these, displayed in table 3 is an analysis of the influences on the level of contact. This does indeed suggest that influences other than the electoral system do make a difference. However, once we have taken these into account, it appears that the electoral system does make a difference too.

### TABLE 3 NEAR HERE

Our model identifies two influences other than the electoral system. The first is ratio of MPs to the population. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the more MPs there are per 100,000 population, the higher the level of reported contact. The second other influence is economic wealth. Those living in countries with a relatively high GDP per head were also more likely to report contact. After taking these factors into account, however, the impression that we formed from looking at table 2 appears to be confirmed. Those who live in countries that only employ single member districts have a significantly higher level of contact than do those who live in the default category in our model, that is those living in countries with multi-member districts that provide no opportunity for voters to express a personal preference for a candidate. In contrast, those living in countries with mixed systems together with those living in countries that use multimember districts but allow voters to express a candidate preference are not significantly more likely to report contact than are those living in countries with closed systems.

Even so, table 3 constitutes far from a clear endorsement of the claims of the advocates of single member districts. Although they may be insignificant the coefficients for those with mixed systems and those with multimember districts that allow some expression of candidate preference are greater than zero and indeed are only a little lower than the coefficient for single member districts. As a result the difference between the single member districts coefficient and those for mixed systems and multimember systems that permit some candidate choice is not significant. So we cannot conclude that using single member districts is clearly the only means of encouraging contact between voters and their representatives.<sup>9</sup>

### TABLE 4 NEAR HERE

But even if we were to conclude that there is some, if limited support for the claims of the advocates of single member districts so far as reported contact with representatives is concerned, the same certainly cannot be said of voters' ability to recall correctly the name of at least one candidate standing in the election. As table 4 shows, our modeling suggests that there is little relationship at all between the kind of electoral system in a country and the ability of voters to recall the name of a candidate. (Note that in this table and in table 5 we have exceptionally classified countries according to the electoral system in place at the election after which the data were collected rather than the previous election as it is the characteristic of the current election that should influence the ability of voters to recall the names of election candidates.) True, those who live in mixed systems are more likely to be able to recall a name correctly, but this is not true of those living in countries that only use single member districts, or

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<sup>9</sup> Moreover, our analysis in Appendix Table 1 where we exclude those countries that changed their electoral system at the election at which the CSES data were collected suggests that our finding that there is a higher level of contact amongst those living in single member districts may only be true in countries with a low ratio of MPs to population. This is revealed by a significant negative interaction between single member districts and the MP/population ratio, suggesting that a higher level of contact is less likely to be found in those countries that have a high proportion of MPs to population.

indeed those who live in countries that allow voters to express some preference between candidates of the same party. Indeed the only really clear finding in this table is that term limits as implemented in Mexico apparently make it more difficult for voters to remember whom they might have voted for.

#### TABLE 5 NEAR HERE

Table 5 casts some light on why we have secured this largely negative finding. It indicates, as we might expect, that those who have had contact with a representative are more likely to be able to name an election candidate correctly. Thus, other things being equal we might have expected table 4 to have displayed a similar pattern to that in table 3. However the relationship is not particularly strong. True, a stronger relationship is revealed in Appendix Table 3 where we exclude those countries that changed their electoral system on the occasion of the CSES election. But at the same time the interaction terms in this alternative model indicate that having had contact with a representative has rather less influence on the ability of voters to name a candidate correctly where any of the three kinds of electoral system specified in the model are place than it does in those countries that use closed lists. Of course, if this meant that even those who had not had contact with a representative were more likely to be able to be name a candidate correctly if they lived in a country with single member districts this might be considered an argument in favour of such districts, but in practice this does not appear to be the case.

Single member districts may then encourage contact between voters and their representatives, albeit this characteristic is not significantly higher than it is in multimember systems that allow voters to express a candidate preference. But single member districts do not produce citizens who are better informed about the candidates for which they are voting and thus they seem unlikely to encourage voters to take the personal characteristics of candidates into consideration in deciding how to vote. What, however, does this imply for voters' evaluations of their elected representatives and of democracy in general? Does the greater level of contact in countries with single member districts than in those with closed lists mean that voters living in such countries have a higher regard for their elected representatives and a more satisfied with the operation of democracy?

#### TABLE 6 NEAR HERE

#### TABLE 7 HEAR HERE

Table 6 examines what appears to influence perceptions of whether elected representatives are thought to be in touch with public opinion. First those who have recently had contact with an elected representative and to a lesser degree those who can correctly remember the name of an election candidate are indeed more likely to think that elected representatives know what ordinary people think. The presumption of the advocates of single member districts that contact between voters and their representatives enhances the standing of the latter in the eyes of the former is upheld. Alas little else of their case is. Recall that we argued earlier that if

elected representatives act as citizen intermediaries then this should not only have a positive impact on the evaluations of those who have experienced such contact themselves but it should also make a favourable impression on the remainder of the electorate. Yet there is no direct positive relationship between having a single member district and believing that elected representatives are in touch with public opinion. Moreover, table 7 confirms that this is so even if we do not control for contact and knowledge of candidates.

#### TABLE 8 NEAR HERE

Our story is even equally straightforward when it comes to satisfaction with democracy. Contact may be higher in countries with single member districts than in those with closed lists, but table 8 reveals that having direct experience of such contact does not necessarily mean that voters are more satisfied with democracy, let alone that the role of elected representatives as citizen intermediaries has a positive impact on those who have not had such experience. Rather, as table 9 suggests that if anything it is those living in countries with multimember districts that permit some kind of candidate choice that have the highest level of satisfaction with democracy type, and that in any event how long a country has been a democracy is far more important than the kind of electoral system it has.

#### TABLE 9 NEAR HERE

### **Conclusion**

We have been able to supply a little support for the claim that single member districts encourage elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries and that this role is appreciated by the citizens on whose behalf they act. We did find that those living in countries with single member districts were a little more likely at least to report having had contact with an elected representative over the previous twelve months than were those living in countries with closed list systems. Moreover those who had enjoyed such contact were rather more likely to think that elected representatives were in touch with public opinion. However, those living in countries with single member districts were not significantly more likely to report contact than were those living in multimember systems that give voters the chance to express a candidate preference. Moreover those living in single member districts were not better able to remember the names of an election candidate, were not more likely to think that elected representatives were in touch with public opinion and were not more satisfied with democracy.

Not that anything in this paper suggests that living in a multimember district is clearly more desirable than living in a single member one. So far as the criteria that we have been considering and the indicators of those criteria that we have been able to deploy are concerned, we are simply forced to conclude that there is nothing to choose between single and multimember districts. This may go against much intuition and the tenaciously held beliefs of the advocates of both forms of representation, but our evidence suggests that neither side has much of a case. This particular debate about electoral systems at least simply appears to be a blind alley and it certainly provides no grounds for preferring one electoral system over another.



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