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## ***Who Represents Us Best ? One Member or Many?***

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## **A B S T R A C T**

Most of the debate about the relative merits of different electoral systems focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of majoritarianism versus proportionality. But there is also another important debate about the merits of single member versus multi-member constituencies. Advocates of single member constituencies often argue that such constituencies are more likely to encourage elected representatives to act as advocates on behalf of citizens while advocates of multi-member constituencies in contrast suggest that this form of representation can also provide incentives for electoral representatives to undertake that role specially where some form of open-list is in place.

This paper uses data collected by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project in which voters in 19 countries that use a variety of electoral systems were asked about their level of contact with their electoral representatives, their knowledge of candidates, and their satisfaction with democracy. The results suggest that the level of contact between elected representatives and citizens is greater in countries with single number systems than in those with multi-number systems, but that this does not lead to any greater satisfaction with the operation of democracy.

For the most part, one issue tends to dominate in 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. In contrast, advocates of majoritarian systems, such as first the post, argue that what matters is that elections should produce a clear winner. This they claim ensures that it is the electorate rather than some shady backroom coalition deal that determines the partisan colour of the next government (Schumpeter, 1976).

That 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. There is also an argument about representation and the role of elected representatives. Deputies or MPs may indeed 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 a democratic state is meant to be serving. But do some electoral systems provide a greater incentive than others for elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries? Claims that they do are also often part of the debate about electoral systems.

This paper is about this second, potentially neglected debate. It addresses the debate 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 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. This enables us 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 democracy. 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' fate 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 rather 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, forthcoming)

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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 they 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 at least 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.

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. 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 candidate's 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 do 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' evaluation 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 since 1996 the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project has been systematically including on national election studies a module of questions asked in an identical format (bar translation) across countries. The questions included in the module are 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.

For this paper we have available to us the results of the module as it was administered in 19 countries, that is largely those where elections were held during the first two years of the project, 1996 and 1997. It is anticipated that we will eventually be able to extend our analysis to some thirty countries using data collected throughout the period between 1996 and 2001. Although there are some limitations in the range of electoral systems represented by our nineteen countries, they do between them contain some countries that use a single member district system (albeit not necessarily the plurality rule) and some that use a multi-member one. We also have some countries that used a mixed or additional member system in which all voters participated in both a single member and a multi-member electoral process. Our expectation is that if single member districts do indeed encourage more contact with their elected representatives and greater satisfaction with the democratic process as a result, we should find that this is true of countries with such mixed systems as well as those which only use single member districts.

**Table 1 : Countries and their Electoral Systems**

<b>Electoral System</b>			
<b>Single Member</b>		<b>Multi-Member</b>	
<b>All seats</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>No candidate Choice</b>	<b>Candidate Choice</b>
Australia	Germany	Argentina	Japan*
Great Britain	Hungary	Czech Republic	Poland
New Zealand*	Lithuania	Israel	Taiwan
USA	Mexico	Netherlands	
	Ukraine	Norway	
		Romania	
		Spain	

\* Our data are for the 1996 New Zealand and Japanese elections when in each case a new mixed member electoral system was introduced. For most of our analyses, however, it is the old system that is relevant and thus that is how both countries are classified in this table.

We have in truth rather fewer countries with multi-member electoral systems that permit (or require) voters to express a candidate preference than we would like. Of the three that do fall in this category, two (Japan and Taiwan) use the Single Non-Transferable Vote rather than an open party list system, while in one case (Japan) the electoral system was changed on the occasion of the election for which we have data. Such systems are important for our analysis because as we noted in the previous section claims that multi-member districts can in fact provide at least as much an incentive for elected representatives to act as citizen intermediaries as do single member districts appear to be strongest where voters can express a candidate preference. Our analysis, at least in this paper, will therefore primarily focus on comparing the level and impact of citizen contact amongst those countries with single member district systems with that amongst countries with closed list multi-member ones. This of course is but the minimum test that the claims of advocates of the single member district system need to pass.

We should also note that the single member systems in our countries do not all simply operate the single member plurality rule. Either the alternative vote or a double ballot

system in is used in Australia, Hungary and Lithuania. Meanwhile in the United States of course, parties themselves do not control the nomination process, which is commonly the subject of a primary election. Carey and Shugart (1992) suggest the incentives to develop a personal reputation may be rather greater than they are with simple single member plurality systems. We therefore also take this possibility into account in our analysis.

### **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 an [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. But if single member districts do provide an incentive for elected representatives to interact with their constituents then we should at least find in the answers to this question a higher level of contact reported by voters in countries deploying such districts.

Our second indicator is whether voters are actually aware of the names of any of the candidates standing in their constituency. After all there seems little likelihood that voters are influenced by the personal characteristics or reputations of individual candidates if they do not at least know who they 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 read 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. Unfortunately data for this item are not available for Argentina, Israel, Lithuania, and the Netherlands.

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 (including mixed 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 quite another to show that it matters. If the existence of such interaction 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 this is in fact the case, 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. We examine this possibility by looking the association between our indicator of citizen/representative contact and the following item.

*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 score one and the second five.

But ultimately if the interaction supposedly encouraged by single member district systems is beneficial for democracy then we should be able to demonstrate that it promotes satisfaction with democracy. This then is the key dependent variable in our model. 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].*

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, either directly or as a result of their being more likely to feel that elected representatives know what people think.

The second possibility however is that single member districts generate a higher level of satisfaction with democracy not only among those with experience of contact with their representatives. Rather 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 relationship between satisfaction with democracy and kind of electoral system independently of any process of citizen/representative interaction.

Finally, it is likely that electoral systems affect satisfaction with democracy in more ways than just whether or not citizens feel intermediaries are available for them. It has long been argued that one reason for using first-past-the-post systems is because they make government more effective by forcing the construction of majorities. Alternatively, it is often argued that proportional election systems will lead to greater satisfaction with democracy because every part of society will feel it is fairly represented in the government. What sort of effect the electoral system will have is an empirical question – but it seems likely that it will have some direct effect on satisfaction beyond those effects associated with contact (or the possibility of contact) between representatives and citizens. Thus what we look at in this paper is a part of the overall relationship between electoral systems and satisfaction with democracy. We will need to examine, and at times control for, the direct effects of electoral systems.

And it would of course 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 an exogenous variable in all of our models that dichotomises countries into mature democracies, that is countries that have been democracies for at least 25 years, and the remainder. 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. We therefore also include this ratio (logged) in all of our models.

Of course it may still be objected that these far from exhaust the possible influences on the level of satisfaction with democracy. Trouble is, pursuing this argument too far simply threatens to undermine the claims of advocates of single member districts. If the

*Who Represents Us Best ? One Member or Many ?  
by John Curtice and Phil Shively*

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 on which to base choosing 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.

**Figure 1 : The Model**

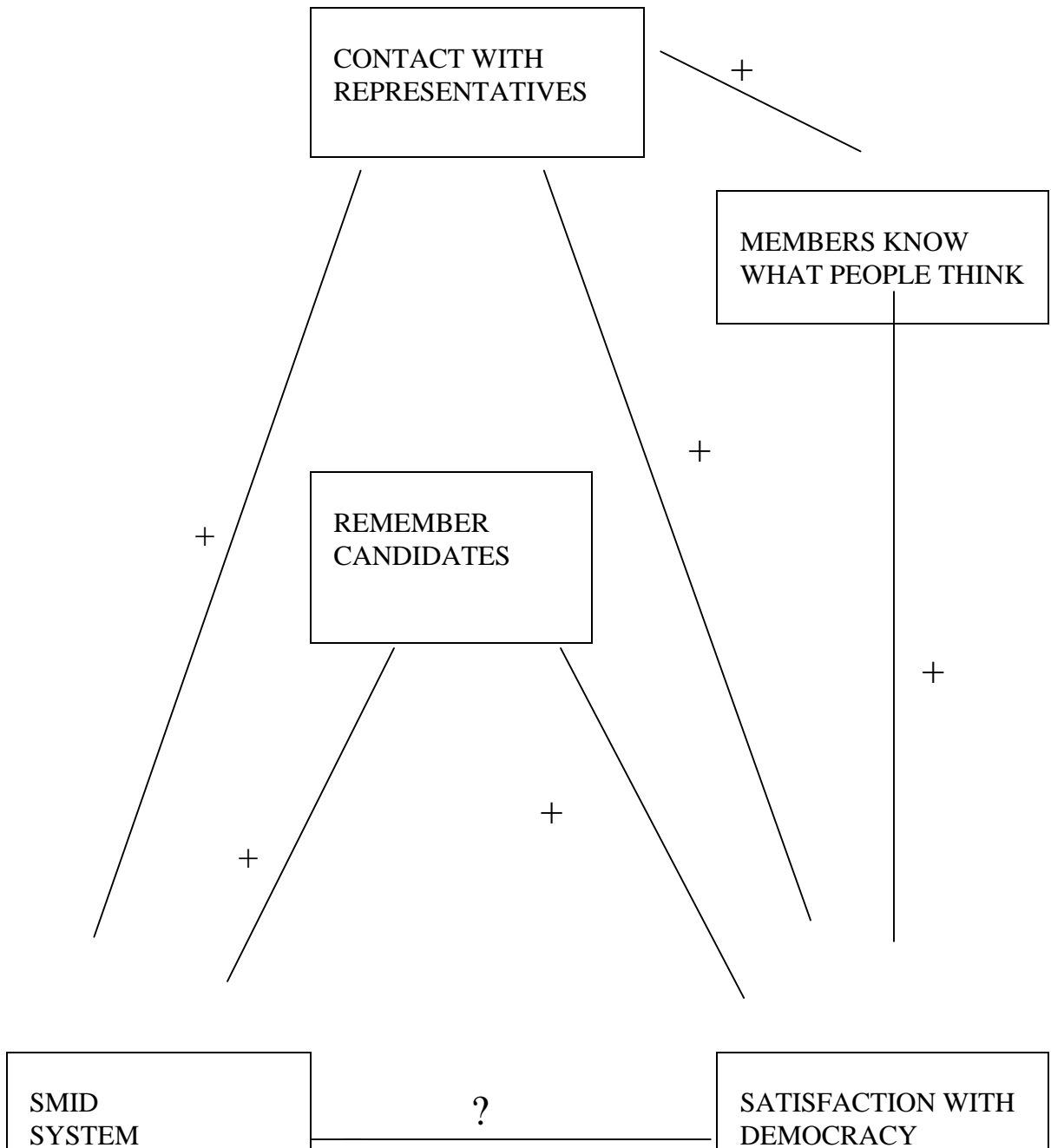




Figure 1 outlines our full model of the supposed benefits of single member districts. It now simply remains for us to put it to the test.

### **The Theory in Practice**

Before proceeding with the analysis, let us survey the landscape. Table 2 shows the extent of contact with representatives, voters' ability to remember candidates' names, and satisfaction with democracy for the countries in our study.

**Table 2: Contact, Recall, and Satisfaction**

Country	% Contacted	% Correctly Naming Candidates	% Satisfied
<u>Single-member systems</u>			
Australia	16	58	42
Germany	11	76	63
Great Britain	13	60	75
Hungary	7	63	42
Lithuania	16	---	35
Mexico	10	18	42
New Zealand*	26	83	69
Ukraine	8	39	9
USA	14	52	80
<u>Multimember systems</u>			
Argentina	10	---	42
Czech Republic	8	58	61
Israel	16	---	53
Japan*	8	94	63
Netherlands	5	---	88
Norway	15	69	90
Poland	6	38	63
Romania	7	30	44
Spain	3	26	63
Taiwan	8	37	47

\* *Prior electoral system*

We will now proceed to analyze the predictions of the model shown in figure 1. For the probit analyses that follow, there is a real question as to the appropriate independent

sample size in assessing the significance of results. We do not have 30,000+ independent cases; rather, we have 30,000+ cases sampled from nineteen countries. Assessment of standard errors based on an assumption of 30,000+ randomly drawn cases would exaggerate the significance of our estimates. Therefore, we have used robust probit estimation, adjusted for clustering. This yields exactly the same estimates of parameters as a standard probit model, but the standard errors are calculated taking into account intra-country dependence.

As a first cut into the empirical investigation of the model from figure 1, let us see whether electoral systems vary in the amount of contact citizens have with representatives or the extent to which citizens can correctly identify their representatives. We have categorised our electoral systems into three types: single-member district systems (including mixed systems that include single-member districts), which is symbolised by *smd*; multimember systems with candidate choice, including the SNTV systems of Japan and Taiwan, and Poland's open list system proportional representation (symbolised by *multmemb*); and closed list system PR. In table 3 we test for the effect of electoral systems on representatives' contact with constituents, leaving closed list system PR as the default category. We control here, as in all of our analyses, for the maturity of the democracy, dichotomized as  $\geq 25$  years (symbolised by *maturity*) and less than 25 years, which is the default category; and the logarithm of the population per member, symbolised by *logMPratio*.

We see in table 3 that single-member districts lead to greater contact than either multimember candidate choice systems or the default list system PR, and that the effect is significantly greater than zero. Multimember candidate choice systems lead to somewhat greater contact than list system PR, but the effect is not statistically greater than zero.

**Contact with Table 3 : Effects of Electoral System on  
Constituents, Probit model**

*Who Represents Us Best ? One Member or Many ?*  
by John Curtice and Phil Shively

	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>z</b>
smd	.271	.099	2.720
multmemb	.092	.102	0.900
maturity	.368	.094	3.901
logMPratio	-.199	.068	- 2.955
constant	-2.120	.235	- 9.023

*pseudo R*<sup>2</sup> = .035

Table 4 presents the similar test for the effect of electoral systems on citizens' familiarity with their representatives, as measured by their ability to recall legislative candidates' names. As noted above, Lithuania, Argentina, Israel and the Netherlands are omitted from this analysis because they did not measure this variable.

**Table 4 : Effects of Electoral System on Citizens'  
Recall of Candidates' Names, Probit model**

	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>z</b>
smd	.423	.136	3.099
multmemb	.507	.345	1.470
maturity	.537	.133	4.308
logMPrat	-.383	.121	- 3.175
constant	-1.537	.409	- 3.756

*pseudo R*<sup>2</sup> = .078

As in Table 3, single member district systems have a positive and significant effect on citizens' familiarity with their representatives. And again, we find that the system of multimember with choice does not have a statistically significant effect. However, as in Table 3 the estimated effect is again positioned between the effect of single member district systems and the default list PR.

Next, let us examine the predictions of the model with regard to whether citizens believe that members know what ordinary people think about things. Since the variable *members know* is coded as a five-point scale we have used robust regression with clustering rather than probit analysis in Table 5. On the first run of our analysis the background controls

for maturity and the ratio of population to members did not have statistically significant effects, so we dropped them for the analysis presented in the table.

**Table 5: Effects of Electoral System and Contact with Representatives on Citizens' View that Members Know What People Think, Regression Model**

	Coefficient	S.E.	t
smd	-.232	.088	-2.620
multmemb	-.282	.107	-2.628
contact	.216	.036	5.928
constant	1.876	.054	34.490
$R^2 = .012$			

The regression affirms one of the predictions of the model, that contact with members leads citizens to believe that members know what ordinary people think. But both of the electoral systems that provided greater contact with members have negative direct effects on the perception that members understand ordinary people.

It remains to see what are the effects of all this on satisfaction with the democratic process. Table 6 shows the effect of each of our posited factors on satisfaction with democracy. As in Table 4, Lithuania, Argentina, Israel and the Netherlands had to be excluded. At the first run of the analysis *logMPratio*, one of the background controls did not have a statistically significant coefficient, so it was dropped from the model.

**Table 6: Impact of these Factors on Satisfaction with Democracy, ProbitModel**

	Coefficient	S.E.	z
smd	-.759	.234	-3.244
multmemb	-.077	.161	-0.479
contact	-.053	.040	-1.328
recall names	.146	.041	3.561

*Who Represents Us Best ? One Member or Many ?  
by John Curtice and Phil Shively*

members know	.178	.040	4.418
maturity	1.180	.247	4.775
constant	-.201	.124	-1.619

*pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = .107*

Of the predictions from the model, recall of members' names and a belief that members know what ordinary people are thinking have the predicted positive effect. *Contact* does not have the predicted direct effect; but as we saw in Table 5, however, it has a positive effect on *members know*, which in turn has a positive impact on satisfaction. Single member district electoral systems, it turns out, have a significant direct negative effect on satisfaction, though as we have seen in earlier tables they will have a positive indirect effect through their impact on contact and familiarity with representatives.

One further link to the model suggests itself as a possibility. If *contact* does not have a direct effect on satisfaction, it may yet have another indirect effect through familiarity with representatives – if in fact it has a positive impact on familiarity. We test this in Table 7. As in earlier tables dealing with recall, Lithuania, Argentina, Israel and the Netherlands are excluded.

**Table 7 : Effect of Contact on Citizens' Recall of Candidates' Names, Probit Model**

	Coefficient	S.E.	z
contact	.600	.065	9.226
smd	.411	.142	2.897
multmemb	.515	.356	1.449
maturity	.534	.139	3.852
logMPrat	-.370	.117	-3.149
constant	-1.537	.400	-3.841

*pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = .0925*

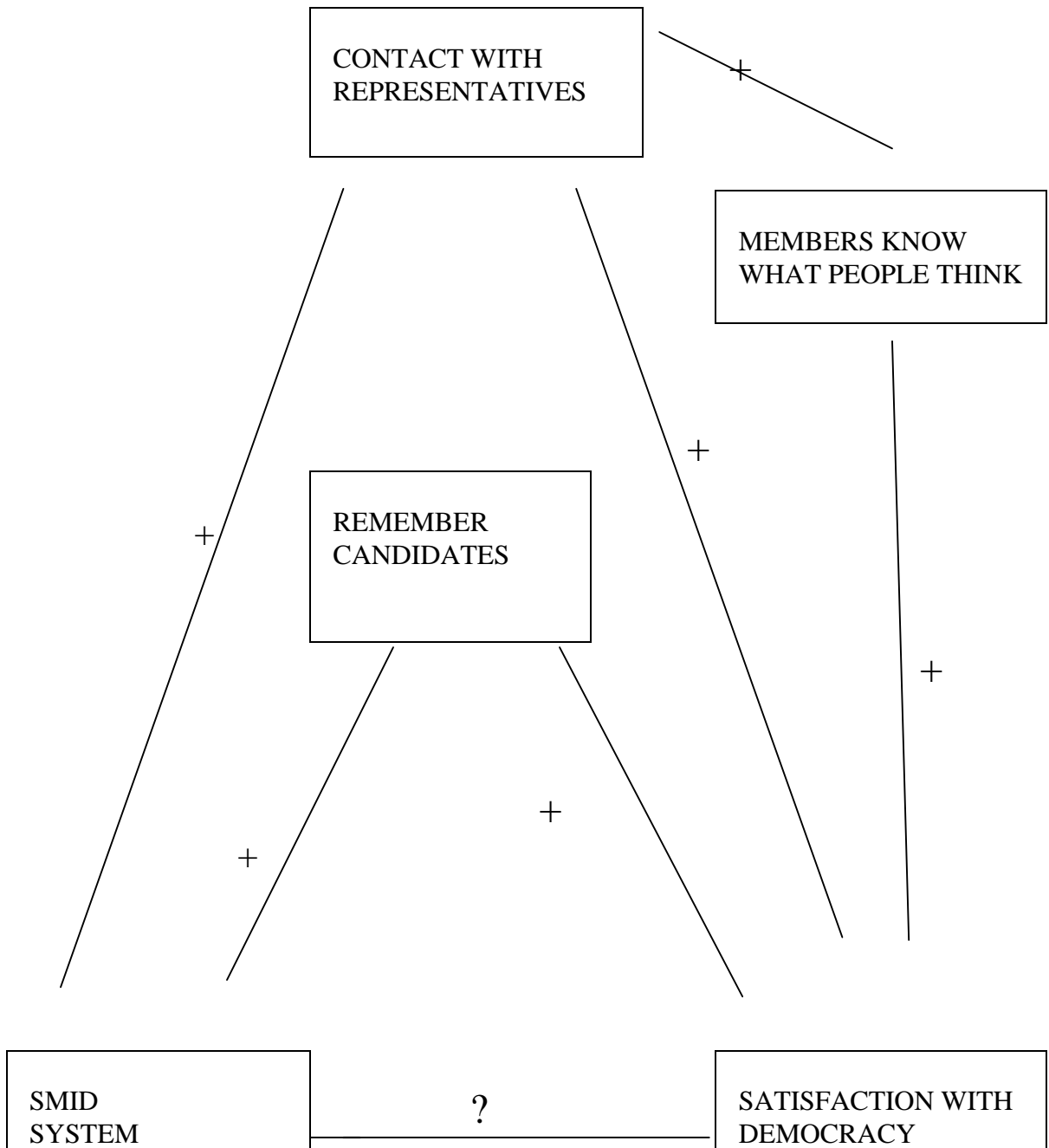
### Assessing the Model

With the positive effect of *contact* seen in this table, we can complete our evaluation of the model. In figure 2 we eliminate the tracks that did not produce significant

*Who Represents Us Best ? One Member or Many ?*  
*by John Curtice and Phil Shively*

relationships in our analysis, and put the appropriate negative sign on the direct relationship between single-member districts and satisfaction. We see in the figure that single-member districts do lead by a variety of paths to a more personal relationship of citizens to the legislature, which in turn leads to greater satisfaction with democracy. At the same time, however, single-member districts have a countervailing negative direct effect on satisfaction with democracy.

**Figure 2 : Direct and Indirect Influences of SMD System on Satisfaction.**





The overall effect of the two opposed processes can be assessed through a simple bivariate probit analysis predicting satisfaction from *smd*, with controls for *maturity* and *logMPratio*. In such an analysis, the overall effect of single member districts – comprising both the negative direct effect and the indirect positive effects through familiarity with representatives – is negative, with a robust statistical significance  $<.05$ .

Thus, it appears that the negative direct effect is greater than the positive indirect effects that operate through personalisation of the legislature. We can only speculate what the source of the negative direct effect is, but one might hypothesise that it has to do with the tension Lijphart (1999) describes between the accountability and representation functions of elections. Single-member district systems – at least first past the post ones – produce effective accountability through their ability to bring about the ouster of a government at an election in which it does not do well. This comes at the cost of representativeness, however, as many parts of society may not find themselves sharing as fully in governmental power as they would under a proportional representation system. Lijphart clearly thinks the representativeness of proportional systems should produce greater satisfaction with democracy than the accountability of first past the post systems. It may be that this is what is showing up in the negative direct effect of *smd*.

To test whether this is what is behind the negative direct effect, we can break out the two types of single-member district that we had combined under *smd*. Because our concern was simply to see whether living in a district with an identifiable member led to greater familiarity with representatives, we had combined under *smd* both pure single-member

district systems (Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the United States) and those that elect some of their members from an exhaustive set of single-member districts, but then add other seats to provide an overall proportional result (Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Mexico, and Ukraine.) These latter systems should provide representation in more or less the same way as straight proportional systems, and should provide about the same (low) level of direct accountability through elections, since the final result is proportional. If the explanation drawn from Lijphart is behind the negative direct effect of *smd* on satisfaction, then that effect should be confined to the purely single-member district systems. The results of the test are shown in Table 8; since *logMPratio* did not have a significant effect it was dropped from the analysis.

We see in the table that the prediction does not hold. In fact, the negative direct effect of *smd* appears to be coming primarily from its “mixed system” component, rather than from the pure *smd* systems. The effect of pure *smd* systems, while negative, is not statistically significant.

**Table 8 : Comparison of the Effects of Pure SMD Systems and Mixed Systems,  
Probit Model**

	Coefficients	S.E.	z
pure smd	-.165	.235	-0.701
mixed systems	-.721	.225	-3.200
multmemb	-.141	.214	-0.661
maturity	.606	.197	3.079

*pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = .0756*

## **Conclusion**

It has long been speculated that single member district systems have a benign impact on democracy through their capacity to make representation more personal and its experience more direct. We looked for that effect in this paper, we found it and were able to specify some of its paths, and as one would expect it increases citizens' satisfaction with their democracy.

We also found that single member districts appear to have a countervailing negative direct effect on satisfaction. We were able to show that this does not appear to be due to virtues of proportionality; mixed systems are just as proportional as pure PR systems, yet at least in this sample of countries they appear to be the source of most of the negative effects of single member districts. And in the course of that test, we also cast real doubt on the idea that mixed systems will produce the best of both worlds – the fairness of PR and the intimacy of SMD. At least as gauged by citizens' satisfaction with their democracy, this does not appear to be the case.

There is clearly plenty of work yet to be done in the overall evaluation of electoral systems and democracy. But, it is no mean feat to have established the benign path by

*Who Represents Us Best ? One Member or Many ?*  
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which single member districts make representation more direct and intimate, and thereby increase citizens' satisfaction with democracy.

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## Note

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