

Strategy of Voting System in the UK

The plurality rule is used in a single winner voting system wherein voters elect candidates to a public office that is based on single member constituencies. It is also used to elect multi member constituencies by using an exhaustive counting system. It is a repetitive process of electing one candidate at a time until all the positions are filled. The plurality rule is used in the United Kingdom that is more commonly referred to as first-past-the-post. This voting system makes use of simple plurality wherein it is a winner takes all scenario. The most notable difference is that the elected winner must have the highest number of votes and it is not required that the winner gains absolute majority of the votes (Abott, 2006) (Besley & Coate, 1997).

First-past-the-post is used to determine a single winner when he or she is able to have the highest number of votes. This term was taken from horse racing wherein the winner is determined after the horse passes a point within the track. In this sense, using this system a winner is determined after obtaining the largest number and the others automatically lose. It is important to note the winner must not pass any specific post like in horse racing as long as they receive the most votes that is described by a winner takes all scenario. This system has been debated on for many years as there are distinct weaknesses using the plurality rule. As a result, some electoral systems have adopted reforms to include multiple voting systems to compensate for the disadvantages under the plurality rule (Abott, 2006) (Besley & Coate, 1997).

The United Kingdom still uses the First-pass-the-post system in its national elections most recently this was held last May 2010. The voting public from the different districts elect one Member of Parliament. Under the plurality rule, the candidate with the

highest votes win and absolute majority is not considered. This has become a point for contention as in Scotland a candidate from the Liberal Democrat Party won in spite only garnering twenty six percent of the vote. As a result, the plurality rule produces victors only between the two largest parties when used in a single member scenario. The system does not contribute to multi party systems but only supports a two-member party. The common criticism of this rule is the lack of proportional representation. However in spite of its criticisms, it is still used by the United Kingdom including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is important to note that proportional representation is used in local and European elections (Abott, 2006).

The plurality rule is also describe as having a majoritarian system that puts two different political ideologies in contention such as the left and right wing parties. This system has influenced many other electoral and political systems such as the United States where the two major party leaders are the Democrats versus the Republicans. In the United Kingdom, the two major parties are the Conservative and Labour party. There is a growing movement in the United Kingdom to adopt a proportional representation with a partial selection by constituencies in order to give a voice to other smaller parties rather than from only the two major parties. This was especially highlighted after the results of the May 2010 national elections where no clear leader was determined that resulted in a coalition government. Furthermore, this is supported by Feddersen's Model and Palfrey's Model indicating that under the plurality rule two parties receive the most number of votes (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

It has been determined after scientific investigations that the plurality electoral system promote tactical voting wherein constituencies choose to vote one or two

candidates that are most likely to win. They do this in spite that their real choice is neither candidate but they continue to do this because voting for another is seen to be futile or a “waste”. Voters would rather choose from the one or two most likely to win in an effort to contribute to the electoral results. It has been noted that the plurality system encourages votes that are against a particular candidate rather than voting for the one they would like to win (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996). This is illustrated in the United Kingdom political scenario where electoral campaigns are aimed against a political party. There have been electoral campaigns designed specifically against the Conservative party by promoting voters to choose the Labor party or a smaller political party, the Liberal Democrats. In cases like these, voters would rather choose the second place party in a district even if they are not actually supporters of this party in order to have a chance the second place party would win. It has been noted that Labour party support would rather vote for Liberal Democrats rather voting for a Conservative candidate (Abott, 2006).

A dominant political science theory that supports that first-pass-the-post system results in favoring the two largest parties is the Duverger’s Law. Historically, this can be proven as time has shown that a first-pass-the-post diminishes political parties resulting in a two party system. This can be seen upon analysis of the results of the electoral system in the United Kingdom wherein one party holds a majority of the legislative seats. In fact, the national elections in the United Kingdom normally produces a single party majority of government and eighteen out of the twenty two national elections held in the twentieth century indicates it is either the Conservative or the Labour party that wins (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

The First-pass-the-post system using the plurality rule has been criticized to produce governments with a one party majority. It limits the perspective and policies to reflect only one political ideal. It is important to note that in the United Kingdom, the two major parties do have the same stands on certain policies. In this case, voters who choose based on policies cannot meaningfully discern between either candidate with similar agendas (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

The plurality rule as a result provides lesser choices to the voting public, as supported by Hotteling's model that states that there is more convergence between two candidates. The higher the number of candidates the more this will lead to having no equilibrium for the voting public. As a result this has led to the use of tactical techniques that leads constituencies to vote for a candidate they do not agree with but would rather choose to do so to oppose the other. It is in this manner that the real outcomes of the elections do not directly reflect the needs of the constituencies, which later on affects the policies, implemented and eventually brews public discontent. Plurality rule does not reflect the majority of voters, which can lead to radical governmental changes since the one-party rule would make it more feasible to implement. Members of parliament who all come from the same party will most likely support the same policies. A multi party on the other hand encourages more consensus and deliberation that will result in lesser radical governmental policy changes (Besley & Coate, 1997).

The philosophy behind the plurality rule is the upholding of the one person, one vote principle. It is a system that one voter chooses his first preference; the candidate with the largest number of vote wins automatically. This is different from the run-off system wherein the second choice or the lower voter preference is counted to determine

an absolute majority. The plurality rule also implements the one-dimensional spatial case that places restrictions in the distribution of ideal points that is symmetric. This simply implies that it has been mathematically determined that the plurality rule only yields two candidates in an electoral race. Those who are in favor of the plurality rule insist that this system results in winning candidates who take a moderate or center position. The run off system is viewed to produce winners who have extreme political views. This is subject to contention since the definition of moderate is varied depending on the view of the voting public (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

The plurality rule encourages two-party systems and results in single winners; its proponents believe that this is a more stable form of government especially in a parliamentary form. The First-pass-the-post system reduces the influence of other parties and many believe removes extremists from the government. It can also be said that not all parties take on this point of view, but rather the first-pass-the-post prevents fair representation to society's minorities such as women and other races from being duly represented. Reforms in the United Kingdom's electoral system have been suggested but are yet to be implemented (Abott, 2006).

Using a run off system yields different results compared to a first-pass-the-post under the plurality rule. The run off system uses a form of preferential voting that allows voters to rank their choices. The system counts the first preference and when no winner is declared a second round will ensue. The candidates with the lowest number of first preference rankings are eliminated. The second round entails the ballots redistributed at full value to the remaining candidates and counting is based on the next preference slot. It is repeated until a majority of votes is tallied to one candidate. This system is seen to be

effective compared to a first-pass-the-post system where no re-election is required. A winner can be determined based on the rankings. A similarity between plurality and run off system is when in cases that no winner is declared; both apply the equal probability rule in the second mode of counting. This means that both system provide equal opportunity for candidates to win (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

The philosophy of the run off system is to determine a majority from the voting results. This is the main difference from a first-pass-the-post under the plurality rule that does not require an absolute majority. In a sense, a run off system is seen as an improvement of the plurality voting system. The run off system can be used in single member voting system similar to first-pass-the-post. The main difference is that under the run off system smaller third parties has a chance to compete and co-exist against the two-party system. This is not to say that the run off system does not support a two party system when in fact it also has the same result with a first-pass-the-post in some cases (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

The run off system is not seen to result in proportional representation when used in a multi-winner scenario. This is the reason why this is not advocated for legislative body elections since it is most likely to yield to a smaller number of larger parties rather than support smaller parties. As a result parliaments would mostly likely be single party governments instead of a proportional representation. This results in coalition form of government, in spite the face that the run off system does take into account a majority voting under an assembly scenario, it would not be able to produce a majority count in a national level. It will most likely yield to less support and to not account for an overall majority. In the same light, a run off system will be ineffective in supporting minority

representation. It can also lead to gerrymandering of single seat districts where minorities have more control of legislature (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

The plurality rule and the run off electoral system can influence the political environment creating scenarios where citizens opt to run for office or swaying voters to choose based on policies. An example would be where single citizens run for office and wins because of acclamation. The plurality rule was applied in the Democratic primaries in the United States for the gubernatorial seat in 1950 and 1982. The winner emerged with only twenty five percent of the vote. In a plurality system, when two candidates are found to be too similar or too dispersed then a third candidate will most likely win. This is because this candidate represents a moderation between the two and is mostly likely closer to median preference of the voter. In spite the fact that the plurality rule results in endorsing a two party system, it also encourages a three party race. This is seen to be the most effective as an equilibrium occurs in terms of policies amongst the three candidates. A run off system would most likely have many candidates but these are found to have similar positions or medians. There is no distinction in terms of policies between all the candidates running (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996).

It is important to note that in spite of the plurality and run off electoral system, there have been studies to understand voting behavior. To understand why and how do constituencies vote is essential in running an electoral campaign. It is also a significant reflection of the way modern day societies view the political process that certainly affects the national government policies. The basis of the electoral setting in the United Kingdom is the foundations of democratic ideals. This certainly affects the formation of policies in the country. The act of electing public officials is the cornerstone of

representative democracy wherein these individuals are sought to be the voice of the majority. This has certainly influenced why citizens decide to run for public office. It also influences their choices in the electoral process but more importantly, it also impacts the policy choices made by elected officials (Besley & Coate, 1997).

An important factor that influences a citizen to run is the policy outcome. This may either be positive or negative but regardless of which, policy outcomes are paramount to citizens. The constituencies care about result and the lack of it leads to a citizen to run for public office. A candidate runs also because of the policies he or she believes in, these policies are based on preference or set of priorities. A candidate without a policy cannot run for public office since constituencies make their electoral choice based on policies as well. A candidate who wins then is held accountable to policies he or she ran under during the electoral campaign. It will serve to be detrimental if a candidate chooses not to implement these promised policies. Running for public office is certainly a costly endeavor, however before a citizen decides to run he or she also considers their opposition. They use this as a gauge the likelihood of their victory (Besley & Coate, 1997).

The philosophy behind representative democracy is the participation of citizens in the political process. It emphasizes liberal democracy through electing officials rather than dictatorial ruling. A clear characteristic of representative democracy is the ability of candidates to enact policies. This affects the way citizens vote and certainly establishes a link between public economics and political economy. Representative democracy is applies in plurality rule and run off systems wherein individuals are elected to promote the constituency's interests (Besley & Coate, 1997). It remains in question whether

elected officials are indeed the true and real voice of the people because of the varying results found in the plurality and run off system. Both systems do try to be the true representative of democracy by electing the rightful winner considering all circumstances. In the end, it is the optimal behavior of winners and policy outcomes that significantly impact the voting public.

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