

# Preface

The idea behind this book is quite simple. Many studies have examined electoral systems, their nature, causes, and consequences. There are also a good number of studies that analyse the regulation of money in election campaigns. But there is very little research, and no systematic analysis, of other basic dimensions of election laws, such as those that pertain to who has the right to vote and to be a candidate, and who conducts the election. There is a huge gap in the literature, and that gap ought to be filled. Thus this book. As with most research projects, the idea was simple but doing the required research was much more difficult than anticipated. Election laws are there to be studied, but we have discovered that they are not quite there all the time, at least not in the form we would like them to be. Election laws change and it is sometimes a challenge to find the most recent version. Some provisions of these laws are quite ambiguous. Some aspects of election legislation may be incorporated in other laws. And so on ...

Despite all these difficulties, we have completed our journey. We had three objectives. The first was to provide an accurate description of the wide array of election laws in contemporary democracies. The second goal was to review the debate about the pros and cons of the various rules that can be adopted. The third was to uncover broad sociological patterns, that is, to determine what kinds of countries tend to adopt what kinds of rules.

We have made every effort to cross-check the accuracy of the information presented in the text and in the tables about the content of election laws. We are painfully aware that there may still be some errors. All we can say is that we have tried very hard to verify the 'facts.' Readers must be reminded that the data describe the situation as we could ascertain it as of December 1999.

We also review the arguments that have been put forward in favour of, or in opposition to, certain types of rules. Our objective is not to convince readers that certain laws are 'better' than others, but rather to help them better understand the merits and limits of various options and to form a more informed opinion. Unfortunately, the review of the debate is sometimes brief, for the simple reason that the literature on these aspects of election laws is rather thin. It is our hope that researchers will use our presentation as a starting point for a deeper examination of the issues.

Finally, we establish a number of patterns in the kinds of election laws that are adopted in contemporary democracies. We show, in particular, that former colonies tend to enact the same rules as their mother countries, and that there is a tendency for established democracies to be more inclusive than non-established ones. We have only scratched the surface here. We believe that our 'macroscopic' approach is useful because it provides a broad picture of the similarities and differences among groups of countries. But there is clearly a need for more focused comparative case studies in order to provide a better understanding of what makes governments decide to adopt certain types of rules. Again, our hope is that our study will trigger many more.

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