



Changing the Rules of the Game: On the Determinants and Consequences of Electoral Reform in Contemporary Democracies

Pedro Riera Sagrera
Ph.D. thesis defence on 7 June 2013

Abstract

The thesis has three main findings. First, the levels of party system fragmentation and citizens' satisfaction with democracy have strong potential to explain electoral system changes in contemporary democracies. Contrary to what is usually implied by the literature on electoral reform, parties are seen to have strong tendencies to pass restrictive rather than permissive electoral system changes in circumstances where the electoral system might be considered to be already overly-permissive resulting in excessive numbers of parties. Moreover, electoral reforms in the intraparty dimension usually take place when large numbers of voters are currently dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country.

The second main finding is that electoral reforms can reshape the morphology of established party systems through two distinct mechanisms of electoral engineering. The first mechanism takes place at the interparty level, with permissive reforms reducing the difference between the percentage of votes received and the percentage of seats obtained by a party, and restrictive reforms enlarging this gap. The second mechanism operates at the intraparty level, where candidate-centred reforms decrease the level of party system nationalization while party-centred reforms leave party system nationalization unchanged.

Finally, the third main finding of the thesis is that parties' positions regarding the possible modification of the rules of the game have an electoral effect. Parties that advocate a permissive reform in countries with low party system fragmentation are more likely to electorally benefit. By contrast, support for such reforms when the number of parties is large is more likely to result in electoral losses.



Jury:

Fabrizio Bernardi (EUI), Mark Franklin (Massachusetts Institute of Technology/EUI, Supervisor), Pedro Riera Sagrera (Candidate), José Ramón Montero (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

Bio

Pedro Riera research interest include electoral systems, political behaviour and party politics. He has published in *Political Behavior*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Party Politics*, and *International Political Science Review*, among others.