The Second Defense of Proportional Representation with a Limited Majority Bonus

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to strengthen the normative basis of proportional representation with a limited majority bonus (PR-LMB) by comparing it with one of its strongest rivals: proportional representation with a limited transferable vote (PR-LTV). PR-LTV distributes seats in parliament proportionally, but it uses the transfer mechanism of the contingent vote (CV) to ensure voters are able to choose a government. In this sense, both PR-LMB and PR-LTV try to reconcile two ideals: the proportionality of PR and the identifiability/accountability of single-member districts (SMD). However, PR-LTV has a crucial weakness in terms of identifiability/accountability. Thus, the article concludes that PR-LMB is better than PR-LTV.

Introduction

This is the sequel to my article "In Defense of Proportional Representation with a Limited Majority Bonus." In that article, I proposed an electoral system named 'proportional representation with a limited majority bonus' (PR-LMB). It is a kind of proportional representation, yet it guarantees a winning coalition or a winning independent party 55 percent of the seats (majority bonus) to promote a bi-coalitional competition. At the same time, it guarantees the other parties 45 percent of the seats (minority bonus) to offset the disproportionality of the majority bonus. By so doing, it tries to dialectically overcome the false dichotomy of the proportionality of PR and the identifiability/accountability of SMD.[1] Moreover, I refuted some possible objections to PR-LMB: inefficiency, instability and unaccountability (Okazaki 2019).

However, I did not examine any possible alternative to PR-LMB. Without such a comparative analysis, PR-LMB does not have a strong normative basis. In this article, I would like to strengthen the normative basis of PR-LMB by comparing it with what I name 'proportional representation with a limited transferable vote' (PR-LTV). It is an electoral system that I claim to have invented for comparative analysis in this article.[2] PR-LTV applies the transfer mechanism of the contingent vote (CV) to PR. In contrast to the so-called 'single transferable vote' (PR-STV), the transfer mechanism is used to achieve the ideal of identifiability/accountability rather than that of proportionality. Both the majority bonus under PR-LMB and the transfer mechanism under PR-LTV are devices that are intended to enable voters to choose a government under PR. In this sense, both PR-LMB and PR-LTV seem to reconcile the two seemingly incompatible ideals: the proportionality of PR and the identifiability/accountability of SMD. If so, we face a crucial question: which is better, PR-LMB or PR-LTV?

I will begin by explaining the basic mechanism of PR-LTV, which uses the transfer mechanism of CV not at the level of voters but at the level of parties

(**Section 1**). After explaining why I believe CV is more suitable for PR-LTV than alternative vote (AV) and supplementary vote (SV) (**Section 2**), I will argue that PR-LMB is better than PR-LTV in reconciling the ideals of proportionality and identifiability/accountability (**Section 3**).

1. The Basic Mechanism of PR-LTV

⑴ Initial Version

A single transferable vote (STV) is an electoral system in which wasted votes are transferred to other candidates according to voters' preferences. While STV is often equated with PR-STV used in Ireland, there are some forms of STV applied to single-member districts (SMD): alternative vote (AV), supplementary vote (SV) and contingent vote (CV). These can be regarded as three variants of SMD-STV.[3] Although PR-STV and SMD-STV are usually classified into different categories (International IDEA 2005: chapter 3; Farrell 2011: chapter 3 and 6), they are all forms of 'preferential voting' (Reilly 2001: chapter 2). Actually, W. R. Ware 'proposed an adaptation of Hare's STV system to the case of single-seat constituencies' (Farrell and McAllister 2006: 32).

As I have suggested, I argue that the transfer mechanism of CV can be applied to PR conversely. In explaining the basic mechanism, I will assume the superiority of CV over AV and SV, at least in this case. Section 2 will explain why CV is more suitable for PR-LTV than AV and SV.

Let us apply the transfer mechanism of CV to PR.[4] Under PR-LTV, voters are required to cast a vote for parties ranked in order of preference. The number of preferences is allowed to range from 1 to the number of parties submitting a list. The votes are used for selecting not only members of parliament but also the prime minister. Seats in parliament are distributed to each party according to voters' first preferences. On the other hand, the post of prime minister is given to the leader of a party that polls an absolute majority of the votes, including transferred

votes.   Thus, the transfer mechanism is used only for selecting the prime minister. The procedures are as follows.

The 1st Procedure

The first procedure is to check whether the largest party polls a majority of the first-preference votes.   If so, the leader of the party is selected as the prime minister.   If not, one moves to the next step.

The 2nd Procedure

The second procedure is to check the possibility of a so-called grand coalition. Transfer the votes cast for the second-largest party to the largest party according to the second- and lower-ranked preferences.   If the largest party polls a majority of the votes, including transferred votes, the leader of the party is selected as the prime minister.   If not, one moves to the next step.

The 3rd Procedure

The third procedure is to transfer the votes cast for parties other than the top-two parties to the largest party or the second-largest party according to the voters' preferences. The leader of a party that polls a plurality (not necessarily a majority) of the votes, including transferred votes, is selected as the prime minister.

As the procedure shows, the transfer mechanism of CV is used only for selecting the prime minister.   Whereas seats in parliament are distributed proportionally to the parties, the post of prime minister is given to the leader of the winning party, which polls a majority or a plurality of the votes.   Thus, the PR-LTV is meant to enable voters to select members of parliament in a proportional way, as well as the prime minister in a majoritarian way.

However, PR-LTV has a weakness in terms of identifiability.   It is true that

voters can identify the prime minister, the ruling party, and the basic policies when a party polls a majority of the first-preference votes, thus obtaining the post of prime minister and forming a single-party government.

In the case of a grand-coalition government, however, voters can identify the prime minister and the ruling parties, but they cannot identify the basic policies of the coalition government, because the ruling parties have to reach agreements on basic policies after the election.

In the other case, the situation is more complex. It is reasonable to suppose that the winning party receives the transferred votes, be they more or fewer, from most, or even all, parties except the second-largest party (**Figure 1**). If the winning party has a legal obligation to form a coalition government with all the parties except the second-largest party, the following two questions will be raised. Why must the winning party form a coalition government even with a party from which it has received only a small number of transferred votes? Why can the winning party not form a coalition government with the second-largest party, which may

Figure 1　PR-LTV (initial version)
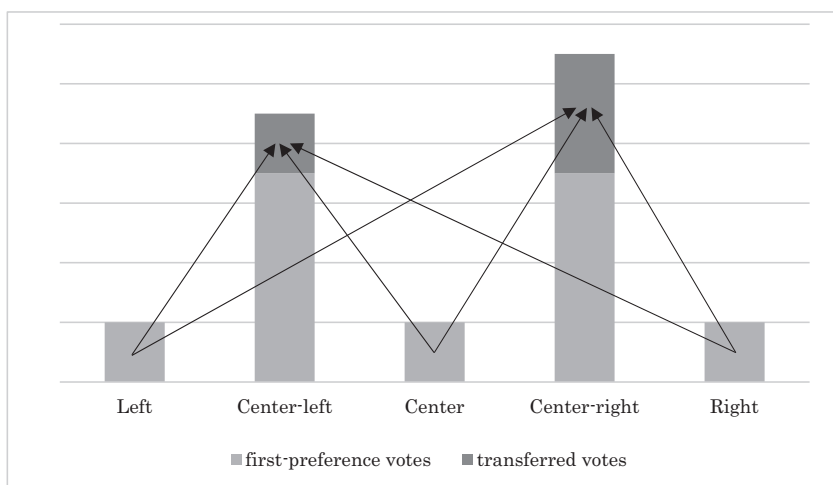
Note: Arrow means the transfer of votes.

have many potential transferred votes to the winning party?

If the winning party is given relative freedom to choose coalition partners, the questions mentioned above can be avoided: the winning party can choose coalition partners from all parties, including the second-largest party, from which the winning party has received the (potential) transferred votes.[5]　However, this means that voters cannot identify the ruling parties and the basic policies of the coalition government.

In sum, except for the case of a single-party government, identifiability has to be limited to the selection of the prime minister and, at best, the ruling parties under PR-LTV.

(2) Improved Version

Are there any solutions to break the deadlock?　I believe that the deadlock can be broken by applying the transfer mechanism, not at the level of voters, but at the level of parties.　The improved PR-LTV imposes a legal obligation on parties, not on voters, to give a preference for coalition partners.　If the application of the transfer mechanism of CV to PR is the first innovative point, the change in the applicable target is the second innovative point.　Let us briefly explain the procedures.

Under the improved PR-LTV, parties are required to submit a list of candidates with coalition partners ranked in order of preference.　The number of preferences is allowed to range from 0 to the number of competing parties.　The order of preference is used not only in selecting the prime minister but also in forming a coalition government.　When and only when there is a mutual preference between the winning party and another party, they are obliged to form a coalition government.

On election day, voters cast a non-preferential vote for a party.　Seats in parliament are distributed to each party according to the votes the party has polled. On the other hand, the post of prime minister is given to the leader of a party that

polls a majority of the votes, including transferred votes. The composition of ruling parties is determined by the preference: when the winning party has given a preference to a party and the party has given a preference to the winning party, they have a legal obligation to form a coalition government. The procedures are as follows.

The 1st Procedure

The first procedure is to check whether the largest party polls a majority of the votes. If so, the leader of the party is selected as the prime minister and the party forms a single-party government. If not, one moves to the next step.

The 2nd Procedure

The second procedure is to check the possibility of a so-called grand coalition. If the largest party gives a preference to the second-largest party and vice versa, and the total sum of their votes amounts to a majority of the votes, the leader of the largest party is selected as the prime minister and the largest and second-largest parties form a coalition government. If not, one moves to the next step.

The 3rd Procedure

The third procedure is to transfer the votes cast for parties other than the top-two parties to the largest party or the second-largest party according to the other parties' preferences. The leader of a party that polls a plurality (not necessarily a majority) of the votes, including transferred votes, is selected as the prime minister and the winning party forms a coalition government with other parties. Check the votes that the winning party finally polls. If the winning party has given a preference to party X, which has given a preference to the winning party, a relationship of mutual preference exists. Then, they have a legal obligation to form a coalition government. However, if the

winning party has not given a preference to party Y, which has given a preference to the winning party, there is a relationship of one-sided preference. Party Y remains a supporter of the government outside the cabinet.

The basic mechanism of improved PR-LTV is illustrated in **Figure 2** (compare it with **Figure 1**).

I pointed out that if 'the disproportionality of electoral systems and the large number of parties encourage pre-electoral coalitions,' as Sona Nadenichek Golder demonstrates (Golder 2006: 8, 36, 99-102, 140), 'it is difficult, if not impossible, to form pre-electoral coalitions under PR' (Okazaki 2019: 736). However, PR-LTV can encourage pre-electoral coalitions by imposing a legal obligation on parties to give a preference to coalition partners before the election. If so, as is the case with PR-LMB, it seems that voters can elect members of parliament in a proportional way and choose a government in a majoritarian way.

Figure 2　PR-LTV
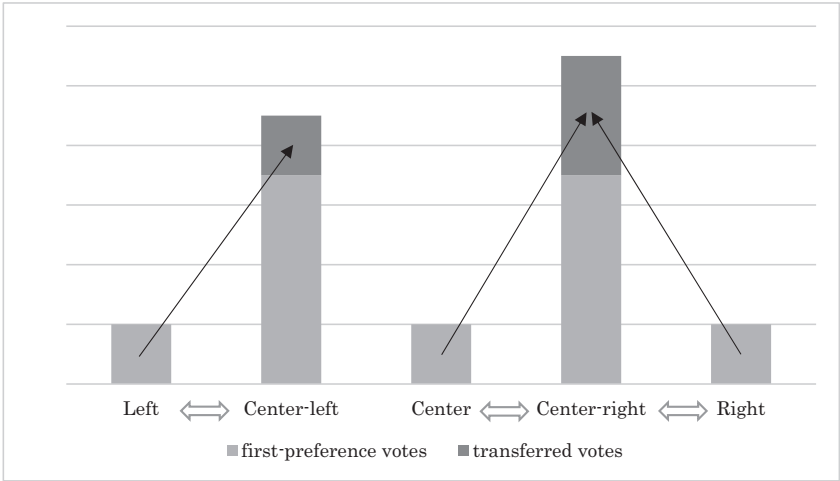
Note: Two-way outline arrow means a mutual preference between parties.

2. Transfer Mechanism Re-examined

I have explained the basic mechanism of PR-LTV assuming that CV is more suitable for PR-LTV than AV and SV.[6] Before proceeding to make a comparative analysis between PR-LMB and PR-LTV, I will explain why I believe that CV is more suitable for PR-LTV than AV and SV. Let us apply AV, SV and CV to the improved mechanism of PR-LTV.[7]

An Application of AV

Parties submit a list of candidates with coalition partners ranked in order of preference. The number of preferences must be equal to the number of competing parties. Voters cast a non-preferential vote for a party. Seats in parliament are distributed to parties in a proportional way, but the prime minister is selected in a majoritarian way. If a party polls a majority of the votes, the leader of the party is selected as the prime minister. If no party polls a majority of the votes, the party with the fewest votes is excluded. The votes cast for the excluded party are transferred to other parties according to the order of preference given by the excluded party. The process is repeated until a party polls a majority of the votes, including transferred votes. The leader of the party is selected as the prime minister (as for AV, see Johnston 2017: 4).

An Application of SV

Parties submit a list of candidates with a coalition partner or with no coalition partners. Voters cast a non-preferential vote for a party. Seats in parliament are distributed to parties in a proportional way, but the prime minister is selected in a majoritarian way. If a party polls a majority of the votes, the leader of the party is selected as the prime minister. If no party polls a majority of the votes, all but the top-two parties are excluded simultaneously.

The votes cast for the excluded parties are transferred to the top-two parties according to their preferences. Votes giving a preference other than for the top-two parties lose their destination; thus, they are not counted. The leader of the party with a plurality of the votes, including transferred votes, is selected as the prime minister (as for SV, see Johnston 2017: 4-5).

An Application of CV

Parties submit a list of candidates with coalition partners ranked in order of preference. The number of preferences is not limited to one (contrary to SV) but does not necessarily include all competing parties (contrary to AV). Here too, voters cast a non-preferential vote for a party. Seats in parliament are distributed in a proportional way, but the prime minister is selected in a majoritarian way. If a party polls a majority of the votes, the leader of the party is selected as the prime minister. If no party polls a majority of the votes, all but the top-two parties are excluded simultaneously. The votes cast for the excluded parties are transferred to the top-two parties according to the order of preference given by the excluded parties. The leader of the party with a plurality of the votes, including transferred votes, is selected as the prime minister (as for CV, see Farrell and McAllister 2006: 25, 53-54).

Thus, there are some minor differences between the applications of AV, SV and CV. Which is suitable for PR-LTV?

First, I believe that AV is not suitable for PR-LTV. It is true that AV has an advantage over SV and CV: the winning party polls a majority of the votes under AV. Under SV and CV, the winner does poll a plurality of the votes yet does not necessarily poll a majority of the votes. Given that a majority is democratically superior to a plurality, there is no doubt that AV is superior to SV and CV.[8]

However, AV seems to have two serious weaknesses. When applied to PR-LTV, there is a possibility that the leader of the third- or lower-ranked party at the

first stage is selected as the prime minister. The prime minister selected primarily through transferred votes will not be expected to enjoy the strong support of voters and will not be able to take a strong leadership position in a coalition government. In contrast, the opportunity to become prime minister is limited to the leader of the top-two parties when the transfer mechanism of SV or CV is applied. This means that stronger support of voters and the stronger leadership of the prime minister are expected under PR-LTV.

The second weakness is more serious than the first one. As explained above, parties must give a preference to all competing parties when the transfer mechanism of AV is applied. If mutual preference poses a legal obligation to form a coalition government, the winning party cannot reject forming a coalition government with a party from which it receives transferred votes. Thus, the application of AV deprives parties of the freedom not to form a coalition government with a party they dislike. In contrast, parties have no obligation to give a preference to all competing parties when the transfer mechanism of SV or CV is applied. If parties do not give a preference to a party they dislike, they are not forced to from a coalition government with the party.

Then, which is suitable for PR-LTV, SV or CV? I believe that CV is more suitable than SV. As I have explained, SV allows parties to give a preference to one coalition partner, but it does not allow them to give a preference to two or more coalition partners. Thus, there are two related problems. One is that SV imposes an institutional restriction on the coalition strategy of parties. Even if a party wants to give a preference to two or more parties, it is not allowed to do so. Most parties will remove such strict restrictions by all means. In contrast, CV allows parties to give a preference to as many coalition partners as they wish. The number is not limited to either zero or one. Therefore, there is no institutional restriction on the coalition strategy of parties. If a party wants to form a three-party coalition government, it can give a first preference to a party and a second preference to another party.

The other problem with the application of SV to PR-LTV is that only a single-party government (in the case of one-sided preference) or a two-party government (in the case of mutual preference) can be established.　As a result, a minority government is likely to be established, in which a party or parties that support the government from outside (the center party in this case) may pressure the government by withdrawing support, thus exerting a considerable influence on the government (**Figure 3**).　In contrast, CV increases the probability of a majority government because the number of mutual preferences is not limited to either zero or one.　Most (if not all) parties that have given preference to the winning party can participate in the cabinet and share the ministerial posts. If a majority government is established, it will be more efficient and stable than a minority government (**Figure 4**).

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that CV is more suitable than SV in terms of the freedom of parties and the majority basis of a government.

Figure 3　PR-LTV based on SV
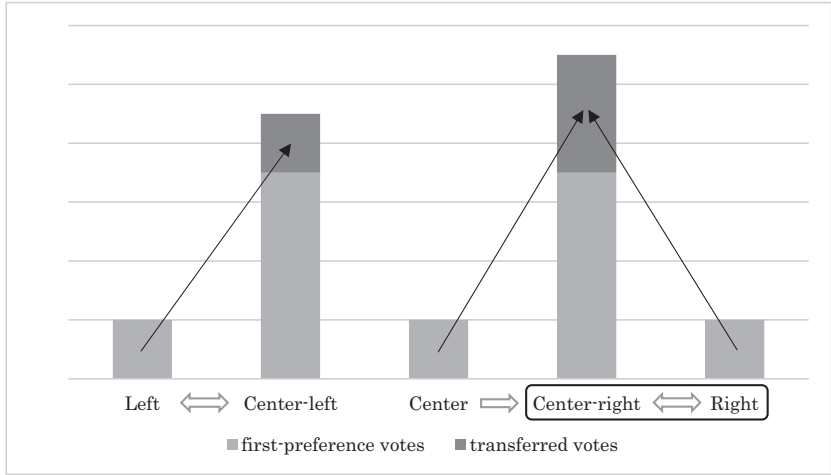
Note: The frame is a coalition government.　A one-way outline arrow indicates a one-sided preference and a two-way outline arrow indicates a mutual preference between parties.

Figure 4 PR-LTV based on CV
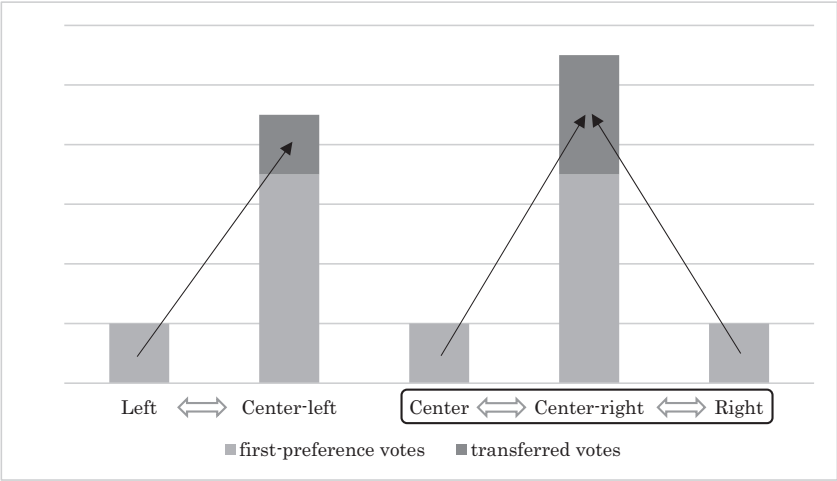
3. Comparative Analysis

Having explained the basic mechanism of PR-LTV, I will briefly compare it with PR-LMB.

As is the case with PR-LMB, PR-LTV seems to reconcile the ideals of proportionality and identifiability/accountability in an electoral system: voters can elect members of parliament in a proportional way and choose a government in a majoritarian way.　Indeed, PR-LTV seems to be more desirable and acceptable than PR-LMB because it does not distort the proportionality of PR.　Although PR-LMB tries to offset the disproportionality of the majority bonus with the disproportionality of the minority bonus (Okazaki 2019: 731), I have to admit that PR-LTV is more acceptable to the proponents of PR than PR-LMB.

Examined carefully, however, PR-LTV turns out to have a crucial weakness in terms of identifiability/accountability.　It is true that PR-LTV ensures the identifiability of the prime minister and the ruling parties: there is no room for parties to negotiate on the selection of the prime minister and the composition of

ruling parties after the election. However, it does not necessarily ensure the identifiability of the basic policies adopted by the coalition government. Suppose the following case, which can be reasonably assumed:

Preferences of Parties

V is a left party, and W is a center-left party.

V and W give a preference for each other and agree on basic policies.

X is a center party, Y is a center-right party, and Z is a right party.

X and Y give a preference for each other and agree on basic policies.

Y and Z give a preference for each other and agree on basic policies.

X and Z give no preference for each other.

Election Results

After the transfer of the votes cast for X and Z, Y polls a plurality of the votes.

In this case, the leader of Y is selected as the prime minister, and X, Y and Z have a legal obligation to form a coalition government. However, X, Y and Z have no consensus on basic policies. The agreements between X and Y might not satisfy Z, and/or the agreements between Y and Z might not satisfy X. If so, the three parties have to compromise to a greater or lesser extent and reach agreements after the election. This means that voters cannot identify the basic policies of the coalition government XYZ before the election.

It is true that the coalition agreements between the three parties could be reached under a favorable 'coalition life cycle': election results and coalition patterns are relatively stable throughout elections.[9] In this case, voters could identify the basic policies of the coalition government as well.

However, both X and Z have a rational incentive not to reach agreements. As is well known, Anthony Downs showed the existence of some 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces in a coalition (Downs 1985: chapter 9). Lanny W. Martin and

Georg Vanberg also noted a '*dilemma of coalition governance*: to govern successfully, coalition partners must be able to overcome the inherent tension between their *collective* interest in mutual accommodation and their *individual* incentives to pursue their particular policy objectives' (Martin and Vanberg 2011: 3-4).

These contradictory forces also operate at the stage of forming a coalition. Since X and Z want to be a governing party and share the ministerial posts, they have an incentive to compromise and reach coalition agreements. At the same time, they also have an incentive to keep their distance from each other. This is partly to allow a party to carry out its own policies without compromising with an ideologically distant party. The other reason is so as not to decrease the party's votes and seats by compromising with an ideologically distant party. If X and Z reach coalition agreements, most supporters will be disappointed by the agreements and abandon their own parties.

It should be noted that the risk of losing supporters is more serious for X, which faces an alternative party W on the opposite side. Some supporters will continue to support X, but others will abandon X and transfer their support from X to W. Due to the expected reduction of votes and seats, X will hesitate to compromise with Z.[10]

To be sure, there is the same incentive for X not to compromise with Z under PR-LMB. Supporters of X will be more or less disappointed if X reaches coalition agreements with Z. However, there is a strong incentive for X to reach agreements with Z: coalition agreements will increase the probability of becoming a governing party and gaining bonus seats. Conversely, no coalition agreements will increase the possibility of becoming an opposition party and losing some seats. In contrast to PR-LMB, PR-LTV lacks such a strong incentive to resist the expected disappointment by supporters.

What is worse, even if a coalition government XYZ is established, it is not easy for the three parties to reach extensive agreements on basic policies. If such

agreements are not reached for a long time, the coalition government must suffer from three difficulties PR entails: the coalition government will be less efficient, less stable, and less accountable because it lacks extensive agreements on basic policies that constrain the ruling parties (see Okazaki 2019: 726-730). Thus, it is difficult for voters to hold the coalition government accountable for the performance.

These examinations lead to the conclusion that PR-LMB is better than PR-LTV in reconciling the ideals of proportionality and identifiability/accountability. However, this does not mean that PR-LTV is useless entirely: I acknowledge that PR-LTV does contribute to alleviating, if not solving, the identifiability/ accountability problem of PR. Moreover, it does not distort the proportionality of PR. It simply imposes a legal obligation on parties to give a preference to coalition partners when they submit a list. Therefore, it will be acceptable for most proponents of PR who have argued for pre-electoral coalitions (e.g., Farrell 2011: 217-218, Ishikawa 1990: 54; Powell 2000: 71-72).

Concluding Remarks

I have tried to strengthen the normative basis of PR-LMB by comparing it with PR-LTV, one of the strongest rivals of PR-LMB. I believe that the first original point of this article is to invent PR-LTV by (1) applying the transfer mechanism of CV to PR and (2) applying the transfer mechanism at the level of parties, not voters. The second original point that I claim is to strengthen the normative basis of PR-LMB by defending it against PR-LTV. Needless to say, it is possible that I have missed some important studies related to the arguments. In addition, I may fail to correctly estimate the advantages and disadvantages of the two electoral systems. Some scholars may defend PR-LTV. My original claims have to be scrutinized by the international community of electoral studies. However, I believe that the theoretical analysis in this article contributes to the development of the theory of an electoral system.

Acknowledgement

Notes

（1） I define the term 'identifiability' as the ability for voters to choose a government prospectively and the term 'accountability' as the ability to do so retrospectively (Okazaki 2019: 737). Recently, on the basis of analysis of the data from 400 parliamentary elections across 28 countries, Christopher Kam, Anthony M. Bertelli and Alexander Held demonstrate that bipolarity in a party system can produce retrospective electoral accountability under PR systems as well as majoritarian systems (Kam, Bertelli and Held 2020). I believe that this empirical study has important implications for normative political theory.

（2） As far as I know, PR-LTV has not been proposed at least in mainstream literature on electoral systems.

（3） Whereas Benjamin Reilly regards SV as a version of CV (Reilly 1997: 95-99; Reilly 2001: 37), I will distinguish SV and CV because the difference between them is of importance for PR-LTV.

（4） I keep in mind the list systems of PR. However, the transfer mechanism of CV can be applied to mixed-member proportional (MMP) systems introduced in Germany and New Zealand.

（5） If a threshold is introduced, the option of the winning party is restricted. However, it does not solve the identifiability problem.

（6） Note that I do not argue for the general superiority of CV over AV and SV. I argue for CV as far as the application of the transfer mechanism to PR is concerned.

（7） For simplicity, I omit the second procedure to check the possibility of a so-called grand coalition.

（8） Van der Kolk argues that voters are not forced to cast a strategic vote under AV in contrast to SV (van der Kolk 2008: 419-422). AV does not truly escape from a strategic vote. Suppose that the right, the center, and the left parties are likely to poll 45, 25, and 30 percent of the votes respectively. If the votes cast for the center party are eliminated and transferred to the other parties, the right party is likely to win a

majority of the votes.   To avoid this result, some of the supporters of the left party will cast a strategic vote for the center party.   If the right, the center, and the left parties poll 45, 30 and 25 of the votes respectively, the votes cast for the left party are eliminated and transferred to the other parties.   In fact, most of them are transferred to the center party, and the center party polls a majority of the votes.   As this example shows, AV does not avoid strategic voting behavior.   Alan Renwick also argues that 'AV reduces but does not eliminate incentives for tactical voting' (Renwick 2011: 6).

（9） Wolfgang C. Müller, Torbjörn Bergman and Kaare Strøm present a 'coalition life cycle' model, which distinguishes 'four phases or stages of coalition politics: government formation, governance, government termination, and parliamentary elections' (Müller, Bergman and Strøm 2008: 9).   The model is highly useful, yet two conceptual distinctions are to be added.   One is the distinction of 'government coalition' and 'opposition coalition,' and the other is the distinction of 'pre-electoral coalition' and 'post-electoral coalition.'

（10） There is little agreement on voters' behavior. Analyzing the government formation in the 16 German states between 1990 and 2009, Marc Debus and Jochen Müller argue that parties have to consider the coalition preferences of voters; otherwise, they are penalized in future elections (Debus and Müller 2013).   However, using the panel data from the German Longitudinal Election Study, Eric Guntermann and André Blais argue that parties are not punished by their supporters even if the party forms a coalition that the supporters dislike (Guntermann and Blais 2020).   If we return to our example, the voting behavior of the supporters of X will depend on the strength of attachment that the supporters have toward X as well as the ideological distance between X and W as well as between X and Z.

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