

# Idiosyncratic, Technocratic, Democratic or Simply Pragmatic? A Parties' Perspective on Electoral System Change in Finland, 1906–1969



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## ABSTRACT

Whilst in Klaus Törnudd's (1968, 57) words "converting the Finnish electoral system into a unique list system with votes for individual candidates", the extent of electoral system change in 1955 was relatively limited. In Carey and Shugart's (1995) terms, Finland shifted from the 1906 system of 'open lists with open endorsement and multiple votes' – voters could rank order candidates – to a system in 1955 of 'open lists with open endorsement and a single vote'. Indeed, the scholarly debate about this electoral system change has revolved not so much around its scale as i) the contemporary perception of its long-term significance and ii) the extent to which the reform was party politicised. Was the 1955 reform a case of 'idiosyncratic change' (Benoit 2004: 372) that emerged more by default than design (Karvonen 2011, 130, Railo 2016, 76); 'technocratic change' (Sundberg 2002, Renwick and Pilet 2016, 115), driven by legal experts rather than the political parties; 'democratic change' initiated primarily out of concern to enhance the proportionality of the electoral system – or what? I make the case that the 1955 reform represented 'simply pragmatic change'. I argue that, when viewed from a parties' standpoint, the 1955 legislation gave statutory force to a progressive *de facto* reduction in the preferential element in the electoral system that the parties had engineered over the previous half century. In a real sense the parties, in running single-candidate 'lists', had fostered a personalisation of electoral politics and an individualisation of candidate campaigning. Equally, in reducing the number of candidate preference votes, the 1955 legislation, when viewed from a voter standpoint, gave *de jure* force to a *de facto* de-personalisation of the electoral system. Paradoxically, a personalisation of electoral politics was in no small measure driven by a de-personalisation of the electoral rules.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1955 the Finnish Eduskunta enacted a measure of electoral system change that created a voting system that was *sui generis* in Europe at the time. Klaus Törnudd (1968, 57) reflected thus: “the gradual change from lists having a maximum of three candidates to one-person ‘lists’ looks rather insignificant when it is viewed as a series of steps in a slow evolutionary process...but the change was important and converted the Finnish electoral system into a unique list system with votes for individual candidates”. Erkkä Railo is similarly unequivocal in characterising the impact of the electoral reform: “Before 1954 candidates campaigned above all to ensure the success of their own party. Following electoral reform they began to produce personalised election material to advertise themselves in newspapers and organise individual candidate events” (Railo 2016, 77). There are several Finnish studies placing the 1955 electoral reform in an historic context (Tarkiainen 1971; Tarasti 1987; Paloheimo 2007) but one crucial question has not been addressed: Why should the political parties have acceded to a measure of electoral reform that *prima facie* would reduce their control over the election process and move to an electoral system in which their control over who was elected would be substantially reduced?

In addressing that question, this article uses primary and secondary documentary sources to map the process of electoral system change in Finland from the introduction of mass democracy in 1906 to a further round of electoral reform in 1969. It is written in the spirit of what Rahat (2011) refers to as the ‘historical-comparative approach’ and faith in his assertion that “the study of the politics of electoral reform...demonstrates that a lot can be achieved from single-case studies and focused comparisons” (Rahat 2011, 535). In the article I argue that the 1955 electoral reform should be understood in essentially pragmatic and instrumental terms: it was legitimised by reference to the *general interest* – fairer representation and increased voter efficacy – but it was grounded in the *self-interest* of the political parties. Put another way, the reform coincided with the ‘golden era’ of the mass party; the parties had prior experience of a preferential electoral system, managed it to their benefit and did not feel threatened by electoral reform. Of course there was a cost-benefit calculus, but the costs – concessions to backbench pressure for a more democratic and equitable system – were set against the safeguards. These included the way the district party managers retained effective control over ballot access, since there was no legal requirement to stage party primaries to nominate candidates (only the Social Democrats did so); the provision for multiple candidacy across districts was retained, despite backbench opposition and, so too, multiparty electoral alliances in one or more districts. In short, there was simply no reason to think that elections would continue to be anything other than party-centred.

The structure of the article runs as follows. In the first section I present three alternative perspectives on electoral system change gleaned from the brief, sporadic references to the process in book chapters written by Finnish authors. These are my interpretations of what they seem to be saying. In order then to put the electoral system change in 1955 into perspective, I outline the essentials of the 1906 electoral reform which accompanied parliamentary reform and the creation of mass democracy in Finland. Pressure for further electoral reform built up before and after the Second World War among backbench parliamentarians and this is outlined in the third section. The main analysis, however, concerns the question of why the political parties should move to an electoral system which patently reduced their control over who was elected. Was it

more by default than design or was there, as I argue, evidence of a pragmatic cost-benefit calculus and ultimately a belief that nothing much would change?

## PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL SYSTEM CHANGE

### **Idiosyncratic change?**

In his much-cited, rational choice-based analysis of models of electoral system change – in which he canvasses a seat-maximising prototype – Kenneth Benoit (2004), reviews the variety of explanations (institutional, non-institutional, sociological etc.) used to account for voting system change. In the article, Benoit identifies a residual category which he refers to as ‘idiosyncratic factors’. These involve “the adoption of institutions for reasons of accident, whim, error, or other circumstances that can be regarded as historically unique” and he argues that idiosyncratic explanations “treat institutions generally as products which simply emerge rather than which are consciously designed” (Benoit 2004, 372). A case in point from Benoit’s native Ireland might be the single transferable vote (STV) electoral system, which parliament approved simply because they had got accustomed to it. As Gallagher (2008, 513) has observed: “STV was not specified in the 1922 constitution of the Irish Free State only because members of the Dáil (the lower chamber of parliament) did not realise that STV was merely one method, and an unusual one at that, of attaining PR”. Farrell, Suiter and Harris (2017, 295) are more succinct: STV was introduced into Ireland by accident.

The ‘simply emerged’, ‘idiosyncratic school’ of electoral system change seems to have its proponents in Finland in explaining the 1955 electoral reform. Lauri Karvonen (2009, 105) notes that it came about as “something of a by-product” of legislation and adds (Karvonen 2010, 50) that “it is doubtful whether the majority of legislators actually realised that it was a new preferential list system on which they had decided”. In a later work Karvonen (2011, 130) writes that the shift to the present electoral system “was basically an unintended consequence of a reform that had quite another goal”, though he does not expand on the assertion. Erkka Railo (2016, 76), drawing on Karvonen and in particular Klaus Törnudd (1968, 57) notes that “it has been claimed the parties did not comprehend the scale and the consequences of electoral system change in proposing it in the early 1950s”.

### **Technocratic change?**

According to Benoit (2004, 371) technocratic change occurs “when decisions over electoral institutions are made by an expert or experts on primarily technical or administrative grounds”. Curiously, in his contribution to an edited volume on the evolution of electoral and political systems in the Nordic countries, Jan Sundberg (2002) makes no attempt to explore the 1955 electoral reform or to present the partisan context of electoral system change. It is difficult to say, writes Sundberg, how accurately actors have been in anticipating the consequences of electoral system change because “partisans motivations, if there have been any, have been hidden in the legalistic formulations motivating the reforms (Sundberg 2002, 92).” In a similar vein Renwick (2011, 464), possibly drawing on Sundberg, argues that “any switch between closed lists, semi-

open lists and fully open lists counts as significant electoral system change” but later adds that in the Finnish case the changes were “technical changes that barely count as significant” (Renwick 2011, 470). All in all, the ‘technocratic thesis’ would hold that electoral system change was narrow-gauge and technical in nature, the work of lawyers rather than being party politicised.

### **Democratic change?**

Referring to changes in the ballot structure in the Netherlands in 1997, Jacobs and Leyemaar (2011, 509) have noted that “the fear of being labelled anti-democratic drove the reform process forward, and it seems that when it comes to minor reforms the costs of opposing the reform are more easily outweighed by the costs of supporting it when the reform increases democracy”. In Finland the pressure for electoral system change appears to have gained momentum in the late 1940s and 1950s among backbench parliamentarians. A major concern was the lack of proportionality in the existing electoral arrangements. In May 1950 a dissenting statement undersigned by MPs von Born, Larson and Kauppi tabled to the Constitution Committee’s report on a government bill on electoral change, put it succinctly: “the small parties regularly lose out and the large parties profit”. A particular bone of contention was the disproportionate size of the Uusimaa constituency and the need to separate Helsinki out as a self-standing constituency. From a backbench perspective in short the electoral system was neither equitable nor democratic. The ‘simply democratic’ view of electoral system change would see the cost of electoral system democratisation as minimal at a time which in hindsight was the golden era of mass party democracy.

Whilst the ‘idiosyncratic change’ perspective has its origins in the work of Klaus Törnudd, I have to say that I do not find the ‘idiosyncratic inference’ in Törnudd’s text. To be sure, electoral system change in Finland occurred incrementally over half a century. But that does not mean, and Törnudd does not imply, that it took place as a result of idiosyncratic factors – that is, almost by accident. But if not idiosyncratic factors, then what? Why would the political parties simply stumble into a measure of electoral change that, however, technocratic it might appear in hindsight, would substantially reduce their control over the candidates that would be elected?

### **Simply pragmatic change?**

The idiosyncratic and technocratic interpretations seriously understate the role of political parties as electoral system managers and electoral system manipulators. Of the few existing accounts, only Tuttu Tarkiainen (1971) – and then only intermittently – brings out the way from the outset the political parties took firm control of the electoral system and reduced the preferential element to their advantage. The idiosyncratic and technocratic interpretations also lack appropriate contextualisation: the 1955 reform was enacted at a time when the organisational density (membership) of parties was high and, so too, levels of party identification. This was the heyday of the mass political party. Against that backdrop my argument is that the political parties would not have proceeded had the 1955 reform substantially reduced their control over the electoral process. Rather, their response was simply a pragmatic one – the costs of conceding to pressure for ‘democratic change’ were weighed against the preservation of mechanisms for party control.

Fleshing the argument out a little, the 1906 electoral system reform produced a distinctively flexible system which may be characterised in Carey and Shugart’s (1995) terms as one of ‘open

lists with open endorsement and multiple votes' (voters could rank order/change the ordering of candidates on the list or even submit their own list). As Carey and Shugart (1995, 422) have noted, "when multiple votes are cast, personal reputation is not overwhelmingly important relative to party reputation as when all candidates are competing simultaneously for the individual support of each voter". In any event, the parties structured the ballot so as to reduce the incentive to engage in intra-party candidate competition whilst ensuring that their preferred candidate was none the less elected. Paradoxically, the reduction in the preferential element engineered by the parties – single-candidate 'lists' had become the norm by the 1930s – created incentives for candidates to cultivate a personal vote, albeit in competition with co-partisans on other lists within the district-based electoral alliance. The parties knew what they were doing. As Tarkiainen (1971, 383) observed: "The adoption of 1-person 'lists' *without compelling reasons* [my italics] before 1955 presupposed a relatively developed organisational infrastructure whilst their acceptance as the only legitimate nomination modus could not have happened without most parties being duly prepared".

In a real sense the parties had fostered a personalisation of the electoral process, managed it and were able to manipulate it to their benefit. True, the 1955 reform meant that intra-party candidate competition intensified between co-partisans on a single list rather than multiple lists within a district-based electoral alliance. However, the concomitant personalisation of electoral campaigns could be turned to partisan advantage whilst a candidate with high name-recognition continued to be a party asset since the provision for multiple candidacy was retained and so too the practice of cross-party electoral alliances. To build the argument further, we need briefly to go back to the 1906 voting reform which marked the birth of modern party and electoral politics in Finland.

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM, 1906–1955

In the immediate wake of Czar Nicholas II's 1905 October Manifesto, an electoral and parliamentary reform committee was set up in the Grand Duchy of Finland, chaired by the lawyer Robert Hermanson, and which, remarkably, completed its work in only three months. It granted all men and women over 24 years the right to vote and run as candidates to a 200-seat unicameral legislature (*Eduskunta*), which replaced a quadricameral House of Estates. The plurality voting system for the Estate of the Clergy and Estate of the Farmers (Törnudd 1968, 25-26) was superseded by a PR list system using the d'Hondt single-number divisor which, probably not coincidentally, was being adopted in Sweden at the time (Paloheimo 2007, 186). Mass democracy was superimposed on an essentially rural society and when the first general election under the new voting system was held in 1907 only 13 per cent of the eligible electorate lived in towns. The country was divided into a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 18 multi-member electoral districts (constituencies). The Hermanson committee favoured short lists with a maximum of three candidates, the reasoning being broadly that the smaller the size of the lists, the less easy for the parties to manipulate them. If the lists were long (as elsewhere), voters would be likely to vote for a candidate they were unfamiliar with and the parties would exercise *de facto* control over

the list structure (Tarkiainen 1971, 121). Between 1907 and 1966 candidates were nominated by electoral associations (*valitsijayhdistykset*) and it was the 1969 party law before candidate nominations formally became the task of political parties.

From 1906-1954 a minimum of fifty enfranchised citizens in a district could form an electoral association and in 1955 the figure was reduced to thirty. In practice, however, electoral associations were from the outset run by the political parties. Between 1907 and 1933 electoral associations ran lists comprising at most three candidates (Törnudd 1968; Tarasti 1987, 84-85). Voters could do one of three things: i) they could simply back the list as a whole by drawing a red line under it; ii) they could change the ordering of candidates on the list; iii) they could write in the name of a candidate not on the list of the electoral association, along with his/her occupation and place of residence. If voters accepted the list as it stood, the first-listed candidate received a comparative number equal to the total number of votes given to that list; the second received a comparative number equal to half the list vote and the third candidate a number equal to a third of the list vote. If the same candidate appeared on several lists within an electoral alliance his/her comparative number was formed by adding the individual numbers from each list. The wider point is that the Hermanson committee in 1906 envisaged a personalised electoral system in which voters would have a multiple preference option and could vote for a candidate or rank-order candidates on the list. Renwick and Pilet (2016, 21) have argued that “electoral systems are more personalised the more candidate preferences voters can express”. The Hermanson committee created a highly personalised electoral system – on paper at least.

## PARTY NOMINATION STRATEGIES 1906–1955

In the early pre-independence elections between 1907 and 1917, only the Social Democratic Party required candidates to be party members; for the others acceptance of the party programme and aims was sufficient. Most candidates, however, were party members, although it was 1946 before the Agrarian Party made this a requirement (Tarkiainen 1971, 330). From the outset, moreover, the parties exercised substantial tactical control over the election process by pursuing a range of manipulative nomination strategies.

First, they exploited the provision for electoral associations to form electoral alliances (*vaaliliitot*) across a district and for candidates to appear on the lists of several of the party’s electoral associations. Multiple candidacy within a district party’s electoral alliance – that is, the repetition of the name of the same candidate on several lists within the same electoral alliance – was primarily designed to ensure the election of a preferred candidate (Törnudd 1968, 109). Perhaps the best-known tactic was the so-called ‘Tampere system’ (*Tampereen järjestelmä*), so called because it originated in the Old Finn Party (*suomalainen puolue*) in the town of Tampere in the north Häme constituency, although in preparing for the first democratic election in 1907 the party leadership recommended its use elsewhere.

It involved placing the preferred candidate (*yleisehdokas*) in second place on every one of the electoral association lists the party ran in the constituency, sandwiched between two strong local candidates (who would be in turn 1 and 3 on the lists), whose substantial vote

would contribute to the election of the preferred candidate. In the case of 2-candidate lists the preferred candidate was placed second on every list and the local candidates took it in turns to be number 1. This was the case in Vaasa east in 1910, 1911 and 1913; in 1913 in Vaasa south and in 1916 in Häme south. As Tarkiainen (1971, 374) has noted: "The benefit of the Tampere system was that it avoided conflict between the local candidates since ostensibly they competed from the same start line; it seemed fair to voters; and the party's preferred candidate was elected on the strength of half votes – and when placed third, one-third votes". Not untypically, in the Häme south constituency in 1916 an electoral association using the slogan 'Old Finn Party women' contained a preferred male candidate in place 2 (Tarkiainen 1971, 381).

Second, the parties used the provision for multiple candidacy in different constituencies with a view to trading off the popularity of vote-attracting candidates to swell the party poll. With the exception of the Social Democrats, the general pattern was for parties to run more lists than candidates, which can be seen as evidence of multiple candidacy. At the 1924 general election there were 899 lists nationally and 730 candidates; in 1945 the ratio was 1005 lists and 850 candidates. The Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL) in particular had recourse to multiple candidacy and at the 1951 general election its 200 candidates were spread over 247 lists. Indeed, when multiple candidacy across several districts was first debated in the Eduskunta in 1950, its abolition was strongly opposed by SKDL which claimed that the Agrarian Party and right-wing Social Democrats had calculated that such a step would disadvantage the Communists.

Third, the provision for electoral associations to form [cross-party] electoral alliances in one or more districts allowed the parties to pursue strategic political goals. In 1917 a national electoral alliance between the Old Finns, Young Finns and the People's Party was expressly designed to prevent a repetition of the 1916 general election result, which saw the Social Democrats win an absolute majority of parliamentary seats (103) with 47.3 per cent of the vote. The Agrarian Party joined the electoral alliance in two constituencies – Uusimaa and Turku-Pori north – where it had not previously run candidates (Koskiahio 1977, 45) and the Swedish People's Party did so in Turku south (Lindman 1968, 151). In 1939 the Agrarian Party and the Progressive Party (*Edistyspuolue*) formed an electoral alliance in 12 constituencies and for the Agrarians the objective was in part to obliterate the Small Farmers and Rural People's Party (*Pienviljelijäin ja maalaiskansanpuolue*), which had been founded in 1936. Negotiations between the two parties began fifteen months before the election and part of the agreement was that the Progressive Party was not permitted to forge electoral alliances with other parties (Koskiahio 1977, 67).

Finally, the parties became quickly aware that, in an era of strong party identification, voters rarely exercised a preference option and changed the electoral association's ordering of candidates, giving the parties in practice control over who was elected. In the general elections held between 1909 and 1933, the proportion of voters who changed the candidate order on the list exceeded one per cent only once (1.27 per cent) in 1910 (Törnudd 1968, 103). Put another way, whilst the electoral rules made provision for citizens, by changing the ordering on the list, to vest candidates with a differential value ( $1-\frac{1}{3}$ ), a block list vote assigned the desired value of candidates to party managers and meant in practice citizens cast a party vote. Party control over the election process was reduced only marginally when in 1933 lists were reduced from three to a maximum of two candidates but two years later the voter's right to change the list ordering was removed. By then 1-person 'lists' had become widespread. In 1933, the last general election

at which 3-person lists were allowed, the number of 1-person lists stood at 79.6 per cent; three years later, the first election with a maximum of 2-person lists, 1-person lists dominated the field with 95.3 per cent of all lists.

Summing up, 3-person lists were standard until the early 1920s. In 1910 only a little over 4 per cent of all lists were not 3-person; by 1916 the figure had risen to 8 per cent and by 1924 to 18 per cent (Tarkiainen 1971, 371). The increasing prevalence of 1-person 'lists', when viewed from a district party management perspective, had the merit of sidestepping the selection problems associated with internal party disputes and deferring responsibility for their resolution until after the election. Disagreements over the composition of lists were commonplace between the central party leadership and the district party executive and/or between the latter and the local party branch. There were complaints too from individual candidates about their position on the list or the number of lists on which they appeared and from voter groups within the constituency who felt marginalised by ballot arrangements (Tarkiainen 1971, 381).

Equally, 1-person 'lists' meant that the parties handed the decisive voice over who would be elected to the citizenry at large. The cost-benefit calculus was not lost at the time. Condemning the widening practice of running 1-party lists the Social Democrats' party executive (*puolue-toimikunta*) in 1929 summed matters up by stating that running 1-person lists meant the party relinquished the decisive say [over who would be elected] to the "unorganised mass of voters" (Tarkiainen 1971, 371). In short, the practice of running 1-person 'lists' meant that by the mid-1930s there had been an accentuated personalisation of the electoral process on the 'supply side' – the persona and individual attributes of candidates became more important in campaigning and so, too, the importance of personal candidate advertising. 1-person lists stimulated intra-party candidate competition and, as such, it is difficult to subscribe to the Paloheimo view (2007, 193) that by the early 1950s the Finnish electoral system resembled a standard closed-list PR system. On the 'demand side' even though 1-person 'lists' reduced the preferential element available to voters and meant in practice a party vote, voters none the less cast a vote for a candidate and candidate votes within the electoral alliance determined the successful order of candidates.

## THE PRESSURE FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEM CHANGE

The pressure for electoral system change appears to have gained momentum in the late 1940s and early 1950s among backbench parliamentarians. The critique was two-pronged. The first concerned the lack of proportionality in the existing electoral arrangements. In May 1950 the dissenting statement undersigned by MPs von Born, Larson and Kauppi stated that "the small parties regularly lose out and the large parties profit". A particular gripe was the disproportionate size of the Uusimaa constituency and the need to separate Helsinki out as a self-standing constituency.

The second concern was a feeling among a number of rank-and-file parliamentarians that they were not [any longer] operating on a level playing field in the competition for parliamentary seats. The case for reform focused on i) the parties' manipulation of two-candidate lists; ii) the parties' deployment of 'celebrity' candidates in multiple constituencies and iii) the parties'

reluctance to control the increase in ‘disloyal’ personal candidate advertising [in newspapers funded by extra-parliamentary sources] by those who could afford it (Tarkiainen 1971, 452). In proposing a statutory move to 1-person lists and the abolition of multiple candidacy, the ostensible logic of a private members’ bill (*lakialoite*) tabled by nineteen MPs (mainly Agrarians) in the name of Erland Haapaniemi in May 1950 was the empowerment of the electorate, namely that “the will of the electorate should be realised as clearly and decisively as possible”.<sup>1</sup> It was pointed out that the 2-candidate lists meant perforce that voters were obliged to divide their vote, with the result that their ‘original wish’ was not always realised. Two-candidate lists, it was inferred, served the party rather than the people. The backbench opposition to running celebrity candidates in several constituencies was that they could be elected in only one and this served [unfairly] to pull in candidates with a low individual poll in others. It was also noted that the recent election spending on “unhealthy personal advertising” had reached unacceptable proportions and the law needed to clamp down on it.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, the pressure for change told. There was a shift to a single candidate ‘list’ – albeit in an experimental basis – for the 1954 general election, when the red line was replaced with a candidate number and the electoral term extended from three to four years. The present open-list voting system was legislated for in the 1955 Election Act<sup>3</sup> and came into regular operation at the 1958 general election. Electoral system change in Finland had occurred incrementally. The process of moving from 3-2-1-person lists spanned virtually half a century and, moreover, crucial aspects of the voting system were retained. Renwick and Pilet (2016, 115) have noted that “though in principle significant – moving from a flexible to an open-list system – in practice the [1955] reform spelt no great change”. However, as noted earlier, the scholarly debate has revolved not around the extent of electoral system change but rather i) the contemporary perception of its [long-term] significance and ii) the extent to which the reform was party politicised.

Pulling the threads together so far, the electoral reform envisaged by the Hermanson committee in 1906 involved the creation of a *strong preferential voting system* (Karvonen 2004) with a markedly anti-party flavour, in which voters were permitted to rank-order candidates and even undertake Swiss-style *panachage* by writing in the names of candidates not on the list. Symptomatically, candidates were to be nominated by electoral associations, not political parties. By the early 1950s the overwhelming preponderance of single-candidate ‘lists’ substantially weakened the preferential element in the electoral system, albeit not the partisan element in voting behaviour. The Electoral Act which came into force in 1955 appeared *prima facie* to confirm the prevalent practice of single-candidate electoral associations (Törnudd 1968, 57). However, the removal of the provision for multiple candidacy within an electoral alliance in a district, together with the adoption in 1951 of a miniature ballot paper – replacing a broadsheet containing all the candidates in their electoral alliances – on which the voter was obliged to select one candidate i) reduced party control over the outcome and ii) intensified competition between candidates on the same list. Moreover, with individual vote tallies determining the ordering of successful candidates, there was a strong incentive to cultivate a personal vote and this, in turn, generated heightened co-partisan rivalry which the parties sought to manage and turn to their advantage. How then did the political parties seek to retain control of the new electoral rules?

### PERSONALISATION AS A PARTY NOMINATION STRATEGY: THE RETENTION OF MULTIPLE CANDIDACY ACROSS DISTRICTS 1955–1969

Several general points are in order at the outset. First, as noted, the parties had become accustomed to, and saw benefits in 1-person ‘lists’, albeit with the attendant personalisation of candidate campaigning. Second, it was difficult to argue against, or conversely simple to justify the electoral reform on democratic grounds. From an electorate’s perspective the political efficacy of voters would be enhanced and their vote would count for their chosen candidate. Third, although the 1955 legislation represented in many ways (à la Renwick) a ‘technical change’, this should not be construed to imply that the electoral system change was not ‘party politicised’. It was, and changes were debated on the floor of the Eduskunta and in committee. Finally, and crucially, electoral system change reserved to the parties ‘control elements’ from the old system.

First, *the provision for multiple candidacy across districts* was retained until 1969<sup>4</sup> and parties could and did run candidates with high name-recognition in several constituencies. Parties saw they could profit from, and exploit the ‘personalised’ element in the reformed electoral system (Arter 2018). True, multiple candidacy was by no means the rule. At the 1958 general election, only 3.1 per cent of all candidates stood in more than one constituency and the Swedish People’s Party, the Liberal League (*Vapaamielisten Liitto*) and Agrarian Party Opposition did not run any multiple candidates. In 1962 the proportion of multiple candidates was down to 1.7 per cent of all candidates and in 1966 it stood at 1.6 per cent (table 1). Over the three general elections between 1958 and 1966 only the Swedish People’s Party did not have recourse to multiple candidacy (table 2).

*Table 1: The proportion of all candidates standing in multiple constituencies, 1958–1966*

YEAR	ALL CANDIDATES	MULTIPLE CANDIDATES	% OF MULTIPLE CANDIDATES
1958	1,040	32	3,2
1962	1,252	21	1,7
1966	1020	16	1,6*

\*Tables 1-4 compiled by the author from 'Eduskuntavaalit 1958; Kansanedustajain vaalit 1962; Kansanedustajain vaalit 1966. Suomen virallinen tilasto A26, A28, A29. Helsinki 1959, 1962 and 1966.

Table 2: Multiple candidacies by party, 1958–1966

	SKDL	TPSL	SDP	ML/ KEPU	KP	VML	LKP	SPP	KOK	RKP	OTHERS	TOTAL
1958	4	7	3	1	5	5	–	–	7	–	–	32
1962	1	6	2	1	3	–	–	5	–	–	3	21
1966	–	–	–	5	–	–	8	2	1	–	–	16

Importantly, multiple candidacy was by no means a guarantee of election. Of those candidates representing the seven parliamentary parties in 1958 running in several districts, only 44.4 per cent were elected. The Finnish People's Party politician Irma Karvikko, one of two candidates in her party standing in six different constituencies in 1958, is a case in point. Karvikko, whilst not a celebrity candidate, enjoyed high name-recognition. She was the first female journalist on the newspaper *Turun Sanomat* and had been an MP since 1958 and minister for social affairs between 1953 and 1957, when she resigned from the Sukselainen cabinet over the government's proposal to postpone child benefits. Despite this relatively high profile, she was not elected in 1958.

Whilst multiple candidacy was by no means an automatic passport to parliament, the wider point in relation to electoral system change is that the retention of the provision allowed the parties to pursue a variety of multiple candidacy nomination strategies. First, multiple candidacy performed a *personal-vote-maximisation function*, that is, it represented a strategy of exploiting the personal vote appeal of candidates with high name-recognition across several districts. Before the spread of mass television national name-recognition tended to derive not from show-biz celebrity but political and/or public service or possibly success in sports.<sup>5</sup> The Social Democrats, National Coalition (*kokoomus* – hereafter Conservatives) and SKDL, for example, ran ministers, experienced parliamentarians, trade unionists, employers' leaders and senior party officials in 1958. Hertta Kuusinen represents perhaps a limiting case of a party seeking to capitalise on a personal candidate vote. An MP since 1945 and the Communist Party's general secretary at the time of the 1958 general election, Kuusinen stood in four constituencies – Helsinki and Uusimaa in the south and the up-country districts of Kuopio east and Vaasa east (table 3). She was elected in Helsinki and polled 26.9 per cent of the total SKDL vote in these four constituencies. Four years later she also ran in four constituencies – Helsinki, Uusimaa, Mikkeli and Pohjois-Karjala – claiming 26.0 per cent in these constituencies and 6.3 per cent of SKDL's national poll in 1962 (table 4).

*Table 3: Hertta Kuusinen (SKDL) as a case of multiple candidacy at the 1958 general election*

CONSTITUENCY	SKDL VOTE	KUUSINEN VOTE	SKDL MPS	KUUSINEN %
HELSINKI	40,983	12,176	4	29.7
UUSIMAA	33,249	11,429	3	34.4
KUOPIO EAST	18,224	3,042	2	16.7
VAASA EAST	24,675	4806	3	19.5

*Table 4: Hertta Kuusinen (SKDL) as a multiple candidate at the 1962 general election*

CONSTITUENCY	SKDL VOTE	KUUSINEN VOTE	SKDL MPS	KUUSINEN %
HELSINKI	51,087	16,000	4	31.3
UUSIMAA	40,341	11,040	4	27.4
MIKKELI	15,436	2,518	1	16.3
POHJOIS-KARJALA	16,535	2,516	2	15.2
TOTAL	123,399	32,074		26.0

Second, multiple candidacy served as an element in a *party identification strategy* (Harmel and Svåsand 1993). There are at least three clear cases over the 1958-1966 period. Created in 1959 the Finnish Smallholders' Party was a *personal party* (McDonnell 2013) founded by the dissident Agrarian politician Veikko Vennamo. At his last election as an Agrarian candidate in 1958, Vennamo polled 22.5 per cent of his party's vote in Kuopio west and this was the highest of any Agrarian candidate nationally. In 1962, standing in all 14 mainland constituencies, Vennamo attracted 13, 675 votes or 27.5 per cent of the Smallholders' poll but went unelected. As part of an identification strategy for a new party, the goal was clearly to familiarise voters with the party's existence across the national territory. In 1966 Vennamo was elected for the Kuopio constituency, having run in four constituencies.

In the case of the Centre Party multiple candidacy in 1966, following its change of name from Agrarian Party the previous year, was designed to identify the renamed party to voters in the urbanised 'deep south' (Helsinki and Uusimaa). In 1962 a short-lived 'puppet party', the Finnish Centre Party (*Suomen keskustapuolue*), had run candidates in Helsinki, Uusimaa – Ahti Auranen in both – and Häme south (Hokkanen 2002, 528-530), but four years later all five of the 'mother' Agrarian-Centre Party's multiple candidates ran in Helsinki and four of them also in Uusimaa. In Helsinki they included the prime minister Johannes Virolainen, his predecessor as

prime minister Ahti Karjalainen, Finland's chief secretary to the United Nations Hilikka Pietilä, and Jaakko Numminen, a senior civil servant well known in the field of cultural and educational policy. For the modernising Centre Party multiple candidacy was an element in a party adaptation strategy in which the party sought to extend beyond its rural strongholds into the populous urban south.

In the case of the Liberal People's Party, a new party formed by the merger of the Finnish People's Party and Liberal League just before the 1966 election, multiple candidacy was designed to 'sell' the party to urban middle class voters in the southern constituencies. Six of the eight Liberal candidates standing in two districts included Helsinki as one of them and 43.8 per cent were elected. Clearly, then, multiple candidacy had a strategic as well as a 'hard vote' value and saw parties seek to exploit the personalisation dimension of the electoral system.

For the smaller legislative and extra-parliamentary parties, multiple candidacy doubtless served a '*stretching limited resources*' function. For the breakaway Social Democratic Opposition, which elected 9 MPs in 1958, 13 per cent of its candidates ( $n = 54$ ) stood in two constituencies and in every case Helsinki was one of them, and one of the two Häme constituencies was the other. The 'Alliance of Free Citizens and Centrists' (*Vapaiden kansalaisten ja keskustan vaaliliitto*) put up candidates in only four constituencies in 1958 and one-fifth of its candidates ( $n = 25$ ) ran in two or three of these (without success). In the case of several multiple district candidates there was clearly a 'home constituency' and a 'second-string constituency', which could be geographically distant from the first. The Finnish People's Party Kaarlo Kajatsalo was elected in Kymi in 1958 with nearly three thousand votes and polled a mere 29 votes in his second-string Vaasa north. Vaasa north was at the time the smallest mainland constituency with a district magnitude of only 8 and, despite a second two-constituency candidate (Esa Kaitila), the Finnish People's Party went empty-handed. The only multiple district candidate for the Agrarian Party in 1958 was Arvo Salonen running in Häme north and Helsinki, both very weak party support areas. Plainly, as a nomination strategy, multiple candidacy could be used tactically, installing 'names' in weak support areas to create a party presence.

## THE RETENTION OF ELECTORAL ALLIANCES

In addition to multiple candidacy, *cross-party electoral* alliances continued to allow parties to combine forces in one or more districts to improve their chances of winning a seat. At the time of electoral system change all the candidates in an electoral alliance appeared on the same list and these multi-party lists were common. In 1958, for example, there were nine 2-party electoral alliances, three 3-party and in only three constituencies was there no electoral alliance. With the exception of the Social Democrats, which eschewed electoral alliances despite repeated approaches from the Communists, all the legislative parties employed them and the Liberal League never contested a general election on its own, mostly 'allying' with the Conservatives. Over the three general elections between 1958 and 1966 Liberal groupings profited the most from electoral alliances (table 5) whilst the Social Democrats and SKDL did not get the seats their vote merited. In 1962, for example – the so-called 'Note Election' – the three left-wing parties (SKDL, TPSL and

the SDP) gained 46 per cent of the valid vote but the non-socialist majority in the Eduskunta was 113-87. If TPSL (former Social Democrat Opposition) and the SDP had forged electoral alliances the result would have been 105-95 (Pesonen 1972, 11).

Electoral alliances represented a tactical instrument in the inter-party battle for parliamentary seats, used principally by the non-socialist parties, and whilst their primary aim was to maximise the party's vote and legislative presence, there were a host of secondary objectives inter alia denying the Communists and Vennamo's Smallholders' Party and 'working' a constituency with a view to the next election. Re-stated, electoral arithmetic was often of secondary importance, as for example when a party sought a foothold in a constituency, when an electoral alliance with another party was designed to prevent the latter allying with a third party or even to draw the teeth of a rival party by negotiating an electoral alliance with it (Tarkiainen 1971, 393). Electoral alliances could also be used to counter the vote-attracting potential of a multiple candidate. Not untypical was the situation in the Mikkeli constituency in 1962 where, with the multiple candidate Hertta Kuusinen standing, the SKDL list polled more than that of the Conservatives but forfeited a second seat to a 'blocking' non-socialist electoral alliance of Conservatives and the Finnish People's Party. Veikko Vennamo's personal vote (4782) was more than that of one-third of those elected for the Kuopio constituency in 1962, but fell short of election by 27 votes. This was largely the consequence of a tactical 'blocking alliance' between the Agrarian Party, Finnish People's Party and a breakaway group from Vennamo's Smallholders' Party. The Agrarian Party chair, V.J. Sukselainen recorded in his diary how, happily, one candidate in the breakaway faction, Rieti Partanen, gained enough votes (1,947) to dump Vennamo out of parliament (Virtanen 2018: 16). Electoral alliances, whilst essentially technical arrangements, could serve party political goals.<sup>6</sup>

*Table 5: The Gains and Losses from Electoral Alliances, 1958–1966*

	KOK	LIBL	FPP	RKP	ML	SDP	SDO	SKDL	SPP
1958	–	–	+1	–	-1	–	–	–	–
1962	+1	+1	+5	+1	-1	-1	-2	-3	-1
1966	-1	–	+2	–	–	-4	+5	-4	–
	+/-0		+9	+1	-2	-5	+3	-7	-1*

\* The figures are based on the assumption of the same vote distribution and they are calculated by comparing the actual seats gains with the seats that would have been gained without electoral alliances. It can be seen that the primary beneficiary of electoral alliances were the Liberals (under their various names) and the two main losers the Social Democrats and SKDL. The figure of +9 represents combined seat gains of the Liberal League and Finnish People's Party, which merged in 1966 as the Liberal People's Party.

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Electoral alliances invariably required the ‘junior partner’ to pursue a ‘lead candidate strategy’ and this entailed either running only a single candidate or urging party supporters to concentrate their vote on the party’s main (lead) candidate. The 1966 electoral alliance between SKDL and TPSL in every mainland constituency was negotiated at the national party leadership level and railroaded through the district organs of the two parties. TPSL then pursued an effective lead candidate strategy (outside Helsinki where it hoped to elect two MPs) and none of the seven elected ‘lead candidates’ polled less than 96.5 per cent of the TPSL vote within the electoral alliance (Koskiaho 1977, 106, 200). In contrast, the LKP vote in Pohjois-Karjala in 1966 rose by 40 per cent in an electoral alliance with the Centre Party. However, the incumbent Liberal MP, Eino Ojajärvi, faced a strong challenge from a co-partisan Matti Sydänmaa, the LKP vote was split and neither was elected (Borg 2015, 52–53).

### **PARTY-CENTRED ELECTIONS NOT THREATENED**

We noted earlier that the idiosyncratic perspective on electoral system change (Karvonen 2010, 50; Railo 2016, 76) would hold that the parties did not comprehend the full ramifications of electoral reform. It is far more likely, however, that the political parties did not feel their ‘control’ to be seriously threatened since, at the point of electoral system change their domination of the electoral process was all but complete. Voters cast a ballot first and foremost for a party and their choice of candidate was secondary – in 1958 80 per cent of voters in Tampere prioritised party over candidate (Pesonen, Sänkiaho and Borg 1993, 74) whilst in 1966 77 per cent of voters had chosen their party even before the campaign began (Rantala 1972, 34). Campaigns were centrally directed by the political parties, candidates took their cue from their party organisation (central and district) and political activists were party-centred activists and most activists were party members.

The 1955 electoral reform, then, coincided with the ‘golden era’ of the mass political party. The organisational density of the parties – measured by the member-voter ratio – was high, even when entering the routine caveat about the reliability of party membership data. When the party membership figures for 1959 are compared with the national poll for the parliamentary parties at the general election the previous year (the first conducted under the new electoral rules) it can be seen (table 6) that in the order of one-third of voters were party members and in the Agrarian Party the figure was over half.

Table 6: The Organisational Density of the Finnish Political Parties 1958/1959

PARTY	MEMBER-VOTER RATIO %
FINNISH PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE	30
SOCIAL DEMOCRATS	21
AGRARIAN PARTY	54
FINNISH PEOPLES PARTY (LIBERALS)	16
CONSERVATIVES	26
SWEDISH PEOPLE'S PARTY	40

Source: Tarkiainen 1971, 242

Yet whilst voting system change came at a time of party-centred election campaigns, the new legislation reinforced a discreet and pre-existing change in the party-candidate balance. Writing less than a decade after the 1955 reform, Törnudd (1968: 58) observed that “the electoral campaign is carried out in a highly individualistic fashion. The party organisations of course do their share of electioneering, put out pamphlets and publish advertisements featuring all their candidates, but their activity is supplemented and often drowned out by the agitation on behalf of individual candidates, sometimes more or less openly competing within the same electoral alliance”. Electoral reform in short accentuated existing co-partisan rivalry and contributed to an increased personalisation of candidate campaigns.

### CONSOLIDATING PARTY DEMOCRACY – ELECTORAL SYSTEM CHANGE 1955–69

When approving the 1955 electoral reform legislation, the Eduskunta stated that the government should conduct an expert review to see if further changes were necessary and, accordingly, on January 31 1957 an electoral review committee was set up. In its report in December 1964, it recommended a number of reform proposals. One was captured in a members' initiative (*toivomusaloite*) underwritten by Ingvar Melin (Rkp) and others in April 1966.<sup>7</sup> It stated that when in 1955 legislation enacted single-party lists, the idea was that every vote would go to the candidate to whom it was given and that as such the continued use of multiple candidacy was contrary to the broad principle of the electoral system. However, the use of candidates with high name-recognition (*keulakuvaehdokkaat*) had continued and should be prohibited. The newly re-elected MP and Smallholders' Party leader Veikko Vennamo who, ironically, had run in four constituencies in March 1966, was more concerned with the proportionality of the electoral system. His member's initiative read: “The electoral system is undemocratic and favours the larger

parties. It should be reformed so that every party gets a number of seats proportionate to its vote<sup>8</sup>. The case for further electoral system change had become both politicised and party politicised.<sup>9</sup>

Importantly, a government bill in 1969 represented significant electoral system change in formalising and consolidating the status of political parties as electoral actors.<sup>10</sup> It gave parties a monopoly over the candidate nomination process. Parties replaced electoral associations and decisions on candidate selection were to be made by party members in accordance with each party's electoral rules. From 1907–1966 inclusive it was still possible for a voter to write in on the ballot paper the name of a candidate not on the electoral association list although at the 1966 general election only 161 voters or 0.007 per cent of the total electorate did so (Pesonen 1972, 9). This was now proscribed. A candidate could stand for only one party and in only one constituency but two or more registered parties continued to have the right to form electoral alliances within the same constituency.

The bill was approved by a majority on the Eduskunta's Constitution Committee<sup>11</sup> but there were two dissenting reports. One, underwritten by Pentti Sillantaus (Conservative), E.J. Paavola (Liberal) and Juuso Häikiö (Conservative) opposed the candidate selection process being restricted to party members and the nomination of candidates becoming the exclusive preserve of registered political parties. The dissenting report also criticised the lack of a clear stipulation of rules guaranteeing intra-party democracy in the candidate selection process and the retention of electoral alliances in their existing form. In a separate measure in 1969 the party support (*puoluetuki*) legislation (approved in the Eduskunta in December 1966) was modified such that the support was linked to the number of MPs and only parliamentary parties would receive it. All in all, the anti-party sentiment that had informed the work of the 1906 Hermanson committee had dwindled to a minority of legislators and the parties had reasserted the case for party-based representative democracy.

## CONCLUSION: IDIOSYNCRATIC, TECHNOCRATIC, DEMOCRATIC OR SIMPLY PRAGMATIC ELECTORAL SYSTEM CHANGE?

We began by asking why in 1955 the political parties should have acceded to a measure of electoral reform that *prima facie* would reduce their stranglehold over the electoral process and move to a system in which their control over who would be elected would be substantially reduced. Drawing on the limited work of Finnish political scientists, we considered various perspectives on electoral system change and asked whether, when viewed from a district party management standpoint, it was a case of idiosyncratic, technocratic, democratic or simply pragmatic change. The argument advanced was that it was not idiosyncratic à la Benoit in the sense that it happened for reasons of “accident, whim or error” (Benoit 2004, 372) – that is, by default rather than design (Karvonen 2011, 130). Neither was it technocratic à la Sundberg (2002) and Renwick and Pilet (2016) in being driven by lawyers and experts rather than the political parties. It *was* a case of democratic change in so far as the electoral system reform was certainly ‘sold’ in democratic terms, the orthodoxy being that the will of the people would be realised as precisely and decisively as possible, although first (until 1969) the provision for multiple candidacy and

then the continued possibility of cross-party electoral alliances clearly compromised that goal. Both were at the heart of a range of party nomination strategies and, for a short period after 1969, these became the sole preserve of the political parties. Electoral system change in 1955 could be legitimised by reference to the need to attend to the ‘democratic deficit’ although the cost of electoral system democratisation appeared minimal at a time of mass party democracy.

In short, what I am arguing is that the 1955 electoral reform was a case of ‘simply pragmatic change’. The parties knew full well what they were doing. Indeed, three main concluding points warrant emphasis. First, by effecting a progressive reduction in the preferential element in the electoral *system* – the stipulation for a maximum of two candidates per list and the withdrawal of the provision for voters to change the ordering of candidates – the parties had by the mid-1930s contributed materially to a personalisation of the electoral *process*. The 1955 legislation formalising single-candidate ‘lists’ merely accentuated this growth in candidate-centred campaigning. Second, and crucially, the parties had experience of working with this increasingly personalised electoral process and retained the means with which to seek to manage it. In contrast, and third, when viewed from a voter rather than parties’ standpoint, the 1955 legislation, in reducing the number of candidate preference votes, gave *de jure force* to a *de facto* de-personalisation of the electoral system. Paradoxically, a personalisation of electoral politics was driven in no small measure by a de-personalisation of the electoral rules.

## NOTES

1. Lakialoite n:o 5 Haapaniemi y.m.ä. Ehdotus laiksi edustajanvaaleista annetun lain muuttamisesta 8/5/1950
2. Laki valtiopäiväjärjestyksen 5:n muuttamisesta. Erl Haapaniemi ynnä muita
3. Laki 336: Kansanedustajain vaaleista. Annettu Naantalissa 30 päivänä kesäkuuta 1955
4. The Constitution Committee’s opposition to the Haapaniemi move to abolish multiple candidacy was flimsy in the extreme, stating that if it were to be prohibited it would create practical difficulties in the preparation of elections (whatever that meant!) and that more research was needed into the matter. Perustuslakivaliokunnan mietintö N:o 25 hallituksen esityksen johdosta valtiollisista vaaleista annetun lainsäädännön uudistamisesta sekä sanotun lainsäädännön muuttamista tarvoittavien kuuden lakialoitteen ja kahden toivomusaloitteen johdosta (PeVM 25/1950).
5. However, the Olympic weightlifting champion Kelpo Gröndal (SKDL 1962–70), the Olympic ski champion Heikki Hasu (maalaisliitto-keskustapuolue 1962–66, 1967–70) and the Olympic sprint medallist Voitto Hellsten (SDP 1962–70) did not run as multiple candidates.
6. Most notably, in 1917 the Old Finns and Young Finns forged electoral alliances in every constituency – running 192 candidates in total – to prevent the Social Democrats gaining an absolute majority of parliamentary seats as they had done at the general election the previous year (Tarkiainen 1971, 367; Paloheimo and Sundberg 2009, 2012).
7. Toivomusaloite 5/1966 vp (Melin ym). Henkilön sallimisesta asettua kansanedustajaehdokkaaksi vain yhdessä vaalipiirissä.

8. Toivomusaloite 6/1966 vp Vennamo.
9. Exceptionally, in February 1969, President Urho Kekkonen blocked a bill supported by the prime minister Mauno Koivisto (SDP), the non-socialist governing parties and the cabinet-based TPSL, together with the parliamentary opposition, which included the provision for 'electoral rings' (vaalirengas). The difference between electoral alliances and electoral rings is that in the latter seats are allocated first to individual parties and only then to individual candidates. The measure was opposed by the two left-wing governing parties, SDP and SKDL, whilst Kekkonen held i) that it would lead to a two-party system and ii) that electoral rings would lead to an increase in splinter parties, so complicating the task of government formation (Suomi 1996, 256–258; Koivisto 1997, 140–142).
10. 1969 vuoden valtiopäivät n:o 99. Hallituksen esitys Eduskunnalle laiksi kansanedustajain vaaleista ja laiksi tasavallan presidentin valitsijamiesten vaaleista.
11. 1969 vp Perustuslaki valiokunnan mietintö n:o 11 hallituksen esityksen johdosta laiksi tasavallan presidentin valitsijamiesten vaaleista.

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