Preface

This data handbook on *Elections in Europe* is the result of the research project “Wahldatenhandbuch Europa” conducted by Dieter Nohlen at the Institute of Political Science at the University Heidelberg and supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). It constitutes the concluding part of a wider project covering electoral data worldwide which follows continental lines. This is the fourth and last installment in the series, following volumes focusing on Africa in 1999, on Asia and the Pacific in 2001, and on the Americas in 2005, all published by Oxford University Press.

One of the main objectives of these handbooks was to apply systematic criteria and homogeneous concepts to the information that has been collected. Official and non-official reports on elections often lack this requirement for comparative analyses. For example, percentages in official statistics and electoral results sometimes indicate votes cast, sometimes valid votes. In these handbooks, they always refer to the same absolute unit, the valid votes. The concept of electoral systems is often indistinctly applied to all, or a number of, the aspects governing an electoral process. Here it refers precisely to the way voters express their political preference in form of votes and the way these votes are turned into executive posts such as presidencies or legislative mandates in form of parliamentary seats. The information given on different electoral systems is organized around analytical criteria and is intended to allow further historical and international comparisons.

For me, personally, the presentation of this last installment of this series highlights the results of many decades of scientific research. The basic idea of these electoral handbooks—a systematic and historically complete documentation of elections in all countries of the world—is almost 45 years old. It was born in 1962, when Dolf Sternberger and Bernhard Vogel embarked on a voluminous research project at the recently founded Institute of Political Science at the University of Heidelberg (Germany) on parliamentary electoral laws, which should result in an updated edition of the famous comparative work of Karl Braunias, an Austrian professor of public law, on ‘European Electoral Law’ (*Das parlamentarische Wahlrecht*), published in 1932 and 1933. I became involved in the studies of electoral systems when I contributed some individual studies, especially on Spain and Portugal. From the middle of the 1960s, I took charge of the project and by the end of the
decade also the responsibility for the continuing project of worldwide scope, in cooperation with Klaus Landfried.

The major scientific interest consisted in the contextual analysis of electoral systems in country-by-country-studies, with the emphasis on how they work, how they shape parties and party systems and what kind of distant political consequences they show, for example on the functioning and development of democracy. Since the early 1960s, Heidelberg has carried out several projects on elections and electoral systems, including empirical and theoretical publications covering all world regions. The first major data-oriented publication was the two volume book on ‘Election of Parliaments and other State Bodies’ (Die Wahl der Parlamente und anderer Staatsorgane, edited by Dolf Sternberger and Bernhard Vogel, 1969), which recorded and analyzed the national elections in all European countries. In 1978 a second two volume work appeared, addressing elections and electoral systems in Africa. It was edited by its main contributors, Franz Nuscheler and Klaus Ziemer, and published as part of Die Wahl der Parlamente (edited by Dolf Sternberger, Bernhard Vogel, Dieter Nohlen, and Klaus Landfried) under the subtitle ‘Political Organization and Representation in Africa’ (Politische Organisation und Repräsentation in Afrika). That same year, I finished my book on ‘Electoral Systems of the World’ (Wahlsysteme der Welt), a first comprehensive comparative study of electoral systems worldwide, where I developed my conceptual approach to the empirical study of electoral systems.

Scholars like Stein Rokkan highly appreciated the collection of data gathered by the continuous effort of the Heidelberg study group on elections and electoral systems. Yet since the beginning, this widespread research served a dual purpose, not only to collect comparable electoral data but also to improve our conceptual and theoretical knowledge in this special field of study on the basis of worldwide experiences. Already the first installment of 1969 contains a new conceptual introduction into the study of electoral systems, based on the comparative study of European elections held since the early 19th century. Our empirical research on the history of elections and electoral systems was guided by our interest in augmenting our knowledge of the effects produced by changes in the electoral regulations as well as of the contextual conditions. We did this by extending the field of study through an increase in the number of cases in the dimensions of time and space. Theoretically, we focused first on concepts—an area of this field
of research with a lot of deficits as Arend Lijphart had stated once. Second, we concentrated on the question of causality between electoral systems and party systems, which has been of utmost interest since the seminal writings of Maurice Duverger and his “sociological laws”, renewed by Giovanni Sartori. Third, we addressed the importance of contextual factors in the institutional analysis, which I personally ranked high. Fourth, we emphasized axiological preferences in order to deliver valid criteria for the never ending controversy about electoral systems.

Regarding these questions, it is important to remember the very beginnings of the study of electoral laws at Heidelberg University, which in methodological terms were inductive, meaning a historical approach, moving on contextual, conceptual, and typological grounds, comparing qualitatively. These characteristics of the research were basic for my understanding of the problems to be studied. They first gave room for controversies with more normative approaches dominating the earlier teaching at Heidelberg University, especially that of Dolf Sternberger—a fervent defender of the plurality system. Later on they led to debates with other prestigious scholars from the contemporary political science like Giovanni Sartori and Arend Lijphart. While Sartori engaged in a more nomothetical kind of research, contradictory to my contextual reasoning, Lijphart applied variable-orientated statistical methods in his analysis and dissolved more or less the historical context of electoral systems. Concerning my own approach, I learned much in the debates on electoral reforms in the many countries that invited me to present my experiences and suggestions, letting me participate in their reform processes. This interaction strengthened my own position that there is no ideal or theoretically superior system that could gain unconditional historical approval. In other words: The context makes the difference. First by preferring a certain system, legislators within their frame of time and space express their own ideas and interests. Second, the historical factors, socio-economic and cultural, exert an influence on the effects of electoral systems, which in turn may determine the choice or design of an electoral system. The best system is the one that fits best in changing circumstances. Furthermore, this learning by doing in the field of institutional politics led me to suggest a change in the analytical and operational perspective: From ready-made electoral systems and their transplantation from one country to another to customized electoral systems, which are likely to fulfill necessary functions in a specific historical context, to be identified by systemic analysis.
For the purpose of this kind of comparative analysis, along with the inductive approach, the conceptual work proved to be essential. Since the very beginning of electoral research in Heidelberg, I emphasized the understanding of the representation by majority and the proportional representation as principles of representation. Surely, there were others earlier than me who proposed this basic conceptualization, but I added the idea that it is helpful to distinguish between principles of representation and rules of decision and that representation by majority and proportional representation may be conceived either as principles of representation or rules of decision. I called attention to the problem of conceptualizing electoral systems asymmetrically, very widespread in the literature on electoral systems, which defined systems of representation by majority in terms of a rule of decision and systems of proportional representation in terms of a principle of representation. I insisted on the need for a symmetrical ground for definitions. From this observation I addressed the problem of mixed systems, treated in the literature as a third class of electoral systems, different from the basic majority/plurality and proportional systems. This category was difficult to define and includes systems, which sometimes produce political outcomes similar to a class of systems from which they were theoretically distinguished. I introduced the concept of combined electoral systems, systems which technically combine a principle of representation with a rule of decision that you would normally expect with a different principle of representation. This idea helped to understand the very nature of the so-called mixed systems and also to classify them according to one of their basic characteristics. I proposed to take the principle of representation as the main criterion for this operation.

Based on these assumptions and findings, in the late 1980s a now multinational research team began working on parliamentary and presidential elections in Latin America and the Caribbean. The main result concerning electoral data was published in 1993 in German (Handbuch der Wahldaten Lateinamerikas und der Karibik) and at the same time in Spanish (Enciclopedia Electoral Latinoamericana y del Caribe, published in Costa Rica). It was followed by a Handbook on Comparative Electoral Legislation in Latin America (Tratado de Derecho Electoral Comparado) published in 1998 in the Spanish language in Mexico. A renewed and enlarged edition appeared in 2006. While finishing this systematic inquiry, aimed at supporting Latin
Americas efforts to establish free and fair elections, a new research project on ‘Elections and Democratization in Africa and Latin America’ in 1996, provided the perfect framework to receive the old idea of a worldwide compendium of electoral data handbooks. This path led us to Elections in Africa (1999), Elections in Asia and the Pacific (2001), Elections in the Americas (2005), and finally to Elections in Europe (2010).

These volumes first present the constitutional and other legal conditions of elections, either from the introduction of universal male suffrage or from political independence to the present day, as well as the rules that actually govern the electoral processes and referendums; and second, the results of national elections for presidents and parliaments, including information on electoral participation and data on referendums. Basic information is provided on political institutions and the distribution of power, based on political preferences expressed in form of votes for political parties or candidates standing for political alternatives.

I am very grateful to many individuals and organizations. First of all, I am deeply indebted to all my research assistants and especially my co-editors without whose invaluable support it would have been impossible to complete one single volume and even less, the whole series: Michael Krennerich, Bernhard Thibaut, Florian Grotz, Christof Hartmann, and Philip Stöver. I also wish to thank the many scholars around the globe who contributed to the success of this collective effort, whom I cannot all name here. The invitation to participate was a mixed blessing, as it demanded a huge amount of time and energy: collecting the relevant information, pressing the quantitative and qualitative data into a strict corset of guidelines, sometimes recalculating national data to international standards and dealing with never ending questions from the editors. And such work would produce an apparently paradoxical outcome: the more demanding the elaboration of an article was, the clearer and simpler it finally appears to the reader. I am therefore more than grateful to the brave authors. But I also understand why some of them refused or withdrew their promised participation.

Elections in Europe owes much to the research team (Forschungsgruppe Nohlen, fgn) in Heidelberg, especially to Marian Gallenkamp, who tirelessly assisted in reviewing the articles and collecting and standardizing the relevant information. Arthur Mickoleit, Matthias Trefs, and Steffen Kassner provided valuable research
assistance in different phases of the project. They all prepared contributions for this book. Finally, Dominique Le Coq was of most valuable help to the project in revising the English version. As work on *Elections in Europe* wore on over several years, the latest elections in some contributions were appended by the members of the research team after the articles had been finished by the authors. Finally, in order to fill the data gap between the book being ready for publication and the date of appearance, Marian Gallenkamp prepared a Post-Scriptum on the elections and referendums held in 2009.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Institute of Political Science at the University of Heidelberg (*Institut für Politische Wissenschaft an der Universität Heidelberg*), which provided the main infrastructure of the research project, and the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg (*Max-Planck-Institut für Ausländisches Öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht*), whose rich library was an invaluable support to the research team. Special thanks go to the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*) for their generous funding of the project.

Finally, I am indebted to the NOMOS publishing house. It helped me in a difficult situation that endangered the whole outcome after the project had been finished. Dr. Andreas Beierwaltes deserves special recognition for enabling the publication of the results of the research project in the present form.

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