**The de Borda Institute: 2023 ANNUAL REVIEW**

av - Alternative vote bbb Farmer’s *BoerBurgerBeweging* Party, (The Netherlands)

bc - Borda Count aup - American University in Paris

cass- The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

ccp - Chinese Communist Party ccr - Centre of Conflict Resolution in Munich

ceps - Centre for European Policy Studies cop - Conference of the Parties (as in Dubai)

crc - Community Relations Council crs - Conflict Research Society

dcc - Dublin City Council deb - de Borda

ers - Electoral Reform Society fptp - First-past-the-post

gfa - Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement hk - Hong Kong

ifes - International Foundation for Electoral Systems

innate Irish Network for Non-violent Action & Training

ips Irish Political Studies it - *Irish Times*

jrct - Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust mbc - Modified Borda Count

nig - New Ireland Group ngo - non-governmental organisation

nigp - Northern Ireland Green Party nihrc - NI Human Rights Commission

ojps - Open Journal of Political Science

osce - Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

pr-stv - Proportional Representation – Singe Transferable Vote

psai - Political Studies Association of Ireland

pvv - Freedom Party *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (The Netherlands)

rcv - Ranked Choice Voting (= av or pr-stv) sf - Sinn Féin

tcd - Trinity College Dublin td - *Teachta Dála,* a Deputy in *Dáil Éireann*

ucd - University College Dublin ucl - University College London

uprg - Ulster Political Research Group uu - University of Ulster

To: (i) Patrons: Professors Angela Mickley (Potsdam), Arend Lijphart (California), John Baker (ex ucd), Maurice Salles (Caen), Paul Arthur (uu) and 杨龙 Yáng Lóng (Nánkāi, Tiānjīn); Doctor Judith Stephens.

(ii) Serving board members: Professor Katy Hayward (Queen’s), Edwin Graham, Mark McCann**,** Phil Kearney and Vanessa Liston; plus some former members: Grace Walsh, Roseann Seale and Sieneke Hakvoort… and maybe future ones like Roz Skillen.

(iii) Copies to: Profs. Don Saari (Irvine), Fuad Aleskerov (Moscow), Hall Gardner (aup), Hannu Nurmi (Turku), Richard English (Queen’s), Peter Stone (tcd), Sonny 盧兆興 Ló Shìu Hīng (Hong Kong), and 送迎发 Sòng Yíngfǎ (Xúzhōu); along with Anna Tulin Brett, Andy Pollak, Charles Stanley-Smith, Ciarán Cuffe mep, dcc’s Cllr. Dermot Lacey, Joe Humphreys of the it, John Manley of the *Irish News*, Noeleen and Marian (cfc), Rob Fairmichael, Mal O’Hara (nigp), Simon Wood, Laura Burns, Tim Jones (jrct), Tommy Sands, Jonny Clark (Corrymeela) and Wes Holmes; while beyond these shores are Albert Frantz in Vienna, Elca Stigter and Leo Joosten in Leiden; Eva Wolf, Gregor Berz, Manfred Holler of the ccr and Alfred Tolle in Munich; Michael Emerson (no relation) of ceps + Jeremy Wates in Brussels; Lord Desai, Tom Brake, Michael Sinclair, Paddy McEvoy and Perry Walker in Britain; 方英 Fāng Yīng in Beijing; Jan Oreský and Mirek Libal in Prague, while Vera Stoyarová is in Brno; Nato Kirvalidze in Tbilisi; Valery Perry in Sarajevo; Marie-Claude Klein and Vicky Selwyn in France; Paul Tarrant and Nigel Pearson in New Zealand; and our latest colleagues, Steen Bentall and Jakob de Jonge in The Hague and another Dutchman, Klaas Staal, from Karlstad University in Sweden. All good friends of deB.

**(Those named in the text are shown underlined in bold.)**

Dear Everyone,

Firstly, my apologies. This report normally comes out in the first week of December, but I was on the continent where my hard disc decided it had had enough – and so will I, one day, but not today – it died! Now for obvious reasons, the de Borda Institute’s annual report is not divided into two; so let’s try four sub-divisions: **A** Successes, **B** Disappointments, **C** Failures and **D** Dreams.

**THE UK**

**A1** The *Guardian*! A big success, this one: an old supporter of our cause, George Monbiot, heaps praise on the mbc in a feature article in The *Guardian*, and full marks to **Phil** for helping him over a long correspondence.

[*https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/09/cop28-rigged-fail-save-planet-climate-summit-fossil-fuel?CMP=Share\_AndroidApp\_Other*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/09/cop28-rigged-fail-save-planet-climate-summit-fossil-fuel?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other)

George’s punchline is, “The modified Borda count developed by the [de Borda Institute](http://www.deborda.org/modified-borda-count/) looks

especially useful.”

**A2** The House of Lords. Lord **Desai** hosted a presentation, in which **Don** (Saari) participated on-line and mentioned the mbc as a separate voting procedure, quite distinct from (though very similar to) the Borda Count bc. See A17.

Why Lord **Desai**? Oh in 2003, when the Lords were voting on reforming themselves, they had five options ‘on the table’ to be resolved by five majority votes; but that’s “daft,” said he, why not a points system? Unknown to his good self, he was advocating a Borda vote. So I wrote to him and suggested a seminar; but I know nothing about voting, he said; but I knew nothing when I first thought of a points system, I replied. So we had a seminar.

**B2** It was not as good as we had hoped, if only electronically – technical problems with the zoom – so maybe it was just as well that only one member of the press turned up, the *Financial Times*. The event was completely ignored by the NI and all other media.

# A3 The *Ecologist* published *Climate, Covid and Consensus*.

# B4 UCL, you will remember, published their final report on referendums in Ireland, without even listing our deB submission on preferential decision-making. They did correspond, for a time, but now, nothing… and not even a response to A11.

**IRELAND**

**A5** Áras an Uachtaráin, where with **Peter** (Stone), **Roz** and **Vanessa**, we presented a copy of *The Punters*’ *Guide to Democracy* to the President, Michael D Higgins.

**B5** Despite sending out photos and all, the press North and South decided this was also a non-event.

**A6** Thepsai publishes quite a bit of de Borda stuff in blogs on its website; so that’s good.

**C6** But ips has rejected yet another deB article for their journal. I’ve written pieces for peer-reviewed journals over a dozen times in over six countries over three continents, and this year alone, I’ve had material published in England (A3), Ireland (A8), China (A17), Germany (A20), The Netherlands (A21) and the USA (A25). In stark contrast, and Ulster-like, ips says “No!” Italways says ‘no’. Some of their rejections have then been accepted for publication in other journals, as in

<http://www.votingmatters.org.uk/ISSUE29/INDEX.HTM>

but it still says ‘no’. Apparently, my latest essay “needs greater justification for inclusion in a journal devoted to the study of Irish politics,” as if the themes of power-sharing, and mention of an Irish invention, the matrix vote, were not Irish enough!

**B7** *The Irish Times*. **Phil** and I had thought the it would publish an article of ours on decision-making and the gfa’s proposed border poll, but our joint article got another ‘no’.

**A8**  *Books Ireland* published

<https://booksirelandmagazine.com/few-problems-are-binary-peter-emerson-on-asking-better-political-questions/>

**IRELAND, NORTH AND SOUTH**

**B9**  To talk politics in China is quite difficult, and one has to be fairly tactful, demonstrating the matrix vote, for example, by asking the audience to cast their preferences in a role-play for the actors in a film (rather than for members of the *Politbureau*). I’ve managed to talk politics in over six mainland universities (plus two in Taiwan and one in HK), and I’ve demonstrated electronic voting in Beijing and Xúzhōu. But in 2018, a lecture in Ānyáng University was cancelled at the last minute.

I think this was because Xí Jìnpíng was preparing to change the ccp rules so that he could remain in power for more than 10 years… The atmosphere for those employed by the state was palpable. If in doubt, of course, it’s best to do nothing… so my talk was cancelled. I might have been more successful if back in Ireland I had been awarded an honorary degree or something, anything, but despite recommendations from the late **John (**Robb) and **John** (Barry), there’s nothing so far. What’s more, it seems no-one in Queen’s wants to help and nor do others in psai. I remain a mere mister, which is not very impressive, and having an honorary degree would help my work in China, I think, but…

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

**A10** To mark the 25th anniversary of the gfa. we produced a leaflet recalling the nig’s 1986 public meeting which brought together pretty well everybody from sf (Catholic extremists) to the uprg (Protestant ones), over 200 participants, who debated and then voted on prototypes of the mbc and matrix vote for the first time. But only **Jonny** responded, and hence a Corrymeela workshop, in which **Simon** did the electronic vote analysis.

**B10** Queen’s Universityorganised a commemoration, but the above was not mentioned.

**A11** *The Irish News.* With **John** (Manley’s) help, Ireland’s debate on a future Border Poll has at last discussed a multi-option approach:

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/11/27/news/platform_peter_emerson_a_multi-option_preferential_boder_poll_-3801450/>

**B11**  The *Belfast Telegraph* has promised to do something, sometime; bbc-ni and utv don’t respond to anything; and the *Newsletter* also doesn’t bother.

**A12** TheINNATE newsletter, (**Rob** is the editor), always gives us good coverage, and **Rob** has recently made a video on the theme of consensus politics (to be released shortly).

**B13** The CRC has still to host an event on decision-making, but signs are that 20 years of asking may actually lead to a seminar or something.

**A14** Our deB software – [www.debordavote.com](http://www.debordavote.com) –which **Vanessa** helped to develop, is back in business, and maybe…

**D14** **Simon** and I will find someone to develop it further, if not also to add a matrix vote thereto.

**B15** NI Elections. Having campaigned for many years for fairer elections – in particular, to ask for a ban on all political campaigning on polling day – I issued a statement supported by a couple of politicians like Naomi Long (Alliance) and **Mal** (nigp), along with a few apoliticals like **Jonny** and **Tommy**, hoping to bring our elections into line with most other voting contests held in most osce countries, (but Britain’s rules are also below par). The Electoral Commission acknowledged receipt; nothing else.

In some polling stations in nationalist areas, the first person a voter meets is the sf polling agent. “Ach, how’yer’doing Paddy?” The party agent should be a party observer ONLY, with no ‘whad-about-yers’ with the voters, at all! Secondly, information on *who* has voted should NEVER be given to the party agents/observers, at least not on polling day. By international standards, our ni elections are appalling! The local press, it seems, are not really interested, but bbc Radio 4 did promise….

I have also campaigned for a fairer count procedure. (Sometimes, albeit rarely, votes are transferred without the voters’ knowledge let alone their consent. It is not a deliberate manipulation, just an anomaly of the rules.) The Electoral Commission promised to hold a seminar on this topic, but then ‘unpromised’. One might have thought the nihrc would have been interested in this violation of democratic rights… but no. And nor, it seems, is the Electoral Office, or Queen’s, or the psai.

**CHINA**

**A16** Following my participation in their 2021 webinar – and as far as I know, the only other participant from these islands was Peter Frankopan, the well-known sinologist and expert on The Silk Roads – the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences cass invited me to present a paper in its ‘Second International Forum on Democracy: Shared Human Values’. Accordingly, with all the technical stuff coming from **Simon**, we made a second vimeo:

<https://vimeo.com/ravenhillfilms/scienceofsocialchoice>

**B16**  Earlier this year, China reversed its Covid policies, and what had originally been planned as a 3-day webinar became a hybrid and then a seminar only… so the vimeo was not shown; but it’s on our webpage.

<https://vimeo.com/ravenhillfilms/scienceofsocialchoice>

**D16** There may be other forums, in 2024/5.

**A17** *OJPS* published *Consensus and Climate Change*.

**A18 cass** invited deB to nominate one of our younger members to join a Youth Research Group, and **Roz** has signed up. So, we watch this space…

**GERMANY**

**A19 Manfred**, **Eva** and **Gregor** hosted an Adam Smyth Seminar on “The Borda Count voting procedure; but Jean-Charles de Borda is gyrating in his grave.”

<https://vimeo.com/890361226/71e6685601>

In 1433, Nicholas Cusanus invented what came to be called the Borda Count bc, but in 1770,

Jean-Charles devised something much more sophisticated: it is now called the Modified Borda Count mbc. In a bc of, say, 4 options, your 1st preference gets 4 points, regardless of how many other options you vote for. In an mbc, your 1st pref. only gets as many points as the number of options you have cast preferences for, so it gets 4 points, ***only*** if you cast all 4 preferences. In effect, then, while the bc tempts voters to cast only a 1st preference, which is **NOT** what Jean-Charles wanted, the mbc encourages everyone to cast many if not all of their preferences. So whereas the bc could not facilitate consensus, the mbc can, and does… and could, in the cop’s, in democracies, in parliaments, and especially in conflict zones. And because Jean-Charles is credited with the bc and not with his proposal, the mbc, the poor old soul is a’rolling in his grave.

**A20** The ccr, edited by **Manfred**, publshed my *Reviewing Dutch Democracy*.

<https://www.ccr-munich.de/publications/MSSR/2023_6/MSSR-Volume6.pdf>

Next, in…

**THE NETHERLANDS**

**A21 Leo** and I met Jakob de Jonge and Steen Bentall, two leading figures in The Hague Peace Project, which has now published an article on deB voting

<https://thehaguepeace.org/site/decision-making/>

and made a U-tube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIDnaevpbMY>

**D22**  In their most recent election, the Dutch ballot paper listed over 1,000 candidates. The voter was able to cast only one preference! So, needless to say, every ballot was an inaccurate summary of the voter’s opinions; inevitably, therefore, the outcome was also inaccurate. (It is of course the same with fptp and many other single-preference voting systems.) No wonder Dutch elections are fickle.

In this election, the winners from last time, the bbb, now loses, and the pvv (Geert Wilders) wins, 37 of 150 seats. As often happens in The Netherlands (and a few other countries blessed with pr, like Ireland), open and transparent elections are followed by closed and opaque discussions… lasting for days (Ireland, 70 in 2016), weeks (Germany, 23 in ’17), months (the Netherlands, 7.5 in ’17) if not years (Belgium, 1.5 in 2010/11 ). Last time round, after the 2021 elections, **Klaas** wrote to The Hague to suggest a matrix vote. It looks as if sorting out a government might be even more problematic this time round, so maybe deB should help organise another conference, like the webinar we did with **Manfred** in Munich in 2021 on the matrix vote, or the public meeting on the same theme in 2016 in Dublin. With **Phil** and **Vanessa** and the it, we showed how, using a matrix vote – which **Charles** had programmed to count electronically – the Irish or any other parliament could elect an all-party power-sharing cabinet; the demonstration was successful.

The 2020 elections also produced a hung parliament. Initially, the Greens suggested an all-party government but did not pursue the idea… not least I suspect because they didn’t know how it could be done… in part because they didn’t attend our workshop.

Today, the case for a Dutch experiment is strong; (see A26), and **Charles,** maybe, awaits.

**FRANCE**

**A23** My word, quite out of the blue, President Macron used the word ‘préférendum’, and it was reported in *Figaro* and elsewhere.

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/qu-est-ce-que-le-preferendum-annonce-par-le-gouvernement-20230829>

My word! And that is my word. So we produced an etymology, **Marie-Claude** translated it,

<http://www.deborda.org/home/2023/10/19/2023-2421-la-methode-borda-en-francais.html>

and sent it to France… where…

**B23**  it seems, *rien*, nothing.

**B24** The Council of Europe held another World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy>

In the event of 2022, all the participants voted in plenary for the best candidate to get the Democracy Innovation Award; there were three of them, and the 400+ participants used three binary votes. Electronically! Brilliant. Democratically? Nonsense. The bottle – electronic voting – was full of vinegar – binary ballots! A long exchange of e-mails followed, but to no avail. So (at my own expense) I went to the 2023 event – it was open to the public – and sure enough, *déjà vu, toujours vu,* they had another three binary votes. Crazy! An Innovation Award, with the recipient chosen by the ancient, 2,500-year-old binary vote!

**D24**  After visiting Leiden and Berlin, I went back to Strasbourg, at further expense. But I’m now in another correspondence and maybe, in the 2024 World Forum, I will be able to demonstrate preferential decision-making in a workshop… if not facilitate a preferential vote for the 2024 Innovation Award.

**USA**

**A25 *Global Journals*** published Evolving Decision-Making: Exploring the Shift from Binary to Preferential Voting.  <https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume23/E-Journal_GJHSS_(F)_Vol_23_Issue_4.pdf>

**B26**  It is odd, to put it mildly. The UK has its ers which wants preferential voting in elections, but at the time of the 2011 referendum on electoral reform, it did not campaign for preferential voting or even a multi-option choice in decision-making: the referendum question was, “av or fptp?” neither of which is pr. It was all a bit like asking a vegetarian, ‘beef or lamb?’

The USA is the world’s most binary polity. Better that than a one-party North Korea, of course, but it’s hardly an ideal.

Furthermore, the DPRK has elections which are binary, “Candidate X, yes or no?” The USA *et al* are real democracies, they say, but their decision-making is binary, “Option X, yes or no?” My correspondence with ifes and the FairVote campaign has born no fruit…

**D26** …yet.

**FINLAND**

**A27 Hannu (**Nurmi)and I first met in Caen**,** care of **Maurice (**Salles), ages ago.And at last, I’ve given a talk on consensus politics in **Hannu’s** university in Turku. Like many another European country, Finland has had problems when forming a post-election government coalition. If the USA is ever to move beyond its binary polity, other countries could perhaps adopt a less adversarial way of doing things, as in all-party power-sharing. And the countries which are best able to do this are perhaps Ireland, Finland, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

**NEW ZEALAND**

**A28**  In the summer of 2023, when their October elections were fast approaching, **Paul** and **Nigel** suggested I should write something for their local press in Auckland, but…

**B28** the NZ media did not respond…

**B29**  …so I wrote an article for a political journal down there. Alas, (as happens so often), punters and professors alike often just assume that articles on voting are about elections and not about decision-making systems; electoral systems often vary – single or multiple preferences, small or large constituencies, pr etc.. But decision-making, oh no, that is (nearly always) binary. So the academic who responded to my article confused electoral systems with decision-making, and rejected it. This happens, even in NZ where the world’s first multi-option referendum was in 1894, and where in 1992 they had a pretty good five-option vote on their own electoral reform!

**UKRAINE**

**B30**  The war goes on. I’ve done quite a bit of work with the local NI Ukrainian community and, for the moment at least, it would appear there’s no end in sight to the horrible violence.

**OTHER MATTERS**

**B31 COP28. Phil** and I did try **to** influence the way the Parties (countries) involved in Cop28 in Dubai resolved their differences, but with little or no success.

**D31**  But now that George Monbiot has given us credit, maybe we will be able to influence events next year, in Azerbaijan (a country which I’ve often visited).

**C32** DeB is a financial disaster, with no funding to speak of. The crc did support last year’s Belfast book launch, in part, but not this year’s trip to the House of Lords. So our income is next to nothing, while our expenditures are the routine stuff of the website, and programmes like word, power-point, and then there’s broad-band and the like, so many thanks to ***Mark*** for dealing with (though not paying for) all this.

**A33** The deB tedx talk has now been watched 76,000 times.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiCJhSuLdok

**C34**  There is no formal membership, in line with a decision taken, oh, years ago, but it could be changed, of course. At the moment, all too few of us are involved and there’s no formal structure. Instead, everything is done ‘off the cuff’, normally by either **Phil** and/or myself. So we need to recruit some younger blood. Me? Oh I’m too old for that. Maybe someone under 80, should take on the task, someone like… oh, **Phil**. Or maybe **Roz**?

**D35**  Now there aren’t many retired submariner gardeners who are interested in the fact that the first people on this planet to take a multi-option vote were, I think, the Jurchens. Nevertheless, as I recall in *The Punters’ Guide to Democracy,* in the year 1197, the government of the rulers of China’s Jīn Dynasty took a three-option vote on a question that might have initially been binary: war or peace? The perceived enemy was their northerly neighbour, Mongolia, and the three options were ‘attack,’ ‘defend,’ or ‘alternate between the two.’ The vote was 5:46:33, which was nice, and peace did reign. (But not for long I’m afraid, for then came a certain Chinggis Khan; the Mongols defeated the Jurchens in 1234; and one of his grandsons Kublai Khan, became the emperor of the new Yuan Dynasty in 1234).

But what was it, I wonder, which prompted these Jurchens to become the world’s first multi-option decision-makers?

Meanwhile, the work goes on. The plans for 2024 include:

+ something in the Netherlands, with **Jakob** and **Steen**;

+ further developments on our soft-ware – [www.debordavote.com](http://www.debordavote.com) – to cater for a matrix vote with **Simon** and, I hope, **Laura**;

+ an on-line lecture in Karlstad University with **Klaas**;

+ the publication with **Manfred** of another article in Munich’s next ccr journal…

+ and another in the London-based Journal of Transdisciplinary Peace Praxis;

+ a talk on Ukraine in North Belfast with **Wes**;

+ a possible book launch in Berlin, which **Perry** is trying to organise;

+ a move to multi-option voting in the nigp, with **Mal**;

+ possible participation in the 2024 cass Forum (if it caters for an on-line presentation), (D16);

and:

+ something with the crc, (B13), well, maybe;

and:

+ with Queen’s, another maybe, for Queen’s is “not aware of research at the [Geroge Mitchell] Institute on the matrix vote;”

+ and in the Council of Europe’s 2024 World Forum, another but more likely maybe, (D24). Then, on its completion, I might just go a little further eastwards…

All best wishes for 2024. Many thanks to all of you for helping to promote a form of preferential decision-making, not least in your own spheres: **Angela** in her conflict resolution work, **Mal** in the nigp, **Phil** in chairing the Irish environmental group, *An Taisce*, and so on (much of it unknown to myself… so maybe we *are* changing the world).

But the work must continue:

(a) to prevent violence in so many countries, not least in conflicts like those in Ukraine and the Middle East; and

(b) to resolve the existential disputes in cop29 and others.

Apologies again for this late (and lengthy) summary of our activities over the last year.

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That’s it. I hope I haven’t missed anything out, or failed to give due credit to any of you. But yes, it’s been a busy year, with some successes, a few disappointments, a couple of failures… and we dream on. Many thanks to everyone for helping us to get this far. In this very troubled world, I wish you all a Happy New Year, and let us hope that an increasing awareness of the existential problems facing the human race – Climate Change and violent conflicts – might prompt some to work out how best to solve the former and promote reconciliation in, and even prevent any more of, the latter.

Peter