

CBCS B.A POLITICAL SCIENCE HONS

**SEM IV CC8 :POLITICAL PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS IN
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

TOPIC II: Electoral System

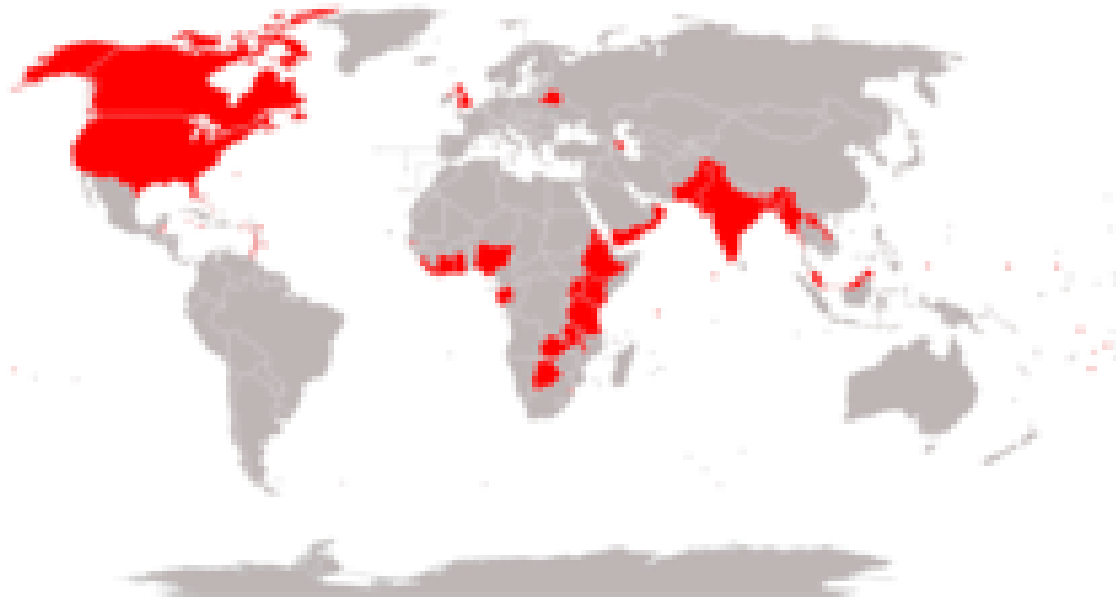
The Importance of Electoral Systems

Political institutions shape the rules of the game under which democracy is practised, and it is often argued that the easiest political institution to manipulate, for good or for bad, is the electoral system. In translating the votes cast in a general election into seats in the legislature, the choice of electoral system can effectively determine who is elected and which party gains power. While many aspects of a country's political framework are often specified in the constitution and can thus be difficult to amend, electoral system change often only involves new legislation and can thus be subject to manipulation by unscrupulous majority.

Even with each voter casting exactly the same vote and with exactly the same number of votes for each party, one electoral system may lead to a coalition government or a minority government while another may allow a single party to assume majority control.

Electoral Systems and Party Systems

A number of other consequences of electoral systems go beyond this primary effect. Some systems encourage, or even enforce, the formation of political parties; others recognize only individual candidates. The type of party system which develops, in particular the number and the relative sizes of political parties in the legislature, is heavily influenced by the electoral system. So is the internal cohesion and discipline of parties: some systems may encourage factionalism, where different wings of one party are constantly at odds with each other, while another system might encourage parties to speak with one voice and suppress dissent. Electoral systems can also influence the way parties campaign and the way political elites behave, thus helping to determine the broader political climate; they may encourage, or retard, the forging of alliances between parties; and they can provide incentives for parties and groups to be broadly based and accommodating, or to base themselves on narrow appeals to ethnicity or kinship ties



Countries using first-past-the-post for legislatures.

Types of electoral systems

1. Plurality systems (First Past the Post)

Plurality voting is a system in which the candidate(s) with the highest number of votes wins, with no requirement to get a majority of votes. In cases where there is a single position to be filled, it is known as first-past-the-post; this is the second most common electoral system for national legislatures, with 58 countries using it to elect their legislatures, the vast majority of which are current or former British or American colonies or territories.

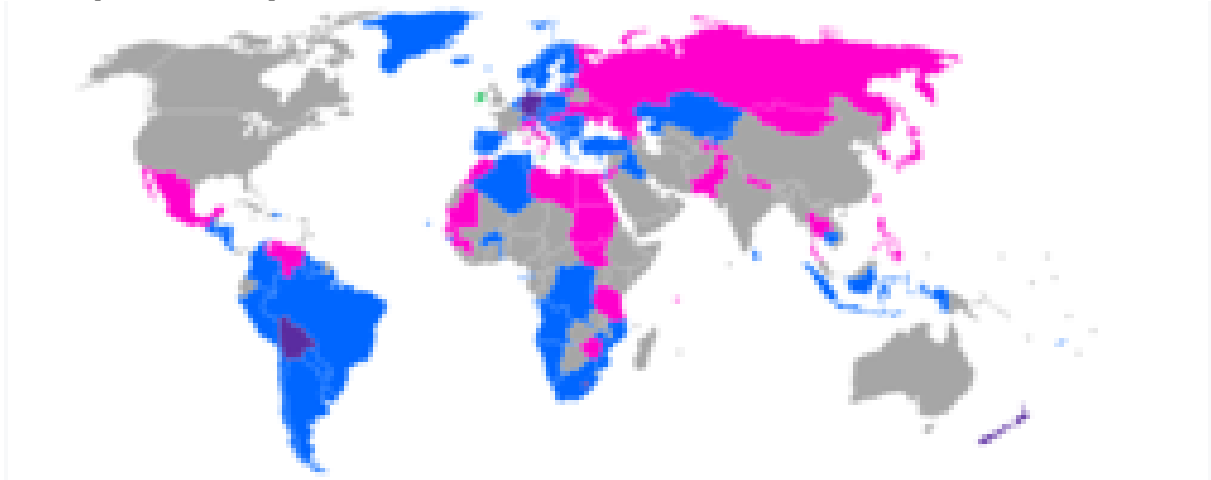
It is also the second most common system used for presidential elections, being used in 19 countries. territory where this system is in use and single non-transferable vote (SNTV), in which voters can vote for only one candidate in a multi-member constituency, with the candidates receiving the most votes declared the winners; this system is used in Afghanistan

In cases where there are multiple positions to be filled, most commonly in cases of multi-member constituencies, plurality voting is referred to as block voting or plurality-at-large. This takes two main forms: in one form voters have as many votes as there are seats and can vote for any candidate, regardless of party – this is used in eight countries.

There are variations on this system such as limited voting, where voters are given fewer votes than there are seats to be filled (Gibraltar is the only, Kuwait, the Pitcairn Islands and Vanuatu. In the other main form of block voting, also known as party

block voting, voters can only vote for the multiple candidates of a single party. This is used in five countries as part of mixed systems.

2. Proportional system:



Countries by type of proportional system

Proportional representation is the most widely used electoral system for national legislatures, with the parliaments of over eighty countries elected by various forms of the system.

Party-list proportional representation is the single most common electoral system and is used by 80 countries, and involves voters voting for a list of candidates proposed by a party.

In **closed list systems** voters do not have any influence over the candidates put forward by the party, but in **open list systems** voters are able to both vote for the party list and influence the order in which candidates will be assigned seats.

In some countries, notably Israel and the Netherlands, elections are carried out using **'pure' proportional representation**, with the votes tallied on a national level before assigning seats to parties. However, in most cases several multi-member constituencies are used rather than a single nationwide constituency, giving an element of geographical representation; but this can result in the distribution of seats not reflecting the national vote totals. As a result, some countries have levelling seats to award to parties whose seat totals are lower than their proportion of the national vote.

In addition to the electoral threshold (the minimum percentage of the vote that a party must obtain to win seats), there are several different ways to allocate seats in proportional systems. There are two main types of system: **highest average** and **largest remainder**.

Highest average systems involve dividing the votes received by each party by a series of divisors, producing figures that determine seat allocation; for example the D'Hondt method (of which there are variants including Hagenbach-Bischoff) and the **Webster/Sainte-Laguë method**.

Under **largest remainder systems**, parties' vote shares are divided by the quota (obtained by dividing the total number of votes by the number of seats available). This usually leaves some seats unallocated, which are awarded to parties based on the largest fractions of seats that they have remaining.

Single transferable vote (STV) is another form of proportional representation; in STV, voters rank candidates in a multi-member constituency rather than voting for a party list; it is used in Malta and the Republic of Ireland. To be elected, candidates must pass a quota (the Droop quota being the most common). Candidates that pass the quota on the first count are elected. Votes are then reallocated from the least successful candidates, as well as surplus votes from successful candidates, until all seats have been filled by candidates who have passed the quota.

3.Mixed systems:

In several countries, mixed systems are used to elect the legislature. These include parallel voting and mixed-member proportional representation.

In parallel voting systems, which are used in 20 countries, there are two methods by which members of a legislature are elected; part of the membership is elected by a plurality or majority vote in single-member constituencies and the other part by proportional representation. The results of the constituency vote have no effect on the outcome of the proportional vote.

Mixed-member proportional representation, in use in eight countries, also sees the membership of the legislature elected by constituency and proportional methods, but in this case the results of the proportional vote are adjusted to balance the seats won in the constituency vote in order to ensure that parties have a number of seats proportional to their vote share. This may result in overhang seats, where parties win more seats in the constituency system than they would be entitled to based on their vote share.

Variations of this include the **Additional Member System** and **Alternative Vote Plus**, in which voters cast votes for both single-member constituencies and multi-member constituencies; the allocation of seats in the multi-member constituencies is adjusted to achieve an overall seat total proportional to parties' vote share by taking into account the number of seats won by parties in the single-member constituencies. A form of mixed-member proportional representation, Scorporo, was used in Italy from 1993 until 2006.