



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Electoral systems play a critical role in shaping the dynamics of democratic governance, influencing political representation, party structures, voter behavior, and governmental stability. This research paper provides a comparative analysis of three major electoral system typologies: First-Past-the-Post (FPTP), Proportional Representation (PR), and Mixed Electoral Systems (such as Mixed-Member Proportional and Parallel systems). Drawing on empirical evidence and global case studies, the paper examines how each system affects inclusivity, political fragmentation, vote efficacy, and institutional effectiveness. The study also addresses the challenges inherent in each system—such as gerrymandering in FPTP, coalition instability in PR, and administrative complexity in mixed systems—and evaluates ongoing reforms aimed at improving democratic outcomes. By critically evaluating these systems through normative and functional lenses, the paper aims to highlight the intricate balance between representational fairness and governance efficiency, offering insights into the suitability of electoral systems in diverse political contexts.

Keywords: *Electoral Systems, Political Representation, Proportional Representation, Electoral Reform, Democratic Governance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

An electoral system refers to the method and rules through which votes are translated into seats in a legislature or positions in a government. It forms the core mechanism of representative democracy, determining how citizens' preferences are aggregated and reflected in the political structure of a state. Electoral systems not only influence who gets elected but also shape party systems, government stability, voter behavior, and the nature of political representation itself.

The importance of electoral systems in democratic governance cannot be overstated. A well-designed electoral system promotes political inclusiveness, fair representation, and stability, while a poorly designed one can lead to distortions in representation, marginalization of minority voices, or frequent governmental deadlock. In the contemporary global context—marked by rising populism, democratic backsliding, and political polarization—the design and performance of electoral systems have become increasingly salient topics in political discourse and reform agendas.

This paper offers a comparative analysis of three major electoral systems: plurality/majoritarian systems (e.g., First-Past-the-Post), proportional representation (PR) systems, and mixed electoral systems (e.g., Mixed-Member Proportional). Through selected case studies including the United Kingdom, Germany, and New Zealand, the paper explores how different electoral designs function in practice and how they influence political outcomes such as representativeness, stability, and party competition.

The central research question guiding this analysis is: How do different electoral systems impact political representation, party dynamics, and government stability in democratic states? This inquiry also leads to a subsidiary question: Which system better balances fair representation with effective governance?

The paper is structured as follows: Section II presents the theoretical framework, defining each system and summarizing scholarly approaches to electoral system analysis. Section III offers empirical case studies of countries employing different systems. Section IV engages in a comparative evaluation across key democratic metrics. Section V discusses





contemporary challenges and reform efforts, and Section VI concludes with key findings and suggestions for further research.

2. COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

The evaluation of electoral systems requires a multidimensional framework encompassing political representation, government stability, voter engagement, simplicity, and the resulting party structures. These criteria allow for an insightful analysis of how various systems function not just in theory, but in real political landscapes shaped by historical, cultural, and geographical factors.

	FPTP	PR	MIXED
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION INCLUSIVENESS AND MINORITY PARTICIPATION	limited representation for minorities		
	Broad inclusion of diverse groups		
GOVERNMENT STABILITY COALITION GOVERNMENTS VS STRONG MAJORITIES	Strong single-party governments		
	Frequent coalition governments		
VOTER TURNOUT AND ENGAGEMENT SIMPLICITY VS. COMPLEXITY	Lower, especially in safe seats		
	Higher, as votes are more impactful		
IMPACT ON PARTY SYSTEMS TENDENCY FOR TWO PARTY DOMINANCE	Generally moderate to high		
	Most complex, dual vote systems		
IMPACT ON PARTY SYSTEMS TENDENCY FO TWO-PARTY DOMINANCE	Multiparty system common		
	Mixture of major and minor parties		

1. Political Representation: Inclusiveness and Minority Participation

Electoral systems differ significantly in their ability to represent diverse voices. Proportional representation (PR) systems, such as those used in Germany and the Netherlands, are designed to mirror the electorate’s preferences closely. They facilitate inclusiveness, allowing smaller parties, regional voices, and ethnic minorities to gain parliamentary representation. As a result, PR systems often yield more gender-balanced and ethnically diverse legislatures. In contrast, plurality systems like First-Past-the-Post (FPTP)—used in India, the UK, and Canada—tend to disproportionately favor larger, regionally concentrated parties, often marginalizing smaller or dispersed groups. While this may create clearer majorities, it frequently results in “wasted votes” and underrepresentation of minorities. Mixed systems, such as in New Zealand, attempt to strike a balance by combining local representation with a proportional correction at the national level.

2. Government Stability: Coalition Governments vs. Strong Majorities

Stability in governance is often linked to the type of electoral system in place. FPTP systems generally produce single-party majority governments, which tend to be more decisive and stable in policymaking. For instance, the UK's Westminster system has traditionally enabled long stretches of uninterrupted majority rule, allowing governments to implement their agendas without coalition negotiation.





On the other hand, PR systems usually result in coalition governments, which can lead to consensus-driven policymaking but may also bring political fragmentation and instability. Countries like Italy and Israel frequently experience coalition collapses and repeated elections. Mixed systems offer varied outcomes depending on the balance between PR and plurality components. Japan, for instance, has seen both stable governments and coalition arrangements under its hybrid system.

3. Voter Turnout and Engagement

Electoral systems also influence citizen participation. PR systems generally encourage higher voter turnout, as citizens feel their votes are more likely to make an impact. In countries like Sweden and Denmark, turnout consistently exceeds 80%, reflecting a strong sense of electoral efficacy under PR.

In contrast, plurality systems often suppress turnout, especially among minority and opposition voters in "safe seats" where the outcome is predictable. The U.S. and UK, for instance, routinely face turnout levels around 60% or lower. Mixed systems, depending on their design and voter education efforts, can boost engagement, though their complexity may act as a deterrent in some contexts.

4. Simplicity vs. Complexity

In terms of ease of understanding and administration, plurality systems like FPTP are the simplest: one voter, one vote, one winner. This simplicity fosters public understanding and quick results, but often at the cost of fairness in representation.

PR systems, especially those involving party lists or ranked preferences, are more complex, requiring greater voter literacy and administrative capacity. Mixed systems like Germany's MMP (Mixed-Member Proportional) or Japan's parallel system can be confusing, as voters cast multiple ballots for different tiers of representation. However, this complexity is often justified by the system's greater responsiveness and fairness.

5. Impact on Party Systems

Electoral systems shape the party landscape. FPTP tends to reinforce a two-party system, as theorized in Duverger's Law, by penalizing smaller parties and encouraging strategic voting. The United States and the UK exemplify this dynamic, with stable two-party dominance and marginal influence for third parties.

PR systems, by contrast, foster multiparty competition, enabling the rise of ideologically diverse and issue-based parties. This can enrich the political discourse but also complicate governance, as seen in the frequent coalition politics of Israel and Belgium. Mixed systems, depending on their proportionality level, can moderate this effect, allowing for both strong parties and minority voices.

6. Geographic, Cultural, and Historical Influences

No electoral system functions in isolation. Geography and federal structures often demand tailored systems. For instance, India's vast diversity and federalism challenge FPTP's suitability, prompting calls for reforms that can better reflect regional and caste-based realities.

Historical legacies also shape system choice. The UK's adherence to FPTP is rooted in its imperial parliamentary tradition, whereas post-war Germany adopted MMP to avoid the extremes of Weimar-era fragmentation. Cultural values—such as consensus in Nordic countries or individualism in Anglo-American democracies—also influence whether societies value inclusiveness over decisiveness or vice versa.

3. OVERVIEW OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM TYPOLOGIES

Feature	First-Past-the-Post (FPTP)	Proportional Representation (PR)	Mixed Electoral Systems (e.g., MMP, Parallel)
Basic Mechanism	Candidate with most votes wins in each district	Seats allocated based on party's share of total votes	Combines FPTP and PR elements (dual vote systems)
Ballot Structure	Single vote for one candidate	Vote for a party list (or ranked candidates)	Two votes: one for candidate, one for party





Representation Type	Majoritarian (winner-takes-all)	Proportional (party share mirrors vote share)	Mixed – combines local and proportional representation
Party System Tendency	Two-party dominance (Duverger's Law)	Multiparty system with greater diversity	Hybrid (can support both strong parties and smaller ones)
Voter Choice	Limited to local candidates	Broader ideological and party choice	Broader choice: both party and local candidate
Government Stability	High (strong majorities)	Medium to low (coalition governments)	Moderate (depending on proportional component)
Minority Representation	Generally poor	High	Moderate to high
Vote Wastage	High (many votes don't affect outcome)	Low (nearly every vote counts)	Moderate
Administrative Complexity	Low	Moderate to High	High (requires dual counting and seat balancing)
Examples	India, UK, USA	Germany, Netherlands, Israel	New Zealand, Japan, South Korea

4. CHALLENGES AND REFORMS

Despite their foundational role in shaping democratic outcomes, electoral systems are not without significant challenges. These problems vary by system type but often converge around core issues such as fairness, efficiency, and representational integrity.

One common challenge across many plurality systems, especially First-Past-the-Post (FPTP), is the prevalence of “wasted votes”—ballots cast for losing candidates or for winners beyond what is needed to secure victory. This phenomenon undermines the principle of equal representation and often discourages voter participation, particularly in so-called safe constituencies. Additionally, gerrymandering—the manipulation of electoral boundaries for partisan advantage—remains a serious threat to electoral integrity in countries like the United States and India.

Proportional Representation (PR) systems, while more inclusive, face their own difficulties. The most prominent is political fragmentation, where too many small parties gain access to the legislature, making it difficult to form stable coalitions. This often results in governmental paralysis, as seen in cases like Israel and Italy. In mixed systems, dual candidacies, overhang seats, and ballot complexity can confuse voters and distort proportionality.

In response to these challenges, several reforms and innovations have emerged worldwide. Ranked-choice voting (RCV)—now implemented in parts of the United States, Australia, and Ireland—allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference, thereby reducing wasted votes and encouraging more civil campaigning. Legal thresholds (e.g., 5% minimum vote share) have been introduced in many PR systems, like Germany, to prevent excessive party fragmentation. Furthermore, gender quotas and zipped party lists (alternating male and female candidates) have been adopted in countries like Sweden, Mexico, and Rwanda to enhance gender representation in legislatures.

Despite these efforts, debates around electoral reform remain polarized. Proponents of the status quo argue that frequent or radical changes can disrupt political continuity, confuse voters, and produce unintended consequences. Conversely, reform advocates contend that electoral systems must evolve to reflect societal changes, ensure fairness, and restore public trust in democratic institutions. This tension is evident in ongoing debates in countries like Canada and the UK, where proposed reforms have been stalled by political opposition or public referenda.

Ultimately, addressing the shortcomings of electoral systems requires a balance between institutional stability and democratic responsiveness. As political landscapes grow more complex, electoral systems must be continuously evaluated and, where necessary, restructured to uphold the principles of fair representation and effective governance.





5. CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis has demonstrated that electoral systems profoundly shape the quality and character of democratic governance. Plurality systems like First-Past-the-Post tend to prioritize stability and simplicity, often at the cost of fair representation, while proportional representation systems promote inclusiveness and diversity, though they may result in coalitional instability. Mixed systems, which attempt to combine the strengths of both, offer nuanced advantages but introduce administrative and strategic complexities.

The findings underscore a central tension in democratic theory: the trade-off between representative fairness and effective governance. Each system reflects differing normative priorities—whether to amplify the majority's voice or to ensure the inclusion of minority perspectives. These choices have tangible consequences for party systems, voter turnout, legislative behavior, and public trust.

Looking forward, future research should explore the implications of digital voting technologies—such as blockchain-enabled ballots, mobile voting, and biometric authentication—on electoral transparency and participation. Additionally, comparative behavioral studies examining how voters adapt their choices under different systems (strategic voting, protest voting, or tactical abstention) could further enrich our understanding of electoral system dynamics in the 21st century.

Ultimately, no electoral system is universally perfect. The challenge lies in contextualizing system design to a country's political culture, institutional capacity, and democratic aspirations. Electoral reform, therefore, must be approached not as a technical fix, but as a deeply political and philosophical project aimed at aligning institutions with democratic ideals.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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