



Extracted from *Electoral System Design: the New International IDEA Handbook*

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2. The World of Electoral Systems

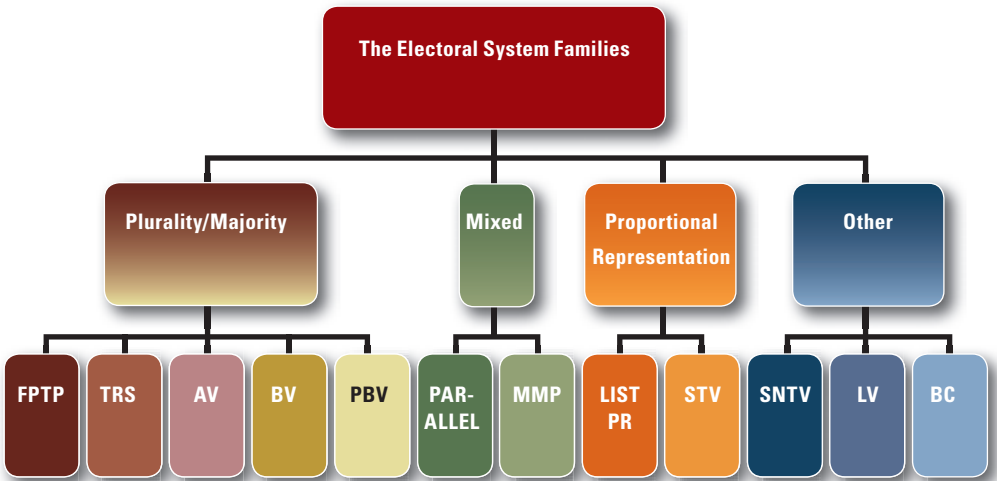
63. THERE ARE COUNTLESS ELECTORAL SYSTEM VARIATIONS, AS NOTED IN PARAGRAPH 9 above, but essentially they can be divided into 12 main systems, the majority of which fall into three broad families. The most common way to look at electoral systems is to group them according to how closely they translate national votes won into legislative seats won, that is, how proportional they are. To do this, one needs to look at both the votes-to-seats relationship and the level of wasted votes. For example, South Africa used a classically proportional electoral system for its elections of 2004, and with 69.69 per cent of the popular vote the African National Congress (ANC) won 69.75 per cent of the national seats. The electoral system was highly proportional, and the number of wasted votes (i.e. those which were cast for parties which did not win seats in the Assembly) was only 0.74 per cent of the total. In direct contrast, in Mongolia in 2000, a Two-Round System only requiring a plurality of 25 per cent of the votes for candidates to be elected resulted in the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) winning 72 seats in the 76-member Parliament with around 52 per cent of the popular vote. This result was mirrored in Djibouti's Party Block Vote election of 2003 when all 65 legislative seats were won by the Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès with 62.7 per cent of the vote.

64. However, under some circumstances non-proportional electoral systems (such as FPTP) can give rise to relatively proportional overall results, for example, when party support is concentrated in regional fiefdoms. This was the case in another Southern African country, Malawi, in 2004. In that election the Malawian Congress Party won 30 per cent of the seats with 25 per cent of the votes, the United Democratic Front won 27 per cent of the seats with 25 per cent of the votes, and the Alliance for Democracy won a little more than 3 per cent of the seats with just under 4 per cent of the votes. The overall level of proportionality was high, but the clue to the fact that this was not inherently a proportional system, and so cannot be categorized as such, was that the wasted votes still amounted to almost half of all votes cast.

Equally, some design factors accentuate disproportionality. Systems with a high level of malapportionment often produce disproportional results, as do proportional systems with high thresholds—which can result in a high level of wasted votes, as in Turkey in 2002 where a 10 per cent threshold resulted in 46 per cent of votes being wasted.

65. If we take the proportionality principle into account, along with some other considerations such as how many members are elected from each district and how many votes the voter has, we are left with the family structure illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: The Electoral System Families



Plurality/Majority Systems

66. The distinguishing feature of plurality/majority systems is that they usually use single-member districts. In an FPTP system (sometimes known as a plurality single-member district system) the winner is the candidate with the most votes but not necessarily an absolute majority of the votes (see paragraphs 76–79). When this system is used in multi-member districts it becomes the Block Vote. Voters have as many votes as there are seats to be filled, and the highest-polling candidates fill the positions regardless of the percentage of the vote they achieve (see paragraphs 80–85). This system—with the change that voters vote for party lists instead of individual candidates—becomes the Party Block Vote (see paragraphs 86–88). Majoritarian systems, such as the Alternative Vote and the Two-Round System, try to ensure that the winning candidate receives an absolute majority (i.e. over 50 per cent). Each system in essence makes use of voters’ second preferences to produce a winner with an absolute majority if one does not emerge from the first round of voting (see paragraphs 89–99).

Proportional Representation Systems

67. The rationale underpinning all PR systems is to consciously reduce the disparity between a party's share of the national vote and its share of the parliamentary seats; if a major party wins 40 per cent of the votes, it should win approximately 40 per cent of the seats, and a minor party with 10 per cent of the votes should also gain 10 per cent of the legislative seats. Proportionality is often seen as being best achieved by the use of party lists, where political parties present lists of candidates to the voters on a national or regional basis (see paragraphs 106–108), but preferential voting can work equally well: the Single Transferable Vote, where voters rank-order candidates in multi-member districts, is another well-established proportional system (see paragraphs 109–112).

Mixed Systems

68. Parallel systems use both a PR element and a plurality/majority (or other) element running independently of each other. Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems also use two elements (one of which is a PR system), with the difference that the PR element compensates for any disproportionality arising under the plurality/majority or other system, normally leading to a much more proportional outcome than a Parallel system. Parallel and MMP systems have been widely adopted by new democracies in Africa and the former Soviet Union (see paragraphs 128–137).

Other Systems

69. Three systems do not fit neatly under any one of the above-mentioned categories. The Single Non-Transferable Vote is a multi-member-district, candidate-centred system in which voters have one vote. Limited Vote is very much like SNTV but gives voters more than one vote (however, unlike Block Vote, not as many as there are seats to be filled). Borda Count is a preferential system in single- or multi-member districts (see paragraphs 138–144).

70. As Table 2 and the map which comes with this book illustrate, just under half (91, or 46 per cent of the total) of the 199 countries and territories of the world which have direct elections to the legislature use plurality/majority systems; another 72 (36 per cent) use PR-type systems; 30 (15 per cent) use mixed systems; and only six (3 per cent) use one of the other systems. When the different systems are classified by population size, the dominance of plurality/majority systems becomes even more pronounced, with legislatures elected by FPTP, Block Vote, PBV, AV or TRS methods representing collectively 2.65 billion people (54 per cent of the total population of these 199 countries). PR electoral systems are used in countries totalling 1.19 billion inhabitants, mixed systems are used to represent 1.07 billion people, and the population in countries using other systems is only 34 million.

Table 2: Electoral Systems for National Legislatures

	Number of Countries/Territories		Total Population		Established Democracies		Population		New Democracies		Population		Other Countries		Population	
	1		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11				
FPTP	47	23.6%	2 148 870 177	43.5%	22	32.4%	1 458 403 073	70.3%	4	13.0%	205 865	0.1%	21	21.0%	690 261 239	27.0%
BV	15	7.5%	32 102 545	0.6%	8	11.8%	1 515 622	0.1%	0	0	0	0	7	7.0%	30 586 923	1.2%
PBV	4	2.0%	30 423 015	0.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4.0%	30 423 015	1.2%
AV	3	1.5%	26 214 298	0.5%	2	2.9%	25 333 424	1.2%	0	0	0	0	1	1.0%	880 874	0.0%
TRS	22	11.1%	409 376 918	8.3%	3	4.4%	60 534 006	2.9%	2	6.5%	14708 102	4.8%	17	17.0%	334 134 810	13.1%
List PR	70	35.2%	1 181 718 922	23.9%	21	30.9%	195 051 175	9.4%	19	61.3%	168 528 219	55.0%	30	30.0%	818 139 528	32.5%
STV	2	1.0%	4 366 409	0.1%	2	2.9%	4 366 409	0.2%	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0	0
MMP	9	4.5%	298 619 263	6.0%	4	5.9%	153 200 059	7.4%	1	3.2%	10 032 375	3.3%	4	4.0%	135 386 829	5.3%
Parallel	21	10.6%	773 091 334	15.7%	2	2.9%	175 931 177	8.5%	5	16.1%	112 701 569	36.8%	14	14.0%	484 458 588	18.9%
SNTV	4	2.0%	34 327 534	0.7%	2	2.9%	202 655	0.0%	0	0	0	0	2	2.0%	34 124 879	1.3%
Modified BC	1	0.5%	12 809	0.0%	1	1.5%	12 809	0.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0	0
LV	1	0.5%	27 833	0.0%	1	1.5%	27 833	0.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0	0
Total	199		4 939 151 057		68		2 074 578 242		31		306 176 130		100		2 558 396 685	

Note: As of November 2004. Includes only elections to national legislatures and lower houses. Based on the methodology used by Arend Lijphart in *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (1999). ‘Established democracies’ include all countries considered democratic now, and at least for the last 20 years, ‘new democracies’ include all countries that are considered democratic now and have been at least for the past 10 years, and ‘others’ are the ones which have not been considered democratic throughout the past 10 years by the Freedom House country ratings (2004) (see <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>>). For countries and territories not included in the Freedom House country ratings (countries with a population less than 250,000) we have based our classifications on other sources. Fourteen countries are not included in this table because they do not have direct elections or have transitional governments. Countries which use two electoral systems running side by side (hybrids) are classified by the system under which the largest number of seats in the legislature is elected.

- 1 = Percentage of the 199 countries covered that have this type of electoral system.
- 2 = Percentage of the total population of the 199 countries that live in this type of electoral system.
- 3 = Number of countries/territories.
- 4 = Percentage of the established democracies that have this type of electoral system.
- 5 = Percentage of the population in the established democracies that live in this type of electoral system.
- 6 = Number of countries/territories.
- 7 = Percentage of the new democracies that have this type of electoral system.
- 8 = Percentage of the population in the new democracies that live in this type of electoral system.
- 9 = Number of countries/territories.

10 = Percentage of the 'other' countries that have this type of electoral system.

11 = Percentage of the population in the 'other' countries that live in this type of electoral system.

Sources: International IDEA databases; for the classification of democracies, Freedom House country ratings, <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>>; and, for population, US Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook* and additional estimates for countries and territories not included in the Factbook.

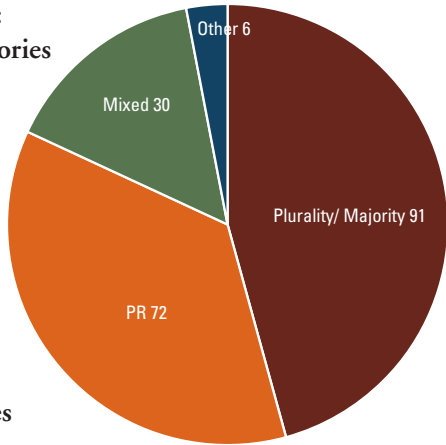
71. In terms of the number of countries which use them, List PR systems are the most popular, with 70 out of 199 countries and related territories, giving them 35 per cent of the total, followed by the 47 cases of FPTP systems (24 per cent of the 199 countries and territories). When it comes to numbers of people, however, FPTP systems are used in countries which contain almost twice as many people as List PR countries. The 2.1 billion figure in Table 2 is inflated by the size of India (population 1.1 billion) and the United States (293 million), but FPTP is also used by many tiny Caribbean and Oceanian islands as well. The largest country that uses List PR is Indonesia, with 238 million people, but it is predominantly a system used by middle-sized West European, Latin American and African countries. Next in order are Parallel systems (16 per cent of world population) and Two-Round systems (8 per cent of world population). While TRS systems are used in more countries, therefore, Parallel systems represent more people. This is largely because the Russian Federation (144 million inhabitants) and Japan (127 million) use classic Parallel systems.

Table 3: The Distribution of Electoral Systems across National Legislatures

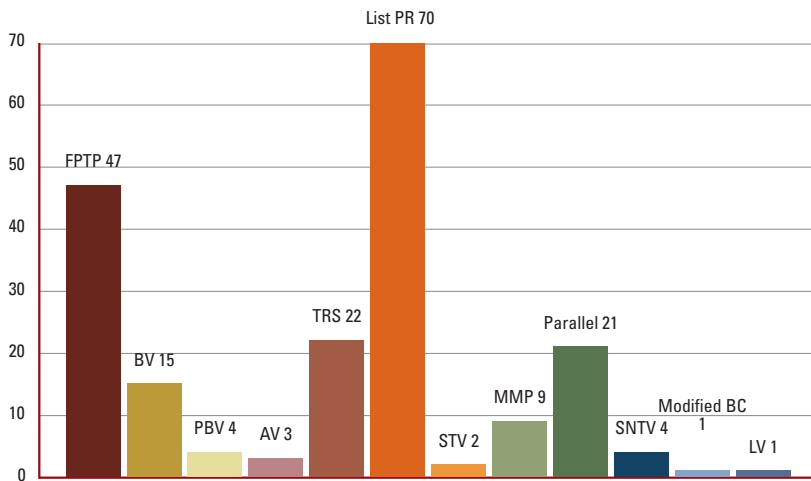
	Africa	Americas	Asia	Eastern Europe	Western Europe	Oceania	Middle East	Total
FPTP	15	17	5	0	1	7	2	47
BV	1	3	2	0	3	2	4	15
PBV	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
AV	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
TRS	8	3	6	1	1	1	2	22
List PR	16	19	3	13	15	0	4	70
STV	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
MMP	1	3	0	2	2	1	0	9
Parallel	4	0	8	7	1	1	0	21
SNTV	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	4
BC	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
LV	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	48	45	26	23	26	18	13	199

Note: As of 2004. Includes only elections to national legislatures; for countries with bicameral legislatures, system for the lower house.

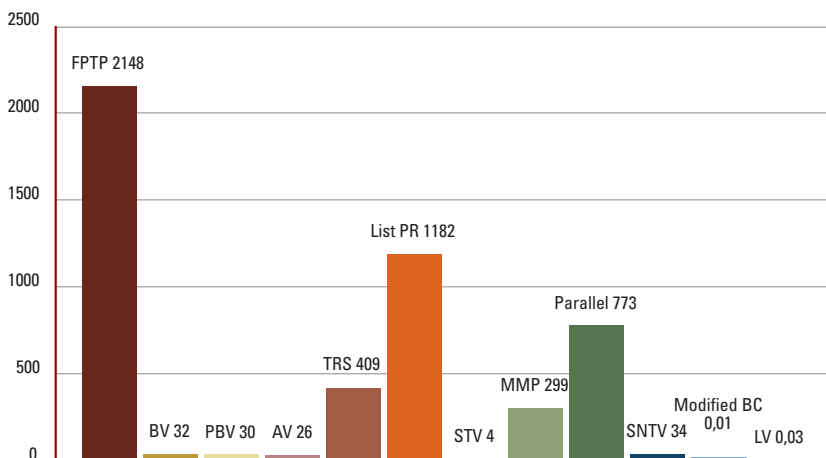
Figure 2: Electoral System Families:
1 - Number of Countries and Territories



2 - Electoral Systems:
Number of Countries and Territories



3 - Total population (in millions)



72. The Block Vote is used in 15 countries and territories, 8 per cent of the countries included, but its 32 million people only represent 0.7 per cent of the total population of the 199 countries in Table 2. Conversely, Mixed Member Proportional systems are used in only nine countries—Albania, Bolivia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lesotho, Mexico, New Zealand and Venezuela—but their collective population of 299 million represents 6 per cent of the total population. The Single Transferable Vote, Limited Vote, Modified Borda Count, Alternative Vote, Party Block Vote and Single Non-Transferable Vote systems are the rarest electoral systems in use today, with only one to four examples of each. The use of AV in Australia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea means that 26 million people live under AV systems, while the SNTV systems of Afghanistan, Jordan, the Pitcairn Islands and Vanuatu represent 34 million people, and the Republic of Ireland and Malta's STV systems 4 million.

73. If we look at electoral systems in 'established democracies', then we find that PR systems are more numerous, with 21 (31 per cent) out of the 68 countries, but the size of India and the United States still means that 70 per cent of people living in these 68 countries live under FPTP systems. There are a disproportionate number of MMP systems among established democracies—6 per cent of the total, while worldwide MMP systems are found in only 4.5 per cent of all countries. Both the world's examples of STV, the Republic of Ireland and Malta, fall into the category of established democracies.

74. Across continents, the distribution of electoral systems is more mixed. As Table 3 and the attached map show, FPTP systems make up approximately 35 per cent of the total in Africa, the Americas and Oceania. The system is less common in Europe, Asia and Middle East. List PR systems are similarly spread throughout Africa and the Americas. However, List PR is more dominant in both Eastern and Western Europe, and together the two PR systems (List PR and STV) constitute almost two-thirds of all electoral systems in Europe. The Parallel System is primarily used in Asia and Eastern Europe.