



# Electoral System Design Database Codebook





# **Electoral System Design Database Codebook**

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

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Design and layout: International IDEA  
Cover illustration: © 123RF, <http://www.123rf.com>

ISBN: 978-91-7671-208-5

Created with Booktype: <https://www.booktype.pro>

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# Introduction

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The choice of electoral system is one of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy.

In almost all cases the choice of a particular electoral system has a profound effect on the future political life of the country concerned, and electoral systems, once chosen, often remain fairly constant as political interests solidify around and respond to the incentives presented by them. The choices made may have consequences that were unforeseen, as well as predicted effects.

Electoral systems can also have a significant impact on the wider political and institutional framework. Their design and effects are heavily contingent upon other structures within and outside the constitution. Successful electoral system design comes from looking at the framework of political institutions as a whole: changing one part of this framework is likely to cause adjustments in the way other institutions within it work.

This Codebook provides detailed explanations of the variables and answer options in International IDEA's Electoral System Design Database (ESD Database).

## **Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook**

The initial global data for the ESD Database was collected during the content development phase for the publication *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis 2005).

The Handbook provides a comprehensive overview of the electoral systems in use in more than 200 countries and includes 18 case studies as well as a map showing where the various electoral systems are used. It discusses the advantages

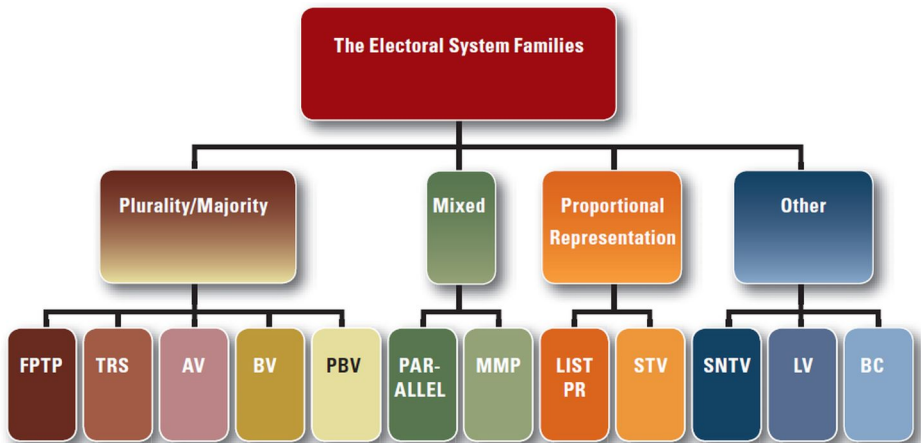
and disadvantages of different electoral systems (see Figure 1), and the factors to consider when modifying or designing an electoral system. The Handbook is widely referenced in the research and practitioners' communities and has been translated into a number of languages.

The creation of the Handbook involved many people. A group of researchers conducted desk research to review the electoral legislation of countries around the world. National legal documents were compiled from different sources, including the official web portals of governments, regional organizations that work in the area of democracy and electoral processes, and research institutes specialized in the area of elections and politics in general.

In a few cases, when legal documents on elections-related issues were not available for some countries, the researchers contacted the national electoral management body (EMB) of those countries in order to obtain the necessary data. These data were then analysed and informed decisions were made on the electoral system design of each country as well as other related information provided in the Handbook.

The dataset created for the Handbook was later transferred online to International IDEA's Global Database on Elections and Democracy, a compilation of key databases brought together under one interface, and since then the content has been continually updated. In the past two years, historical data has been added to the ESD Database dating back to 1991.

Figure 1. Electoral system families



Source: Reynolds, A., Reilly, B. and Ellis, A., *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005), p. 28.



## About the Electoral System Design Database

The ESD Database provides global comparative data on six variables for the period from 1991 to present. The data is updated after every parliamentary election held in the countries covered by the Database. For a more comprehensive review of the variables in the ESD Database see Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis (2005).

The main difference between the ESD historical data and other similar datasets is its country coverage. The Database provides comparative data on 217 countries and territories. Another distinct feature of the ESD Database is that it provides sources for each data point, which users can access by clicking on the data.

The sources are normally quotes from countries' electoral legislation on electoral systems. In cases where the electoral legislation was inaccessible, secondary sources have been used. In many cases the Database provides additional in-depth information on electoral systems, which can be accessed in the Comments section of each data point.

## Updates to the Database

The ESD Database is continuously updated after every parliamentary (lower house) election held in the countries covered by the Database. The updates are made by reading the most recent version of the electoral legislation.

International IDEA invites researchers and practitioners working in the area of elections to contribute to the update of the ESD Database. If users note that the Database has missing data, or if they find data that is incorrect, missing sources or requires more explanation, they can use the online form in the 'Submit feedback' section. International IDEA will review the submission as soon as possible and update the Database if the data suggested is correct.

# Variables used in the ESD Database



<b>Variable name</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	Lists the names of the countries or territories for which data on electoral system design is provided.
<b>Answer options</b>	Country name (text)

<b>Variable name</b>	<b>Year</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	<p>The year in which the legislative elections (to the lower house) took place. This should not be understood as the year in which the electoral law providing for the electoral system was enacted or changed, but rather as the year when the law was implemented in elections. For example, Italy's recent reform of the electoral system was enacted in 2017 (Rosatellum law, 3 November 2017). However, the ESD Database has recorded the data for 2018, when this change was implemented in the Italian parliamentary elections held on 4 March 2018.</p> <p>Note: Since presidential and legislative elections take place in different years in some countries, the 'Year' variable may not apply in those cases to the variable 'Electoral system for presidential elections'. The year in which presidential elections took place can be obtained from the International IDEA Voter Turnout Database.</p>
<b>Answer options</b>	Year





<b>Variable name</b>	<b>Electoral system family</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	<p>A large number of electoral systems are currently in use around the world and there are many permutations of each form. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, International IDEA has categorized electoral systems into three broad families:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plurality/majority systems</li> <li>2. Proportional representation (PR) systems</li> <li>3. Mixed systems</li> </ol> <p>However, some electoral systems do not fit into any particular family. These are single non-transferable vote (SNTV), limited vote (LV) and Borda Count (BC) systems (see Figure 1 and the variable ‘Electoral system for the national legislature’ for further details).</p>
<b>Answer options</b>	<p><b>Plurality/majority</b> Plurality/majority systems are based on the principle that a candidate(s) or party with a plurality of votes (i.e. more than any other) or a majority of votes (i.e. 50 per cent plus one—an absolute majority) is/are declared the winner(s). Such a system may use single-member districts (e.g. first-past-the-post, alternative vote or the two-round system) or multi-member districts (e.g. the block vote and party block vote systems).</p> <p><b>PR</b> PR is an electoral system family based on the principle of the conscious translation of the votes for a party or grouping into a corresponding proportion of seats in an elected body. For example, a party that wins 30 per cent of the votes will receive approximately 30 per cent of the seats. All PR systems require the use of multi-member districts. There are two major types of PR system: list PR and the single transferable vote (STV) system.</p> <p><b>Mixed</b> A mixed system is one in which the choices expressed by voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems: one PR system and one plurality/majority system. There are two kinds of mixed system: parallel systems and mixed-member proportional systems.</p> <p><b>Other</b> This answer option refers to other electoral systems that do not fit into any of the above three families.</p> <p><b>In transition</b> This answer option indicates that a country’s political system is in transition and that it therefore does not have an electoral system clearly defined in law, or electoral law exists but a country has not yet held elections under that law.</p> <p><b>Not applicable</b> This answer option indicates that the country does not hold direct elections to elect the national legislature.</p>

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Electoral system for the national legislature</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	In simple terms, the electoral system refers to the way in which votes are translated into seats in parliament. Essentially, there are 12 main electoral systems, the majority of which fall into three broad families (see Figure 1 and the variable 'Electoral system family' for further details). This variable shows the electoral system for the national legislature; if a country has two chambers (e.g. a Senate and a National Assembly), the data are for the lower house only.
<b>Answer options</b>	<p><b>AV (alternative vote)</b> AV is a preferential plurality/majority system used in single-member districts. Voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper. A candidate who receives an absolute majority (50 per cent plus 1) of valid first preference votes is declared elected. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority of first preferences, the least successful candidates are eliminated and their votes reallocated according to their second preferences until one candidate has an absolute majority. Voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.</p> <p><b>BC (Borda count)</b> BC is a candidate-centred preferential system used in either single- or multi-member districts in which voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper and each preference marked is then assigned a value using equal steps. These are summed and the candidate(s) with the highest total(s) is/are declared elected.</p> <p><b>BV (block vote)</b> BV is a plurality/majority system used in multi-member districts. Electors have as many votes as there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals win the seats. Voters usually vote for candidates rather than parties and in most systems may use as many, or as few, of their votes as they wish.</p> <p><b>FPTP (first-past-the-post)</b> FPTP is the simplest form of plurality/majority electoral system. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not an absolute majority of valid votes. The system uses single-member districts and the voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.</p> <p><b>List PR (list proportional representation)</b> Under a List PR system each party or grouping presents a list of candidates for a multi-member electoral district, the voters vote for a party, and parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the vote. In some (closed list) systems the winning candidates are taken from the list in order of their position on the list. If the lists are 'open' or 'free' the voters can influence the order of the candidates by marking individual preferences.</p> <p><b>LV (limited vote)</b> LV is a candidate-centred electoral system used in multi-member districts in which electors have more than one vote, but fewer votes than there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest number of votes win the seats.</p> <p><b>MMP (mixed member proportional)</b> MMP is a mixed system in which the choices expressed by the voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems—one List PR system and (usually) one plurality/majority system—where the List PR system compensates for the disproportionality in the results from the plurality/majority system.</p>

**Parallel**

A Parallel system is a mixed system in which the choices expressed by the voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems—one List PR system and (usually) one plurality/majority system—but where no account is taken of the seats allocated under the first system in calculating the results of the second system.

**PBV (party block vote)**

PBV is a plurality/majority system that uses multi-member districts in which voters cast a single party-centred vote for their party of choice, and do not choose between candidates. The party with the most votes will win every seat in the electoral district.

**STV (single transferable vote)**

STV is a preferential system in which the voter has one vote in a multi-member district and the candidates that surpass a specified quota of first preference votes are immediately elected. In successive counts, votes are redistributed from least successful candidates, who are eliminated, and votes surplus to the quota are redistributed from successful candidates until sufficient candidates are declared elected. Voters normally vote for candidates rather than political parties, although a party-list option is possible.

**SNTV (single non-transferable vote)**

Under the SNTV system voters cast a single vote in a multi-member district. The candidates with the highest vote totals are declared elected. Voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

**TRS (two-round system)**

The TRS is a plurality/majority system in which a second election is held if no candidate or party achieves a given level of votes, most commonly an absolute majority (50 per cent plus one), in the first round. A TRS may take a majority-plurality form—where more than two candidates contest the second round and the one who wins the highest number of votes in the second round is elected, regardless of whether they have won an absolute majority—or a majority run-off form, where only the top two candidates in the first round contest the second round.

**In transition**

This answer indicates that a country's political system is in transition and thus does not have an electoral system clearly defined in law, or electoral law exists but a country has not yet held elections under it.

**No direct elections**

This answer indicates that the country does not hold direct elections to elect the national legislature.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number of tiers</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	<p>The tiers of an electoral system can be understood as the sets of representatives that are elected to the same chamber by the entire electorate of a country.</p> <p>Many electoral systems, both plurality/majority and proportional, have a single tier of representation. Each voter in the country votes once and there is one set of elected representatives. In mixed systems, there are usually two tiers of representatives, those elected under the plurality/majority system and those elected under the proportional system. It is also possible for an electoral system to have two tiers without being mixed in character.</p> <p>Two-tier proportional systems may have both national and regional lists. In the two-tier plurality/majority system, there are representatives elected from single-member districts using FPTP and representatives elected from specific parts of the country using a Block Vote.</p> <p>Electoral systems with two or more tiers should be distinguished from hybrid systems, in which one part of the country elects its representatives using one electoral system and another distinct part of the country elects representatives using a different system. For a detailed explanation of electoral system tiers see <i>Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook</i> (2005: 118–19).</p>
<b>Answer options</b>	<p><b>1</b> The country's electoral system has 1 tier.</p> <p><b>2</b> The country's electoral system has 2 tiers.</p> <p><b>3</b> The country's electoral system has 3 tiers.</p> <p><b>H</b> Indicates a hybrid system, where one part of the country elects representatives using one electoral system, while another distinct part of the country elects representatives using a different system.</p>

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Legislature size (directly elected)</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	Total number of directly elected representatives, excluding those appointed or indirectly elected.
<b>Answer options</b>	Number

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Legislature size (voting members)</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	Total number of directly elected representatives, including those appointed or indirectly elected.
<b>Answer options</b>	Number

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Electoral system for presidential elections</b>
<b>Explanation</b>	Electoral system used to directly elect the president of a country.
<b>Answer options</b>	<p><b>FPTP (first-past-the-post)</b> FPTP is the simplest form of plurality/majority electoral system. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not an absolute majority of valid votes.</p> <p><b>STV (single transferable vote)</b> STV is a preferential system in which the voter has one vote in a multi-member district and the candidate who surpasses a specified quota of first preference votes is immediately elected. In successive counts, votes are redistributed from the least successful candidates, who are eliminated.</p> <p><b>TRS (two-round system)</b> The TRS is a plurality/majority system in which a second election is held if no candidate achieves a given level of votes, most commonly an absolute majority (50 per cent plus one), in the first round. A TRS may take a majority-plurality form—more than two candidates contest the second round and the one who wins the highest number of votes in the second round is elected, regardless of whether they have won an absolute majority—or a majority run-off form—only the top two candidates in the first round contest the second round.</p> <p><b>Not applicable</b> Answer indicates that the country does not hold direct elections to elect a president.</p> <p><b>Other</b> Answer indicates that the country has a system other than FPTP, STV and TRS, or its political system is undergoing a transition.</p>

## Further reading

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Catt, H. et al, *Electoral Management Design: Revised Edition* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2014), <<https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-management-design-revised-edition?lang=en>>, accessed 23 August 2018

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Reynolds, A., Reilly, B. and Ellis, A., *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005), <<https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-system-design-new-international-idea-handbook?lang=en>>, accessed 23 August 2018

## About International IDEA

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The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

### What do we do?

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work. We provide analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produce comparative knowledge on good international democratic practices; offer technical assistance and capacity-building on democratic reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convene dialogues on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

### Where do we work?

Our headquarters is located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

<<http://www.idea.int>>

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International IDEA's Electoral System Design Database provides global comparative data on six variables for the period from 1991 to present. This Codebook provides detailed explanations of the variables and answer options in the Database.

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ISBN: 978-91-7671-208-5 (PDF)