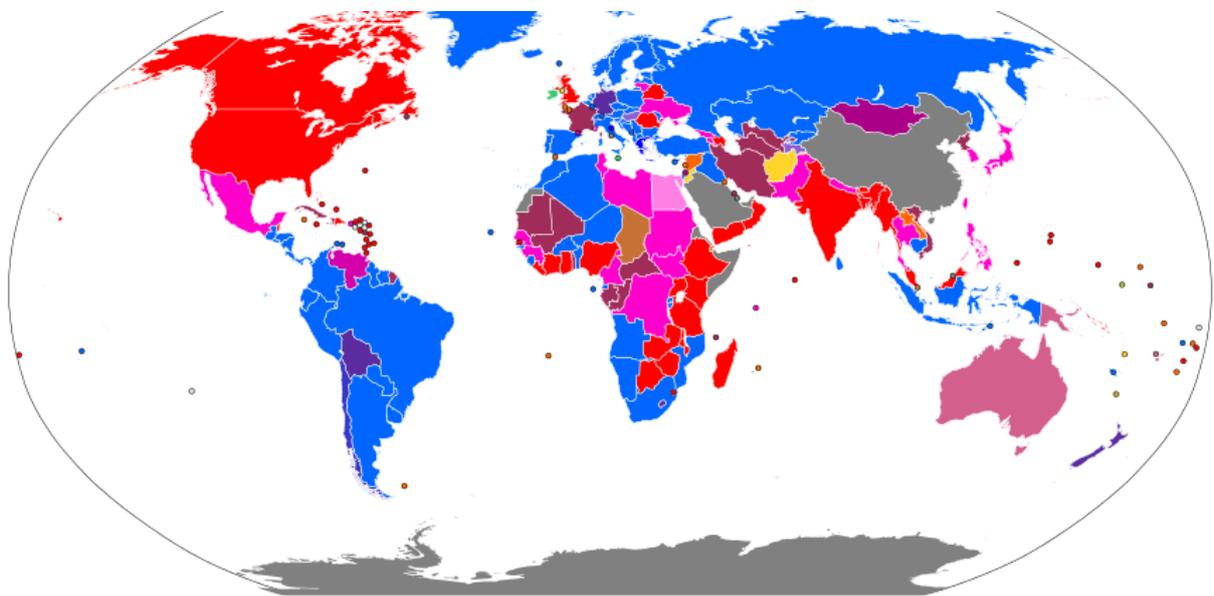


Electoral Systems

1. Comparative data - a starting view

Some organizations present comparative data on electoral systems all over the world - see for instance ACE, an electoral knowledge network¹, or the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). The following figure originates from IDEA.²

Figure 1: Electoral systems map for lower house elections³



Legend:

Single-member constituencies:

- [First past the post](#) (FPTP)
- [Two-round system](#) (TRS)
- [Instant-runoff voting](#) (IRV)

Multi-member constituencies, majoritarian:

- [Majority bonus system](#) (MBS)

¹ <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/es10>

² <http://www.idea.int/esd/world.cfm>

³ Information sources: Table of voting systems by nation, Table of Electoral Systems Worldwide, 16 July 2012, in: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Electoral_systems_map.svg

-  [Block voting](#) (BV) or mixed FPTP and BV
-  [Party block voting](#) (PBV) or mixed FPTP and PBV
-  [Single non-transferable vote](#) (SNTV) or mixed FPTP and SNTV
-  Modified [cumulative voting](#)
-  Modified [Borda count](#)

Multi-member constituencies, [proportional](#):

-  [Party-list proportional representation](#) (party-list PR)
-  [Binomial system](#)
-  [Single transferable vote](#)

Mixed majoritarian and proportional:

-  [Mixed-member proportional representation](#) (party-list PR and FPTP)
-  Mixed-member proportional representation (party-list PR and TRS)
-  [Parallel voting](#) (party-list PR and FPTP)
-  Parallel voting (party-list PR and TRS)
-  Parallel voting (party-list PR and BV or PBV)
-  Parallel voting (party-list PR and SNTV)
-  No direct elections
-  No information

Accordingly, **party-list proportional representation** (blue) and **first past the post** (red) are the dominating electoral systems, complemented by **parallel voting** (pink), **two-round system** (dark pink), and some other systems of lower significance. ACE establishes the following percentages: *List proportional representation* exhibits the highest numeric value with 36.3% of all electoral systems. *Plurality systems (FPTP)* cover 26.4% of all systems, followed by *Parallel* (14.1%) and some other systems, such as *Two-Round-System*, *Block Vote*, *Mixed Member Proportional*, and *Single Non-Transferable Vote*.

This inductive way of approaching renders an initial impression and some associations. In order to understand electoral systems, however, the used abbreviations have to be outlined. And electoral systems have to be classified according to overarching criteria of comparison.

2. Criteria of classification

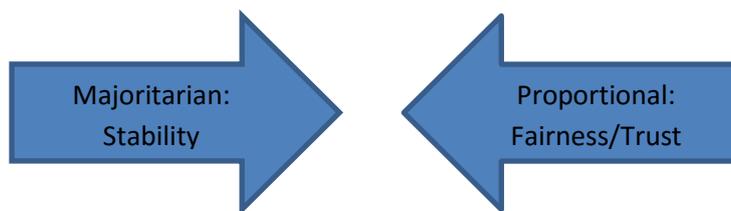
Any electoral system can be fully understood only in its specific context of historic and current preconditions. Combined with this case-specific way of scrutiny, two overarching criteria are helpful for conducting a substantiate analysis, proportionality and personalization. Additionally further criteria, such as transparency and complexity, may be exerted.

2.1 Proportionality

Since elections are a means of representation, it is crucial how proportionally votes are transferred into parliamentary mandates. In contrast to a widespread opinion, there is a fundamental quarrel about the optimal degree of proportionality:

- According to one leading idea, electoral systems are conceived of as a means of democratic stability. Proportionality of electoral systems, therefore, should be **limited** in order to foster the forming of governmental majorities, the **majoritarian view**.
- According to the counter position, votes should be transferred into mandates **as proportionally as possible**. Here electoral systems are conceived of as a means of democratic representation, fostering the trust in a fair system, a **proportional view** (see the following figure 1).

Figure 1: *The majoritarian and the proportional view*



Both points of view are reasonable because both, the practical formation of a stable government and trust in fair representation, make democracy function. And in general there are different interests that strengthen this or that. That's why we encounter a broad variety of electoral systems between pure majoritarian and pure proportional thinking.

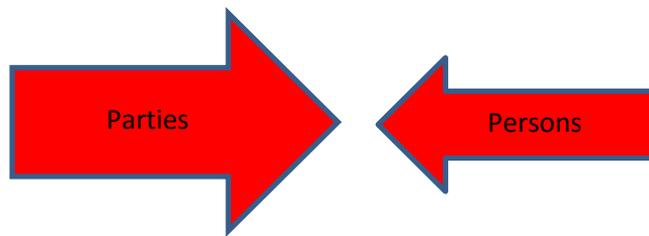
2.2 Personalization

Different points of view also regard the favoring of persons respectively parties: Individual persons represent the variety of opinions and individual human rights best. So far democratic institutions should constitute a forum of individuals' arguments, and electoral systems should favor personalized ways of active and passive voting.

While this individual active voting is meanwhile generally accepted, the **optimal weight of personalization is open with regard to passive voting**: Beyond little communal entities, a nothing but individual representation (by hundreds of deputies) does not give sufficient orientation to the voters, and collective decision-making would become chaotic or completely impossible. That's why

political parties have developed to represent cleavages of voters and to enable reasonable ways of political decision-making.

Figure 2: *Parties or Persons? (Personalization of passive voting)*



Any organization, on the other side, implies the risk of subduing legitimate individual interests and opinions. Insofar the favoring of parties and the favoring of individual persons conflict with each other. Because parties dominate meanwhile, it is the question how far persons (at all) are electable in an electoral system (*Personalization*/see figure 2).

2.3 Further criteria

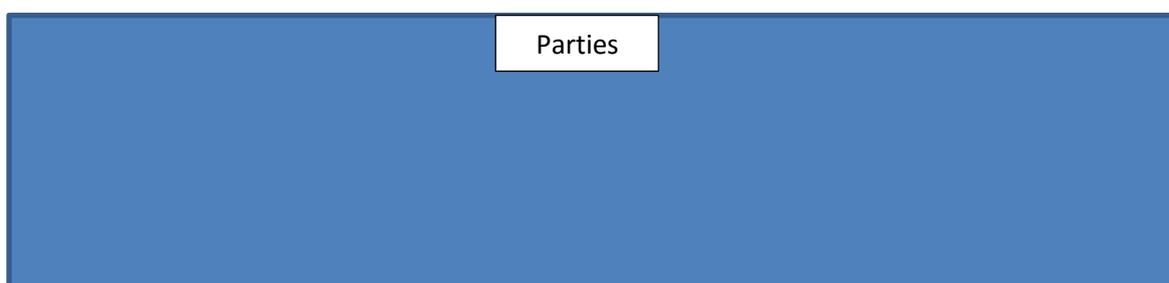
Aside of the two presented crucial features, a) the relationship between majoritarian and proportional structuring, and b) the degree of personalization, further aspects can play a supplementing role in debates on electoral systems.

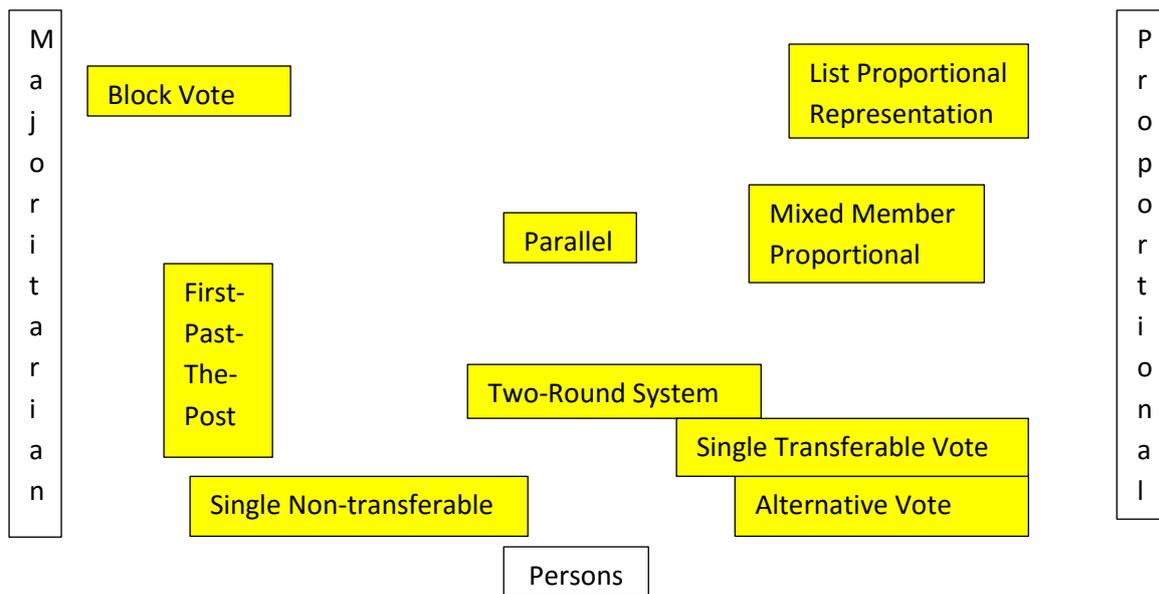
An aspect that usually gains exceeding importance is **given traditions**: If any involved actor may refer his ideas to concretely given traditions, he or she has a big advantage over all other arguments; since electoral systems are last but not least an institution of trust - and nothing might produce trust as much as long experience or routine. Other aspects are simplicity respectively **transparency versus (over-)complexity with non-transparency**: Electoral systems vary with regard to this aspect to a significant degree. Practical experiences, indeed, show that involved actors very often do not favor particularly simple and transparent electoral systems - be it because they are afraid of being observed in a too plain way, be it because electoral systems usually are produced as a compromise between different normative concepts - an compromises are often complex and non-transparent.

3. An overview of electoral system types

Starting from the outlined main criteria (majoritarian versus proportional, parties versus persons), I locate the initially presented types of electoral systems as follows (figure 3).

Figure 3: *Overview of electoral systems*





Plurality: First-Past-The-Post

In single winner plurality voting (FPTP), each voter is allowed to vote for only one candidate, and the winner of the election is whoever received the largest number of votes. In an election for a legislative body, each voter in a given geographically-defined electoral district votes for one candidate from a list of candidates competing to represent that district. Under the plurality system, the winner of the election acts as representative of the entire electoral district, and serves with representatives of other electoral districts. In an election for a single seat, such as president in a presidential system, the same style of ballot is used and the candidate who receives the largest number of votes represents the entire population.

The system constitutes the **ideal-type of a majoritarian electoral system** because already getting a relative majority of votes (in American: Plurality) is enough to represent all voters in a constituency - an extreme form of institutionally produced majority-building. So when a candidate wins the seat with 25% of all votes, 75% of all votes are lost - an extremely disproportional way of transferring votes into mandates...

Starting from newer experiences in Great Britain and the U.S., Duverger has taken the theory that constituencies that use first-past-the-post systems will **have a two-party system**, given enough time. This theory, however, is only logical if there are similar majority preconditions throughout the whole country. In a country, such as India, with very different regions and parties,

FPTP leads to a multi-party parliament including very small parties - just the contrary of what Duverger said.

FPTP seems to be a clearly **personalized electoral system** because it is about electing single persons. The opportunities to select certain persons, on the other side, are insofar **limited** as usually certain personal candidates stand for certain parties. The voter is not entitled to select one candidate out of different candidates of one party. To put it in other words: Usually the electable candidates of all parties are predetermined - by the parties or other entities. That's why the competence of personalization by the voter is limited.

The system is **simply manageable** for voters and vote counting officials; it is however very **contentious to draw district boundary lines** in this system because little changes of those lines may lead to a complete change of relative majorities (pluralities) resulting in a changed party belonging of the mandate.

Single nontransferable vote

Single non-transferable vote or SNTV is an electoral system used in multi-member constituency elections. In any election, each voter casts one vote for one candidate in a multi-candidate race for multiple offices. Posts are filled by the candidates with the most votes. Thus, in a three-seat constituency, the three candidates receiving the largest numbers of votes would win office.

Example

There are three seats to be filled and five candidates: A, B, C, D and E.

Votes	Candidate	Party
819	A	X
1,804	B	Y
1,996	C	Z
1,999	D	Z
2,718	E	Y

C, D and E are the winning candidates. This breaks down by party as:

Party	Votes	Percent	Seats
Y	4,639	51	1

Z	3,995	44	2
X	819	9	0

Party Y has more votes than Party Z, but fewer seats because of an inefficient spread of votes across the candidates.

The potential for tactical voting in a single non-transferable vote system is large. Receiving only one vote, the rational voter must only vote for a candidate that has a chance of winning, but will not win by too great a margin, thus taking votes away from party colleagues. If many voters fail inefficiently, results as the presented above may come into existence. Aside of those special preconditions, SNTV electoral systems typically produce more proportional electoral outcomes as the number of seats in each constituency increases.⁴

Block Vote

Plurality-at-large voting, also known as block vote or multiple non-transferable vote (MNTV), is a non-proportional voting system. In such a system, each party introduces a list of candidates and the **party winning a plurality of votes wins all the seats**. If a country is divided in some multi-member electoral districts, the system is commonly referred to as block voting or bloc vote. Although multiple winners are elected simultaneously, block voting is not a system for obtaining proportional representation; instead, the usual result is that the **largest single group wins every seat** by electing a slate of candidates, resulting in a landslide.

The system can be understood as an **artificial pushing up of the plurality** system: Not only one candidate winning a relative majority (plurality) gets the seat; here a party (bloc) winning a relative majority gets all seats in a multi-member-constituency. Operating with (party) blocks, the system is far from personal election. As in the case of FPTP, elections are easily manageable for voters and counting bodies, but contentious in drawing demarcations of constituencies.

List Proportional Representation

A family of voting systems emphasizing proportional representation (PR) is party list proportional representative systems. These systems operate with

⁴ Source: Single non-transferable Vote, in: Wikipedia, December 05, 2014: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_non-transferable_vote

elections in which multiple candidates are elected (e.g. elections to parliament) through allocations to an electoral list. Parties make lists of candidates to be elected, and seats get allocated to each party in proportion to the number of votes the party receives. Voters may vote directly for the party or for candidates whose vote total will pool to the party, or for a list of candidates. The order in which a party's list candidates get elected may be pre-determined by some method internal to the party or the candidates (a closed list system) or it may be determined by the voters at large (an open list system) or by districts (a local list system).

Many variations on seat allocation within party-list proportional representation exist. Exceedingly important is the district magnitude (number of seats in a constituency): The higher the district magnitude, the more proportional an electoral system becomes - the most proportional being when there is no division into constituencies at all and the entire country is treated as a single constituency. Of complementary significance are different allocation formulas.

Electoral systems of party list proportional representation are often operationalized with percent thresholds for allocating seats. By that, risks of having too many and too small parties in parliament are reduced. Therefore LPR systems are to be classified as proportional with more or less limits and party-oriented.

Two-Round Systems

The two-round system (also known as the second ballot or runoff voting) is best known from France. Aside of single usages in parliamentary elections, it is used around the world for direct elections of presidents. The voter casts a single vote for his/her chosen candidate. However, if no candidate receives the required number of votes (usually an absolute majority), then those candidates having less than a certain proportion of the votes, or all but the two candidates receiving the most votes, are eliminated, and a second round of voting occurs, resulting in a winner of an absolute majority.

This type of voting seems to be a majoritarian system because of the requirement to reach an absolute majority. But in contrast to plurality systems, two-round systems produce absolute majorities of real votes, either in the first round or in the second one. That's why they are more proportional than plurality systems. Additionally they are highly personalized.

Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)

Mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) is a voting system originally used to elect representatives to the German Bundestag, which has now been adopted by some other legislatures around the world. MMP is similar to other forms of proportional representation (PR) in that the overall total of party members in the elected body is intended to mirror the overall proportion of votes received; it differs by including a set of members elected by geographic constituency who are subtracted from the party totals so as to maintain overall proportionality. In Germany, these constituencies are plurality constituencies and send the half of all deputies to parliament. Hence MMP, in Germany known as Personalized Proportional Representation, comprises two different principles, plurality within the direct constituencies (the half of all deputies) and proportionality regarding the whole parliament. In sum MMP can be categorized as predominantly proportional and predominantly party-oriented.

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

Single Transferable Vote is a voting system designed to achieve proportional representation through ranked voting in multi-seat constituencies. It is used in the Republic of Ireland and many other national and local entities under British influence.

Under the system, an elector has a single vote that is initially allocated to their most preferred candidate and, as the count proceeds and candidates are either elected or eliminated, is transferred to other candidates according to the voter's stated preferences, in proportion to any surplus or discarded votes. The exact method of reapportioning votes can vary. STV provides approximately proportional representation, enables votes to be cast for individual candidates rather than for closed party lists, and minimizes wasted votes by transferring votes to other candidates that would otherwise be wasted on sure losers or sure winners. That's why, in figure 3, the system is classified as proportional and persons-oriented.

Alternative Vote, also known as **Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)**, is a special case of the single transferable vote system. It is used to elect members of the Australian House of Representatives and most Australian State Governments, the President of India, members of legislative councils in India, the President of Ireland, the parliament in Papua New Guinea, in Northern Ireland by-elections, for electing hereditary peers for the British House of Lords, and many local usages in countries with historical British influence.

Unlike the single transferable vote in multi-seat elections, the only ballot transfers are from backers of candidates who have been eliminated. IRV is used to elect a single winner from a field of more than two candidates: Ballots are initially distributed based on each elector's first preference. If a candidate secures more than half of votes cast, that candidate wins. Otherwise, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Ballots assigned to the eliminated candidate are recounted and assigned to those of the remaining candidates who rank next in order of preference on each ballot. This process continues until one candidate wins by obtaining more than half the votes.

Alternative (Instant Runoff) Voting implies the need for electors to vote strategically for candidates who are not their first choice. For example; suppose there are two similar party candidates A & B, and a third opposing candidate C, with raw popularity of 35%, 25% and 40% respectively. In a plurality voting system candidate C may win with 40% of the votes, even though most electors prefer A and B over less popular candidate C. Alternatively, voters are pressured to choose the likely stronger candidate of either A or B, despite personal preference for the other, in order to help ensure defeat of C. It is often the resulting situation that candidate A or B would never get to ballot, whereas voters would be presented a two candidate choice. With IRV, the elector can allocate their preferences B, A, C and then A will win despite the split vote in first choices.⁵

The system is, as Single Transferable Vote, to classify as proportional and persons-oriented.

Parallel (Segmented)

In parallel (also known as segmented) electoral systems, majoritarian and proportional system elements are simply added. On this way, different specific systems can be comprised, such as plurality systems, bloc vote, list proportional systems, or single transferable vote. Therefore parallel systems are to be classified in the middle-range area between majoritarian, proportional, party-oriented and personal systems.

⁵ Instant Runoff Voting, in: Wikipedia: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instant-Runoff-Voting> (December 06, 2014)

4. Conclusions

Electoral systems can be classified in a two-dimensional range, formed by the dimensions of *proportionality* and *personalization*. Although certain types of electoral systems are historically associated with certain countries, worldwide processes of diffusion get relevant.

Finally, any electoral system should be understood in its specific context of historic and current preconditions. An impressive example is India with strong British traditions, electoral procedures comprising not only the first past the post system (on national level), but also single transferable vote and alternative vote (in diverse elections), specific regulations for protecting some Indian tribes, and very specific impacts of the deep differences between different Indian regions - resulting in a national parliament with some big and many small parties down to parties of only one mandate. That's why the theoretically proclaimed association between First-Past-The-Post and two-party-systems is wrong in this specific case.