

Practices of Democracy

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Practices of Democracy

An Introduction

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Preface

The last two decades have brought many changes to politics, including the emergence and diversification of political participation, the emergence of many social movements, the development of the internet with direct effect on how campaigns are conducted, the increasing personalization of politics, and the access of populists to legislative and executive office. Among the most noticeable changes and with the largest effect for the political system and society at large are the development of alternative models of democracy: direct democracy, deliberative democracy, and technocratic models of government (involving experts). They emerged on the basis of an increasing critique towards representative democracy in general and of its institutions and office holders in particular. They gained momentum throughout the world and started being implemented on a regular basis in local communities and countries especially in the 21st century. Direct and deliberative democracy are intended to enrich representative democracy in the attempt to improve the general quality of democracy, and especially its inclusiveness towards citizens. By contrast, technocratic models of government emerged from a critique of the supposed inefficiency of elected politicians and representative institutions to tackle complex efficiency problems.

These alternative models of democracy are present in many countries and they influence how institutions work, what policies are in place, people's desire to participate in politics, and their levels of political trust. A complete analysis and understanding of contemporary political processes must therefore include the perspectives derived from these alternative models of democracy because they are a game-changer. However, so far comparative politics has often been taught along normative and theoretical lines exclusively centred on the traditional model of representative democracy, ignoring the emergence of alternative models of government like direct democracy, deliberative democracy, or technocracy. At best, those models are discussed as one separate chapter in textbooks that are, for all other chapters, only considering how politics function within the logic of representative democracy.

In this textbook, we opt for a completely different approach. Representative democracy in its pure form that involves the monopoly of elected politicians over policy decisions is no longer the reality today. In all the contemporary representative systems, citizens are invited to intervene more directly in policymaking via instruments of direct democracy and of deliberative democracy. The extent of their use may vary. Direct democracy is not used to the same extent in France, Poland or Switzerland. Deliberative democracy is more institutionalized in countries like Ireland or Belgium than in most other countries. Elements of technocracy are also present in all countries. Experts are associated to policy decisions to a certain degree in almost all instances. Their role may vary, from mere policy

advisers to members of the government in (fully or partly) technocratic cabinets like the ones that have been ruling Italy under Mario Draghi (2021–2) or the technocratic-led government of Mehdi Jomaa in Tunisia in 2013–14. But experts play a major role in policymaking in most contemporary democracies.

Under these circumstances, we strongly believe that any textbook on democracies in the 21st century must systematically integrate these new realities and discuss extensively the different dimensions of the political system in relation to the core model of representative democracy, but also considering the alternative models of direct democracy, deliberative democracy, and technocracy. It is exactly the logic of this textbook and how each of its 13 chapters is organized.

The textbook starts with a chapter that discusses at length the four models of government – representative democracy, direct democracy, deliberative democracy and technocracy – that constitute the framework of the volume. The textbook then goes into different dimensions of contemporary democracies, but with the same structure of discussing the topic of the chapter systematically in relation to these four models of government. Those chapters are organized in three parts.

- Part 1 discusses core institutions of democracy: Chapter 2 elaborates on the role and forms of constitutions; Chapter 3 discusses electoral and voting systems; Chapter 4 analyses the roles, functions and organization of legislatures; Chapter 5 then examines governments and how they operate.
- Part 2 includes chapters on some of the core actors of democracies: Chapter 6 is about political parties; Chapter 7 covers the politicians; Chapter 8 brings in elements about social movements and civil society.
- Part 3 addresses some of the core political processes in democracy as well as a few major challengers for contemporary democracies: Chapter 9 covers political participation; Chapter 10 elaborates on the modes of political communication and their changes over time; Chapter 11 analyses public opinion; Chapter 12 examines the impact of migration; Chapter 13 discusses the growing challenge of populism.

The core feature of the 13 chapters of the handbook is that they systematically consider the four models of government that best characterize contemporary democracies: representative democracy, direct democracy, deliberative democracy, and technocracy. The chapters also share some common pedagogical features that are included to facilitate the learning process for students. Each chapter defines with clear learning objectives that students must achieve with the chapter. Second, the chapters include boxes that reflect on specific cases or challenges in relation to the topic of the chapter and that allow students to start reflecting by themselves using the tools of the chapter. Third, the chapters contain one or two case studies that students (and their instructors) can use to verify that they have mastered the core concepts and elements of the chapter and that they are able to use them in developing solid reflections from students in comparative politics. Finally, the very essence of the textbook is to be comparative. Each chapter is therefore very rich in examples from across the world that are used to facilitate the learning process by students.

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Electoral and Voting Systems

Jean-Benoit Pilet Alan Renwick

Chapter Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Familiarize with the variety of electoral systems used to elect politicians (representative democracy) and to vote on specific policy proposals (direct democracy and deliberative democracy).
- Discuss and understand the main effects of electoral rules on political dynamics in representative democracy, direct democracy, deliberative democracy, and technocracy.
- Master the main concepts and theories to be able to produce solid ground-based arguments in the debate of what would be the best electoral system.

Introduction

Electoral and voting systems can be defined as the set of rules that are organizing how votes are cast and counted for electing representatives (in representative democracy), or to validate or reject specific policy proposals (in direct and deliberative democracy). They can encompass a huge variety of elements – from who can vote, who can stand for election, and how campaigns are conducted all the way down to the procedures for running a polling station and counting the votes. A large literature in comparative politics has studied electoral systems. It has actually been one of the first topics of research when modern political science institutionalized in the 1950–60s, with key seminal studies by authors like Maurice Duverger (1954) or Douglas Rae (1967). This early interest in electoral systems in relation to the traditional model of representative democracy is rather logical since representative democracy is built upon institutions composed of elected representatives chosen

by citizens. The choice of the rules organizing the electoral process through which elected representatives are selected is therefore central. Over the years, a wide range of studies have therefore mapped the different types of electoral systems and election laws used across the globe (Norris, 2004; Farrell, 2011; Bormann and Golder, 2013; Herron et al., 2018 – see Box 3.1). Building on that fact, many scholars have tried to understand how those rules impact the electoral results, but also the behaviours of voters, candidates, and political parties (Blais and Massicotte, 2002; Pilet and Renwick, 2020).

However, in this chapter, as in the rest of the handbook, we will broaden the scope. We will start by discussing electoral systems within representative democracy, and then will move to electoral systems in relation to direct democracy, deliberative and participatory democracy, and then to technocracy. For each model of government, we will discuss the variety of electoral rules (giving examples from across the globe), their impact on political actors, and their consequences for citizens.

Throughout the chapter, the presentation of the variety of electoral rules would be guided by two transversal questions: (1) How do electoral rules affect the quality of representation and the legitimacy of political decisions? (2) What explains the adoption of some specific rules by political authorities?

Electoral and Voting Systems in Representative Democracy

Electoral and voting systems within the model of representative democracy serve to elect representatives that will govern on behalf of the people. There are two main types of elections: to elect members of parliament and to elect presidents. In the first, elections serve to choose those who will sit in the legislative chamber. In the second, elections serve to elect the head of state, who could also be the head of the executive (in presidential systems) or collaborate with a prime minister/head of the executive (in semi-presidential systems and parliamentary systems with presidents who have only ceremonial prerogatives, as in Ireland).

For both presidential and parliamentary elections, there are many election rules that can be discussed. Covering them all would require more than a single chapter (see Blais et al., 2004 for more details on other dimensions of the electoral system). We have therefore decided to focus on the three most studied: the electoral formula, which defines how votes are translated into seats; districts and district magnitude, which concerns the division of a country into electoral districts and the number of seats in each district; and ballot structure, which shapes the nature of the choice that voters are presented with and how votes are cast.

Electoral Formula

The electoral formula is the core of any electoral system. It is the mechanism through which votes are counted and then translated into seat(s)/elected office(s). It determines

the model of democracy that lies behind the electoral system and has major effects on politics, not least on the structure of competition among parties and politicians. There are two main families of electoral formulas used for elections across the globe (see Box 3.1), and therefore of electoral systems: majoritarian and proportional. Beyond these, some systems try to combine aspects of both.

Majoritarian systems are designed to identify a winner. The logic is straightforward. Voters cast their votes. These votes are counted. A winner is identified (by getting the most votes, by obtaining more than half of the votes, by voter transfers – see below) and gains whatever is to be allocated – whether that is a seat in the legislature, several seats or an office such as the presidency.

The simplest example of this logic is the Single-Member Plurality (SMP) electoral system used for general elections in Canada. Votes are counted in each of 338 constituencies across the country; the candidate with the most votes in each constituency is elected to the House of Commons. There is no minimum number of votes to obtain, or minimum gap between the first and the other candidates running. As its nickname suggests, the system follows a pure first-past-the-post logic. It is also a widely used system for the elections of president, with examples in countries across the globe like Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Iceland and South Korea.

Other majoritarian systems share the logic of identifying a winner, but use different, often more complex, mechanisms to do so. One argument against SMP is that a candidate could be elected with (sometimes much) less than 50 per cent of the votes. To avoid such outcomes, several majority electoral systems involve multiple rounds of voting (run-off electoral systems). A minimum threshold for victory is set – most often, 50 per cent of the votes. If a candidate exceeds this threshold in the first round, they are elected. If not, a second round is organized with fewer candidates to ensure that the elected candidates obtain an absolute majority or something close to it. Such systems are used for legislative elections in France and presidential elections in France, Austria, Poland, Portugal and Romania.

To avoid multiple election rounds while ensuring the winning candidate has wide support, some countries use the Alternative Vote (AV) system. Voters rank the candidates in order of preference. If no candidate exceeds 50 per cent of first preferences, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and these votes are transferred to the candidates ranked second on those ballot papers. This continues until a candidate reaches an absolute majority of votes. In Europe, AV is used at the national level only for presidential elections in Ireland (as well as for by-elections for both chambers of the Irish Parliament, the Dáil Éireann and Seanac Éireann).

The second main family of electoral formulas are proportional systems. The logic is not to identify a winner, but to give each political party or other group a share of the seats in proportion to its share of the votes. Thus, a party winning 25 per cent of the votes should ideally obtain 25 per cent of the seats.

The family of proportional systems itself is divided into two categories: list proportional representation (list PR) and Single Transferable Vote (STV). List PR structures

electoral competition among lists of candidates, typically representing different political parties. Votes are counted for each list and the share of votes is translated into a share of seats based on an arithmetic formula. An example of this is the largest remainder formula with the Hare quota. The first step is to calculate the quota, which is the total number of valid votes divided by the number of seats available. Each list initially receives as many seats as the number of times it has passed the quota: if the quota is 1,000, for example, a list with 5,500 votes gets five seats. Then the remainder votes for each party are ranked. Seats that remain to be allocated are distributed to the parties with the largest remainders until all seats are gone.

The other proportional system is STV, used for legislative elections in Ireland and Malta. Voters rank candidates in order of preference (as under AV – see above). An eligibility quota is calculated (most frequently the Droop quota). First preferences are counted first and candidates above the quota are elected. If seats remain to be allocated, surplus votes from candidates already elected are transferred to the second preferences expressed on the ballots. Votes received by last-placed candidates are also transferred. This continues until all seats have been allocated. STV is very similar to AV except in two ways. First, STV works with multimember districts, whereas AV normally uses single-member districts. Second, the quota that a candidate must pass to get elected is 50 per cent of the votes under AV, but lower than that under STV. As a consequence, STV tends to produce more proportional results.

Majoritarian and proportional systems have different logics: identifying a winner vs. distributing seats proportionally. These logics have both merits and limitations (see Lijphart, 1999). Majoritarian systems are, for instance, simplifying the formation of governments and lead to more stability of the executive. PR systems, by contrast, lead to more party system fragmentation and complex coalition formation, but they facilitate the emergence of new parties that promote new ideas or policy issues. They also make it easier for voters to find a party that aligns with their policy preferences. Building on those elements, some have sought to combine the advantages of both to obtain ‘the best of both worlds’ (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001; Linhart et al., 2019), leading to the development of mixed electoral systems. Such systems divide seats into two blocs, one allocated following a majoritarian logic, the other using PR. Voters typically have two votes – one relating to each of the two blocs of seats. These systems vary widely, depending on which majoritarian (SMP, run-off, AV) and which PR (list PR, STV) formula is used, how many seats are allocated according to each formula, and whether the two blocs are linked or run independently. In Lithuania and Italy, the two parts are independent (what is known as a ‘parallel’ mixed system). In Germany, by contrast, as well as in Scotland and Wales, the PR component is used to compensate for the disproportionality of the majoritarian part, so that the overall distribution of seats is as close to the distribution of votes as possible (a ‘mixed-member proportional’, or MMP, system).

Finally, another way of combining majoritarian and proportional logics is the so-called reinforced proportionality (or majority bonus) model. This runs mostly like list

PR systems, but a ‘majority bonus’ is added to ensure that the winning party or coalition obtains a solid majority of seats to govern alone. Italy used such a system between 2005 and 2017: the lower chamber had 617 members; the party or coalition winning most votes was awarded 340 seats, while the remaining 277 seats were allocated to other lists. This system was opposed by several parties and was changed to a mixed system in 2017. A majority bonus also exists for the Greek parliament (see below).

Box 3.1

Electoral Systems Worldwide

Across the globe, the distribution of electoral formulas is rather different for the elections of members of parliament and heads of state (Bormann and Golder, 2013). For parliamentary elections, list PR system is the most common systems, used in about 60 per cent of all democracies. Plurality systems remain in use in about 30 per cent of all democracies (e.g., India, Nigeria, the US, Canada and the UK). Mixed-member systems are rarer, used in about 10 per cent of all democracies. For presidential elections, the picture is radically different as it consists of electing one single person. Therefore, majority systems are used in almost all cases (exceptions being some presidential college systems in which electors in the college may be attributed via proportional representation). The most frequent formula is the two-round system used for about two-thirds of all presidential elections across the globe, followed by plurality elections and qualified majority systems.

District Magnitude

The second main dimension of the electoral system is the organization of the territory into districts. This element links directly to the logic of territorial representation: the idea that members of parliament represent the nation as a whole, but also the residents of their district in particular. This question applies mostly to parliamentary elections. For presidential elections, there is only one position to be filled. Yet, a few systems use some sorts of districts for presidential elections in order to guarantee that the elected candidate obtains a majority of votes across most of the territory. It is the case of the electoral college for the US president as presidential electors are allocated at state-level on the basis of the scores of candidates across each of the 50 states.

For parliamentary elections, the division of the country into electoral districts is more prevalent. Only a few countries allocate all seats in the legislature in just one nationwide district. In the Netherlands and Slovakia, all 150 MPs are elected this way. All other European countries and the vast majority of countries around the globe divide their territory into electoral districts that may vary in number, size, shape and the number of seats to be allocated. The number of seats allocated in each district is crucial for how the system works and is known as district magnitude (DM).

Almost all majoritarian systems – plurality, run-off or AV – function with single-member districts, each electing just one representative. The majoritarian logic may be combined with multimember districts, but this is rare. In the ‘block vote’ system, for instance, voters cast as many votes as there are seats to be allocated, and the seats are allocated to those candidates who obtain the most votes. This system is used for some local elections in the United Kingdom, where it often allows one party to win all the seats with much less than half of the vote.

Proportional systems, by contrast, require multimember districts: you cannot distribute a single seat proportionally among parties. DMs tend to vary widely both across and within countries. Slovenia requires all its multimember districts to be the same size (DM = 11). By contrast, Spain has some districts that send two or three MPs to parliament, while the largest districts of Barcelona and Madrid elect 32 and 37 respectively.

DM is the main element, alongside the electoral formula itself, that drives an electoral system’s effective proportionality. Full proportionality requires large districts. If only a few seats are to be allocated, they cannot be divided among many parties. Spain is the best example. The low DM in most districts allowed the two main Spanish parties – the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialists (PSOE) – to dominate, capturing the vast majority of the seats with 30–40 per cent of the vote each. The largest party could hope to win an absolute majority of the seats with about 40 per cent of the votes. By contrast, in countries using a single nationwide district, like the Netherlands or Slovakia, many parties can gain representation: there were 17 of them in the Netherlands in 2020 and 6 in Slovakia in 2020.

Ballot Structure

The aspects of electoral systems that we have looked at so far – electoral formula and DM – relate to the ‘interparty’ dimension of electoral systems – that is, they affect how votes are translated into seats across political parties and thereby help define the structure of the party system. But elections are not only about competition between parties. They are also about relations among candidates within the same party – the ‘intraparty’ dimension.

The intraparty dimension of the electoral system is defined as the degree to which the system focuses on candidates or on parties. Some systems only allow voters to express a preference among the parties, without any possibility to select preferred candidates within these parties. Other systems allow voters to choose among candidates within the same party or even across parties. The intraparty dimension is thus fairly straightforward on the surface. Under that surface, however, are various complexities.

The most widely recognized way of organizing this complexity was developed over two decades ago by Carey and Shugart (1995). They identified two main aspects of the intraparty dimension, which they labelled ‘Ballot’ and ‘Vote’:

- *Ballot* refers to the extent of party control over who is elected. There are three possibilities: parties can present a fixed set of candidates that voters cannot

disturb; parties can determine who their candidates are but voters can change the order of these; or parties control neither access to candidacy nor the order of those candidates.

- *Vote* focuses on the nature of the vote that voters cast: systems where voters cast only a vote for a party; those where they vote for multiple candidates; and those where they vote only for a single candidate.

The crucial element of the Ballot dimension in European democracies is the degree to which parties or voters determine the order in which candidates get elected (see Table 3.1). Among the systems where the order is entirely determined by parties, we find most majoritarian systems, such as SMP. Parties select one candidate per district. Voters for that party have no other candidate they can choose. The same logic holds for so-called ‘closed-list’ systems (used in countries like Spain, Portugal, Romania, Uruguay, Argentina and Sri Lanka). Parties determine their list of candidates and voters cannot disturb this. If the party wins three seats, these go to the three candidates ranked highest on the list by the party.

Table 3.1 Electoral systems and intraparty candidate ordering

Order determined entirely by parties	Order determined partly by parties and partly by voters	Order determined entirely by voters
Single-Member Plurality (SMP)	Flexible-list PR	Open-list PR
Two-round systems		Single Transferable Vote (STV)
AV		
Closed-list PR		

At the other end of the spectrum, we find ‘open-list’ systems (used in Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland, Chile, Colombia and Brazil) and STV (used in Ireland and Malta). Parties again select their candidates, but voters have full capacity to decide which of these candidates are elected. Under open-list PR, for example, if a party wins three seats, these are filled by the three candidates from the party’s list who receive most support from voters.

Between these two logics are the intermediate ‘flexible-list’ systems. Parties again put up lists of candidates. Voters can cast preference votes among the candidates to alter the ranking of candidates defined by parties, but the party rankings matter too. The final order of candidates can be determined in various ways, which we cannot set out in detail here. The simplest system is that candidates move to the top of the list if they secure support from at least a defined proportion of the party’s voters. Flexible-list systems are found in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden and Suriname. Within the family of flexible list systems, it is interesting to note that the weight of preference votes tends to be increased in several countries (see Box 3.2).

On the Vote dimension, there are significant differences among the various list systems. Closed-list systems do not allow voters to express preferences among candidates at all. In some open- and flexible-list systems, voters can express one preference for a single candidate (e.g., Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden), while in others, voters can indicate several preferences among the candidates on their chosen party's list (e.g., Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Latvia, Norway and Slovakia). In Luxembourg and Switzerland, voters can mark as many preferences for candidates as there are seats to be filled, and these preferences can be distributed across different lists (the 'panachage' system).

The last type of model regarding the VOTE dimension are ranking systems like STV (Ireland and Malta) or Alternative Vote (Australia). In those systems voters do not simply tick the name of one or several candidates, rather they are asked to rank-order candidates from the most to the least preferred.

Box 3.2

The Personalization of Electoral Systems in Europe

Recent decades have seen a marked trend towards greater personalization of electoral systems across Europe (Renwick and Pilet, 2016; Passarelli, 2020). This fits a larger trend towards the personalization of politics in general (Karvonen, 2010). The personalizing trend is particularly found in list PR systems. Reforms in this direction have taken place in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden. Most changes have involved the ballot dimension, increasing voters' influence over who is elected. Specifically, many countries using lists with limited flexibility have opened them up to a greater degree.

Main Effects of the Electoral Systems in Parliamentary Elections

Electoral systems are much more than neutral technicalities: they also strongly influence how politics works, both during and after elections. In this subsection, we examine some of their main consequences systems. The most studied is the link between the electoral formula and the number of parties in the party system. This link was already discussed in the 1950s in the work of Maurice Duverger (1954) who formulated 'laws'. He argued that:

- simple-majority single-ballot systems (such as SMP) favour two-party systems;
- proportional representation systems favour multiparty systems.

Although these laws have been discussed widely, with divergent findings especially for SMP systems, their logic remains central to understanding how electoral rules shape competition among parties, and consequently the party system. The causal link between electoral and party systems runs through two mechanisms: the mechanical and the psychological effect.

The mechanical effect is the direct and mathematical impact of the electoral rule in how it translates votes into seats. Majoritarian systems such as SMP designate a single winner in each district, therefore limiting mechanically the number of parties gaining parliamentary representation. Note that the impact of single-member districts in reducing the number of parties gaining seats can, however, be moderated where smaller parties have concentrated support in some areas, allowing them to win certain districts. This has been true, for example, of the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) in the UK, and of the Bloc Québécois in Canada.

By contrast, under PR the same distribution of votes almost certainly leads to a wider distribution of seats across parties than under majoritarian rules. In very large districts, as in the Netherlands, parties with tiny vote shares may enter parliament. The impact of PR and larger districts also appears clearly with the electoral reform in New Zealand in 1993, as discussed in Case Study 3.1.

Case Study 3.1

The 1993 Electoral Reform in New Zealand

Before 1993, legislative elections in New Zealand were held under a single-member district plurality electoral system. Almost all seats were won by two parties, National and Labour. In 1993, New Zealand reformed its electoral system and opted for a mixed-member system. The first elections under this new electoral system were held in 1996. Seats were won by six parties. It is a good exercise to try to explain this increase in the number of parties in the New Zealand Parliament with the elements presented in the previous paragraphs about the impact of electoral rules on the party system.

A second mechanism is key to understanding the logic behind Duverger's laws: the psychological effect. This captures 'how parties and voters react to these rules' (Blais and Massicotte, 2002: 56). It posits that voters will often be reluctant to vote for a party that has little or no chance of securing a seat. Rather, they cast what political scientists call a 'strategic vote' (in contrast to a 'sincere vote' for the party they really prefer). Strategic voting is more likely when the electoral system is less proportional and votes for small parties are more likely to be 'wasted'. By contrast, few voters in very proportional systems need to abandon their sincere preference, since even small parties have good chances of winning seats. Research confirms that strategic voting is more common in majoritarian than in proportional systems (Abramson et al., 2010). Under PR, it is more common when electoral thresholds are higher (Meffert and Gschwend, 2011) or DMs lower (Lachat et al., 2015).

Political parties are also subject to a psychological effect: like voters, they too try to anticipate the mechanical effect of electoral rules and may modify their behaviour accordingly. More proportional systems make it more likely that smaller parties will run,

believing they could win some seats, even on a limited share of votes. By contrast, in less proportional systems, politicians could decide not to form new parties or to abandon existing small parties; or small parties could try to form pre-electoral alliances with others to increase their chances of gaining access to parliament (Cox, 1997).

The psychological effects on voters and parties tend to reinforce the mechanical effects. These effects combine to explain why, on average, less proportional electoral systems are associated with less fragmented party systems, as well as why reforms towards more proportional systems typically increase party system fragmentation (Ward, 2019; Riera, 2020). We can see it in Table 3.2, which shows that the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP – i.e., the number of parties represented in parliament, weighted by their electoral size) – tends to be larger in PR countries than under majority systems.

Table 3.2 Effective number of parties in the lower house of parliament (1945–2022)

Country	Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP)	Electoral formula	Country	ENPP	Electoral formula
France (1958–81; 1988–2019)	3.18	Maj. (run-off)	Netherlands	5.06	PR
United Kingdom	2.21	Maj. (SMP)	Norway	3.78	PR
Austria	2.89	PR	Poland	4.10	PR
Belgium	6.01	PR	Portugal	2.84	PR
Bulgaria	3.37	PR	Romania (1990–2008)	5.65	PR
Cyprus	3.70	PR	Spain	3.05	PR
Czech Republic	4.22	PR	Sweden	3.68	PR
Denmark	4.71	PR	Switzerland	5.24	PR
Estonia	4.67	PR	Croatia	3.00	PR
Finland	5.21	PR	Germany (West Germany before reunification)	3.46	Mixed
France (1986)	4.66	PR	Hungary	2.69	Mixed
Greece	2.66	Reinforced proportionality	Italy (2006–18)	3.63	Reinforced proportionality

Country	Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP)	Electoral formula	Country	ENPP	Electoral formula
Ireland	3.10	PR (STV)	Lithuania	4.42	Mixed
Italy (1945–2001)	4.27	PR	Romania (2008–20)	3.37	Mixed
Iceland	3.94	PR	Latvia	5.46	PR
Luxembourg	3.65	PR	Malta	1.99	PR (STV)
Slovakia	4.63	PR	Slovenia	6.78	PR

Sources: Pilet et al. (2016)

The impact of electoral systems on proportionality and on the number of parties is mostly related to the electoral formula (PR vs. majoritarian systems) and to district magnitude. Yet, other features may also affect proportionality. It is especially the case of electoral thresholds. Such thresholds define a certain share of votes that parties must obtain to get access to the allocation of seats between parties. They must be defined at national level or within each district. And they can vary significantly across countries. In the Netherlands, the national-level threshold is very low, set at 0.67 per cent of valid votes. Most former communist countries in Europe have incorporated an electoral threshold in their systems, many of them adopting a 5 per cent threshold (including Poland, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Croatia and Romania). In Turkey, the electoral threshold is set at 10 per cent of valid votes, denying access to parliamentary representation for many parties. Thresholds are also in use in mixed systems such as in Germany, Italy and Lithuania. For example, in Germany, a party must obtain at least 5 per cent of valid votes nationally (or have won three direct district seats) to be eligible for the allocation of the compensatory seats.

Electoral systems also affect intraparty competition between politicians from the same party, especially in systems where several candidates from the same party are elected within the same district (which is the most frequent in list PR systems and under STV). In particular, the ballot structure can shape politicians' incentives to cultivate their personal reputations or to burnish the reputations of their parties. Carey and Shugart (1995) posited that in systems that allow voters to express preferences for candidates, a candidate should not only convince voters to vote for their party, but they should persuade them to vote for themselves rather than for their co-partisans.

These incentives for candidates to cultivate their personal reputations have consequences during electoral campaigns, but also between them, in parliamentary activities. For example, one study found that candidates run more personal campaigns in larger districts with open lists (Selb and Lutz, 2015). The strategy of those candidates is to stress their own personal merits, and not only the merits of their parties, because they must

convince voters to vote for their party, but also for them and not for other co-partisan candidates within the list. In the same vein, other studies have shown that politicians elected with open lists invest more in activities building a personal reputation such as drafting private members' bills in parliament (Bräuninger et al., 2012) or spending time connecting with voters in the district (Pilet et al., 2012).

Finally, while we have focused on the impacts of electoral systems on the inter- and intraparty dimensions of politics, the influence of electoral rules extends well beyond the mere distribution of seats. These rules may affect, for example, the representation of social groups (such as women or ethnic minorities – see Bernauer et al., 2015; Lublin and Bowler, 2018), the composition and dynamics of government, the content of policies adopted (Iversen and Soskice, 2006), or the accurate representation of citizens' preferences (Ferland, 2021). These effects fall beyond what can be covered in this chapter, but are a major agenda for research in political science.

Electoral and Voting Systems in Direct Democracy

Like elections, referendums ought to be organized under specific rules that define who can vote, how a valid vote can be cast and how the votes are translated into a final result. It is what we discuss in this section.

Referendums are organized widely across the globe (Altman, 2010; Qvortrup, 2018), but they vary on a wide range of features. The most commonly studied issues are (Morel and Qvortrup, 2017):

- whether the referendum is optional or mandatory;
- who can initiate the process;
- which issues and questions could be submitted to referendums;
- and what is the legal impact of referendums (advisory, binding, abrogative).

But there are also rules related to the voting procedures that are of importance. In particular, there are three voting rules that are of major importance:

- 1 What is the nature of the vote to be cast?
- 2 Is there a quorum in terms of electoral participation?
- 3 What is the share of votes that an answer to the referendum question should achieve to be validated?

Regarding the first dimension – the nature of the vote to be cast – the most frequent logic is to pose a question to which voters answer by 'yes' or 'no'. The 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, for example, asked voters the following question: 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?'. In France, in 2005, the question posed to French voters about a European constitutional

treaty was ‘Do you approve the bill authorizing the ratification of the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe?’. However, even if they are rarer, multiple-choice questions may also be used. For example, Australia held a referendum in 1977 about the choice of a new national anthem. Voters had four options (keeping ‘God Save the Queen’, or for one among three other songs). It also happens that voters are asked to rank different options in order of their preferences (as in Alternative Vote for elections). In 2018, in British Columbia (Canada), voters were asked to answer two questions. First, they had to say whether they wanted to keep the first-past-the-post system or to opt for a form of proportional representation. Second, in case of a shift to PR, they were asked to rank three alternative electoral systems.

The second dimension of voting rules for referendums that is highly important is whether there is a turnout quorum, which is a minimum number of voters who must have turned out to vote for the result of the referendum to be valid and for yes/no votes to be counted. The goal is to make sure that the question submitted to a direct vote was salient enough for a large share of voters and to avoid decisions only backed by a minority of the electorate. For example, a participation quorum of 50 per cent is implemented in Italy, Hungary, South Korea, Portugal, Slovakia and Romania. Lower thresholds might be set in other countries (for example, 25 per cent in Colombia and 20 per cent in Kenya).

Case Study 3.2

Brexit Under a Regionalized Double-Majority Rule

In some federal countries such as Switzerland, referendums are held using a double-majority rule. A proposal will pass if it obtains a majority of votes countrywide and in a majority of cantons. It was not the case for the Brexit referendum in the UK. Can you propose a regionalised double-majority rule for the United Kingdom? And discuss how it might have affected the results of the Brexit referendum and the dynamics of the referendum campaign.

Finally, a crucial voting rule is the share of votes that should be obtained by one of the answers to the referendum question to be validated and implemented. Most often, the quorum is set to 50 per cent + 1 vote of all valid ballots cast. It is the case for 91.5 per cent of all countries organizing national referendums (Direct Democracy Database – International Idea, 2023). But a few countries opt for supermajorities. Ghana imposes a supermajority of 70 per cent of the votes. Jamaica imposes a supermajority of 60 per cent of the votes for optional referendums. The Constitution of Florida specifies a threshold of 60 per cent of all votes to pass a new constitutional amendment via a referendum. In Fiji, at least three-quarters of all registered voters should have supported the winning option. In some countries, double-majority systems are also imposed to make sure that the winning answer obtains a majority nationwide, but also across a

majority of the territories of the country. In Switzerland, a majority of cantons need to have voted in favour of the new proposition. In Australia, a majority of valid votes should be obtained in at least four of the six states (see also Case Study 3.2 about double majorities in referendums).

Electoral and Voting Systems in Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

Theoretically, the goal of deliberative methods is to develop a wide consensus among participants on the final policy recommendations that are being formulated (Habermas, 1988; Cohen, 1989). Voting would mean that no consensus was reached and that a choice should be made between diverging views that could not have been accommodated. Yet, in practice in many deliberative forums, there is a final vote at the end of the process to adopt the final report and the policy recommendations. It is done for two main reasons. First, it allows showing the (allegedly wide) support of participants for the final outcome of the process. Second, it deals with time constraints. Reaching a wide consensus could take much time. Having a vote allows deciding within the time limit of the process (most deliberative forums last for a few days, at best a few weekends). It has therefore led deliberative theorists to acknowledge gradually that the myth of the consensus was not a necessary condition for good deliberation and that disagreement might contribute to the quality of the process (Bächtiger et al., 2010; Ercan and Dryzek, 2015).

Very few studies have attempted to look in detail at voting rules within deliberative forums. One of the rare attempts has been conducted by Paulis and colleagues (2021) who have systematically coded the rules of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) organized by public authorities in Europe between 2000 and 2020. Their study shows first, that slightly less than one-half of DMPs (42.8 per cent) aim at reaching a decision by consensus, meaning that there is no formal vote and that discussions on the final report to be issued go on until nobody objects to the document produced. It happens mostly within mini-publics with rather few participants (maximum about 20). It also means that they identified a good share of DMPs (35.2 per cent) where the rules and procedures specify that a formal vote should be held on the final report.

Those voting rules on the final report may vary on various dimensions. First, deliberative assemblies may differ in whether they ask participants to cast a vote on the full set of recommendations they are formulating or on each and every one of those recommendations. The French Citizens Assembly on Climate Change is an example of the latter. The report even mentioned what share of participants voted for or against each of the policy recommendations. A second dimension on which voting rules within citizens' assemblies may differ is the threshold for a policy recommendation, or the full report, to be adopted. Most often, the simple majority is applied but, in some cases, higher thresholds are set to push for a broader consensus among participants.

Electoral Systems and Technocracy

Finally, we will discuss how the question of electoral systems fits into the logic of technocracy and of technocratic governments. The two concepts might seem dissociated as, by definition, technocrats are governors selected for their expertise and outside of the electoral cycle. Therefore, it makes no sense to examine, for example, whether some electoral rules favour the election of technocrats. Nevertheless, in democracies, the appointment of technocrats in government has not meant that elections were not held. Parliamentary and presidential elections were maintained and technocrats were appointed within government as fully technocratic cabinets, as technocracy-led cabinets or cabinets led by elected politicians but involving technocrats, by the president or by the parliament. Therefore, one question that we can explore is whether we observe that technocrats are more often members of the executive under some specific electoral rules.

The question has been indirectly approached in a few studies that have looked at a direct consequence of electoral law – namely, party system fragmentation (and its impact on the number of parties in power). The hypothesis is that more parties in parliament will mean more parties in government. As a consequence, with more parties in government, it is more problematic to divide the spoils across all coalition partners, and there are fewer portfolios left for appointing technocrats. At best, those studies found a small negative effect of party system fragmentation on the appointment of technocratic ministers (Amorim Neto and Samuels, 2011; Emanuele et al., 2022). However, none of those studies specifically looked at differences across electoral formula.

Therefore, to address this question, we propose to look at the dataset of technocratic ministers made recently available by Vittori and colleagues (2023a). The dataset covers all members of cabinet across 31 European democracies (EU 27, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the UK) between 2000 and 2020. It identifies specifically both partisan and technocratic ministers. It differs allows examining whether the share of technocratic ministers is larger under some electoral rules. And what appears is that there is not a greater share of technocratic ministers under majoritarian electoral systems. It is actually the contrary (see Table 3.3). National governments in European countries where legislative elections are held under a majoritarian electoral formula have the lowest share of technocratic ministers (5.5 per cent). There are many more such technocratic ministers in countries where national lower chambers are elected under list PR (11.7 per cent) or mixed electoral systems (20.8 per cent).

Table 3.3 Share of technocratic ministers and electoral systems

Electoral formula	% of technocratic ministers	Ballot structure	% of technocratic ministers
Mixed	20.8	Closed lists	19
List PR	11.7	Flexible lists	12
STV	9.7	Open lists	5
Majoritarian	5.5		

As explained on pp. 00–00, another major component of the electoral system is the ballot structure. It is especially important in list PR systems differentiating between closed and open lists. This dimension has also been explored indirectly in a few studies on technocratic ministers. The hypothesis proposed is that, under closed lists, party leaders have a greater capacity to appoint who they want in cabinets. Under open lists, voters can express their preferences for some candidates and it is then hard for party leaders not to select candidates among the most popular candidates. It leaves fewer portfolios for technocratic ministers who, by definition, did not run for elections (Dumont et al., 2008; Folke et al., 2016). Alexiadou and Gunyadin (2019) found, for instance, that the odds of appointing technocratic ministers of finance during the 2008 economic recession were especially higher under closed lists systems. Emanuel and colleagues (2022) did not find the same effect for the appointment of technocratic ministers at all portfolios, though.

Here again, we can look at the dataset compiled by Vittori and colleagues (2023a). Examining the link between ballot structure and the appointment of technocratic ministers, it may seem that the association is quite straightforward, with a larger share of technocrats appointed as ministers in countries with closed lists systems, followed by flexible lists systems and rather few technocratic ministers under open lists systems (see Table 3.2).

Conclusion

The goals of this chapter were to present how electoral systems and voting rules influence the dynamics of political actors in democracies, and therefore to discuss their impact on the quality of representation and political legitimacy in democratic systems.

The chapter has revealed a wide variety of election rules used across countries and for the different models of democracy. More majoritarian systems co-exist with proportional representation systems. Party-centred systems co-exist with personalized systems. The issue of territorial representation is present across different systems and countries. And the different rules produce different political dynamics for elected politicians and for citizens.

These general lessons are well established for the study of representative democracy. With this chapter, we have shown that they expand to the other models of democracy. Who is eligible to vote, how votes are cast and what majority threshold is set are crucial questions for the dynamics of referendums. Similarly, within deliberative forum, elections rules are crucial in shaping the dynamics among participants – for example, by stipulating what threshold of support ought to be reached (consensus, super majority, simple majority) for policy recommendations to be adopted. Even within the model of technocracy, election rules are important to consider. They do not contribute directly to the appointment of technocrats to govern, but they shape the context in which representative actors choose to appoint technocrats in power rather than elected partisan politicians.

All these elements confirm that electoral systems are at the core of the dynamics of democracies. They are more than technical elements. They shape how politics

function. A question that logically stems from these observations is how electoral rules are defined (Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005). What leads a government to opt for a majoritarian rather than a proportional model, for example? Or why have many countries gradually evolved towards more personalized and less party-centred electoral systems over the last decades (Renwick and Pilet, 2016)? These questions may be answered by looking at the motivations of actors who decide on election laws, and they will report on their strategic as well as value-driven motivations (Bol, 2016). Another way to look at it is to ask whether there exists a best electoral system. The answer to that question is widely debated, but the dominant view is that electoral rules have different consequences and that there is no best system as such, but a best system concerning what kind of political dynamics you would like to favour (Bowler et al., 2005). Some election rules, such as majority electoral formula or higher legal thresholds, limit the fragmentation among political actors and incentive to form wider alliances. It may facilitate the stability of institutions, but it comes at the cost of having an inclusive system that will better reflect the diversity of opinions that may exist, as well as the emergence of new ideas (Carey and Hix, 2011). The same trade-offs apply to all electoral rules and in the end, no study has been able to establish whether some specific electoral rules are boosting the perceived legitimacy of decisions that are taken, for none of the four models of democracy that are covered in this handbook (Bernauer and Vatter, 2012; Bosch and Orrìols, 2014; Arnesen et al., 2019; Goldberg, 2021; Vittori et al., 2023b). The question that students of electoral systems who will have read this chapter must answer is, therefore, not what is the best electoral system, but what is the best electoral system for which model of democracy and for which achievement in which goals.

Key Terms

Electoral formula: rules used to allocate seats to candidates on the basis of the votes cast by voters.

Plurality electoral systems: electoral formula that allocates seats to the candidate(s) or list that has won the most votes.

Majority electoral systems: electoral formula that allocates seats to the candidate(s) or list that has won a majority of votes.

Proportional representation (PR) systems: electoral formula that allocates seats to the list of candidates (or individual candidates under single transferable vote – STV) in proportion to their share of votes.

Mixed-member electoral systems: electoral formula under which a share of seats is allocated under a majority (or plurality) system and another share under proportional representation.

(Continued)

Thresholds: minimum share of votes that parties or candidates should obtain to take part in the allocation of seats.

District magnitude: number of seats to be allocated in the electoral district/constituency.

Single-member districts: electoral district in which one single seat is to be allocated.

Multi-member districts: electoral district in which several seats are to be allocated.

Closed lists: list PR system under which voters are not allowed to cast votes for candidates within lists. Seats are allocated within lists on the basis of the rank ordering of candidates defined by the party.

Open lists: list PR system under which voters are asked to express preferences for candidates within lists. Then, within each list, the candidates elected are the ones who have obtained more votes.

Flexible lists: list PR system that allows voters to express preferences for candidates, and under which the allocation of seats within lists combines the number of preference votes received by candidates and a mechanism protecting to a certain extent the rank ordering of candidates defined by the party.

End of Chapter Summary

This chapter has covered:

- The main rules organizing elections, and especially the translation of votes into seats in parliamentary elections.
- The main voting rules that also apply for referendums and within deliberative mini-publics.
- The relationship between technocracy, and especially the appointment of technocratic ministers and electoral systems.

More generally, it has covered:

- How electoral rules are more than mere technical details, but actually affect the political dynamics (between parties and candidates as well as among citizens) within democracies.
-