Electoral Systems and their components

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Electoral System[1]

The Mode according to which voters express their preference for a party and/or candidates by way of votes and according to which votes are translated into parliamentary seats. The term electoral system therefore refers to *principals of representation* rather than to electoral laws, the electoral process, and/or the organization of elections.

Main Electoral System Type I: Proportional Representation (PR system)

The aim of that electoral system type is the widespread true reproduction, in parliament, of the social forces and political groups prevailing in the population. Additional advantages of PR systems are described as:

- preventing artificial parliamentary majorities,
- encouraging agreed majorities by negotiation and compromise,
- preventing drastic political reversals

Main Electoral System Type II: Majority Representation (Plurality System)

The aim of that electoral system type is to achieve a governing majority of a party or a party alliance. Additional advantages of that system type:

- preventing the fragmentation of parties and/or encouraging party concentration; creation of small-number or even two-party system,
- promoting stable governments,
- furthering political moderation
- encouraging rotation in the execise of government
- enabling voters to decide directly about government parties

[1] In general the definitions on this transparent are taken from Nohlen (1995)

Individual elements of Electoral Systems

- District Size
- Forms of Candidacy: individual versus party list
- Legal threshold

Analysis of electoral systems on three levels[2]

a) Analysis of technical elements of electoral systems, taking into account the *probable* effects of these elements and their combination,

b) Classification of electoral system by principle of representation,

c) Analysis of *real* effects of technical elements (and their combination) of electoral systems

Probable Effects and/or functional demands of various types of electoral systems*

Electoral System	Representation	Concentration	Participation
Plurality system	Negative	Positive	Positive
Absolute majority system	Negative	Positive	Positive
Proportional representation in small districts	Negative	Positive	Positive
Proportional representation in multi member districts	Negative	Positive	Negative**
Pure proportional system	Positive	Negative	Negative**
Personalized proportional system	Positive	Positive	Positive

* Please check the single effects carefully. Some of them deserve questioning.

** In the case of closed and blocked lists.

[2] See Beichelt (2001: 243-244)

Real Effects of various electoral systems (in difference to expected effects)

Country Case	Electoral System	Representation	Concentration	Participation
Poland				
Czech Republic				
Russia				
Ukraine				

Hypotheses on the influence of institutional parameters on democracy for single cases, e.g. Poland or Russia (extended and revised table from session 1)

		Democracy with regard to specific qualities**		
		Stability of Regime*	Participation / Inclusion	Competition / Accountability
Government system	Parliamentary System			
	Presidential System			
	Semi-Presidential System			
Party System	High/low polarization			
	High/low fragmentation Party System			
Electoral system	Proportional representation			
	Majority representation			

* not: Stability of Government(s).

** Legend: "+" = predominantly positive influence

"–" = predominantly negative influence

"O" = no dominant influence or both positive and negative elements of influence

Relevant and/or Cited Literature

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(Lijphart 1991; Lijphart 1992; Lijphart 1994; Nohlen 1995; Nohlen 1996; Nohlen/Kasapovic 1996; Beichelt 1998; Grotz 2000; Beichelt 2001; Nohlen 2004)