



Proportional Representation

For Prelims: [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#), [Election Commission of India](#), General Financial Rules, [National and State Parties](#), First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system, Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system, Proportional Representation (PR) By Single Transferable Vote (STV).

For Mains: Shifting from FPTP to Proportional Representation Electoral System, Consequences and Advantages of Proportional Representation.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, there is a growing consensus among a broad cross-section of citizens and political parties in India that the current [First-Past-The-Post \(FPTP\) electoral system](#) must be replaced with a **Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system** as one viable alternative.

What is the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) Electoral System?

▪ About:

- It is an electoral system in which voters cast a vote for a single candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins the election.
 - Also known as the **simple majority system or plurality system**.
- One of the **simplest and oldest electoral systems**, used in countries such as the **UK**, the **US**, **Canada**, and **India**.

▪ Features:

- Voters are **presented with a list of candidates nominated** by different political parties or running as independents.
- Voters choose **one candidate** by marking their ballot paper or [electronic voting machine](#).
- The candidate who receives the **most votes in a constituency** is declared the winner.
- The **winner does not need to get a majority (more than 50%) of the votes**, but only a plurality (the largest number) of the votes.
- This system frequently leads to **disproportionate outcomes** when selecting members of an assembly, like a [Parliament](#), as political parties may not receive representation in line with their proportion of the overall vote.

▪ Advantages:

- **Simplicity:** It is a straightforward system that is **easy for voters to understand and for officials to administer**. This makes it **cost-effective and efficient**.
- **Clear and Decisive Winners:** It provides **results with a definitive winner**, which can **contribute to stability and credibility** in the electoral system.
- **Accountability:** Candidates in elections directly **represent constituents**, allowing for better accountability compared to **Proportional Representation systems where candidates may not be as well known**.
- **Candidate Selection:** It allows **voters to choose between parties** and specific

candidates, while the **PR system requires voters to select a party** and the representatives are elected based on party lists.

- **Coalition-Building:** It encourages **different social groups to unite** locally, promoting broader unity and preventing fragmentation into numerous community-based parties.

What is Proportional Representation (PR) Systems?

▪ About:

- It is an electoral system where the political parties get **representation (number of seats) in the legislature in proportion to the share of votes they get** in the elections.

▪ Features:

- It **fairly represents political parties** based on their share of the vote.
- It ensures that **every vote counts towards allocating seats** in Parliament or other elected bodies.

▪ Types:

◦ **Single Transferable Vote (STV):**

- It allows a **voter to rank his/her candidate in order of preference**, i.e., by providing backup references and **casting only one vote**.
- **Proportional Representation (PR) By Single Transferable Vote (STV)** enables voters to choose the **most preferred candidate of the party** and vote for independent candidates.
 - The **President of India is elected through the PR system** with a STV, where a secret ballot system is used to elect the President.
 - The electoral college, which consists of the Legislative Assemblies of the States, Council of States, and members of **Rajya Sabha** and **Lok Sabha**, elects the Indian president through a PR system utilizing an STV.

◦ **Party-List PR:**

- Here **voters vote for the party (and not individual candidates)** and then the parties get seats in proportion to their vote share.
- There is usually a **minimum threshold of 3-5% vote share** for a party to be eligible for a seat.

◦ **Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMP):**

- It is a system that aims to achieve a **balance between stability and proportionate representation** in a country's political system.
- Under this system, **one candidate is elected through the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system** from each territorial constituency. In addition to these representatives, **there are also additional seats allocated to various parties** based on their percentage of votes nationwide.
- This allows for a **more diverse representation in government** while still maintaining the stability of having individual representatives from specific geographical areas.
- **New Zealand, South Korea, and Germany** are examples of countries where MMP is operational.

▪ Advantages:

◦ **Ensures Every Vote Counts:**

- In PR **every vote is counted towards allocating seats in Parliament**. This means that voters have a greater sense of participation in the democratic process.

◦ **Diverse and Representative Government:**

- Smaller parties and **minority groups are more likely to be represented** under a PR system, which can lead to a more diverse range of perspectives and ideas in Parliament.

◦ **Reduces Gerrymandering:**

- PR systems are **less susceptible to gerrymandering**, as distribution of seats is determined by the proportion of votes a party receives rather than by **manipulating district boundaries**.
- As a result, parties cannot **unfairly manipulate the electoral map to their advantage**, as is sometimes seen in systems with arbitrary constituency boundaries.

▪ **Disadvantages:**

- **Unstable Governments:** PR can lead to unstable governments as smaller parties and **minority groups are more likely to be represented** which can be difficult to form stable coalitions and govern effectively.
- **More Complex:** PR systems can be **more complex than FPTP systems**, making them more **difficult for voters to understand** and for governments to implement.
- **Expensive:** PR systems are **expensive to operate, as a significant amount** of resources and funds are required to conduct elections.
- **Neglect of Local Needs:** PR can lead to leaders **prioritising party agendas** over local needs, as multiple representatives share a constituency.
 - This diffusion of accountability **may result in selfish political behaviour** and neglect of specific constituency concerns.

Why there is Need to Shift From FPTP System to the PR System?

- **Over or Under Representation:** The FPTP system may lead to **over or under representation of political parties (in terms of seats they win) when compared to their vote-share they get.**
 - Eg: In the first three elections after independence, the Congress party won close to **75% of seats** in the then Lok Sabha with just **45-47% vote share**.
 - In the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received just **37.36% of the vote** and won **55% of the seats in Lok Sabha**.

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If the PR system is applied for the 2024 election

Political formation	% of votes	Actual number of seats	Seats as per PR
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	43.3%	293*	243
INDIA bloc	41.6%	234	225
Others/independents	15.1%	16	75
Total	100%	543	543

- **Lack of Representation for Minority Groups:** In a 2-party FPTP system, a party with a **small percentage of votes may not win any seats which can result in a significant portion of the population being unrepresented in the government.**
 - Countries like the UK and Canada also use FPTP, but their **Member of Parliaments (MPs)** have more accountability to their local constituencies.
- **Strategic Voting:** **Voters may feel pressure to vote for a candidate** they do not truly support to prevent a candidate they dislike from winning the election. This can lead to a situation where **voters feel like they are not truly expressing their preferences.**
- **Disadvantage for Smaller Parties:** **Smaller parties struggle to win in the FPTP system and often have to align with national parties, undermining local self-government and federalism.**

Other Alternative Electoral Systems

- **Ranked Voting Systems:** These are systems that **allow voters to rank candidates in order of preference**, rather than choosing one candidate.

- **Score Voting Systems:** These are systems that allow voters to score candidates on a numerical scale, rather than choosing one candidate or ranking them.

International Practices

- **Presidential democracies** (like **Brazil** and **Argentina**), as well as **parliamentary democracies** (like **South Africa**, the **Netherlands**, **Belgium**, **Spain**, **Germany**, and **New Zealand**), have different **proportional representation (PR) systems**.
 - In Germany, the **Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR)** system is used (50% of the 598 seats in the Bundestag are filled from constituencies under **FPTP system**, and the remaining 50% are filled by apportioning them amongst parties securing at least 5% of the votes).
 - In **New Zealand**, **60% of the total 120 seats** in the House of Representatives are **filled through the FPTP system** from territorial constituencies, while the remaining **40% are allotted to parties securing at least 5% of the votes**.

Way Forward

- **Recommendation of Law Commission:**
 - The **Law Commission** in its 170th report (1999) recommended the introduction of the **Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR)** system on an experimental basis.
 - The report suggested that **25% of Lok Sabha seats may be filled through a PR system** by increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha.
 - It recommended considering the **entire nation as one unit for PR based on vote share**, or alternatively, considering it at the state/UT level, given India's federal polity.
- **Upcoming Delimitation Exercise:**
 - The upcoming **delimitation exercise**, which redraws constituencies based on population shifts could pose disadvantage to states with slower population growth. This could **violate the very principles of federalism** and lead to resentment in states losing representation.
 - Thus, we need a mechanism that ensures fair representation for all states, regardless of population growth. This mechanism could involve:
 - Taking into account the current levels of representation of each state can help to create a fairer balance.
 - Investigating alternative systems like the Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) could be beneficial.
- **Recommendation for MMPR system:**
 - To ensure a more equitable distribution of power, the **MMPR system could be implemented for the additional seats** or at least a quarter of the existing seats in each state/UT.
 - This would **empower southern, northeastern, and smaller northern states** by giving them a stronger voice in Parliament, even with an increase in total seats.

Conclusion

As India continues to **evolve as a democracy**, **exploring electoral reforms** like proportional representation and mixed member proportional representation **can potentially lead to a more balanced and fair system**.

Implementing these changes thoughtfully, considering India's unique federal and diverse nature, could enhance the democratic process and ensure that every vote really counts.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system in the context of India's diverse political landscape. Discuss the potential benefits and challenges of adopting a Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) system.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. **(2022)**

Q. To enhance the quality of democracy in India the Election Commission of India has proposed electoral reforms in 2016. What are the suggested reforms and how far are they significant to make democracy successful? **(2017)**