



Mixed electoral systems

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In some ways, it is misleading to call mixed systems a distinct “family” of electoral systems. As the name implies, these systems mix two – or more – different systems in an attempt to obtain the advantages of the different systems while minimizing their disadvantages.

The most widely used mixed systems attempt to balance two key principles that are generally seen as mutually exclusive: identifiable local representation and some measure of proportionality.

While there are many ways in which systems can be mixed, the possibilities include:

- Using a mix of systems across the province
- Using different systems in different areas of the province
- Using different systems to elect different levels of government
- Using a mix of different kinds of options

Systems that mix different electoral families across the province

In mixed systems that attempt to combine local representation with some form of proportionality, the most common method is to essentially split the legislature into two types of members: Some members are elected in individual districts, while others are elected by some form of PR-List system.

For example, Germany elects half its 600-member parliament from single-member districts using the plurality system, while the other half are chosen by a party list system with regional lists of candidates.

- German voters have two votes – one for the local member, one for the party list
- Their parties must win 5 per cent of the national vote or three individual constituency seats before they are eligible to receive any list seats

Systems that use different electoral families in different regions

Systems that use different electoral families in different regions are designed to deal with the representational challenges of various communities. One significant issue is how to balance the representational issues of dense urban communities with those of sparsely-populated rural areas.

France, in its system to elect its Senate, uses a combination of majority and plurality rules in single-member rural electoral districts and proportional representation in urban, multi-member districts.

In the past, Alberta and Manitoba experimented with simultaneously using different systems in different parts of the province in an attempt to balance rural and urban interests. In urban areas, they had multi-member districts – that is, more than one representative elected from a district – using proportional representation by single transferable vote (PR-STV), while in rural areas they had single-member districts with a majority formula. The ballot in both urban and rural districts looked the same; voters simply indicated their preference(s) by rank ordering the candidates.

Systems that use different electoral families for different assemblies

Australia and Japan hold simultaneous elections for both their lower and upper houses of parliament – using different systems for the two houses. This often means parties must use different nominating and campaigning strategies and voters have different kinds of decisions to make, on different ballots, at the same time.

Systems that mix different kinds of options

Russia has included a *none of the above* (NOTA) option on their ballot papers, in addition to listing candidates by party. In Russia, the NOTA option has never attracted a very large percentage of the vote. However, if NOTA should win, the procedure would be for another election to be held. An alternate proposal would have a member of the legislature chosen at random if the NOTA option gets a majority.

Additional Resources

This list of readings could be of interest to anyone wanting to know more about electoral reform. The Citizens' Assembly does not endorse the following books and articles or their projections. However, they are useful to illustrate some of the issues being considered by the Citizens' Assembly. A more extensive list is available on the Assembly's website.

Blais, André, and Louis Massicotte. 'Electoral Systems,' in Lawrence LeDuc, Richard G. Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds.). *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. 1996.

Farrell, D. *Electoral Systems: a Comparative Introduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001. [This is the book being issued by Assembly members as a reference book.]

Lijphart, Arend. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

State Electoral Office of South Australia Website <http://www.seo.sa.gov.au/>

- Animated "How your vote counts" explanation of various voting systems
- Other useful resources

NOTE: More detailed information, including lecture notes, presentations and video recordings, is available on the Citizens' Assembly website.

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