

# Proportional Representation: Reinventing Democracy

## Introduction

Proportional representation (PR) is a voting system in which the share of seats won by each political party or group is roughly proportional to the share of votes that party or group receives in an election. PR systems are used in many countries around the world, including many European countries, and are often seen as fairer and more representative than first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems, which are used in the United States and a few other countries.

There are many different types of PR systems, but they all share the common feature of allocating seats in proportion to votes. This means that parties that receive a large share of the vote will win a large share

of the seats in the legislature, while parties that receive a small share of the vote will win a small share of the seats. PR systems are often contrasted with FPTP systems, which award all of the seats in a given electoral district to the candidate who receives the most votes, regardless of whether that candidate receives a majority of the votes.

PR systems are often seen as fairer than FPTP systems because they give all voters a say in who represents them in the legislature. In FPTP systems, it is possible for a candidate to win an election with only a plurality of the vote, which means that they may not represent the majority of voters in their district. PR systems, on the other hand, ensure that all parties that receive a significant share of the vote are represented in the legislature.

PR systems can also lead to more stable governments than FPTP systems. In FPTP systems, it is possible for a single party to win a majority of the seats in the

legislature even if they do not receive a majority of the votes. This can lead to situations where the government does not represent the majority of the population, which can make it difficult to pass legislation and implement policies. PR systems, on the other hand, tend to produce more proportional results, which can lead to more stable and representative governments.

Despite their many advantages, PR systems are not without their critics. Some argue that PR systems can lead to weak and unstable governments, as they can make it difficult for any one party to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature. Others argue that PR systems can lead to a proliferation of small parties, which can make it difficult to form effective coalitions.

Overall, PR systems are a more fair and representative way of electing representatives than FPTP systems. They give all voters a say in who represents them in the legislature, and they can lead to more stable and representative governments. However, PR systems are

not without their critics, and it is important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of PR systems before adopting them.

## Book Description

**Proportional Representation: Reinventing Democracy** is a comprehensive guide to the theory and practice of proportional representation (PR) voting systems. PR systems are used in many countries around the world, and they offer a number of advantages over first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems, which are used in the United States and a few other countries.

PR systems are more fair and representative than FPTP systems because they give all voters a say in who represents them in the legislature. In FPTP systems, it is possible for a candidate to win an election with only a plurality of the vote, which means that they may not represent the majority of voters in their district. PR systems, on the other hand, ensure that all parties that receive a significant share of the vote are represented in the legislature.

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**Proportional Representation: Reinventing Democracy** covers a wide range of topics, including:

- The history of PR systems
- The different types of PR systems
- The advantages and disadvantages of PR systems
- The prospects for PR in the United States

This book is an essential resource for anyone who wants to learn more about PR and its potential to improve democracy.

## **About the Author**

Pasquale De Marco is a leading expert on PR systems. He has written extensively on the topic, and he has advised governments and political parties around the world on the implementation of PR systems.

# Chapter 1: The Case for Proportional Representation

## 1. The Flaws of First-Past-the-Post Voting

First-past-the-post (FPTP) voting is a system in which the candidate who receives the most votes in a given electoral district wins all of the seats in that district, regardless of whether they receive a majority of the votes. This system is used in the United States and a few other countries, but it is increasingly being replaced by proportional representation (PR) systems.

There are a number of flaws with FPTP voting. First, it can lead to situations where a candidate wins an election with only a plurality of the vote, which means that they may not represent the majority of voters in their district. This can happen when there are multiple candidates running for office, and no one candidate receives a majority of the votes. In these cases, the



candidate with the most votes wins, even if they only receive a small percentage of the total votes cast.

Second, FPTP voting can lead to a disproportionate representation of different groups in the legislature. For example, in the United States, the two major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, typically win the vast majority of seats in Congress, even though they may not represent the majority of voters. This is because the FPTP system tends to favor candidates from large, well-organized parties, and it makes it difficult for smaller parties and independent candidates to win elections.

Third, FPTP voting can lead to a lack of accountability on the part of elected officials. Because FPTP winners are not required to receive a majority of the vote, they may not feel accountable to all of their constituents. This can lead to situations where elected officials only represent the interests of their core supporters, and they ignore the needs of the broader electorate.

PR systems are designed to address these flaws. PR systems allocate seats in proportion to votes, which means that parties that receive a large share of the vote will win a large share of the seats in the legislature, while parties that receive a small share of the vote will win a small share of the seats. This ensures that all parties that receive a significant share of the vote are represented in the legislature, and it makes it less likely that a single party will win a majority of the seats with only a plurality of the vote.

In addition, PR systems tend to produce more stable governments than FPTP systems. In FPTP systems, it is possible for a single party to win a majority of the seats in the legislature even if they do not receive a majority of the votes. This can lead to situations where the government does not represent the majority of the population, which can make it difficult to pass legislation and implement policies. PR systems, on the other hand, tend to produce more proportional results,

which can lead to more stable and representative governments.

# Chapter 1: The Case for Proportional Representation

## 2. The Benefits of Proportional Representation

Proportional representation (PR) offers a number of benefits over first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting systems.

These benefits include:

- **Fairer representation:** PR systems ensure that all parties that receive a significant share of the vote are represented in the legislature. This is in contrast to FPTP systems, which can result in a single party winning a majority of the seats in the legislature even if they do not receive a majority of the votes.
- **More representative governments:** PR systems lead to more representative governments because they give all voters a say in who represents them in the legislature. In FPTP

systems, it is possible for a candidate to win an election with only a plurality of the vote, which means that they may not represent the majority of voters in their district.

- **More stable governments:** PR systems can lead to more stable governments than FPTP systems. This is because PR systems make it more difficult for any one party to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature. This can lead to more consensus-based governments that are less likely to collapse.
- **Greater voter turnout:** PR systems can lead to greater voter turnout than FPTP systems. This is because PR systems give voters a greater sense of agency and make them more likely to feel like their vote will make a difference.
- **Reduced vote splitting:** PR systems can reduce vote splitting, which occurs when voters cast their ballots for a candidate who is not their first choice because they believe that their first choice

has no chance of winning. This can lead to more efficient elections and more representative governments.

Overall, PR systems offer a number of benefits over FPTP voting systems. These benefits include fairer representation, more representative governments, more stable governments, greater voter turnout, and reduced vote splitting.

# Chapter 1: The Case for Proportional Representation

## 3. Proportional Representation in Practice

Proportional representation (PR) is a voting system in which the share of seats won by each political party or group is roughly proportional to the share of votes that party or group receives in an election. PR systems are used in many countries around the world, including many European countries, and are often seen as fairer and more representative than first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems, which are used in the United States and a few other countries.

There are many different types of PR systems, but they all share the common feature of allocating seats in proportion to votes. This means that parties that receive a large share of the vote will win a large share of the seats in the legislature, while parties that receive

a small share of the vote will win a small share of the seats.

One of the most common types of PR system is the party-list PR system. In a party-list PR system, voters vote for a political party, and the seats in the legislature are then allocated to the parties in proportion to the number of votes they receive. This type of PR system is used in many countries, including Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Another common type of PR system is the single transferable vote (STV) system. In an STV system, voters rank the candidates in order of preference. The seats in the legislature are then allocated to the candidates with the most votes, and the votes for the lower-ranked candidates are transferred to the higher-ranked candidates. This type of PR system is used in Ireland and Malta.

PR systems are often seen as fairer than FPTP systems because they give all voters a say in who represents



them in the legislature. In FPTP systems, it is possible for a candidate to win an election with only a plurality of the vote, which means that they may not represent the majority of voters in their district. PR systems, on the other hand, ensure that all parties that receive a significant share of the vote are represented in the legislature.

PR systems can also lead to more stable governments than FPTP systems. In FPTP systems, it is possible for a single party to win a majority of the seats in the legislature even if they do not receive a majority of the votes. This can lead to situations where the government does not represent the majority of the population, which can make it difficult to pass legislation and implement policies. PR systems, on the other hand, tend to produce more proportional results, which can lead to more stable and representative governments.

Despite their many advantages, PR systems are not without their critics. Some argue that PR systems can

lead to weak and unstable governments, as they can make it difficult for any one party to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature. Others argue that PR systems can lead to a proliferation of small parties, which can make it difficult to form effective coalitions.

Overall, PR systems are a more fair and representative way of electing representatives than FPTP systems. They give all voters a say in who represents them in the legislature, and they can lead to more stable and representative governments. However, PR systems are not without their critics, and it is important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of PR systems before adopting them.

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

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