

CHARACTERISTICS OF MAJORITARIAN, PROPORTIONAL AND MIXED SYSTEMS

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Abstract: Choosing an appropriate electoral system depends on a society's priorities in terms of political representation, government stability, and the complexity of the electoral process. In an ideal world, an electoral system should combine fair representation with governmental stability and be simple enough to be understood by all voters. Thus, each society must evaluate what compromises it is willing to make and choose the system that best reflects its specific values and needs.

At the current moment, the importance and purpose of developing this scientific endeavor, arises from the author's intention to highlight some doctrinal and legislative landmarks in the field of majority, proportional and mixed systems. At the same time, there is also the urgent need to carry out a comprehensive analysis regarding the essence of the research subject.

In the process of developing the scientific article, we were guided by several and various scientific research methods that made it possible to properly investigate the titular subject, among which we can list: the analysis method, the synthesis method, the deduction method, the systemic method, the historical method, as well as the comparative method.

The theoretical and legal basis of the scientific approach includes the defining material such as the activity reports of key institutions with responsibilities in the electoral field, as well as the specialized literature, both local and international - which directly or indirectly addresses the essence and content of the subject under research.

Keywords: majority system, proportional system, mixed system, parallel system, mixed-proportional system, proportional representation, single transferable vote, etc.

JEL Classification: K 10; K 14

Introduction

For several decades, the topic of electoral law has been addressed, as well as the manner of conducting elections. The electoral system in a broad sense represents a mechanism, a harmonious system of various legal norms that regulate the procedure for granting electoral rights, the conduct of elections and determining the results of voting. This mechanism as a whole constitutes the Right to Vote (Gladcenco, Pușcaș, 2019). In the Republic of Moldova, several electoral systems have evolved. Each system has left its visible traces in the history of the state. Today we can talk about three electoral systems (majoritarian electoral system, proportional representation electoral systems and mixed electoral system), one of which is relatively new – the mixed electoral system. The mixed electoral system is an electoral system in which part of the mandates are distributed to the majority system and part to the proportional system, so two electoral systems are used together. Thus, thanks to a mixed system, the quality of the lawmaking process is improved and citizens are given a greater degree of sovereignty (Gladcenco, Pușcaș, 2019)

Results obtained based on scientific analyses

Majoritarian system

The majority system is the electoral system in a collegiate body (parliament), which is characterized by the fact that the winner is considered the candidate who has accumulated the majority of votes. There are electoral systems that require an *absolute majority* (50% plus 1 vote) and systems of *relative majority*, which means that the one who accumulates more votes than any other competitor involved in the competition wins the election. Of course, the majority system is beneficial for those who have money and real influence, and such a system separates us from the European political ideal of building a modern party political system.

The advantages of the majoritarian system are the following: this system is considered universal, it can be used to elect both individual representatives and collective bodies of state power or local self-government, the majoritarian system allows small parties to participate and win elections.

This family of electoral systems includes five voting systems: the simple majority system (FPTP), the two-round system, the alternative vote, the block vote and the block vote for the party.

1. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system or the single-round majority system The „*First-past-the-post*” system (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020) is also known in the literature as the „*First-Past-The-Post*” (FPTP) system – a name inspired by horse racing and which would translate as „*the first to cross the finish line takes the pot*”. The first-past-the-post system is one of the simplest electoral systems. Under this system, a country is divided into as many electoral districts as there are seats in parliament (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020). If there are 150 seats in parliament, there will be 150 districts. In each district, the electorate votes for one electoral candidate, and the candidate who accumulates the most votes (relative majority) obtains the seat in that district (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

2. Two-round system. Similar to FPTP, the two-round system (TRS) operates in single-member constituencies, and the vote is given to a candidate and not to a party. However, in TRS, it is not enough for a candidate to accumulate a majority of votes to win the race. In the case of majoritarian TRS, if a candidate does not obtain an absolute majority (i.e. 50% + 1 of the votes) in the first round, a second round of voting is organized in which only the top two candidates who accumulated the most votes in the first round compete. In the second round, one of the candidates will receive the majority and will be declared the winner. In the majoritarian-pluralist TRS, a minimum threshold is set for candidates to qualify for the second round of voting. Since more than one candidate can qualify in the second round, the candidate with the most votes – a not necessarily absolute majority – is declared the winner. The majority TRS system is more common, while the majority-pluralist TRS is applied for parliamentary elections in France (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

3. Alternative voting. The alternative voting (AV) system also operates in single-member constituencies and requires an absolute majority to determine the winner of the election race. The main difference between AV, on the one hand, and FPTP and TRS, on the other, is that in AV, preferential ballots are applied. The preferential ballot requires the voter to sort the candidates in order of preference, that is, to number the candidates (1, 2, 3, etc.), thus indicating who is the first preferred candidate, who is the second, third, etc. In other words, while FPTP and TRS require voters

to indicate only the most preferred party or candidate, AV allows for a more sophisticated expression of voters' preferences (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

4. Other Majoritarian/Pluralist Systems. Block voting (BV) and party block voting (PBV) are two other systems in the family of majoritarian/pluralist electoral systems. The main difference between these two systems and the others mentioned above is that they both operate in single-member constituencies. BV and PBV systems are neither widely used nor supported by electoral experts, and therefore only a brief overview of these systems is provided in this report.

In **Block Voting (BV)**, voters have a number of votes equal to the number of seats allocated for the constituency, and seats are won by the candidates who obtain the highest number of votes. In other words, BV is similar to FPTP, but it is applied in multiple-member constituencies.

Party Block Voting (PBV) works similarly to BV with two important exceptions: i) instead of voting for individual candidates, voters vote for lists of candidates proposed by parties and ii) voters have only one vote. The winner is determined by the majority of votes, and the party that obtains the highest number of votes obtains all the seats available in the constituency (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

BV is used for parliamentary elections in the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Lebanon and Syria, while PBV is used for certain parts of parliamentary elections in Chad, Egypt and Singapore (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

Proportional systems

The proportional representation system is the most democratic method of determining election results. This electoral system ensures the relative representation of small parties as well. In practice, several proportional representation systems are known: the rectified quota system, the single number system, the Hondt system, etc. In the Republic of Moldova, the proportional representation system is applied following the election results.

There are two main types of proportional representation system: **Proportional representation (PR) and single transferable vote (STV)**. The PR system can be subdivided into two groups: *PR on party-blocked lists (PR-CL)* and *PR on party-open lists (PR-OL)*.

a) Proportional representation. Proportional representation systems operate on the basis of different electoral formulas, which can be divided into two large categories:

- largest remainder: the number of votes accumulated by each party is divided by a quota that represents the number of votes needed to obtain a mandate. There are different ways of calculating the quota, the main two being the Hare quota and the Droop quota;
- largest average: the number of votes obtained by each party is divided successively by a set of divisors. The set of divisors used varies – the main divisors are d'Hondt and SainteLague. The size of the plebiscite-nominated constituencies can vary. According to the rules of the PR, an electoral district must correspond to at least 2 mandates. On the other hand, it is possible for a country to have only one electoral district, in which case the number of mandates elected in this district would be equal to the total number of mandates in parliament. Between these two extremes there are considerable variations – from small constituencies (3–5 representatives) to medium (5–10) and large (15 and more representatives) constituencies. As a general rule, the larger the constituencies, the more proportional the results will be. And vice versa, small constituencies tend to reduce the proportionality of election results (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

Main advantages and disadvantages. The strongest argument in favor of party-list proportional systems – or proportional systems in general – is their ability to ensure a „fair” (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020) transformation of votes cast in elections into seats in parliament. In many new democracies, the issue of fair representation, including access for smaller parties or groups in society, is considered unfavourable for the consolidation of democracy. In volatile contexts, it may be difficult for a party with 20% of the vote to accept that it may not obtain even a single seat in parliament, which can happen in majoritarian systems. Another side effect is that proportional systems produce fewer wasted votes, which assures voters that elections are meaningful. Proportional systems also promote the development of a multi-party system, as they offer possibilities to include smaller parties. This in turn gives rise to coalition governments based on power-sharing arrangements that provide for compromises across the political spectrum (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020), rather than „either-or” solutions to political challenges. Some argue that proportional systems promote political continuity and stability (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020). The argument is that „regular changes in government between two ideologically polarized parties, as can occur in FPTP systems, make long-term economic planning more difficult, while coalition governments with broad representation contribute to the stability or coherence in decision-making that enables national development”. Criticisms against proportional systems focus on how this system promotes coalition governments and the fragmentation of political parties. Coalition governments are believed to lead to legislative gridlock that could stall policy implementation and development. Moreover, coalition arrangements concluded by political parties after the elections reduce the possibility for voters to participate in the formation of governments. And even if a party enjoys only 10–15% of the electorate's support, the leader of such a party could still become the country's prime minister. Proportional systems promote the fragmentation of the party system, which can lead to undue influence by small parties: if neither of the two large blocs in parliament has a majority, small parties in the middle gain considerable power. In addition to the arguments for and against proportional systems, mentioned above, they are appreciated for promoting the representation of different groups in society. In order to attract voters, political parties are encouraged to present a diverse list of candidates that reflects the structure of the population, for example, men/women, young/old, rural/urban population, ethnic/religious/racial groups, etc. In particular, party-list proportional systems are appreciated for promoting women in elected positions. While under FPTP, parties are encouraged to promote the „most acceptable candidate” (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020), under list-based proportional systems parties must present the „most acceptable list of candidates”, in which women are given a fair share. In particular, party-list proportional systems allow for the easier introduction of quotas for women's representation, which is already being done in many countries (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

Proportional systems with blocked lists (PR-CL) represent the simplest form of proportional systems. It involves voters voting for a party in a single-member constituency. Based on the distribution of votes, parties obtain a number of seats in parliament, and the order of candidates on the party lists determines who obtains these seats. Under PR-CL, the order of candidates on the list presented to voters is determined by the party's central committee or the party body of the constituency. The structure of the ballot paper provides considerable control to political parties.

Proportional systems with open lists. Proportional systems with open lists (PR-OL) represent a more sophisticated version of the proportional list system. It differs from PR-CL in one important aspect: the

structure of the ballot paper. While under PR-CL, voters can only vote for a specific party, PR-OL offers voters the opportunity to influence the choice of candidates on the list (Gladcenco, Pușcaș, 2019).

b) Single Transferable Vote. The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a preferential voting system. Voting takes place in single-member constituencies with the application of a proportionality formula – a quota – to distribute the mandates. But at the root of the STV system is preferential voting: voters are asked to order individual candidates according to their preference. When the votes are counted, all candidates who receive a number of votes cast with the preference „1” equal to or greater than the established quota are elected. Subsequently, a process of redistributing the surplus votes of the elected candidates and eliminating the candidates with the lowest number of first preference votes takes place until all the mandates are distributed (Gladcenco, Pușcaș, 2019).

Main advantages and disadvantages. The general advantages and disadvantages of PR systems in general are also relevant for the STV system. Beyond them, STV provides more value to voters' votes, expressed in favor of parties and candidates. In practice, STV is applied more in electoral districts with rather small nominal folds, which have the advantage of bringing elected representatives closer to voters. Compared to party-list PR, STV also increases the chances of popular independent candidates to be elected to represent voters in parliament. Some of the main disadvantages of the STV system are quite obvious: it requires voters to cast a rather complicated vote, and the calculation of the distribution of mandates is quite complex. There are also opinions that STV causes party fragmentation and internal party splits, since candidates from the same parties can compete on the ballot (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

Mixed systems

In order to minimize the shortcomings of the majoritarian system, as well as the proportional system, some countries use the mixed system, which, in essence, represents a combination in different proportions of the advantages of both systems while minimizing the disadvantages. Thus, in the Federal Republic of Germany, half of the members of the first and main chamber, the Bundestag, are elected through the majoritarian system in a single round at the country level, and the other half are elected through proportional voting based on the states. In mixed elections, the voter, as a rule, has two votes - one is given to the candidate from the single-member constituency, and the second is given to those elected on party lists. The advantage of the system is that, having two ballot papers, the voter can choose on two levels: at the electoral constituency level – locally and nationally. In Australia, for example, the House of Representatives is formed according to the absolute majority system, and the Senate - according to the proportional representation system. Recently, two more European states have switched to the mixed electoral system – Lithuania and Hungary. The practice of political life has shown that the mixed electoral system, unlike the proportional system, can solve in a more appropriate and acceptable manner both the problem of minority representation in legislative bodies and the formation of the majority necessary for stable governance. The solution or the possibility of solving this problem of particular importance served as a reason for a dispute in several countries in Europe, including the Republic of Moldova, regarding the transformation of the proportional system or even the transition to the mixed system. The main arguments put forward not only by voters in favor of changes are indisputable, given the fact that the proportional system itself is not established to benefit voters, but one intended to represent the interests and will of political parties.

There are two types of mixed electoral systems: **the parallel system and the mixed proportional system (MMP)**. The main difference between the two is that, in the case of the former, the two combined systems are distinct and independent of each other, while in the case of the latter, the combined systems are linked to each other. Since the way the two systems work in terms of voter choices is quite similar, it is worth examining in this paper. Both the parallel system and the MMP vary considerably from country to country.

- *Number of ballots*: In some mixed systems, voters have a single vote, which is used to elect a candidate in the majoritarian/pluralist component and to elect a political party in the proportional component of the election.

- *Majoritarian/pluralist component*: Most mixed systems use either FPTP (e.g. Japan, Russia and Ukraine) or TRS (e.g. Lithuania and Hungary) to select candidates in single-member constituencies, but other systems may be used.

- *Proportional component*: Mixed systems use party-list PR in the proportional component, some with closed lists, others with open lists.

- *Seats per system*: Mixed systems can vary in the number of seats elected in each system – in some cases half of the parliamentarians are elected in each system, but the practice can vary from country to country. The number of mandates distributed by the different systems influences the outcome (Gladcenco, Pușcaș, 2019), for example:

I. Mixed parallel systems. Despite their differences, parallel systems have one characteristic in common: they all consist of two separate electoral systems, which operate completely independently of each other. In other words, some members of parliament are elected according to majority/plurality rules, and some members of parliament are elected according to proportional representation (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

II. Mixed member proportional system. The key feature of mixed member proportional (MMP) systems is the way they link the two systems used – namely, the way in which the seats offered in the proportional component are used to compensate for the disproportionality produced in the majority/pluralist component of the system. If a political party wins 20% of the votes but only 5% of the seats under majority/pluralist rules, it is awarded additional seats from the proportional component to compensate for the gap (Bakken, Sorescu, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I can say with certainty that each type of voting system has distinct advantages and disadvantages, which influence the quality of political representation and governmental stability. Majoritarian systems favor stability and simplification of the electoral process, but may neglect fair representation. Proportional systems provide more fair and diverse representation, but may lead to governmental instability. Mixed systems attempt to balance these aspects, combining elements of both systems to achieve more efficient and fair representation and governance.

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