

# **POLS 3024: INTRO TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**DO INSTITUTIONS MATTER?  
ELECTORAL SYSTEMS**

28 Feb 2019

Michael Jana

# What is Electoral System

- Institutions guiding how people vote and get elected into political office
- Do these rules differ
  - by country?
  - How?
  - Why?
  - What are the implications?
    - On quality and breadth of representation
    - On fractionalization and polarization of political party systems
    - On stability of governments and political systems
    - On voter turnout and voting behaviour

# Main Types of Executive Elections

- Direct, e.g.
  - France
  - Russia
  - Malawi
  - Argentina
- Indirect, e.g.
  - USA (through electoral college)
  - South Africa (through elected MPs)

# How Candidates are elected

- Electoral formula
- District magnitude
- Ballot structure
- Electoral threshold

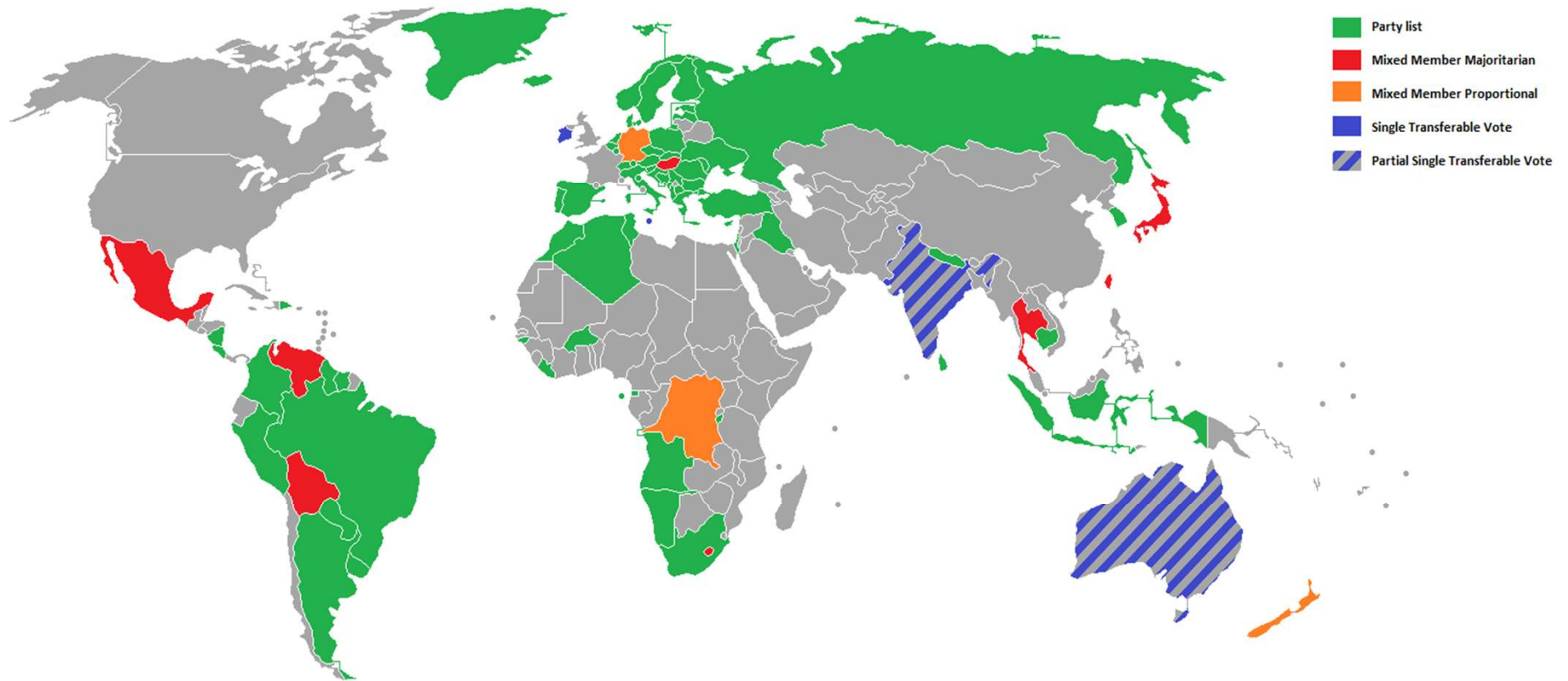
# Electoral Formulae

- Plurality electoral system:
  - Who gets the most votes wins; First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)
- Majority electoral system:
  - 50+1%; “runoff”
- Proportional Representation (PR)

# Examples of FPTP Countries

- Botswana
- Ethiopia
- India
- Jamaica
- Kenya
- Malawi
- Nigeria
- United Kingdom
- United State of America
- Zambia

# Examples of Countries that use PR



# Examples of Countries that changed from FPTP to ...

- Cyprus (changed to PR in 1981)
- Denmark (changed to PR in 1920)
- South Africa (changed to PR in 1996)
- Lesotho (changed to PR in 2002)



# District Magnitude

- Single-member district system
  - Country divided in districts/constituencies (FPTP)
- Advantages:
  - Clarity on responsibility and accountability
  - “moderating” influence on political competition; hedges against extremism
- Disadvantages:
  - Representational distortion (e.g. under-representation of smaller parties)

# PR

- Country as a “single” district with multi-member
- Country divided in districts; each with multi-member
- Closed party list
  - Voters vote for prescribed party lists
- Open party list
  - Voters vote for either the list or individuals on the list.
  - Deemed more democratic than closed party list;  
WHY?

# Ballot Structure

- Categorical
  - Vote cast is for one candidate
- Ordinal
  - Voter can rank his/her choices
  - If a candidate has reached a winning threshold, remaining votes are transferred to second choice...etc
  - Advantage: avoids vote wasting

# Discuss

- What are the effects (positive or negative) of the following electoral systems?
  - Plurality
  - Majority
  - PR

# **Some Positive effects of Single-Member Plurality (SMP) System**

- Direct responsibility and accountability of elected leaders to their constituencies
- Hedge against extremism
- Weed out weak parties

# Some Negative effects of SMP

- Not inclusive (“winner-takes-all”)
  - Excludes the minority
  - Under representation of small parties; and may lead to a two-party system
  - Under-representation of women due to gender dynamics

# Some positive effects of PR

- Inclusive and fair
  - Includes the minority
  - Can accommodate affirmative action to promote equality and equity e.g. promotion of women representation

# Some negative effects of PR

- Can give way to extremism
- Can promote fractionalization