



# Electoral Systems And Political Representation An Evaluation Of Alternatives To First Past The Post In India: An Overview

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**Abstract:** In India, it is possible to identify the institutions that have been exercising a larger and direct influence over electoral structures and processes, and that possess the authority to sanction changes therein. Historically, the institution that founded Independent India's electoral system and determined its principles and features is the Constituent Assembly of India. Thereon, the reins of electoral reform have been commanded mainly by the Election Commission of India and the Law Commission of India. The ad hoc National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution has also been able to successfully weigh in on significant deliberations on electoral reform. In this context, this section studies (a) the Constituent Assembly Debates to comprehend its reasoning in selecting the First-Past-the Post system for India; and to identify whether the then compulsions that caused the Assembly to choose First-Past-the-Post continue to exist in contemporary India, or have been resolved with time; and (b) the recommendations of the Law Commission of India and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution to identify their positions on the continuance of the First-Past-the-Post system, or reforms therein, and the reflections of 55 the Election Commission of India on these, if any. This knowledge will enable the researcher to evolve prescriptions of optimal feasibility.

**Keywords:** Electoral System, Political, First Past and Post, India

## INDRODUCTION

India remains by far the largest democracy in the world, with almost 600 million voters. India's parliamentary government and First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, see First Past the Post (FPTP), is a legacy of British colonialism, which ended in 1947. The British introduced self-government to India in stages, but it was not until the end of colonial rule and the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950 by a Constituent Assembly that universal suffrage were achieved. The Constituent Assembly, which comprised a number of eminent jurists, lawyers, constitutional experts and political thinkers and laboured for almost three years, debated the issue of which electoral system should be adopted at great length before finally choosing a FPTP electoral system. Various systems of proportional representation were considered and attracted many advocates, given India's extremely diverse and multi-ethnic society, but FPTP was chosen mainly to avoid fragmented legislatures and to help the formation of stable governments - stability being a major consideration in a developing country with widespread poverty and illiteracy.

## The Constituent Assembly of India

The Constituent Assembly of India was a legislative body created<sup>87</sup> to draft the Constitution of independent India. The deliberations were conducted and recorded as the Constituent Assembly Debates (Proceedings) from 9 December 1946 to 24 January 1950, both dates inclusive. The Debates offer insights into the philosophy and intent of the Constitution of India, thereby aiding the resolution of recurring controversies<sup>89</sup> on the structure, processes, and direction of governance in India. The Constituent Assembly's discussions for and against continuing the First-Past-the-Post system, inherited from India's erstwhile British colonizers, took the form of debates on the benefits and challenges of adopting a Proportional Representation system in independent India. Significant observations made during the course of the debate are highlighted below. The opinions are organized chronologically and with speaker-attribution so that the research gains a flavor of the evolution of the discussion.

## Research Limitations

The above questions will be studied within the parameters of the following two select research limitations.

The study of the value of the First-Past-the-Post system, toward enabling a representative legislature, is limited to elections for the Lok Sabha; and The comparison of elections for India's Lok Sabha is limited to elections for its equivalent chamber—i.e. a directly elected House of People's Representatives—in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, France, Canada, and Australia.

## Methodology and Data Sources

The objectives of this research are normative, the findings are expected to be demonstrative, and the recommendations are expected to be prescriptive in nature. The research hypotheses are tested by demonstration through quantitative data, and comparative analyses of qualitative data. The research uses the historical method and statistical demonstration to ascertain whether the First-Past-the-Post system causes the election of an unrepresentative Lok Sabha, a point that sets the context for the rest of the research. The research uses the historical method to study the reasoning of the Constituent Assembly of India in its choice of the First-Past-the-Post system for Lok Sabha elections, and the positions of the Law Commission of India and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution on the representativeness of the First-Past-the-Post system; and qualitative and comparative analysis to examine recommendations for alternatives to First-Past-the-Post prescribed by the institutions, if any. It uses the institutional method and comparative analysis to study the practice of First-Past-the-Post in countries selected for learning's for India. It uses the institutional method and qualitative prescription to recommend an electoral system that is best suited to returning a representative Lok Sabha, and the structural changes that are required to enable such reform.

The data used for research is open source and has been collected from largely primary and partly secondary sources. Primary sources used include government documents, and secondary sources include books and articles, accessed from libraries and the internet.

## Research Questions

In the context of the above, the questions that this study seeks to address are:

- How well-suited is the First-Past-the-Post system to the Indian electoral context?
- What are the possible alternatives to the First-Past-the-Post?

## System in India

- Are these possible alternative systems in contemporary use in any country?
- What are the socio-political conditions of the said countries that contribute to the success of the said alternative system?
- Do these said socio-political conditions exist in India? Consequently, are any of these alternative systems better suited to the Indian context than First-Past-the-Post?
- If the study finds that First-Past-the-Post is in fact the method that is best suited to India, then what are the possible systemic reforms that can be undertaken to improve the efficacy of the First-Past-the-Post system?

## Definition

**First-Past the Post/ Relative Majority/ Simple Plurality System:** A system of electoral winner determination in which a candidate who has secured the highest number of votes polled is declared a winner, even if he has failed to secure a majority of votes polled.

**Block Vote System:** A First-Past-the-Post system that is applied in elections for multi-member constituencies. Here, instead of a single simple ballot to elect one representative, voters cast as many (simple) ballots as there are candidates to elect multiple representatives. Each voter can cast only one vote per candidate.

**Distributive/Cumulative Voting:** Like block voting, this also is a system that is applied in elections for multi-member constituencies, and voters cast as many ballots as there are candidates. Unlike block voting, however, each voter is not restricted to casting only one vote per candidate. This enables a manner of not only marking voter preference, but also of loading the odds in favor of one's preferred candidates.

## Majority System: A system of electoral winner determination

In which a candidate who has secured the majority of votes is declared the winner. It may take one of two forms.

A Simple Majority System, wherein the winning candidate is required to secure 50% + 1 vote.

A Special Majority System, wherein the winning candidate is required to secure a pre-determined percentage in excess of the simple majority—i.e. more than 50% + 1 vote.

**Single Round versus Two-Round System:** In a single round system, polling occurs in a single stage. They may allow for one or more ballots to be cast by the voter, but at a single time. In a two-round system, polling occurs in two stages, wherein the first stage generally serves as an eliminating poll and the second stage generally serves as the winner determining stage. In both stages, the system may allow for one or more ballots to be cast by the voter.

**Run-off/ Eliminative Exhaustive Ballot/ Eliminative Repeat Ballot System:** A system of multi-round voting wherein a requisite number of candidates get eliminated in each round until one candidate has secured a majority. Its simplest form is a two-round Run-off System in which the two candidates securing the highest votes in the primary round contest against each other in the final round to secure a simple majority.

**Proportional Representation System:** A form of legislative representation in which the percentage of seats distributed among parties/coalitions is equivalent to the percentage of votes that each has polled.

**List System:** A form of Proportional Representation system in which each party creates a list of the candidates that it is fielding in each constituency, the number of candidates is generally equal to the number of seats allotted to that constituency. The proportion of votes that a party receives is the proportion of seats that it can fill.

**Closed List System:** A form of List System in which the ranking of candidates on the party list and their selection to fill the seats is left entirely to the will of the party, and voters have no say over which candidates from the list will fill the apportioned seats.

**Open List System:** A form of List System in which voters, through their ballots, choose not only their preferred parties, but also their preferred candidates to fill the seats won by the parties.

**Threshold:** A pre-determined number or percentage of votes that a candidate/party must secure in order to contest the next round of polling, or be considered for seat allocation.

**D'Hondt Formula:** A formula that enables Proportional Representation systems to calculate and allocate seats for votes won. The formula, applied to each party at the time of allocating each seat to determine its recipient, is  $N=V/(S+1)$  where V is the number of votes that the party has won, S is the number of seats that the party has been allocated so far, and N is the Quotient that the party secures for the seat under consideration. The seat under consideration is allocated to the party that secures the highest N.

**Schepers Formula:** Also a formula that enables Proportional Representation systems to calculate and allocate seats for votes won. The formula, applied to each party, is  $P=V/(T/S)$  where V is the number of votes that the party has won, T is the Total number of votes cast, S is the total number of seats to be distributed, and P is the number of seats allocated to the party.

**Apparentment:** A system wherein, in a Party List Proportional Representation system, more than one party combines their lists in order to meet the quotient required to win an additional seat. This enables minority parties to increase their representation in the House, and also enables the reduction of unrepresented quotients thereby reducing vote wastage.

**Ranked-Choice/ Preferential Voting/ Instant Run-off System:** A non-simple ballot structure wherein a voter is required to rank all contesting candidates/parties in accordance to preference.

**Single Transferable Vote:** A form of Proportional Representation system that processes the ranked-choice ballot structure. The underlying general principle is that if no candidate is able to secure the qualifying vote threshold, then the lowest polling candidate is eliminated from the contest, and her/his votes are transferred to the candidate ranked next on those votes.<sup>4</sup>This process of elimination of candidates and redistribution of votes is repeated until a candidate secures the qualifying threshold. The transferable vote system can also take the form of multiple transferable votes, where in more than one lowest polling candidate is eliminated and their votes are transferred.

**Mixed System:** A system where in two or more forms of electoral and representation systems are combined. It may take.

**One of two forms:** A Mixed Parallel System wherein the different systems employed have no bearing on each other's selects oral outcomes. A Mixed Member System wherein some or all of the different systems employed have a direct bearing on the electoral outcome of some or all of the other systems

**Distance Voting/Absentee Ballot:** A system wherein a voter can cast one's ballot without appearing at the designated polling station of one's constituency. Common methods are postal ballot, online ballot, proxy ballot, and voting at an alternative polling station.

**Abstention:** A formal recording of the voter's refusal to vote for any of the contesting candidates in an election. In India, it is known as the None-of-the-Above (NOTA) vote.

**Wasted Votes:** Votes that have been cast for a losing contestant, and are therefore rendered unrepresented.

**Simple versus Complex Ballot:** In a simple ballot, a voter is required to indicate a single choice. In a complex ballot, a voter is required to indicate more than one choice.

**Secret Ballot:** A form of voter-confidence guarantee wherein a voter is protected by electoral law from being required to reveal in whose favors the ballot was cast.

The Constituent Assembly of India Debates (Proceedings) spanning from 9 December 1946 to 24 January 1950 enables the tracing of the genesis of the First-Past-the-Post system in independent India. The arguments proffered by the architects of India for and against First-Past-the-Post and its alternatives in the context of the then prevalent socio-political conditions, and the consequent decision to adopt First-Past-the-Post as the method of electoral winner determination, make clear the intent behind its adoption and the merits perceived therein. This enables a past versus present comparison of whether the advantages of First-Past-the-Post that existed at the time of Independence continue to be relevant in contemporary India, or have been rendered obsolete by changing socio-economic conditions. The Constitution of India that the Assembly formulated, when read in conjunction with the amended version as it stands today, provides essential clarity on the electoral structures and processes that may be amended, and those that may not. This clarity aids the research to focus its resources on studying reform areas that are constitutionally permissible, there by evolving prescriptions that are able to be considered for application in the Indian system.

However, it is required that the process of locating electoral reforms within constitutional parameters as above must begin by first questioning the contemporary relevance of constitutional provisions. Only when it is ascertained that the Constitution requires no amendment in its prescriptions on elections can this research locate its own prescriptions within those of the former. Toward this, The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, in its recommendations (2002) on Electoral Processes and Political Parties, submits that while some far reaching reforms in the electoral processes are necessary, no major constitutional amendment is called for, because the necessary correctives can be achieved by modifying ordinary legislation or, in many cases, merely by subordinate legislation and executive action. The Commission lists the First-Past-the-Post system as an issue that requires necessary correctives. It observes that when, under the First-Past-the-Post system the majority of candidates are elected by a minority of votes, the representative character of the representative sones under doubt, resulting in a serious erosion of their representational legitimacy. This is exacerbated when in several cases; more votes are cast against the winning candidates than for them. The Commission therefore pays significant attention toward examining the suitability of the First-Past-the-Post system to contemporary India, and considers reforms to correct the inherent flaws.

Earlier, the Report of the Committee on Electoral Reforms (1975) had considered alternatives to the First-Past-the-Post system, prompted particularly by the German model of mixed representation in the Bundestag. The Committee also considered a system where in the country would remain

divided into single member constituencies as at present; that the candidates polling more than fifty percent of valid votes would be declared elected from their respective constituencies; and that the remaining seats would be filled by the List System. The Committee did not, however, recommend the adoption of any specific system, and left the decision to a future public debate. On a similar note, L P Singh in 'Electoral Reforms: Problems and Suggested Solutions' (1986) proposed that candidates who secure over fifty percent of votes should be declared elected and that the remaining seats should be filled by the List System, while also cautioning that the subject is a complex one that requires public debate.

Such caution against driving a hasty decision on the matter was reiterated by The Report of the Committee on Electoral Reforms (May 1990) when addressing the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's recommendation (January 1990) to consider the suggestions to adopt Proportional Representation and List Systems. The Committee admitted that it is unable to arrive at unanimous opinion on the issue. Accordingly, it recommended to the Ministry of Law and Justice and the Election Commission of India that an expert committee is required to examine the subject.

It was then realized that a more intensive and extensive deliberation is required before India can choose an alternative to the First-Past-the-Post system. Such a deliberation was undertaken by the Law Commission of India which proposed its recommendations in its One Hundred Seventieth Reports on Reform of the Electoral Laws (May 1999). The Report noted that the First-Past-the-Post system has given rise to several electoral inequities and distortions, particularly on account of the multiplicity of political parties. The Commission considered the several alternative solutions offered, and identified as "laudable" the recommendation that no candidate should be declared elected unless s/he obtains at least fifty per cent of the votes cast. The Commission also presented for consideration its views on the adoption of the List System. However, like experts earlier, this Commission too paired its recommendations with a caution - that several practical difficulties are required to be resolved before such an alternative system can be implemented. The Commission urged the government and parliament to take a decision on the matter in consideration of the circumstances.

However, the above exhortations failed to be reflected in the Election Commission of India's Proposed Electoral Reforms (2004). Its two sets of notes on areas of immediate concern to the Commission and requiring the Prime Minister's urgent attention make no reference to seeking an alternative to the First-Past-the-Post system. Similarly, the Election Commission of India's Proposed Electoral Reforms (2016) also refrains from examining the matter, despite examining these electoral lacunae and engaging in extensive study and research toward identifying solutions for the latter. Interestingly, as early as in its 1972 Report on the Fifth General Elections, the Election Commission of India had opined that neither the List System nor any other version of Proportional Representation is suitable for India. However, the Election Commission of India does not revisit its 1972 examination even in the Background Paper on Electoral Reforms (December 2010) which it had co-sponsored with the Legislative Department of the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Nevertheless, the Law Commission of India in its Report No.255 on Electoral Reforms (March 2015) picks up the thread from its own 1999 report and examines the merits and demerits of the First-Past-the-Post system. It reiterates the findings of the 170<sup>th</sup> Law Commission Report on the Proportional Representation system and recommends that these be examined by the government to determine whether its proposals can be made workable in India at present.

The understanding of existing electoral law and reforms proposed there in was greatly aided by documents compiled by the Legislative Department in the Government of India's Ministry of Law and Justice. Its Manual of Election Law – Volumes I and II serve as a useful repository of extracts pertaining to elections contained in the Constitution of India and rules and orders under the Constitution; relevant Acts of Parliament including The Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951, and statutory rules and orders such as The Delimitation of Council Constituencies Orders and The Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961. Interestingly, it is the latter that establishes that

First-Past-the-Post shall be the method by which the winners of a Lok Sabha election will be determined. In this respect, Rule 64 states, “Declaration of result of election and return of election.-The returning officer shall, subject to the provisions of Section 65 if and so far as they apply to any particular case, then-(a)declare in Form 21C or Form 21D, as may be appropriate, the candidate to whom the largest number of valid votes have been given, to be elected under Section 66 and send signed copies thereof to the appropriate authority, the Election Commission and the chief electoral officer...”.

Its compilation on National and Regional Consultation on Electoral Reforms (2011) provides reports and summaries of discussions conducted, and records observations by experts. During the consultation, Pawan Bansal, the then Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, analyzed the extent to which the electoral system under present practice reflects the will of the majority, and the phenomenon of the proliferation of political parties. He also observed that all proposed electoral reforms must meet the “touchstone” of the Constitution of India. Veerappa Moily, the then Union Minister for Law and Justice, emphasized the importance of bearing in mind electoral lessons “from the various civilizations across the globe” when fashioning electoral reforms. Shivraj Patil, the then Governor of Punjab and the Administrator of Chandigarh, opined that suggestions by the Election Commission of India must be accepted. Balram Gupta, then Senior Advocate, High Court of Punjab and Haryana, proposed that a candidate, in order to be elected, should secure over 50% of polled votes. If the poll verdict does not provide for such a majority for any candidate, then “there should be a run-off election between the first two candidates”.<sup>43</sup> RS Choudhary, IAS (Retd.), former Vice Chancellor, Kurukshetra University, Indian National Lok Dal, opined that “a candidate even getting the highest number of votes should not be declared elected, if his votes are less than the minimum votes to save forfeiture of security deposit”.

It is interesting to note that the need to resist electoral wins with minority votes was emphasized in as many as three out of the four Regional Consultations on Electoral Reforms conducted – the Bhopal consultation covering Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand; the Kolkata consultation covering West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha; and the Mumbai consultation covering Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Goa. In this respect, the Summary of Recommendations made in Regional Consultations (Draft) prepared by C V Madhukar, then Member, Core Committee on Electoral Reforms, recorded the proposal that “candidates should have to secure a majority (more than 50%) of votes to win any election” as a “structural change” required toward the “conduct and better management of elections”.

On occasion, we find that private citizens have come together to collectively exhort the government to implement electoral reforms, and to share with the government their researched views on what the nature and direction of these reforms should be. One such initiative was The Political Parties (Registration and Regulation of Affairs, etc.) Draft Bill 2011, prepared by a committee chaired by Justice M N Venkatachaliah and advocated by the Association for Democratic Reforms, the National Election Watch, and the Centre for Standards in Public Life. The Draft Bill is accompanied by a Background Paper for Electoral Reforms<sup>48</sup> which explains the urgent need to correct the flaws in our electoral system. In its observations on the need for a representative democracy, the paper says:

- “A representative democracy has to approximate closely to the society it seeks to represent, in order to maintain its legitimacy as a system of government...A parliamentary democracy requires representative government which will truly reflect the public opinion.”
- However, there presentation al legitimacy of the Indian Parliament is being eroded. “The multiplicity of political parties combined with the First-Past-the-Post system results in a vast majority of parliamentarians and legislators getting elected on a minority vote. The percentage of polling is itself quite low and those who win usually obtain less than 50% of votes cast, i.e., more votes cast against them than in their favors and the votes secured by them being a fraction of the

electorate. A candidate is returned even if he gets less than one-third of the votes polled. There are extreme cases of some candidates who won on the basis of 18% of the votes polled. On an average over 60% of the parliamentarians have won on a minority vote. It is said that the present Lok Sabha has 68% of its members elected on a minority vote. The votes secured by a successful candidate in the Assembly sectors on an average are 25%, of the votes polled. On an average only 50% - 55% of the voters turn up for voting. This means in effect a winning candidate gets about 6% of the votes of the electorate in the constituency.”

- Both First-Past-the-Post and Proportional Representation present systemic challenges. “It is said that the system of First-Past-the-Post has the merit of preponderance of ‘decisiveness’ over ‘representativeness.’ Proportional Representation system though it may have some advantages of greater representation all legitimacy is beset with the problem of having more and more disparate coalitions providing unstable and not long lasting governments which has been the bane of countries like Italy.”
- An alternative to the First-Past-the-Post system must be found. “The principle of representativeness will be realized to a great extent if a candidate is declared successful if he obtains 50%+1 vote of the votes polled. Obtaining 50%+1 vote is however not an easy proposition. It therefore appears more feasible and appropriate in the circumstances that it be provided that for a Candidate to be declared elected, he should secure at least 40% of the votes polled and if the difference of votes between the candidate getting the highest number of votes (and not less than 40%) and the candidate getting the next highest is more than 5%, then the candidate with a minimum of 40% votes should be deemed to have obtained 50%+1 votes and declared the winner. If no candidate gets at least 40% then there should be a run off contest between the top two candidates. This is broadly the French pattern. Such a system will give greater legitimacy to the elected representatives and our democratic process. This will also prevent a candidate from winning only on the basis of caste, community, religion and language and he will represent a more inclusive section of the electorate.”

Accordingly, the Background Paper proposed that the system of 50% +1 vote should be adopted by effecting appropriate amendments to The Representation of the People Act, 1951 and The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. The amendment that it recommended to Rule 64 (a) is: “Amend Rule 64 (a) by adding the following: Provided that no candidate shall be declared elected unless he has secured 50%+1 of the votes polled; Provided further that if the candidate securing the largest number of votes has not secured 50%+1 of the votes polled, then such candidate to be declared elected should have secured at least 40% of the votes polled and if the difference of votes between the candidate securing the largest number of votes and not less than 40% and the candidate securing the second largest number of votes is more than 5% then the candidate securing a minimum of 40% of the votes polled shall be declared elected. In the event of no candidate securing 40% of the votes polled there shall be a run off contest between the top two contestants /candidates and the winner as between them shall be declared elected...”

### **Documents compiled by the Election Commission of India**

Greatly aided the research to contextualize itself in the existing electoral laws and past electoral experiences. They enable an accurate comprehension of the complexities and exigencies in the conduct of elections in India, thereby enabling the research prescriptions to be better located within the socio-political context prevalent in the country. This is particularly true of the compilation of Election Laws and the Election Commission of India’s Instructions in the form of Handbooks, Manuals, and Check Lists<sup>s</sup>, which include compendiums of instruction on the monitoring of matters such as election expenditure and the media, manuals on force multipliers, vulnerability mapping and risk management, standard operating procedure for the pre-poll hours, and handbooks and model checklists for all levels of electoral officers as well as for candidates. The Statistical Reports on General Elections from 1951 to 2014 enable the study of the scale of the electorate and voters,

contestants and winners, and constituencies and representation. The record of election results enables the accurate study of vote share and seats here of winning as well as non-winning candidates, and the relationship therein. They enable the identification of the forms and magnitude of representation and under-representation that result from our country's electoral process, and to understand result trends and the possible impact of the First-Past-the-Post system on them.

### **Findings on institutional positions on First-Past-the-Post in India Constituent Assembly of India**

- The Constituent Assembly of India, in its debates, deliberated extensively on the form of electoral system that India should adopt. When arguing on the methods of electoral winner determination best suited to India, members proposed and opposed the Functional Representation, Nomination, Proportional Representation, Transferable and Non-

Transferable Vote Indirect Election through Electoral College, Block Vote, and First-Past-the-Post systems. It appears from the debates that the Assembly recognized that First-Past-the-Post is not the most representative electoral model. Yet, First-Past-the Post was selected when the other proposed models were rendered eliminated due to the concern that their complexity would pose a challenge to the conduct of inclusive elections in the newly independent India – then a nation of mostly illiterate first-time voters who were yet to be acquainted with the structures and processes of democracy, and were yet to imbibe the reasoning nature of the democratic spirit. Law Commission of India

- The Law Commission of India, which functions under the Ministry of Law and Justice of the Government of India, records its views on the First-Past-the-Post system and its alternatives in its One Hundred and Seventieth Report on Reform of the Electoral Law, May 1999, and its Report No.255 on Electoral Reforms, March 2015. In these, it recognizes that First-Past-the Post causes unrepresentative results, and that alternatives need to be considered; it examines the merits and demerits of alternative systems vis a vis First-Past-the-Post; it posits that the List System should be the preferred alternative; and it recommends that its suggestions should be examined by the government to determine whether they can be made workable in India at present. National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution

- The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, constituted by the Government of India in February 2000, records its views on the First-Past-the-Post system and its alternatives in its Report submitted in 2002. In this, it recognizes that the primary goal of our electoral system is representativeness, which is not enabled by First-Past-the Post. Hence, there exists the need to consider alternative electoral models. It appears to favor the two-round Run-off System with winner-declaration by simple majority as an alternative to First-Past-the-Post. It also records that the Chief Election Commissioner has suggested the latter system on several occasions, and that he has stated that the Election Commission of India possesses the capacity to conduct run-off polls. The Commission, however, refrains from making a positive recommendation straightaway toward the acceptance of the system, and instead recommends that the suggestion be examined closely by the Government of India and the Election Commission of India in consultation with political parties and other stakeholders.

### **CONCLUSION**

Our analysis shows that an institutional approach is the most promising way to Understand why a broad variety of parties are relatively small in more proportional electoral systems. Only such an approach can encompass the broad variety within the category of pro-reform advocates into a coherent theoretical framework. We tested the consequences of such institutions over twenty-five elections in the twenty-one electoral democracies with at least 2.5 million inhabitants within the period of study. The results show mixed effects of different PR system characteristics on party size, but point to the inherent tie-breaking roles of proportional representation in accounting for differences in party competition between PR and plurality systems. Serious reform proposals inspired by social choice and spatial theories tend to downplay the parties' institutional and business environment. These narrow perspectives should be included in a comprehensive theoretical framework such as the one proposed here. While acknowledging the importance of long-term consequences, the electoral reform debate is necessarily a pragmatic debate. Taking the many choices about

different institutions as given, and the limitations of institutional reform proposals in mind, it is not irrational to take the different incremental pay-offs derived from the principle characteristics of the different electoral systems as a starting point for a moderate preference for plurality or proportional representation electoral systems. Battles about the precise seat-vote distributions that different institutions do (or do not) deliver are as important as ever.

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