Stoycho P. Stoychev

Elections and Electoral Systems Around the World

Evolution, Participation and the Introduction of Hybrid Models

St. Kliment Ohridski University Press

ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AROUND THE WORLD



To my son, Peter

Stoycho P. Stoychev

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Introduction

Elections are central to the functioning of contemporary representative democracies (Cheibub & Przeworski, 1999, pp. 224–230; Dahl, 1971, pp. 1–8; Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 269–272). As their foundational frameworks, electoral systems structure political representation and the interparty competition, thereby shaping voter engagement determining the legitimacy of democracy. This book examines the balance between representation and accountability in electoral systems, which is a persistently central topic to the debates in electoral studies and comparative politics (Lijphart, 2012). It has important implications for public trust in government and the corresponding patterns of engagement and participation. More proportional electoral systems provide a wider spectrum of political representation, which potentially results in a more legitimate political system specifically in heterogeneous societies (Dahl, 1989, pp. 113–118; Lijphart, 1994a, pp. 7–14). Conversely, less proportional systems may narrow the spectrum of representation but provide greater governmental stability, rising the capacity for decisive policies and reforms.

More importantly, they institutionalize direct chains of accountability between the elected representatives and their constituents, which is another critical aspect determined by electoral frameworks. It assumes that citizens can identify who is responsible for the quality of policy performance and have the means to sanction or reward incumbents in subsequent elections accordingly. Electoral arrangements that clearly link voters and their representatives enhance, therefore, performance. Conversely, frameworks that diffuse these links may dilute personal liability, although it may still be maintained or even improved at the collective party level (Carey & Shugart, 1995, pp. 417–424). Therefore, the design and functionality of electoral systems, set by the arrangements of their principal components, plays a decisive role in maintaining the most fundamental features of democratic institutions and their governance outputs.

Their structural design and the performance of their essential functions determine not only the representational dimension of legitimacy, but also its qualitive dimension, which is ultimately a function of public trust and confidence in the integrity of elections as the only legitimate method for delegation of political power in the institutional terms of representative governance. Therefore, along with different aspects of representation, accountability, trust and participation, the multifaceted concept of integrity, and most importantly the phenomena undermining it, are central to the analytical docus in this book. Integrity is a complex construct reflecting the compatibility of representative democratic government with a given social structure and culturally driven behaviors. In its conceptualization, we recognize that clientelistic structures and other premodern perceptions of power, authority and norms of conduct, among others, are problematizing not only the functioning of elections, but the general aptness and plausibility of democratic forms in communities that have not achieved a certain level of modernization.

Given this qualitative aspect of the institutional construction of representative democratic government, co-founded by explicit settings of principal components, electoral systems provide the framework shaping electoral participation and engagement, by affecting the personal perceptions of efficacy. Systems that provide citizens with greater influence over policy outcomes, stimulate higher levels of involvement in and engagement with public affairs (Powell, 1986, pp. 357–360).

Clarity and simplicity of electoral rules and procedures improve the efficacy function and increase personal utility of participation. Straightforward and uncomplicated electoral systems are more likely to adopt trust in electoral democracy and encourage participation. Conversely, complex frameworks may compromise efficacy, raise concerns with the integrity of electoral results and consequently discourage electoral engagement, both in terms of outreach and in terms of intensity.

Apart from the cultural and developmental issues of integrity, contemporary democracies face the negative consequences of polarization, which affects even well modernized societies with long traditions in democratic government. This phenomenon has a direct effect on identity, perceptions and emotions, and hence, transforms patterns of engagement. Electoral systems contextualize the effects of polarized behavior on participation, determining its manifestations in parti-

san animosity, strategic voting, negative campaigning and rejective mobilization. Therefore, the deteriorating effects of polarization on institutional performance and legitimacy differ in accordance with the electoral settings in play.

In plurality systems, polarization deepens the division of societies, as slight majorities intensify the zero-sum dynamics of government, resulting in exclusion and marginalization of all views and interests, apart from those endorsed by the supporters of these narrow majorities. In turn, this gives rise to political retribution when power changes hands. The cyclicity of this phenomenon in the long run, intensifies public frustration with democratic government, which is increasingly perceived as confined to scramble between oligarchic circles, incapable of achieving national development or accomplishing more fundamental priorities, transcending the narrow mercantile interests of these cliques.

In proportional systems, polarization results in highly fragmented parliaments and public spheres in general, comprising of hostile factions that are either unwilling or incapable of engaging in any form of cooperation. Formulation of coalitions becomes not just impossible, but unthinkable, as any form of collaboration across polarized divides is condemned as an immoral, wicked and corrupt act of betrayal. Inevitably, this polarized fragmentation leads to frequent or even permanent parliamentary and governmental crises, which in turn fuels general disillusionment with democracy, comparable to those in plurality systems. Expanding perceptions of institutions as weak and uncapable of delivering basic public services, boost perceived impasse and desperation, justifying antidemocratic and authoritarian appeals.

In recent years, the negative effects and influences of polarization have been catalyzed and amplified by digitalization of political communication and public interaction. Within the digital public sphere, technology reduces dramatically logistical barriers to communication and cognitive influence, while multiplying the effectiveness of misinformation and disinformation, propaganda and deepfakes. Digitalization In effect of digitalization, perceptions are expandingly deceived and fabricated, while behavior revolves rapidly around emotional reactions to provocations. The virtual publicity segments individuals in digital bubbles and echo chambers, extrapolating to biased reconstructions of reality, which substitute authentic civic participatory behavior with virtual myriads of artificial identities and modes of conduct.

The effects of digital revolution are not unequivocally negative, however. New technological solutions demonstrate potential to revolutionize electoral systems and electoral processes, therefore open qualitatively new prospects for electoral development. Accounting for these technological innovations, the book explores drivers of electoral reform and the opportunities for adoption of more complex voting systems and solutions for improved electoral management and administration.

Within this conceptual and theoretical framework, the book seeks to resolve long-standing methodological and empirical challenges in electoral studies, with particular emphasis on the shortcomings of existing typologies and their implications for understanding democratic processes. The starting point of our analysis is the recognition that conventional typologies in electoral studies rely heavily on outcome-based classifiers such as disproportionality of seat allocation or party system fragmentation. The discussion on principal components in Chapter 3 suggests that while insightful, these metrics are contingent on the core operation of the systems themselves and when applied as classification criteria result in typologies that are neither exhaustive nor exclusive, leaving particular systems either undefined or misclassified. As discussed in Chapter 4, the conflation of **mixed** and **hybrid** systems in existing taxonomies creates further ambiguity by limiting the analytical ability to effectively distinguish their structural implications. We attempt to resolve this methodological fallacy by developing a typology that utilizes the principal classifiers of ballot structure and district magnitude instead of disproportionality and fragmentation.

The proposed typology conceptualizes **Personalized Multi-Member** systems as a separate class of candidate-centered arrangements within multi-member districts, contrasting with mixed alternatives, which maintain independent majoritarian and proportional components. Chapter 4 further explores the structural and operational particularities of hybrid systems, focusing on their ability to balance democratic outcomes, as well as the cognitive demands that they impose on voters, along with the administrative complexities for election management bodies. Contextualizing the analysis within a broader comparative framework provides a better understanding of the pure types and specific applications of electoral systems, their advantages and major challenges.

Electoral participation is then operationalized through voter turnout as a composite measure of civic engagement with democratic governance and legitimacy of its institutions. Therefore, turnout trends in the past decades have become indicative of the capability of democracies to sustain their legitimacy and viability in the context of persistent and contemporary challenges and transitions. Chapter 5 presents an empirical analysis of these trends both globally and at the regional level for all democratic countries in the world after the end of WWII. The extensive time series data, covering the globe for a period of eighty years, requires the application of both simple linear modelling with straightforward interpretability and more advanced, but complex techniques for statistical analysis of longitudinal data. The general dynamic of the global turnout trend indicates a sustainable erosion of trust in the electoral process. Amplifying the detrimental effects of entrenched clientelistic structures and practices, this erosion undermines the legitimacy of democracy itself, particularly in societies with short experiences with democratic government weak institutional safeguards.

The introduction of improved classification necessitates a comparative analysis of turnout trends in distinct types of systems, most importantly in the newly conceptualized PMM models. Chapter 6 presents an attempt of such inquiry, combining linear regression and advanced models for time series data analysis. Grounded in the theoretical assumptions of this book and the conceptualization of principal components in Chapter 3, our quantitative findings are interpreted both in terms of dynamic participation and in terms of the potential of different electoral systems to facilitate the consolidation of democratic practices and their resilience to persistent and emerging threats. The discussion on electoral reforms and the quantitative analysis of their impact on turnout in the past thirty years, primarily in transitional and post-conflict settings presented in Chapter 7, contextualize the proposed typological framework within the broader discourse on electoral system change. The chapter complements quantitative findings with case study summaries of seminal electoral reforms and applications in consolidated democracies, setting the stage for final conclusions and interpretation of the finding made throughout the book.

Before we proceed with our analysis, it is necessary to make some **important clarifications** concerning the very **subject of our inquiry**. While its focus is on elections as a central mechanism of democratic governance, this book does

not argue that democracy is the sole or uncontested pathway to development. Throughout history, various forms of government have coexisted with democracy, many of which have demonstrated capacities for significant economic, scientific and cultural achievements. Autocratic regimes have fostered rapid industrialization and technological advancements under centralized control, and absolute monarchies have historically presided over periods of political and economic stability. This exposition recalls that democracy, while central to contemporary conceptions of government, is not inherently the sole or universally applicable model of societal development.

Moreover, democratic countries themselves cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Their political cultures have evolved throughout complex and context-specific historical trajectories, often marked by unique combinations of religious, socioeconomic and geographical factors. Some of these societies experienced gradual and organic modernization, characterized by incremental reforms and slow integration of democratic principles into their political systems. In contrast, others were rapidly modernized under totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, where coercion and control accelerated industrial and social transformations without prior or parallel development of participatory public institutions. Additionally, external pressures, such as colonial legacies or international interventions, have formally democratized some states and communities in the absence of foundational modernization processes. These pathways result in a significant variation in how democratic institutions, including elections, operate across different national contexts. Economic development and institutional traditions further complicate the functionality of elections in diverse democratic environments. Wealthier democracies with established law enforcement frameworks often exhibit higher levels of electoral participation and institutional trust, while younger or less affluent democratic systems may struggle with challenges of clientelism, voter suppression and electoral manipulation. Together, these contextual elements show that the effectiveness and design of democratic institutions cannot be detached from their sociopolitical environments.

Given these complexities, we explicitly avoid advocating for one-size-fits-all solutions for democratic development or electoral reform. The observed effects, while abstract enough to support a global analysis of the postwar period,

are relevant to countries that meet basic democratic criteria. Our particular focus on full and flawed democracies, as defined by the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit, ensures that the analysis remains contextually grounded and conceptually plausible.

The completion of the major tasks of this book entails contextualizing the fallacies of conventional electoral system typologies, analyzing the structural complexities of hybrid PMM models, investigating the cumulative effect of traditional and contemporary challenges to electoral integrity, and exploring how different system types drive participation. Therefore, the first two chapters of the book advance the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of electoral analysis, discussing the phenomenon of representation, the complexities of electoral engagement, and the intricate relationships between identities, legitimacy, polarization and digitalization. In practical terms, the book aims to synthesize theoretical foundations and to integrate empirical insights to outline prospects for electoral systems change. Consequentially, the introduction of more comprehensive categorization, incorporating the intricate, yet resilient hybrid models, emerges as a focal contribution of this work.

Chapter 1: **Foundations of Electoral Democracy**

The fundamental purpose and rationale of electoral systems is to ensure that the preferences of citizens are reflected in public governance. It provides fundamental normative standards against which democratic systems and their performance are often evaluated. Works on representation underscore the extent to which electoral systems can yield legislatures and policies that reflect the interests of citizens (Golder & Stramski, 2010, pp. 90–96). Their historical evolution has been shaped by a series of shifts in political, social and technological conditions, which have redefined both the substance of governance and the quality of democratic institutions. From the earliest collective decision-making arrangements to the contemporary issues of national and global electoral norms, the trajectory of electoral systems has delineated the parameters for representative authority.

Conceptualizing Representation

The origins of representative governance can be traced back to the Athenian Assembly and Council permitting citizens to engage in direct participation, whereas reliance on sortition exemplified the various avenues through which political equality was conceptualized (Hansen & Crook, 1999, pp. 45–52). Although constrained by property and status, the Roman Republic introduced more structured representative elements. The establishment of the Tribal Assembly and Tribune of the Plebs set precedents for the involvement of a broader cross-section of the polity in governance, laying the conceptual foundation that would inform representation in later centuries (Millar, 2002, pp. 78–85).

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire and the subsequent ascendancy of monarchical systems, nascent forms of parliamentary governance gradually reasserted the notion that authority should be shared and held to account. Although initially a concession to aristocratic interests, the Magna Carta ultimately

contributed to the consolidation of the principle of limited monarchical power (Holt, 1992, pp. 21–27). The Model Parliament of 1295 and parallel developments such as the Estates-General and the Cortes gradually codified representation through assemblies that included at least some portion of the population beyond the nobility (Davies & Denton, 1981, pp. 112–120). Experiments with constrained elections or lotteries, such as those conducted by the prince-electors in the Holy Roman Empire or the sortition in the Venetian Republic, demonstrated that representation could be shaped by both tradition and deliberate institutional engineering (Finlay, 1980, pp. 148–156; Ullmann, 1975, pp. 34–35).

The emergence of nation-states initiated a rapid evolution in the modalities of representation. The French Revolution redefined the concepts through the institution of universal suffrage, while the U.S. Constitution's Electoral College blended elements of direct and indirect elections (Keyssar, 2000, pp. 26–52; Tilly, 1975, pp. 70–95). The English Reform Act of 1832 brought adjustments to electoral boundaries and relaxations of the qualifications required to vote, while the introduction of the secret ballot reinforced the integrity of the electoral process. The growth of industrial societies and the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas gave rise to demands for broader representation. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, property-based restrictions had been incrementally dismantled, paving the way for near-universal male suffrage across much of Europe and the Americas (Rokkan, 1970, pp. 72–144). New Zealand was the first country to grant women voting rights in 1893, marking a turning moment in democratic history. A gradual expansion of women's suffrage across the globe followed particularly after World War I (Stevenson, 2009). The post-war settlements in Europe resulted in the redrawing of state boundaries, with the formation of new nations that embraced electoral principles acknowledging, at least on paper, the authority of the governed (MacMillan, 2003, pp. 93–110).

These patterns reoccurred after World War II reinforcing norms of democratic legitimacy and representation (Glendon, 2001, pp. 174–200; Lees, 2005, pp. 45–70; Maier, 1977, pp. 407–450). The decolonization process that followed, introduced these principles to diverse cultural contexts, with newly independent states either adopting or adapting electoral frameworks to enhance legitimate representation in polities shaped by ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity (Meredith, 2005, pp. 153–180; Reilly, 2001, pp. 95–124). How-

ever, the Cold War rivalries distorted this process. In numerous contexts, superpower competition prompted the implementation of electoral frameworks that were designed to advance ideological objectives rather than purely representative goals (Brown, 1990, pp. 89–95; Westad, 2007, pp. 110–150; White, 1980, pp. 60–85).

The end of the Cold War brought further innovations in electoral engineering prioritizing, proportional voting systems in recently democratized states to ensure the representation of historically marginalized groups. This development served to firmly establish pluralism as a fundamental normative principle of democratic thought and practice during the late twentieth century (Huntington, 1991, pp. 3–30; Lijphart, 1994a; Reynolds, 1999, pp. 182–220).

Therefore, political representation historically developed as a dynamic and multifaceted relationship between citizens and elected officials, mediated by a range of institutional, normative and sociopolitical factors. The concept is a fundamental tenet of democratic governance, which interpretation and application in theory and practice reflect a diversity of perspectives and approaches to its moral and philosophical dimensions.

Arguing that individuals in a state of nature possess rights to life, liberty and property, and form political societies to secure these rights, Locke defined representation as a focal mechanism for safeguarding natural rights and assuring **governmental legitimacy** derived from **popular consent** (Locke, 1988, pp. 287–302). Thus, representation emerges as a substitution of direct governance. It enables citizens to delegate authority to chosen legislators while retaining ultimate sovereignty. In this sense, the legislative power delegated to representatives must reflect the interests of the people rather than the elected themselves (Dunn, 1969, pp. 53–74; Tully, 1993, pp. 118–145). The normative idea that representation must be rooted in consent and geared toward the protection of fundamental rights, conceptualizes representatives as responsible agents whose legitimacy is contingent upon their adherence to the public good (Dahl, 1989, pp. 108–132).

In the context of the dramatic upheavals of the late eighteenth century, Burke advanced a nuanced conception of representative government, featuring the moral and prudential obligations of legislators, articulating that representatives are not mere delegates who mechanically transmit the expressed will of their constituents, but **trustees** who exercise independent judgment informed by experience

and a sense of the **common good** (Burke, 2003, pp. 54–67). Hence, genuine representation does not entail unquestioned compliance with the immediate demands of constituents. Instead, it entails a nuanced grasp of the public interest and an obligation to deliberate, reason and offer judicious counsel. This trustee model drew upon classical and Christian moral philosophies to frame representation as a duty-laden vocation, rather than a straightforward electoral transaction (Macpherson, 1980, pp. 33–58; Stanlis, 1958, pp. 145–172).

By conceptually linking representation with popular sovereignty, consent and protection of natural rights, these ideas established the normative justification of authority in contemporary democracies, influencing subsequent reflections on the responsibility and legitimacy of representatives (Pocock, 1987, pp. 201–215). Therefore, representative government can be though not merely as a logical development from ancient direct democracy, but as a consciously distinct model that combines democratic consent with what Manin terms "aristocratic" features. The "principle of distinction" in this model, defines the **centrality of elections** providing those who are elected with exceptionality based on qualities or resources. Regularity of elections grant periodic reaffirmation of consent, while preserving limited independence of representatives to act autonomously (Manin, 1997, pp. 9–94).

Another aspect of political representation concerns the mechanisms that ensure the translation of citizens' preferences, interests and identities in the processes of governance, entailing an examination of not only the roles and performance of political agents but also the numerous ways in which they assert their authority to speak and act on behalf of the people. A dominant approach in this direction delineates representation as a multifaceted concept encompassing **formal authorization, symbolic embodiment, descriptive resemblance and substantive responsiveness** (Pitkin, 1967, pp. 38–110). It incorporates the capacity of representatives to stand for their constituencies, reflect their demographic and social characteristics, embody shared values and actively pursue policies that serve the well-being of represented. Subsequent elaborations on the concept differentiate additional forms of representation, including promissory, anticipatory, surrogate and gyroscopic, which capture variations in how representatives align their actions with the preferences and judgments of citizens across time and contexts (Mansbridge, 2003, pp. 515–528).

Feminist and minority-focused theorists have emphasized the importance of **descriptive representation**, which highlights the extent to which elected bodies reflect the demographic composition of the polity, thereby enhancing the visibility and opinions of historically underrepresented groups (Phillips, 1995, pp. 39–64; Williams, 1998, pp. 4–37). This perspective embodies the idea that legitimacy depends on achieving a reflective diversity within legislatures.

The intricacies of political representation are further illustrated by the inherent tension between **authorization** and **liability**. The path to political office for representatives is paved by electoral competition. However, the question of whether their subsequent actions accurately reflect the evolving interests and identities of citizens is an ongoing point of contention. Therefore, the concept of representation cannot be reduced to a simple assessment of policy congruence or ideological alignment, which shifts the conceptual focus toward the performative dimension, including claims-making and discursive practices through which representatives constantly rearticulate their relationships with represented groups. In this sense, the concept can be constructed as an ongoing process in which representatives endeavor to define and justify their roles in the public sphere, thus shaping the very identities and interests they aim to represent (Saward, 2010, pp. 36–72; Urbinati, 2006, pp. 23–56).

Furthermore, representation is not merely a discrete matter. It has institutional and systemic dimensions that connect it to broader electoral rules and party systems. The configuration of electoral institutions influences the extent to which specific groups can express their views and the extent to which legislative bodies reflect the diversity of the population. Proportional electoral rules have been demonstrated to yield higher levels of descriptive representation for women and minorities than majoritarian do (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 275–304; Norris, 2004, pp. 163–189). Indeed, the frequency, timing and competitiveness of elections, the role of parties in candidate selection and the presence of gender quotas or reserved seats influence both the supply of representative candidates and the probability that they will be elected.

Rather than equating solely with accountability through the ballot box, genuine representation rests on a continuous scrutiny and justifications (Manin, 1997). It relies on both elections as a moment of choice and public debate as an ongoing forum of legitimization. Therefore, representation is not anchored solely

in procedural mechanisms or historical precedents, but evolves to mediate and reflect shifting social hierarchies and collective identities. Broadening suffrage, incorporation of marginalized groups and institutionalization of principles that encourage responsibility and plurality have transformed the essence of representation from a restrictive privilege into a broader and reflexive process intertwined with moral imperatives, institutional incentive structures of electoral systems and social forces that shape public demands (Norris, 2004, pp. 163–189). Its trajectory reflects the capacity of electoral institutions and political agents to accommodate the evolving demands of heterogenous societies.

The ways in which individuals understand their stake in governance, navigate information landscapes, and respond to incentives and constraints play a decisive role in ensuring that representation moves beyond theoretical ideas and acquires tangible depth. By illuminating how electoral rules, cultural norms and personal dispositions influence voter turnout and decision-making, institutional architecture of representation connects with the lived realities of electoral participation. In this sense, the study of representation transitions into questions of who takes part in elections, why, and under what conditions.

Electoral Participation and Voter Behavior

Electoral participation and voter behavior lie at the core of representative democracy and collective decision-making. These concepts are key to understanding mass-level responses to institutional frameworks and normative goals of representation. They validate the political system's legitimacy, influence policy agendas and provide feedback on the quality of governance (Cox, 1997, pp. 58–89; Franklin, 2004, pp. 17–29). This section aims to develop a complementary understanding of the two concepts by moving beyond partial or isolated explanations. It integrates four alternative analytical perspectives into a synthetic theoretical framework to illuminate the complexity of electoral engagement.

The **Rational Choice Theory (RCT)** provides a foundational analytical framework for understanding electoral participation. Originally developed in economics, it posits that voters are rational actors who seek to maximize their personal utility (Downs, 1957, pp. 34–42), considering the probability (P) that their vote will influence the election outcome, the perceived benefits (B) of their preferred

candidate or party winning, and the costs (C) of voting, including time and effort (Downs, 1957, pp. 39–42; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968, p. 30). The calculation is expressed as:

$$U(V) = (P \times B) - C$$

and shows that voters are more likely to participate if the expected benefits exceed the perceived costs, yielding positive net utility.

Early applications of this approach encountered difficulties in explaining the relatively high rates of voter turnout in large-scale elections, given that any single vote is unlikely to be decisive, which is denoted as the **"paradox of voting"** (Feddersen, 2004) contradicting with strict interpretations of the theory, suggesting that purely instrumental calculations cannot fully account for turnout patterns as voters often lack **perfect information** and face **cognitive limitations** (Green & Shapiro, 1994, pp. 105–110; Uhlaner, 1989, pp. 392–394).

These critiques have been addressed by expanding the concept of benefits to include non-material rewards, such as the satisfaction derived from fulfilling civic duty, affirming a personal identity, or expressing loyalty to a political group (Blais, 2000, pp. 75–79; Blais & Achen, 2019, pp. 473–475; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968, pp. 31–35). Moreover, adjustments to structural factors, like more convenient voting procedures, can reduce perceived costs and thereby alter the rational calculations underlying participation (Nagler, 1991). By incorporating these incentives, RCT explanations better accommodate observed patterns of electoral participation, while providing a parsimonious and straightforward starting point for understanding the strategic dimensions of voting.

Instead of instrumental calculations, **psychological models** use internal cognitive and emotional factors to build their explanations of electoral engagement. They focus on the subjective dimensions of participation, including political efficacy and emotional attachments, which collectively elucidate the underlying reasoning behind personal decisions for engagement and choices over complex preferences in conditions of uncertainty and informational constraints (Dalton, 2017, pp. 120–125; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, pp. 130–133). Under these assumptions, real-world voter strategies involve **cognitive shortcuts** or **heuristics** based on party identification, candidate familiarity, or emotionally salient issues

(Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, pp. 275–278; Simon, 1955, pp. 102–106; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981).

Memory processes and recency effects thus bias the ways in which voters evaluate candidate performance and policy outcomes, weighing recent events disproportionately in the formation of an electoral judgment (Mansbridge, 1999). Campaigns take advantage of these cognitive predispositions by stressing message strategies that make positive candidate stories most accessible in voter memory. These message strategies lower cognitive burdens while introducing biases that ultimately diminish the quality and rationality of the electoral judgment.

Confirmation bias or availability heuristics result in decisions that support existing beliefs or recent emotionally involving events (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, pp. 145–148; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). If voters encounter a conflict between new information and their existing preferences, which are grounded in stable partisan attachments, one probable outcome is cognitive dissonance and often delusions and a distorted interpretation of reality (Festinger, 1957, pp. 38–41). Beyond this, campaigns and partisan appeals prime voters to particular issues or candidate characteristics, increasing the cognitive availability of the given trait and their influence on the decision (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Mondak, 2010, pp. 22–50).

To overcome these biases, voters need certain critical thinking skills and eagerness to actively seek information to thoroughly evaluate political content (Carpini & Keeter, 1997, pp. 34–38), which form the sense of **political efficacy**, understood as the belief in one's capacity to comprehend and influence political processes. **Internal** efficacy refers to the confidence in one's political knowledge and skills, while **external** efficacy pertains to the perception that political institutions respond to civic input (Finkel, 1985; Niemi et al., 1991, pp. 1407–1410). Corresponding intrinsic motivations arise from internal values and interests, fostering informed and consistent engagement, even if the instrumental odds of influencing outcomes are low (Hetherington, 1998, pp. 792–797). On the other hand, extrinsic motivations, such as compulsory voting or peer pressure, can also boost turnout without deeper political understanding.

As voters prioritize problems, they find personally relevant or urgent, focusing attention and effort where perceived stakes are highest, their engagement raises (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, pp. 81–100). These reactions to salient issues are primarily based on **emotions**, like enthusiasm, anger, or fear, which

increase the perceived importance of electoral outcomes or encourage defensive mobilization. Positive emotions, such as hope and pride, tend to energize voters, prompting them to view elections as opportunities for meaningful change. Conversely, anger or fear can mobilize persons seeking to prevent undesirable policies or punish incumbents perceived as indifferent or corrupt (Brader, 2005, pp. 395–398; Marcus et al., 2000, pp. 43–45). Thus, emotional responses often transcend instrumental logic, providing powerful motivations for participation that go beyond the narrow calculation of probabilities and payoffs.

Party identifications further reveal other psychological dimensions of electoral behavior. Long-term affective attachment to political parties acts as cognitive anchors for how voters process information and evaluate candidates, as well as deciding whether or not and how to participate. The more psychically invested a person is in a given party, the more certain they are to participate since their psychic investment reduces uncertainty and complexity in decision-making processes (Almond & Verba, 1963, pp. 226–235; Campbell et al. 1960, pp. 121–130). These identifications are mental shortcuts which make a large and complex political environment highly manageable, making it possible for those who are unsophisticated about current policies or for those whose informational costs of participation are high to participate in elections rather easily.

Beyond party attachments, **social identities** and values further shape voter behavior through psychological pathways. Individuals commonly align their political choices with the interests of groups to which they belong, whether defined by ethnicity, religion, status, or ideology (Huddy, 2001, pp. 128–135). In many cases, voters view elections as opportunities to defend collective identities and hence charge their choices with values that extend beyond instrumental motives. These group-based affiliations have the potential to either enhance or dampen the influences of socioeconomic and institutional factors, which makes psychological frameworks decisive for explaining differential participation in various contexts.

This approach highlights that voters rarely possess perfect information or engage in exhaustive policy comparisons, but rely on cognitive heuristics and emotional cues, filtering political content through beliefs, partisan identifications and affective responses (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 51–55). Under these circumstances, psychological predispositions can override or complement pure-

ly rational calculations, steering electoral engagement through complex internal landscapes of identity and emotion. Hence, electoral participation is not solely about rational maximization of personal benefits, but is shaped by subjective experiences, levels of confidence, emotional reactions and identities.

Another view comes from the **Social Capital Theory (SCT)**, which—unlike models based on rational calculations or purely internal motivations—emphasizes the collective dimensions of political engagement. It situates individuals within social networks, trust-based relationships, and community contexts that shape their likelihood of voting and related activities, referred to as social capital (Putnam, 2000, pp. 18–21). Citizens are provided with the conditions for higher electoral engagement in communities characterized by dense networks of civic organizations, voluntary associations and robust norms of reciprocity (Putnam, 2000, pp. 67–89). Such environments nurture mutual trust and lower information costs that turn voting into a social obligation rather than an isolated act of choice.

Family, friends and community leaders encourage participation, heightening the perceived benefits of voting and diminishing its costs by embedding political action within a supportive social framework (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 45–48). **Bonding social capital** arises in tightly knit, relatively homogeneous groups, where strong mutual obligations facilitate mobilization and reinforce stable turnout patterns (Putnam, 2000, pp. 151–154). While these cohesive networks can effectively stimulate participation within a particular community, they may limit exposure to diverse perspectives.

By contrast, **bridging social capital** links individuals across social, ethnic, or ideological cleavages, providing the capacity for broader electoral participation. When bridging ties are prevalent, participation extends beyond narrowly demarcated groups, enhancing the quality of democratic deliberation in general. Civic associations channel the influences of social capital on participation. They facilitate streams of political information, favor the development of political skills and reduce informational costs of voting (Norris, 2004, pp. 99–105). This support boosts not only turnout but also political efficacy by reassuring citizens that their views are represented, and their actions really matter. High levels of social and institutional trust further reinforce this dynamic by endowing participation with meaning, hence raising expected benefits from voting (Uslaner, 2002).

Social networks also exert significant normative pressure, stigmatizing abstention from voting in communities where it is considered a moral obligation (Coleman, 1988, pp. S102–S105; Portes, 1998, pp. 7–10). Over time, such norms generate a self-reinforcing cycle of engagement, mitigating political alienation and disenfranchisement by increasing the sense of belonging and collective agency (Putnam, 2000, pp. 111–114). Thus, participation is not a simple product of personal preferences or internal motivations, but a collective effort embedded in social interaction.

Focusing on broader institutional and contextual factors of participation, structural models draw attention to how formal rules, resource distributions and general political environments provide voters with opportunities and constraints (Franklin, 2004, pp. 62–67; Lijphart, 1997, pp. 4–5; Norris, 2004, pp. 85–89). Central to this approach is the effect of electoral systems on voter incentives and the perceived value of participation. If votes cast for smaller parties are perceived to translate into legislative representation, voters feel more efficacious even if they support less popular options, which potentially raises turnout (Lijphart, 1997, pp. 10–12). In contrast, in winner-take-all environments, minor party supporters may view their efforts as useless, which could perpetuate patterns of strategic voting focused on blocking the least-preferred outcomes rather than expressing true preferences (Kostadinova, 2003, pp. 746–748).

The impact of particular electoral laws also matters. Compulsory voting laws tend to increase turnout by removing the opt-out considerations. Simple voter registration, convenient polling places, and easy ballot-casting procedures also help participation (Franklin, 2004, pp. 88–91). Conversely, onerous registration requirements, strict voter ID laws, and other institutional obstacles can deter it.

Socio-economic status is also important factor. The more educated and resourceful people are, the more meaningful participation is (Boix, 1999, pp. 615–617; Brady et al., 1995). Similarly, urban centers, with thicker social networks, easier access to rallies, and more accessible polling stations record higher turnouts than in more rural or far-flung areas where logistic challenges hinder voting (Franklin, 2004, pp. 115–117).

Structural accounts are also embedded in historical legacies and cultural contexts. Stability in democratic institutions and transparency in electoral practices breed trust and foster legitimization of elections as a means to affect policy.

Where fraud, corruption, or authoritarian legacy is large, skepticism and disillusionment can depress turnout. (Dalton et al., 2011; Farrell, 2011, pp. 211–214; Norris, 2004, pp. 180–183). Thus, the personal agencies cause decisive effects on electoral engagement, interactively with the macrolevel conditions and institutional arrangements.

Integrating these four paradigms into a synthetic theoretical framework, we recognize that voters calculate perceived costs and benefits of voting, given the probability of influencing outcomes, policy gains, and the practical burdens of participation. These calculations are framed by inner efficacy, party identifications, emotional reactions, and cognitive heuristics in coherence with previously held beliefs and socially embedded group identities. Personal motivations and calculations do occur within a social environment, where networks of interaction and chains of interpersonal trust are established. For this reason, social capital strengthens or loosens the psychological drivers of engagement, anchoring them in shared experiences and expectations. These interactions occur within more general institutional frameworks and socio-economic conditions that set limits on perceived effectiveness of participation and, therefore, on rational incentives to engage. Electoral participation thus follows from a dynamic interplay of factors at diverse levels of interconnectedness and is not solely caused by either personal or collective determinants.

Identities and Democratic Legitimacy

Political identities based on ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or cultural values strongly determine community-level electoral behavior. Group loyalties guide how people perceive political messages, evaluate candidates, and in general relate to electoral politics (Huddy, 2001, pp. 136–139; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). They are formed through family, education, peer networks, and personal experience in the incremental process of political socialization and therefore often have stable orientations toward politics and social life in general (Burns et al., 2001, pp. 223–225; Dalton, 2013, pp. 89–93).

These identifications are derivatives of complex intersections of enduring personal and collective characteristics. Arguably, the most cardinal among these are race and ethnicity. The struggle for political inclusion and representation his-

torically originates in the formation and assertion of the identities of marginalized groups, excluded from formal political processes. Indeed, black voters have always been at the front line in the fight for civil rights and racial justice in the United States. Racial cohesion from the Reconstruction era up to the Civil Rights Movement served as a fundamental determinant in assessing electoral implications and prioritizing policy, primarily in the South (Dawson, 1994, pp. 52–56). In many countries, native groups and ethnic minorities have emerged to advocate for the increase of political representation.

The other important determinant of political identity in respect to affiliation is **religion**. Often, the electorate identifies with those candidates and parties whose programs conform to their religious values and moral perceptions (Guth et al., 2006, pp. 225–228). Religious institutions frequently facilitate political engagement through the cultivation of community networks, the endorsement of candidates whose beliefs align with those of the denomination, and the organization of electoral activities that encourage engagement. In societies where religious affiliation is a salient source of identity, the resonance of faith-based values with political choices reflects deeply held moral and cultural commitments (Djupe & Gilbert, 2008, pp. 95–98; Norris & Inglehart, 2004, pp. 178–180).

Despite the increase in the number of women in legislative bodies in recent decades, structural and cultural constraints continue to impede their full political participation, making gender yet another key factor of identity. The experiences of women in politics have historically been determined by a complexity of gender-based discrimination and systemic difficulties in balancing public responsibilities with challenges of private life, especially motherhood (Paxton & Hughes, 2014, pp. 83–86). Advocates of identity-conscious reforms strive to reshape electoral opportunities and outcomes beyond descriptive representation, but to achieve substantive policy awareness that addresses issues disproportionately affecting women (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010, pp. 110–114).

Preferences over policies are further complicated by demographic factors of identity. Urban populations are more likely to espouse progressive policies, whereas rural communities tend to adhere to conservative values, which in turn shape their electoral choices (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006). As a result of shared age-based interests, aging populations prioritize healthcare and pension policies (Norris, 2004, pp. 212–215). Household composition, family structures, and

marital status also influence political attitudes and voting patterns (Wolfinger & Wolfinger, 2008), as family often promotes elevated levels of political engagement with policies that safeguard family welfare, educational opportunities, and community services (Sears & Levy, 2003, pp. 85–89; Stoker & Jennings, 1995, pp. 428–430).

Cultural norms and values add another layer to the formation of political perceptions and policy preferences. In collectivist contexts, political identities prioritize group solidarity and the advancement of communal welfare. In contrast, individualistic political cultures prioritize personal autonomy and market-driven approaches to governance (Triandis, 2018, pp. 23–27).

By altering the demographic and cultural composition of communities, migration transforms identities and the essence of representation by introducing diverse perspectives and multiculturalism (Bloemraad, 2006, pp. 55–58; Hopkins, 2010, pp. 50–55). Nevertheless, substantial cultural discrepancies and linguistic obstacles often impede integration of migrants and social cohesion, resulting in political estrangement (Dancygier, 2010, pp. 78–81).

As multiple forms of these identity factors coexist and interact, the concept of intersectionality introduces a complex understanding of the identity foundations of political representation and electoral behavior (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1245–1248). Accounting for intersectional dynamics potentially fosters more equitable political systems, capable of achieving both descriptive and substantive representation, enhancing the democratic legitimacy of their institutions and procedures (Young, 2002, pp. 123–126). It is crucial factor for electoral engagement, as illegitimate regimes make participation pointless. However, legitimacy does not solely depend on the quality of actual representation, but is a function of public perceptions, which are based on social trust, communal bonds, and normative pressures (Gerber et al., 2008, pp. 34–37; McPherson et al., 2001, pp. 415–417; Putnam, 2000, pp. 141–150). Trust in political institutions and beliefs that they are genuine regulators of public relations justify and encourage participation. Conversely, institutional corruption, historical exclusion, and compounded political disenfranchisement erode trust and demotivate engagement, especially within marginalized communities (Hancock, 2007, pp. 250–252; Lijphart, 1994b; Mansbridge, 2003, pp. 515–520).

Along with identity-based perceptions, political ideologies expand the cognitive framework for interpreting political contexts, informing stable voting patterns, and integrating contemporary issues into existing systems of belief (Campbell et al., 1960, pp. 179–182). Moral values underlie these ideological inclinations, with liberals emphasizing care and fairness, and conservatives prioritizing loyalty, authority, and sanctity (Haidt, 2012, pp. 47–50). Ideological and moral foundations of partisanship reinforce identity-driven voting behavior and influence electoral participation.

Political Parties and Movements

The centrality of **political parties** in representative democracy reflects their indispensability in articulation and aggregation of interests, structuring electoral competition, and providing channels for policy influence. Their capacity to bridge social demands and governmental decision-making rests upon three core functions: **elite recruitment**, **policy agenda setting**, **institutional framework development** (Kittilson, 2006, pp. 89–91). Yet, it is disputable how effectively parties continue to perform these tasks, as the distinction between **responsible** and **responsive representation** illuminates contemporary disfunctions in party systems (Mair, 2009, pp. 11–12).

Responsible parties pursue policy objectives that may collide with short-term public preferences but contribute to broader governance imperatives and reforms, usually tied to expert-driven policy prescriptions or supranational constraints. In contrast, responsive parties adapt their strategies to align with shifting popular preferences, emphasizing immediate voter appeal and broad electoral competitiveness, thus institutionalizing **populism** not only as a campaign strategy, but as a governmental practice, underscoring a critical cyclicity between institutionalized parliamentarianism and “audience democracy” (Manin, 1997, pp. 202–218).The advent of parties initially institutionalized programmatic and predictable representation, yet current developments revolve to nascent forms of personalized leadership, struggling to reconcile responsibility with responsiveness (Mair, 2013, pp. 33–35).

As a result, recent decades witnessed a mass withdrawal from party membership, increasingly forcing parties to rely on public funding and state resources,

thus weakening their capacity to serve as agents of social mobilization (Katz & Mair, 1995). The ensuing erosion of party-voter linkages undermines the intermediary function of parties leading to even larger disillusionment with membership and grassroots engagement, which partly facilitates the proliferation of populist platforms and anti-establishment appeals, as well as the emergence of political movements eager to fill these gaps in representation.

Political movements, thereby emerge as external pressure groups that can recalibrate the agenda of mainstream politics by mobilizing collective identities and articulating demands that challenge or expand party platforms (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998, pp. 12–15; Tarrow, 1998, pp. 64–68). Feminist and environmentalist movements have successfully embedded gender equality and climate change policies into national electoral debates, compelling parties either to adopt these issues or risk losing ideological credibility (Kitschelt, 1988; Rootes, 1999). Feminist activism has consistently drawn attention to candidate selection biases that impair the descriptive representation of women. By challenging party recruitment strategies, which prioritize incumbency or closed leadership decisions, they have exposed how certain groups remain structurally disadvantaged (Kittilson, 2006, pp. 89–91). The content of party platforms is susceptible to similar reframing, although mostly partially or symbolically.

Although political movements highlight deficiencies of the party-based structure of representation, they also face challenges in sustaining momentum and translating protest into long-term institutional impact (Tarrow, 1998, pp. 70–75). The negotiation between movements and parties often leads to co-optation. Parties can dilute movement objectives in broader electoral strategies, thereby preserving the status quo while offering a façade of reform.

At the same time, the expansion of engagement beyond conventional electoral channels indicates that representation reflects increasingly dynamic processes of identity construction and agenda transformation, as politicians frequently appeal directly to voters based on personal qualities, media presence, and symbolic messages rather than strict programmatic adherence (Manin, 1997, pp. 221–234). Parties continue to shape electoral competition and channel the public access to power and policy formation. However, they increasingly struggle to balance the imperatives of responsiveness with the demands of responsibility. This allows movements to expose representational gaps and offer alternative agendas (Mair, 1994).

Discussion and Prospects for Research

The complexity of representation and electoral engagement suggests that multilevel modeling could prove as a methodological tool for examining how personal decisions intersect with community characteristics, national institutions, and the broader political environment. At the individual level, demographic factors, psychological traits and efficacy shape personal propensity to participation. Psychological attachments direct how voters interpret information and form perceptions. At the community level, civic organizations, social networks, and chains of trust can diffuse political information, reduce participation costs, and normatively promote electoral participation. Economic disparities, community stability, and local traditions also influence the accessibility and relevance of the electoral process (Norris, 2004; Putnam, 2000), interacting with personal level attributes to reinforce or mitigate motivations and capacities, while institutional frameworks, political environments, and historical experiences determine the perceived benefits and costs of participation (Franklin, 2004; Lijphart, 1997).

What makes multilevel modeling promising is its potential to capture these cross-level interactions. For example, the impact of person-level party identification may vary according to the competitiveness of the national political context or the density of local social networks. Similarly, the relationship between education and turnout may depend on the character of electoral procedures or the presence of civic associations that facilitate exchange of information.

Still, fully operational multilevel model, capturing all relevant factors remains a challenging task due to data limitations, theoretical contradictions, and methodological complexities. Incorporating metrics at different scales can strain statistical models and raise issues of collinearity and model specification (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Marcus et al., 2000). Nevertheless, advancements in data availability, sophisticated statistical techniques, and interdisciplinary collaborations, already deliver incremental progress in multilevel analysis and pave the way to comprehensive holistic models.

Chapter 2: **Challenges to Democratic Governance**

In the previous chapter, we conceptualized the basic elements of representative democracy, underlining that elections are the only legitimate means of delegating power. As we underlined, democratic legitimacy is not only a question of the quality of representation, but its quantitative dimension, participation, and engagement also depend upon trust rooted in the perceived integrity and equity of the election process. Therefore, public perceptions form the grounds for the sustainability of the whole democratic regime, which becomes molded through a complex interaction of causes depending on each other.

Arguably, the principal condition for legitimacy lies in whether democracy is perceived as the "only game in town." This concept encapsulates the extent to which formal institutions function as authentic regulators of public affairs and the degree to which informal structures and practices influence the distribution of power and authority. Research on countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and parts of South and Southeast Asia demonstrate the entrenchment of clientelism and vote buying in many of these states, stemming primarily from democratization prior proper modernization (Dekel et al., 2008; Hyde & Marinov, 2012; Joseph & Vashchanka, 2022; Lehoucq, 2003). The imposition of democratic institutions on societies, largely regulated by irrational informal norms, inevitably results in **façade democracy**, only variable in the extent of its entrenchment (Milton-Edwards, 1994; Ritter, 2014).

This problem turned out to be one of the major concerns ever since the beginning of the Third Wave of Democratization, which spurred the establishment of electoral democracies in many instances, where social structures were not ready for their functional application. Although extensive efforts, significant resources and methodical international support were invested in institution building, dissemination of best practices, and promotion of electoral standards (Bjornlund, 2004, pp. 89–120), the persistence of **democratic backsliding** highlights the fra-

gility of democratic institutions and procedures in many contexts. Achievements were often undermined by the reemergence of authoritarian rule and/or persistent embeddedness of corruption and clientelism, which distorted electoral outcomes and eroded public trust in democratic institutions (Diamond, 1999, pp. 65–70; O'Donnell et al., 1986, pp. 72–85).

Electoral Clientelism and Vote Buying

Successful consolidation of democratic governance is largely dependent on political culture. In contexts normalizing clientelism, patronage, and transactional politics, democratization efforts often face subtle social resistance. In such settings, vote buying and manipulation are socially entrenched practices, sustained by elites, community leaders, and segments of the population, perceived as a norm of conduct rather than a deviation (Auyero, 2001, p. 78).

These persistent phenomena directly undermine the democratic legitimacy of elections by systematically distorting voters' incentives, biasing the competitive environment, and eroding the linkage between policy performance and electoral support. Electoral clientelism, conceptualized as a form of contingent exchange whereby patrons, usually linked to political elites, distribute selective material benefits to clients in exchange for electoral support, shapes voting behavior in ways that subvert free and equal participation in democratic processes (Hicken, 2011, pp. 289–294; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007, pp. 1–32).

The intermediary role of brokers between politicians and voters, is central to clientelistic networks. These actors wield considerable influence within their communities, using detailed knowledge of local dynamics to target benefits effectively and monitor voter compliance (Auyero, 2001, p. 89; Finan & Schechter, 2012, pp. 870–872). They also enforce informal regulatory mechanisms that ensure reciprocal loyalty, perpetuating traditional norms and clientelistic practices even in the presence of formally sound electoral regulations (Lazar, 2004, pp. 235–237; Stokes et al., 2013, p. 33). In such cultural frameworks, legitimate political support and illicit electoral practices intertwine, normalizing transactional relationships between voters and politicians (Norris, 2014, p. 112). In the form of an explicit exchange of money or material goods for a personal vote at the ballot box, these transactions are defined as vote buying (Hicken, 2007, p.

56; Schaffer, 2007a, pp. 3–11; Stokes, 2005, pp. 316–320; Stokes et al., 2013, pp. 15–35).

Electoral clientelism and vote buying reduce the competitiveness and fairness of elections by biasing the incentives of both voters and candidates. Instead of programmatic appeals, voters are targeted with material inducements, which dislocates the principal-agent relationship crucial for democratic accountability and undermines the normative expectation that voters should choose freely among competing platforms (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007, pp. 21–28).

Transparency and credibility of the electoral process in such systems are heavily affected, as parties and candidates utilize personalistic networks of intermediaries and brokers, circumventing formal regulations and oversight mechanisms (Stokes et al., 2013, pp. 87–115), which reduces the perceived and actual fairness of elections, thus diminishing trust and public confidence in democratic institutions (Hyde & Marinov, 2012, pp. 195–200; Lehoucq, 2003, pp. 239–241; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005, p. 41).

Since material inducements are more readily deployed in contexts of poverty, economic uncertainty, and unequal resource distribution, clientelistic structures tend to reinforce inequalities, further isolating marginalized groups (Birch, 2011, pp. 72–75; Hicken, 2011, pp. 294–299). In result, the uneven distribution of resources deepens, as political actors, possessing better means for clientelistic mobilization gain an electoral advantage over those who rely solely on programmatic appeals. Therefore, in clientelistic systems the distribution of votes and seats in the legislature or the executive reflects the logic of resource allocation rather than an impartial aggregation of voter preferences over platforms (Magaloni, 2006), cementing poverty, inequality, and institutional incapacities (Hicken et al., 2015; Keefer & Khemani, 2005, pp. 14–15; Kramon, 2009).

Therefore, the theoretical distinction between formal and informal institutions is of key importance in electoral analysis. Plausible interpretations of elections require a certain level of formality. De jure, formal legal and institutional frameworks governing entire electoral process, from pre-election campaign regulations and administrative arrangements to polling, counting, and post-election dispute resolution, could adhere to internationally recognized standards, providing a normative benchmark for evaluating the conduct of elections (Birch, 2011, pp. 3–25; Elklit & Reynolds, 2005; Norris, 2014, pp. 3–30). However, how these

rules are applied, enforced, and experienced in practice, determines the de facto regulations (Norris, 2014, pp. 90–110), providing a baseline for empirical investigations of the variations in electoral practices across different political regimes and contexts (Norris, 2015).

If clientelistic structures and practices are relevantly limited and legal frameworks are largely regulating the electoral process de facto, the concept of integrity becomes relevant. Its recent explanations in the research agenda of Comparative Politics and Electoral Studies have drawn extensively on principles enshrined in international conventions and agreements, as multiple contemporary democracies confronted pervasive challenges of manipulation, corruption, and fraud in elections (Lehoucq, 2003; Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002; Schedler, 2002).

However, integrity is not identical with the absence of fraud or overt malpractice, as it entails a broader condition wherein no single stage of the electoral cycle systematically disadvantages certain political actors or segments of voters (Birch, 2011, pp. 110–130; Lehoucq, 2003, pp. 239–245). According to this conception, electoral integrity exists when elections fulfill three broad conditions. First, they must be based on electoral laws and regulations that respect the principles of equal and universal suffrage and safeguard fundamental political rights (Norris et al., 2016). Second, the electoral process must feature neutral and efficient administration, free from external interference (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005). Third, elections must provide credible and enforceable oversight mechanisms to address grievances and ensure that allegations of misconduct are resolved promptly, fairly, and transparently (Hyde & Marinov, 2012). These principles should not only be equitable, but also diligently executed without prejudice.

The increasing availability of comparative datasets, particularly from the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), allows the identification of patterns of malpractice and structural shortcomings, and the assessment of reform efforts in different electoral regimes around the world in comparative perspective (Birch, 2011, pp. 40–65). EIP provides several instructive empirical insights supporting the proposition that electoral integrity is not solely a function of economic development or democratic longevity, but also depends on deliberate institutional design, independent bodies of electoral governance, impartial media, and vibrant civil society organizations capable of monitoring.

Political Polarization and Populism

Achieving relative enforcement of formal rules and regulations, by limiting electoral clientelism and connected malpractices is a basic prerequisite for institutionalization of elections as an actual transmitter of political power. It creates a structural environment, where electoral behavior and participation unfold. However, the mere existence of such an environment does not guarantee the quality of the electoral process, as there are still major challenges to its outcomes even in functional institutional frameworks.

Polarization raises serious concerns in recent decades, marked by increasing ideological distances and growing emotional animosity between political groups, intense political tensions and decreasing willingness to compromise (Rahat & Hazan, 2008, pp. 341–344). Therefore, it shapes the dynamics of political competition and profoundly influences electoral behavior (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008, pp. 563–564). It is characterized by alignment of political beliefs, values, and policy preferences along distinct and often inflexible ideological lines, which in turn gives rise to a bifurcated political landscape (McCarty et al., 2006, pp. 23–25). It can be understood both in terms of affective polarization, which encompasses the emotional and social animosity between opposing political groups, and ideological polarization, which pertains to the divergence in policy positions and ideological commitments (Iyengar et al., 2012, pp. 407–409; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, pp. 46–47).

Affective polarization creates deep feelings of distrust, dislike, and contempt among people from different political parties (Burns et al. 2001, pp. 97-99). This emotional gap hastens social fragmentation, decreases bipartisan cooperation, and diminishes the quality of political discussion. (Hetherington & Rudolph 2015, pp. 75-76). **Ideological polarization** pertains to big differences on policy positions, making communication more difficult and any common ground harder to achieve (Sartori, 1976, pp. 119-121). When both forms of polarization increase in a complementary relationship, the adversarial environment created diminishes good governance and proper policy implementation (McCarty et al., 2006, pp. 27-29).

Changes in socioeconomic and demographic landscapes are critical drivers of political polarization. Increasing economic inequality, changes in labor mar-

kets or patterns of deindustrialization, can generate tensions between different socioeconomic groups (Autor et al., 2020, pp. 3140–3145). They are reinforced as parties increasingly appeal to specific socioeconomic interests using populist rhetoric that emphasizes economic grievance or cultural protectionism. Rising ethnic diversity and evolving cultural dynamics contribute to identity-based polarization (Putnam, 2007, pp. 140–143). In this context, parties adapt their platforms to attract or solidify support from specific demographic groups, resulting in distinct and potentially exclusionary political identities, exacerbating social divides.

The realignment of party platforms and ideologies also creates significant ideological distinctions (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 102–104) as they tend to shift toward more extreme positions, catering to their rigid supporters, but marginalizing moderate and undecided voters (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008, pp. 542–544). The concept of identity politics has become intertwined with the dynamics of political realignment. Political allegiances are increasingly defined by social identities, including race, religion and ethnicity (Mason, 2018, pp. 148–150). As political affiliations align more closely with these identities, disagreements become more personal and emotionally charged, and challenges are often perceived as direct threats to personal integrity or group solidarity. This intensifies affective polarization leading to a deepened emotional divide between opposing groups and reducing the inclination to consensus (Huddy et al., 2015). In such context, political debates become conflicts of identity rather than mere contests of ideas, reinforcing polarization as ideological purity becomes a marker of loyalty and belonging.

The type of political leadership and their language used in political discourse are influential factors of polarization. Leaders who adopt divisive rhetoric can deepen polarization by framing opponents as enemies. Such rhetoric solidifies groups, while heightening distrust and animosity toward others, which further entrenches affective polarization (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015, pp. 71–73). On the other hand, political leaders who emphasize interparty dialogue and bipartisanship can be a focal point of calming political tensions. Through the use of rhetoric that encourages respect among colleagues and acceptance of diverse opinions, such leaders have the ability to bridge the polarized factions of parties. The probability of compromise, coalition building, and hence less political

hostility is higher in constructive political discourse. It is this type of leadership that upholds dialogue in order to offset the separating forces and create a more wholesome and effective democratic process (Norris, 2004, pp. 210–213).

Another major effect of polarization is to increase partisan loyalty. This makes swing voting less likely as the public becomes resistant to messages from other sources, with little room for gains by moderate or centrist candidates. This provides parties with a core of reliable voters; yet it results in a less expansive political market, with dialogue and bipartisanship always difficult. Negative voting emerges where ballots are cast not in support of a preferred candidate but against the undesirable opponent (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). Negative voting may increase turnout among political ultras, but often encourages apathy among those disillusioned by the antagonism of the system.

It further extends to issue prioritization and selective engagement. Highly polarized contexts see public discourse shift toward contentious, identity-based issues, which may be at the cost of more substantial or policy-oriented debates of a nuanced or technical character (Mason, 2018, pp. 182–185). Moreover, voters are most likely to prioritize issues that fall within their ideological commitments, which has its consequence in fragmented electoral platforms with inconsistent policy attention. Polarization appears to promote more aggressive and confrontational tactics in campaigning strategies and messaging. Political campaigns are becoming more fearful in their appeals, using negative ads and divisive rhetoric as ways to turn out their bases (Geer, 2006, pp. 58–60; Sunstein, 2017, pp. 142–144). Further developments of such a strategy only deepen the division in society, reinforcing negative stereotypes and strengthening zero-sum mentalities at the core of polarized societies.

Increasing polarization also heightens disputes over ballot counting and the impartiality of election management bodies (Norris, 2015). Where partisan identities are entrenched and distances between ideological poles are pronounced, citizens and elites alike are more prone to contest election results in ways that extend beyond standard legal challenges (Norris & Grömping, 2019).

The impacts of polarization go beyond voter behavior to greatly affect legislative processes and governance. It leads to **legislative gridlock**, where partisan barriers block policy reforms and prevent bipartisan cooperation across the aisle (Binder, 2003, pp. 47–50). Discussions become even tougher with hardening par-

ty stances that lead to inefficiency and destroy public confidence in democratic institutions. These effects manifest differently in different types of electoral system in place, which amplifies systemic vulnerabilities unique to each framework.

In countries with plurality or majority electoral systems, polarization intensifies animosity between the two dominant parties. This fosters strategic voting and reinforces the dominance of single-party majorities (Aldrich, 1995, pp. 189–222; Bawn et al., 2012), exacerbating zero-sum dynamics wherein the governing party frequently disregards the opposition's positions altogether. Such an approach produces policies that are not only highly partisan but often completely unacceptable to the opposing side, leading to cycles of political **retribution** when power changes hands.

Proportional representation systems experience different, yet equally destabilizing manifestation of polarization, tending to produce fragmented parliaments, where polarization **hinders** the formation of **viable coalition governments**. Hostile alienation among political factions, results in fragile or unstable coalitions that struggle to govern effectively. In extreme cases this leads to parliamentary and governmental crises with frequent breakdowns in coalition agreements and a reliance on temporary or caretaker governments. Such instability diminishes public confidence in democratic institutions, as voters perceive their political leaders unable to overcome factional divisions for the sake of coherent and consistent governance.

Over time, the deeply polarized political environments erode foundational democratic norms and mutual respect among political actors. This causes disrespect for institutional rules, contestation of the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and the emergence of an "us versus them" mentality, whereby political opponents are perceived not as legitimate competition but as threats to the very existence of the nation's values or survival. Delegitimization of opponents undermines democratic pluralism and lessens the propensity of political leaders to respect institutional checks and balances or to respect the results of electoral outcomes when power is at stake.

The social consequences of polarization reinforce its institutional effects. Large divides among the people exacerbate social fragmentation breeding distrust in political institutions and among the citizens themselves (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015, pp. 55–57). Such a noxious political environment creates

perfect breeding ground for populist movements and anti-democratic actors who justify authoritarian or illiberal solutions to perceived dysfunctions of polarized democracies.

Undeniably, parties in polarized settings often engage in tactics that corrode fairness for partisan gain—gerrymandering, voter suppression, electoral manipulation—all of which undermine the legitimacy of electoral outcomes (Norris, 2015, pp. 71–74; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 195–198). With such biased perceptions of institutions, cynicism and skepticism can feed political disengagement (Lau et al., 2007, pp. 1195–1197). Deeper ideological cleavages imply a greater possibility of political violence and social turmoil, ultimately jeopardizing the stability of democratic regimes (McCoy et al., 2018, pp. 16–20). Social conflicts destroy the possibility of reconciliation by challenging social cohesion.

Accordingly, polarization does not emerge purely as an epiphenomenon of ideological distance or as a derivative of partisanship. It rather crystallizes in the interaction of structural conditions with communicative flows framing political discourse through which emotional and cognitive dimensions of voter decisions are shaped. Interacting with competitive party systems and electoral frameworks, it amplifies into a self-reinforcing characteristic of present democracies that is intrinsically connected with populism, which is another face of the same challenge.

Populism complements polarization in contesting conventional notions of representation by constructing an antagonistic relationship between the **people**, regarded as a **morally pure** entity, and the **corrupt, self-serving elite** (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 5–14). This division extends beyond partisan or ideological cleavages because populist leaders claim to embody a more authentic or direct representation of the popular will than traditional parties or institutions. They often employ direct and personalized forms of communication and bypass the intermediary structures of party organizations to elevate personal bond between leader and voter, thus effectively centralizing the representational process around individual figures, rather than collective platforms or ideologically coherent frameworks (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, pp. 37–45).

These characteristics redefine key dimensions of representational theory, which centers on mechanisms of delegation, accountability, and party identification, with formal rules shaping how voter preferences are translated into seats and policy outcomes (Pitkin, 1967, pp. 38–46). Populist discourse seeks to re-

vise this mediation by claiming that the leader can stand in for the "**true interests**" of the people, ostensibly reducing the need for institutional checks. Such an emphasis on personal authenticity and a presumed monolithic popular identity challenges the pluralistic basis of representative governance. Populist notions of "true" representation may lead to the marginalization of minority opinions or specialized interests, as the leaders brand them as part of the "elite" or "others" (Mény & Surel, 2002, pp. 10–13).

The resulting tension highlights how populists strategically harness dissatisfaction with existing representative structures to promote direct rule and majoritarian principles accompanied by critiques of complex electoral procedures and judiciary oversight, or even constitutional safeguards. This anti-elitist stance resonates with individuals who perceive conventional political parties as remote or captured by illicit interests. Such views may blur the boundary between state institutions and populist leaders when in power, which affects the legitimacy of conventional representational frameworks (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 82–91).

In contexts where electoral rules favor strong executive authority, personalistic leadership often flourishes, further intensifying populist demands for more direct democracy at the expense of intermediary bodies and established constitutional arrangements. Empirical evidence from Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán shows how populist governments reshape institutional frameworks to consolidate authority, thereby marginalizing opposition and intensifying social cleavages (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018). In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's prolonged tenure exemplifies the merger of populist discourse with nationalist appeals, resulting in stark divides between supporters who perceive Erdoğan as the embodiment of the people's will and opponents who view him as an authoritarian threat (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 100–109). These examples illustrate the diverse ways populism can entrench polarization, destabilize democratic norms, and recast electoral politics into continual contests of moral legitimacy.

The contrast between populist claims of direct representation with the identity foundations of representative governance sheds light on how populism reshapes the representational nexus. At an identity level, representation is not simply a question of selecting officials but also of symbolizing and validating group identities within pluralist societies. By asserting a singular "**will of the people**,"

populist leaders may crowd out alternative social identities and heterogeneity, posing the normative contention of whether direct charismatic channels can coexist with broader representation and institutional accountability. Proponents of representative democracy argue that populist personalism may undermine long-term responsiveness, particularly to marginalized groups whose interests are already constrained by systemic barriers, raising further questions about how electoral designs might either inhibit or facilitate the ascendancy of populist leaders who claim to channel the popular will. More proportional systems facilitate pluralistic contestation, which provides smaller parties, including populist ones, with access to parliament (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 88–92). Majoritarian systems can concentrate power in the hands of a single charismatic figure with a straightforward electoral majority.

Empirical examples highlight the adaptability of populist appeals across diverse contexts. The Five Star Movement gained legislative representation in Italy by aggregating anti-establishment sentiment in digital platforms. Donald Trump's 2016 campaign activated previously disengaged constituencies in economically distressed regions through direct populist messaging (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, pp. 101–109). Studies of recent populist electoral campaigns in Western Europe and Latin America also reveal increased participation rates among previously inactive voters once populist rhetoric connects with local grievances (Anduiza et al., 2019; Norris, 2014, pp. 53–66; Rooduijn, 2018). These contrasting contexts demonstrate how populism exploits systemic opportunities to magnify voter turnout and alter the balance of party competition.

Mediatization and Digitalization of Politics

Mediatization refers to the growing influence of **media logic** in shaping political communication and campaign strategies, fundamentally changing the relationship between political actors and the public (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 229). As citizens get information via a variety of channels, these channels influence how issues are framed, what becomes prominent, and what sources will be perceived as trustworthy. They quite often make crucially important imprints on the interpretation of political cues, preference formation, and choices over possible electoral actions (Peterson, 1990, pp. 215–236).

Additionally, media consumption patterns determine the quality, quantity, and diversity of political content accessible to voters. A balanced media diet ensures informed decision-making (Prior, 2007, pp. 108–115). In contrast, reliance on limited or ideologically homogeneous sources can create informational silos that reinforce existing beliefs and minimize exposure to dissenting views, thus deepening political polarization (Sunstein, 2017, pp. 218–220). Traditional media, especially newspapers and public broadcasters, have long strived to uphold journalistic norms in attempts to build trust with the public over whom they served as gatekeepers of information. In the era of digital broadcasts and decentralized content creation, entry barriers are practically nonexistent, opening more opportunities for partisan actors and opportunistic misinformation agents to shape the electoral discourse (Norris 2001, pp. 102–105).

Fragmentation of sources of information and the proliferation of **digital media** have revolutionized the manner in which political information is consumed and disseminated. Partisan broadcasts polarize media by catering to niche ideological audiences. Many shows often frame information in a manner that promotes particular narratives supporting their audience beliefs while minimizing or discounting other perspectives (Levendusky, 2013, pp. 159–164).

This selective reporting solidifies partisan identities and fosters a sense of belonging among like-minded people, deepening ideological divides. By highlighting certain aspects of a policy debate or candidate trait, media frames direct public attention, emphasizing some aspects of a problem while neglecting others (Sunstein, 2017, pp. 232–235). This framing alters the criteria of voters in evaluating candidates or parties and forming preferences. Campaign strategies often exploit these dynamics, using consistent messaging to prime voters to consider particular concerns when making electoral judgments (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Through sustained repetition and thematic focus, political actors and supportive media outlets influence the cognitive accessibility of certain issues and narratives to shape the decision-making process, which results in overcommitment with specific issues like judicial reform, corruption, change or stability.

The dominance **of partisan media** and polarized information environments has weakened the quality of public discourse, which eroded deliberative spaces. Constructive dialogue and debate are hindered by hostility, antagonism, and ideological rigidity, making it difficult to bridge divides and reach consensus

(Sunstein, 2017, pp. 95–97). As a result, political conversations often devolve into confrontational exchanges, with people retreating to familiar partisan narratives rather than engaging with diverse perspectives (Mutz, 2006, pp. 83–85). Therefore, the function of the media in electoral processes is not merely to present information; it is much more engaged with the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that underpin how voters process content, influenced by the strategic use of emotional framing and selective reporting of events (Kahneman, 2011).

In the digital era, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have opened access to political information and participation in public discourse (Kreiss, 2016, p. 128), especially to younger demographics (Kreiss, 2012, p. 67). However, this comes at a cost: digital algorithms prioritize content that aligns with users' preexisting beliefs, reinforcing ideological divides that fragment political communication (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013, p. 92; Pariser, 2011, p. 83). Advanced machine learning tools enable campaigns to predict and manipulate voter behavior, potentially swaying electoral outcomes and undermining the autonomy of individual choice (Bennett, 2015; Tufekci, 2014). This method of **microtargeting** has been demonstrated to be effective in a number of elections, including the 2016 Brexit referendum and the U.S. presidential election, where **data analytics** played a decisive role in influencing electoral outcomes by identifying voters who were undecided and sending more than four billion personalized political advertisements to influence their decisions (Howard et al., 2018).

Personal data is often exploited without knowledge or consent of its owner (Zuboff, 2019, p. 76). The utilization of such data by Cambridge Analytica to create psychological voter profiles exemplifies both the potential benefits and ethical challenges associated with data-driven campaigning. This raises significant ethical concerns about privacy, transparency, and the fairness of electoral competition. In response, some countries have enacted stricter regulations for digital campaigning, including requirements for transparency in political advertising and disclosure of funding sources (Woolley & Howard, 2018, pp. 57–73).

As the public sphere represents a critical space within social life where citizens engage in rational-critical debate, discussing issues of public interest outside the influence of state or market power (Habermas, 1989), its structural transformation driven by digitalization has intensified the privatization of discourse, enabling people to retreat into isolated **informational bubbles** and **echo chambers**,

diminishing incentives of engagement in rational-critical debates, thus challenging the foundational assumptions of democratic deliberation (Habermas, 2023). Instead, as algorithms amplify emotionally resonant and ideologically aligned content, the trans-rational dimensions of political behavior, such as emotions and identity, often dominate, sidelining rational discussions necessary for cohesive democratic engagement. Therefore, echo chambers and filter bubbles deepen political polarization, the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation often gain traction faster than real news, while anonymity in online platforms facilitate the dissemination of hate speech and extremist content, degrading the overall quality of political interaction (Sunstein, 2017, p. 92).

Initiatives such as algorithmic transparency and the promotion of digital literacy are essential for fostering a healthier digital public sphere (Grönlund et al., 2010, pp. 110–113; Helberger et al., 2018, pp. 202–204; Mihailidis, 2014), yet they are still far from achieving satisfactory results. The exponential growth of polarization, mistrust in political institutions and deepening emotional divisions between political factions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, pp. 215–217), fueled primarily by digital media and communications, witness the general failure of these campaigns and the inadequacy of their instrumentalization. The challenge of discerning accurate information from fabrications complicates voters' ability to make informed decisions (Entman, 1993, pp. 51–53; Lewandowsky et al., 2017, pp. 353–355), potentially depressing turnout (Tufekci, 2020, pp. 145–148).

The rapid dissemination of digital information has introduced new vulnerabilities into the electoral process. **Misinformation** and **disinformation** via social media have emerged as a critical threat to electoral integrity, undermining public trust in democratic processes (Woolley & Howard, 2018, pp. 1–18, 167–185). Disinformation, defined as intentionally false information disseminated to deceive, has become a pervasive issue in present political campaigns, compromising the quality of public discourse and eroding trust in democratic institutions (Woolley & Howard, 2016, pp. 4884–4886). The digital public sphere, characterized by vast and interconnected social media platforms, provides an ideal environment for the spread of manipulated content. This dynamic enables malign actors to influence public opinion and sway electoral outcomes at a previously unimaginable scale.

Misinformation campaigns are capable of significantly reshaping voter perceptions, altering attitudes toward political candidates or policy issues. These

campaigns often utilize emotionally charged narratives or misleading content to create confusion, deepen divisions, and foster polarization. The mechanics of social media platforms can inadvertently amplify misinformation. Algorithms designed to maximize user engagement often prioritize sensational and emotionally potent content, thereby accelerating the spread of falsehoods over accurate information and complicating efforts to correct false narratives once they have been widely disseminated (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017, p. 13). These online ecosystems are particularly influential among younger voters who prefer digital avenues of participation. Provided their relatively low political efficacy, due to objectively limited experience, younger voters get rapidly and deeply embroiled in virtual realities, constructed by misleading information and fake news.

Deepfakes introduce additional complexity to the threats of digitalization. These AI-generated synthetic media pose significant risks to public perception by impersonating candidates or spreading disinformation (Chesney & Citron, 2019, p. 1773). Counteraction requires a combination of advanced detection technologies and legislative measures, which are hardly achievable at the present stage of development. The establishment of bodies like the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) exemplifies how national frameworks try to reinforce cybersecurity for critical infrastructures, including electoral systems. However, their results are still questionable.

Digital Campaigns

Digital technologies have changed not only political communications but also the electoral campaign landscape and its resource management. Digital advertising allows campaigns cheap alternatives compared to traditional media, such as television and radio. Precise targeting through digital platforms enables campaigns to realize strategic resource deployment to reach specific voter segments. The efficiency of small-budget campaigns opens a level of competitiveness in electoral contests (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018, pp. 160–164). Metrics on engagement and voter behavior provide the opportunity to fine-tune those strategies, directing efforts to places they are most likely to yield substantial returns in voter mobilization, fundraising, or visibility.

Electoral systems shape the character and focus of digital campaigns, as candidates and parties strive to maximize their results given their institutional

framework (Carey & Hix, 2011). Those systems in which the electoral focus is atomized across different and often extensive geographic areas or swing districts orient digital campaigns toward influencing the top priority constituencies. In such systems, campaigns use targeted advertising and data analytics. For example, in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, both major parties focused their resources on the swing states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. This has been made possible through the use of digital tools, which allowed microtargeting of undecided voters (Hersh, 2015, pp. 88–122).

Where the electoral goal is to secure a larger total share of votes, campaigns adopt broader, nationwide strategies. In such contexts, digital platforms are utilized to promote party branding and ideological coherence, rather than focusing exclusively on local constituencies. The political movement of Podemos in Spain, for instance, used the digital environment to build up support across the country and challenged established parties by using a grassroots-driven digital strategy (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016, pp. 378–380). In mixed electoral systems, parties face the twofold challenge of winning specific constituencies while seeking to maximize their overall vote share. Japan's Liberal Democratic Party has been very effective in that regard, mobilizing on a localized scale but canvassing with comprehensive digital outreach (Reed et al., 2012, pp. 360–365).

The expansion of social media enhances grassroots mobilization, as well. Digital platforms are not only sites of political dialogue but also serve as organizational tools for campaign events, volunteer coordination, and voter outreach. Features like event pages, group messaging, and live streaming allow campaigns to effectively organize activities and actively engage their supporters. Hashtags, viral content, and online challenges might raise campaign visibility, build momentum, and help spread the electoral messages fast (Bossetta, 2018, p. 471). These tactics allow campaigns to act quickly in response to changing circumstances, harness public opinion and shift the narrative when necessary.

Online fundraising has clearly improved the capacity of the candidate to mobilize a broad base of small donors while reducing dependency on older sources of financing. The case of ActBlue showed how digital tools can enable quite sizeable collections from grassroots supporters and proved the power of online platforms in engaging a diversity of voters in a shift toward more decentralized and community-driven financial support. However, resource allocation needs to

be balanced because of the differing levels of internet penetration and digital engagement among various demographics and marginalized groups (Nickerson & Rogers, 2014, pp. 66–69).

Focusing on how information channels frame voter perceptions and electoral agendas, and how digital transformations bring about new opportunities and risks for political communication, this section underlined that media and information processing are integral to electoral behavior. Such an interplay of information environments and cognitive processes has consequences not only for the levels of turnout but also for the depth, quality, and stability of preferences with significant consequences for contemporary democracies experiencing unprecedented evolution in media ecosystems.

Unfolding Assumptions

This chapter has demonstrated that representative democracies have become more vulnerable in the context of rapidly evolving digital public sphere. Media fragmentation and digital echo chambers embed bias and magnify ideological divergences where partisan media narratives gain traction and resonate more deeply with polarized electorates. Affective polarization shapes and channels information acquisition and engagement across ideological divides. As media ecosystems reconfigure political knowledge, strategic actors increasingly leverage data-driven strategies. This is an example of how the interaction between communication platforms and partisan identities serves to reinforce a cycle of polarization and negative partisanship.

The systemic implications of heightened ideological entrenchment create disincentives for cooperation, encourage the rise of antagonistic rhetoric and alter the terms of interparty competition. This constraint distorts legislative outcomes and undermines the foundational democratic principles of mutual respect and institutional checks, thus affecting both policy stability and public trust. Established democracies have exemplified these divergences in the past twenty years. Embedded partisan identities and shrinking willingness to negotiate policy differences imply that polarization has both structural and cultural roots. Its intensification is neither random nor easily reversible. Instead, it thrives amid institutional configurations that reward stubbornness, electoral frameworks that

concentrate or diffuse power in ways that privilege populist leaders, and communicative regimes that amplify selective narratives.

Considering these findings, contemporary challenges to democratic governance unfold across multiple levels. Top-down elite strategies, populist narratives, media fragmentation and transforming identities and preferences of voters, collectively engender suspicion and antagonism affecting the quality and fairness of electoral rules, procedures, and outcomes. The expansion of social media platforms, algorithmic content sorting, and big data analytics can broaden participation, increase message relevance, and reduce communication costs, but pose risks of disinformation, ideological fragmentation, privacy violations, and data-driven manipulations. Therefore, the tools that have the potential to empower electoral engagement, channel voters into informational silos, foster mistrust, and tilt the electoral playground. In essence, the digital evolution of political communication increasingly shapes public opinion through private platform algorithms, micro-targeted messaging and ephemeral viral content at the expense of deliberation. It provides fertile ground for populism and polarization, compromising the legitimacy and functionality of democratic governance.

In these settings, rival political elites rationalize malpractice as necessary defense against hostile opponents (Birch, 2011, pp. 110–130; Norris, 2014, pp. 53–66), reinforcing a cycle in which polarization justifies misconduct (Norris et al., 2016), which in turn deepens polarization itself by casting doubt on the legitimacy of winners and fueling further grievances (Hetherington, 2001; Rose & Mishler, 1994; Schedler, 2002, pp. 37–43). Populism attacks public perceptions of electoral malfeasance by claiming fraud or institutional bias as an instrumental way to destroy public confidence in the electoral process (Schedler, 2002, pp. 37–43). This is more evident in pre-election campaigns or right after a close contest, when populist leaders invoke claims of rigged outcomes, systemic corruption, or conspiratorial manipulation of the vote count.

Rhetoric along such lines de-legitimates electoral institutions while repositioning the populist actors themselves as guardians of the popular will (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Although such claims are rarely evidence-based, they can become particularly salient in contexts characterized by political polarization and declining trust in democratic processes in general (Norris, 2014, pp. 53–66). In effect, they often lead to legislative impasses, party system fragmentation, and

deterioration of interpersonal trust across partisan lines (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015, pp. 692–701). This process catalyzes antagonistic group identities (Inglehart & Norris, 2017) and suspicion to others, often culminating in a zero-sum perception of politics (Mény & Surel, 2002) and more rigid attitudinal alignments with populist leaders who claim to represent genuine public interest against allegedly illegitimate establishments (Galston, 2018; Kessel, 2015; Stoker, 2019).

The integrity of electoral processes thus depends on much more than the mere existence of good legislation or neutral regulations. What is rather needed, is rigorous enforcement of norms and impartial monitoring, along with attention to so-called minor practices with possible biasing effects. Even the best in design electoral systems can give rise to seriously flawed outcomes due to manipulations related to either clientelistic structures, vote-buying practices, or populist rhetoric at the expense of fairness and eventually the loss of public trust in the democratic way of government.

Chapter 3: **Principal Components of Electoral Systems**

After conceptualizing the foundations and challenges of electoral democracy, our analysis turns to the structural elements of electoral systems. The electoral formula and district magnitude determine the incentives guiding the functioning of representation. Ballot structure and thresholds specify how voters express their preferences across parties and candidates. Subsequently, measures of disproportionality assess the extent to which these institutional arrangements fairly reproduce distribution of votes in allocation of seats (Cox, 1997, pp. 17–35; Lijphart, 1994a, pp. 3–14).

Together, these elements define the properties and functioning of electoral systems, their outcomes, and the extent to which they fit particular social structurers. Determining the patterns of political representation, these components have a direct impact on democratic legitimacy. Therefore, they are central to the notion of representative government and embody the primary analytical focus of our inquiry.

Delineating Core Elements

The electoral formula determines the method by which votes are translated into seats, serving as the foundation of an electoral system, and implying disparate distributions of disproportionality (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2005a). The concept of district magnitude, or the number of representatives elected from a single electoral district, is significant in influencing the structure and incentives of parties in elections (Bormann & Golder, 2013).

Ballot structure determines the way voters cast their ballots. This includes a single vote, multiple votes, or preferential rankings for individual candidates and/or party lists. This structure shapes the model of electoral and intraparty com-

petition, influencing party cohesion, candidate selection, and voter mobilization (Farrell & Scully, 2010).

Both normative and effective thresholds are important aspects of electoral system design, as they exert a considerable influence on the fragmentation of party systems. The analysis of disproportionality in seat allocation is of vital importance for the understanding of the normative and empirical implications of different electoral arrangements. Precise conceptualization and consistent measurement of these elements facilitate robust cross-national comparisons and contribute to debates on electoral engineering and electoral integrity (Norris, 2004, pp. 62–89; Taagepera, 1998).

Electoral Formula

Three major formulas are met in contemporary electoral practice, which have distinct implications for the outcomes, the viability of smaller parties, and the stability of governance. The **plurality formula** awards victory to the candidate or party receiving the most votes in a given electoral district, regardless of whether a majority is achieved. It results in significant disproportionality between shares of votes and seats obtained by parties, as only the top-performing candidates gain representation while votes for others are effectively excluded from seat allocation.

The **majority formula** requires candidates to achieve an absolute majority, or half of the votes plus one, to secure a seat. It is aimed at enhancing legitimacy by ensuring that winners have broad electoral support. It also produces disproportional outcomes, particularly in the context of fragmented party systems, as it excludes smaller parties from meaningful representation.

The **proportional formula** is aimed to closely match party vote shares with the corresponding shares of seats they get in the allocation procedure. Two main subtypes are commonly distinguished: the **highest-average** and the **largest-remainder methods**.

D'Hondt is one of the most frequently used-highest average methods, using a series of divisors expressed as:

$$D = \{1, 2, 3, ..., k\}$$

where k is the number of seats to be allocated. Formally, each divisor is given by:

$$d_i = i, \text{ for } i = 1, 2, 3, ..., k$$

The vote shares for each party P_j are divided by these divisors to allocate seats. The formula for the quotients is:

$$Q_{j,i} = \frac{V_j}{d_i}$$

where V_j is the total number of votes received by party P_j, d_i is the $i^{\text{-th}}$ divisor from the series D, and $Q_{j,i}$ represents the quotient for party P_j at the $i^{\text{-th}}$ seat allocation step. Seats are allocated iteratively by selecting the largest remaining quotient $Q_{j,i}$ until all k seats are distributed. This method tends to advantage larger parties, thus limiting legislative fragmentation while maintaining proportionality of representation.

Sainte-Laguë is another highest-average method using odd numbers as divisors. It ensures a proportional allocation of seats while giving slightly less advantage to larger parties compared to D'Hondt because of the faster increase in divisors. The series of divisors can be expressed as:

$$D = \{1, 3, 5, ..., 2i - 1\}$$

where i is the sequential index for seat allocation, and $2i - 1$ is the $i^{\text{-th}}$ odd number in the series. Formally:

$$d_i = 2i - 1, \text{ for } i = 1, 2, 3, ..., k$$

Obtaining the quotient and the subsequent allocation of seats is procedurally identical to D'Hondt.

The Hare (Hare-Niemeyer) Quota is a largest-remainder method, calculated as:

$$Q_H = \frac{T}{S}$$

where Q_H is the quota, T is the total number of votes, and S is the total number of seats to be allocated. The Droop (Hagenbach-Bischoff) Quota is another largest-remainder method:

$$Q_D = \left| \frac{T}{S+1} \right| + 1$$

Together with the Imperiali Quota:

$$Q_I = \left| \frac{T}{S+2} \right|$$

these methods require an increasingly lower number of votes to win a seat, therefore increasing the chances for representation of smaller parties.

District Magnitude

District magnitude (M) is a key structural component of electoral systems, determining the degree of disproportionality of representation and the party system fragmentation. It is a discrete variable that indicates the (average) number of seats allocated in one district and is defined as ($M = 1$) for **single-member districts (SMDs)**, and ($M = k$) for **multi-member districts (MMDs)**, where $k \in [2, K]$, and K represents the total number of allocated seats in the legislative body.

Larger district magnitudes tend to produce more proportional outcomes. The larger number of seats are available for allocation enables parties to enter the legislature with even relatively modest shares of the vote. Therefore, systems effectively applying nationwide districts ($M = K$) minimize disproportionality. In contrast, smaller district magnitudes maximize disproportionality by increasing the effective threshold for representation (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989, pp. 112–115).

The relationship between district magnitude and the effective number of parties is central to understanding how electoral systems shape political competition and diversity of representation (Bormann & Golder, 2013; Laakso & Taagepera, 1979, pp. 3–10). This number is defined either at the electoral level as:

$$Ne = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} v_i^2}$$

where, Ne is the **effective number of electoral parties**, n is the total number of parties competing in an election, and v_i is the share of votes received by party i; or at the parliamentary level as:

$$Np = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} s_i^2}$$

where, *Np* is the **effective number of parliamentary parties**, *n* is the total number of parties winning seats in an election, and s_i is the share of seats allocated to party *i*. As district magnitude increases, the number of viable parties rises, allowing for greater **party system fragmentation**.

While district magnitude is a powerful determinant of disproportionality and fragmentation, its effects are contextually modulated. Regional parties with concentrated geographic support can achieve legislative success even within systems using SMDs (Shugart & Carey, 1992, pp. 124–130). Moreover, it can vary between districts within a system (Farrell, 2011, pp. 41–44). For analytical purposes, in such cases, the average magnitude across all districts is calculated or the magnitudes of the largest and smallest districts are taken to capture variation. However, both approaches can obscure significant regional disparities in representation.

Ballot Structure

Ballot structure is defined along two primary dimensions determining the expression of voters' preferences and the aggregation of electoral outcomes. The first one is the **type of choice**, defining if voters are allowed to cast single vote, multiple votes and/or rank preferential candidates. The **essence of representation** is the second dimension, determining if voters are asked to select among **personal candidates**, **party lists**, or **both**. List systems are further divided into open, closed, and flexible subcategories.

In **single-vote** systems, voters cast one vote for either a candidate or a party. This structure is common for pure plurality/majority and closed-list PR systems, simplifying the voting process, but restricting voters' ability to express preferences beyond their first choice. **Multiple-vote** systems allow voters to support more than one party or candidate (even across parties), while **preferential voting** permits the ranking of candidates or parties in order of preference. The last two systems reduce the wasting of votes by transferring surplus or lower-ranked votes to more candidates but require greater voter proficiency and impose administrative complexity on election management bodies (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 82–85).

In **closed-list** systems, voters have no options to change the order of candidates arranged by parties. This structure centralizes power within party leadership, ensuring organizational cohesion but limits voter influence and potentially discourages engagement (Farrell, 2011, pp. 56–58). **Open-list** systems provide voters with the ability to order candidates within the list. Seats are allocated based on the parties' cumulative vote shares, but candidates receiving the most individual preferences are given priority in seat allocation. The **flexible-list** systems allow voters while voting for a party to express a preference for a specific candidate. The party's pre-established order often prevails, but candidates surpassing a predetermined threshold of voter preferences can advance their position in the list and get a seat.

There are also arrangements, where voters can split their votes/preferences across parties (**panachage**), which can significantly alter electoral dynamics and outcomes, enhancing voter agency but weakening party cohesion and/or encouraging intraparty competition (Carey & Shugart, 1995, pp. 418–423). Similarly, highly flexible voting systems can incentivize coalition-building and cross-party appeals, particularly in contexts of deep social divisions (Reilly, 2001, pp. 125–127).

Eventually, electoral formula appears as an **embedded nominal expression** of the essence of representation dimension of ballot structure, influencing both voter behavior and the dynamics of representation in terms of candidate selection and accountability to constituents (Lijphart, 1994a).

Thresholds

Thresholds determine the minimum share of votes a party must achieve to participate in the allocation of seats and are reflected in the degree of party system fragmentation, the disproportionality of outcomes, and the overall structure of representation. **Normative (nominal) thresholds** are both explicitly stated in formal electoral regulations or the constitutions, and functionally embedded in the ballot structures. They serve to limit legislative fragmentation in the context of purely proportional electoral systems and vary considerably across countries between two and ten percent of the valid votes (Lijphart, 1994a; Norris, 2004, pp. 72–74).

Conversely, the **effective (real) thresholds** are not legally defined norms, but are derivatives of district magnitudes (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989, pp. 116–

118). Conventionally, the functional relationship between the two components assumes a Droop quota and is defined as:

$$T_e = \frac{75}{M+1}$$

where T_e is the effective threshold as a relative share of valid votes in percentages and M is the average district magnitude (Taagepera, 2007, pp. 246–247).

Systems, effectively utilizing a single nationwide MMD exhibit extremely low effective thresholds and usually impose a normative barrier to restrict excessive parliamentary fragmentation (Farrell, 2011, pp. 66–68). In contrast, systems with relatively low average district magnitudes produce so high effective thresholds that normative ones become implausible.

Disproportionality

The concept of disproportionality is fundamentally connected to the principle of equitable representation, which requires legislative seats to be distributed among competing parties in proportions close to their vote shares in elections. Systems that achieve low disproportionality provide smaller parties and minority groups with fair representation, while more disproportional systems tend to overly favor larger parties at the expense of smaller and marginal groups' interests.

The **degree of disproportionality** is a derivative of the district magnitude and to a lesser extent of ballot structure. Proportional systems with nationwide multi-member districts and normative thresholds of less than five percent typically yield very proportional outcomes. By contrast, majoritarian and plurality systems produce significant vote-to-seat disproportionalities, favoring up to a couple of major parties (Lijphart, 2012). Conventionally, the degree of disproportionality is measured by the Gallagher Index (G):

$$G = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(v_i - s_i)^2}{2}}$$

where v_i is the share of votes received by party i, s_i is the share of seats allocated to it and n is the total number of parties (Gallagher, 1991).

The model implies that higher net deviations between and across parties results in higher disproportionality values. It is universally applicable to all formulas, ballot systems, and district magnitudes, both in democratic and nondemocratic contexts, as long as , which is the basic assumptions of elections (not only plural and free). Therefore, an electoral system cannot be proportional/disproportional by type. Disproportionality is inherent characteristic of electoral outcomes, which varies from election to another even if the system remains totally unchanged, making its utility as a classification criteria highly problematic. In the following sections we elaborate on a theoretical and methodological discussion of the implications of this conclusion for the plausibility of electoral analysis and the validity of its empirical findings.

Theoretical Considerations

In the preceding section we have illustrated how profound the impact of the electoral system configuration is on the character of political competition and the resilience of party systems. Furthermore, electoral systems play an essential role in determining the extent of accountability of elected officials. By defining the relationship between voters and representatives, they determine the legislative mandate (König et al., 2011). Critically engaging with classical theories and new insights, this section highlights the necessity for a synthetic explanatory framework of the contextual complexities of contemporary democracies.

Contemporary understanding of the impact of electoral systems in shaping democratic institutions and representation is based on the fundamental principles laid down by the "empirical rule" of Duverger. In its terms, plurality formulas **mechanically** favor **two-party dominance** because only candidates with the most votes in their districts win the seats, leading to a **psychological** consolidation of voters and parties around the most viable candidates (Duverger, 1954, pp. 217–223). Proportional formulas minimize these effects by allocating the seats on the basis of vote shares, which provides even smaller parties with access to legislative representation, resulting in multiparty systems and fragmented parliaments, which necessitate coalition majorities and cabinets, thus diminishing the stability and longevity of their governments.

The validity of this theory has been challenged by empirical examples, where parties with relatively small, but regionally concentrated electoral support exhibit multiparty competition despite plurality electoral formulas, substantiating the key function of different social and political contexts in modulating the systemic effects of institutions. The psychological effects of systems are further questioned as the assumption that voters shift support to viable parties is sustainably questioned by strong motivations like ideological loyalty, social divides or protest.

Nevertheless, policymakers frequently draw on Duverger's insights to anticipate the structural consequences of electoral reforms, particularly in post-conflict or transitional settings where the choice of electoral system can significantly shape political outcomes. Contemporary studies have built on this foundation by incorporating additional variables to provide a more detailed understanding of the interplay between electoral rules and democracy. By framing these rules as mechanisms that mediate both institutional and behavioral dynamics, Duverger's theory remains central to debates on the design of democratic institutions, highlighting the strategic considerations that electoral systems impose on voters and parties.

Instead on the structural effects of electoral formulas, Rae's normative analysis on disproportionality as a determinant of electoral fairness, provided theoretical and methodological foundation for the comparative analysis of electoral systems across diverse political contexts (Rae, 1971, pp. 112–117). Challenging the normative justifications of majoritarian systems, his approach outlined **wasted votes** as a critical indicator of electoral efficiency. In highly disproportional systems, votes cast for unsuccessful candidates or in a surplus beyond what is needed to win a seat, do not get legislative representation, which not only distorts proportionality but discourages voter participation by eroding the perceived voter efficacy.

Rae's approach reinforced Duverger's findings in the understanding of how electoral systems shape party politics and democratic government, but also shared their limitations. The narrow focus on disproportionality as a primary measure of performance underestimates the influence of broader socio-political and cultural factors alike. Electoral clientelism and strategic voting can profoundly distort electoral outcomes regardless of disproportionality, undermining the normative assumptions of the theory (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, pp. 725–731), especially

in emerging democracies, where ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities often play a more significant role than ideological cleavages.

The assumption of rationality and predictability of electoral behavior similarly challenges the classical theoretical explanations of the electoral systems' effect in framing the ideological positioning, coalition potential, and strategic interactions among political parties. Based on the **degree of ideological polarization** and the **predictability of electoral outcomes** as explanatory variables they claimed that **centrifugal forces** encourage ideological differentiation and appeal to narrower and polarized constituencies, while **centripetal forces** drive parties toward moderate, median voter positions to maximize electoral support (Sartori, 1976, pp. 121–130).

Despite cumulative virtues of classical theories, they have been criticized for overly deterministic assumptions and limited contextual sensitivity, overly neglected federalism, social cleavages, political cultures, and historical legacies, which profoundly influence electoral outcomes (Colomer, 2004, pp. 78–84; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989, pp. 45–49). As a result, their generalizability remained constrained to consolidated electoral practices in established democracies (Caramani, 2004, pp. 23–29).

The explanatory power of these theories proved insufficient in more informal institutional environments driving voter behavior and party competition in transitional democracies. The conceptualization of electoral systems as static structures is another central limitation, leading to underestimation of the dynamic adaptation to cultural and technological transformations (Renwick, 2010, pp. 97–101). However, the Third Wave of Democratization has demonstrated the importance of electoral adaptability in accommodating diversity. In many post-colonial states, the adoption of electoral systems has been influenced by the legacies of former metropolises. The adoption of majoritarian formulas in multiethnic societies has frequently led to the marginalization of minority groups, contributing to political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts, and separatism. Tailored proportional systems that accounted for the local social peculiarities have proven more effective in fostering political representation and mitigating conflict (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 60–67).

In emerging democracies where institutional structures are weak or contested, a greater emphasis on the interaction of informal practices with formal elec-

toral rules is necessary (Lupu & Riedl, 2013, pp. 1348–1351). Accounting for the evolving role of technology in influencing political behavior and electoral outcomes additionally requires adaptive analytical frameworks that go beyond traditional electoral classifications.

Assembling Components

The examination of the principal components of electoral systems indicates that even ostensibly technical design elements exert profound influence over the quality and shape of democratic representation. They structure the underlying incentives for party formation, voter engagement, and patterns of political competition. Even seemingly minor variations can determine which viewpoints achieve legislative presence, which issues gain salience, and how reactive elected officials remain to shifting citizen preferences. They determine whether multiethnic societies attain broad representation or fragmented polities confront permanent legislative deadlocks, and whether political cleavages receive proportional parliamentary space or end up marginalized by majoritarian logics. Recognition of the transformative capacity of core electoral components becomes essential in evaluating and reforming contemporary electoral practices, which evolve as political agents learn to navigate institutional terrains. Therefore, it is imperative to contextualize components within the broader analytical framework of electoral system classifications, by adapting a refined classificatory framework.

Chapter 4: **Introducing Hybrid Models**

Electoral systems directly shape political competition, representation, participation, and governmental stability in contemporary democracies (Tsebelis, 2003, pp. 1–24). Having conceptualized their principal components and the key aspects of their operational logic, we proceed with a comparative analysis of their applications and the corresponding effects for political outcomes. The goal of this comparison is to isolate the improvement-promotion mechanisms, which are instrumental for informed and guided electoral reforms (Golder, 2005). In pursuing this goal, we consider the complexity of electoral systems and their embeddedness in broader political, social, and cultural contexts, setting the stage for subsequent cross-country time series analysis, allowing for the identification of global trends, regional patterns, and system-specific trajectories (Gerring, 2007, pp. 111–134; Powell, 2000, pp. 21–34).

Comparing Electoral Systems

We have already discussed that past experiences with colonialism, authoritarianism, or war can influence attitudes toward democracy and democratic participation (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 141–164). Present socioeconomic development, including income inequality and social cleavages based on ethnicity, religion, or class, can significantly impact electoral dynamics. Electoral systems that promote wider representation and stability in economically homogeneous societies usually do not have the same effects in contexts marked by deep divisions (Boix, 1999). Considering these conditions is crucial for assessing their overall potential to facilitate conflict resolution and effective governance (Norris, 2004, pp. 44–49).

Plurality/Majority vs. Proportional Representation

Plurality/majority and proportional representation systems embody two fundamentally distinct approaches to elections and democracy, reflected across principal components (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 137–145; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989, pp. 4–6). The electoral formula nominally embodies this divergence, but district magnitude is the is the primary factor defining its logic.

Plurality and majority systems employ single-member districts, encouraging a direct form of political competition, where electoral contests are not just between differing political ideologies but between candidates who embody these differences, thus fostering the direct accountability of representatives to their constituencies (Farrell, 2001, pp. 15–17). In contrast, PR systems adopt multi-member districts, broadening the spectrum of representation, but introducing a certain level of complexity in voter-representative relationships (Norris, 2004, pp. 58–64; Reynolds et al., 2005, pp. 62–66).

The type of ballot further accentuates these differences. Plurality/majority systems are centered on candidates, grounding political campaigns in the personal credibility and local effectiveness of nominees (Farrell, 2001, pp. 77–92). Closed-list proportional systems are based on party representation and their political platforms. The open-list variations of proportionality attempt to balance collective ideology over policies with the merits of personal candidates, offering voters further electoral involvement (Gallagher & Mitchel, 2005a).

While proportional systems often incorporate thresholds to prevent extreme legislative fragmentation, plurality systems inherently filter out smaller parties through their limited distinct magnitude (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989, pp. 112–116). The degree of disproportionality thus becomes a distinguishing factor, with plurality/majority systems resulting in much higher levels in contrast to proportional systems (Boix, 1999, pp. 612–615; Norris, 2004, pp. 57–63).

Mixed Approaches

Mixed systems aim to bridge the divide between the two basic electoral paradigms into electoral frameworks that offer improved legislative representation (Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001b). They have a dual-core structure, where a portion of the legislature is elected through a plurality method in single-member

districts, and the rest through party lists within larger multi-member districts or nationwide MMD. They enable voters to express preferences both for personal candidates and for parties (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2008, pp. 113–124; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989, pp. 135–142). However, the necessity to balance two distinct voting mechanisms within a single operational framework can lead to challenges in implementation and diminishing public trust, while not fully coping with disproportionality.

The Palette of Electoral Systems

Having highlighted the relationship between electoral design and political outcomes, the goal of the present section is to outline all specific electoral systems in global use at present. **The First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)** also known as the simple majority or plurality system, is among the most straightforward and widely adopted methods in legislative elections (Cox, 1997, pp. 47–95). It allows voting for an individual candidate in a single-member district. The winner in each district is determined by the plurality formula. FPTP is simple for the voters, and produces clear-cut electoral outcomes, resulting in stable single-party governments (Cox, 1997, pp. 123–130). However, it tends to favor larger, well-established parties and often leads to two-party systems, limiting the representation of minority interests (Duverger, 1954, pp. 206–212).

The **Block Vote (BV)** is applied in multi-member districts, where each voter casts as many votes as there are available seats. Candidates who receive the highest number of votes are elected. Although allowing for **cross-party voting**, the system tends to favor major parties capable of mobilizing substantial support across all districts, and usually results in a disproportionate allocation of seats (Blais & Massicotte, 1996, pp. 67–70). The **Party Block Vote (PBV)** is a modification, focusing on parties rather than individual candidates. Voters cast a single vote for a party list in MMDs, and the party receiving a plurality of votes in a district wins all its seats. This system can significantly magnify the political dominance of the major party, advancing decisive legislative majorities and stable governments, while limiting the outreach of representation.

The **Two-Round System (TRS)** or **runoff voting,** ensures that the winning candidate secures an **absolute majority** of votes, typically exceeding fifty percent. This system is widely applied in **presidential** elections and is less frequent

in legislative ballots using single-member districts. In the first round, all eligible candidates compete, and if no candidate achieves a majority, a second round is held. Usually, only the top two candidates from the first round proceed to the run-off, although variations exist that allow additional candidates to advance under certain conditions. TRS offers the advantage of ensuring that the winner has broad support among voters. However, apart from being costly and time-consuming in requiring voters to participate in two separate voting rounds, they involve excessive strategic and negative voting as voters recalibrate their preferences to avoid **wasting** of votes or choose the **"lesser evil"** between two genuinely undesirable alternatives (Norris, 1997, pp. 6–8). Furthermore, in less developed democracies, the time span between two rounds allows losing incumbents in the first round to resort to violence or to directly abolish the second round.

Alternative Vote, also known as **Instant Runoff Voting**, is a system used in single-member districts. Voters rank candidates by preference on the ballot. A candidate with a majority of first preferences is elected. Otherwise, the candidate with the fewest first preferences is eliminated and his or her votes redistributed according to the second preferences. This elimination and redistribution continue until one candidate achieves the majority (Reilly, 2001, pp. 5–17). AV encourages candidates to appeal to a broader electorate because second and third preferences may become crucial in close races. It is also designed to reduce the "spoiler effect," whereby small party candidates can alter the outcome. However, the complexity of vote counting and the potential for voter confusion are major drawbacks of this system (Reilly, 2001, pp. 42–57).

List Proportional Representation (List PR) is an ordinary method that allocates legislative seats to each party based on its vote percentage. Voters choose a party list rather than individual candidates in multi-member districts. Lists can be closed, with the party determining the order of the candidates, or open/flexible in which case the voters have some influence over the ordering by expressing preferences (Blais & Massicotte, 1996, pp. 49–66). Seat allocation is done through either the highest-average or largest-remainder methods described in the previous chapter.

The **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** is applied in multi-member districts, allowing voters to rank candidates by preference. A Droop Quota determines the number of votes needed to secure a seat and candidates who surpass the quota

with first preferences are immediately elected. Any surplus votes are transferred to remaining candidates based on subsequent preferences. If there are still unallocated seats, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and their votes are redistributed. This iterative process continues until all seats are allocated (Reilly, 2001, pp. 113–122). STV is appreciated for its emphasis on personal candidates, while minimizing wasted votes, thus offering a reasonable level of proportionality. However, it is overly complex both for voters and administrators, which determines its extremely limited application in legislative elections to Ireland and Malta.

The Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP) is a method that simultaneously combines plurality and proportional voting in one system. Voters cast two ballots: one to elect a candidate in a single-member district (constituency vote) and another for a political party list (party vote). In the constituency vote, the candidates who receive the most votes in each district get the seats. The party vote determines how many seats each party will have in total. If a party receives fewer constituency seats than its share of the vote would suggest it should, additional seats are allocated to the party list in order to equalize the results. If a party wins more constituency seats than its share of votes allows, it keeps these "overhang" seats and others are compensated, which makes the legislature bigger (Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001b). The MMP systems maintain the link between representatives and their local districts while ensuring that the overall seat count in the legislature reflects the party votes. Critics of MMP, however, indicate that the system can become complex since voters have to deal with two ballots and understand what the votes stand for (Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001a, pp. 583–596).

Parallel Systems, also known as **Mixed Member Majoritarian** or Dual-Member Systems, also combine two elements but, unlike MMP, they do not try to correct the disproportionate outcome created by the majoritarian component. Voters have two votes: one is cast for a candidate in a single-member district, the second for a party list in a multimember one. The total number of seats allocated for each party is the uncorrected sum of those that parties receive in the majoritarian and PR components. As their name suggests, this system reflects both direct and broader representation in parallel. While appreciated for their simplicity and for maintaining local representation, these systems still do not fully cope with disproportionality (Farrell, 2001, pp. 89–96).

The **Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV)** is a plurality system applied in multi-member districts, where each voter casts a single vote for a preferred candidate. Candidates receiving the highest vote totals are elected. While smaller parties have a chance of winning seats, the overall outcome still favors larger, well-organized ones, because the success of a candidate depends heavily on strategic voting and party coordination, as vote-splitting among candidates of the same party can lead to unintended results. Therefore, SNTV potentially compromises party cohesion (Reynolds et al., 2005, pp. 113–117). The **Limited Vote (LV)** is a variant of SNTV applied to multimember districts, in which voters can cast more than one vote but less than the total number of seats available in the district. Seats are awarded to those candidates who receive the most votes. It tends to be more proportional than standard plurality systems but still blatantly favors larger parties capable of organizing coordinated voting tactics. Its semi-proportional nature can allow small parties or independents to capture representation, thereby blocking the domination of a single party (Farrel, 2001, 105–111).

The **Borda Count (BC)** is a ranked voting system allowing ordering of candidates by preference. Points are allocated with the highest rank, receiving the most points. In a simple Borda Count system, if there are N candidates, a voter's top choice receives $N - 1$ points, the second choice $N - 2$ points, and so on. After all votes are counted, the candidate(s) with the highest total points are declared winner(s). The Borda Count is considered effective in reducing polarization, as it encourages moderate candidates who can gather broad support across all voter preferences. Due to its extreme complexity, this system is applied for legislative elections only in Nauru, but is occasionally used for internal party elections, academic societies, and organizational decision-making processes (Farrell, 2001, pp. 135–140).

Table 4.1. Spread of Electoral Systems Around the World

Electoral System	n	p (%)
Alternative Vote	2	1.17
Block Vote	3	1.75
First-Past-the-Post	43	25.15
FPTP & Block Vote	1	0.58
List Proportional Representation	72	42.11
Mixed-Member Proportional	8	4.68
Parallel Systems	21	12.28
Single Non-Transferable Vote	6	3.51
Single Transferable Vote	2	1.17
Two-Round System	13	7.60
Total	171	100

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parline Database (April 2024)

Table 4.1 gives an overview of the worldwide distribution of electoral systems and underlines how FPTP, List PR, and Parallel Systems tend to be preferred to all other types when it comes to legislative elections. Taking these systems altogether would make up the electoral methods of roughly 80% of the countries in the world. This summary must, however, be read with caution, since the distributions presuppose uniformity across the general population being studied, and political systems worldwide are anything but homogeneous because of basic discrepancies in political culture, institutional legacies, socioeconomic conditions, and historical trajectories, all of which are factors that ought to be considered for the proper interpretation of these figures.

Meta-Analysis of Classifications

Having outlined the variety of contemporary electoral systems utilized in legislative elections across the globe, we now direct our attention to the conceptual perspectives and methodological challenges associated with their classification. By critically examining existing approaches and identifying their methodological shortcomings, this study aims to compel a more exhaustive and robust electoral systems typology. This is not merely an academic exercise but

has practical significance in guiding electoral reforms and informing the design of political institutions.

Among the most influential typologies of electoral systems informing contemporary comparative research, the one proposed by Arend Lijphart is probably the most straightforward and universally applicable. It is based on the fundamental dichotomy between majoritarian and consensus models, which translates into two distinct electoral arrangements: majoritarian (plurality) and proportional systems. Additionally, Lijphart conceptualizes semi-proportional formulas that lie somewhere in the continuum between the two pure alternatives. This dichotomy has served as a foundational element in much of the contemporary research on electoral systems, significantly influencing the academic discourse on electoral typologies (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 1–10)

Paradoxically, Lijphart did not endeavor to present an exhaustive standalone typology of electoral systems but incorporated it as one, among others, classification criteria within his comprehensive taxonomy of democracies, elucidating the interconnection between electoral frameworks, party systems, models of governance, and the overall quality of democracy (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 134–136). While not introducing new conceptualizations, Lijphart's systematization of existing concepts and theories offers a streamlined explanatory framework that empirically captures the most crucial features of democratic institutions. His contribution lies in synthesizing existing research into an accessible model, which became particularly relevant during the peak of the Third Wave in the late 20th century. Policymakers have found practical value in his guidelines for institutional engineering, making his taxonomical analysis a foundation for subsequent reforms.

Lijphart's classification has been directly applied in diverse research frameworks on the implications of electoral arrangements for political representation and electoral justice (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2008; Norris, 2004), as well as in the construction of generative taxonomies (Reynolds et al., 2005), which advantage from its simplicity and intuitive interpretability. We define these taxonomies therefore **conventional**. In its simplest form, a conventional typology divides electoral systems into three primary categories: majoritarian/plurality, proportional, and mixed systems, each defined by its electoral **formula** and the degree of **disproportionality** of its outcomes.

Drawing on data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Table 4.2 illustrates the distribution of countries according to the conventional electoral system categories. The data show a notable global inclination towards proportional representation, which is employed by over forty percent of the countries worldwide. Pure majoritarian or plurality systems are used in about one-third, and mixed systems constitute nearly one-fifth of the cases.

Table 4.2. Electoral Systems by Category Around the World

Electoral System Category	n	p (%)
Proportional Representation	75	41.90
Plurality/Majority	63	35.20
Mixed System	34	18.99
Other Systems	7	3.91
Total	179	100

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parline Database (April 2024)

Figure 4.1 reveals that proportional and mixed systems are primarily applied in continental Europe and Latin America, where political cultures of coalition-building encourage multiparty dynamics.

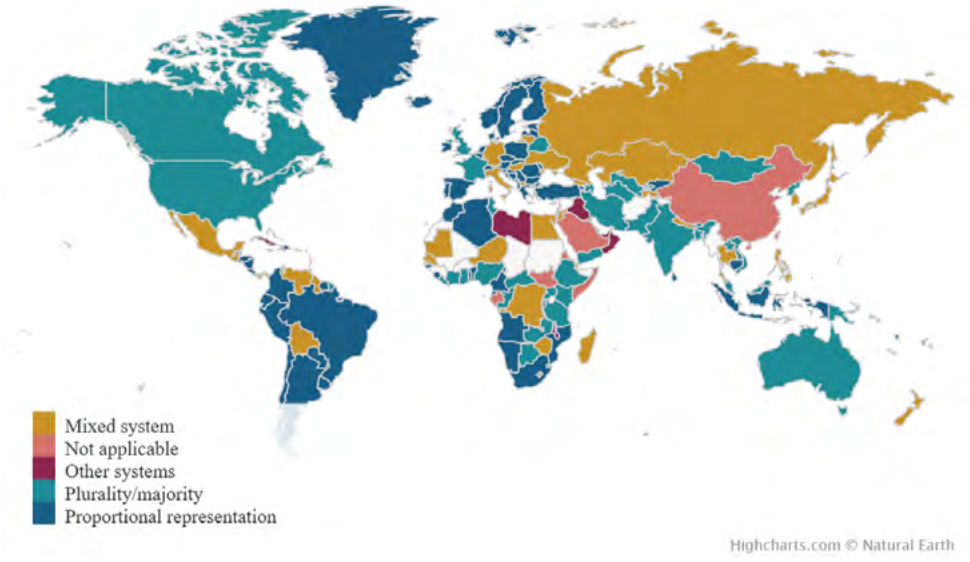

Figure 4.1. Electoral System Categories Around the World
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parline Database (April 2024)

In contrast, plurality/majority systems are used in the United Kingdom, France, and most of their former colonies, including the United States and Canada. In Africa, the diversity of electoral systems reflects complex colonial legacies and post-independence reforms, often aimed at mitigating the challenges of ethnic and religious fragmentation by enhancing the representativeness of legislatures.

Newer taxonomies based on structural characteristics as classification criteria significantly improve the categorization and interpretation of specific systems and their implications for political representation. By emphasizing the interactions between district magnitude, ballot structure, and the nomination of candidates within parties, Herron et al. (2018, pp. 23–41) propose a typology distinguishing between single-seat districts, mixed-member systems, list systems, and proportional representation with a single transferable vote (PR-STV), arguing that these interactions are crucial because they directly affect the functionality and perceived fairness of electoral systems.

In similar attempt to explain how electoral systems shape political outcomes, Gallagher and Mitchell (2005b) provide a classification built on district magnitude, to explain how electoral rules influence political behavior. Their approach differentiates between single-member constituency, mixed, and proportional representation systems. However, their framework falls short in integrating innovative electoral systems that challenge conventional assumptions. Similarly, Baldini and Pappalardo (2008, pp. 78–84) provide a typology based on the mechanics of electoral systems to explain how different configurations impact political dynamics. While applicable across diverse governance contexts, the depth of their analysis conflicts with emerging electoral mechanisms.

Taagepera's (2007) structural taxonomy is one of the most complex contemporary models, employing the dimensions of district magnitude (*M*) and assembly size (*S*) as classifiers to examine how these two variables interact in shaping the proportionality of election results and the effective number of parties within a political system. It provides a detailed map of electoral systems predicting how diverse configurations may affect political dynamics. The strength of this model is in its conceptual abstraction, which allows for universal generalizability in varied contexts, including non-democratic countries. His rationalization excels in scien-

tific precision, although the high level of conceptual abstraction obscures specific political dynamics at play in unique national settings (Taagepera, 2007, pp. 12–36).

Machover (2012) introduces another innovative typology, incorporating lottery-based versus deterministic decision-making mechanisms, challenging the conventional classifications by exploring nontraditional electoral frameworks. The inclusion of randomness into electoral outcomes highlights the flexibility of universal typologies in addressing rare electoral systems. This approach expands the boundaries of electoral studies demonstrating that comparative political research can accommodate more complex and multifaceted forms of decision-making and representation, thus showcasing the analytical evolution of the discipline (Machover, 2012, pp. 3–4).

Partial typologies focus on subsets of electoral systems, providing detailed and context-specific insights that often prioritize depth over coverage. A good example is the detailed taxonomy of Mixed-Member Electoral Systems (MMES), distinguishing between Mixed-Member Proportional and Mixed-Member Majoritarian (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001b). Although critical for the analysis of electoral practices in Germany, New Zealand, or Japan, its generalizability and comparative potential remains limited.

Another partial typology, focusing exclusively on mixed systems introduces the concept of **contamination**, which refers to the **hybridization** of majoritarian and proportional systems, leading to new **species** of electoral arrangements. It acknowledges the fluid character of electoral systems and their potential to evolve as political contexts change, similarly to biological organisms and the consecutive effects for vote-to-seat conversion, political competition, and governance. Still, this framework remains limited to the analysis of mixed settings (Ferrara et al., 2005, pp. 14–26).

Exploring the electoral systems in post-communist contexts, Birch (2003, pp. 1–20) distinguishes between single-member district, proportional representation, and mixed systems. Her analysis highlights the importance of balancing local representation with broader political stability, which is a crucial factor in societies undergoing significant political transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy but cannot be extrapolated outside this specific set of countries.

Although foundational, conventional and partial typologies fall short in capturing the complexity of contemporary electoral systems. By classifying typolog-

ically different instances under broad common categories, they oversimplify the complex variations existing in practice. For example, mixed systems are frequently regarded as homogeneous, despite significant differences exist in how they mix majoritarian and proportional components. Comprehensive typologies of these mixed models remain partial and do not allow for comparison with pure models. They also fail to distinguish between two componential and single componential alternatives, which is a dynamical methodological fallacy. Striving to overcome these deficits, newer approaches are either highly contextual or are generalizable and possess predictive power but oversimplify typological differences.

Methodological Considerations

So far, we have systematically deconstructed the complexities and limitations of existing typologies of electoral systems. The remaining of this section aims to conceptualize the structural integration of majoritarian and proportional elements into a cohesive mechanism, thereby addressing the ambiguities of available classifications and bridging theoretical innovation with practical relevance (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2008, pp. 352–354). We begin by addressing the methodological fallacies that hinder the comprehensive understanding of hybrid systems.

Most of the misclassifications identified in existing typologies result from their structuring over an expanded set of criteria, adding electoral thresholds, ballot structure, district magnitude, and the mechanical electoral formulae to Rae's fundamental dimensions, aiming to account for the complex landscape of electoral systems and their political outcomes (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2008; Lijphart, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2005). However, instead of the intended mapping of complexity, this multiplication of criteria has led to what Sartori famously described as **conceptual stretching** (Sartori, 1970, pp. 1036–1040), referring to the dilution of less abstract analytic categories to encompass a wider set of empirical phenomena. As classes of typologies become conceptually thicker, their ability to incorporate more instances diminishes. Largely underestimated, this methodological fallacy questions their validity in analyzing electoral systems within the general population of democratic countries. Therefore, existing approaches are inherently impeded in accurately differentiating between systems as overly complex categories lose their distinctive explanatory power (Reeve & Ware, 1992, pp. 8–10).

A proposed solution to this problem is the dynamic approach to electoral system analysis (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2009), suggesting that static classifications should be replaced by more elastic frameworks to account for the constantly changing electoral systems. Yet, conceptual stretching persistently occurs in comparative politics specifically due to the inelasticity of most of its fundamental concepts when applied in global-level analyses, which require abstract and parsimonious categories that maintain generalizability.

The **parsimony** principle, favoring simpler and more abstract classifications that are robust enough to explain complex phenomena with a few, but fundamentally important variables, does not imply oversimplification but emphasizes the strategic selection of only necessary and sufficient conditions (Sartori, 1970, pp. 1043–1046). This implies that true typologies should reduce complexity and rationalize the analysis of electoral systems by focusing on core classifiers rather than accumulating the explanatory power of all possible contextual variables. Essentially, a genuinely rigorous classification of electoral systems must comply with two critical methodological requirements. It must be **exhaustive** to include every plausible electoral configuration, accommodating both traditional forms of representation and more complex innovative solutions into **mutually exclusive** categories (Sartori, 1970).

Fallacies of Existing Methodologies

While introducing robust structural criterion for classification to replace disproportionality, district-based typologies share some of the conventional drawbacks. Overly complex frameworks providing contextually grounded constructs for a deeper understanding of specific political environments are not exhaustive. Others, aiming for conceptual abstraction and universal generalizations often end in conceptual stretching confronting with emerging or modified systems that do not perfectly fit the conventional majoritarian/proportional divide. Therefore, the trade-offs involved in balancing complexity and parsimony in typological constructs are significant. Simpler typologies that rely on nominal classifiers and clear-cut distinctions may enhance analytical accuracy at the expense of neglecting key subtleties, while multiple classification dimensions and continuous variables offer complex depiction of electoral dynamics, limiting clarity and generalizability.

Taagepera's model highlights another important methodological challenge: the existence of two classifiers from fundamentally different domains. While district magnitude is a crucial factor in determining electoral outcomes, particularly in understanding the degree of proportionality of a system's output, the utilization of assembly size as a core variable has considerable limitations. It is relevant to assessing the effective number of parties, particularly in small legislative bodies, but its impact diminishes as the assembly size increases. More importantly, assembly size is only weakly connected to the electoral process itself, as it does not directly influence voting behavior or outcomes in a way that district magnitude does. While district magnitude is intrinsic to the structure of electoral systems, assembly size is not. It is a feature of legislative design that is determined independently of electoral mechanics.

Another critical issue with Taagepera's approach is the use of **continuous variables** as classifiers. While allowing for the construction of sophisticated analytical models, they are less effective for typological purposes, which benefit from nominal classifiers that distinguish between mutually exclusive categories. Even if thresholds are applied to continuous variables for the introduction of nominal distinctions, they are often subjectively determined and lead to potential inconsistencies in classification.

Whether a district elects two representatives or two hundred (i.e., continuity) has a significant impact on disproportionality, as even highly proportional electoral formulas can yield disproportionate outcomes in districts with low magnitudes, but exerts minimal effect on taxonomy, which is mostly determined by the **basic dichotomy** between single member and multi-member districts. Therefore, while Taagepera's model provides a high level of conceptual abstraction that allows for universal generalizations even beyond democratic contexts, it faces challenges in measuring what it is intended to measure.

A stringent consideration of this issue in terms of research design could trace it back to the stage of operationalization, where Machover's framework faces even bigger concerns. While employing dichotomous classifiers enhancing the exclusivity of his framework, the incorporation of non-structural characteristics poses significant methodological risks. Electoral classifications should rely on attributes intrinsic to electoral mechanics, whereas decision-making processes, particularly those involving lottery mechanisms, do not align with the core struc-

tural characteristics of electoral systems. As a methodological rule, the deviation from conventional metrics often raises concerns about the sustainability and **validity** of indices and classifications.

The last crucial and foremost important methodological concern of all the discussed approaches is how they handle instances of electoral systems, differing in one or more aspects from pure majoritarian or proportional formulas. Although the MMES taxonomy distinguishes between different mixed systems, it remains limited to those maintaining parallel or compensatory components only and does not address applications that integrate majoritarian and proportional elements within a single mechanism like SNTV or BC (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001a). Ferrara et al. (2005) make a step forward in that direction but leave pure majoritarian and proportional systems outside their classification, eventually compromising its exhaustiveness. The use of continuous classifiers as **the degree of contamination**, introduces additional complexity, limiting parsimony. Moreover, the composite heuristics of their model, while useful for detailing the analysis, complicates the taxonomy's applicability across different contexts, limiting its potential for extrapolation.

By proposing a refined classification that recognizes hybrid models as a distinct category, we address the methodological fallacies of conceptual stretching and the inadequacies of outcome-based taxonomies. This is achieved not by the introduction of totally new and potentially biased criteria, but through utilization of traditional and well explored principal components as classifiers to conceptualize the structural integration of majoritarian and proportional elements into a cohesive mechanism.

Personalized Multi-Member and List Single-Member Systems

Hybrid electoral systems are conceptually separate class within electoral typologies, which incorporate structural elements from both majoritarian and proportional systems into a cohesive single-component electoral framework. They are defined by three key features. First, voters either choose among personal candidates, akin to majoritarian systems, but within the structural context of multi-member districts (Ferrara et al., 2005, pp. 33–41), or vote for party list in single-member constituencies. Second, unlike mixed systems that simultaneous-

ly operate two distinct components (majoritarian and proportional), hybrid systems combine these elements within a single operational mechanism. Third, this integration allows voting solely for personal candidates, resulting in proportional allocation of seats. Essentially, these are majoritarian systems that systemically produce nearly proportional results in legislative elections.

They are less common, but offer unique perspectives on electoral engineering, potentially balancing the strengths and weaknesses of pure types in a more efficient way than mixed options, promoting fair representation along with voter empowerment. A major drawback is their **procedural complexity** for voters and administration, often involving numerous counting stages or complex calculation protocols. However, new voting technologies and the prospects for increasing digital literacy among voters provide tools for coping with these obstacles and prospects for a wider **future spread** of hybrid systems in electoral practice around the world (Alvarez et al., 2009, pp. 76–85).

A **key distinction** exists between mixed and hybrid models. MMM and MMP maintain a clear separation between majoritarian and proportional components, functioning through two parallel processes that converge only in the final stage of seat allocation. This convergence is manual and expressed in either addition or compensation according to the model and has considerable potential for producing inconsistencies in representation if not carefully balanced, thus limiting the system's ability to reduce disproportionality. In contrast, hybrid models feature automatic functioning of majoritarian and proportional components into a single electoral process. The introduction of this category improves existing taxonomies by promoting exhaustiveness, exclusivity, and parsimony for a straightforward and universal systematization.

Optimal Classifiers

As we have discussed in previous sections, traditional typologies are heavily influenced by the degree of disproportionality in defining classes. However, by its definition, disproportionality is inherent to every electoral system and varies even within the same system across different elections over time. Therefore, it cannot be used as a straightforward classifier but merely as an index for evaluating the outputs of the systems' applications. Methodologically sound typologies should employ structural features of the systems for classification, rather than

their electoral outputs, to avoid the effect of circular reasoning and keep their number as low as possible to provide a parsimonious taxonomic solution.

The comparative evaluation of existing typologies has revealed that **two structural factors** are consistently present in both proportional and majoritarian systems: ballot structure (V) and district magnitude (M). **Ballot structure** identifies whether votes are cast for personal candidates $V(i)$ typical for majoritarian systems or for party lists $V(l)$ a core PR feature. Proportional and consequently mixed systems cannot operate without parties, as they involve lists that only parties can register. The vote for party lists is central to proportional representation, as it minimizes the cumulative disproportionality between votes received and seats allocated. In contrast, majoritarian systems focus on voting for personal candidates, often irrespectively of party affiliations. **District magnitude** distinguishes between single-member districts, with a magnitude of M^1 in majoritarian systems, and multi-member districts, with a magnitude of M^+ in proportional systems.

Formal Definitions

By applying the two structural classifiers, we can express **plurality/majority systems** as:

$$S(pl) = V(i)M^1$$

and pure **PR systems** as:

$$S(pr) = V(l)M^+$$

Therefore, **mixed models** are defined as:

$$S(mi) = V(i)M^1 \bigwedge V(l)M^+$$

Conceptually, hybrid systems exist in two distinct forms. They are either **Personalized Multi-Member (PMM)** systems, in which votes are cast for personal candidates within multi-member districts, or **List Single-Member (LSM)** systems, which are empirically unobserved and theoretically implausible in parliamentary elections, as voting for party lists in single-member districts lacks meaningful reasoning:

$$S(hy) = V(i)M^{+} \bigoplus V(l)M^{1}$$

However, LSM becomes relevant in the context of direct **presidential elections**, where voters select among presidential couples (list of two) in single member districts. Akin the list PR logic, in case of incumbent's incapacity or removal, the vice president (second on the list) assumes office seamlessly, ensuring continuity of governance without the need for preterm elections.

Mayoral elections, in contrast, exemplify candidate-centered systems that lack substitution mechanisms. When a mayor vacates office, preterm elections are necessary to select a new incumbent, reflecting the majoritarian logic of individual representation. Power in such systems is intrinsically tied to the mandate of the elected candidate, and institutional continuity is secondary to maintaining the legitimacy of the voter's choice. The **structural divergence** between substitution-based presidential systems and individually centered mayoral systems reveals a **critical distinction** that traditional typologies fail to capture.

Reclassification of Electoral Systems

The restructured typology necessitates a reclassification of several specific electoral systems. The most substantial concerns the Single Transferable Vote, which has been conventionally assigned to the PR class due to the proportionality of its outcomes, particularly in its application in Ireland (Gallagher, 2005). However, as STV applies voting for personal candidates in MMDs, its thorough classification, irrespective of the outcomes it may produce in any possible empirical application, defines it as PMM. Hypothetically, STV in MMDs with party lists, which is not empirically observed, would classify as proportional system due to the party-oriented type of ballot structure.

The Borda Count is also reclassified depending on its specific variation. As it is always candidate-centered, if used in MMDs it aligns with PMM, while its application in SMDs classifies as a majoritarian system. The Block Vote applied in MMDs also warrants reclassification as a PMM. Despite allowing voters multiple votes, it remains a candidate-centered method. Traditionally challenging for categorization within existing typologies, the SNTV and the Limited Vote classify as PMM systems under our revised framework due to their candidate-centered ballot structures within MMDs.

Table 4.3. Revised Typology of Electoral Systems

Type	Description	Electoral Systems
Majoritarian Systems	Systems where votes are cast for personal candidates in single-member districts.	FPTP, TRS, AV, PBV, $BC_{(SMD)}$
Proportional Systems	Systems where votes are cast for party lists in multi-member districts.	List PR
Mixed Systems	These operate two system components (majoritarian and proportional) simultaneously within the same election and mechanically sum (parallel) or compensate (MMP) the results.	Parallel Systems (MMM), MMP
Personalized Multi-Member Systems	Systems that integrate multi-member districts and vote for personal candidates, thus merging majoritarian and proportional core elements seamlessly in one component.	STV, SNTV, LV, $BC_{(MMD)}$, BV

The complete revised typology of electoral systems is summarized in Table 4.3. It not only clarifies the complex mechanics of various electoral arrangements but also offers a more comprehensive, accurate, and methodologically sound framework for our subsequent statistical analyses.

The New Typology in A Nutshell

The typological analysis presented in this chapter marks a significant departure from conventional approaches by addressing methodological fallacies that have persistently undermined the proper classification of electoral systems. Central to this contribution is the resolution of conceptual stretching, which has rendered hybrid systems undefined or misclassified within the existing frameworks. Using two structural dimensions, this study ensures that the refined typology remains both parsimonious and exhaustive, offering a systematic framework defying conventional dichotomies of majoritarian and proportional models.

By conceptually delineating PMM and LSM systems, this chapter illuminated their distinct operational mechanisms, and the complexities associated with their implementation, particularly concerning administrative demands and voter comprehension. As we move forward, our focus shifts from classification to the empirical implications of electoral systems for voter behavior and broader patterns of democratic participation.

Chapter 5: **Global Trends in Voter Turnout**

Building on the conceptual and theoretical foundations discussed earlier in this book and the refined typology introduced in the previous chapter, our next step is to operationalize this framework to allow for empirical testing of its assumptions. The conceptualizations of the normative, quality, and participatory dimensions within our synthetic theoretical framework serve as a foundation for integrating insights from previous research, enabling a nuanced analysis of participation as a dependent variable shaped by the structural and contextual features of elections.

Operationalization of Electoral Participation

Voter turnout (T), defined as the ratio of eligible voters who cast a ballot in a given election (Franklin, 2004, p. 25), expressed as:

$$T = \frac{V}{E}$$

where E is the total number of voters and V is the number of those who actually voted, provides a standardized baseline measure that is both intuitive and precise, enabling analysis of variations in participation across different electoral systems, regions, and periods of time, providing a high level of analytical comparability and consistency (Franklin, 2004, p. 102; Verba et al., 1995, p. 233). Its scale of measurement allows the application of both simple linear regression models for assessing basic trends and more sophisticated multivariate techniques capturing the dynamic impact of multiple determinants in longitudinal perspective (Franklin, 2004, pp. 104–109), contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of what drives participation in democratic systems, which makes it a good operationalization (Putnam, 2000, p. 98).

Voter Turnout and Democratic Legitimacy

As we have already discussed, the concept of democratic legitimacy rests on the foundational principle of popular sovereignty and derives from the consent of the governed (Dahl, 1989, pp. 47–56). High voter turnout is thus a sign of good institutional health, showing mass involvement in the electoral process and indicating a mass acceptance of the democratic system. When a large proportion of eligible voters go to the polls, the resulting mandate is more robust, thus consolidating the legitimacy of political power and its policy outcomes (Norris, 2002, pp. 12–15).

On the other hand, low turnout represents the alienation of citizens from democratically elected leadership and might undermine the legitimacy of power delegation mechanisms. Low turnout poses fundamental questions concerning the legitimacy of political institutions, in particular when substantial demographic or socio-economic groups are structurally excluded from electoral representation (Norris 2002, pp. 17–19). As an outcome, policies increasingly reflect the interests of smaller, privileged, politically active groups, and thus power is inequitably distributed, while existing social inequalities are perpetuated. On the contrary, higher voter turnout, particularly by underrepresented groups, is regarded as an essential ingredient for functional democracies (Lijphart, 1997).

Turnout is also a measure of political efficacy, expressing collective beliefs in the power of each vote to shape both the composition of the regime and its policy output (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 140). Higher rates, therefore, reflect perceived empowerment and greater civic culture, which reinforces the legitimacy of the institutions and deepens the state-citizen linkage (Hetherington & Husser, 2012). It also expresses the degree of diffusion of social networks and levels of trust in the community (Putnam, 2000, pp. 338–340).

Voter Turnout as an Indicator of Social Change and Stability

Elections provide one of the most important catalysts for peaceful social change by offering a structural means for the expression of political preferences, as well as renovation of authoritative bodies, allowing political reorientation and sometimes even a large-scale rearrangement of societal life. Through elections, citizens can shape the course of government policy and adjust institutional arrangements to emerging socio-political realities so that governance remains

responsive to their values and interests (Powell, 1986, pp. 357–360). Therefore, turnout constitutes a gauge of the capacity of a society to channel demands for social change through institutional procedures. By encapsulating political competition and change within the institutional framework of electoral struggle, high turnout reduces the dangers of destabilization and societal breakdown (Huntington, 1991, pp. 99–102). For that reason, it becomes one of the indicators of the stability and robustness of a democratic order. High levels of participation indicate a shared belief in democratic norms and values (Putnam, 2000, pp. 141–144). When citizens feel that elections are a valid way of articulating their political interests, the potential for conflict and fragmentation is reduced, and the result is a more coherent society.

Conceptual Limitations

Although voter turnout is a very strong conventional operationalization of electoral participation, several methodological limitations do raise caution. While it is a direct measure of participation in elections, it is only an indirect reflection of other forms of electoral engagement and thus may underestimate wider political engagement. High political engagement can sometimes be manifested as an abstention from formal electoral participation-a positive political stance known as **boycotting**. More importantly, the potential for voter turnout to measure the quantity of participation but not its quality also exists. A higher turnout rate does not necessarily translate into more authentically conscious participation; such a result may be due to social pressures, legal obligations, or biased media influence.

Comparisons across diverse electoral systems may be misleading if institutional context is not adequately controlled, as these may impose powerful structural incentives or disincentives on turnout. The sensitivity inherent in that case makes it quite difficult to segregate real political effects from systemically embedded structural ones. In particular, cross-national comparisons of turnout demand nuanced adjustments for the cultural and institutional differences that may otherwise spur false inferences about relative civic engagement or levels of democratic participation health across nations. Moreover, data aggregated at the national level can conceal systemic inequities and participation barriers that may be specific to given groups within the country and may thereby limit how well turnout analysis will explain subnational phenomena. It is also too sensitive to

the political context of any given election. Its measure often spikes in the most polarized or high-stakes elections and lessens in contests that are low profile or predictable. This contextual volatility, combined with substantial seasonality in the time series, leads to reasonable fluctuations in its rates between elections.

Moreover, turnout data can only reveal who voted, but not why eligible citizens did not. Turnout data alone does not provide the motivations, barriers, and attitudes of non-voters. Yet, the reasons for abstention are very important for a full understanding of electoral engagement, as they can reveal significant insights into political disillusionment, alienation, or access barriers. Therefore, the use of voter turnout as the sole measure of electoral participation risks simplifying its complexity to the point of rendering analysis reductionist and thereby diminishing its explanatory power.

It is important not to overlook that turnout statistics are susceptible to manipulation. Changes in either voter registration rules or voting laws, or even practices like vote-buying, intimidation, or coercion, can bias this statistic and invalidate the resultant analytical conclusions. The risk increases under non-transparent electoral processes. Where there are no solid guarantees about the quality of elections, even turnout itself can be misleading.

However, using voter turnout as an operational measure gives Political Science a more scientific character by bringing the discipline in line with fundamental tenets of empirical measurement and replication (Dalton, 2008, pp. 76–80). It is a strong indicator enabling testing hypotheses, validating theories, and building predictive models (King et al., 1994, pp. 24–27).

Trends in Voter Turnout

The period immediately after World War II, as shown in Table 5.1, reflected quite an extraordinary level of participation, with a global average turnout of 78.19%. Since that time, however, a clear decline has been witnessed and culminated in the 2000s to signal the crisis of contemporary representative democracy.

Table 5.1. Average Voter Turnout by Region and Decade (%)

Region	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Global	78.19	77.38	77.42	76.61	76.99	71.39	68.05	66.57	62.42
Africa	N/A	64.79	66.91	61.65	75.17	63.30	64.38	61.37	55.96
Asia	59.83	66.94	74.72	71.79	73.73	74.75	70.12	69.15	65.80
Latin America	69.83	70.84	70.59	73.37	74.83	67.81	66.98	68.80	62.72
North America	75.55	74.50	80.33	70.86	70.43	67.21	62.42	63.61	64.94
Eastern Europe	N/A	94.59	96.35	98.11	79.95	72.26	61.31	58.41	53.83
Northern Europe	80.87	80.30	83.42	83.81	81.54	76.08	72.84	71.98	69.74
Southern Europe	85.58	80.28	87.54	86.10	81.94	78.31	71.89	65.46	63.77
Western Europe	88.65	87.59	84.73	85.09	82.11	76.38	75.92	71.03	67.33
Oceania	96.13	95.24	85.81	82.27	80.29	79.34	71.67	73.55	68.76

Source: International IDEA Voter Turnout Database (2024).

Regional patterns can be split into three broad categories based on historical trajectories and recent dynamics: regions with historically high turnout followed by gradual decline, regions with early peaks and sharp declines, and regions with moderate turnout stability and recent decreases (Figure 5.1). The first group, comprising Northern, Southern, Western Europe, and Oceania, has shown high voter turnout between the 1940s and 1970s, driven by sound democratic traditions, strong voter mobilization and civic engagement.

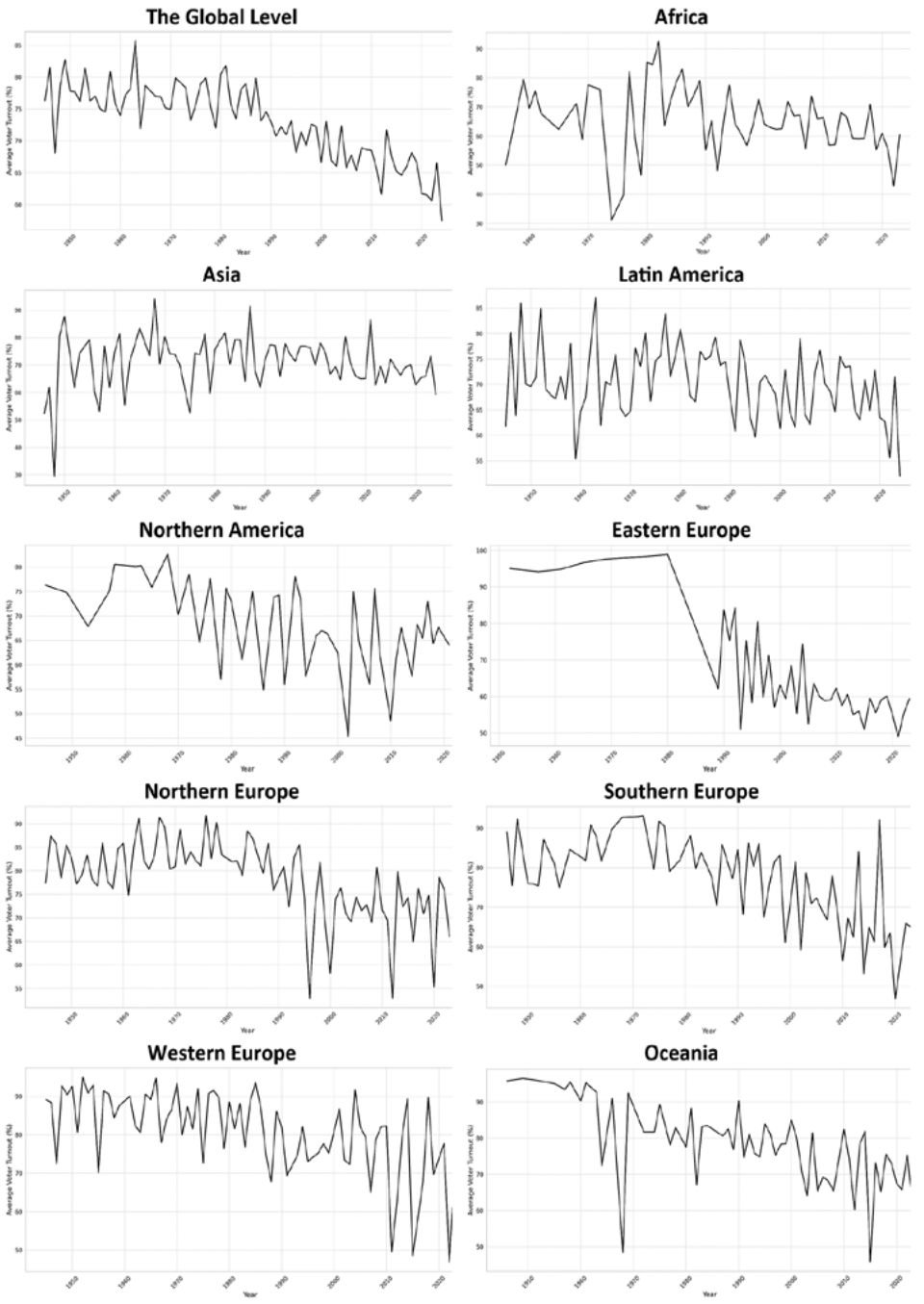

Figure 5.1. Dynamics of Voter Turnout by Region

However, since the end of the Cold War turnout gradually declined and within a decade, participation rates have fallen to about 70%, reflecting a combination of factors including aging populations, declining trust in political institutions, economic crises, rising populism and reduced voter mobilization. Nevertheless, democratic structures in these regions remain comparatively stable, with highest turnout levels globally.

Eastern Europe and Africa have seen early peaks in turnout followed by sharp declines. In Eastern Europe, voter turnout during the communist era was extremely high due to compulsory voting laws and state control, then saw a steep and constant decline after the transitions to democracy in the 1990s, reaching 50% in the 2020s. Similarly, turnout reached a peak of 75% in the 1980s in the years immediately following decolonization and the early years of independence in Africa, followed by sustained decline to 56% in the 2020s. Those massive declines hint at specific challenges in transitional and post-conflict societies marked by instability, weak democratic institutions, and growing disillusionment. Both regions underpin that systemic changes and deficits in governance can lead to similar changes in participation despite large contextual differences.

Countries from Asia and the Americas register moderate turnout through the late 20th century, with less fluctuation until recent decades. In North America, the turnout peaked in the 1960s, in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, and in Asia during the 1990s, coinciding with economic development and democratic consolidation. In the following sections we use both simple and advanced statistical techniques to model these trends and predict future turnout rates, with the goal of understanding what drives electoral participation, including net effects of electoral systems for democratic legitimacy, representation, and civic engagement.

Linear Regression Analysis

To examine global and regional historical patterns we use linear regression, as a conventional method for investigating trends in electoral participation (Franklin, 2004, pp. 45–50; Lewis-Beck & Skalaban, 1989, pp. 146–150). It allows the quantification of the average rate of change over time, providing a clear picture of turnout dynamics in the past decades (Dalton, 2008, pp. 80–85; Gelman & Hill, 2007, pp. 12–15). The linear regression model is expressed as:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x + \epsilon$$

where y represents the voter turnout, x represents time (election year), β_0 is the intercept, β_1 is the slope of the regression line (indicating the average change in turnout per year), and ϵ is the error term. In this context, the intercept does not have a meaningful interpretation, as it refers to the irrelevant year of zero. Our primary focus is on the slope and the coefficient of determination R^2, which measures how well the model explains the variability in voter turnout.

Table 5.2 summarizes the results of the analysis. The global trend line shows a slope of about −0.203, indicating that voter turnout on average declines by around 0.2 percentage points each year worldwide. The very high R^2 value reflects that approximately 64% of the variation is accounted for by the model, thus a strong linear relationship exists between turnout rates and time. Finally, the extremely low p-value confirms the statistically significant trend.

The registered decline depicts widespread changes in political engagement, reflecting growth of political apathy and dissatisfaction with political institutions, as well as generational change in social values (Franklin, 2004, pp. 158–162), emphasizing concerns with the health of representative democracy and the importance of understanding the underlying factors for these dynamics.

Table 5.2. Summary of Linear Regression Model Estimates by Region

Region	β_1	β_0	R^2	Sig. level	SE
Global	-0.203	475.30	0.636	0.01	0.017
Africa	-0.137	337.73	0.049	0.10	0.080
Asia	0.005	60.08	0.000	0.91	0.050
Latin America	-0.079	227.54	0.068	0.05	0.033
Northern America	-0.207	479.46	0.251	0.01	0.054
Eastern Europe	-0.745	1558.18	0.749	0.01	0.067
Northern Europe	-0.206	486.71	0.335	0.01	0.034
Southern Europe	-0.301	675.09	0.380	0.01	0.049
Western Europe	-0.259	594.86	0.310	0.01	0.046
Oceania	-0.355	784.99	0.459	0.01	0.051

The declining trend is significant in all regions, with the only exclusion of Asian countries. It raises concerns with democratic legitimacy of representative governance, as lower participation can lead to growing disconnection between citizens and political institutions, additionally fostering apathy, and disengagement, resulting in a general erosion of trust in democracy (Norris, 2011b, pp. 101–103).

While this linear model provides valuable insights, it has some considerable limitations. It supposes a constant rate of change over time, which may not capture fluctuations or sudden shifts caused by momentous events (Gujarati & Porter, 2009, pp. 205–207). It also assumes linearity, while voter turnout may exhibit non-linear trends, which requires more complex modeling techniques to capture cyclical or exponential changes. To address these limitations, in the following section we apply advanced models for time series analysis (Box et al., 2008, pp. 45–47).

Advanced Statistical Modelling

For the longitudinal analysis of voter turnout data, we use **ARIMA**(p, d, q) modelling (Box et al., 2008, pp. 43–45; Enders, 2014, pp. 92–95), which involves three key components. The autoregressive component assumes that current values of the series can be predicted from their past values and is expressed as:

$$AR: \phi_p(L)(y_t - \mu) = a_t$$

where $\phi_p(L)$ is the AR polynomial of order p, L is the lag operator, y_t is the time series, μ is the mean of the series, and a_t is white noise. The integrated component reflects stationarity, which is a critical validity assumption of the model, expressed as:

$$I: y'_t = y_t - y_{t-1}$$

where y'_t is the differenced series. The moving average component captures the impact of random shocks, expressed as a linear combination of current and past white noise:

$$MA: \theta_q(L)a_t = \varepsilon_t$$

where $\theta_q(L)$ is the *MA* polynomial of order q, L is the lag operator, a_t is the white noise, and ε_t is the error term.

These models possess a considerable predictive power and allow forecasts of future turnout rates based on historical data (Box et al., 2008, pp. 56–59; Enders, 2014102-105). They include robust diagnostics for model fit to ensure validity and reliability of the results (Chatfield, 2004, pp. 67–70; Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018, pp. 89–91; Shumway & Stoffer, 2017, pp. 140–145).

Table 5.3. Summary of ARIMA Model Coefficients

Region	AR	p-value	MA	p-value	AIC	BIC	L-B T	J-B T	Htrs. T
Global	-0.197	0.181	-0.569	0.667	426.406	433.514	0.40	0.53	0.56
Africa	0.150	0.225	-0.944	0.000	455.804	461.985	0.76	0.23	0.00
Asia	-0.073	0.370	-0.894	0.000	557.087	564.000	1.00	0.04	0.00
Latin America	-0.097	0.426	-0.877	0.000	539.287	546.395	0.96	0.67	0.28
Northern America	-0.321	0.099	-0.751	0.000	320.563	325.983	0.49	0.13	0.85
Eastern Europe	-0.877	0.000	0.412	0.015	309.802	315.085	0.45	0.00	0.00
Northern Europe	-0.093	0.572	-0.804	0.000	512.013	519.005	0.70	0.00	0.03
Southern Europe	-0.278	0.104	-0.743	0.000	455.598	462.027	0.67	0.28	0.04
Western Europe	-0.123	0.321	-0.856	0.000	534.372	541.202	0.59	0.29	0.03
Oceania	-0.376	0.052	-0.669	0.000	431.755	437.987	0.53	0.00	0.75

Table 5.3 summarizes the model coefficients and diagnostic tests, revealing the patterns of electoral participation across regions. They show that neither the autoregressive nor the moving average components are statistically significant at the global level, suggesting that global voter turnout does not strongly depend on its own past values or on past shocks and errors. The relatively high p-values imply that this trend is influenced by plenty of factors that may not be captured by simple time series dependencies.

The regional autoregressive coefficients are also non-significant in general (at the 0.05 level), suggesting that turnout rates are influenced by external factors unique to each election cycle rather than long-term historical trends. Eastern Europe is a notable exception, where the significant and negative *AR* coefficient indicates a reactionary adjustment to preceding election cycles. Apart from Eastern Europe,

the regional moving average coefficients are negative and statistically significant, highlighting the enduring impact of past shocks, which implies that unexpected events, such as political crises, policy changes, or shifts in public sentiments, tend to have a lasting negative influence on voter turnout in subsequent elections.

The Ljung-Box diagnostic test shows minimal autocorrelation in residuals, indicating that the models provide a robust fit across regions. Deviations from normality are indicated by significant Jarque-Bera test statistics for Asia, Eastern and Northern Europe and Oceania, pointing to outliers or swings in turnout that may reflect exceptional events or social shifts. Significant heteroskedasticity in Africa, Asia, and across Europe suggests that turnout variability within these regions reflects dynamic political and socioeconomic contexts and distinct levels of democratization.

The model conclusions confirm that turnout trends are more sensitive to episodic shocks, rather than historical trends. Variability in diagnostics suggests that the character and causes of turnout shocks differ significantly across contexts. In politically volatile regions, they may stem from systemic challenges, while in stable democracies, they probably reflect episodic events or changes in voter mobilization strategies.

Turnout Projections 2024–2033

The ARIMA model estimates permit the projection of voter turnout rates for the next decade. These are shown in table 5.4. The predicted level of changes is variable, with some regions exhibiting relative stability and others slight long-term fluctuations. At the global level, turnout is predicted to stabilize at a level of 62-63%. This stability reflects moderate but solid levels of engagement. Beneath this overall stability, however, there are some major regional differences.

Table 5.4. Summary of Voter Turnout Forecast by Region (%)

Year	Global	Africa	Asia	Latin Am	North Am	East Eur	North Eur	South Eur	West Eur	Oce
2024	63.57	62.09	68.65	66.54	66.17	59.09	71.15	63.05	70.22	71.13
2025	62.37	62.33	67.97	65.13	65.48	59.37	70.67	63.58	70.25	67.55
2026	62.61	62.37	68.02	65.27	65.70	59.13	70.71	63.43	70.25	68.89
2027	62.56	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.63	59.34	70.71	63.47	70.25	68.39
2028	62.57	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.66	59.15	70.71	63.46	70.25	68.58
2029	62.57	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.65	59.32	70.71	63.46	70.25	68.51
2030	62.57	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.65	59.17	70.71	63.46	70.25	68.54
2031	62.57	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.65	59.30	70.71	63.46	70.25	68.53
2032	62.57	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.65	59.19	70.71	63.46	70.25	68.53
2033	62.57	62.38	68.02	65.26	65.65	59.28	70.71	63.46	70.25	68.53

While the projections for the African region and Southern Europe virtually mirror the global trends, for the Americas it is higher and varied in 65–66%. The projected level is thus relatively high for Asia and Oceania, stable at around 68%, apparently due to emerging democratic practices and increasing population and political mobilization efforts.

For Northern and Western Europe alone, this estimate exceeds 70%. That is a testimony to the norm of well-established democracies with high political participation across countries in these regions. In dramatic opposition, the lower projected turnout in the East of Europe at around 59% is arguably explained by economic disparities, political instability, and differences in trust in political institutions, which might undermine public confidence and engagement.

When interpreting the expected regional stability or variation, we must acknowledge the uncertainty in long-term projections. Voter turnout is a factor reactive to unforeseen events, abrupt policy changes, or major technological shifts that might change participation patterns. Hence, not exact estimates but level differences between groups of regions are more informative and reliable.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the analytical exercise presented in this chapter underline that voter turnout patterns cannot be captured by simple linear narratives or static snapshots. Our models demonstrate that although there is broad evidence of

global declines in participation, their magnitude and stability vary greatly across different political environments. Hence, voter turnout cannot be isolated from structural and temporal complexities. This chapter therefore argues that the key to understanding—and possibly reversing—turnout decline lies not in any single explanatory factor but rather in recognizing how enduring institutional configurations interact with shifting political demands. Such findings point toward more context-sensitive theoretical models and more strategically designed policy interventions for strengthening the nexus between citizens and their representative institutions.

The following chapter develops from this macro-analysis to the comparative study of participation across electoral system types based on the new typology developed in this book. By methodically combining statistical evidence and theoretical insight, we attempt to give meaning to exactly how those various configurations shape the patterns of democratic engagement, observing their connotations for broader legitimacy, representation, and voter efficacy by underlining a critical need of contextualizing turnout trends within the structural designs of electoral systems.

Chapter 6: **Patterns of Participation Across Systems**

As we have revealed in the previous chapter, the complex relationship between **electoral systems** and **voter turnout** is influenced by a variety of factors, influencing its temporal dynamics. This chapter builds on these findings and offers an analysis of how diverse types of electoral systems, classified by our improved typology, impact electoral participation, integrating theoretical insights with statistical evidence.

We have already discussed how different types of systems influence the perceived effectiveness of electoral participation and the incentives for engagement s (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 2004; Norris, 2004, pp. 73–77; Powell, 1986).The conceptualization of hybrid systems, and more specifically the PMM, as a distinct class within our taxonomical framework, allows the analysis of their impact on voter behavior compared to other types, thus contributing to our understanding of how different electoral configurations relate to democratic legitimacy, representation and participation.

To ensure a comparability of cases in our examination of how electoral systems shape voter turnout, we limit our analysis exclusively to **functional democracies**. Democratic countries ensure the basic level of **political rights** and **civil liberties** required for a meaningful political competition. At the same time, nondemocratic regimes manipulate electoral outcomes and restrict competition, thus confounding the effects of the electoral systems. Moreover, democratic states generally provide more consistent, comprehensive, and transparent electoral data, which allows for valid and reliable statistical analysis (Przeworski et al., 2000, pp. 11–27).

For the **selection of cases**, we employ the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EDI), which assesses levels of democratic development

in the world, based on five categories, including electoral process, pluralism, political participation, and political culture. Countries scoring above 8 are classified as full democracies, while those scoring from 6 to 7.9 are considered flawed democracies. This systematic classification ensures comparative **homogeneity** regarding democratic performance in our sample (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023, pp. 3–4).

Majoritarian Dynamics

The analysis of voter turnout in democracies using Plurality/Majority systems reveals that while variability over time exists, there is no clear long-term trend.

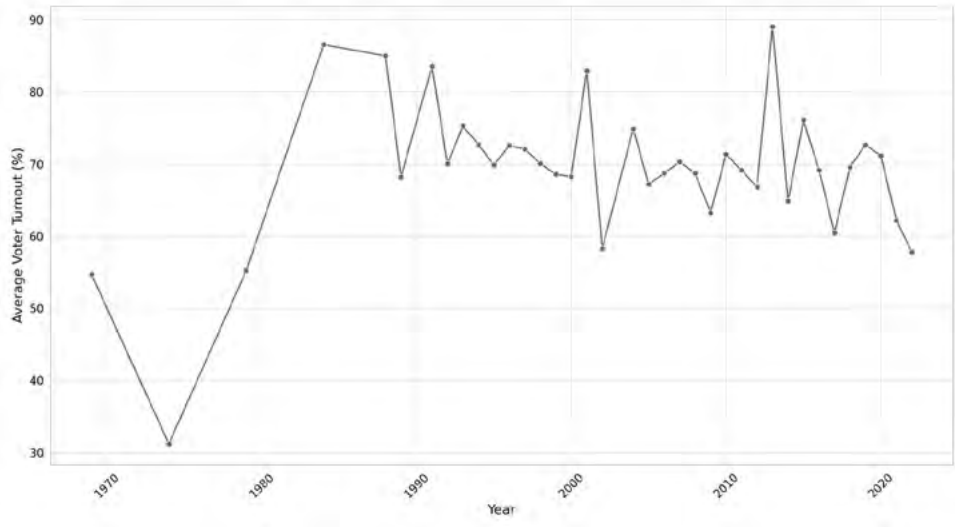

Figure 6.1. Voter Turnout in Plurality/Majority Democracies

Figure 6.1 shows periodic peaks and declines, suggesting that voter engagement may be influenced by specific electoral cycles, political events, or changes in public sentiment toward the electoral process and governance.

Table 6.1 and Figure 6.2 provide a comparative visualization of turnout in both subsets of countries. While full democracies demonstrate a slightly higher average participation rates, the medians are relatively similar. This indicates that

the central tendency of voter engagement is not drastically different between the two groups.

Table 6.1. Summary Statistics of Voter Turnout in Plurality/Majority Democracies

Statistic	Flawed Democracy	Full Democracy
Count (n)	95	51
Mean (%)	69.14	71.78
Standard Deviation (%)	15.34	14.46
Minimum (%)	28.07	42.64
25th Percentile (%)	59.19	61.15
Median (%)	68.65	68.28
75th Percentile (%)	77.93	81.06
Maximum (%)	98.92	95.77

However, due to an outlier (28.07%) in the group of flawed democracies, the observed range of variability is significantly higher (Figure 6.2). Both distributions differ in the upper quartile, suggesting that the top tier of full democracies achieves higher voter turnout, which may reflect better voter mobilization and electoral participation mechanisms in these countries.

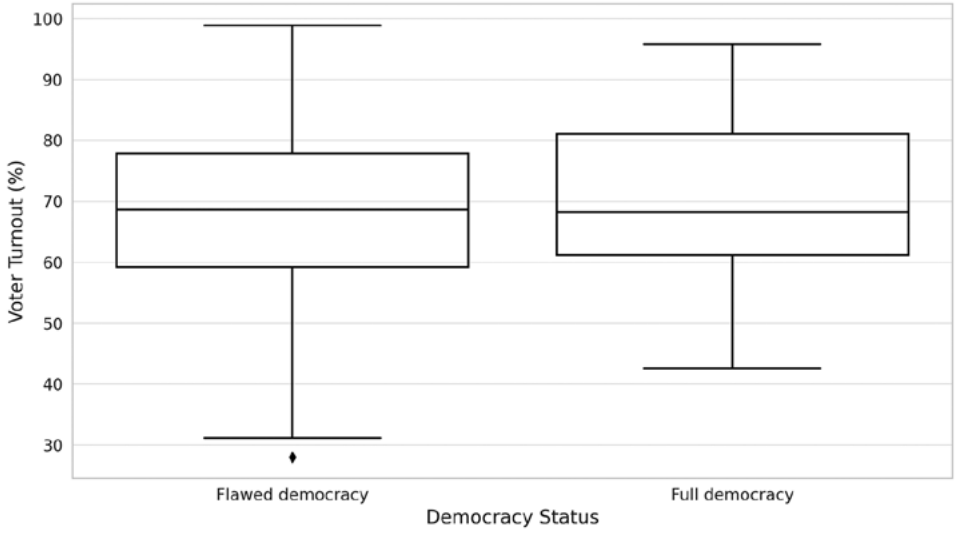

Figure 6.2. Turnout in Flawed and Full Democracies Using Plurality/Majority Systems

The considerable yearly variation in voter turnout among both types of democracies, depicted in Figure 6.3, suggests that electoral engagement is influenced by a multitude of factors that can vary significantly from one election cycle to another.

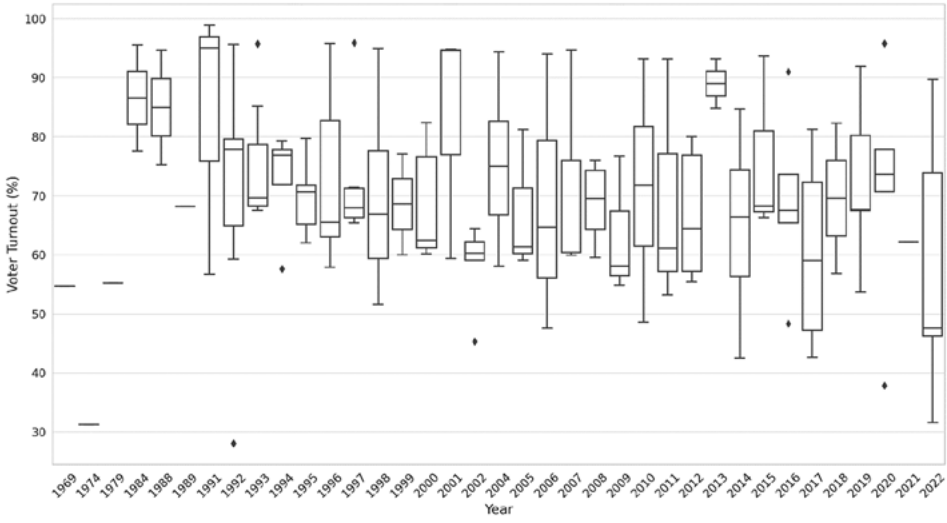

Figure 6.3. Yearly Turnout Variation in Democracies with Plurality/Majority Systems

While median participation remains relatively stable over the years, the absolute and interquartile range indicate wide fluctuations. The identified nine outliers represent elections with exceptionally high or low voter turnout rates compared to the typical range for the specific year, highlighting instances of electoral participation significantly deviating from the norm, or anomalies in the data (Figure 6.3).

To further explore these patterns, we apply the **most-different systems design** to compare four Plurality/Majority democracies that differ in economic development, political culture, geographic region, and level of democratization: the United States, India, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Figure 6.4 shows that despite differences in electoral competitiveness, voter mobilization strategies, specific issues or candidates, and cultural diversities, these countries demonstrate converging average turnout levels after 2000, especially if seasonality in the US trend is smoothed.

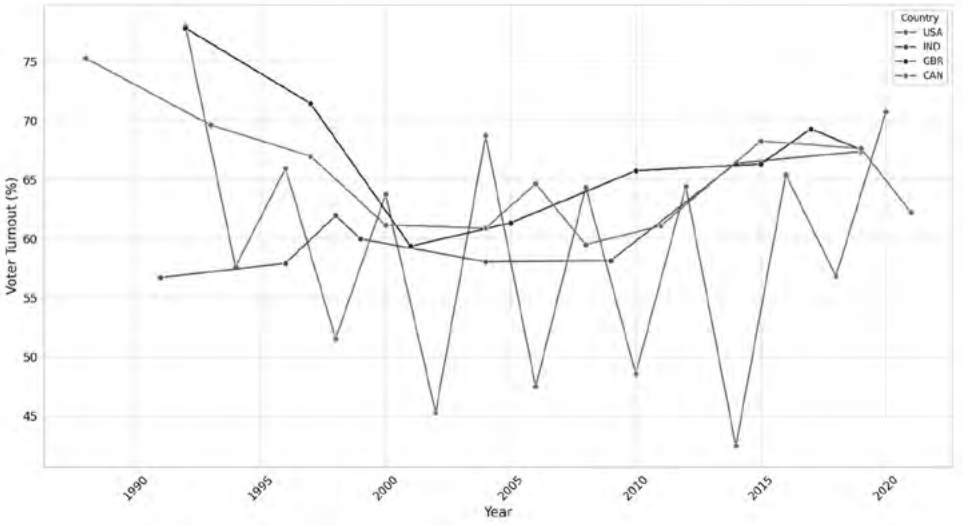

Figure 6.4. Voter Turnout Trends in Selected Countries

This seasonality is particularly evident in the sustainable divergence in voter turnout between presidential and midterm elections, with the latter exhibiting considerably lower engagement. Presidential elections occur every four years (e.g., 2020, 2024) and include the election of the president and the vice president, as well as congressional, state, and local elections. Midterm elections occur halfway through a presidential term (e.g., 2018, 2022) and include elections for the entire House of Representatives, some Senate seats, and various state and local offices. The term "midterm" is derived from the fact that these elections occur between presidential elections and should not be confused with preterm elections in parliamentary systems. As members of the House of Representatives are elected for a two-year term, midterm elections are actually regular elections for this chamber. These cases demonstrate that plurality electoral systems provide a structural framework that influences voter turnout trends in similar ways, despite diverse political and social contexts.

Proportionality Trends

PR systems are theorized to promote voter turnout by closely aligning distribution of legislative seats with the distribution of votes among parties, en-

suring fair representation, which makes electoral participation more impactful and reflective in the political outcome. However, turnout data for the last forty years, presented in Figure 6.5, shows that turnout dynamics in these democracies decreased significantly in the 1980s and sustained a moderate decline trend in the following decades. The linear regression analysis of this trend suggests a gradual decrease in average turnout in proportional representation democracies by about 0.58 percentage points annually since 1980.

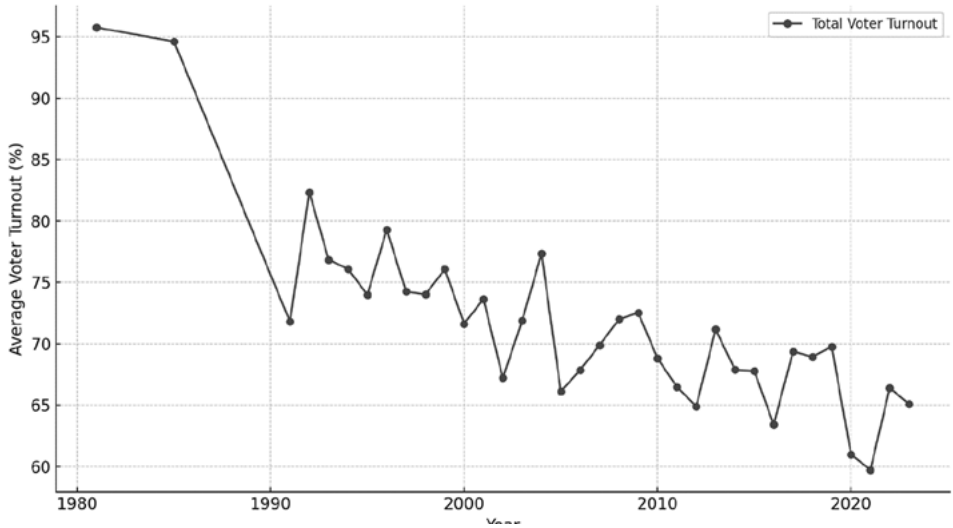

Figure 6.5. Voter Turnout Dynamics in PR Democracies

Table 6.2 summarizes the estimates of the parameters and provides an interpretation, indicating a statistically significant model, accounting for about 70% of the variance in turnout.

Table 6.2. Regression Model Summary of Voter Turnout in PR Democracies

Parameter	Value	Interpretation
Intercept	1231.106	The model intercept indicates the predicted voter turnout at the start of the regression line within the dataset's time frame. Although its value is meaningless in substantial terms, as turnout cannot exceed 100% in the real world, this parameter is fundamental for the construction of the egression line.
Coefficient (Year)	-0.578	The annual decrease in voter turnout is about 0.578 percentage points.
R^2	0.686	Indicates that approximately 68.6% of the variability in voter turnout can be explained by the model.
F-statistic	72.21	Evaluates the overall significance of the model, indicating high level.
Prob (F-statistic)	0.000	The probability of observing such an extreme F-statistic under the null hypothesis, indicating convincing evidence against the null hypothesis.
Durbin-Watson	1.746	Checks the presence of autocorrelation in the residuals, with values close to two suggesting minimal autocorrelation.

The test for autocorrelation in the residuals suggests that the regression fits the data well and the assumptions for linear analysis are adequately met, thus validating its findings.

Differentiating by the level of democratic development, we find out that full democracies perform significantly better on average, suggesting that the quality and integrity of democratic institutions may play a crucial role in encouraging higher electoral participation in countries with proportional electoral systems (Table 6.3). While substantial, voter turnout in flawed democracies tends to be lower on average.

Table 6.3. Summary Statistics of Voter Turnout in Flawed and Full PR Democracies

Statistic	Flawed Democracy	Full Democracy	Overall
Count	275	121	396
Mean	68.16%	75.06%	70.27%
STD	14.32%	11.88%	13.97%
Min	31.95%	42.22%	31.95%
Q1	58.38%	68.49%	60.87%
Median	68.46%	77.44%	71.34%
Q3	77.34%	84.27%	80.44%
Max	97.16%	91.71%	97.16%

In terms of variability, the trend for full democracies appears to be more stable, whereas flawed democracies exhibit higher standard deviation (Figure 6.6), which is indicative of higher political instability and lower public trust in the electoral processes of the latter. The observed differences suggest that while PR systems are designed to enhance representation the overarching political context and the quality of democracy significantly influence their effectiveness in fostering electoral participation.

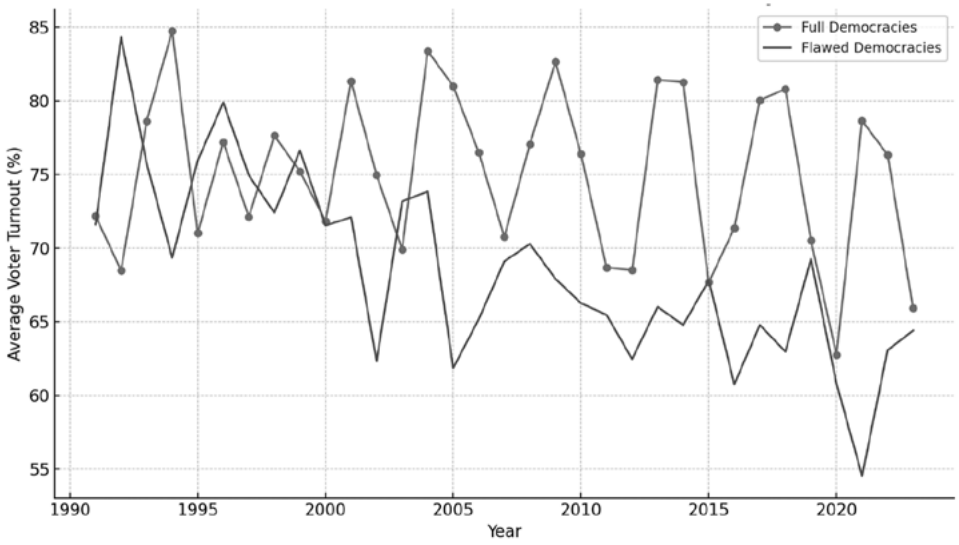

Figure 6.6. Dynamics of Voter Turnout in Full and Flawed Democracies with PR Systems

To statistically check these assumptions we apply a mixed linear model with the level of democratic development as a predictor and including random effects to account for unobserved variations within countries over time. This approach is particularly effective for analyzing hierarchical or grouped data where observations are not entirely independent, which is the case with our panel data on voter turnout time series across multiple countries (Gelman and Hill 2007; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). The model is expressed as:

$$Y_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times X_{i,t} + u_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

where: $Y_{i,t}$ is the voter turnout for country i in year t, $X_{i,t}$ is the EDI Score for country i, β_0 is the intercept, representing the baseline voter turnout when the EDI Score is zero, β_1 is the slope coefficient, indicating the change in voter turnout for one unit increase in the EDI Score, u_i represents the random effects capturing unobserved country-specific factors, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the idiosyncratic error term.

This approach allows us to estimate both the fixed effects, which quantify the impact of democratic development on voter turnout, and the random effects, which capture the unique characteristics of individual countries that could influence turnout rates over time (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). With this model we also address potential autocorrelation and unobserved heterogeneity, which are usual challenges in longitudinal electoral data analysis. This ensures that the estimates account for intra-country dependencies, improving the validity of our findings (Field et al., 2012).

Table 6.4 summarizes the model parameters, which generally imply that more developed democracies exhibit higher electoral participation. The base voter turnout of about 39% is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a substantial baseline level across the countries in the sample.

Table 6.4. Summary of Mixed Linear Model Parameters

Parameter	Estimate	SE	p-value
Intercept (const)	39.183	11.596	0.0007
EDI Score	4.153	1.525	0.0065
Group Variance	122.599		

For each unit increase in the EDI Score, voter turnout is expected to increase by 4.15 percentage points. This effect is also statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The model estimates a high group (random effects) variance, which reflects the variability in voter turnout that is attributable to differences between countries, indicating a substantial cumulative effect of other unobserved factors apart from the EDI Score alone.

The large magnitude of this variance suggests substantial heterogeneity across countries in terms of baseline voter turnout and how they respond to variations in democratic performance. Such heterogeneity could arise from differences in political culture, historical voting patterns, institutional frameworks, or

socioeconomic conditions specific to each country. In practical terms, this finding implies that while the EDI Score has a statistically significant and positive effect on participation, country-specific factors play a significant role in shaping its patterns. Therefore, additional covariates need to be considered to better explain and predict voter turnout variations within this sample.

For this reason, we expand our mixed linear model by first lagging the dependent variable (voter turnout) to include it as a factor, simulating the incorporation of past voter turnout (Arellano & Bond, 1991; Baltagi, 2005), while controlling for the effects of democratic development as measured by the EDI Score. The incorporation of the lagged factor helps in understanding the stability and changes in electoral behavior over time (Wooldridge, 2010) and controls for potential endogeneity issues, providing more reliable and unbiased estimates (Blundell & Bond, 1998). In formal terms, the expanded model is defined as:

$$Y_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times X_{i,t} + \beta_2 \times Z_{i,t-1} + u_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

where: $Y_{i,t}$ is the voter turnout for country i in year t, $X_{i,t}$ is the EDI Score for country i, $Z_{i,t-1}$ is the lagged voter turnout for country i in year $t-1$, β_0 is the intercept, representing the baseline voter turnout when the EDI Score and lagged voter turnout are zero, β_1 is the coefficient for the EDI Score, indicating the change in voter turnout for a one-unit increase in the EDI Score, β_2 is the coefficient for the lagged voter turnout, showing the effect of voter turnout from the previous election year, u_i represents the random effects capturing unobserved country-specific factors, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the idiosyncratic error term.

The model parameters are summarized in Table 6.5, showing that the EDI Score does not have a statistically significant impact when controlling for past rates of voter turnout. These rates appear to exert a significant positive influence on current values. Each percentage point in the previous turnout accounts for 0.825 percentage points in the current. The model estimates a group variance of 4.744, which is dramatically lower than in the previous model, which demonstrates further the considerable effect of the lagged covariate, highlighting the importance of historical turnout patterns in influencing current electoral participation rates in democracies with PR electoral systems.

Table 6.5. Summary of Dynamic Panel Model Parameters

Parameter	Estimate	SE	p-value
Intercept (const)	11.489	5.476	0.036
EDI23 Score	0.287	0.630	0.649
Lagged Voter Turnout	0.825	0.109	0.001
Group Variance	4.744		

To test for more complex effects of democratic development alone, we test for Granger causality. This method is particularly useful in determining the predictive power of time series data through its differentiation to achieve stationarity as prerequisite for accurate causal inference (Granger, 1988; Hamilton, 1994, pp. 444–449; Enders, 2014, pp. 166–169). It does not provide a model in the traditional direct sense, but rather tests the hypothesis whether past values of one time series (X) are useful in predicting the future values of another series (Y) and is defined as:

$$Y_t = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^{n} \beta_i \times X_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$$

where: Y_t is the voter turnout rate at time t, X_{t-1} represents past values of the democracy score (for lags $i = 1; n$), α and β_i are coefficients, and ϵ_t is the error term. This approach enables us to determine if fluctuations in democratic development precede and potentially cause changes in electoral participation.

Table 6.6 summarizes the results. The second lag suggests marginal evidence of Granger causality, indicating that changes in democracy status might have a predictive effect on voter turnout with a p-value close to the 0.05 threshold. The results for the first and the last two lags do not provide such evidence. This suggests that any significant effects of democracy index scores on voter turnout within this sample could be attributed to the systematic relationship between democratic performance and the proportional representation system as factors, but not to the democracy index alone.

Table 6.6. Results of Granger Causality Test

Lag	F-statistic	p-value
1	1.0256	0.3193
2	3.3415	0.0505
3	2.0063	0.1399
4	1.2052	0.3380

The findings presented in this section demonstrate that proportional representation systems, while designed to promote fair representation, do not necessarily sustain high voter turnout over time. The observed persistent decline, analyzed through several different models, appears significantly influenced by past participation patterns. Although full democracies exhibit higher and more stable turnout levels compared to flawed ones, this distinction alone does not explain much of the variation.

Tendencies in Mixed Systems

As we move to the sample of countries applying mixed electoral systems, it becomes evident that similar to the previous analysis, countries classified as full democracies exhibit a notably higher average voter turnout compared to flawed democracies (Table 6.7). The variability in this group, as shown by the standard deviation, is somewhat lower, indicating a more consistent level of electoral participation.

Table 6.7. Summary Statistics of Turnout in Mixed Systems

Statistic	Full Democracies	Flawed Democracies	Overall
Count	48.00	58.00	106.00
Mean (%)	69.18	65.82	67.34
Standard Deviation (%)	9.74	13.88	12.24
Minimum (%)	46.01	37.44	37.44
25th Percentile (%)	59.94	52.92	58.67
Median (%)	70.03	68.85	69.10
75th Percentile (%)	76.96	75.51	76.49
Maximum (%)	88.28	91.50	91.50

The trend across the whole sample reveals significant variations over time. Figure 6.7 depicts its dynamics with a four-year moving average fitted to the data, smoothing out the yearly fluctuations, thus offering a simplified and relatively stable turnout trend. To further explore these dynamics, we employ a vector autoregression (VAR) model to our data. These models treat each variable as a function of its own past values, as well as the past values of all other variables in the system, making them appropriate for examining correlations between two time series (Lütkepohl, 2005, pp. 86–93; Stock & Watson, 2015, pp. 351–358).

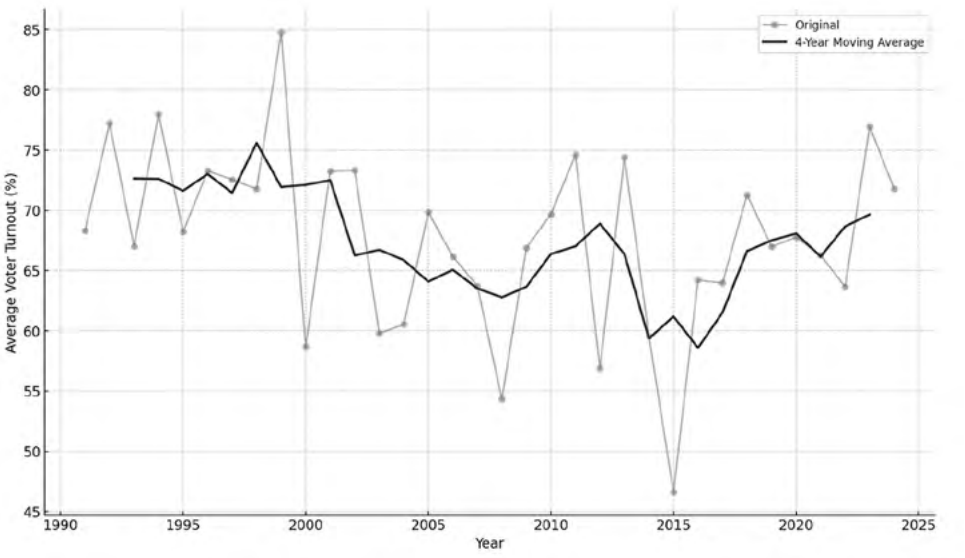

Figure 6.7. Temporal Dynamics of Turnout in Mixed Systems

Stationarity is a crucial requirement for the validity of VAR models because non-stationary data can lead to misleading conclusions due to spurious relationships. To verify stationarity, we applied the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test, following the guidelines outlined by Hamilton (1994, pp. 292–305) and Enders (2014, pp. 119–125) and differencing the time series to stabilize the mean and variance over time (Lütkepohl, 2005, pp. 146–150).

Table 6.8. VAR Model Coefficients

Parameter	Voter Turnout Coefficient	EDI Score Coefficient
const	69.040	7.218
Voter Turnout (L1)	0.054	0.019
EDI Score (L1)	-0.653	-0.118

The model summarized in Table 6.8 shows that the coefficients for lagged voter turnout and EDI Score are not statistically significant, thus indicating that their past levels do not have strong predictive power. The tests for Granger causality, conducted in both directions to assess if changes in the EDI Score can predict variations in voter turnout and vice versa, support these findings. Across four tested lags, the p-values were above the conventional significance level of 0.05, suggesting that there is no strong statistical evidence that democratic performance can predict voter turnout, or that voter turnout can predict the EDI Score in both groups of democratic countries applying mixed electoral systems.

PMM and Turnout

In our enhanced typology we have introduced the concept of Hybrid electoral systems as a distinctive category and their Personalized Multi-Member form regarding applications in legislative elections. By understanding how these systems influence voter engagement, we can better assess their effectiveness in fostering democratic participation. For example, the flexibility in voting options and the increased potential for meaningful impact on electoral outcomes may encourage higher participation. Conversely, the complexity of these systems might overwhelm or deter potential voters who are less familiar with the intricacies of the voting process.

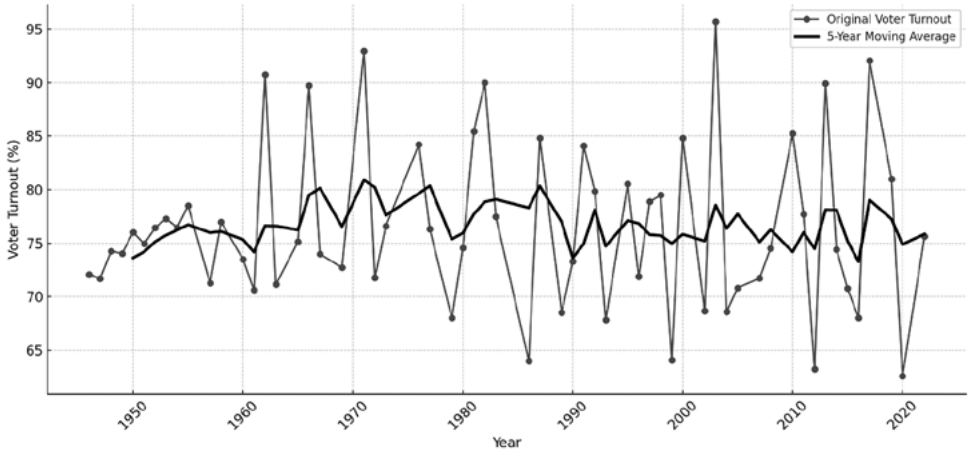

Figure 6.8. Dynamics of Voter Turnout in Democracies with PMM Electoral Systems

The trend in average voter turnout across democracies applying PMM systems is presented in Figure 6.8 depicting significant fluctuations over the past eight decades. The absolute maximum is observed in 2003 with average levels above 95%, while the absolute minimum is registered in 2020. Despite the intense fluctuations, the overall trend remains relatively stable, with most years recording average turnouts between 70% and 85%.

To smooth out annual fluctuations and highlight the long-term tendency we have fitted a moving average curve stabilizing turnout between 73% and 82%. This suggests that, while reflecting short-term events, electoral participation levels in PMM systems are driven by relatively constant fundamental factors in the long run. Figure 6.9 shows the trends in full and flawed democracies separately. Turnout levels in flawed democracies appear generally higher and much less variable compared to those in full ones. A sharp drop in 1995 possibly indicates an anomaly in the data for their otherwise consistent dynamics.

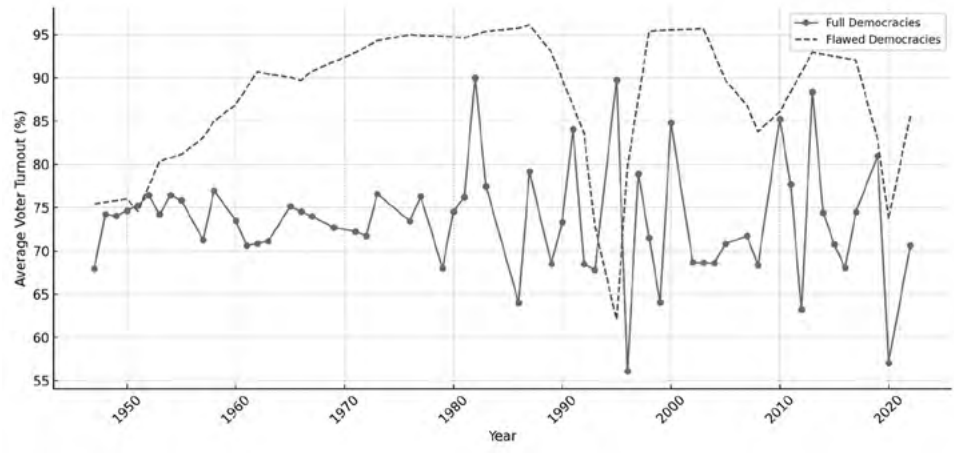

Figure 6.9. Turnout Dynamics in Full and Flawed Democracies with PMM Systems

Figure 6.10 further disaggregates the trends to the level of specific PMM applications, offering insights into their distinct effects on electoral participation. STV and BV exhibit significant volatility, with sharp spikes and drops in turnout, potentially reflecting the influence of critical elections or periods of political instability. In contrast, SNTV, BC and LV display more stable trends, indicating consistent voter engagement.

Table 6.9. Summary Statistics of Trend Analysis for Specific PMM Electoral Systems

Electoral System	Mean Voter Turnout (%)	Standard Deviation	Annual Change
BC	91.87	4.54	+0.29
BV	74.41	5.51	+0.51
LV	74.82	4.38	-0.93
SNTV	59.71	7.80	-1.97
STV	79.47	10.51	-0.33

Table 6.9 provides the summary statistics of these trends, further highlighting the notable differences. The Borda Count system shows the highest average levels of voter engagement in this group. Conversely, SNTV demonstrates the lowest average turnout, potentially due to voter marginalization resulting from sophisticated party strategies. STV displays the highest standard deviation, signaling significant fluctuations over time. Both the Borda Count and Block Vote

exhibit positive turnout trends, while Limited Vote, SNTV, and STV show declines, with SNTV experiencing a particularly steep annual drop.

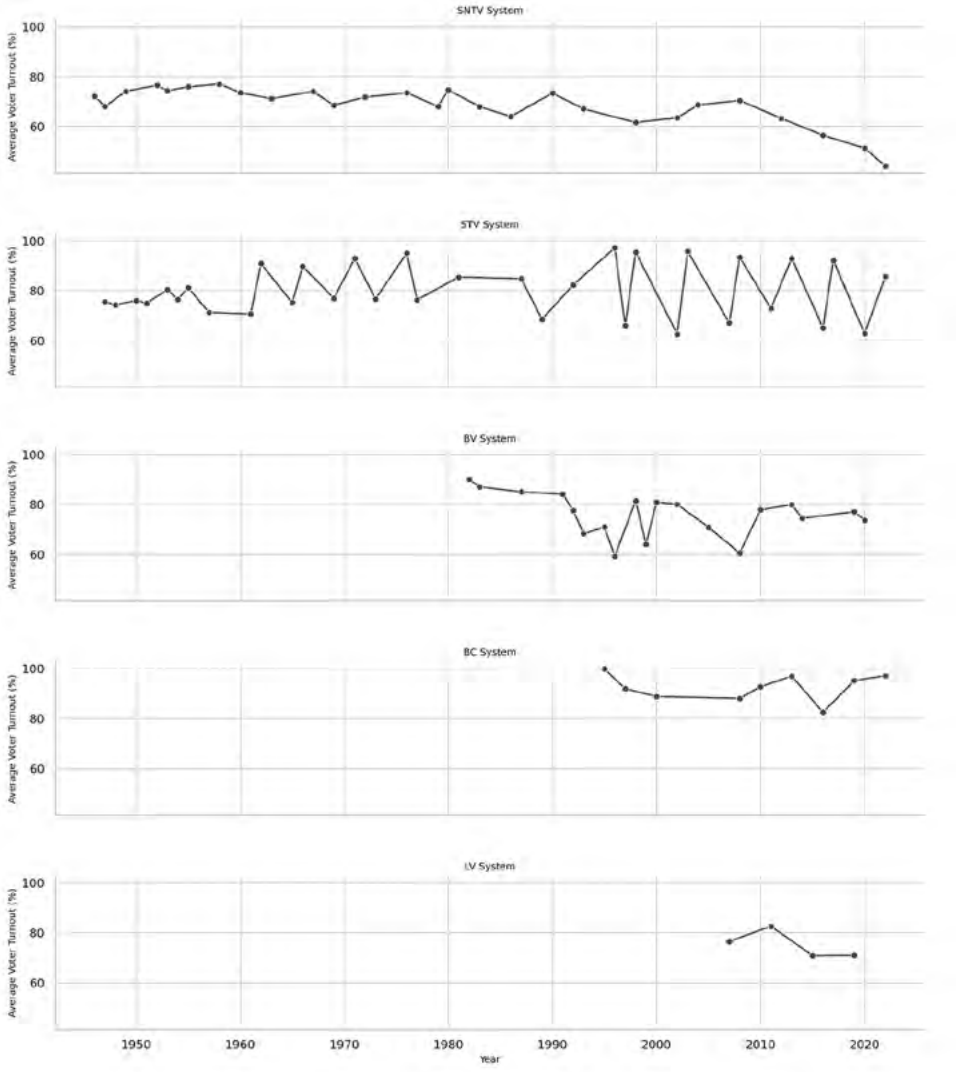

Figure 6.10. Dynamics of Voter Turnout in Different PMM Systems

Extending the comparative analysis, we performed ANOVA to assess differences across groups, treating voter turnout in each PMM system as an independent sample. As summarized in Table 6.10, the F-statistic and the associated

p-value indicate statistically significant differences among these systems, with some promoting participation more effectively than others.

Table 6.10. ANOVA Summary

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	F-Statistic	p-value
Electoral System	6933.20	4	35.88	0.000
Residual	2898.11	60	N/A	N/A

These variations reflect differences in ballot structure and strategic requirements rather than a fundamental divergence in system design. Although all four systems involve voting for personal candidates $V(i)$ rather than party lists, SNTV and Block Vote necessitate strict strategic voting to maximize party support. In these systems, the concentration of votes for fewer candidates within multi-member districts can increase the confusion of voters and fuel disproportionality of outcomes, potentially discouraging participation. In contrast, STV and Borda Count utilize preferential voting mechanisms that provide voters with greater control over outcomes, thus encouraging higher levels of participation.

To determine which specific pairs of electoral systems, account for the statistically significant differences identified through the ANOVA analysis, we utilize Tukey's post-hoc test, which is well-suited for comparing multiple groups, as it controls for the increased risk of Type I error that can occur when making multiple comparisons (Cohen, 2008, pp. 293–295; Field, 2013, pp. 436–439). The results of the detailed pairwise comparisons are summarized in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11. Tukey's HSD Test Results

Pair	Mean Diff	p-value	95% LB	95% UB	Significant
BC vs BV	17.46	0.001	12.40	22.52	Yes
BC vs LV	17.05	0.001	11.99	22.11	Yes
BC vs SNTV	32.16	0.001	27.10	37.23	Yes
BC vs STV	12.40	0.009	7.34	17.46	Yes
BV vs LV	-0.41	0.900	-5.47	4.65	No
BV vs SNTV	14.71	0.001	9.64	19.77	Yes
BV vs STV	-5.06	0.132	-10.12	0.00	No
LV vs SNTV	15.11	0.001	10.05	20.18	Yes
LV vs STV	-4.65	0.197	-9.71	0.41	No
SNTV vs STV	-19.76	0.001	-24.83	-14.70	Yes

The data indicate that the Borda Count method is more effective than others in terms of turnout. This suggests that it may be more successful in mobilizing voters or that it is applied in specific national and cultural contexts with inherently high participation levels. SNTV has significantly lower turnout rates compared to BC and slightly higher than BV and LV, suggesting issues with voter mobilization or dissatisfaction, as discussed previously in this book. The significant difference between SNTV and STV further reflects the fundamental differences in ballot structure between these systems.

Informing Electoral Reforms

Our analysis in this chapter has provided a detailed picture of how electoral systems shape patterns of voter turnout and the broader quality of democratic engagement in established electoral contexts. While institutional arrangements yield discernible effects on participation the diversity of observed outcomes points out the importance of considering historically ingrained political traditions and contextual frameworks. Even within relatively stable democracies, the complexity of electoral formulas, political competition, and voter motivations is neither straightforward nor uniform (Renwick, 2018). As we turn to the analysis of electoral turnout in the context of reforms, the following examination will consider how systems adapt over time, how evolving rules and political pressures transform turnout dynamics, and how reforms shape the long-term trajectories of democratic participation.

Chapter 7: **Electoral Engagement in Reform Settings**

The dynamics of democratic government in constantly changing environments require a balance between stability and adaptability of electoral systems. Stability ensures continuity, predictability and trust, as consistency over time provides a solid base for political competition, which bolsters legitimacy (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 142–165). However, excessive rigidity renders systems obsolete when confronted with emerging challenges. Adaptability allows for recalibration in line with evolving social demands and benchmarks of democratic performance (Bauböck, 2007, pp. 2401–2409; Vowles et al., 1998).

Striking the equilibrium in transitional democracies is even harder. More proportional frameworks often perform better in these contexts, as they can accommodate diverse interests, mitigate conflict, and foster broad-based coalitions (Reynolds, 1999, pp. 67–71). Nevertheless, historical legacies, social cleavages, and resource constraints, demand tailored approaches rather than uniform solutions, adapting global practices and proven mechanisms to local conditions (Tötemeyer, 2010). This implies that electoral reforms are a fundamental aspect of democratic government. They align electoral systems with evolving sociopolitical and technological contexts. As systems of representation and participation develop in response to emerging challenges, adjustments and transformations become necessary. They occur when deficiencies in representation, integrity or effectiveness are identified. Low participation rates, public dissatisfaction or rising polarization frequently prompt debates on reconfiguring electoral institutions. These reforms, whether comprehensive overhauls or targeted adjustments, are intended to realign electoral arrangements with normative goals and to ensure their adaptability to diverse cultural and political settings (Renwick, 2010, pp. 1–24; Renwick & Pilet, 2016). They may expand suffrage, modify how votes translate into seats, or introduce mech-

anisms that enhance the descriptive representation of underrepresented groups (Htun, 2004, pp. 442–453; Krook & Norris, 2014, pp. 5–15).

Building on previous discussions of electoral participation, behavior, and integrity, our examination of electoral reforms illustrates how democratic systems learn from and respond to accumulated experience. They are driven by a dynamic interchange of domestic pressures, international influences and the imperatives of sustaining legitimate governance over time and vary considerably in scope, ambition and potential impact.

Contentious reforms involve fundamental alterations to the core structures and principles of an electoral system. Changing the electoral formula for example, often redistributes political power and can challenge established interests. Such reforms are politically sensitive and may provoke resistance from actors benefiting from the status quo. They frequently arise from intense dissatisfaction, widespread public debate, and broad coalitions of support that push for more adequate translation of votes into political representation (Renwick, 2010, pp. 138–166).

Incremental reforms are relatively modest adjustments to existing electoral processes. Altering electoral thresholds, redistricting to improve representativeness or revising ballot access rules, can be adopted with relatively less controversy (Norris, 2011a). Although incremental changes may appear limited in scope, they can enhance accessibility and strengthen minor parties' competitiveness.

Substantial reforms fall between contentious overhauls and incremental tweaks. They involve significant revisions to electoral arrangements and while they may attract considerable attention and debate, they do not always amend existing traditions as radically as contentious reforms do. Instead, they frequently occur in response to sustained public dissatisfaction or in recognition that the existing system fails to adequately reflect changing social structures or technological conditions. Together, these three categories illustrate the varied pathways through which electoral systems change. The choice of approach depends on contextual factors, including political will, public sentiment, cultural traditions and available windows of opportunity.

Drivers of Reforms

Reforms do not occur in isolation, but as a product of multiple and often interrelated forces driving the initiation, direction, and scope of change. **Public dissatisfaction** with electoral processes, perceived unfairness in representation, declining voter turnout, and entrenched political polarization frequently bring systemic issues to the fore (Norris, 2011a, pp. 533–535). Electoral scandals and persistent grievances generate social pressures for change, channeled through referendums, public consultations, and advocacy by civil society actors. They reflect public debates on legitimacy and fairness, seeking to address deficits in representation, effectiveness, and public trust in democratic institutions.

Comprehensive reforms are often targeted at defining clear boundaries for campaign conduct, voting procedures, and post-election dispute resolution to ensure transparency and consistency throughout the electoral process, impartial Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and stringent campaign finance regulations (Geddis, 2014, pp. 201–230). Effective EMBs must be independent, adequately resourced and equipped with technical expertise, which are crucial prerequisites for building public trust (Birch, 2011, p. 45). Transparency in election administration through unrestricted access to election-related data and public reporting on campaign finances reinforces institutional credibility, which is further enhanced by election observation, providing impartial assessments of electoral processes and detecting irregularities.

Observer missions are especially valuable for identifying systemic vulnerabilities and recommending reforms in transitional democracies (Bjornlund, 2004, p. 97). International involvement in these missions is essential for establishing stable and credible electoral systems. The United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance provide monitoring and guidance that shape reform choices and frameworks, encourage adherence to global democratic principles, and serve as external catalysts of change (Kelley, 2012; Tuccinardi et al., 2014). Drawing on best practices and shared standards, civil society organizations complement these efforts with localized expertise and advocacy, fostering public participation and enhancing the monitoring of electoral procedures.

Populist leaders often champion or initiate electoral reforms that strengthen majoritarian rules, reduce normative thresholds, or introduce changes ostensibly designed to streamline governance. In practice, these reforms can undermine independent electoral oversight and restrict the competitiveness of opposition parties (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 82–91). By recasting reforms as necessary responses to alleged elite collusion or systemic corruption, populist actors secure public backing for institutional alterations that secure a more favorable electoral environment. This can involve restructuring the composition of electoral management boards, reducing the autonomy of constitutional courts or manipulating district boundaries. Once in power, populist incumbents frequently capitalize on strong mandates to re-engineer core elements of electoral design, crafting systems that concentrate executive authority (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 88–92). The populist framing ensures these changes appear to champion "the people's will," while critics contend that such reforms hollow out democratic institutions. Over time, these strategies reduce transparency and impartiality and trigger further disillusionment among segments of the electorate.

Technological Innovations

The integration of technology into electoral processes simultaneously drives and defines reforms. Digital tools, big data analytics and social media platforms are inherently transformative, and their adoption is posited to cause systemic alterations in governance structures and democratic practices (Flichy, 2006, p. 215). New voting technologies promise to enhance accuracy, efficiency and accessibility of elections (Madise & Martens, 2006). Applications of Electronic Voter Registration (EVR) systems, Biometric Registration Systems (BRS) and assistive technologies have already streamlined administrative procedures, reducing manual errors and significantly increasing accessibility of voting (Gelb & Clark, 2013, pp. 50–52; Gelb & Metz, 2018, p. 43; Goodman & Stokes, 2020, pp. 1160–1162; James, 2016, pp. 135–137; Norden et al., 2006, p. 89).

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) have gained wide application in populous countries, to simplify the voting process and to resolve logistic challenges of administration. They have greatly reduced ballot counting times, lessened opportunities for tampering, and made elections much more feasible in the vast and diverse voting population in India (Alvarez & Hall, 2008, p. 163). In Brazil,

they have also showed improvements in efficiency of voting and accuracy of results, which raised public confidence in elections (Nicolau, 2015, p. 10). Optical Scan Voting (OSV) is another prevalent technology that combines the security of paper ballots with the speed of electronic tabulation. Leaving paper trails allows auditing and recounts for greater transparency, which is their main advantage (Mercuri, 2002, pp. 48–49)

Several countries have implemented Online Voting Systems (OVS) in various types of elections. Estonia has been the global pioneer, providing a valuable experience on the feasibility of secure digital elections in technologically advanced contexts (Alvarez et al., 2009, pp. 27–42; Vassil & Weber, 2011, p. 19). The Estonian success with OVS is not coincidental but stems from a distinctive set of factors that have enabled this innovation. Being one of the most digitized countries in the world, Estonia has systematically invested in digital infrastructure over time. Besides, it has a reasonably secure national identification system, an aspect that underpins the functioning and reliability of online voting. What's more, the small population size, centralization of administrative activities, and a political culture in admiration of technological modernization have enabled the attitudinal implementation and acceptance of this technology, making the Estonian experience hardly replicable elsewhere. While OVS platforms provide the unmatched convenience of voting from any location, their functioning depends on the availability of secure digital ecosystems and high levels of public trust.

Risks of hacking and unauthorized access pose serious technological challenges to these systems and fuel ongoing debates on their trade-offs with many experts advocating for adhering solely to paper ballots. Numerous Instances revealing exploitable flaws have flagged considerable exposures to manipulations, which prompt authorities worldwide to prioritize robust cybersecurity measures and fallback mechanisms to ensure accurate audits and recounts like the Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trails (Appel & Stark, 2020, pp. 528–530; Goodman, 2010; Persily, 2017; Rid, 2020, p. 88; Springall et al., 2014, pp. 705–710; Taylor, 2010). Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs) exploiting systems vulnerabilities over extended periods of time, further require international cooperation, continuous system monitoring, and advanced detection tools (Ellena & Petrov, 2018, pp. 15–18). Emerging blockchain technologies promise to revolutionize the field by offering a decentralized, verifiable and tamper-evident method for recording

votes, ensuring data integrity and allowing traceability, while preserving voter anonymity. Its decentralized structure removes the dependence on central authorities, reducing vulnerabilities to manipulation or cyberattacks (Hao & Ryan, 2017). Although still experimental, it has considerable potential to enhance security of elections (McCorry et al., 2017, pp. 357–360; Zheng et al., 2017, p. 562).

Nevertheless, the successful implementation and safeguarding of technology is driven by human agency, institutional frameworks and cultural norms (Chadwick, 2013; Couldry & Hepp, 2016; Pinch & Bijker, 1987, p. 22). Its legitimacy is not an inherent property of the technology itself. Fostering public trust demands a commitment to transparency, achieved by providing public scrutiny access to the source codes and protocols of these systems (Simons & Jones, 2012, pp. 123–152). Balancing the potential benefits of technological innovation with the need to protect electoral integrity and public confidence is a critical task. The resulting discussions continuously shape reform agendas and highlight the importance of carefully designed oversight mechanisms to address concerns effectively and on time.

Accounting for the digital divide is also of key importance. In regions with limited internet penetration and low digital literacy, online voting systems may inadvertently exclude some segments of the population. Addressing these disparities requires targeted infrastructure investments and educational programs (James, 2011, p. 47). Public pilot programs and pre-election trials allow voters to interact with platforms before full-scale implementation, bridging the gap between innovation and familiarity (Stark & Wagner, 2012). Multilingual interfaces and culturally sensitive user experiences further ensure that linguistic and cultural diversity does not hinder participation (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 2016, Section 2). Therefore, the successful integration of new voting technologies depends on addressing challenges in a holistic and systematic manner to strike a balance between innovation and safeguarding the core principles of democratic elections.

Voter Turnout in the Context of Change

Table 7.1 provides a comprehensive overview of all significant electoral systems shifts in democratic countries around the world, from the dissolution of the Soviet Union until 2024. The changes in flawed democracies prevail, accounting for twenty-three of the twenty-nine records. This indicates that reforms are fre-

quently reactive measures designed to address deficiencies in democratic legitimacy and performance, rather than proactive endeavors pursuing enhancement of already functional systems.

Table 7.2 presents the average voter turnout rates across various electoral systems immediately following their adoption. The data shows that the most straightforward electoral systems, such as plurality/majority, tend to exhibit the highest voter turnout rates after their introduction, with an average of 79.71%. It is noteworthy that, despite exhibiting the greatest complexity, PMM systems achieve the second-highest score in this ranking, with a notable discrepancy between them and the third-ranked mixed systems.

Table 7.1. Significant Changes in Electoral Systems by Country (1992–2024)

Region	Country	n	p (%)
Africa	Lesotho	1	3.45
	Subtotal	1	3.45
Asia	Japan	1	3.45
	Maldives	1	3.45
	Mongolia	5	17.24
	Philippines	1	3.45
	Thailand	1	3.45
	Timor-Leste	1	3.45
	Subtotal	10	34.48
Northern America	Bermuda	1	3.45
	Cayman Islands	1	3.45
	Subtotal	2	6.90
Eastern Europe	Albania	2	6.90
	Bulgaria	2	6.90
	Croatia	1	3.45
	Moldova	2	6.90
	North Macedonia	2	6.90
	Romania	2	6.90
	Subtotal	11	37.93
Southern Europe	Italy	3	10.34
	Subtotal	3	10.34
Oceania	New Zealand	1	3.45
	Tonga	1	3.45
	Subtotal	2	6.90
Global	Total	29	100

Source: International IDEA, Electoral System Design Database (2024).

The specific type of reform also exerts an influence on voter turnout. As illustrated in Table 7.3, the greatest average increase in voter turnout (28.78%) has been observed in instances where a transition has been made from proportional representation to a plurality/majority system, while transitions in the opposite direction result in the most significant decline, amounting to a reduction of 10.19%

Table 7.2. Average Voter Turnout per Electoral System After Adoption

Electoral System Type	$\overline{VT}$ (%)
Plurality/Majority	79.71
Personalized Multi-Member	73.98
Mixed Systems	66.85
Proportional Representation	65.69

The effects observed in PMM and mixed systems are more complex. A modest increase of 6.45% is registered when shifting from PMM to plurality/majority. Conversely, there is a slight decline of 2.96% when transitioning from PMM to a mixed framework. The twenty-nine electoral reforms analyzed in this study occurred within eighteen countries and reflect a diverse range of political systems, institutional frameworks and socioeconomic contexts.

Table 7.3. Average Voter Turnout Change by Electoral System Reform Type

Reform Type	$\overline{\Delta}$ (%)
PMM to Mixed	-2.96
PMM to Plurality/Majority	6.45
Mixed to PR	-0.56
Mixed to Plurality/Majority	8.34
PR to Mixed	-4.36
PR to Plurality/Majority	28.78
Plurality/Majority to PMM	-3.74
Plurality/Majority to Mixed	-0.35
Plurality/Majority to PR	-10.19

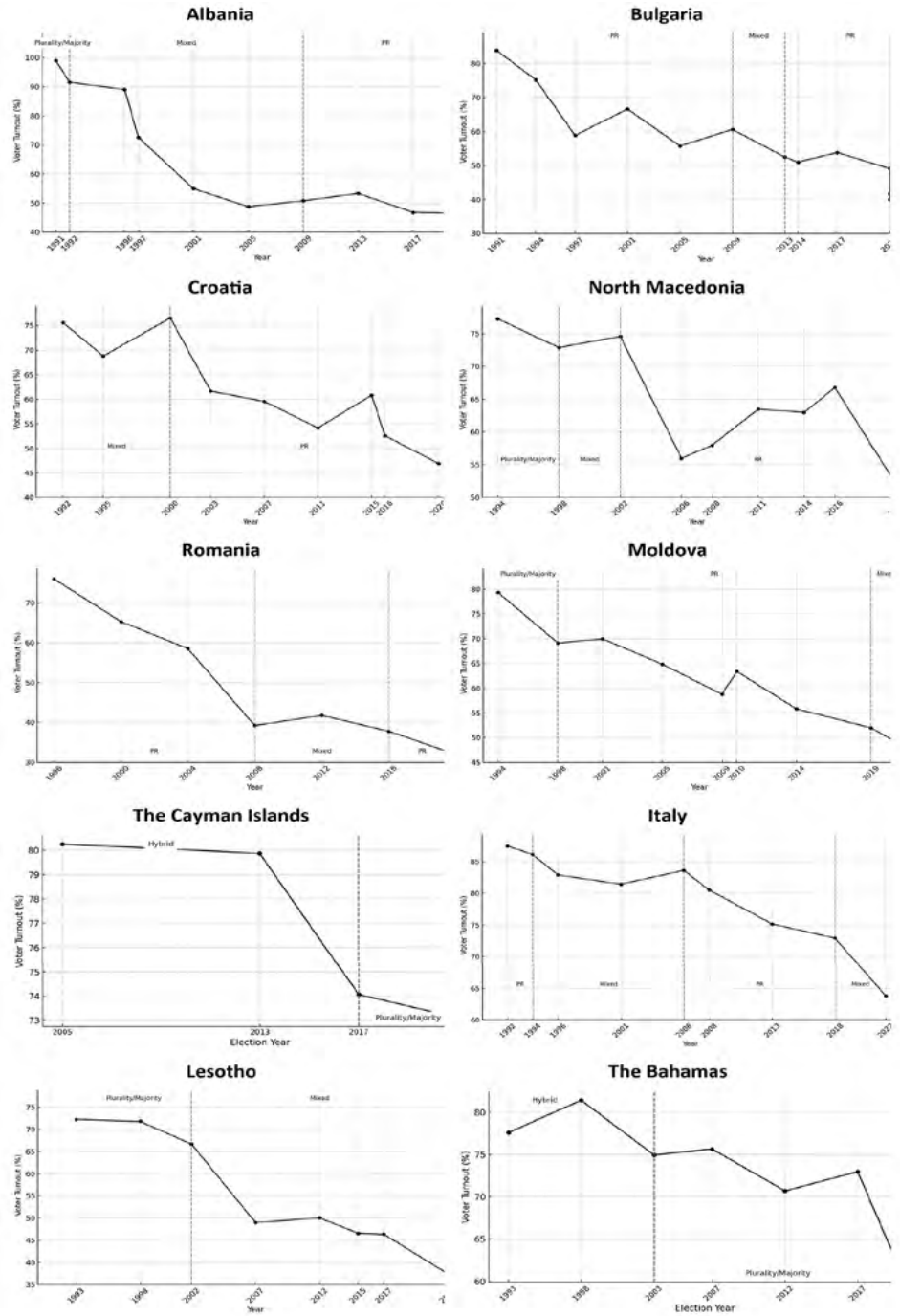

Figure 7.1. Electoral Reforms and Declining Voter Turnout

These reforms represent significant structural changes, intended to address a variety of challenges with political representation, electoral fairness and voter engagement. However, their impact on voter turnout reveals varied outcomes. At the separate country level, its dynamics following electoral reforms demonstrate three distinct patterns. Figure 7.1 shows the ten countries, exhibiting considerable declines in voter turnout after implementation of reforms.

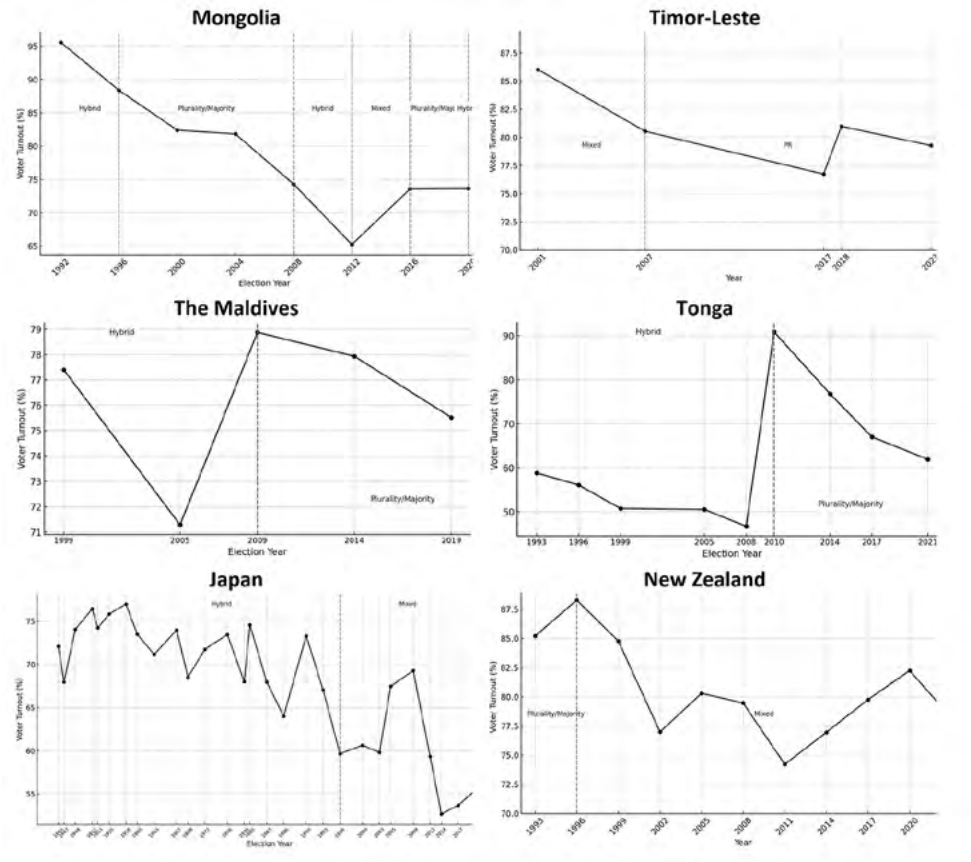

Figure 7.2. Electoral Reforms and Sustainable Voter Turnout

These trends highlight the potential disruptive effects of institutional changes, which may have undermined voter confidence, created confusion about new electoral rules or exacerbated existing political disillusionments. These cases suggest that reforms, while often intended to enhance electoral participation and legitimacy, can inadvertently alienate voters. Alternatively, Figure 7.2 depicts six

countries from the sample that managed to maintain stable voter turnout levels following electoral system shifts. Finally, Figure 7.3 shows voter turnout dynamics in Thailand and the Philippines, which are the only two countries in our sample exhibiting an increase in voter turnout following adoption of new electoral systems. In these cases, reforms were introduced in contexts where public demand was strong, and the new systems were perceived as more equitable.

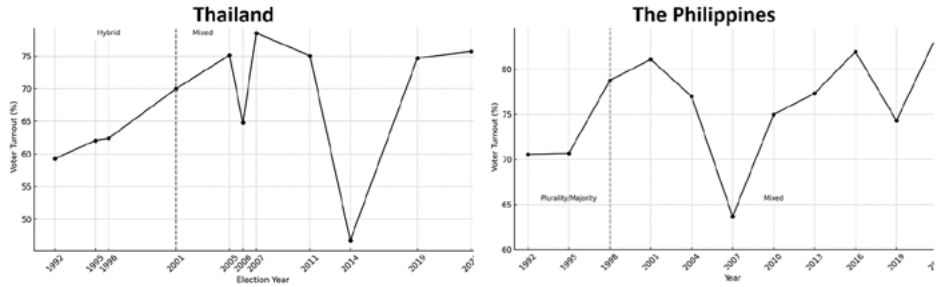

Figure 7.3. Electoral Reforms and Increasing Voter Turnout

This section presented an overview of the experiences of **all democratic countries** that have implemented **significant electoral reforms** over the past **thirty years**. Given the observed decline in voter turnout across most of these cases, it becomes evident that electoral reforms cannot succeed in isolation to promote electoral participation. While modifications to electoral systems are crucial for rectifying procedural imbalances and augmenting representation, their efficacy is contingent upon the overarching political and socioeconomic configurations in which they are operationalized.

The data suggest that neither structural modifications nor the adoption of more inclusive formulas inherently guarantees sustained or improved voter engagement. While some reforms have yielded modest gains, most have observed declines or rendered participation largely unaffected. In the following section, we transition from general patterns of aggregated data to closer examination of seminal reform experiences for a more contextualized outline of their implementations.

Case Studies

This closing section explores notable examples of applied electoral reforms through a set of seven short case studies of well-developed democracies. By outlining historical contexts, motivations, implementation processes and resulting outcomes, these cases provide insights into the adaptability and impact of electoral systems as fine tunings to consolidated democracies. Common themes of proportionality, strategic voting, and coalition-building recur across these examples, reflecting shared experiences of balancing representation with stability. These case studies build on the theoretical discussions in earlier chapters of this book, emphasizing the specific institutional designs and political contexts that shape their outcomes.

The UK Experience with FPTP

The FPTP system has been the founding block of the United Kingdom's electoral framework since its adoption in the late 19-th century with the Third Reform Act of 1884–1885, which expanded suffrage and adjusted parliamentary representation to align with demographic changes (Bogdanor, 1981, pp. 110–125). It replaced the earlier Limited Vote system introduced in 1867 with the Second Reform Act, which in turn had replaced the Block Vote system, established with the First Reform Act of 1832. Ever since, the system has been used in the vast majority of constituencies throughout the UK, although there are some exceptions up-to-date. Historically, FPTP has maintained political stability facilitating single-party governments, often backed by "manufactured majorities," in parliament, elected with a modest share of the popular vote (Taylor & Gudgin, 1979, pp. 52–89).

Debates about its fairness and efficacy have periodically intensified. For instance, the introduction of STV in Northern Ireland in 1973 and of the Additional Member (AMS) mixed systems in Scotland and Wales in 1999 aimed to address regional demands for wider representation (McLean, 2001, pp. 47–63). Similarly, the 2011 referendum on adopting the Alternative Vote, although unsuccessful, reflected growing dissatisfaction with FPTP's inability to accommodate broader competition and ensure equitable representation in the context of increasing electoral pluralism (Renwick & Lamb, 2011). Advocates for reform argue that a

more proportional system could better reflect the diverse electorate of the United Kingdom, particularly in addressing gender and ethnic representational gaps, as public demands are evolving along with expanding diversities in society (Johns & Mitchell, 2016, pp. 1–14; Norris, 2004, pp. 237–254).

The Two-Round System in France

The French TRS system is embedded in the 1958 Constitution of the Fifth Republic. It was designed to overcome the political instability and fragmentation that characterized the Fourth Republic. This system generally reinforces executive authority and reduces legislative fragmentation by requiring candidates to secure an absolute majority and no less than a quarter of the eligible voters in the constituency, in the first round of legislative elections, or face a second round, where a simple majority suffices. Candidates must obtain at least 12.5 percent of registered voters' support to qualify for the second round (Blais & Loewen, 2009).

Through its structural incentives, the system exhibits an unique electoral dynamic. In first rounds voter preferences are expressed more freely, often in support of smaller or ideologically distinct candidates. By contrast, second rounds encourage strategic voting in which voters may shift their support to candidates with a higher likelihood of success or unify against the leader in the first round. This dynamic compels parties to negotiate alliances, adjust platforms, and coordinate withdrawals to consolidate electoral support, thereby fostering party strategizing instead of representation and tactical instead of ideological coalition-building (Reilly, 2001, pp. 52–68).

Therefore, the psychological and mechanical effects of the TRS significantly influence the French political electoral process and party system. They shape ambivalent voter behavior with greater ideological inclinations in the first round and pragmatically rational calculations in the second. The system benefits well-organized and strategically proficient parties by reinforcing their relevance within the party system and the legislature (Stockemer, 2017, pp. 1–15). While promoting legitimacy of incumbents and cooperation between parties, it distorts representation based on authentic ideological congruence and poses significant challenges for smaller parties, lacking the resources to compete effectively with larger and resourceful entities in two sets of consequent campaigns.

Its entrenchment within the French constitutional framework is the major factor for its longevity in its original form. Apart from a culture of political negotiations and consensus-building, the system has effectively safeguarded the Fifth Republic from populist and nationalist waves by consolidating resistance in-between rounds, thus contributing to its stability and adaptability in the past almost seven decades (Elgie, 1999).

The Alternative Vote in Australia

The 1918 adoption of the Alternative Vote System in Australia has marked a significant departure from the previously applied FPTP. Generally, it provides a broader representation within a preferential voting system, consolidating votes among ideologically close individual candidates (Jaensch, 1995, pp. 45–48). Despite the ranking ballot structure has occasionally provoked debates over its complexity for voters, compliance has remained high, primarily informed by the widespread dissemination of "how-to-vote" cards distributed by political parties (Farrell & McAllister, 2006, pp. 57–60; Reilly, 2001, pp. 54–56).

Analyses of the early application of the system argued that its outcomes often resembled those produced by the FPTP. However, the gradual emergence of smaller parties and independents withing legislature revealed its capacity to represent a broader spectrum of voters' preferences. The 1990 federal election provided a seminal example of its operational potential. Despite losing in both primary and secondary preference distributions at the national level, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) achieved a narrow victory by accumulating a massive flow of lower-level preferences from primary supporters of leftist minor parties such as the Greens or the Australian Democrats (Farrell, 2011, pp. 78–82; Jaensch, 1995, pp. 102–105). A peculiar example from the same election is the distribution of preferences in the Division of Richmond, where Neville Newell, the ALP candidate, achieved victory and got the seat with only twenty-seven percent of the first-preference votes, illustrating how the AV enables candidates to leverage broader voter support through lower-level preference allocations. These examples reveal how the AV system has fostered strategic negotiations of preference arrangements between parties, appealing to a wider voter base, which in turn promoted coalition-building and policy moderation as major parties inclined

of concessions to minor players in exchange for favorable preference flows (Farrell, 2001, pp. 83–85).

PR Traditions in The Netherlands

The Netherlands has long been recognized for its commitment to proportionality, adopting a List PR system in 1917 as part of the Pacification reforms, which have also introduced universal male suffrage in an attempt to overcome deep political and religious divides in the society. The shift from single-member to multi-member districts with a purely proportional formula was an institutional response to the large political fragmentation, intended to procedurally accommodate the diversity of social groups, thus limiting the anti-systemic mobilization potential (Lijphart, 1968, pp. 27–35).

The Netherlands has a bicameral legislature called States General, comprising of a House of Representatives with 150 members and a Senate with 75 members. The House is the legislative lower chamber (or "Second Chamber" if literally translated from the Dutch "Tweede Kamer") and is elected through a PR System, allowing voters to choose a preferred candidate within the list of the party they support. However, the list structure is not typically flexible, but largely resembles a closed one. Indeed, preferences do not reorder the list but grant a seat to a candidate given that two conditions are fulfilled.

First, the nominating party must be awarded with seats. As the system does not impose a normative threshold and use a nationwide MMD, to participate in the allocation of seats, a party has to meet only the rational electoral quota, which is simply the price of one seat in votes. As the chamber has a total of 150 members, the electoral quota is:

$$Q = \frac{1}{150} \times 100 \approx 0.67\%$$

or approximately two thirds of a percent of the valid votes. Second, the number of preferences for the candidate must exceed 25% of the quota or roughly 0.17% of the valid votes (Jacobs & Leyenaar, 2011, pp. 505–507). Election data show that in practice, the vast majority of voters cast their preferences for the first or eventually the second candidate on the list, which is yet another demonstration of the embeddedness of proportionality in the Dutch political culture.

Therefore, this model consolidates as one of the world's most proportional systems (Reynolds et al., 2005, pp. 55–75) not only in institutional, but also in psychological, cultural and structural terms. The derivative multiparty structure and coalition-building traditions institutionalize negotiations, consensus and compromise as fundamental principles of governance (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009, pp. 123–130). The system has occasionally been provoked by the emergence of highly polarized and populist parties. Its capacity to effectively confront with these challenges has proven its institutional and functional resilience (Van Kessel, 2015, pp. 99–120).

The Irish STV System

The STV introduction in Ireland in 1922 embodies the county's independence and reflects both British efforts to safeguard the Protestant minority interests and the Irish leaders' aspirations for proportionality (Gallagher, 2005). Despite the excessively complex ballot structure and of vote counting procedures, the system is widely regarded as transparent, fair and effective, fostering high voter empowerment and public confidence in electoral process (Farrell, 2001, pp. 83–97).

It has profoundly shaped Irish political system by institutionalizing a viable intra-party competition, particularly in major parties, which often nominate multiple candidates in one constituency, thus incentivizing engagement of candidates with local communities (Weeks, 2023). In result, the system ensures an optimal balance between strong accountability and constituency ties of representatives and highly proportional distribution of seats, which in turn structures a model of representation, adequate to the social structure of society.

Moreover, the century-old practical experience with the system, witnessed both single-party and coalition governments to generally serve full terms, confuting initial concerns with potential governmental instability (Lijphart, 2012, pp. 120–138). Initiatives for substitution of STV with a FPTP were decisively rejected in referenda, reflecting the widespread public confidence with this system. Its constitutional entrenchment demonstrates its important role in the Irish democratic identity, ensuring that any attempt for its replacement would require a significant public approval (Gallagher, 2005).

The German MMP System

The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (the post-war democratic Constitution) adopted in 1949, established the Personalized Proportional System (typologically MMP) as an electoral framework of the newly democratizing state, intended to avoid the political fragmentation and instability of the Weimar Republic, induced by its List-PR system (Shugart, 2001). It allows voters to cast two votes: one for a candidate in SMDs and another for a party list in a nationwide MMD.

The first vote determines the allocation of 299 personalized direct seats in the SMDs with plurality formula, while the second vote determines the relative party shares of the popular support at the national level. If a party's share of direct seats is less than its share of the national vote, the additional seats necessary to achieve proportionality are assigned to its list. However, if a party wins more direct seats than its national vote share justifies (i.e. is overrepresented), overhang (surplus) seats are created on top of the total number of legislative seats, to compensate underrepresented parties, restoring perfect proportionality (Nohlen, 1978, pp. 367–398). The 2021 federal election illustrated this dynamic, resulting in the largest Bundestag in history with 736 members, including thirty-four overhang seats and 104 compensatory seats (Federal Returning Officer, 2021).

MMP has incentivized strategic ticket splitting in Germany which denotes the strategy of voting for a candidate of one party in SMD and for the list of another at the national level. This strategy allows voters to support smaller parties struggling to win direct seats but gaining proportional representation through the national vote (Jesse, 1988). The high level of proportionality in the resulting legislative representation fosters coalition majorities and cabinets, this reflects a broader national consensus (Katz, 2005). However, the tendency of constantly expanding total number of seats in the Bundestag has raised growing concerns and the necessity for reform of either the electoral mechanism, or in the number of seats (Saalfeld, 2005).

Japan: From SNTV to the Parallel System

Japan's shift from SNTV to a Parallel system is a notable example of a transformative reform aimed at resolving systemic flaws. Within SNTV, the Liberal

Democratic Party (LDP) maintained a dominant position by mobilizing strategic vote-splitting and intra-party competition, which have fostered institutional corruption and governmental inefficiency (Reed, 2005). LDP lost its legislative majority in 1993 as a result of public dissatisfaction and political fragmentation, which provided a window of opportunity for electoral reform (Christensen, 1998; Reed & Thies, 2003).

As a result, a completely different parallel system was adopted in 1994, introducing a dual electoral framework to combine plurality and proportional elements, allowing voters to cast two separate votes. One for a direct candidate in SMD and another for a party list in a MMD. A total of 465 seats are allocated. 289 seats (62%) in SMDs with plurality and 176 seats (38%) in 11 MMDs with Closed-list PR and D'Hondt method.

Although this system shares some similarities with the German MMP, there are two major differences. The proportional component of the German system is intended to compensate for disproportionality and allocates as many seat as necessary to achieve this task. It is applied in a large nationwide MMD, which improves proportionality. In contrast, the Japanese parallel system does not compensate, but mechanically add the results from both components. The seats a party wins in the direct vote and those allocated in the proportional one are simply summed. Moreover, instead of nationwide MMD, it applies much smaller regional MMDs, which further limits the proportionality of the list component, which anyways is use for distribution of much smaller share of the total seats. Therefore, the Japanese approach to nixed systems is also known as Multi-Member Majoritarian to be nominally distinguished from the Multi-Member Proportional methods.

However, this system still produces much more proportional results, compared to the older SNTV. Furthermore, its simplicity compared to MMP, coupled with its capacity to enhance voter engagement and political competition, underscores its effectiveness in Japan's specific political context (Nemoto, 2018). It has significantly altered the intra-party dynamics by moderating the dominance of LDP, resulting in a relatively pluralistic legislature, which reflects wider range of political preferences. Consequently, several smaller parties and opposition coalitions managed to successfully challenge LDP in elections (Christensen, 1994; Pekkanen et al., 2018; Smith, 2018, pp. 33–50).

Patterns and Implications of Electoral Reform

The examined cases reveal a spectrum of approaches to electoral reform and institution-building, each shaped by a specific historical, cultural and political context. Despite their diversity, these cases collectively illustrate key patterns in the design and evolution of electoral systems. Their selection reflects deliberative choices to explore systems with varying priorities, embodying distinct trade-offs between competing objectives. These trade-offs highlight a central tension in electoral system design: the balance between reflecting social diversity and ensuring functional governance. The UK's FPTP system emphasizes stability but struggles with inclusivity in an increasingly pluralistic society, while Germany's MMP system exemplifies a balance of personalized representation and proportionality. The Netherlands' adoption of PR addressed deep social divides, France's TRS was institutionalized to overcome political instability, and Japan's transition to the Parallel system aimed to curb corruption, among other goals. Altogether, these reforms reflected the need to align electoral mechanisms with specific demands of governance, social cohesion and public trust. They have also demonstrated potential for instrumentalization beyond specific systemic designs, but as a response to broader challenges.

A central conclusion of this comparison is that no single electoral system could be universally applicable or optimal. Their effectiveness is a compatibility function of political culture, social structures and historical experiences, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive reform strategies. Therefore, the value of examining diverse electoral systems lies in uncovering the principal trade-offs that underpin effectiveness of electoral design for specific applications.

Findings and Policy Implications

The findings of this chapter indicate that even systems ostensibly designed to broaden representation do not guarantee sustained engagement in the absence of robust civic culture, democratic institutions, and public trust. Moreover, reforms intended to enhance turnout only rarely produce transformative results on their own. Thus, our analysis suggests that no single institutional configuration or reform strategy constitutes a universal solution. From a policy perspective, electoral reforms should be carefully tailored to the specific political, social, and

cultural context of each country, while constant efforts for enhancing public trust in the electoral process are also necessary. The adoption of more complex electoral systems, which provide voters with tangible options to influence election outcomes and therefore promote democratic engagement, require an integrated approach that goes beyond electoral mechanisms alone. Policies the enhance digital literacy and promote access to unbiased political information have already become mandatory.

Conclusion

Bridging theoretical and conceptual developments with contemporary analytical frameworks, this book featured the importance of diachronic perspectives in acknowledging the interaction between institutional architecture and evolving sociopolitical conditions in contextualizing the evolution of representation and accountability as foundational constructs of contemporary electoral democracy. Their peculiar relationship is inherent to the functioning of electoral systems and becomes evident in the process of their classification. The power distributive function of elections, modulated by the systemic design, rationalizes the normative aspect of this relationship, incorporating derivative conceptions of legitimacy in the more complex questions of who has the right to exercise power, what is a good government, does responsibility pose limits on authority or what social justice is, all intertwined in the explanations of the inverse relationship between representation and accountability, especially in the context of democracy.

As electoral systems broaden the scope of representation, they tend to restrain direct mechanisms of control (Golder & Stramski, 2010; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005). The introduction of quotas in legislative bodies, for example, expands descriptive representation at the expense of constituents' ability to hold representatives accountable, as incumbency is primarily determined by the fulfillment of an identity-based criterion and not by performance. This activist form of representation may fail to accommodate a robust notion of accountability, since electoral sanction or reward become subordinate to mere compliance with quota requirements.

Accountability, by contrast, is not based on the agency component of representation, but on the principle of delegated authority and depends on the capacity of the governed to scrutinize and sanction incumbents (March & Olsen, 1995, pp. 54–57). The more extensive the distance between constituents and officeholders, the more tenuous the potential for meaningful oversight. This phenomenon can be discerned both in proportional systems with large multimember districts and in majoritarian setups featuring safe seats (Lijphart, 2012). In the last resort, the

balance between broad representation and direct accountability is not just a matter of normative preference for one over the other but is rather an active process determined by how invested constituents and representatives are.

Both factors materialize the substance of trust and legitimacy of government. Trust, resting on subjective perceptions of fairness and justice, ultimately reinforces the willingness of the governed to regard institutions as both "rightful" and "just," even if tangible evidence is limited or ambiguous (Norris, 2011, pp. 76–83). This emphasis on perceptions explains how regimes that manipulate information or resort to deception can still project a façade of legitimacy if they successfully foster public trust (Schedler, 2013, pp. 31–35). Clientelistic structures and vote buying practices introduce subtle distortions of representational outcomes, demonstrating that even thoughtfully designed electoral systems can result in biased outcomes and pervert quasi-democratic institutions (Birch, 1997, 2011; Hicken, 2011; Norris, 2014; Stokes et al., 2013; Wroe et al., 2013).

Participation, both in terms of voter turnout and willingness to run for office, reflects deeper convictions of trust and legitimacy. Those who commit time and resources to enter elections demonstrate authentic confidence in institutions (Persson & Tabellini, 2005, pp. 89–96), reflecting complex exchange of personal capabilities, psychological motivations, social networks, cultural norms and institutional parameters (Eijk et al., 2005; Franklin, 2002; Norris & Franklin, 1997; Verba et al., 1993; Verba & Kim, 1978; Verba & Nie, 1972).

Within polarized contexts, psychological attachments and social identities can amplify or diminish institutional incentives and motivations for participation essentially determining authenticity of representation and stability of democratic governance. Digitalization of political campaigns and communication has introduced a fundamental shift in how electoral integrity and participation are conceived and enacted. It modifies both the cognitive and emotional aspects of voter behavior, transforming strategies of political parties and candidates, and boosting the ionizing effects of polarization for voters, social networks and communities. Extensive applications of microtargeting and personalized messaging, segments the public into self-winding splinters prone to manipulative practices, thus reconstructing political reality in twisted and biased directions.

At the same time, digital solutions possess the potential to streamline participation and enhance accessibility (Benvenisti, 2018; Herron & Wand, 2007;

IDEA, 2017; Star & Bowker, 2006). If backed up by robust oversight and civic safeguards to prevent manipulation and fraud (Alvarez et al., 2009; Atkeson et al., 2009; Lewandowsky et al., 2017), technological innovations enable qualitatively better electoral reforms. Minimizing the risks associated with complex ballot procedures they can be instrumentalized in more efficient electoral systems from the PMM family to increase involvement and empowerment of voters (Bormann & Golder, 2022; Farrell, 2011; Neto & Cox, 1997).

Provided that the necessary institutional conditions and political cultures support their proper functioning (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005; Lijphart, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2005), PMM systems offer solutions that enhance both descriptive diversity and meaningful representation. The identification of the specific properties of PMM systems becomes possible with their delineation within our enhanced typology, which clarifies the analytical perspective of comparative electoral analysis.

Our review of conventional typologies based on disproportionality revealed their incapability to adequately capture the nuanced spectrum of contemporary electoral arrangements. Moving from potentially misleading outcome-based indicators to ballot structure and district magnitude as principal classifiers, our conceptual framework enhances the explanatory power and methodological precision of applied research (Norris, 2004, pp. 57–83; Taagepera, 2007, pp. 12–36).

Ultimately, the conceptual integration presented in this book highlights the importance of combining theoretical models and empirical analyses with temporal sensitivity to ensure that the evaluation of electoral systems is neither ahistorical nor overly abstract.

Challenges and Limitations

An important limitation of this book concerns generalizability. It is built on a set of cases within a certain time period. Extending its conclusions to different historical periods or political environments may require careful recalibration. Data availability also constrains the capacity to explore every dimension of contemporary electoral challenges. While this book integrates discussions of clientelism, vote buying, digital disinformation, and the introduction of new voting technologies, these are rapidly evolving phenomena, which complicates efforts

in building comprehensive and stable datasets that allow advanced statistical analysis and time series modeling.

Another limitation relates to the interpretation of results. While the structural approach to classifying electoral systems introduces conceptual clarity, it does not claim to fully determine outcomes in isolation. The influence of institutions, social forces and political cultures supposes that identical structural configurations may yield divergent results across contexts. Our findings encourage the interpretation of classifications and insights presented here as starting points rather than definitive prescriptions. Institutional design is one among several variables in a nexus of historical legacies, cultural norms and strategic elite behaviors that together shape the quality of democracy.

Finally, the long-term effects of hybrid systems require further exploration. Likewise, analyzing the global diffusion of digital technologies and the adaptive responses of political actors demands more extensive cross-national datasets, sophisticated modeling techniques and adaptive theoretical frameworks. By identifying these unresolved questions and methodological challenges, this book aims not only to advance current knowledge but also to encourage future research that can refine and extend its contributions.

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Stoycho P. Stoychev

ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AROUND THE WORLD

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Drawing on a combination of theoretical perspectives and comparative analysis, this book offers a comprehensive examination of the role elections and electoral systems play in shaping democratic participation, representation and legitimacy.

Critically assessing existing classifications of electoral arrangements, Stoycho P. Stoychev introduces the concept of hybrid systems—Personalized Multi-Member (PMM) and List Single-Member (LSM)—as a refined approach to understanding the balance between majoritarian and proportional principles. Through empirical analysis of voter turnout trends and electoral system performance across diverse contexts, it sheds light on longstanding debates in electoral studies concerning populism, political polarization and the transformative impact of digital technologies.

Intended for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on electoral system design and its implications for democratic performance and engagement.

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