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Electoral Institutions

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Abstract - Electoral institutions serve as the fundamental framework of democracy, determining how political power is distributed and exercised. This paper examines the structural impact of electoral institutions on party systems, focusing on how plurality systems consolidate into two-party models while proportional representation fosters multi-party diversity. Employing the "effective number of parliamentary parties" (ENPP) metric, the research demonstrates that these rules do not merely count votes; they reshape political incentives, fiscal policy, and social equity. While plurality systems encourage targeted spending toward specific voter blocs, proportional systems tend to prioritize broad public goods and significantly improve women's legislative representation. Ultimately, this review concludes that the health and inclusivity of democratic governance are direct reflections of institutional design, influencing government accountability and national economic development.

Keywords - Electoral institutions, Political Parties, Plural System, Democracy, Elections, Voters, Turnout, Development, Representation.

I. Introduction

Electoral institutions are defined as the rules, laws, and norms that shape electoral politics and its dynamics. They can be formal or informal based on their nature and structure. Electoral institutions fulfil diverse roles, and they have emerged and developed spatially in response to the political and social environments of different contexts. They are characterized and modelled based on the prevalent structures that shape them and vice versa. Therefore, it is crucial to examine their functions and impact on a case-by-case basis within political spheres. This review paper analyzes the role and impact of different electoral institutions. In this process, various electoral systems are assessed for their advantages, disadvantages, and outcomes. Since political parties constitute a significant agent in shaping electoral democracy, this paper examines how they affect electoral institutions and society and, conversely, how they are affected in return. Electoral institutions determine the power dynamics of democracy. Consequently, economic development and related policies are indirectly influenced by electoral institutions as well. They also exert considerable impact on women's representation and participation. Since women's representation constitutes an important indicator of democratic health, measuring their participation in government and political parties is essential.

Political Parties as an Electoral Institution:
Political parties as an institution constitute a significant component of electoral democracy. Representatives elected from these parties typically hold governmental offices. These political parties represent different ideologies and policy considerations (Katz, 2007). Nevertheless, they vary widely in terms of representation, structure, orientations, and social composition. The study of political parties, which includes their

formation, functions, roles, and importance, constitutes a substantial subfield within electoral politics. Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the mechanisms of political parties across democracies worldwide. The number of political parties in different electoral systems is a compelling area of inquiry characterized by divergent scholarly perspectives. However, some scholars, including Duverger (1954), Sartori (1968, 1976), Rae (1971), Lijphart (1990, 1994), Riker (1982), Taagepera and Shugart (1989), Palfrey (1989), Myerson and Weber (1993), and Cox (1994), have advanced significant arguments to understand the number of parties vis-à-vis the presence of electoral laws (Neto and Cox, 1997).

Another set of scholars, Grumm (1958), Eckstein (1963), Meisel (1963), Lipson (1964), Lipset and Rokkan (1967), and Rose and Urwin (1970), have attributed party formation to the presence of social groups within the system (Neto and Cox, 1997). Katz (1997) has advocated for a two-party system to ensure that either party can be held accountable. If either party can achieve a majority, it must be cohesive to make decisions effectively. He argued that parties must be policy-oriented because democracy aims to provide citizens with control over policies of public interest.

Where social cleavages are intense, numerous ethnicities exist, and representation precedes public policy, multiparty democracy is more likely to represent the collective aspirations of the citizenry (Katz, 1997). The proponents of the institutional approach assume that these social groups will organize themselves into pressure groups and political parties. They largely discount collective action beyond their distinct social identities. However, subsequent scholars acknowledge that both approaches, whereby either electoral laws determine the number of parties or social cleavages determine party formation, can coexist (Neto and Cox, 1997). Political parties are also subject to electoral systems. Research has shown that plurality electoral systems often support two-party systems, whereas proportional systems tend to generate multi-party systems (Duverger, 1954).

Electoral Systems and Outcomes:
Electoral systems are the electoral institutions that determine how votes are cast and how seats are allocated. They comprise three components: the electoral formula that determines how votes are calculated; district magnitude, which specifies the number of seats allocated to a district; and ballot structure, which determines how voters express their choices (Blais and Massicotte, 1996).

There are four main types of electoral formulas:
- Majoritarian formulas (including plurality, second ballot, and alternative voting systems).
- Semi-proportional systems (such as the single transferable vote, the cumulative vote, and the limited vote).
- Proportional representation (including open and closed party lists using the largest remainders and highest averages formula).
- Mixed systems (such as the Additional Member System combining majoritarian and proportional elements) (Norris, 1997).

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of electoral systems, for proponents of the majoritarian system, the most crucial measure is government effectiveness. For

advocates, the first-past-the-post system in parliamentary form creates the traditional Westminster model with the dual virtues of a strong yet responsive party government. Cohesive parties with a majority of parliamentary seats are capable of executing their manifesto without the need to engage in post-election negotiations with coalition members. The election result is decisive for the outcome. The cabinet can pass any legislation it deems necessary at any point during its term of office. In a competitive two-party system, a small swing in the popular vote is sufficient to bring the opposition into office. Governments are afforded sufficient autonomy to implement unpopular policies; if necessary, the voters can render a clear judgment on their policy record (Blais and Massicotte, 1996).

Supporters view the manner in which the system penalizes minor parties as a distinctive feature. It prevents fringe organizations on the extreme right or left from gaining representative legitimacy. The advocates of proportional systems argue that other considerations are more substantial, including the fairness of the result for minor parties, the need for checks on party power, and the representation of minority social groups. For critics of plurality systems, the normative case for reform is traditionally based on the disadvantage faced by minor parties who gain a substantial proportion of the vote (Norris, 1997).

The proportionality of election outcomes measures the degree to which the parties' percentage of seats resembles their share of votes. Previous research has found this to be substantially greater under PR than under the majoritarian system. One of the most recognized theories in electoral studies is Duverger's argument that the rules of elections dictate how many parties can survive; specifically, he claimed that plurality voting tends to create a two-party system, while proportional systems naturally lead to a multi-party environment (Duverger, 1954). To obtain a more accurate picture of this, Laakso and Taagepera introduced a metric known as the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP), which does not merely count the parties but weights them based on their actual size and influence. Using this measurement, Lijphart found clear evidence for these trends, noting that the ENPP typically stands at 2.0 in plurality systems, rises to 2.8 in majority systems, and reaches 3.6 in proportional systems (Norris, 1997). These figures demonstrate that proportional representation systems accommodate nearly twice as many effective parties as plurality systems, empirically confirming that electoral rules systematically shape party system fragmentation.

The classic argument for majoritarian systems is that they generally tend to produce stable and accountable single-party governments such that the electoral outcome is decisive. In comparison, PR is closely associated with coalition cabinets unless one party wins a majority of votes. In countries with PR and fragmented party systems, such as Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, governments tend to be coalitions. Majoritarian electoral systems can also result in coalition governments, as occurred in Britain between the wars. Furthermore, PR systems may also produce single-party governments, as evidenced by long periods of dominance by the Austrian Socialists, the Norwegian Labour Party, and the Swedish Social Democrats. The pattern of government formation is consequently more complicated than any linear relationship (Norris, 1997).

The prevailing assumption from previous research is that turnout tends to be higher in proportional systems. The reasons are that, as a fairer system with no wasted votes, citizens may be more inclined to participate. PR also increases the number of parties and the alternatives available to voters. Furthermore, PR makes elections more competitive, thus parties have a greater incentive to maximize their support in seats. One important distinctive feature of proportional systems is the claim that they are more likely to produce a parliament that reflects the voters' composition (Norris, 1995). District magnitude is considered crucial in this regard.

The primary reason is that parties may have an incentive to produce a balanced ticket to maximize their support when they must present a party list. In contrast, there is no such incentive when candidates are selected for single-member districts. Moreover, measures for the reservation of seats within party recruitment can be implemented more easily in this system (Norris, 1997).

The choice between single- and multi-member districts involves competing values, particularly the advantage of having a more representative and responsive legislature. The primary debate concerns the virtues and drawbacks of single- and multi-member districts. That debate coincides, to some extent, with the one over plurality and PR systems, as the latter entail multi-member districts (MMDs) and the former usually employ single-member districts (SMDs). Supporters of single-member districts claim that SMDs provide citizens with a stronger relationship with their representatives and maximize accountability, as district representatives can be held responsible for protecting constituency interests. That responsibility is diluted among representatives in multi-member districts. Representatives must work in a smaller district, facilitating contact with constituents (Blais, 1996).

Single-member districts have at least one crucial disadvantage. They must be redrawn periodically to maintain populations of relatively equal size. This may result in artificial units of no specific relevance to voters and raises all issues associated with designing and redrawing districts (Blais et al., 2001). Multi-member districts need not be of identical size. They may be made to correspond to sociological or administrative boundaries and are hence more congruent for voters (Niemi, Powell, and Bicknell, 1986; Blais, 1996). Their boundaries can remain intact, even if their population increases or decreases, as it is possible to simply modify the number of members to be elected within the district.

The benefit of multi-member districts is that they ensure better representation of groups, especially minority ones. There is substantial evidence that women tend to be better represented in multi-member districts, as parties strive for demographic balance.

How voters are allowed to express their preferences depends on the type of electoral formula. Consequently, the debate over voting methods takes distinctive forms in plurality, majority, and PR systems. Before reviewing these debates, it appears that the more information the ballot reveals about voters' choices, the more accurate the representation of preferences is likely to be. Therefore, a system that allows citizens to express a range of preferences is arguably superior to one that does not. At the same time, however, this type of system may be less straightforward for the electorate, and

there can be a trade-off between simplicity and the amount of information that voters are asked to provide (Lijphart, 1994).

There are different possibilities: the electorate may be requested to rank-order the candidates or vote for as many candidates as they approve. The latter method, approval voting, has been advocated by Brams and Fishburn (1982). There are two main reasons for supporting approval voting. First, it affords the electorate greater flexibility in expressing their preferences; citizens are not compelled to select only one candidate. Consequently, it yields a more accurate measure of preferences without undue complexity. Second, it ensures the candidate with the broadest support is elected. It makes it impossible, particularly, for an extremist to win when there are two moderate candidates, as can occur in a standard plurality election (Blais, 1996).

The principal objection to approval voting is that it can increase the number of parties and reduce the likelihood of a one-party majority government. Strategic voting can also occur under approval voting (Niemi, 1984). The incentive for voters not to support weak candidates is not as strong. They will vote for both their preferred weak candidates and their second preference. Thus, more parties are likely to receive votes and seats, and a one-party majority government is likely to be less frequent.

The fundamental principle of proportional representation is that seats must be allocated among parties according to their vote shares. This assumes that people vote for parties or lists of candidates. The limitation of closed-list PR is that the electorate cannot express preferences among candidates. Critics claim that this is a significant shortcoming. Proponents respond that it is preferences among parties that matter. It is possible, however, to permit citizens to express their preferences about candidates in a PR system, via either panachage or preferential voting in a list system or the single transferable vote (Blais, 1996).

The single transferable vote allows citizens to rank-order candidates and consequently offers the most freedom to express their preferences. It is a more complicated procedure, but it provides richer information about voters' choices. It has two drawbacks. First, it can be implemented only if there are relatively few candidates to be elected in each district. Otherwise, there would be too many candidates to be rank-ordered by the electorate. However, small districts entail a lower degree of proportionality in party representation. Second, it induces candidates of the same party to compete against each other, hindering party cohesion (Katz, 1996). The single transferable vote is attractive for those who are willing to accept only a modest degree of proportionality and comparatively less cohesive parties. The alternative approach is to maintain the list system while allowing citizens to indicate their preferences about candidates via panachage or preferential voting. This is a simpler system, and it can be used in large districts, thus ensuring a high degree of proportionality in party representation.

Due to these competing values, it is impossible to represent any electoral system as inherently superior to the others. As Katz (1997) has argued, the selection of electoral institutions depends on one's conception of democracy. This is one reason why mixed systems have emerged as the most popular currently.

Electoral Systems and their Impact on Development:

Economic development enhances the power resources of citizens relative to leaders. However, this shift does not lead to more democratic institutions until citizens are capable of overcoming their collective action dilemma. In contrast to other components of democracy, elections provide focal points for collective action. They afford citizens clear opportunities to hold leaders accountable. The combination of these two factors, a shift in power resources and the focal function of elections, explains why development is robustly associated with electoral contestation; however, the association is less certain with other democratic institutions (Knutsen et al., 2019).

Economic development favors the electoral dimension of democracy while having ambiguous outcomes on other dimensions.

Distinguishing between actors, citizens and leaders, reveals that the capacities of both citizens and leaders have developed dramatically over recent centuries. It has been found that citizens of a polity are more likely to prefer a democratic regime than its leaders. Leaders may derive rents from controlling office, including power and status, all of which may incline them to maintain their positions even in the face of popular opposition. By contrast, surveys of the mass public generally demonstrate robust support for democracy, especially when contrasted with other feasible alternatives (Norris, 2011).

Lijphart (1999) observed that nations with PR systems generally tend to have lower levels of unemployment, marginally smaller fiscal deficits, and lower economic growth (Taagepera and Qvortrup, 2011). However, the distinction from majoritarian systems was not statistically significant. This area of research became prominent in the early 1990s, when numerous scholars observed that PR systems were marginally more likely to have larger deficits, at least statistically (Alesina and Perotti, 1995; Taagepera and Qvortrup, 2011).

Considerations regarding the policy outcomes of electoral systems began earlier than Lijphart. Indeed, concern about the policy implications of the introduction of PR dates back to at least the beginning of the twentieth century, when reformers began to campaign for the introduction of PR. At that time, as often assumed, majoritarian systems were considered more likely to produce stable governments and consequently superior macroeconomic performance (Taagepera and Qvortrup, 2011).

Citing the examples of the United Kingdom and the United States, the late Samuel Beer (1998) argued that majoritarian systems were preferable because representative government must not only represent but also govern. However, as examples from the United States Congress have conclusively demonstrated, gridlock and pork-barrel politics are not features that exclusively characterize polities with PR systems (Taagepera and Qvortrup, 2011).

Economic development increases the relative power resources of citizens vis-à-vis leaders. A wealthier, more educated, more urbanized, and more connected citizen is more influential (Knutsen et al., 2019). Although development may also enhance the power resources of leaders, leaders in developing countries already control substantial

resources, particularly in autocratic states. Accordingly, economic development has a differential effect on the power resources of citizens and leaders, with citizens enhancing their relative position as a society develops. However, obtaining greater power resources is insufficient, by itself, to ensure a democratic outcome. No citizen can successfully challenge an incumbent leader alone, regardless of how resourceful they are. For citizens to affect the character of national institutions, they must overcome their collective action dilemma (Medina, 2007).

Otherwise, leaders are likely to prevail, maintaining power for themselves. A critical feature distinguishing electoral institutions from others is the role that elections play as a focal point for citizen action, mitigating collective action problems that constrain popular mobilization. This safeguards against democratic backsliding, helping to ensure that electoral institutions are respected.

Democracy is a concept encompassing various dimensions such as electoral contestation, constitutionalism, participation, deliberation, and political equality. These dimensions are positively, but not perfectly, correlated. Nations scoring high on one dimension may score low, or moderately, on another. Examples include early nineteenth-century Britain and Apartheid South Africa, which scored relatively high on contestation but low on participation. It is plausible that economic development impacts some dimensions of democracy more strongly than others and that it may have no impact on certain dimensions (Coppedge et al., 2017).

Brunetti's (1997) survey reviews 17 papers examining the relationship between democracy and economic growth. He finds that nine reported no relationship, four reported a positive relationship, and four reported a negative one. Similar ambiguous effects are reported by Borner et al. (1995).

Barro (1997) finds that the democracy-growth relationship is nonlinear and that a quadratic term captures a positive relationship at low levels of the democracy index and a negative association at higher levels. He concludes that the rule of law performs better than other variables measuring the quality of political institutions in his growth regressions. Barro (1997) also found that the effects of democracy tend to disappear once other variables, including human capital and investment rates, are included in the equations (Olivia and Rivera-Batiz, 2002).

Building on the fundamental differences between electoral systems, economists have examined how politicians respond to different incentives based on how they are elected. Specifically, candidates often choose between two strategies: advocating for policies that benefit the general public or focusing on benefits for specific subgroups of voters.

A major conclusion from these economic models is that politicians in plurality systems tend to prioritize "targetable" benefits for specific groups over broad public goods (Lizzeri and Persico, 2001; Funk and Gathmann, 2013). This pattern appears to be consistent whether examining the specific voting rules or the number of districts involved (Persson and Tabellini, 2003). Under majority rules, candidates are highly motivated to direct spending toward the specific groups of citizens needed to secure a majority; any votes beyond that threshold are essentially considered unnecessary and

"wasted." Under proportional rules, the incentive shifts; candidates value every vote because each one directly increases the party's overall share of seats in the legislature.

In theory, how these electoral pressures influence total government spending is not entirely straightforward. First, public spending may fluctuate in proportional systems depending on whether voters prefer targeted benefits or broad public goods (Lizzeri and Persico, 2001).

If the median voter prioritizes localized benefits, higher overall spending under proportional representation may result. Furthermore, while competition is generally expected to constrain wasteful spending, it varies by system. Competition is often more intense in "swing" districts where the stakes are high, but it may be less vigorous in "safe" districts (Persson and Tabellini, 2003). Consequently, how proportional representation affects the total budget remains an unresolved empirical question.

Most economic models treat the structure of a legislature as fixed, but political scientists have long demonstrated that changing the rules changes the actors. Specifically, transitioning to proportional representation tends to increase political fragmentation (Duverger, 1954; Lijphart, 1994), enhance the presence of left-wing parties, and increase voter turnout (Lijphart, 1997). These shifts can impact the economy in several ways:

- Higher Turnout: This can shift the median voter of the electorate, potentially altering the demand for government services.
- Wider Targeting: In proportional systems, parties may appeal to groups that would otherwise be neglected in a two-party system (Lizzeri and Persico, 2005).
- Left-Wing Influence: If left-leaning voters generally favour more extensive government programs, their increased representation could increase spending.

Whether the system is defined by its specific voting rules (Lizzeri and Persico, 2001) or by the number of districts involved (Persson and Tabellini, 2003), the incentives remain clear. Under majority rules, candidates concentrate their resources on the specific voters needed to win, essentially disregarding additional votes once they reach that threshold. In contrast, under proportional rules, every vote matters because each one directly affects the party's total seat count (Funk and Gathmann, 2013).

Electoral Institutions and Women's Representation:

There is a growing body of research suggesting that placing women in local leadership roles significantly affects either the total amount of government spending, how those funds are distributed, or both (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Similar policy shifts are observed when the overall percentage of women in local legislative bodies increases. At the national level, emerging studies indicate that female lawmakers introduce distinct policy priorities; for instance, in the French Parliament, women are more likely than men to propose amendments specifically addressing women's issues (Lippmann, 2019). The presence of female representation alone can shift which policy problems receive the most attention within a national legislature (Okuyama and Sudo, 2022).

Research has explored these dynamics in various settings. Pande (2003) examined how reserved political seats in India influence the relationship between a lawmaker's identity

and their policy choices, while Besley and Case (2003) reviewed how different institutional structures across U.S. states lead to varied policy outcomes. While the American experience offers substantial data, cross-national comparisons provide broader insight into how electoral systems influence the relationship between women's representation and actual policy outcomes (Okuyama and Sudo, 2022).

In their study, Okuyama and Sudo (2022) found that over the past fifty years, a higher percentage of women in parliament is associated with improved scores on the World Bank's "Women, Business, and the Law" index, which tracks regulations affecting women's economic opportunities. Notably, they observed that this positive trend is driven primarily by countries using proportional representation, rather than those with plurality or majority systems.

The researchers identify Japan as an ideal case study because it enables a comparison of different electoral rules within the same country, while holding cultural and institutional factors constant. This within-country approach is valuable because it circumvents the statistical challenges inherent in cross-national comparisons. Furthermore, since Japan has not yet implemented a gender quota system, it provides a unique opportunity to observe how electoral rules alone influence gender balance and legislative outcomes without other policy interventions confounding the results.

II. Conclusion

Electoral institutions constitute far more than neutral mechanisms for aggregating votes, they are fundamental determinants of democratic outcomes that systematically shape the character of political competition, the nature of policy outputs, and the inclusivity of governance. This paper has demonstrated through comparative analysis that the architectural choices embedded in electoral system design generate cascading consequences across multiple dimensions of democratic performance.

The relationship between voting rules and party systems reveals how institutional frameworks actively structure political competition rather than merely reflecting pre-existing social divisions. Duverger's foundational insight that plurality systems consolidate toward two-party configurations while proportional representation fosters multi-party diversity finds robust empirical confirmation through the effective number of parliamentary parties metric. Proportional systems accommodate nearly twice as many effective parties as plurality systems, demonstrating that electoral rules fundamentally shape the organizational forms through which citizens' political preferences find expression. The fragmentation or consolidation of party systems, which subsequently influences government formation patterns, coalition dynamics, and the stability-responsiveness trade-off characterises different democratic arrangements.

These distinct party system configurations, in turn, generate systematically different fiscal policy orientations. The incentive structures created by electoral rules shape how politicians pursue electoral success, with profound implications for public spending patterns. In plurality systems, where votes beyond the majority threshold are effectively wasted, candidates prioritize targeted benefits for pivotal constituencies whose support determines electoral outcomes. Proportional representation fundamentally alters these

calculations by making every vote consequential for seat allocation, encouraging parties to advocate for broad-based public goods that appeal across wider constituencies. This divergence in political incentives translates into observable differences in government spending composition, with plurality systems demonstrating greater emphasis on geographically concentrated distributive benefits while proportional systems show higher provision of universal public goods. The fiscal consequences of electoral system choice thus extend well beyond aggregate spending levels to encompass the fundamental character of state-society relationships and the distributive patterns that shape citizens' lived experiences of government.

Perhaps nowhere are the consequences of electoral system design more evident than in patterns of political representation, particularly regarding gender equity in legislative bodies. Multi-member districts characteristic of proportional representation systems create incentives for parties to present demographically balanced candidate lists, while single-member districts typical of plurality systems generate no comparable pressure for descriptive representation.

This structural difference produces substantial variation in women's legislative presence across electoral systems, with proportional representation consistently associated with higher female representation. Critically, this representational advantage carries policy consequences beyond symbolic inclusion.

Female legislators introduce distinct priorities that shift legislative attention toward previously marginalized issues, alter spending priorities in specific policy domains, and expand the range of concerns that receive serious consideration within national legislatures. The relationship between electoral rules and women's representation thus illustrates how institutional design choices mediate the translation of social diversity into political voice.

These interconnected findings reveal that electoral systems present fundamental trade-offs between competing democratic values rather than offering clearly superior or inferior arrangements. Plurality systems provide decisiveness, clear lines of accountability, and strong constituency-representative linkages that facilitate citizens' ability to identify responsible parties and sanction poor performance.

Proportional representation offers fairness in translating votes to seats, enhanced descriptive representation, and incentives for programmatic rather than particularistic politics. As Katz argues, the selection of electoral institutions ultimately depends on one's conception of democracy itself, whether prioritizing governmental effectiveness and accountability or emphasizing inclusive representation and proportional fairness. Neither approach fully resolves the tensions inherent in representative democracy; rather, they navigate these tensions differently, privileging certain democratic values while accepting limitations in others.

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