

Democratic + Electoral Systems

Let the “Party” Begin

Democratic Systems

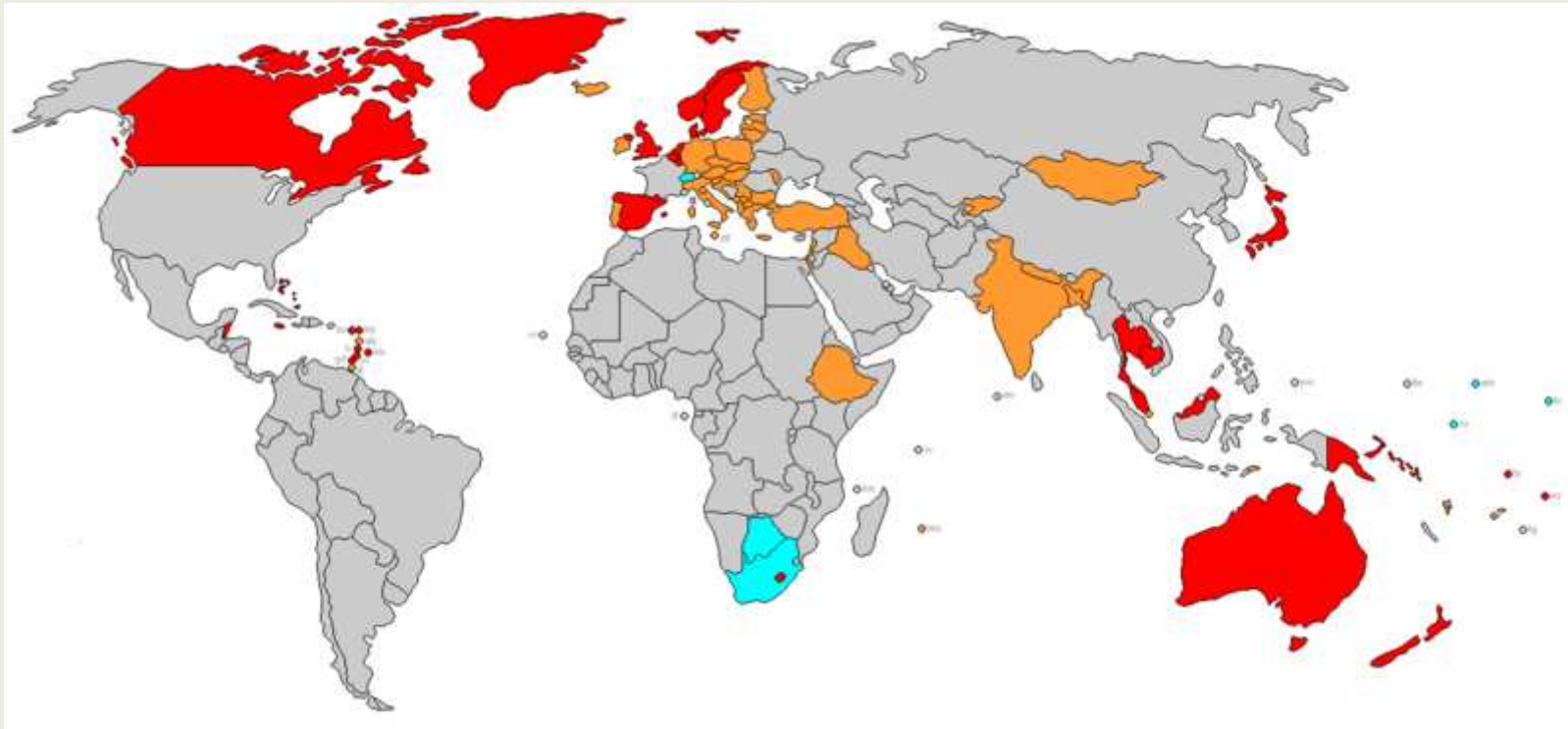
Democratic systems come in three basic types:

1. Parliamentary system
2. Presidential system
3. Semi-presidential system

Parliamentary Systems Features

- Majority of world's democracies have parliamentary systems
- Prime ministers and their cabinets come out of the legislature + legislature elects or removes prime minister from office
- Election of prime minister reflects balance of power among parties in legislature
- Prime ministers tenure in office as long as they can command support of their party

Constitutional Monarchies ■ and Constitutional Republics ■ + Systems where head of state and government in one office – elected by parliament ■



Benefits and Drawbacks of Parliamentary Systems

Benefits

- Prime minister has confidence s/he can “get things done” or legislation passed
- Prime ministers may be easily removed from office by votes of no confidence

Drawbacks

- Public does not directly select the prime minister and feels it has less control over executive and passing of legislation

Presidential Systems Features

- Represent a minority of world's democratic systems
- President directly elected by the public for fixed term + has control over cabinet and legislative process
- Position of head of state and head of government fused
- Strong separation of powers between executive and legislature as power of each based on electorates
- Conflict between legislature and president leads to more active judiciary = “legalization of politics”

Benefits and Drawbacks of Presidential Systems

Benefits

- President is elected directly and can draw on broad national mandate to create and enact legislation

Drawbacks

- Presidency and legislature may be controlled by different parties leading to divided and deadlocked government
- Office negates power sharing and president not easily removed from office

Semi-presidential Systems

- Hybrid system becoming more widespread but less common than prime ministerial or presidential systems
- Term first used to describe France's "Fifth Republic" of post WWII period
- Power divided between prime minister subject to confidence of legislature + directly elected president
- Relative power of each office depends on country

Benefits and Drawbacks of Semi-presidential systems

Benefits

- Directly elected president and indirectly elected prime minister share power and responsibilities
- Creates both public mandate and office supported by coalition of parties

Drawbacks

- Conflict possible between prime minister and president over power and responsibilities

Russian musical chairs for president and prime minister

PRESIDENT



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN-FghgGIR8>

PRIME MINISTER



<http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/articles/bigphoto.shtml>

Democratic Systems Summary

PARLIAMENTARY

- Indirectly elected prime minister holds executive power as head of cabinet – formulates legislation and domestic/international policy
- Serves for unfixed term – may be removed by no confidence vote

PRESIDENTIAL

- Directly elected president holds executive power as head of state and government
- Directs cabinet, formulates legislation and international/domestic policy
- Serves for fixed term and cannot easily be removed from office

SEMI-PRESIDENTIAL

- Directly elected president and indirectly elected prime minister share power.
- President helps set policy while prime minister executes it.
- President manages foreign policy. Which office holds more power depends on country

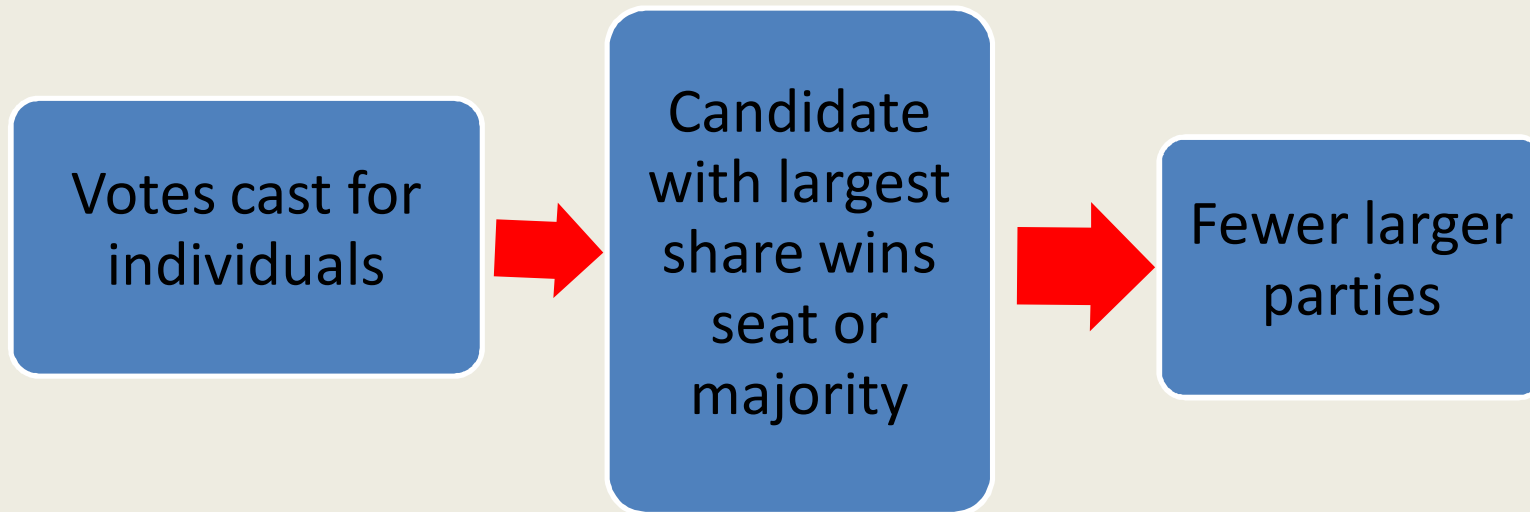
Electoral Systems Basics

- Liberal democracies based on free and fair elections where right of suffrage (voting) open to all citizens + votes counted fairly
- Beyond right to vote – question of electoral rules determining how votes are cast, counted and translated into seats in legislatures
- Variation of these systems make big difference in distribution of political power

Electoral Systems Features

- Democracies divide their populations into **constituencies** (geographical area that elected official represents) that are allocated a certain number of seats
- Votes are cast and counted in two broad forms of electoral system:
 1. Single-member districts (SMD)
 2. Proportional representation (PR)

Electoral System 1: Single Member Districts



SMD or “Plurality” Systems

- Minority of democratic countries around the world rely on plurality based systems
- Examples are US, UK, Canada, other former British colonies
- Candidate with largest share of votes – plurality – wins seat
- “Winner take all” system amplifies political power of some parties

Canada 2011 federal election – Toronto district

Preliminary Results

Toronto				
Party	Party standing	%	Popular vote	%
Animal Alliance/Environment Voters	0	0.0	1,005	0.1
CAP	0	0.0	169	0.0
CHP Canada	0	0.0	1,167	0.1
Communist	0	0.0	729	0.0
Conservative	27	64.3 ■	876,080	40.3 ■
Green Party	0	0.0	69,559	3.2
Independent	0	0.0	1,113	0.1
Liberal	7	16.7 ■	698,785	32.1 ■
Libertarian	0	0.0	1,928	0.1
Marxist-Leninist	0	0.0	1,905	0.1
NDP-New Democratic Party	8	19.1 ■	520,581	23.9 ■
No Affiliation	0	0.0	194	0.0
PC Party	0	0.0	2,079	0.1
Radical Marijuana	0	0.0	213	0.0
United Party	0	0.0	71	0.0
Total number of valid votes:			2,175,578	

Polls reporting: 10,333/10,336

Voter turnout: 2,175,578 of 3,607,579 registered electors (60.3%)

The number of registered electors shown in this table does not include electors who registered on election day.

Electoral System 2: Proportional Representation (multimember districts)

Votes cast
for parties



Seats
divided
among
parties on
basis of
share of vote



More
smaller
parties

PR or Multimember Districts (MMDs)

- Decrease in number of votes that are “wasted” as more than one legislative seat contested in each district
- Voters cast ballots for parties rather than for a candidate – percent of votes a party receives determines how many of districts seats a party gains
- Elections centered less on competitions between individuals – more on parties
- Party discipline + ideology more pronounced in PR systems

Electoral System 3: Mixed System

Votes cast
both for
parties +
individuals



Some seats
filled by
individual
races, some
by share of
vote



Mixed
outcome

Mixed Electoral System

- Combines plurality or majority SMD with PR
- Voters given 2 votes – 1 for candidate + 1 for party
- Percent of seats allocated for each electoral method differs between countries
- Germany for example has a 50/50 split between SMD/PR
- Japan is 60 % SMD + 40% PR