



PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION- POLITY PRELIMS AND GS II MAINS

Q. Proportional Representation offers the alternative to the curdled First Past the Post System (FPTP) in India and holds promise for making India's electoral system more inclusive and representative. Discuss (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Is it time for proportional representation? | Explained*

What's in the news?

- The results of the Lok Sabha elections were declared on June 4.
- The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has won 293 seats with a 43.3% vote share while the Opposition bloc INDIA has secured 234 seats with a 41.6% vote share.
- Other regional parties and independents received about 15% of the votes but only won 16 seats in total.
- As a result, many experts are now advocating for India to switch to a proportional representation system.

Proportional Representation:

- Proportional Representation (PR) is an electoral system where **parties gain seats in proportion to the number of votes cast for them.**
- Unlike the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins, PR ensures that **political representation is more closely aligned with the overall vote share of each party.**

Countries Following Proportional Representation:

- **Presidential Democracies** - Brazil, Argentina
- **Parliamentary Democracies** - South Africa, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain
- **Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR)** - Germany, New Zealand

Proportional Representation in India:

1. Rajya Sabha (Council of States):

- Members are elected by the elected members of State Legislative Assemblies using the **Single Transferable Vote (STV) system.**
- This ensures that the composition of the Rajya Sabha more accurately reflects the political diversity of the state legislatures.

2. State Legislative Councils:

- Some states have legislative councils (Vidhan Parishad) whose members are also elected through the **STV system**, allowing for a proportionate reflection of the political landscape within the state.



Significance of Proportional Representation Systems:

1. Ensures Fair Representation of Minority Groups:

- It provides better opportunities for minority and smaller political groups to gain representation in the legislature, ensuring a more inclusive political landscape.

2. Reduces Wasted Votes:

- Since seats are allocated in proportion to the number of votes received, most votes contribute to the election of representatives, leading to fewer wasted votes and greater voter satisfaction.

3. Encourages Coalition Governments:

- It often necessitates coalition governments, promoting broader consensus and more balanced policymaking as multiple parties must work together to form a government.

4. Reflects Diverse Electorate:

- It ensures the composition of the legislature more accurately reflects the diverse preferences of the electorate, leading to policies that address a wider range of interests and concerns.

5. Higher Voter Turnout:

- Knowing that their vote is more likely to count, voters may be more motivated to participate in elections, potentially increasing voter turnout.

6. Discourages Gerrymandering:

- Since proportional representation systems do not rely on single-member districts, the incentive for gerrymandering - manipulating electoral district boundaries for political gain is reduced.

7. Encourages Political Participation:

- It can encourage greater political engagement and participation from smaller parties and independent candidates, fostering a more dynamic political environment.

Concerns of Proportional Representation Systems:

1. Can Lead to Political Instability:

- Proportional Representation systems can result in fragmented legislatures with many parties, making it challenging to form stable and cohesive governments. Coalition governments can be unstable and prone to frequent changes and disagreements.

2. May Weak the Link Between Representatives and Constituents:

- In Proportional Representation Presidential systems, especially those with large multi-member districts, the direct connection between representatives and their constituents can be weakened, reducing accountability.



3. Can Result in the Proliferation of Small Parties:

- It often lead to a greater number of small parties in the legislature, some with narrow or extreme agendas, complicating governance and legislative processes.

4. Complexity in Voting and Counting:

- It can be more complex for voters to understand and for officials to administer, leading to longer times to finalise election results and potential voter confusion.

5. Difficulty in Forming Majority Governments:

- It is less likely for a single party to win an outright majority in PR systems, making it harder to form strong, decisive governments. Coalitions of multiple parties are often required and can be fragile.

6. Potential for Extremist Parties to Gain Influence:

- Since even small parties can gain seats more easily, there is a risk that extremist parties with a small but dedicated base of support can gain representation and influence in the legislature.

7. Increased Power of Party Leadership:

- In some forms of Proportional Representation systems, especially closed-list systems, party leaders have significant control over candidate selection and their order on party lists, concentrating power within party leadership.

8. Complicated Coalition Negotiations:

- Forming coalitions often involves prolonged negotiations among various parties, delaying the formation of a government and policy implementation, and creating fragile coalitions vulnerable to breakdowns.

Challenges and Criticisms of Proportional Representation Systems:

1. Regionalism and Fragmentation of Politics:

- It can exacerbate regionalism and the fragmentation of politics.
- By enabling the representation of a large number of smaller parties, PR systems can lead to highly fragmented legislatures, complicating the formation of stable governments.

2. Complexity in Coalition-building:

- It often result in coalition governments. While coalitions can be more inclusive, they are also more complex to form and maintain.
- Coalition-building requires continuous negotiation and compromise, which can slow down decision-making and governance.

3. Manipulation of Party Lists:

- In closed-list PR systems, party leaders have substantial control over the order of candidates on the party list.



- This can lead to favouritism and manipulation, where candidates loyal to party leaders are favoured over those with broader public support, potentially undermining democratic principles.

Potential Future Developments in Proportional Representation in India:

1. Broader Adoption Across Different Levels of Government:

- Expanding the use of PR from local bodies and upper houses to potentially include state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha to enhance representativeness at all levels of government.

2. Integration with Digital Voting Systems:

- Leveraging technology to streamline the PR voting process, making it more accessible and efficient for voters and electoral authorities.

3. Educational Campaigns on Proportional Representation:

- Conducting public awareness campaigns to educate voters on the mechanics and benefits of PR, ensuring informed participation in the electoral process.

4. Pilot Programs and Gradual Implementation:

- Initiating pilot programs in select states or constituencies to test and refine the PR system before broader implementation.

Proportional Representation holds promise for making India's electoral system more inclusive and representative. While challenges exist, such as potential political instability and complexity in coalition-building, thoughtful reforms and gradual implementation can mitigate these issues. By ensuring fairer representation of diverse political views, PR can strengthen India's democratic foundations, fostering a more equitable political landscape. The future of PR in India depends on careful consideration of its benefits and challenges, continuous refinement, and commitment to democratic principles.

Go back to basics:

First Past the Post (FPTP) System:

- The FPTP system, also known as the **simple majority voting system**, is an electoral method where the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins the election.
- This system is widely used in countries like the **United Kingdom, Canada, and India** for legislative elections.

Working:

- **Single-Member Districts** - Each constituency elects one representative.
- **Plurality Wins** - The candidate who receives the highest number of votes wins, regardless of whether they achieve an absolute majority (more than 50% of the votes).



Advantages:

1. Simplicity:

- Easy for voters to understand and participate in.
- Straightforward counting process

2. Strong and Stable Governments:

- Often produces a clear winner, which can lead to strong and stable governments.
- Under this system, the ruling party/coalition can enjoy a majority in the Lok Sabha/Legislative assembly without obtaining majority of the votes (more than 50%) across constituencies. This increases the stability of the government.

3. Direct Representation:

- Provides direct representation of constituencies, ensuring that each geographic area has a dedicated representative.

4. Accountability:

- Representatives are directly accountable to their constituents, as they can be easily voted out in the next election if they do not perform well.

Proportional Representation (PR):

- PR is an electoral system designed to allocate seats in the legislature in proportion to the number of votes each party receives.
 - This system contrasts with the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins.
- PR aims to create a **more accurate reflection of the voters preferences across the entire electorate.**

Working:

- **Party Lists** - Voters typically cast their vote for a party rather than an individual candidate.
 - The party then allocates seats to candidates from their list based on the proportion of votes received.
- **Multi-Member Districts** - Each district elects multiple representatives, which allows for proportional allocation.
- **Thresholds** - Often, a minimum percentage of votes (threshold) is required for a party to gain representation, to prevent excessive fragmentation.

Types of Proportional Representation:

- **List PR** - Voters choose a party, and parties receive seats based on their share of the vote. Seats are filled by candidates from the party's list.



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- **Mixed-Member PR** - Combines elements of FPTP and PR. Voters cast two votes: one for a candidate and one for a party.
 - Some seats are filled by individual candidates, while others are allocated to parties based on their share of the vote.
- **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** - Voters rank candidates in order of preference.
 - Seats are allocated based on the proportion of votes each candidate receives, with surplus votes and eliminated candidates' votes transferred according to voter preferences.

