Proportional Representation (PR): Notes for UPSC Polity

Proportional representation is a system used to elect a country's government in which parties gain seats in proportion to the number of votes cast for them.

This concept is important with regards to the Polity section of the IAS Exams

How does Proportional Representation work?

Proportional Representation (PR) characterizes electoral systems in which divisions in an electorate are reflected proportionately in the elected body. If n% of the electorate support a particular political party as their favorite, then roughly n% of seats will be won by that party. The essence of such systems is that all votes contribute to the result—not just a plurality, or a bare majority.

What are the systems employed in PR?

The most widely used families of PR electoral systems are party-list PR, the single transferable vote (STV), and mixed-member proportional representation (MMP).

With party list PR, political parties define candidate lists and voters vote for a list. The relative vote for each list determines how many candidates from each list are actually elected. Lists can be "closed" or "open"; open lists allow voters to indicate individual candidate preferences and vote for independent candidates. Voting districts can be small (as few as three seats in some districts in Chile or Ireland) or as large as a province or an entire nation.

The single transferable vote uses multiple-member districts, with voters casting only one vote each but ranking individual candidates in order of preference (by providing back-up preferences). During the count, as candidates are elected or eliminated, surplus or discarded votes that would otherwise be wasted are transferred to other candidates according to the preferences, forming consensus groups that elect surviving candidates. STV enables voters to vote across party lines, to choose the most preferred of a party's candidates and vote for independent candidates, knowing that if the candidate is not elected his/her vote will likely not be wasted if the voter marks back-up preferences on the ballot.

Mixed member proportional representation (MMP), also called the additional member system (AMS), is a two-tier mixed electoral system combining local non-proportional

plurality/majoritarian elections and a compensatory regional or national party list PR election. Voters typically have two votes, one for their single-member district and one for the party list, the party list vote determining the balance of the parties in the elected body.

Relevant Questions regarding Proportional Representation

How is Proportional Representation practiced in India?

The members of the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly, rather than by the citizens at large like how it is for the Lok Sabha. Rajya Sabha members are elected by each state Vidhan Sabha using the single transferable vote system. Unlike most federal systems, the number of members returned by each state is roughly in proportion to their population

Find out more about the Rajya Sabha ,by visiting the linked article

Is Proportional Representation fair?

Proportional representation) characterizes electoral systems in which divisions in an electorate are reflected proportionately in the elected body. If n% of the electorate support a particular political party as their favorite, then roughly n% of seats will be won by that party. So it is rather subjective to call it fair as the electorates can always be swayed in favor of liking a political party by any means necessary

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