

# GLOSSARY

**Adjustment seats** – Second-tier seats in Mixed Member Proportional electoral systems (e.g., in Germany) or List Proportional Representation electoral systems (e.g., in Sweden). They are awarded to parties on the basis of their proportion of the national (or regional) vote in such a way as to adjust, or compensate, for seat bonuses and deficits in the first-tier races. Also called compensatory seats.

**Alternative Vote (AV)** – A majority electoral system (e.g., Australia), using single-member districts, an ordinal ballot, and, in Australia’s case, required preferential voting. During the count, each ballot is treated as a single transferable vote; if no candidate receives a majority of the first preferences, preferences are transferred from the candidates with the least votes until a majority has been achieved.

**Ballot type** – The means by which electoral choices are presented to voters, as well as any rules about how those choices may be expressed. Ballots are normally categorical (also called exclusive) or ordinal (also called preferential).

**Cabinet** – Those members (usually elected) in a parliamentary system who comprise a collective executive by serving as ministers with specific areas of administrative and policy-making responsibility, called portfolios. The Cabinet must maintain the support of a majority of the legislature on key matters (see confidence). The party or parties that control the Cabinet form the government. Also called executive.

**Categorical ballot** – A ballot that requires voters to choose only one candidate and/or party. Also called exclusive ballot.

**Closed list** – In List Proportional Representation electoral systems, a type of ballot where voters choose a party list; voters are not allowed to change the order of candidates on the list.

**Coalition government** – A government in which two or more parties control the Cabinet, usually on the basis of a formal agreement about who will lead, how portfolios will be assigned, and what policies will be implemented.

**Compensatory mechanisms** – Various means by which an electoral system might allow political parties to take affirmative action or make other adjustments to promote segments of the population that have traditionally been underrepresented. One example is a “zippered” party list, which presents a gender-balanced slate of candidates to the electorate (first a woman, then a man, then a woman, and so on). Such a mechanism is possible in a multi-member district, but not in a single-member district, although other mechanisms might be applicable in both.

**Compensatory seats** – See adjustment seats.

**Confidence** – A parliamentary government remains in office only so long as it has the support of a majority of the legislature on key votes, known as questions or matters of confidence. A motion of non-confidence is a challenge for the government to prove it still has the support of the legislature; losing such a vote would require it to resign. A country’s constitution and its parliamentary conventions will determine which votes count as confidence questions, but in almost all countries, matters of supply – votes authorizing the expenditure of public funds – are considered to indicate confidence.

**Constituency** – One of several terms used interchangeably, such as electoral district, riding, and electorate, to refer to the basic unit of an electoral system. It refers to a geographic area, to the eligible voters who live in that area, and to the number of legislators that this group of voters elects. One of the most fundamental distinctions between electoral systems is their use of single-member and/or multi-member districts. Different countries may prefer one of these terms (e.g., constituency in the U.K., electorate in New Zealand), but other terms may also be used within the same country in different contexts. For example, Elections Ontario usually refers to electoral districts, but the Legislative Assembly of Ontario identifies MPPs by riding and provides funds for offices and staff in their constituencies. In Ontario, MPPs are most likely to refer to ridings or constituencies.

**Constituency seats** – In countries with mixed systems, the first-tier seats, elected in single-member districts, are sometimes called constituency seats to distinguish them from second-tier seats, elected from national or regional lists.

**D’Hondt formula** – series of divisors (1, 2, 3, 4, and so on) used to allocate seats to parties in proportional representation systems under the Highest Averages method.

**Demographic representation** – A principle of representative fairness that suggests the demographic characteristics of a society, such as age, gender, and ethno-cultural identities, should be reflected in the composition of the legislature.

**Disproportionality** – The discrepancy between a party’s vote share (the proportion of people voting for it) and its seat share (the proportion of the legislative seats it wins). One of the ways electoral systems are analyzed is by comparing the average amounts of disproportionality that they generate.

**Dissolution** – The formal dismissal of a parliament that must take place before an election can be held.

**Distribution of preferences** – See transfer of preferences.

**District magnitude** – The number of members elected in an electoral district. In First-Past-the-Post and majority systems, the district magnitude is always one. In proportional representation and mixed systems, the district magnitude is always greater than one.

**Districts** – See electoral districts.

**Double ballot** – In most mixed systems, a double ballot allows the voter to vote twice, usually once for a local representative and once for a political party.

**Double threshold** – In some countries, such as Germany and New Zealand, a party must obtain a specific level of support (a formal threshold) before qualifying for the distribution of any proportional seats. The threshold is defined as a specific percentage of votes or a specific number of constituency seats. In Germany and New Zealand, parties must satisfy one or the other requirement. A double threshold therefore gives parties two chances to qualify for proportional seats.

**Droop quota** – A quota calculated under the Largest Remainders method in proportional representation systems. In List Proportional Representation systems, the formula divides the vote total by the number of seats plus 1:  $v \div (s + 1)$ . The formula for the modified Droop quota, used in Ireland’s Single Transferable Vote system, makes the same calculation and then adds one vote to the result.  $\text{Quota} = (\text{Votes} \div [\text{Seats} + 1]) + 1$ .

**Effective threshold** – Not all electoral systems have a legal or formal threshold that parties must reach to qualify for seats, but for many systems it is possible to calculate the effective threshold: the level of support that in practice allows a party to win seats. In the 150-seat single-district parliament in the Netherlands, for example, the effective threshold is 0.67% of the total vote.

**Electoral districts** – Geographic areas into which a jurisdiction is divided for electoral purposes. Also called constituencies or ridings.

**Electoral formula** – The mathematical rules by which votes are turned into seats. Three basic rules are in use: the majority formula, the plurality formula, and proportional formulas.

**Electoral parties** – Parties that contest elections and attract votes but do not obtain enough support to win a seat, in contrast with parliamentary parties, which occupy seats in the legislature. The number of electoral parties is almost always larger than the number of parliamentary parties, and one way of comparing electoral systems is to look at how big this difference is.

**Electorate** – The primary term used in New Zealand to designate a riding, constituency, or electoral district. “Electorate” also refers to the voting public in general.

**Exclusive ballot** – See categorical ballot.

**Executive** – See Cabinet.

**False winner** – When a party gets more seats but fewer votes than another party and wins the election. Such a result is one possible outcome of disproportionality.

**First Past the Post (FPTP)** – A plurality electoral system, also known as Single-Member Plurality, in which voters choose one candidate in single-member districts using a categorical ballot. The candidate with the most votes (at least one more vote than any other candidate) wins the seat.

**Formal threshold** – The legal requirement that a party obtain a specific level of support, either a proportion of the vote or a number of constituency seats, to qualify for any distribution of proportional seats based on party vote.

**Free list** – In List Proportional Representation electoral systems, a party ballot that allows voters to choose from among different parties' lists and rank the candidates as they choose.

**Gatekeeping function** – The barriers that electoral systems put in the way of new and particularly very small political parties. On the one hand, this may prevent the proliferation of small parties and an overly fragmented party system; on the other, it may prevent the entry of new perspectives and voices into the legislature and government.

**Geographic representation** – The principle that voters have an identifiable representative who is associated with the community in which they live and responsible for representing its interests. Single-member districts are more likely to provide geographic representation than multi-member districts, but only when they do not become too large, in terms of either population or geographic size.

**Hare quota** – A quota calculated under the Largest Remainders method in proportional representation systems. The simplest quota, it results from dividing the number of votes by the number of seats:  $v \div s$ .

**Highest Averages method** – A method of allocating seats in proportional representation systems. A series of divisors is applied to the parties' vote totals. After each seat is awarded, the total for that party is divided again by the next divisor in the series. See d'Hondt formula and Sainte-Laguë formula.

**Imperiali quota** – A quota calculated under the Largest Remainders method in proportional representation systems. It results from dividing the number of votes by the number of seats plus 2:  $v \div (s + 2)$ .

**Informal ballots** – In Australia, the term for spoiled ballots: those that are marked in some way contrary to the rules and are therefore ineligible to be included in the count of any candidate or party. A large number of informal ballots may indicate that voters find the rules and procedures too complicated, or it may indicate a protest vote. In Australia, with compulsory voting and required preferential balloting, both are possible.

**Largest Remainders method** – A method of allocating seats in proportional representation systems. Different formulas are used to calculate a Hare, Droop, or Imperiali quota. Each party's vote total is divided by the quota, and candidates who reach the quota are elected. If seats remain to be distributed after the full-quota seats have been determined, they go in order to the parties with the largest numbers of votes left over – that is, the largest remainders.

**List Proportional Representation (List PR)** – A proportional representation electoral system employing multi-member districts and party list ballots. Lists can be open, closed, or free. Different methods and formulas are used to allocate seats to the parties in proportion to their vote shares.

**Majority formula** – An electoral formula that requires the winning candidate to receive more votes than all the other candidates combined – at least 50% plus one vote. It is a component of majority systems.

**Majority government** – A government in which the party that controls the Cabinet also commands a majority in the legislature. The term is usually applied to a single-party majority as opposed to a coalition government, which may also command the support of a majority in the legislature.

**Majority systems** – Citizens vote in single-member districts and the candidate who secures a majority of the vote wins the seat (majority formula); Alternative Vote and the Two-Round System are majority electoral systems.

**Mandate** – The basis on which a member is elected. In some Mixed Member Proportional systems, for example, the distinction is made between local mandates and proportional (or "at large") mandates.

**Manufactured majority** – A party that wins a majority of the seats but with less than a majority of the votes has a manufactured majority. In other words, a seat bonus creates the majority.

**Margin of victory** – The amount by which the winning candidate's or party's vote total exceeds the second-place candidate's or party's total.

**Minority government** – A government in which the party that controls the Cabinet commands less than a majority in the legislature. It may be a single-party minority or a minority coalition.

**Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system** – A mixed electoral system in which a proportion of the parliament is elected from single-member districts and the remainder from party lists in such a way that seat shares correspond to the parties' vote shares. Voters usually cast a double ballot, voting on one side for their local representative and on the other side for a political party.

**Mixed systems** – Electoral systems with two tiers of seats, each elected on a distinct basis: for example, one tier under Single-Member Plurality and another under proportional representation). This category includes Mixed Member Proportional, Parallel, and Additional-Member Systems.

**Modified Droop quota** – See Droop quota.

**Modified Sainte-Laguë formula** – See Sainte-Laguë formula.

**Multi-member district** – An electoral district with a district magnitude greater than one. Voters there elect more than one member, usually several. Multi-member districts are a basic component of proportional representation and mixed systems.

**Multi-party system** – A type of party system in which three or more parties are competitive – that is, they become parliamentary parties.

**National list** – A party list composed of candidates standing for election in a country-wide district. In many Mixed Member Proportional systems and some List Proportional Representation systems second tier seats are filled from parties' national lists.

**Non-monotonicity** – An increase in vote share that leads directly to a loss in seat share, or vice versa.

**Open list** – In a List Proportional Representation system, a party list that allows voters to express a preference for one or more of a party's candidates.

**Optional preferential voting** – In a system employing ordinal ballots, optional preferential voting allows voters to rank as many or as few preferences as they choose. See also required preferential voting.

**Ordinal ballot** – A ballot that allows or requires voters to rank candidates as their first preference, second preference, and so on. This type of ballot is used, among others, in the Alternative Vote system in Australia and the Single Transferable Vote system in Ireland. Also called preferential ballot.

**Overhang seat** – An extra seat added to a legislature in Mixed Member Proportional electoral systems when parties win more seats in the first tier than their total vote share entitles them to. Overhang seats are needed to ensure that no party loses a seat that has been won at the local level.

**Parallel systems** – Parallel electoral systems are mixed systems in which one tier or group of seats is elected on a plurality or majority formula and another tier is elected on a proportional basis. In these systems, in contrast to Mixed Member Proportional systems, the results in the first tier have no influence on the distribution of seats in the second tier – that is, there are no adjustment seats.

**Parliamentary government** – A type of constitution in which the Cabinet is responsible to the legislature, in contrast to the separation of powers that marks the presidential-congressional model of the United States.

**Parliamentary parties** – Parties that occupy seats in the legislature, in distinction from electoral parties, which win votes but not seats. The Green Party in Canada, for example, is an electoral party but has not been a parliamentary party. The Liberal Party has always been a parliamentary party.

**Party discipline** – Particularly in parliamentary systems, elected representatives are expected to vote the same way as the other members of their party, regardless of personal beliefs or the preferences of their constituents.

**Party list** – In List Proportional Representation systems with multi-member districts, the parties compile lists of candidates to be elected. These lists can be closed, open, or free.

**Party system** – The number and type of established parties. The party system is shaped by the electoral system. Two dominant types are the two-party system and the multi-party system.

**Party vote** – In mixed systems using a double ballot, the party vote enables voters to express a preference for a political party separately from their vote for a local candidate. In systems using only single-member districts, there is no separate party vote, and choosing a candidate on the ballot is also the means by which a party preference is expressed. In List Proportional Representation, the party-centred ballot produces a party vote and may or may not allow voters to state a preference among the party's candidates.

**Plurality formula** – An electoral formula requiring the winning candidate to receive more votes than any other candidate. It is a component of plurality systems.

**Plurality systems** – Electoral systems that rely on a plurality formula. Most common is the First Past the Post system, in which citizens vote in single-member districts and the candidate who secures a plurality of the vote (at least one more vote than any other candidate) wins the seat.

**Portfolio** – An area of administrative and policy-making responsibility – such as defence, finance, education, or labour – assigned to a member of the Cabinet, and sometimes equivalent to a ministry or department.

**Preferential ballot** – See ordinal ballot.

**Proportional formula** – Electoral formulas and systems in which seats are allocated to parties in proportion to the shares of votes that the parties receive.

**Proportional representation (PR) systems** – Electoral systems characterized by electoral formulas that attempt to achieve proportionality. The two main types are List Proportional Representation and Single Transferable Vote.

**Proportional seats** – Although this describes all seats in a proportional representation system, the term usually refers to the second tier of seats in a mixed system. These seats are elected on a proportional basis (in contrast to a non-proportional first tier of constituency seats) and may or may not also serve as adjustment seats.

**Proportionality** – A match between seat share (the product of an electoral system) and vote share (the direct expression of the electorate's preferences). Proportionality is commonly seen to be a principle of fairness.

**Quota** – The number of votes required to obtain a seat in a proportional representation system with multi-member districts. The quota for each election is derived from a formula that computes the number of votes cast and the number of seats to be elected. See Hare quota, Droop quota, and Imperiali quota.

**Regional lists** – In Mixed Member Proportional systems, regional lists may be used to allocate second-tier seats (in Germany).

**Representation by population** – The principle that each citizen's vote should carry the same weight, usually understood to mean that each representative should represent approximately the same number of constituents.

**Required preferential voting** – The requirement that voters mark a preference for every candidate on the ordinal ballot, and that these preferences constitute a proper numerical sequence, with no repeats or omissions. Required preferential voting is used in Australia's Alternative Vote system. See also optional preferential voting.

**Responsible government** – A fundamental principle of the parliamentary system requiring the Cabinet to maintain the confidence (the support of a majority) of the legislature.

**Riding** – See constituency.

**Sainte-Laguë formula** – A series of divisors (1, 3, 5, 7, and so on) used to allocate seats to parties in proportional representation systems under the Highest Averages method. The modified Sainte-Laguë formula used in some jurisdictions replaces 1 with 1.4.

**Seat bonus (deficit)** – A seat bonus is awarded by the electoral system when a party obtains a seat share that is larger than its vote share; a seat deficit is suffered when a party receives a seat share that is smaller than its vote share.

**Seat share** – The proportion of the seats in the legislature that a party holds.

**Second-tier seats** – Seats in a mixed system that are usually elected on a proportional basis and may serve as adjustment seats that compensate for disproportionality in the the first-tier seats, usually chosen by majority or under Single-Member Plurality. In a List-PR system, the second-tier may be a small group of seats allocated on the basis of national party lists also serving as adjustment seats vis-à-vis the first tier.

**Single-member districts** – Districts in which voters elect one member of the legislature, used in plurality and majority systems and for election of the first tier of seats in most mixed systems.

**Single-Member Plurality (SMP)** – See First Past the Post.

**Single Transferable Vote (STV) system** – A proportional representation electoral system that uses preferential ballots. Counting involves determining a quota, and if necessary, continuing with the **transfer of preferences** until all seats have been filled.

**Single transferable votes** – The counting of ordinal ballots in Alternative Vote (in Australia) and in Single Transferable Vote (in Ireland and Malta) treats voters' choices as single transferable votes. If the result is not determined on the basis of the first preferences on each ballot, ballots representing surplus votes or last-place finishers are reallocated on the basis of the second preferences, and so on.

**Strategic campaigning** – The practice of political parties focusing their election campaigns on specific districts (usually identified through polling and past voting patterns) in which they have a stronger chance of winning.

**Strategic voting** – Voting deliberately for a party that is not the voter's first preference, in order to achieve an objective other than electing the preferred party. In a plurality or majority system, a voter might vote for a less preferred party to help prevent an even less favoured party or candidate from winning the seat. In some proportional representation systems that have a formal threshold, adherents of one party might vote for another like-minded party that is a possible or likely coalition partner.

**Supply** – See confidence.

**Surplus votes** – Votes a candidate receives beyond the total necessary to win a seat. Surplus votes have a practical effect only in Single Transferable Vote systems, where votes for any candidate that exceed the quota in one count are reallocated on the basis of next preferences to other candidates; see transfer of preferences.

**Thresholds** – See double threshold, effective threshold, formal threshold.

**Tier** – A group of seats in the legislature elected on a different basis from other seats. In a mixed system, seats from single-member districts constitute the first tier, and a group of seats elected from national or regional party lists constitute the second tier. It is also possible, though, to have two (or more) tiers in a List Proportional Representation system, where one tier is elected in regional multi-member districts and the second tier consists of a

group of national party list seats serving as adjustment seats. Both Hungary (Mixed Member Proportional) and Austria (List PR) have three tiers (local, regional, and national).

**Transfer of preferences** – Part of the counting procedure when ordinal ballots are treated as single transferable votes. It involves reallocating votes for the last-place candidate (and surplus votes in some systems) among the remaining candidates according to the next preference marked on each ballot. In Alternative Vote, the first transfer takes place if no candidate has secured a majority in the first count, and the process continues until someone has acquired a majority of the ballots. In Single Transferable Vote, the transfer begins if not all the seats have been filled by candidates whose first-preference votes exceeded the quota, and it continues until all available seats have been filled in this manner, or until no more transfers can be made. Also called distribution of preferences.

**Transparency** – The degree of ease with which voters can understand not only the act of voting but also the calculation of the results.

**Two-party-preferred votes** – A way of measuring support for the two largest parties (or party groupings) under Alternative Vote.

**Two-party system** – A type of party system in which two parties are competitive – that is, they typically win enough seats to be the government or the official opposition.

**Two-Round System (TRS)** – A majority electoral system in which citizens vote in single-member districts using a categorical ballot. If no candidate secures a majority of votes (50% plus one vote), a second round of voting is held in which the number of candidates is reduced (ideally to two) and the candidate who finishes first in the second round is the winner.

**Volatility** – The tendency for parties to experience large swings in their level of support from one election to another. Also, the tendency of voters to switch their support from one party to another in successive elections. The latter may not be as obvious if there are offsetting movements of voters back and forth between the parties.

**Vote share** – A party's proportion of the overall votes cast in the election.

**Vote splitting** – The opportunity for voters to vote more than one way, as with a double ballot, where a vote for a local representative is separate from a vote for a political party. For political parties in multi-member districts (particularly in Single Transferable Vote systems), vote splitting involves the possibility that voters may divide their votes between two candidates of the same party, thereby decreasing the likelihood that either will be elected.

**Wasted votes** – Votes that do not find direct expression in election results – that is, they do not bring representation in the legislature. The term applies, for example, to all votes for non-winning candidates in plurality and majority systems.

**Winner-take-all** – Characteristic of any electoral district where only one party is able to win the seats. Whenever there is a district magnitude of one, only one candidate can “take all.”