

# What are Electoral Systems?

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The components of electoral systems  
and what they mean



# Objectives

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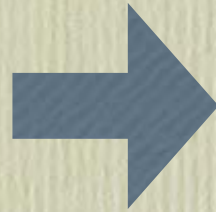
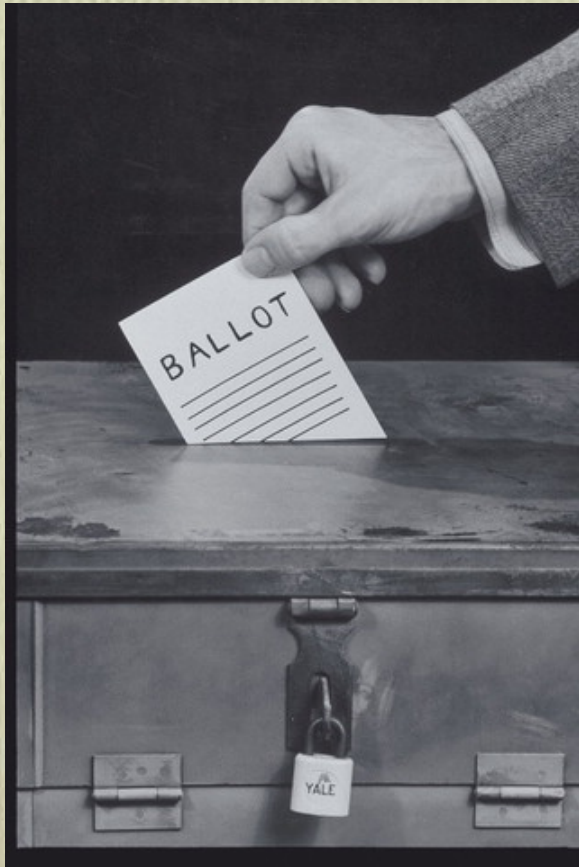
- To learn about components of electoral systems
- To see how connected these components are

# Elections & representative democracy

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- What is direct democracy?
  - Direct democracy: citizens exercise authority without going through representatives
- representative democracy – citizens choose representatives to exercise authority
  - Elections are an obvious instrument of representative democracy

# What are electoral systems?



# What are electoral systems?

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- An electoral system determines the rules by which votes are translated into seats.

# What are electoral systems?

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- Electoral systems are the product of principles and characteristics
- Principles – what matters
- Characteristics – facts; elements

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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<p><b>the “riding”</b> sometimes called “district” or “constituencies”</p>	<p><b>the structure of the ballot</b></p>
<p><b>the number of representatives in each riding</b> “District Magnitude”</p>	<p><b>determining who wins “Formula”</b></p>

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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<p><b>the riding</b> sometimes called “district” or “constituencies”</p>	

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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## •1. Constituencies

- The geographic area from which voters elect politicians
- Can be large (Nunavut) or small (St. Paul's)

## What accounts for the difference in size of electoral district?

- The size of the district is determined by principle of *representation by population*
  - One person, one vote, one value
- Our districts look unequal because they are roughly equal in population
- The trade off to have equal population is to unequal geographic size

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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# What are the components of an electoral system?

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- **2. Ballot Structure**

- What are ballots?

- The tool for citizens to express their preference

- What other ways are there to show preferences?

# Three kinds of ballots

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- Categorical
  - either/or choice **X**
  - easy to understand
  - simple to vote/intuitive

# Three kinds of ballots

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- Ordinal
  - ranking choice **1, 2, 3, etc.**
  - greater choice
  - more complex voting

# Three kinds of ballots

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- Mixed ballots
  - Ballots sometimes use some combination of categorical and/or ordinal

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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# What are the components of an electoral system?

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## • 3. District Magnitude

- The number of representatives from each district
  - Single member systems have one
  - Multi-member systems have more than one
- In most of the world's democracies citizens choose more than one member per district

# Characteristics of single and multi-member systems

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- Single member systems:
  - One representative per district
  - Clear lines of accountability
- Multi-member systems:
  - More than one representative per district
  - Multiple lines of accountability

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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# What are the components of an electoral system?

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- **4. Electoral Formula**
- The rules that determine who wins
  - Plurality: most number wins
    - First past the post
  - Majority: 50% plus one
    - Two round voting
    - Preferential voting

# What are the components of an electoral system?

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- **4. Electoral Formula**

- Proportional: percentage of votes = percentage of seats
- Mixed Formulas
  - Some combination of the above formulas

# Electoral Systems: Conclusion

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- Comprised of broad democratic principles
- and
- Specific elements related to design mechanics