ELECTORAL SYSTEMS BRIEFING PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet aims to provide a brief explanation of the major features, advantages and disadvantages of the basic types of electoral systems. In order to understand fully the effects of implementation of various electoral systems, it is useful firstly to establish some of the basic concepts of electoral systems design.

SOME CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The following are the most common criteria for assessing the effectiveness of an electoral system:

1 Accountability

Indicative factors for assessing how well an electoral system promotes accountability include responsiveness to public opinion, including the ability of the public to dismiss a government.

2 Representativeness

Does the electoral system produce governments that are broadly representative of the voters?

3 Fairness

Indicative factors for assessing performance against this criterion include participants believing that the election process is not systematically or in implementation biased against them, and hence they accept election results.

4 Equal rights for each voter

Indicative factors to be considered under this criterion include that each voter's vote has the same value in the election process.

5 Promotion of relatively effective and relatively accommodating government

Does the electoral system promote a sufficient stability in government that allows effective management of the state? Does the electoral system also promote sufficient consultation and compromise between political forces?

6 Development of relatively strong parties and relatively strong local representatives

Does the electoral system promote a balance between the cohesion of parties and the amount of control voters have over their representatives' actions.

7 The system provides accessibility through simplicity, and a relatively precise reflection of citizen's preferences

How well does the electoral system allow voters to express their choices precisely, in a manner that is simple enough for all voters to understand?

As can be seen from the above, some of these criteria have conflicting requirements.
SOME PRACTICAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEM DESIGN

Election systems are a trade off between various underlying principles – no system fulfills all principles completely. However, to concentrate on satisfying only one principle - for example accountability of the elected representatives to voters – will limit the effectiveness of the chosen system.

Which of the principles are more important needs to be determined by reference to each particular country’s environment. There is no a universal electoral system that fits all environments.

No election system is neutral – all have a specific political or social bias. Which bias is most acceptable can only be determined in relation to a specific country’s circumstances, needs and popular acceptance.

The major practical issues that would normally be considered when designing an electoral system are the following. An electoral system should, to a greater or lesser degree:

- Ensure a representative parliament;
- Not be overly complex, so that elections are meaningful and accessible to the average voter;
- Provide incentives for conciliation, cooperation and mutually beneficial action between political participants;
- Promote the public’s perception of the legitimacy of the parliament and the government;
- Assist in facilitating stable and efficient government;
- Promote the accountability of the government, and elected representatives, to the public;
- Encourage the growth of political parties that are inclusive of a broad range of societal groups;
- Assist in promoting a parliamentary opposition; and
- Be realistic with regard to a country’s financial, technical, and administrative capacities.

Reconciling Some Contradictions

Choosing or designing an appropriate electoral system is in some ways an exercise in reconciling conflicting requirements to the greatest degree possible. For example:

- Keeping the system simple, yet not being afraid to innovate and not underestimating the capacities of the voting population;
- Balancing the need for short term solutions against longer term stability considerations;
- Building on past electoral systems, without being restricted by their historic parameters; and
- Not underestimating the influence of electoral systems on society, yet recognising that electoral systems are not a solution for all socio-political problems.

Electoral Systems’ Effects

Electoral systems are not passive, neutral actors in the process of choosing representatives.
The type of electoral system used will have a significant effect on issues such as:

- Consensus or confrontation in the legislature and government;
- Links between the public and their elected representatives;
- The number of political parties;
- The internal structure of political parties; and
- The structure, sustainability, and functions of election administration bodies.

As well as considering the way in which an electoral system deals with the narrow issue of voter representation, the effects it has on other aspects of the social and political process must be taken into account.

CLASSIFICATION OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Electoral systems may be classified into three basic types:

1. **Majoritarian/Plurality Systems**
   - To be elected to office for an electoral area, a single candidate, or multiple candidates, must win the highest number of valid votes, or in some variants the majority of valid votes, in that electoral area. These systems include:
     - First Past the Post (FPTP)
     - Block Vote and Party Block Vote
     - Alternative Vote (AV)
     - Two Round

2. **Proportional Representation Systems (PR)**
   - Using multi-member electoral areas, the numbers of elected representatives for an electoral area are determined in accordance with each qualifying contesting party’s or candidate’s share of the valid votes cast in that area. These systems include:
     - List Proportional representation
     - Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)
     - Single Transferable Vote (STV)

3. **Semi-Proportional Systems**
   - These systems allow for some potential representation for parties or candidates that are not the highest vote winners in an electoral area, but do not intentionally provide for representation in proportion to each party’s or candidate’s share of valid votes. These systems include:
     - Parallel
     - Single Non Transferable Vote (SNTV)
• Limited Vote

Currently, various suggestions for the electoral system to be used for the DPR and the DPD envisage the use of different majoritarian/plurality, or proportional representation systems. There have been no suggestions to use any of the Semi-Proportional Systems listed above.

The worldwide distribution of these systems, according to data available in 1997, is shown in the following table.
BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

MAJORITARIAN/PLURALITY SYSTEMS

Majoritarian/plurality systems are based on constituencies (districts) within the area covered by an elected body. They may operate in either single or multi-member constituencies. The candidate or party that wins the highest number of votes (plurality) or, less usually, the majority (however defined) of votes, within a constituency wins all the representative positions for the constituency.

First Past The Post (FPTP)

- This type of system is found most prominently in the UK and its former colonial possessions.
- The system is based on 'single member districts' – one representative is elected from each constituency.
- The winning candidate in each constituency is the one who receives the most votes. This need not necessarily be a majority of votes.

- **Some Significant Advantages of 'First Past the Post'**
  - FPTP can consolidate and limit parties, often into 2 broad based parties, so voters have a clear cut choice. It can limit the possibilities of extremist parties;
  - It tends to provide strong, single party governments;
  - Elections under FPTP tend to hold parties accountable for their actions;
  - It can promote an adversarial opposition to hold the government accountable;
  - As with other constituency based systems, it can promote local links between voters and representatives;
  - An FPTP system can allow Independent candidates to contest elections;
  - It balances the focus between the political party and the individual candidate/representative, and
  - It is simple for voters to understand and use, and, apart from the need to maintain constituency boundaries, to administer.

- **Some Significant Disadvantages of 'First Past the Post'**
  - Seats won are highly disproportional to overall votes obtained. The party with a majority, or the highest proportion, of votes overall may not gain a majority, or the highest proportion, of seats. A party with a significant proportion of the overall vote may gain no seats at all;
  - The "winner takes all" process means that large proportions of votes are 'wasted'. These voters are not represented and minority parties are excluded from 'fair' representation;
  - The plurality system means that the winning candidate may only be supported by 30-40%, or even less, of the voters;
  - In common with other single member constituency style systems, FPTP has disincentives for candidates from minority groups;
  - FPTP may restrict the growth of pluralistic, multi party systems;
• It can create regional party strongholds and promote ethnically-based parties;

• It can be either insensitive, or excessively sensitive, to swings in public opinion; and

• It can be affected by manipulation of electoral boundaries.

Alternative Vote ( Preferential Voting or AV)

• Alternative Vote systems generally use single member districts.

• Under full preferential voting systems, voters must order all candidates in the order of their preference (1, 2, 3, 4 etc).

• Under optional preferential voting systems, voters may have the option of marking only one candidate or preferentially numbering some or all candidates.

• Under a ‘ticket voting’ system the voter votes for a political party, and the voter’s preferences are deemed to have been marked on the ballot in accordance with the relevant party’s preference ranking of candidates, which all political parties provide to election authorities, before election day.

• The winner is the candidate with 50%+1 of the valid votes cast in the district. If this is not achieved from the voters’ first preferences, then the candidate with the lowest number of first preferences is eliminated, and the second preferences marked on these ballot papers are distributed to the relevant other candidates. This process of eliminating the candidate with the lowest number of votes and distributing his/her ballots to the candidate still in the count, to whom the voter has assigned his/her next highest preference, continues until one candidate has 50%+1 of the vote.

• Some Significant Advantages of Alternative Vote

  • Alternative vote systems have advantages of connecting voters to representatives that are similar to those provided by other constituency-based systems.

  • Alternative vote systems allow voters multiple opportunities to influence who their representative will be, though this argument is less strong when a ‘ticket voting’ variant is used.

  • Because of the requirement for majority support for a candidate to be elected, these systems can enhance the legitimacy of the elected representatives.

  • They can encourage cooperation between political parties and reduce the effects of extremism.

  • They can allow small, similarly focused parties to coordinate without formally aligning.

  • They are cheaper to administer than other majority systems, such as the Two Round system.

• Some Significant Disadvantages of Alternative Vote

  • They have disproportional results, often giving government to a party with a lesser proportion of the total vote.

  • Alternative Vote systems frequently result in a candidate who receives the second or third highest number of first preferences, winning the election. Voters may find this difficult to accept.

  • They require a high degree of literacy and numeracy in the voter population. Thus they can lead to higher levels of invalid votes, and significant questioning of election legitimacy.
• They require more complex and intensive voter education programs.

• Ballot papers for an electoral district must be assembled in the one location for ballot counts and result determination under Alternative Vote systems to be completed. This has security, transparency and logistics implications.

• The complexity of the counting system, that may be beyond the training and implementation capacities of election administrations, and beyond the understanding of party and civil society observers. Even in ideal circumstances it may take days to determine a winner. It is not an easily automated system.

• They can promote ‘under the counter’ deals and money politics in determining parties’ advice to voters on which party to place as second and subsequent preferences on the ballot paper.

• They can be affected by manipulation of electoral boundaries.

Two Round Systems

• Two Round electoral systems are used for legislative elections in over 30 countries - France, Haiti, Cuba, Egypt, much of Francophone sub Saharan Africa, much of the former Soviet Union – including Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan. Such systems are also common for presidential elections.

• These systems generally use single member districts, though they can be used on a ‘party vote’ basis in multi-member districts.

• A candidate who obtains 50%+1 of votes in the first round wins the election. In some systems a minimum turnout requirement must also be met. Also, under some Two Round systems, a candidate obtaining less than, but within specified percentage points of, a majority of the vote, and who is at least a specified number of percentage points of the total vote ahead of his/her nearest rival, may also be determined as the winner in the first round.

• If no candidate obtains 50%+1 of votes in the first round (or any lesser amount as defined in the system), leading candidates (this may be defined in various ways – the 2 leading contenders (majoritarian TRS), or all contenders obtaining above x% of the vote in the first round (plurality/majoritarian TRS)), contest a second round of the election. The highest vote getter in the second round wins.

• Some Significant Advantages of Two Round Systems

  • Two Round systems have advantages of connecting voters to representatives that are similar to those provided by other constituency based systems.

  • Because of the requirement for majority support, the use of Two Round systems can enhance the legitimacy of the elected representatives.

  • They allow voters to have a second choice, or change their mind about their favoured candidate, between the first and the second rounds.

  • They do not need the high literacy levels and highly skilled administrative support of other majoritarian systems, such as Alternative Voting.

  • They encourage cooperation and alignments of parties for the second round election, in order to gain plurality/majority support. This may serve to provide some curb on extremism. It also may be carried over into cooperation in the legislature.

• Some Significant Disadvantages of Two Round Systems
- Two Round systems are expensive, and place immense logistics pressures on election administrations, which have to hold two full election rounds within a short period of time.

- They result in disproportional results, with significant numbers of 'wasted' votes.

- They generally result in voter fatigue, with second round voter turnout generally being much less than at the first round.

- The extended time period between commencement of the election and determination of results from the second round can lead to political and social instability.

- They can promote ‘under the counter’ deals and money politics in determining minor parties’ advice to voters as to which of the candidates remaining in the second round their supporters should vote for.

- They can be affected by manipulation of electoral boundaries.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR) SYSTEMS

The basic aim of Proportional Representation systems is to produce a representative body in which the proportion of seats won by each party closely reflects the proportion of the total vote that each party has obtained.

Candidates are elected from multi-member constituencies. The country as a whole may be a single constituency from which all representatives are elected, or there may be a number of regional or district constituencies from which representatives are elected. The greater the number of constituencies used, the less likely it is that the composition of the representative body will fully mirror the overall proportions of the vote won by each party.

List Proportional Representation

- Some form of List Proportional Representation is used by around 70 countries. All forms of List Proportional Representation have the following general characteristics:

  - Parties submit a list of candidates, generally of at least an equal number of candidates to the numbers of representative positions to be filled in the electoral area.

  - Voters vote for a single party. The number of representative positions each party receives is determined by and directly related to the proportion of the total votes it receives in the relevant electoral area.

  - The number of representative positions obtained by each party may be determined using a formula based on a number of different variants of either a "largest remainder" or a "highest average" method. Each of the different ways of doing these calculations may produce a slightly different election result – in terms of the number of representatives elected from each political party.

  - There may be thresholds for a party to pass to be included in the distribution of representative positions – for example, obtaining a minimum qualifying % of the total vote.

  - Variants of List Proportional Representation differ mainly in the way in which successful candidates are selected to fill the numbers of seats won by each party.
Closed List

- This is by far the most usual form. The number of positions won by a political party is filled by candidates according to their ranking on a list of candidates determined by the party. Usually only the party name appears on the ballot, though the order of candidates in the party list is usually made public, and is generally not allowed to be changed after a specified nomination date. Thus the political party has considerable control over the candidates within the party that are allocated the seats won.

Open List

- Voters vote for both the political party they prefer, and within that party’s list for the candidates that they want to fill the representative positions won by that party. Typically the number of candidates on party list of candidates shown on the ballot is double the number of vacancies to be filled. Voters generally may vote for the same number of candidates within a single party’s candidate list as there are vacancies to be filled. ‘Ticket splitting’ is generally not allowed.

Free List

- An example of this is the system used for the PR part of the ‘mixed’ system in Switzerland. Each political party nominates its list of candidates, with both the ‘party’ and each candidate appearing separately on the ballot paper. Voters may vote for the party list as it stands, or may cross out or repeat names, split their vote between parties’ lists, or select names from any list in forming their own list that they may write on a blank ballot.

- **Some Significant Advantages of List Proportional Representation**

  - List Proportional Representation is an inclusive system, enabling the legislature to be composed of representatives of a wide range of political movements, including minorities, within society.
  
  - It more or less accurately translates proportions of the vote won into percentages of representatives elected.
  
  - Under List PR, few voters are left unrepresented, with their votes ‘wasted’, thus voter turnout is encouraged.
  
  - List PR promotes diversity in a multi party system.
  
  - List PR promotes diversity in candidate nominations for election, and assists the election of minorities. For example, the proportion of women members of legislatures is generally much higher under proportional representation systems.
  
  - List PR tends to restrict the growth of regional strongholds of particular parties.
  
  - Some European empirical evidence suggests that it may result in more effective government performance.
  
  - In the closed List PR variant, it is very simple for voters to understand and relatively simple to administer.
  
  - List PR creates highly visible examples of power sharing and co-operation.

- **Some Significant Disadvantages of List Proportional Representation**

  - Under List PR systems, there is often no strong linkage between a representative and voters within a specific geographic area.
- Using List PR systems, it is rare that a single party has a majority in the legislature. Resulting coalition governments would require policy compromise, and may be slower acting and less internally stable than single party governments.

- List PR requires a functioning party system.

- Particularly under closed List PR, it is more difficult to accommodate independent candidates.

- List PR promotes multiple parties, and may lead to fragmentation of the party system into single issue or 'personality' parties.

- It allows the survival of extremist parties.

- Governments elected under List PR may be less accountable as it is more difficult to dislodge a party from power. Even unpopular parties may be retained in the post-election government coalition.

- Under closed List PR especially, the voters have no say in who their representatives are going to be. This may lead to a lack of accountability of representatives to voters. And leave significant power to determine representatives with political party leaders.

- More complex versions (open and free List PR) may be difficult to understand and administer.

**Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)**

- Used in Germany, New Zealand, amongst other countries.

- Voters have 2 separate ballots, or a single ballot containing two separate electoral contests: one for a party preference (generally nationally), the other for a candidate for their electoral constituency (local district).

- There can be a varying ratio of proportional representation to constituency seats – generally, between 50% and 25% of seats are proportional representation seats.

- Each party's share of the overall representative positions in the legislature is directly set by its share of the proportional representation election vote. To establish the party members that are elected:

  - All winning party candidates from constituency elections are declared elected. Sufficient extra candidates from the party list for the PR election are declared elected to make the party's % of representatives equal to the party's % of the proportional representation election vote.

  - Special provisions may be needed, including a flexible total number of representatives, to deal with situations where a party's seats won from districts is in excess of the proportion of seats it is entitled to from its % of the PR vote.

**Some Significant Advantages of MMP**

- MMP has similar, but more extensive, advantages to PR, for example:

  - It retains the proportionality benefits of a wholly PR election – there is a direct relationship between votes obtained and representative positions won - while ensuring voters have some accountable, geographic representation.

  - It allows voters to have two votes – so votes can be split between parties/people representing different parts of a voter's views
- It is an inclusive system, enabling the legislature to be composed of representatives of a wide range of political movements, including minorities, within society.

- Under MMP, few votes are 'wasted', thus voter turnout is encouraged.

- It promotes diversity in candidate nominations for election, assists the election of minorities, and provides representation for some minority parties.

**Some Significant Disadvantages of MMP**

- MMP can tend to promote coalition or weak governments, difficult to dislodge from power.

- Under MMP, the vote for a local constituency representative is less important than the vote for a political party in determining the overall allocation of seats. MMP can create two classes of parliamentary representatives, each with a different agenda within their own party.

- It can be difficult for voters to understand how seats are allocated under MMP, and may require substantial voter education efforts.

- MMP can give rise to 'strategic voting' where voters are encouraged to vote in their constituency for a candidate from a party other than, but in sympathy with, the party they support, to maximise their party's seats under the PR allocation.

- MMP is more complex for voters to use, and for election administrations, than are list PR systems, whilst delivering the same proportionality of results.

**Turning Votes into Representatives Using Proportional Representation**

- Proportional representation systems use different methods of translating the votes won by a party into its allocation of seats. These methods are independent of the different methods of constructing candidate lists and of rules for voting under the various proportional representation systems: it is basically mix and match of whatever is the preferred voting method with whatever is the preferred seat allocation methodology.

- Different voting methods will affect the amount of control the voter has over who are the successful candidates. The seat allocation method will assist in determining how proportional is the relationship is between votes obtained and seats won by each party.

- All proportional representation methods need to calculate a number - the divisor - that is the basis for allocating seats to political parties on the basis of the votes they have obtained. The divisor can be calculated in a variety of ways.

**Calculating the Divisor for Allocating Seats to Each Party**

Divisors can be of two basic types

- Quota

- Quotient

**QUOTAS**

- Many PR systems calculate a 'quota' which is used as the divisor for allocating seats to each party. There are a number of different methods by which quotas are calculated.
TYPES OF QUOTAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Formula</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HARE</td>
<td>Votes/Seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAGENBACH /BISCHOFF</td>
<td>Votes/(Seats + 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DROOP</td>
<td>(Votes/Seats + 1) + 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPERIALI</td>
<td>Votes/(Seats + 2)</td>
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</tbody>
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**QUOTIENT**

- In systems where seats are allocated on the basis of a ‘quotient’, each party’s votes are divided by a series of numbers – it may be 1, 2, 3 etc - up to the number of seats to be allocated. All the results of these calculations are then ranked highest to lowest. Where there are N seats to be filled, the Nth highest quotient then becomes the divisor for allocating seats.

**Largest Remainder Method**

- Using this simple method of allocating seats to parties may give results that are not fully proportional. Each party’s votes are divided by the quota or quotient to be used as the basis of allocating seats. Initially, each party receives the number of seats equivalent to the number of whole quotas or quotients contained in its votes. If this does not result in the allocation of all seats available to be filled, then the remaining seats are allocated to parties in accordance to the ranking, highest to lowest, of the remainder of their votes left after the full quotas (or quotients) won have been subtracted.

  - Using a quota calculation that gives a relatively high quota (eg HARE quota) means
    - fewer full quotas are achieved
    - more seats are decided on the basis of remainders
    - it relatively favours parties obtaining smaller proportions of the vote

  - However even using a method with a lower quota (Droop or Hagenbach-Bischoff) does not always solve this problem of exact proportionality.

**Highest Average Method**

- The object of using this method of allocating seats under proportional representation systems, is to ensure that for all seats allocated, the average number of votes required to win a seat shall be as nearly as possible the same for each party. There are a number of different versions of highest Average systems, but all are based on dividing the votes won by a party by a series of numbers (divisors), to obtain a series of quotients which are ranked to determine seat allocations.

**D'Hondt Methods**

- There are two basic versions of the D'Hondt method, though there are many variations. The first does not use a quota, and operates as follows:
  - Round 1: Each party’s votes is divided by ONE – the highest quotient obtains a seat
  - Round 2: The votes from each party that won a seat in Round 1 are divided by 2, votes for other parties are divided by 1 – the party with the highest quotient obtains a seat
  - Round 3 and subsequent rounds: As for Round 2, with the divisor for a party’s votes increasing by 1 each time that party wins a seat, until all seats are allocated
• The second basic version operates on a quotient system as follows:

• Each party’s votes are divided by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, up to the number of seats to be filled. If there are 5 seats to be filled, the 5 highest quotients in this series of numbers = a seat, and seats are awarded to a party on the basis of how many of these highest quotients are derived from dividing its votes.

• D’Hondt based systems tend to favour major parties at the expense of smaller parties

_Sainte-Lague and Modified Sainte-Lague Methods_

• The Sainte – Lague system operates similarly to the second basic version of the D’hondt method, but the divisors are not 1,2, 3 etc but 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 etc

• Using a Modified Sainte-Lague method, the divisors are 1.4, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 etc

• Sainte-Lague and Modified Sainte-Lague increase the size of the divisors, making it more difficult for major parties to win each additional seat

• Modified Sainte-Lague, with an initial divisor of 1.4, makes it harder for smaller parties to gain representation in the first round.

_Hagenbach-Bischoff Method_

• Using the Hagenbach- Bischoff method, each party’s votes is divided by a series of divisors to produce an average vote. The party with the highest average vote after each stage of the process is awarded a seat. After a party has been awarded a seat, its vote is then divided by the next highest divisor.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS PROPOSED FOR THE DPD**

List Proportional Representation

The basic characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of these systems are described in the section on ‘SYSTEMS PROPOSED FOR THE DPR’ above

_Block Vote_

• Block Vote systems are used in Bermuda, Maldives, Kuwait, Mauritius, and Palestine Authority, amongst a very few countries. Party Block Vote is used in Djibouti, Lebanon, Tunisia and Senegal, and for most districts in Singapore.

• Block Vote is a form of FPTP in multi-member districts. Usually, voters can vote for as many individual candidates as there are representatives to be elected. Thus, if 5 representatives are to be elected, each voter can vote for up to 5 candidates.

• The winning candidates in each district are the n highest vote winners, where there are n representatives to be elected.

• _Some Significant Advantages of Block Vote_
• It is claimed that a Block Vote system can be used to ensure that minorities are represented in the legislature (empirical research in countries such as Singapore does not necessarily support this claim);

• A Block Vote system strengthens parties, and also allows the voters to choose between candidates;

• It is simple to use and administer; and

• It uses larger size, multi member electoral districts, but with candidates who are directly accountable to voters.

• **Some Significant Disadvantages of Block Vote**

  • "Block Vote" systems tend to accentuate all the disadvantages of FPTP;

  • Block Vote is the most disproportional of all election systems, and can lead to a party with bare plurality support winning all, or nearly all, the seats in a multi-member electoral district;

  • The "winner take all" process means that a large proportion of votes are 'wasted'. These voters are not represented and minority parties are excluded from 'fair' representation;

  • Block Vote systems can be affected by manipulation of electoral boundaries;

  • This system may restrict the growth of pluralistic, multi party systems; and

  • It can be either insensitive, or extremely sensitive, to swings in public opinion.