



## **Comparative Analysis of Democratic Systems Across Countries**

No country can call itself democratic in the true sense of the term without conducting free and fair elections. It would be appropriate to state that elections lie at the heart of any representative democracy, allowing the citizens to choose who would govern them. HG Wells has therefore called the electoral process "a democracy's ceremonial, its feast, its great function".

Not all democracies follow the same electoral system. Electoral systems can be classified into three main types:

### **1. First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) System:**

- Also known as the majoritarian system.
- The candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins, regardless of whether they have an absolute majority.
- Ensures geographic accountability but often leads to a two-party system and lacks proportional representation.
- Examples: USA, UK, Canada, and India.

### **2. Proportional Representation (PR):**

- Designed to reflect a party's legislative representation proportionally to its popular vote.
- Encourages political party growth and coalition administrations.
- Reduces seat bonuses for large parties but may result in a fragmented party system.
- Used in countries like Israel and the Netherlands, employing various PR methods.

### **3. Mixed Systems:**

- Combine local representation from FPTP with proportional representation from PR.
- Balances local and proportional aspects.
- Variations like parallel and mixed-member proportional exist but can be complex.
- The impact of the electoral system on the party system is explained by Duverger's Law. It distinguishes between the mechanical effect (small parties excluded in FPTP) and the psychological effect (strategic voting to avoid smaller parties). FPTP leads to a two-party system, while PR results in a multi-party system.

## **Presidential vs. Parliamentary Systems: A Critical Assessment**

- **Presidential System:** In a presidential system, the executive (the President) and legislative branches are distinct, preserving checks and balances. The President, elected independently, serves a fixed term, promoting stability. However, a divided government can lead to a deadlock, with opposing parties controlling both branches. The system promotes direct accountability and transparency, but the separation of powers can slow decision-making. For instance, the United States exemplifies the presidential system.
- **Parliamentary Systems:** Parliamentary systems blend executive and legislative power, with the executive (Prime Minister) emerging from the legislative. Checks and balances exist through legislative scrutiny and no-confidence votes. A vote of no confidence can remove the Prime Minister, fostering a cordial relationship when the executive and legislative are from the same majority party. Coalition governments may reduce stability, but majority parties lead to faster decision-making. The parliamentary system enforces accountability through impeachment by the legislature. Successful examples include the United Kingdom and India.

Both systems have advantages and disadvantages. The choice depends on a nation's historical context and specific needs for accountability, efficiency, and stability, reflecting diverse government organization methods worldwide.

## **Federalism and Unitarianism: Managing Diversity in Democratic Frameworks**

A good way to analyse democracies in the world is through understanding the ways of power sharing. These are broadly categorized into Federalism and Unitarianism. In the federal system, the distribution of power is between the central government and states. The division of powers is enumerated in the Constitution which provides clarity and respective autonomy to the government. In a unitary system, on the other hand, the power is concentrated at the centre or national level. This allows for lesser regional autonomy in comparison to federal systems. Federalism allows better accommodation of different regions and protection of various diverse groups and minorities. Unitary systems on the other hand allow for uniform economic development as power is centralised.

The United States is often quoted as the best example to understand federalism as states have autonomy in various areas. The case of Indian federalism is unique, as K.C. Wheare calls it "quasi-federal". To understand unitary systems, France and the UK are two such countries that can be looked at.

## **Direct Democracy in the Digital Age: Global Perspectives**

Direct democracy mechanisms like referendums, initiatives and recalls allow citizens to exercise direct action. Through referendums, people can directly decide on certain government-proposed policies or actions. Initiatives give people the ability to petition for the creation of new laws or amendments to current ones. Recall is also another device in which using a petition and subsequent vote, citizens have the power to oust elected politicians before the end of their terms. Switzerland is often quoted as the best example of understanding the procedure of referendums. Estonia has started e-democracy through Internet Voting (i-Voting). Article II of the California Constitution has provided its citizens the right to recall.

With the coming of new-age technology and a world that is deeply interconnected by social media, the influence can also be observed in modern direct democracy. Due to increased internet accessibility to voting and Information, participation in direct democracy has become easier for citizens. Platforms for social media offer ways for citizens to participate in debates, plan campaigns, and rally for direct democracy initiatives. At the same time, indeed, social media's ability to disseminate information quickly can also result in the dissemination of propaganda or false information, which may affect the results of direct democracy procedures. The direct democracy landscape has thus

changed as a result of the digital era, creating new possibilities for citizen involvement and participation. However, it also raises issues that must be resolved in order to guarantee the legitimacy and inclusion of the digital direct democracy process.

## **Election Financing and Political Transparency: Cross-Country Insights**

The laws controlling how political campaigns are funded differ between nations. These restrictions may range from public financing of elections to tight limits on contributions. By limiting the impact of money in politics, strict campaign finance restrictions can help lower the possibility of corruption and encourage openness. Big companies and interest groups frequently have substantial financial resources to support political campaigns and advocate for legislation that advances their interests. Across many democratic regimes, the influence of corporate interests and lobbying on legislative and electoral outcomes can vary greatly. Case studies of various countries implementing successful measures to ensure fair and transparent elections can allow us to understand this better. For example, Canada has "Proactive Disclosure" on Grants and Contributions and all reports are published within the Government of Canada.

## **Democratic Innovations: Learning from Best Practices Worldwide**

Various democratic innovations like citizen assemblies, deliberative democracy, and participatory budgeting can be analyzed to understand their effectiveness and how they help in building consensus. Citizen assemblies are groups of people chosen at random to discuss particular concerns and give recommendations to decision-makers. They can present various viewpoints and encourage inclusion in decision-making, making sure that policy reflects a wider range of interests. For instance, complex topics like abortion were successfully addressed by the Irish Citizens' Assembly, demonstrating the value of recommendations from a representative sample of the general public. The recommendations made by the Assembly are reported to the Irish Parliament i.e. Oireachtas.

Deliberative democracy emphasizes inclusive, well-informed debates to reach conclusions as a group. It stimulates collaboration and fosters a well-informed public, which may result in better policy outcomes. In 2019, the German-speaking community of Belgium in Ostbelgien voted to establish a Citizen's Council. This is based on the contemporary wave of deliberative democracy.

Through their involvement in the budgeting process, individuals can have a direct impact on how public money is allocated through Participatory Budgeting. This increases citizen engagement, provides accountability, and creates openness, which results in more timely and fair budget decisions. The participatory budgeting process in Porto Alegre, Brazil gave locals the power to choose how to spend a portion of the city's budget, which enhanced public services and raised civic participation.

## **Democratic Backsliding and Challenges to Democracy: Global Trends**

Globally, the instances of democratic backsliding can be noticed. This refers to the gradual deterioration of democratic institutions and norms along with a decline in an effective system of checks and balances. Values like the Rule of Law & respect for human rights decline. All across the world, democracies struggle with issues like polarisation, and disinformation. The contributing factors of democratic backsliding include a rise in authoritarianism as well as infrastructural decay. Democratic institutions and norms may be threatened by the emergence of authoritarian leaders or inclinations within democracies. The foundations of democracy can be undermined by weak institutions, corruption, and a lack of accountability.

To protect democracy, independent institutions and checks and balances must be strengthened. Programmed that encourage media literacy and education can assist in combating misinformation by fostering an informed and involved populace. Promoting inclusivity and conversation is the need. Polarisation can be reduced by promoting inclusive political debate and efforts to heal divisions. Cooperation on a global scale can be promoted. Maintaining democratic values and offering assistance to nations facing difficulties are two roles that international organizations and alliances can play.

