A short discussion of election systems applicable to multiple seat elections was included as Section 8 in the printed version of *Election Methods: Review of Alternatives and Oregon Proposals*. Because relatively few political jurisdictions in Oregon conduct multiple seat elections a more detailed discussion was reserved for this online version.

MULTIPLE SEAT ELECTION METHODS – DETAILED DISCUSSION

Introduction

Multiple seat election methods are best suited for simultaneously electing multiple candidates for multiple seats. At-large city council elections, where candidates don't run for a specific seat but rather the top vote recipients fill the number of open seats, exemplify a current election system that could be changed with an alternative election method.

Relatively few governmental elections in Oregon involve simultaneously electing multiple candidates for multiple seats. However, multiple seat elections do occur in some Oregon political jurisdictions. For example, Lake Oswego city council members are elected at large with three positions up for election every two years. The three candidates who receive the highest number of voters are elected to fill those three positions. A change to multiple seat elections might be considered by other Oregon political jurisdiction in conjunction with adoption of an alternative election system.

Figure 2 summarizes the three major categories of multiple seat methods: at-large, semi-proportional, and proportional representation.
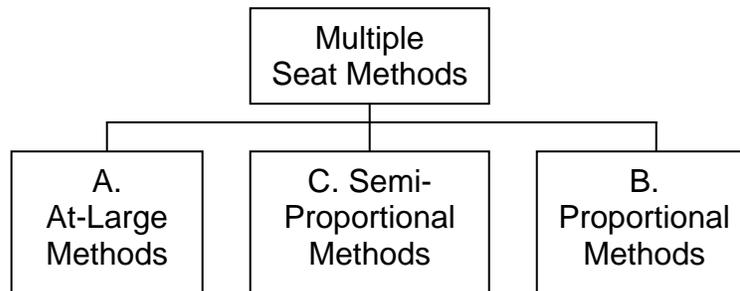

Figure 2 – Multiple Seat Election Methods
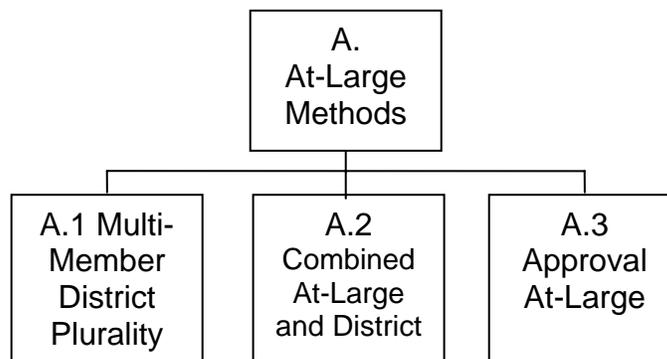
A. – At-Large Election Methods

Figure 3 – At-Large Methods

A.1 – Multi-Member District Plurality Elections

Multi-Member District Plurality or At-Large Voting

This system is unique among plurality-majority systems in that it uses multi-member districts, instead of single-member districts. For that reason political scientists often refer to it as multi-member district plurality voting.

Today, however, multi-member district plurality voting is used almost exclusively in local school board elections, city councils and special districts, where it is called at-large voting. Typically, an entire town or city is considered to be one large district, and all candidates for office run together against each other.

At-Large Voting - How It Works

In at-large voting, two or more candidates are elected at a time. Voters have the same number of votes as the number of seats to be filled. The candidates with the highest numbers of votes, a plurality, win.

At first glance, at-large voting seems to be very different from the other forms of plurality-majority voting. But this is an illusion. Even though races take place in multi-member districts and voters have multiple votes, this remains in essence a plurality voting system. You could view it as a series of single-member district plurality elections put together.

So despite its appearances, at-large voting is definitely a member of the plurality-majority family of systems. Since it is designed primarily to ensure representation for the majority, it shares almost all the same advantages and disadvantages of the other systems that take this approach. It does, however, have a few unique political attributes.

Advantages Specific to At-Large Voting

Citywide Representation

The advantage most often cited by advocates is the election of candidates that have citywide support among the voters. At-large representatives may thus be more likely to advocate what is good for the city as a whole. In contrast, district representatives may tend to vote for programs that benefit their area but that may not be in the best interests of the entire community. District representatives might also fight against a program that puts a burden on their neighborhood but that does benefit the city as a whole.

Eliminates Gerrymandering

This is the only form of plurality-majority voting to escape this problem. If there are no separate districts in a city, then gerrymandering is not a possibility. This eliminates the possibility of drawing districts lines to benefit incumbents or the dominant party. All the political hassles involved in redistricting – the partisan battles, and the expensive court suits – are also avoided.

Disadvantages Specific to At-Large Voting

May Neglect Geographical Representation

Because there are no separate districts in at-large city elections, this system does not ensure geographical representation. It is not uncommon for many or most of the city council members elected at-large to come from one area of the city, typically a middle-

class, white area. As a result, some neighborhoods may have no one on the city council working to ensure that their particular problems are addressed.

At-large proponents respond that this system can be modified to produce some geographical representation. In some cities, for instance, the seats are numbered and correspond to specific neighborhoods in the city. Candidates for those seats must be residents of those areas. All voters still vote on all the seats in the city.

Worst at Representing Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Studies have shown that at-large voting also exaggerates the tendency of plurality-majority systems to under represent racial and ethnic minorities. It is quite easy for a white majority, voting cohesively, to elect an all-white city council or school board. It is this high potential for racial bias that has caused this system to be increasingly challenged in the courts as being in violation of the Voting Rights Act and its amendments.

More Expensive Campaigns

Candidates must run city-wide campaigns which can be more expensive than campaigns in one district. Typically, candidates must spend more on media advertisements to cover this wider area and they must also develop an extensive campaign organization that will court voters in all areas of the city.

- LWVCA

A.2 – Combined At-Large and District Elections

The Combined At-Large and District System

Combined systems are those in which some representatives are elected at-large and others elected from single-member districts. These voting systems are found almost exclusively in municipalities and special districts. Historically, they have gained in popularity as support has declined for at-large systems. As noted earlier, at-large voting has been under increasing political and legal attack since the 1960s for its inability to adequately represent racial and ethnic minorities and its neglect of neighborhood representation. This has led to the search for alternatives.

This search has usually not been very wide ranging and has not included the proportional and semi-proportional voting systems to be examined later. Typically, the only alternative considered has been single-member district plurality voting. Some reformers, however, have not wanted to completely abandon the advantages of the at-large system, and so a combined system has been seen as a good compromise and one that incorporates the advantages of both systems.

Combined At-Large and Single-Member District - How It Works

There are usually two parts to the ballot: one for the at-large contests and one for the district race. The winners are decided by the plurality rules discussed earlier for at-large and single-member district elections. The number and mix of the seats in a combined system can vary considerably. Typically, a city might have ten district seats and five at-large, or five district seats and ten at-large.

Advantages of the Combined System

Advocates argue that combined systems incorporate the best of districts and at-large representation. The district representatives allow for geographical representation. Considerable evidence exists that these systems produce better representation for racial and ethnic groups than pure at-large systems. In addition, the at-large representatives can bring a city-wide perspective to policy issues and therefore encourage a more wide-ranging political debate.

Disadvantages of the Combined System

Critics argue that these systems combine the worst of both district and at-large representation. For example, the districting element encourages gerrymandering and brings along with it all the political battles and court suits often associated with redistricting. Also, the at-large element is likely to under-represent political and racial minorities. Finally, these combined systems still retain most of the political shortcomings that characterize plurality-majority voting systems in general, including over-representing the largest parties, discouraging minor parties, wasting large numbers of votes, and so on.

- LWVCA

A.3 – Approval At-Large Elections

Approval at-large elections are the same when multiple seats are elected as when one office is elected. Voters select all the candidates that they are willing to see elected. The candidates elected are those with the most votes to fill all the seats to be elected. Approval at-large elections have all the advantages and disadvantages of single-seat approval elections, except that there is more opportunity for insincere voting.

B – Proportional Representation Voting Methods

A general introduction to proportional representation is below, followed by discussion of different forms of these election methods.
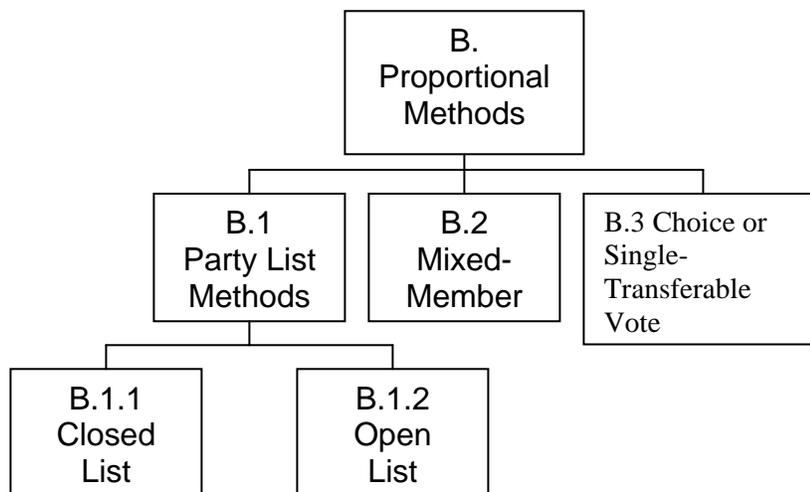
Figure 4 – Proportional Methods

The Forgotten History of Proportional Representation in the United States

Though the current growth in use of proportional representation methods has an international flavor, most Americans are not aware of the use of these election methods in the early 1900's in over twenty cities ranging from Sacramento to Boulder to Cleveland to Cambridge. Of the original cities, only the Cambridge program remains. More recently, other locales have adopted cumulative voting or other proportional election methods.

The success of proportional methods in facilitating diverse representation is illustrated in an editorial after the first election in Ashtabula, Ohio in 1915. "The drys and wets are represented; the Protestants and Catholics; the business, professional, and laboring men; the Republicans, Democrats, and Socialists; the English, Swedes, and Italians are represented. It would be hard to select a more representative council in any other way."[i]

The abandonment of proportional representation in Ashtabula and other American cities is considered by most political scientists as being due to the threat this election method posed to those who had held political power and not due to any inherent defects in the reform programs.[ii]

Proportional representation (PR) is the most used voting system in the world. Among advanced Western democracies, proportional representation (PR) has become the predominant system, In Western Europe, for instance, 21 of the 28 countries use proportional representation, including Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

It is best to think of proportional representation as a basic principle: the number of seats a political party or group wins in a legislature should be in proportion to the amount of its support among voters. So if a political party wins 30 percent of the vote, it should receive about 30 percent of the seats. As you will see, PR election designers have devised a variety of ways to achieve that goal. But all of them are versions of the three basic kinds of PR. (See figure 3 (need to move and label chart above.)

History

Proportional representation systems were first developed in 19th century Europe to remedy what were seen as defects in the reigning plurality-majority voting systems. It had become clear that both plurality and majority systems routinely produced unfair distortions in the representation of parties in the national legislatures, and this led to the next stage in the evolution of voting systems: the development of proportional representation systems. The late 19th century was a time when suffrage was being extended to most of the public and large political parties were developing in these countries. It is no coincidence that as the importance and prevalence of parties grew, so too did the interest in having a voting system that gave these parties their fair share of seats, which is precisely what PR promised to do and did accomplish. Today, of the world's 21 industrialized democracies, only France, the U.K., Canada and the U.S. have not adopted PR.

Common Features of PR Systems

List systems, mixed-member and choice voting PR all differ in the way ballots are structured, votes are cast and seats allocated. Nevertheless, these all are forms of PR and so they both achieve proportionality and share a number of common characteristics.

Multi-member Districts

All PR systems use multi-member districts. Instead of electing one member of the legislature in each local district, PR uses larger districts where several members are elected at once. In practice, the number of members elected in a district can vary considerably. Ireland uses small 3 to 4 person districts, while in the Netherlands the entire country is one district of 150 members.

Not winner-take-all

All single-member district systems are winner-take-all. When only one candidate is elected, one party inevitably gets all of the representation. In contrast, multi-member PR districts allow many parties to win seats in a district. This means that more voters receive representation. In PR districts, 80 percent to 90 percent of voters win representation compared to the 40 percent to 60 percent typical of winner-take-all voting systems.

Proportional Allocation of Seats

Candidates win the seats in proportion to the votes a party or political group receives. In many ways, this is the central defining characteristic of these systems, and only multi-member districts can achieve it. Assume, for instance, that we have a ten-member PR district. If the Democrats win 50 percent of the vote, they would receive five of those ten seats. With 30 percent of the vote, the Republicans would get three seats. And if a third party received the other 20 percent of the vote, it would get the remaining two seats.

Emphasis on Political Identity

Proportional representation systems assume that most people tend to identify their political orientation according to parties and political ideologies - not geography. The assumption tends to be the reverse in single member district systems. PR proponents argue that in the early days of democracy, people often were born, lived, and died in the same small geographical region. But in today's modem and mobile society, geographical considerations play a smaller role in people's political identity.

Low Thresholds

Threshold means the minimum percentage of the vote a party must have to win a seat in the legislature. As you saw earlier, plurality-majority system have a threshold of 50 percent + 1, the highest among voting systems. In the more common forms of PR, thresholds may range from 5 percent to 10 percent.

General Advantages

Fewer Wasted Votes and More Effective Votes

Because it takes only a small percentage of votes to elect a candidate in PR systems, far fewer votes are wasted and more of them help to elect candidates. In plurality-majority voting, a party that wins 30 percent of the district vote wins no representation, but in a multi-member PR district, that party would win 30 percent of the seats.

Allows More Sincere Voting

In plurality-majority systems, it often makes little sense to vote for minor party candidates even if they are your first choice. In PR systems, minor party candidates stand a better chance of being elected and so voters can vote sincerely for the candidates they most prefer, instead of having to choose between the lesser of two evils.

Better Representation of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Supporters say that PR could finally resolve the problem of how to give racial and ethnic minorities a fair chance to elect their own representatives, and that this problem is very difficult to solve if we keep single-member districts.

Better Representation of Women

Advocates of PR maintain that it can result in fairer representation for women. They point out that the United States continues to lag far behind many other Western democracies in the number of women elected to our national legislature. The percentage of women elected to Congress is 17 percent[1] while in Europe 75 percent of the countries have a form of proportional representation and representation of women in legislative bodies is 20 percent.[2]

More Voter Choice

Because PR encourages a multiparty system, this gives voters more choices at the polls than they would have in a two-party system. Minor party candidates become viable and realistic choices for voters because they stand a good chance of being elected.

More Competitive Districts

One of the problems of single-member plurality voting is the proliferation of safe seats, districts drawn so that one party has such a large majority that the other party has virtually no chance of winning the seat. PR advocates argue that every multi-member district is competitive because even parties in the minority are able to elect candidates.

More Access to Representatives

Surveys show that a significant number of voters in single-member districts are reluctant to approach an elected official of a different party who they feel will not be sympathetic to their concerns. But in multi-member districts, voters have access to representatives from several parties and this makes it easier to find a sympathetic ear.

Reduces Gerrymandering

By using large multi-member districts, PR reduces the importance of geographical lines and the incentive to gerrymander. Gerrymandering relies on the drawing of district lines so that particular parties waste their votes. For example, in a single-member plurality system, a district might be drawn where the Republicans have only 30 percent of the vote, all of which would be wasted on their losing candidate. But in a multi-member PR district, a party that had 30 percent of the vote would win 30 percent of the seats in the district.

May Discourage Negative Campaigns

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[1] Women in Congress, 110th Congress, 2007-2009, http://womenincongress.house.gov/data/wic-by-congress.html?cong=110 retrieved April 14, 2008
[2] Women in National Parliaments, http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm retrieved April 14, 2008.

The presence of multiple parties in elections might also serve to discourage overly negative campaigns. In two-party contests, fiercely negative campaigns can be very effective. For example, if a Republican candidate uses negative ads to disillusion the supporters of the Democratic candidate, those voters are likely to either switch to the Republican or simply not vote, either of which works to the advantage of the Republican. But if there is a third party candidate in the contest - let's say a centrist Reform party candidate - then smearing your opponent may not work as well. Even if the negative campaign alienates supporters from the Democrat, it may just drive them into the Reform candidate's camp, not the Republican's. So there may be less incentive to engage in this kind of campaign.

Majority Rule More Likely

One of the central complaints about plurality-majority systems is a party winning a majority of the seats in the legislature while winning only a minority of the vote due to single member districts and gerrymandering.

Higher Voter Turnout

As a rule, voter turnout is higher in countries that use proportional representation. It is not unusual to see participation rates as high as 80 to 90 percent or even 90 percent in PR countries in contrast to the 35 to 50 percent rates typical in the U.S. Voting systems only account for part of this difference. Many political factors affect turnout rates, such registration methods and weekend voting. But political scientists have estimated that use of PR voting could increase turnout in the U.S. by 10 to 15 percent.

General Disadvantages

Coalitions and Legislative Gridlock

Probably the most common criticism of PR is that as it increases the representativeness of government it also increases its instability. Critics often cite Italy as the classic case of this problem because it was plagued for decades by coalitions that were continually falling apart and reforming. Proportional representation proponents respond that unstable coalitions are in fact quite rare in countries that use this system.

Small Parties Have Too Much Power

In a multiparty system, a small party can be in a position to determine the composition of the ruling coalition. For example, if one large party wins 42 percent of the seats and another 38 percent, and a small party wins 20 percent, that gives the small party the balance of power and puts it in the position of "king-maker." This is especially a problem when a small party bypasses the party that received the most votes to form a ruling coalition with the party that came in second place.

More Expensive Campaigns

PR critics charge that the larger size districts used in PR may increase the costs of campaigns. Consider elections for a city council. With single-member district voting, the candidates' campaigns only have to cover one district. But if all the candidates ran in one large citywide PR district, they would have to reach many more voters in their campaigns.

Weakens Constituency-Representative Link

A move to very large multi-member districts undermines the intimate relationship that exists between constituents and representatives in small single-member districts. This is especially true in PR systems like Israel and the Netherlands where the entire countries are one district and there are not even regional districts. But even where PR uses regional districts, they may be so large geographically that access and communication becomes more problematic.

Encourages Extremism

A common accusation against PR is that it encourages extremism. Critics charge that extremist parties of the left and right can gain seats with PR voting. As evidence of this, they often cite the rise of the Nazi party in Germany.

Greater Administrative Expense and Complexity

Election officials would have to learn new vote counting methods and seat allocation formulas. In some cases, expensive new voting machines would have to be purchased to accommodate the new voting techniques.

The Most Common Types of Proportional Representation

The three most popular types of PR are **party list voting**, including closed list and open list; **mixed member proportional** (MMP); and **choice voting**.

- LWVCA

B.1 – Party List Proportional Representation Methods

The origins of party list PR can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century. By the 1920s almost all European democracies were using some version of the party list vote. Today party list systems are by far the most common form of PR. Over 80 percent of the PR systems used worldwide are some form of party list voting.

How It Works

Legislators are elected in large, multi-member districts. Each party puts up a list or slate of candidates equal to the number of seats in the district. On the ballot, voters indicate their preference for a particular party (see the chart below), and the parties then receive seats in proportion to their share of the vote. So in a five-member district, if the Democrats win 40 percent of the vote, they would win two of the five seats. The two winning Democratic candidates would be chosen according to their position on the list.

-- Closed Party List --

Election for the United States House of Representatives				
District One				
Voting Instructions: 1. You only have ONE vote. 2. Place an X in the box UNDER the party for whom you wish to vote.				
Democrats	**Republicans**	**Reform**	**Libertarian**	**Green**
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1. Benjamin Foster	1. Wendy Berg	1. Steven Wong	1. Tom Wartenberg	1. Rachel Folsom
2. Sam Rosen-Amy	2. Steve Grolnic	2. Deborah Gorlin	2. Damon Washington	2. Robert Moll
3. Colin Volz	3. Sarah McClurg	3. Bran Crenshaw	3. Beata Panagopoules	3. Juan Hernandez
4. Benjamin Pike	4. Gerald Epstein	4. Naomi Gerstel	4. Alice Morey	4. Meryl Fingrutd
5. Megan Gentzler	5. Fran Deutsch	5. Robert Zussman	5. Sarah Pringle	5. Daniel Czitrom

There are two broad types of list systems - closed list and open list. In a closed list system, the original form of party list voting, the party fixes the order in which the candidates are listed and elected, and the voter simply casts a vote for the party as a whole. This is shown in the chart, which illustrates an election for the House of Representatives in a five-seat district. Winning candidates are selected in the exact order they appear on the original list. So in the example here, if the Democrats won 40 percent of the vote, the first two candidates on the pre-ordered list, Foster and Rosen-Amy, would be elected.

B.1.2 – **Open List Proportional Representation**

-- Open Party List --

Election for the United States House of Representatives									
District One									
Voting Instructions: 1. You only have ONE vote. 2. Place an X in the box to the LEFT of the candidate for whom you wish to vote. 3. Your vote counts both for your candidate and your party.									
Democrats		**Republicans**		**Reform**		**Libertarian**		**Green**	
	Benjamin Pike		Fran Deutsch		Naomi Gerstel		Beata Panagopoules		Daniel Czitrom
	Sam Rosen-Amy		Steve Grolnic		Bran Crenshaw		Damon Washington		Robert Moll
	Megan Gentzler		Wendy Berg		Steven Wong		Tom Wartenberg		Rachel Folsom
	Benjamin Foster		Gerald Epstein		Deborah Gorlin		Alice Morey		Meryl Fingrutd
	Colin Volz		Sarah McClurg		Robert Zussman		Sarah Pringle		Juan Hernandez

The open list system allows voters to express a preference for particular candidates, not just parties. It is designed to give voters some say over the order of the list and thus

which candidates get elected. One version of this is illustrated in the ballot above. Voters are presented with unordered lists of candidates chosen in party primaries. Voters cannot vote for a party, but must cast a vote for an individual candidate. This vote counts for the specific candidate as well as for the party. In our example, if the Democrats won two seats, and Volz and Gentzler received the highest and next highest number of individual votes, they would rise to the top of the list and be elected.

Advantages Specific to the Party List System

More Party-Oriented and Issue-Oriented Campaigns

In party list systems, campaigns become more centered around the parties and their platforms. In European campaigns, for instance, candidates are more likely to say, "vote for my party and its policies," instead of saying, "vote for me." The focus of the candidates and the press is more on the issues and how parties differ on them. In single-member district plurality elections, the emphasis on campaigns tends to be on the individual candidates and the focus is often on their personal strengths and weaknesses.

Closed Lists May Encourage Diversity of Candidates

Closed list systems provide a diversity of representation even if that is not a concern of voters. For example, a party could balance its slate with men and women in alternate positions so that equal gender representation would be encouraged despite any sexism on the part of the voters.

Open Lists Give More Power to Voters

Open lists tend to take power away from parties and give it to voters. Some argue that it allows voters to encourage more diverse representation when parties fail to provide leadership in this area.

Disadvantages Specific to the Party List System

Undermines Close Constituent-Representative Ties

Because party list systems tend to have the largest districts, they also more actively undermine the traditional geographical link between constituents and their representatives, especially when compared to the mixed-member and choice vote versions of PR.

Closed Lists Give Too Much Power to Parties

Since voters have no say in the order of the list, parties are in a position to control who represents the voters; however, voters can choose to vote for another party.

- LWVCA

B.2 – Mixed Member Proportional Representation Elections

Mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) is an attempt to combine single-member and proportional voting systems. Half of the candidates are elected in single-member districts. The other half are elected by a party list vote and added on to the district members so that each party has its proportional share of seats. Proponents claim that mixed-member proportional voting is the best of both worlds, providing the geographical representation and close constituency ties of single-member plurality

voting, along with the fairness and diversity of representation that comes with PR voting. For a long time Germany was the only country using mixed-member proportional representation. It is still one of the least used PR systems, but in recent years it has begun to garner a great deal of attention. In fact, it is now one of the "hottest" systems being considered by those involved in electoral design. In the 1990s New Zealand switched from winner-take-all to MMP. Hungary and Mexico also adopted this approach. More recently, the newly formed parliaments of Scotland and Wales used this system for their first elections.

How It Works

In the German version of this system, people cast votes on a double ballot (see ballot below). First, on the left part of the ballot, they vote for a district representative. This part of the ballot is for the single-member contest. The person with the most votes wins. In a hypothetical 100-member state legislature, 50 of the seats would be filled in this way. On the right part of the ballot, the party list portion, voters indicate their choice among the parties, and the other fifty seats are filled from lists of candidates chosen by these parties.

-- Additional Member Proportional Representation Ballot --

Official Ballot Election for the House of Representatives	
You Have 2 Votes	
District Vote	**District Vote**
This vote decides who will be elected to the House of Representatives from this district. Vote by putting an "X" in the box immediately before the candidate you choose. Vote for only one candidate.	This vote decides the share of seats that each of the parties listed below will have in the House of Representatives. Vote by putting an "X" in the box immediately before the party you choose. Vote for only one party.
Vote Here	Vote Here
Fred Smith	Republican Party Berg, Grolnic, McClurg, Epstein, Deutsch
Naomi Lintz	Democratic Party Foster, Rosen-Amy, Volz, Pike, Gentzler
Damon Washington	The New Party Fosom, Moll, Hernandez, Fingrutd, Czitrom
Cheryl Houston	Christian Coalition Party Wong, Gorlin, Crenshaw, Gerstel, Zussman
Write-In	

These party list votes are counted on a national basis to determine the total portion of the 100-seat legislature that each party deserves. Candidates from each party's lists are then added to its district winners until that party achieves its proportional share of seats. The chart below illustrates how this process works for our hypothetical election. The Democrats won 40 percent of the party list votes in the 100-member state legislature, so they would be entitled to a total of 40 of the 100 seats. They also elected 28 of their candidates in district elections, so they would then add 12 more from their regional party lists to come up to their share of 40 seats.

-- Voting Results and Seats Allocations in Mixed-Member Voting --

Political Parties	Number of District Seats Won	Percentage of the National Party List Vote	Total Number of Seats Deserved by Party	Number of Seats Added from Party Lists
Democratic	28	40%	40	12
Republican	18	36%	36	18
Christian Coalition	4	18%	18	14
New Party	0	6%	6	6
TOTALS	50	100%	100	50

In the German version a party must either get five percent of the nationwide party list vote, or win at least three district races in order for it to gain any seats in the legislature. In our hypothetical case, the New Party did not win any district seats, but they did win over five percent of the nationwide vote, so they deserve their share of legislative seats, which in this case would be six seats, all of which would be filled from the regional party lists.

Advantages Specific to the Mixed Member Proportional System

Ensures Geographical Representation

The use of many relatively small, single-member districts means that all geographical areas will have at least one representative promoting their interests in the legislature.

Close Constituency Ties

Small geographical districts also encourage close ties between representatives and their constituents. People know that a specific representative serves them and they can contact him or her about their concerns.

Two Votes Allow Better Expression of Views

For example, supporters of the Greens would cast their party list vote for their own party to ensure that it wins some seats in the legislature. Then in the district contest, they might cast their other vote for the major party candidate who has the best chance to win and is closest to their political perspective - probably the Democratic candidate. In this way, they would effectively express their preference for a coalition of Greens and Democrats.

Disadvantages Specific to this System

Bias Toward Large Parties in Districts

Because districts have single winners, there is a tendency for the candidates of the larger parties to be favored. These are the only candidates that stand a realistic chance of getting the plurality of votes necessary to win these seats.

Discourages Some Sincere Votes

Plurality voting on the district ballot also discourages supporters of minor party candidates from casting sincere votes. They are usually forced to vote for the next-best major party candidate; otherwise, they would be wasting their vote.

District Contests May Violate Majority Rule

As with any plurality voting system, the district representative in MMP may win with less than a majority of the vote. So an official that most people voted against may represent a district. Hungary has avoided this problem by using a majority system for its district contests: two-round runoff voting.

Vulnerable to Gerrymandering

Single-member district lines can be manipulated to unfairly favor the candidates of a particular party. MMP defenders point out that the PR component of MMP guarantees that no matter who wins on the district level, that nationally the parties always get their proportional share of seats and gerrymandering is less of a concern in this system.

- LWVCA

B.3 – Choice Voting (Single-Transferable Vote) Elections

Choice voting continues to be the favorite voting system of many electoral scholars. Many believe that it is the approach that best maximizes voter choice, effective votes, constituency ties, and fair representation for parties. Currently this system is used to elect parliaments in Ireland and Malta. In Australia it is used to elect the federal Senate, as well as the legislatures in several states there. It is also the PR system that was used in several cities in the United States during the twentieth century, including New York, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, and Boulder. It continues to be used today in Cambridge, Massachusetts for elections to their city council and school board. Because it has been used almost exclusively in English-speaking countries, it is sometimes referred to as an "Anglo-Saxon PR."

How It Works

The next ballot illustrates the voting process. All candidates are listed in the same place on the ballot. Instead of voting for one person, voters rank each candidate in their order of preference. So a voter who likes Campbell best would mark the "1" after his name. If Gomez is the second choice, the voter would mark "2" by his name, and so on. Voters rank as few or as many as they choose. (The sample ballot uses the AccuVote system used in choice voting in Cambridge, Massachusetts to elect its city council and school board.) For over 50 years the Cambridge count and vote transfers were done by hand. Software now allows computers to do this task. You may have noticed that the ranking process in choice voting is identical to that used in the instant runoff voting system described in the previous chapter. However, counting choice voting ballots is a bit more complicated. An example of how the votes are actually transferred is shown in the next chart.

-- Single Transferable Vote (Choice Voting) Ballot --

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS	Candidates for City Council from District One	Only one vote per candidate
Mark Your Choices by Filling in the Numbered Boxes Only. Fill in the number one **1** box next to your first choice; fill in the number two **2** box next to your second choice; fill in the number three **3** box next to your third choice, and so on. You may fill in as many choices as you please. Fill in no more than one box per candidate. Fill in no more than one box per column.	**(Three to be elected)**	*Only one vote per column*

Candidate	Boxes
Greg Odom (Dem.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Brandon Roy (Rep.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Joel Przybilla (Reform)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Travis Outlaw (Dem.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
LaMarcus Aldridge (Ind.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Sergio Rodriguez (Rep.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Write-In	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Write-In	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Write-In	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Assume that there is a three-seat district in which six people are running for office. The first step in the process is to establish the threshold, the minimum number of votes necessary to win a seat. The formula looks like this: number of votes cast divided by the number of seats plus one, plus one vote. In our three-seat district with 10,000 votes cast, the threshold is 10,000 votes cast divided by three seats plus 1, plus one vote, or 2501. The more seats in a district, the lower the threshold and the easier it is to get elected. In a nine seat district with 10,000 voters, for instance, the calculation is 10,000 votes cast divided by nine seats plus 1, plus one vote, for a threshold of 1,001 - considerably lower than in a three-seat district.

-- Counting of a Single-Transferable Vote Election --

Candidates	1st Count — Number of Votes	2nd Count — Transfer of Outlaw's votes and results	3rd Count — Transfer of Rodriguez's votes and results	4th Count — Transfer of Aldridge's votes and results	5th Count — Transfer of Odom's votes and results
Greg Odom (Dem.)	400	+300 / 700	700	700	--
Brandon Roy* (Rep.)	2,300	2,300	+500 / 2,800	2,501	2,501
Joel Przybilla (Reform)	2,000	2,000	2,000	+200 / 2,200	+100 / 2,300
Travis Outlaw* (Dem.)	2,900	2,501	2,501	2,501	2,501
LaMarcus Aldridge* (Ind.)	1,800	+99 / 1,899	+100 / 1,999	+99 / 2,098	+600 / 2,698
Sergio Rodriguez (Rep.)	600	600	--	--	--

* Designates Winning Candidates. Total Vote: 10,000 Threshold: 2,501

The second step is to count all the number one choices to see if any candidates have reached the threshold of 2,501. In this case, the Democrat Travis Outlaw has 2,900 voters and he is declared elected. But Outlaw actually has 399 more votes than he needed to win. These votes are considered wasted if they stay with Outlaw, so 399 votes are transferred to those voters' second choices on the ballot.

In the second count, we see the effect of this transfer. The other Democratic candidate, Greg Odom, gets 300 of those second choice votes, and the independent candidate, LaMarcus Aldridge, gets the other 99. No one is yet over the threshold, so another transfer takes place. The candidate with the least chance to win is eliminated and all his or her votes are transferred to their second choices. This candidate is Sergio Roderguez, one of the Republicans, and 500 of his voters' second choices go to the other Republican candidate Brandon Roy, and the other 100 votes are given to Aldridge.

Again the votes are recounted to see if anyone has reached the threshold. Brandon Roy has reached it with 2,800 votes and so he is declared elected. Once again his excess votes are redistributed to their second choices, 200 to Joel Przybilla, and 99 to LaMarcus Aldridge. But still no one has reached the threshold, so again the lowest candidate is eliminated and those votes transferred. That candidate is Odom, the Democrat, and 100 of his votes go to Przybilla, and 600 go to Aldridge. This puts Aldridge over the threshold with 2,698 votes, and he is the last one elected.

Choice voting was invented primarily to reduce the problem of wasted votes.

Transferring votes also produces other effects. It eliminates spoilers and allows voters to cast their votes sincerely for the candidates they most prefer. If their first choice candidate cannot win, then their vote will likely be transferred to someone who can win.

Advantages Specific to the Choice Voting System

Maximum Voter Choice

First, unlike closed party list voting or single-member district voting, the voter can choose among several candidates of the same party. Second, unlike some other voting systems, choice voting allows voters to cross party lines with their rankings. So a Democratic voter might rank a Democratic candidate first, but then give her number two ranking to a female Republican candidate that she particularly likes.

Vote for Candidates Not Parties

This means that no officials win office simply by being a part of a party list. Choice advocates argue that this makes officials more directly accountable to the voters.

Can Be Used in Nonpartisan Elections

Some local areas in the United States have nonpartisan elections where candidates appear on the ballot without any party designation. It would be impossible to use party list or MMP voting in this context because they require candidates to be listed by party. But, choice voting can be easily used in nonpartisan elections since the candidates can be listed with or without their party affiliation.

Voters Determine Basis of Representation

In single-member district voting, people are represented based on where they live. Voters in various areas of a multi-member district may group themselves into "voluntary

constituencies" based on their common political interests and be represented on that basis. For example, voters from different areas may band together to vote for a female candidate if they value that kind of representation. In this way, choice voting allows voters to be represented in the ways they think are most important.

Discourages Negative Campaigning

Many proponents claim that choice voting discourages the kind of negative campaigning that have become common in single-member district contests. Choice voting candidates may avoid this because they can benefit from being the second choices of voters. If they attack their opponents, they risk alienating these possible supporters.

Disadvantages Specific to the Choice Voting System

Complexity of the Count

Critics make much of the complex process of counting votes and making transfers. If voters can't understand how the seats are allocated, then this lessens the legitimacy of this voting system. Choice voting proponents acknowledge that the transfer process can be complicated, but suggest that voters can easily understand the basic principles at work.

Too Many Choices on Ballot

With a five-member district and three parties vying for office, you could easily have 10-12 candidates on a choice ballot. Critics suggest that many voters might find it difficult to become familiar with all of these candidates, and so they would be unable to make an informed choice. The ballot choices are usually simpler in party list or MMP systems.

Choice Voting in Local, Nonpartisan Elections

The use of choice voting for local elections, such as for city councils or school boards, raises some special issues. These elections, at least in California, are almost always nonpartisan. We have seen in the case of partisan elections that choice voting provides representation to the two major parties in approximate proportion to their support within the electorate and also gives minor parties a chance for some representation. The situation for nonpartisan elections is less clear.

In some communities individual groups may be organized sufficiently to run candidates as a slate. In the present winner-take-all system if such a group represented a plurality of the voters it might succeed in winning all of the seats on the board or council. With choice voting in such a situation, the organized group might still win a majority of the seats but it is highly unlikely that it would win them all, even if the opposition was fragmented. This is a consequence of the way the votes are counted and transferred.

Let's assume that a group represents about 50 percent of the voters and runs a slate of five candidates for five seats to be contested. The threshold for election would 16.7 percent of the votes. If the voters who support this group divide their first place votes exactly evenly among the three most popular candidates, each would be elected in the first round of counting. However, the remaining two candidates would have no first place votes and there would be no surplus votes available to be transferred to them from the other members of the slate. One of them would be immediately dropped and the other would undoubtedly follow in the next round.

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Note that this is the optimum result for this slate. If the voters distributed their first place votes evenly among the five slate members, each would have 10 percent of the vote, far below the threshold for election, and they would have to depend on picking up transferred votes from voters for non-slate candidates to have a chance to win. Under these circumstances they would probably be fortunate to win two seats. If you try various other scenarios you will see that none would lead to the slate winning five seats.

In less organized communities voters could choose to support candidates on the basis of their personal qualities (leadership, experience, etc.) or on factors such as political philosophy, positions on issues, ethnic or gender identity, where they live, etc. Winning candidates may or may not represent any readily identifiable group of voters. For an individual voter, decisions on how to rank the candidates might involve weighing the relative importance of these various factors.

One possible strategy for a candidate could involve making a highly targeted appeal to a relatively small segment of the community, with the goal of receiving about 20 percent of the first place votes, which would assure election. This could be done with relatively modest campaign spending. Others may choose a broader based campaign, hoping to get enough first place votes to keep them in the running and then pick up transferred votes from other candidates.

Choice voting demands more of voters than our present system, especially in local elections where party affiliations are not available as a basis for choice. Trying to intelligently decide between their fourth and fifth choices in what may be a large field of candidates will be a new experience for most people. Of course voters are not required to use all of their choices, but if they do not, then they forfeit some of their influence on the election.

- LWVCA

C. – Semi-Proportional Voting Methods
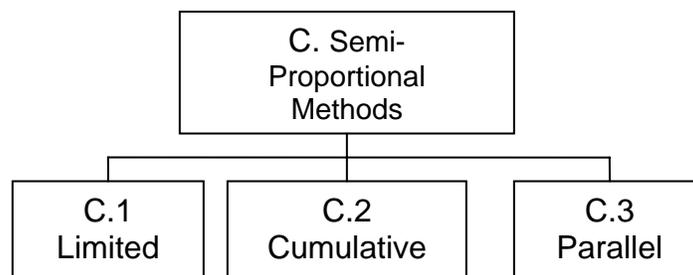
Figure 5 – Semi-Proportional Methods

In the debate about voting methods, the main alternatives are usually plurality-majority systems and proportional representation systems. These are the most prevalent and popular systems. The third and final family of voting systems is semi-proportionality. The basic intent of these systems is to prevent the majority of voters from dominating each and every seat, and to allow for some minority representation; however, as you will see, this is far from guaranteed.

-- Proportionality of Voting Systems --

Plurality-Majority **Semi-Proportional** **Proportional**

At-Large Plurality | Single-Member Plurality | Single-Member Majority | Limited Voting | Cumulative Voting | Parallel Voting | Choice Voting | Mixed-Member PR | Party List

Least Proportional   *Most Proportional*

Scale of Proportionality
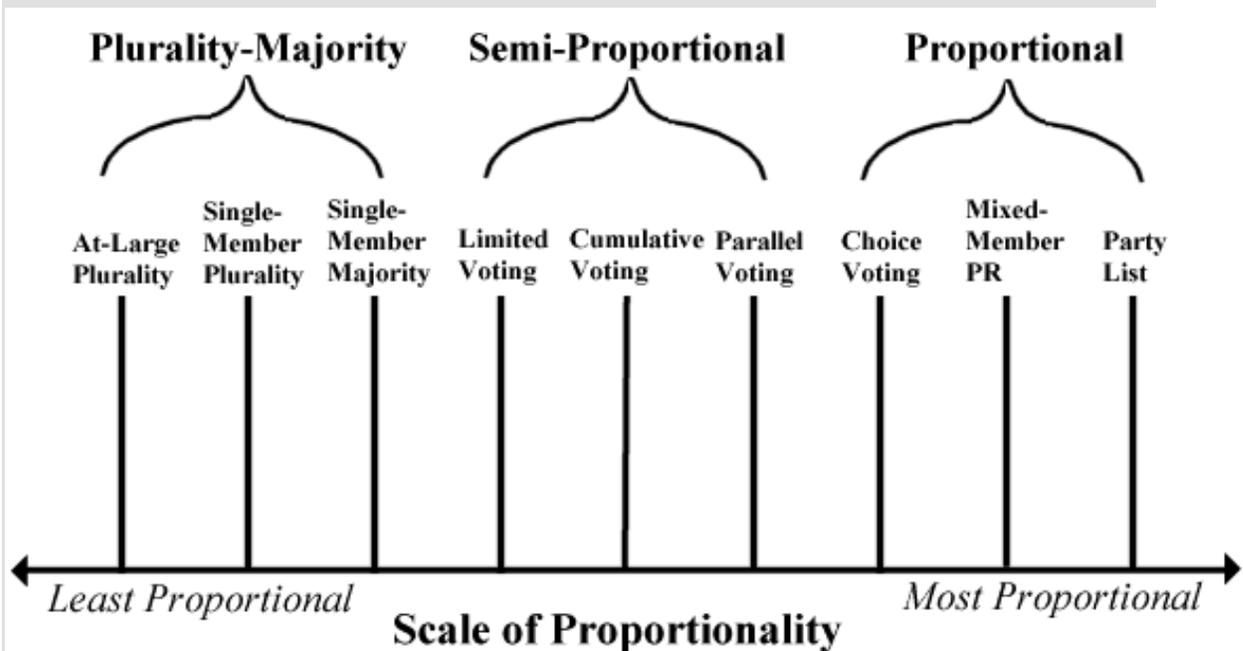
Proponents of semi-proportional systems like to think of them as a practical compromise between plurality and PR systems. They eliminate some of the problems of plurality voting, and they produce more proportional results. However, these systems are often attacked from two different sides. On the one hand, champions of plurality-majority systems see them as overly complicated and largely unnecessary reforms that lean too far backwards to try to accommodate political minorities. On the other hand, advocates of PR consider semi-proportional voting to be a crude and unreliable version of proportional representation.

In this chapter, you will become familiar with three different forms of semi-proportional voting: **cumulative voting**, **limited voting**, and **parallel voting**. Limited and cumulative voting are variations of the at-large voting system that you saw in the chapter on plurality-majority systems. But some modifications are made that dampen the winner-take-all characteristics of at-large voting and that result in a more proportional allocation of seats among parties.

Parallel voting approaches semi-proportionality from the other direction. Instead of starting with a plurality system and making it more proportional, parallel voting starts with a proportional system, mixed-member proportional voting (MMP), and makes it less proportional. Like MMP, some legislators are elected from single-member districts and some from party lists. But unlike MMP, no effort is made in parallel voting to ensure that seats are allocated in proportion to votes received, and so the usual result is semi-proportional.

History

The earliest forms of semi-proportional representation were developed in the 19th century. By the mid-1800s, the drawbacks of plurality voting were becoming more obvious and less acceptable to governments and voters. Majority voting was invented as

one way to solve some of these problems, but it did not address several other common problems of plurality voting. Under plurality rules, the largest party almost always received more seats than it deserved and the smaller parties, fewer seats, and majority voting did nothing to change that. So reformers continued to search for new approaches. The limited vote and the cumulative vote were invented to try to produce more proportional results. They were the first, somewhat awkward, attempts to assure more fair and accurate representation for the mass political parties that were emerging at that time.

A few European countries experimented with these systems, but almost all of them eventually chose fully proportional systems as the alternative to plurality-majority voting. Until recently it was relatively rare to see semi-proportional systems in use either in the United States or abroad. No country uses the cumulative vote to elect their national legislature, and the limited vote is only used in Spain to elect its senate.

These two systems have been used occasionally on the local level in this country. In the 1980s and 90s, there was a resurgence of interest in the cumulative vote, primarily among those interested in finding new ways to ensure fair representation for racial and ethnic minorities by the Justice Department. Several dozen towns and counties have adopted cumulative voting in response to these voting rights concerns. Abroad, the 1990s saw a surge of interest in parallel voting. It was adopted by several emerging democracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The relative scarcity of working examples of these systems has meant that there are fewer studies of them compared to plurality-majority or PR systems. For this reason, we know less about the political impacts of these systems, and what we know is somewhat more tentative.

Common Features of Semi-Proportional Systems

Multi-Member Districts

All of these systems utilize multi-member districts. It is this feature that allows for the representation of minorities in districts and that produces more proportional results than plurality-majority systems. The number of seats in these districts can vary tremendously within and among these systems. The cumulative vote has sometimes been used with small three-seat districts, while the parallel system often utilizes regional districts where dozens of seats are at stake.

Candidate-Centered Voting

All semi-proportional systems use candidate-centered voting procedures and they resemble plurality voting in this respect. Votes are cast for individual candidates and the winning candidates are the ones with the most votes.

Lower Thresholds

Semi-proportional systems typically have a threshold of exclusion that is lower than plurality-majority systems and higher than PR systems. In plurality-majority systems, this threshold is 50 percent, the highest among all systems. In PR systems, the threshold is more typically much lower, often in the five percent to 15 percent ranges. In semi-proportional systems this threshold can vary greatly, but it often falls in the 20 percent to 40 percent range, and this is part of what accounts for their semi-proportional results.

General Advantages

More Proportional than Plurality-Majority Voting

The main appeal of semi-proportional systems is that they produce more proportional representation of parties than plurality-majority voting, without going as far as fully proportional systems. Under plurality-majority rules, the largest party usually gets more legislative seats than its share of the vote would seem to warrant, while the second largest and smaller parties get fewer seats than their share should entitle them to. This tendency is somewhat dampened in semi-proportional systems. In this way, semi-proportional systems reduce distortions in representation, although not to the extent usually found in fully proportional systems. Champions of the two-party system would see this characteristic of semi-proportional systems as a disadvantage rather than an advantage.

Fairer to Racial Minorities

Just as semi-proportional systems may aid minor parties, they can also be helpful to racial and ethnic minorities. The lower thresholds in these systems mean that these minorities stand a better chance of winning some representation than they would in a pure plurality-majority system. When cumulative voting and limited voting were used for the first time in the 1980s in some local elections in Alabama, African-Americans in those jurisdictions were able for the first time since reconstruction to elect some representatives to their city and county legislatures.

Fewer Wasted Votes than Plurality

Because political minorities do stand a somewhat better chance of winning some representation in these systems, there are usually fewer wasted votes than in plurality-majority systems. More voters come away from the polling booth with someone to represent them.

General Disadvantages

Less Proportional than PR

While these systems do often produce more proportional representation of parties than plurality-majority systems, they usually fall short of the more accurate proportionality offered by full PR systems like the mixed-member PR or choice voting. Sometimes they produce a nearly proportional allocation of seats among parties, but at other times the results are very unproportional. This kind of unreliability and capriciousness in a voting system is disturbing to critics. These systems usually fall short of the more accurate Proportional Representation.

May Deny Representation to Minor Parties and Racial Minorities

The problem here takes two forms. First, thresholds in these systems are sometimes so high as to make it difficult for minorities to win any seats. In practice, this means that only the two largest parties in a district can win representation. Small third parties are denied representation just as they would be in plurality-majority systems.

The second source of problems for minorities is the inconsistency of these systems. A large racial minority may still not win any representation if its voters fail to allocate their votes among candidates in the most strategic manner.

May Produce Manufactured Majorities

Just as semi-proportional systems may be less than fair with small parties, they may be more than fair with the largest, giving them more seats than their share of the vote would justify. This can produce manufactured majorities, where a party with less than a majority of the vote wins a majority of the seats. Critics of semi-proportional voting see this as a violation of the principle of majority rule.

May Discourage Single-Party Majorities

One of the most often cited advantages of plurality-majority voting is that it tends to produce single-party majorities in the legislature. Some critics of semi-proportional systems charge that their increased openness to political minorities may undermine the chances of creating single-party majorities. However, defenders point out that there is little evidence of this and that semi-proportional systems routinely produce single-party legislative majorities.

More Wasted Votes than PR

Critics maintain that semi-proportional systems do not go far enough to minimize wasted votes. These systems do better than plurality-majority systems, but usually fall short of full PR. When a party's supporters are forced to waste their votes, their party will win fewer seats than it warrants.

- LWVCA

C.1 – Limited Voting Elections

The limited vote (LV) is another variation of at-large voting. One of the first uses of LV was tried and abandoned in England in the mid-19th century. Today this system is relatively uncommon, with only Spain using it to elect its senate. Until recently, a version of LV was also used in Japan. In the United States, several cities and towns, mostly in Connecticut and Pennsylvania, have used the limited vote for many years, primarily to ensure some representation for political minorities. More recently, 21 towns in Alabama adopted limited voting to settle voting rights suits.

How It Works

The limited vote works almost exactly the same way as at-large or multi-member district plurality voting works. The crucial difference is that voters have fewer votes than the number of seats to be elected. In a three-seat district, voters might have two votes. The elections for the Spanish Senate typically use four-seat districts in which voters have three votes. The limited vote ballot is virtually identical to those used in at-large or multi-member district plurality voting.

Counting the ballots and determining the winner is very straightforward. The threshold of exclusion can be very different for LV than it is for cumulative voting (CV, see next section). In CV, the threshold for a five-seat district is 16.7 percent, relatively low. The formula for the limited vote threshold is the number of votes cast divided by the sum of votes and number of seats. In a five-seat district where voters have four votes, the threshold is four divided by nine, or 44.4 percent. This is dramatically higher than that for CV. This difference in threshold levels accounts for some of the dissimilar political results of these two systems.

Advantages Specific to this System

The limited vote shares all the general advantages of semi-proportional voting systems, including the ability to produce a more proportional allocation of seats than plurality-majority and to allow for some minority representation. But it has several additional advantages as well.

Easy to Use and Administer

Because this system so closely resembles at-large voting, most voters find it very easy to use. Election administrators also appreciate the ease and simplicity of this system.

May Reinforce a Two Party System

When the threshold of exclusion in LV extends into the 30 percent to 40 percent range, it can help to reinforce the two party system. With such a high threshold, usually only the two major parties can win representation. This is obviously considered a serious disadvantage by those who value multiparty democracy.

Usable in Nonpartisan Elections

Like the cumulative vote, limited voting can also be used in nonpartisan elections.

Disadvantages Specific to the Limited Vote

May Produce Majority Sweeps

Like the cumulative vote, if a party nominates too many candidates, their vote can be spread too thin for any of their candidates to be elected. So even though they have, say, 35 percent of the vote, they win no representation. This is more like the result you would get in a single-member plurality election. Mistakes in nomination strategies can easily result in this kind of disproportional result.

May Produce Minority Rule

Again the problem here is identical to that in cumulative voting. If voters do not manage to distribute their votes in the most strategic manner among their candidates, they end up wasting many of their votes.

Less Geographical Representation

Like the cumulative vote, LV uses multi-member districts and so it also comes under attack for de-emphasizing the kind of geographical representation that takes place in single-member districts. The details of this accusation and the defenders replies are identical to the ones seen above in the discussion of cumulative voting.

- LWVCA

C.2 – Cumulative Voting Elections

In the United States, cumulative voting (CV) is the most talked about form of semi-proportional voting. However, if you were to look in foreign handbooks on voting systems, the cumulative vote is often not even mentioned as an alternative. That is because it is not currently used in any other country besides the United States.

The first effort to adopt CV in this country was spearheaded in the 19th century by U.S. Senator Charles Buckalew of Illinois. In 1867 he introduced a bill in Congress that would

have mandated cumulative voting for the U.S. House of Representatives. Though his bill failed to become law, Buckalew later played a more successful role in helping to persuade Illinois to adopt CV for its House of Representatives. It was used there between 1870 and 1980, and it allowed both Democrats and Republicans to elect representatives from each district.

More recently, voting rights advocates have expressed growing interest in this form of voting. In response to voting rights suits, several local areas have abandoned plurality-majority systems and adopted cumulative voting. CV is currently used in Amarillo and several other cities and towns in Texas to elect their local school boards.

Interestingly, the most common use of CV in the United States is not in the public sector, but in the private sector. It is used for the election of boards of directors in hundreds of corporations. Proponents of CV are fond of pointing out that it can hardly be considered a "radical" alternative if it is used so often by the traditionally conservative U.S. business community. Even some local Leagues of Women Voters in California use CV during their program planning meetings!

How it Works

Candidates run in multi-member districts. Voters have as many votes as there are seats. Voters cast their votes for individual candidates and the winners are the ones with the most votes. The difference is that voters may distribute their votes among the candidates in any way they prefer. For example, in elections for the county commission in Chilton County, Alabama, voters have seven votes to use to elect the seven commissioners. Voters can cast all seven for one candidate, one vote for each of seven candidates, four for one and three for another, or any other combination they desire.

When CV was used to elect the Illinois House, it was used in three seat districts. Voters could cast one vote for each of three candidates, three votes for one candidate, or one and one half votes for two candidates.

The CV ballot (see following page) resembles somewhat the one used for at-large voting. However, it has spaces for voters to cast multiple votes for each candidate. This example shows a computer-readable ballot for the election of seven officeholders to a legislative body. Voters fill in a square for each vote that they want to give to a candidate, up to a total of seven for all the candidates.

Official Ballot
Municipal Elections

Instructions to Voters: You may cast up to seven (7) votes. You may distribute your seven votes in any way among the candidates: all seven for one candidate, four for one and three for another, one for each of seven candidates, etc. Cast votes for candidates by filling in the numbered boxes next to their name. For example, to cast three votes for a candidate, fill in boxes 1, 2 and 3

Candidates for City Council	You may cast no more than seven (7) votes
Enid Lakeman	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Thomas Gilpin	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Leon Weaver	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Kathleen Barber	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
J.F.H. Wright	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Clarence Hoag	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
John Humphreys	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
John Commons	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Wilma Rule	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Joseph Zimmerman	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Edward Still	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Write-In	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Write-In	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Computing the results in CV is straightforward - the candidates with the most votes win. The results in the table below show the outcome of a three-seat district contest. The candidates with the three highest vote totals are declared the winners, in this case two Democrats and a Republican.

- Results of a Cumulative Vote Election -
(30,000 Democrats and 16,000 Republicans with three votes each.)

Democrats		Republicans	
Candidate	**Votes**	**Candidate**	Votes
Barber	35,000*	Lakeman	48,000*
Still	30,000*		
Weaver	25,000		
	90,000		
Result			
	2 seats		**1 seat**
(* Winning candidates)			

As this example illustrates, if a political minority puts all of its votes on one candidate, then it stands a good chance of winning that one seat. The threshold (the minimum percentage of the vote required for election) for CV is calculated by the following

formula: one divided by the number of seats to be elected, plus one. For a three-seat district the threshold is one divided by three plus one, or 1/4, or 25 percent. Since the Republicans have about 35 percent of the vote in this example, this means that, as long they put all of their votes on one candidate, they cannot be excluded from winning that one seat.

The level of the threshold depends directly on the number of seats at stake in the district. The more seats, the lower the threshold. Conversely, if there are very few seats in the district, the threshold can be too high for small political and racial minorities to overcome.

Advantages Specific to this System

Like other systems in this family, CV offers semi-proportionality in party representation and often increases the chances of minority representation. When used in Illinois in three seat districts, CV usually resulted in the larger party winning two seats and the smaller party one seat.

Easy to Use

Proponents of CV believe that Americans would find this system easy to use. It is not all that different from the at-large elections that are already used in many cities in the United States. While the process of combining votes on candidates is a new one, it is not a particularly difficult one to understand.

Minority Representation Without Race-Conscious Districting

Many proponents argue that one of the main advantages of this system is that it increases the chances for racial and ethnic minorities to win representation, while avoiding the need to create special majority-minority districts. Chilton County, Alabama, for instance, continued to use a countywide multi-member district as it had in previous at-large elections, but simply changed to electing local officials by the cumulative vote. This allowed African-Americans for the first time to elect members to the previously all-white county commission and school board.

More Options for Representation

Because CV uses larger multi-member districts, voters in areas of the district may group themselves together into "voluntary constituencies" based on their common political interests and be represented on that basis.

Discourages Gerrymandering

CV shares an advantage with at-large and multi-member district PR systems, lessening the opportunity for gerrymandering. Since the multi-member districts of CV are designed to allow for representation of political minorities, attempts to manipulate district lines are less effective.

Disadvantages Specific to Cumulative Voting

May Produce Majority Sweeps

In some cases the cumulative vote can end up giving all the seats in a district to the majority (a "sweep") and completely deny representation to the minority - exactly what this system was designed to prevent. One actual example of this problem occurred in the

town of Centre, Alabama. In its first CV election in 1988, one black candidate was elected. But in the next election in 1992, a second black candidate divided the vote and both minority candidates lost. Such problems do not arise in PR systems like party list voting because the number of nominated candidates has no effect on the allocation of seats.

May Produce Minority Rule

The inconsistency of the results in CV can also produce another problem - minority rule. Consider a three-seat election in which one party has a strong majority of the voters. If a candidate of this party is very popular, many voters may give her several of their votes. As a result, the votes cast for her are in excess of what she needs to win office and are therefore wasted, leaving too few votes to elect another candidate of the same party. This allows the minority party to win two of the three seats, a clear violation of the principle of majority rule.

Requires Strict Party Control of Nominations and Votes

Proponents of CV argue that problems like majority sweep and minority rule can be minimized if parties exert effective control over candidate nominations and the distribution of their supporters' votes. For example, parties in the Chilton County cumulative elections pass out sample ballots that tell voters how many votes to give to each of the party's candidates: three for this candidate, four for this one, and so on. However, there is no guarantee that voters will actually follow these directions. Voters can be alienated at this strict, top-down control over the casting of votes.

Similar kinds of voter resentment can occur over party attempts to strictly control nominations. If parties become too good at estimating their optimal number of candidates, voters may feel that this is limiting their choices.

Reduces Constituent-Representative Ties

Many criticisms of CV come from advocates of PR systems, but this particular complaint usually comes from defenders of single-member district plurality-majority systems. They argue that the de-emphasis on geographical representation that can occur in the larger multi-member districts used in CV is not an advantage as proponents claim but a serious disadvantage. This arrangement may make it more difficult for representatives to establish close ties with their constituents. Proponents respond that geographical representation isn't always the most important thing for voters, and if it is, they can always vote for candidates that come from their area.

CV advocates also argue that providing representatives from different parties in each district actually improves constituent relationships because it makes it easier for constituents of all political stripes to find a representative who is sensitive to their particular political concerns.

Confusing to Voters

Proponents of plurality-majority systems also sometimes charge that cumulative voting is overly complicated. Proponents believe that CV is easy to use since it is merely a slight modification of at-large voting and most voters would have little trouble understanding or using it.

- LWVCA

C.3 – Parallel Voting Elections

This voting system is also sometimes called a "combination system." These alternative names indicate that the origin of this system is very different from that of cumulative and limited voting. While the other two are variations of at-large voting, parallel voting is a variation of mixed-member proportional voting (MMP), but does not require proportionality like MMP and other PR forms do. This means that it follows very different procedures and as a result has some different advantages and disadvantages.

This system had a burst of popularity in the 1990s when it was adopted by several former communist countries, including Albania, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Georgia, Lithuania, and Russia. In those countries it was often portrayed as a "compromise" between PR and plurality voting systems, much as MMP is a compromise where it is used. Some other countries using parallel voting include Guatemala, Japan, and South Korea.

How It Works

The procedures of parallel voting are almost identical to those of mixed-member proportional voting (MMP). As with MMP, one half of the legislature is elected in single member districts and the other half is elected from party lists. Voters get two votes, one for a district representation, and the other for a party. The main difference between parallel voting and MMP is that there is no effort to ensure proportional representation for parties. In the party list half of the election, the seats are simply divided proportionately among the parties and then added to the district winners without any attempt to ensure proportionality for parties' seats. The fact that the party list seats are not used to correct the distortions of the district vote is why this system is called "parallel."

Advantages Specific to Parallel Voting
Somewhat Friendlier to Minor Parties

As you saw earlier, cumulative voting and limited voting can be hostile to small minor parties, sometimes preventing them from having any representation at all. In contrast, the party list part of parallel voting usually allows for some representation of minor parties, but it is usually less than their share of the vote. Parallel systems tend to have a very low threshold on the party list side of the vote. In Russia, for instance, the threshold is five percent.

Larger Party System and Broader Debate

Because parallel voting is somewhat more favorable to minor parties, it is more likely to result in multiparty races and multiparty legislatures. This in turn is more likely to broaden political debate, as more diverse points of view are represented in campaign debates and policy discussions.

Ensures Geographical Representation

The cumulative vote and the limited vote both utilize only multi-member districts. In parallel voting, half the seats are located in small, single-member districts and this allows for more direct geographical representation. Each local area is assured of representation and there is also the possibility of closer ties between the representatives and their constituents.

Two Votes Allow Better Expression of Views

Having two different votes allows voters to express more complicated political views. For example, voters may split their votes as a way of expressing their support for a particular coalition of parties. Supporters of the Greens would cast their party list vote for their own party to ensure that it wins some seats in the legislature. Then in the district contest, they might cast their other vote for the major party candidate who has the best chance to win and is closest to their political perspective, probably the Democratic candidate.

Disadvantages Specific to Parallel Voting

Like CV and LV, many of the disadvantages of parallel voting are related to its inconsistent proportionality. In LV and CV the problem is rooted in the manner nominations are made and the misallocation of party votes. In parallel voting, the inconsistencies are caused by the use of single member plurality districts.

May Violate Majority Rule

Parallel voting may violate the principle of majority rule in two different ways. First, on the district level, plurality voting may result in the election of a candidate that is not supported by the majority of the voters. This is especially likely if there are more than two candidates running. The other is when a party can win a majority of the seats in the legislature without winning a majority of the vote, a manufactured majority. Of course, proponents of plurality-majority voting who prefer single-party legislatures may consider these manufactured majorities to be a strength rather than a defect of parallel voting.

Bias Toward Large Parties

As a rule, larger parties tend to get more seats than they deserve in the single-member districts contests, and there is no attempt to compensate for this bias. For example, in a recent parallel voting election in Japan, the largest party received only 32.8 percent of the party list vote, but ended up with 48.2 percent of the total seats. In contrast, in a mixed-member proportional election in New Zealand that same year, the largest party received 34.1 percent of the vote and 36.7 percent of the total seats.

Vulnerable to Gerrymandering

Because it utilizes single-member districts, parallel voting encourages gerrymandering, the drawing of district lines to advantage a particular party. Since the parallel system makes no effort to ensure proportionality, gerrymandering goes unchecked and can easily create misrepresentation of parties in the legislature.

Discourages Some Sincere Votes

District voting discourages supporters of minor party candidates from casting sincere votes. They vote for the next best major party candidate; otherwise, they would be wasting their vote. However, people can vote sincerely on the party list part of the ballot, because those votes for minor parties are likely to be effective in winning some representation.

Less Easy to Use and Administer

Parallel voting is not based on the familiar at-large approach to voting. This has led some critics to be concerned that American voters would be unfamiliar with this kind of ballot and confused by the two-vote system. But proponents argue that this two-ballot system is

not all that different from the combined at-large/single-member district systems already in use in many American cities.

- LWVCA

[i] Amy, Douglas J. (1993). *Real Choices New Voices: The Case for Proportional Representation Elections in the United States.* p. 11. New York: Columbia University Press

[ii] Amy, D., p. 11.