

Instituting a Proportional Representation System of Voting in the United States

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Introduction

The current voting system in the United States exhibits numerous flaws that weaken American democracy. Presently, the U.S. operates a winner-take-all voting system through single member districts. Consequently, those who did not cast their vote for the winner are effectively not represented in the American government. This problem introduces a lack of trust into the voting system, increases political hostility, and expands the influence of gerrymandering. I propose that these issues could be vastly improved by instituting a proportional representation ranked-choice voting system in the United States. This method of voting allows citizens to rank their vote choices on their ballots and distributes legislative seats proportionally to the percentage of votes a political party receives. The introduction of this system into the United States would allow for a more accurate representation of the American electorate. Subsequently, a higher trust in the voting system would emerge, voter turnout would increase, the effect of gerrymandering would decrease, and minorities and women would be more often elected. In addition, more political parties would be created and polarization would likely decline.

What is a Proportional Representation System?

A proportional representation system is a system of voting in which the number of seats a political party is awarded in a legislature is proportional to the percentage of votes that party received. A party-list proportional representation system is one in which voters cast their vote for a political party, not a candidate. Parties are awarded seats according to the percentage of votes they won. They then fill those seats from a list of pre-approved candidates, starting at the top of the list and allocating seats to candidates in the order they are listed until all the seats they won are filled. A proportional representation system can also work by using ranked-choice voting and single transferable votes. In this option, voters have individual candidates to vote for and can choose their first, second, and third choices. This type of voting uses multi-member districts, therefore one designated district would have more than one representative in the House of Representatives. There is a quota set prior to the election as to the percentage of votes needed for a candidate to be awarded a seat. After candidates who have met the quota from first-choice votes have been awarded seats, the candidate who received the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated, and those ballots are redistributed to the other candidates using the voters' second choices. This elimination and redistribution process then repeats and continues until all of the seats are filled. Instituting a ranked-choice voting system would be an easier transition for the United States than implementing a party-list system, as Americans would still be able to vote for individuals instead of parties.

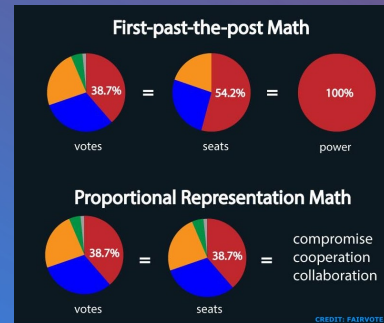
Current Problems with the United State's Voting System

- Lack of accurate representation
 - A winner-take-all system leaves those who did not vote for the winning candidate to be unrepresented in the House of Representatives
- Large influence of gerrymandering
 - Single-member districts result in one representative per district, increasing the incentive to gerrymander
- High polarization and political hostility
 - The winner-take-all system has resulted in a two-party system in which there are few incentives for bipartisanship
- Citizens' lack of trust in the voting system
 - Lack of accurate representation results in lowered trust, as voters feel their voices are not heard

Current U.S. Voting System

- Single-member, winner-take-all districts; only highest vote winner is given a seat
- Two largest parties most able to gain seats
- One party will reach a majority in the legislature, offering little incentive for bipartisanship and encouraging political hostility

A Comparison of the Voting Systems



Proportional Representation

- Multi-member districts, seats allocated proportionally based on ranked choices
- Parties gain seats if they can reach the quota; multiple parties are more likely to win seats
- If no party reaches a majority in the legislature a coalition must be formed, incentivizing bipartisanship and political cooperation

Predicted Impacts of a Proportional Representation System on the U.S.

- Smaller parties will be more likely to gain legislative seats
- Voters will choose parties that more accurately represent their views since they will not feel that votes for third parties are "wasted"
- Coalitions will be formed if no party receives a majority of seats, encouraging political cooperation and discouraging hostility
- Ranked-choice voting decreases polarization as voters would not have to identify with only one party
- Eradicating single member districts mitigates the impacts of gerrymandering
- Smaller groups (minorities) would be represented and gain trust in the voting system and voter turnout would increase

Possible Disadvantages

- Public backlash from those against amending the Constitution
- Adopting a new voting system may be confusing to voters
- Instability caused by many parties and coalitions
- Extreme views are more likely to be represented

Proposed Solutions

- Education on the system's benefits to show the change is beneficial to democracy
- An information campaign led by the government to teach voters how the new system works and its benefits
- Quotas to win seats will mitigate the likelihood of too many parties and decrease the probability of success fringe groups and extreme views

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