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**URN**

**REPORT SUBJECT**

The major voting systems in use around the world

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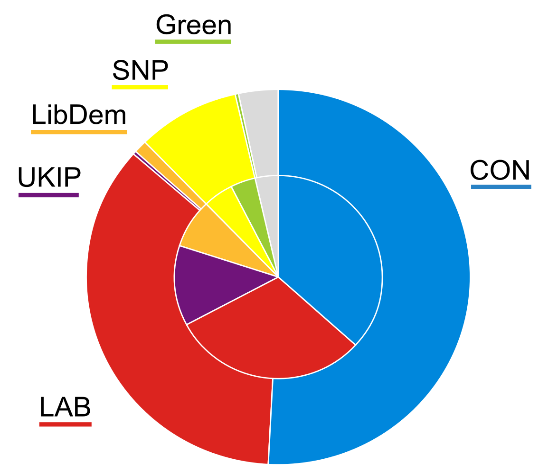
**The Major Voting Systems in use around the World**

There is a plethora of electoral systems in use to elect Parliaments around the world. We will explore the most popular electoral systems in this report and briefly comment on the fairness of these systems.

* First past the post (FPTP)
* Party list proportional representation (PR)
* Two-round run-off
* Additional-member system (AMS)
* Alternative Vote (AV)

First past the Post

First past the post is one of the most popular voting systems around the world, especially within countries formerly part of the British Empire [10]. It is used in the UK, USA, India, Canada, and a variety of other countries [10]. FPTP demands that the nation is divided into constituencies. Each constituency returns one member to Parliament. Hence, there are only as many members taking seats in Parliament as there are constituencies in the country.

  
On polling day, the electorate is given a list of candidates standing for election in their constituency. An individual may only choose one candidate to vote for. After polling stations close, the votes are subsequently counted and the candidate with the most votes wins and is sent to Parliament. Therefore, all other candidates lose and are not sent to Parliament; this leads to some dubbing this system “winner takes all” [2].

The popular vote for a party is defined as the total number of votes won by all the candidates who stood for the same party. Since losers are given nothing, nor is there a minimum vote the winner must achieve, this can lead to Parliaments where one party may have a majority of seats but a minority of the popular vote. This happens because the party that won the election, fielded candidates who defeated all alternative candidates in a majority of constituencies in the country. Thus, proportionality is traded for local accountability.

*Pie chart [11] showing the results from the UK 2015 Westminster elections. Inner circle shows popular vote. Outer circle shows seats won*

Party List Proportional Representation

Party list PR is popular in the European Mainland, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa [7]. Unlike FPTP, the country does not need to be divided into constituencies. However, constituencies do exist in some countries such as Spain [5]. Political parties are required to produce ranked lists of candidates that they would like to sit in Parliament.

On polling day, the electorate is then given the right to choose their favourite list of candidates and may vote for one respectively. There are several different ways to count votes, here we will look at a commonly used method which is the **d'Hondt method**[8]. First, the total votes are tallied and divided by the number of seats won by the party (either in the constituency or the entire nation) plus one to acquire a number for the quota for each party. Obviously, at the beginning of the counting process every party has zero seats.

Under the **d'Hondt** counting system, the party which has the largest quota has its 1st member of the list granted a seat in Parliament and they are duly elected. Then the quota for that party is adjusted thereafter and the party with the largest quota is sought after again. This process is repeated, so ensuring a level of proportionality of seats won to votes cast for those parties. It also ensures that the leadership of all the parties are entrenched in Parliament since the leadership put themselves at the top of the list [1]. Here local accountability is exchanged for proportionality.

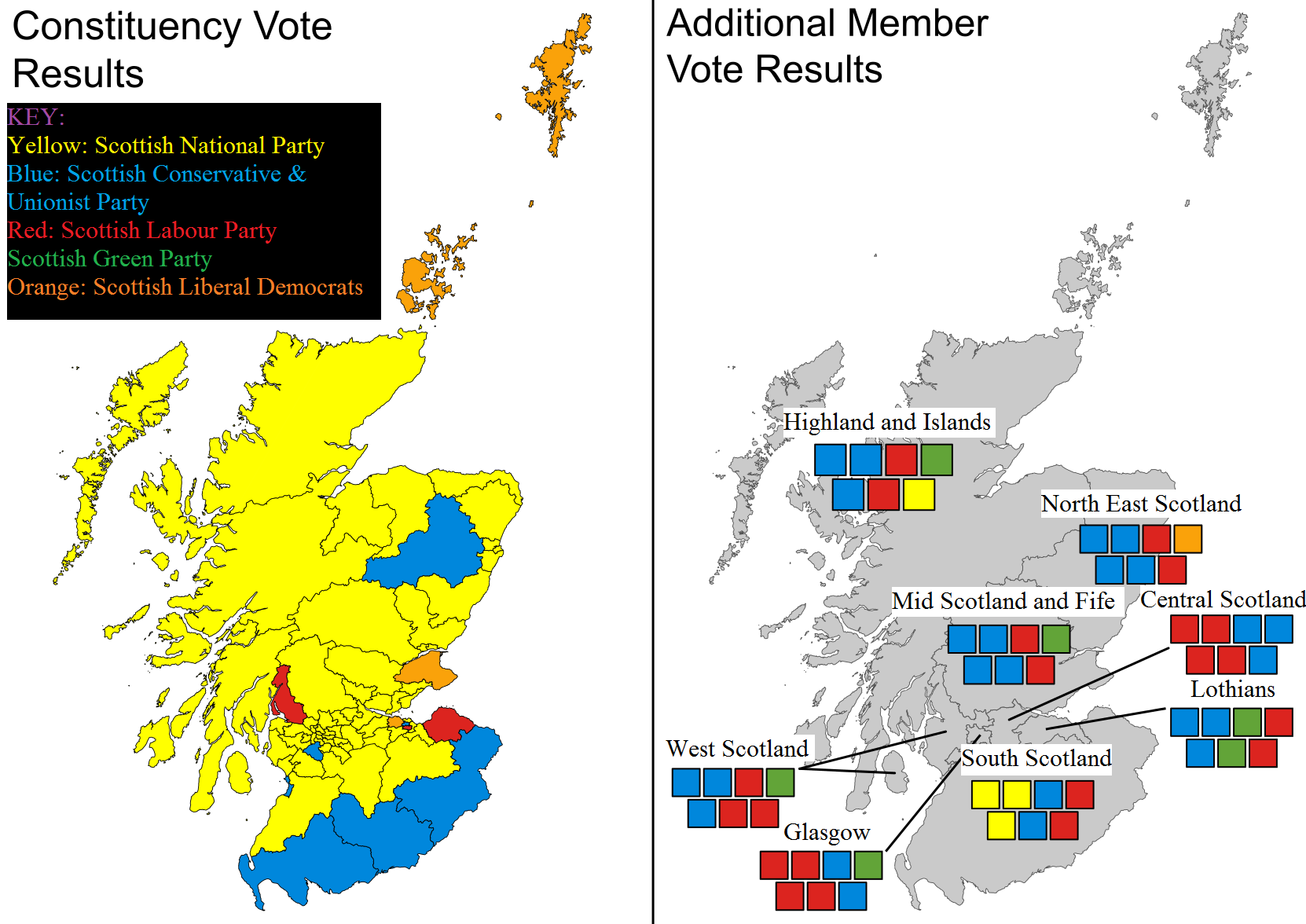
Two-Round Run-off

Two-round run-off systems are very similar to first past the post. The President of the 5th French Republic is elected this way. Like FPTP, the country is divided into constituencies and each constituency elects one MP from a list of candidates standing there. The election is split into two polling days usually a week apart.

On the 1st polling day, voters vote for their favourite candidate. If no-one receives more than 50% of the total vote in the first round [4], then the two most popular candidates are selected to stand for election again in the 2nd round. All candidates who win over 10% may stand in the 2nd round [14]. The winner of the 2nd round is then returned to Parliament, with the loser of the 2nd round facing the same fate as those who didn’t make it to the 2nd round. A major consequence of two-round is establishment parties collaborating with each other in the 2nd round to cut down minor parties. They do this by standing down and letting a less disagreeable opponent win [13].

Additional-Member System

Additional-Member systems are a mixture of first past the post and party lists. The most well-known Parliaments which are elected using AMS are the Scottish Parliament and the German Bundestag. The nation is divided into constituencies and each of these constituencies belong to one region each e.g. all the Glasgow constituencies belong to the Glasgow region. Each constituency returns one member to the Parliament, just as it would do under FPTP. In addition to those MPs, more are elected from a top-up list which operates under the **d’Hondt** system.



*Scottish Parliamentary election results for 2016 with constituency results on the left and regional list results on the right* [12]

On polling day, individuals from the electorate are provided two ballots each. One for their constituency and one for their region. They then choose their favourite candidate to represent their constituency and then their favourite party list for the region. Constituency seats are allocated using FPTP. The distribution of regional seats operates under the **d’Hondt system**. Constituency seats won in that region as well as regional seats are used to find the quota. Therefore, there are two classes of politicians: one which was directly elected by a locality and another which was elected from a list for a region [3].

Alternative Vote

AV is used to elect the Australian House of Representatives [6]. AV is like first past the post insofar as the country is divided into constituencies and each constituency elects one MP from a list of candidates.

On polling day, voters are then able to rank candidates in numerical order with lower numbers indicating higher preference. Voters are free to rank as many as they please. The votes are then tallied and if no candidates win over 50% of the 1st preference votes, then the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. That candidate’s votes are redistributed per their 2nd preferences. This process repeats (using 3rd, 4th, etc. preference votes) until a candidate breaches the 50% threshold, therefore winning a seat in Parliament. This system was devised to stop the ‘spoiler effect’ found in FPTP elections [9].

From the wide variety of electoral systems in use around the world, not only is democracy widespread but the people want different things from their electoral systems. FPTP offers direct accountability of politicians but party list PR gives proportionality of seats won to votes cast. Whilst others try to create a compromise between proportionality and local accountability. So, we can conclude that fairness in elections implies different things to different electorates and nations.

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