

LIBERAL ARTS

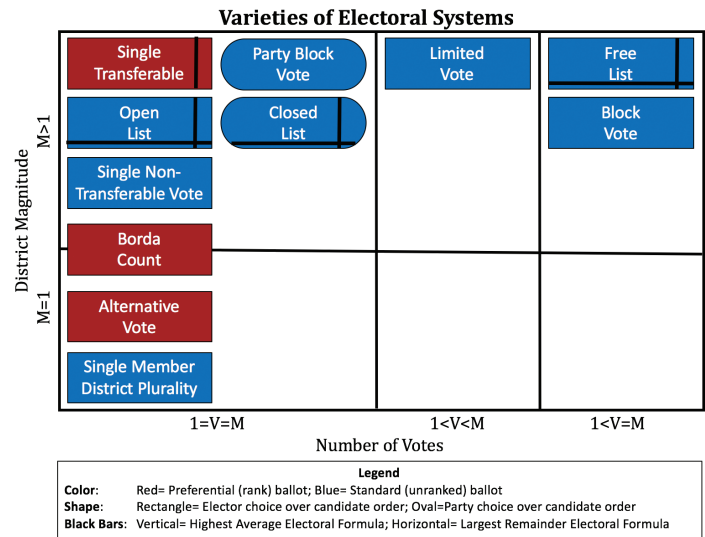
Organization and Comparison of Electoral Systems

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Political science does not have a strong typology of electoral systems. The ones that exist are not comprehensive, as they do not encompass all types, and they contain logical flaws in that they incorporate attributes that do not pertain to essential differences. Without a logically consistent typology, researchers and policy makers make errors as they conduct research and analysis. The purpose of this project is to build a model of the full universe of electoral systems in use across the world’s national legislatures by identifying the fewest number of defining features, and to design a visual representation of the result (see figure). The key properties I identify are: 1) the number of votes cast per voter; 2) the number of seats per district (i.e., district magnitude); 3) whether voters can express ranked preference or not; 4) whether voters can reorder party lists or not; and 5) whether the electoral formula follows a quota system, divisor system, or neither (i.e., a simple plurality). I apply this typology to code legislative elections in 85 democracies circa 2004. In future research, I will analyze the associations between these properties of electoral systems and important national outcomes, such as the level of proportionality between party vote percentages and party seat percentages, and the strength and longevity of the democracy.

Research advisor Thomas Mustillo writes: “Research on the world’s electoral systems is a very mature area of study, with includes rich and detailed case analysis, as well as large-N

quantitative comparisons. It is therefore surprising that the overarching typologies that political scientists use to map out the variations between electoral systems are logically flawed and incomplete. At the outset of this research, we envisioned a sort of ‘periodic table of electoral systems,’ which embodies a degree of rigor and systemization such as we find in the Periodic Table of Elements. Adam has produced a visual model of the world’s electoral systems that is closer to that goal than any currently published typology that I am aware of.”



■ A typology of electoral systems used in the world’s national legislatures.