

Introduction

Popular elections are at the heart of representative democracy. The understanding of the laws and practices that govern such elections is essential to understanding modern democracies. Although the design of an appropriate electoral system is an important issue in any democracy, the notion of what is 'appropriate' is not straightforward, since an electoral system in a parliamentary system has to balance several aims. Conventional wisdom suggests that plurality rule is most likely to produce the formation of stable government with majority parties. However, plurality is characterised by a high degree of disproportionality between vote shares and seat shares, the number of seats won by bigger parties being unduly large compared to their vote shares. In contrast, the family of proportional representation systems is more favourable to minority groups and small parties, since the number of seats won by a party is 'close' to its share of the overall vote. Unfortunately, the more representative the system, the more its tendency to promote fragmented legislatures and, therefore, the less the chance of stable ruling coalitions. This is one of the main drawbacks of a proportional representation system.