

Political scientists and sociologists frequently emphasize that structure, such as institutional arrangements within a state, incentivize the actions and behavior of people. One of the major institutions within a democratic nation is the voting system. More specifically, an electoral rule is a set of procedures that includes how the ballot is structured, how people cast their votes, and how the winners are decided. Proportional representation and plurality voting systems are two of the most common systems in western democracies. Two of our case study countries, America and Germany, have adopted these systems: America adopted the plurality system, while Germany adopted a mixed system with plurality on the local scale and proportional representation on the national level. As one of the fundamental attributes of a democracy, electoral rule greatly shapes the behavior of citizens in these two democratic countries. The plurality system in America fosters its two-party system, centrist leaders, and politically ignorant citizens, while proportional representation in Germany leads to more ideology-driven parties and voters with more accountability.

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One of the consequences of electoral rules can be reflected on the number of parties participating in an election. States with a plurality voting system tend to have fewer parties than those with PR voting rules. As Blais (2002) suggested, the average amount of parties in a PR system is nine, compared to six in plurality systems (p.56). To explain, plurality voting is a winner-take-all system, which means that the party that wins the most votes wins the election and becomes the governing party. In such a system, smaller parties would be deserted by voters simply because they jack any chance of winning. On the contrary, proportional representation systems promote a multiparty system. Unlike plurality voting systems, in which only the votes of a majority count, all votes contribute to the result in a proportional representation system as divisions in the

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electorate are reflected proportionately in the elected body. If a party won 20% of the votes, then this party will win roughly 20% of seats. Therefore it is significantly easier for a smaller party to survive in a PR system, because they are more likely to gain seats and represent voters. In our case studies, the American party system is usually a nearly pure two-party system—the Republican Party competing with the Democrat Party (Thad, K., 2016, p.332). In Germany, the governing parties include CDU, FDP, SPD, Greens, and Linke (Russell J. Dalton, 2016, p.31).

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Strategic voting exists in both systems. In plurality systems, people are encouraged to vote strategically, while in PR systems, people are more encouraged to vote in line their own interests. To illustrate, it has been shown that in a plurality system, voters have the choice of voting for their most-preferred candidate or strategically for their second-preferred, who has a better chance of defeating the candidate they oppose (Blais, A., 2002, p.58). In this case, a candidate that appeals to independent voters has the highest chance of winning, and therefore is more likely to be elected. As a result, plurality voting rules tend to create centrist leaders. On the other hand, in a PR system, while people might vote for another party that has a better chance of defeating the party they oppose, this happens on a much smaller scale as their votes are still counted towards their favored parties.

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In plurality systems, voters are more likely to be politically ignorant, while in a PR system, people are generally more accountable. To explain, the plurality voting system is known for its simplicity, and that it discourages citizens from learning more about politics than what is necessary to vote. In addition, votes in a plurality system are less effective than that of PR systems, which lower interest in voting. Therefore, it is not

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surprising that “Seventy percent of Americans cannot name their senators or their congressman. Only about thirty percent name an issue when they explain why they voted the way they did, and only a fifth hold consistent opinions on issues over time” (p.2). On the other hand, the PR system has a higher voter turnout because people are more likely to vote when every ballot counts towards the result. Moreover, given that, people are better represented in a PR system via multiple ideology-oriented parties, citizens are more incentivized to develop an interest in political matters. In Germany for example, about half of the citizens had followed the campaign in the newspapers, and compelling numbers had showed up at a party’s information table or attended a meeting or rally during the 2009 campaign (Russell J. Dalton, 2016, p.25).

In conclusion, different electoral rules structure different behaviors by incentivizing people within the nature of its institutional arrangement. While the PR system tends to have more ideology-oriented governing parties, and voters with more accountability and interest in politics, the plurality system promotes a two-party system and disinterested voters. In spite of this effect, institutions do not determine behavior, they only provide incentives. However, they do leave their imprint over a lengthy haul (Blais, A., 2002, p.57).

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