**To eat a cake and to have a three-quarter of it: is it possible to have the best of both worlds of electoral systems?**

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**Abstract**

Article investigates whether it is possible to combine advantages of two groups of electoral systems (PR and pluralitarian (or majoritarian)) or not. It analyzes existing mixed electoral systems and suggests possible improvements of this system. The main conclusion is that it is not possible to eliminate all disadvantages of PR and pluralitarian electoral system but it is possible, at least theoretically, to eliminate most of them by combining attributes of both worlds of electoral systems. In short, electoral system proposed in this article would enable “eating entire cake keeping a three-quarter of it”.

*Keywords:* electoral system, proportionality, plurality, majority, district, threshold

**1. Introduction**

The main purpose of this article is to answer the following question: is it possible to combine advantages of both proportional and pluralitarian electoral law? The same question can also be formulated another way: does mixed-member electoral system allow “nations to tailor their electoral systems so as to potentially have their cake and eat it too” (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2005:10)?

The next section defines the two main electoral systems: proportional and pluralitarian and explains the main advantages of these two systems. The third section defines and analyzes mixed-member electoral system and compares this system with pluralitarian and PR systems. This section also explains the main variances of mixed electoral systems. The fourth section analyzes one of the two variances of mixed-member electoral system: mixed-member proportional (MMP) system on the basis of investigation of German electoral system. The fifth section examines, theoretically, possible improvements of MMP electoral system. In the section that follows an electoral system is proposed. Finally, in section seven, advantages and disadvantages of proposed electoral system are analyzed.

**2. Proportional versus plurality electoral law**

Electoral systems are usually classified into two groups – plurality systems and proportional electoral systems (PR). However, there are no universally accepted definitions of these two systems in political science. For example, Ferrer and Russo (1984) define pluralitarian electoral system as a system in which only one representative is elected from one electoral district. In contrast, in the proportional electoral system more than one representative is elected from one electoral district. Nohlen (1990) criticizes this definition by arguing that the pluralitarian electoral system allows the election of more than one person in an electoral district. For example, in the United Kingdom, several electoral districts elected more than one representative to parliament up until 1948. However, nobody argues that the electoral system in the UK was not pluralitarian prior to this year. Therefore, Nohlen (1990: 83) defines the two electoral systems in the following way: “In pluralitarian electoral system candidate(s) or party – in order to be elected - must get plurality or majority of votes in an electoral district…In proportional electoral system, the distribution of mandates depends on percentage of votes received by candidates or political parties in electoral districts.” This article accepts Nohlen’s definition of electoral systems.

 Proponents of plurality law (for example, Duverger (1954) and Hermens (1940)) cite its following advantages. Firstly, plurality law creates a stable, usually one-party government. Secondly, plurality electoral law creates clear responsibility for the policies, and enables people to choose a government. Thirdly, plurality law enables close and clear contact between members of the parliament and their constituencies. Furthermore, it produces a simple voting method. In addition, plurality law neutralizes the disproportionately strong influence of small parties. Finally, under plurality law, extreme parties have much less of a chance to be represented in the parliament.

According to the well-known Duverger’s law (1954), plurality electoral law tends to produce a two-party system and proportional law (PR) tends to produce a multiparty system. Some authors (Sartori, 1986; Nohlen, 1990) have challenged Duverger’s law. However, empirical evidence shows that, in the long run, plurality law causes overrepresentation of the two strongest parties at the national level. According to Lijphart (1999: 13), on the basis of pluralitarian electoral law,

the bulk of the seats are captured by the two major parties, and they form the cabinets: the Labour party from 1945 to 1951, 1964 to 1970, 1974 to 1979, and from 1979 on, and the Conservatives from 1951 to 1964, 1970 to 1974, and in the long stretch from 1979 to 1997. The hegemony of these two parties was especially pronounced between 1950 and 1970: jointly they never won less than 87.5 percent of votes and 98 percent of the seats in the House of Commons in the seven elections held in this period.

Overrepresentation of the strongest party and a small number of parties create a stable government in countries with plurality electoral law. Frequently, one party has an absolute majority in the parliament. Accordingly, this party may form a stable government because the parliamentary majority has an interest in supporting its own government. For example, in the United Kingdom, general elections have failed to produce an absolute majority of one party only twice since 1945 (Steiner, 1991: 109). Therefore, a one-party government is almost an inevitable consequence of plurality electoral law. Brass (1977: 1388) found that, “one-party governments were more stable than coalition governments, that majority governments were more stable than minority governments, and that government stability correlated negatively both with the number of parties in the cabinet and governmental fragmentation.” Stability is not only a goal in and of itself, but it may also produce higher GDP per capita growth. According to Haggard and Kaufman (1995: 356), “two-party systems appear to have had a good long term record in maintaining stable macro-economic policies.”

 PR may produce instability in government. Failure of the Weimar Republic is almost a cliché in the literature. However, many modern countries have also experienced government instability. For example, Italy - because of PR - has had over 50 cabinets since World War II (Osiatynski 1999: 10). In Poland, 31 parties won seats in the October 1991 parliamentary election. The largest party won only 13.5 percent of the seats (Lijphart, 1992: 210). It is extremely difficult to form a governing coalition with such a strong dispersion of parliamentary seats. The situation is even worse if a strong party is considered to be an anti-system party. For example, in Italy, the communist party had never entered into a governing coalition even though it was the second largest political party for a long period of time. The government coalition in Italy very often consisted of five or more parties with a very weak majority in the parliament. France, which also had PR systems, faced similar problems in the 3th and 4th Republics (as well as in 1986).

One-party government (which is usually a product of plurality law) has an additional advantage. It enables a clear responsibility in politics. The governing party is responsible for political success and failure. As a result, the electoral process is essentially a referendum on the incumbent. If people are satisfied, they may vote not only for the same government, but also, indirectly, for the same politics. Moreover, plurality electoral law *de facto* enables voting about the government as a whole. In contrast, if a country has a multiparty government, it is not clear which party is responsible. In addition, people usually do not have the opportunity to decide about the government under a PR system, because typically, no party receives an absolute majority in the parliament. The governing coalition is a result of bargaining among parties. Many times, one party receives much fewer votes than in the previous election. Despite this, the party continues to run the country, changing only portfolios, as a member of the governing coalition.

Plurality law allows for the election of people, not only parties. Each candidate represents not only a party but also his/her constituency. Equally important, people know who represents them in the parliament. In other words, plurality law enables a strong connection between members of the parliament and their constituencies. The majority of countries with PR have a system with a closed list of candidates. Thus, people elect parties and not candidates. The party bureaucracy decides the position of candidates on the list. People who have a high position on the list have a very good chance of being elected and people who are low on the list have almost no chance of being elected to the parliament. Consequently, party bureaucracies actually decide in advance on the majority of the members of the parliament.

PR sometimes allows a small party to have a significant influence in the government because it is not possible to form a coalition government without support of the small party. “In Germany, the party with the *most* government experience is the *smallest* of the three main parties, the Free Democrats. This party has been in coalition with one or the other of the two largest parties, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, for twenty-seven out of thirty-four years in the period 1950-1983” (Taylor, 1984: 58).

As was noted earlier, political scientists agree that a government formed by only one party is the most stable form of democratic government. Since this type of government is usually a result of plurality electoral law, it follows that a PR systems produce a less stable government. However, a more stable government is not necessarily more efficient one. Efficiency can be measured according to economic and political criteria. The most objective economic criteria are economic growth, inflation, unemployment and distribution of income. Consequently, economic results show the efficiency of the government. Lijphart’s data (1991: 78) indicate that countries with a parliamentary system and a PR (these countries usually have coalition governments) had an average economic growth rate of 3.5 percent per year in the 1961-88 period. The same figure is 3.4 percent for countries with a parliamentary system and plurality law (these countries usually have a one-party government).

PR countries had lower inflation than countries with plurality law (6.3 percent: 7.5 percent), and a lower rate of unemployment (4.4 percent: 6.1 percent). In addition, economic equality is higher in countries with PR, because 20 percent of the richest people earn 39 percent of the income, while in countries with plurality law the richest people earn 42.9 percent. Countries with a presidential system and a plurality electoral law had economic growth of 3.3 percent per year, inflation of 5.1 percent per year, unemployment of 6.1 percent per year, and the richest 20 percent of the population earned 39.9 percent of the national income. Even though the differences are not very large, it is clear that countries with coalition governments (mainly countries with PR) have more efficient economies.

The data discussed above raise the question: how is it possible that less stable governments are more efficient? One of the possible explanations is that PR provides better control of government. If one party has an absolute majority in the parliament, it is much more difficult to control the government. Since party discipline is very strong in the parliamentary system, members of parliament rarely dismiss the government controlled by their own party. “In the first place, the political strength of the British Prime Minister comes, today, from his position as head of a disciplined majority party, and from the appointive powers that his office gives him” (Needler, 1962: 382). Consequently, a one-party government can usually be changed only with a new election. Frequently, the majoritarian government is stable even if its policies are inefficient. In contrast, inefficient policies may lead to a resignation of a coalition government. If a party considers actual policies as harmful, it will most likely leave the coalition government in order to enhance its chances in the next election.

In a majoritarian system the real decision-maker is the prime minister. According to Steiner (1991, 115), “the Prime Minister can define the consensus as being what he thinks fit. Even though a majority of the opinions expressed were against him, that would not necessarily prevent him deciding as he wishes.” In such a system, ministers are more like executors than decision-makers. In contrast, in a coalition government, the prime minister must respect the opinions of all the ministers, especially the opinions of the ministers from other parties in the coalition. Otherwise, other parties will leave the coalition and the government will lose its majority in the parliament. In a coalition government, the prime minister is controlled not only by the parliament, but also by his/her own ministers in the cabinet. If political policies are inefficient, it is much easier to change a coalition government than a majoritarian one. Therefore, even though coalition governments are less stable they are not necessarily less efficient. After World War II, the British government has been one of the most stable governments among the western democracies while Italy had one of the most unstable governments. However, since 1945, Italy’s growth rate has been much higher than Britain’s, even though Britain discovered oil on its territory (Lijphart 1991, 80). Obviously, instability of the government did not produce a lower level of efficiency.

Some additional facts may also help explain the success of coalition governments. Majoritarian governments represent the majority in the parliament. However, they do not necessarily represent a majority of the voters because plurality electoral law can produce an artificial majority in the parliament. Often, a party with less than 40 percent of the votes has an absolute majority in the parliament. In addition, real support for the governing party is lower than the percentage of votes. Many voters vote strategically, knowing that only the two strongest parties have a real chance to win in a constituency. An artificial majority in the parliament produces legality, but not legitimacy for a policy. Since the PR system produces a fair representation in the parliament, a coalition government represents not only the majority in the parliament, but also the majority of the people. (Of course, this statement is not valid for minority governments). In other words, a coalition government has legality and legitimacy. In order to enhance support among voters, coalition governments sometimes have even more parties in the coalition than is necessary for majority support in the parliament. According to Laver and Schofield (1991, 69), “larger coalitions, all other things being equal, may possibly have more legitimacy and authority than smaller ones.”

Coalition governments are politically less stable but they have more stable policies. Frequently, a new coalition has some parties and ministers from the previous government. This fact enables a certain degree of continuity in policies. On the contrary, if a party loses an election in a majoritarian system, a new one-party government will replace all the ministers from the previous government. Finally, plurality electoral law sometimes produces an abrupt change of government and policies.

To take a concrete instance, postwar Labour governments in Britain have nationalized certain industries, some of which subsequent Conservative governments have denationalized; Labour proclaims its intention, when it regains power, of renationalizing these without compensation. This has led worried industrialists to seek a remedy for such repeated reversals, which make it impossible for them to plan ahead beyond the next election (Lakeman, 1984: 48).

In short, it is obvious that both electoral systems have, theoretically, advantages and disadvantages for policy-making.

**3. Mixed electoral systems**

Since both electoral systems (pluralitarian and proportional) have advantages and disadvantages, it is logical that many countries tried to combine the elements of both electoral minimizing the negative consequences of the two systems and taking the main advantages of them.[[3]](#footnote-3) As a result they established *mixed-member* system. According to Shugart and Wattenberg (2005: xxi), “in the view of many electoral reformers, mixed-member system offers the best of both worlds – the direct accountability of members to the districts in which they are elected, and the diverse partisan preferences.” In other words, mixed-member electoral system was supposed to enable “eating a cake and having it”. So, is it possible to take advantages of both worlds? Before answering this question it is necessary to define mixed-member electoral system and to classify it.

 There are three main definitions of mixed electoral systems. Blais and Massicotte (1996) define mixed electoral systems in terms of inputs: a system where plurality/majority and PR are used simultaneously in a single election and where at least 5% of the total members are elected under a different system. Sartori (2000) focuses on the output: mixed system provides a plurality-proportional mix and must not be fully proportional. According to Blais and Massicote’s definition, Israeli elections 1996 and 1999 - when the prime minister was directly elected, on the basis of majoritarian electoral law, and members of the parliament were elected on the basis of PR electoral law – were not based on mixed electoral law. On the basis of Sartori’s definition, Germany does not have mixed electoral law because electoral results in this country are almost fully proportional.[[4]](#footnote-4) Since these two classifications are too restrictive, this article uses Shugart and Wattenberg’s (2005: 10) definition: “Mixed-member systems are thus a variant of such multiple-tier systems with the specific proviso that one tier must entail allocation of seats *nominally* whereas the other must entail allocation of seats by *lists*.” This article also follows the authors’ classification of mixed electoral systems in two groups:

We identify two broad subtypes, which we call mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) and mixed-member proportional (MMP)… The primary variable in mixed-member systems that separates MMM and MMP systems is the presence or absence of linkage between tiers. If the tiers are not linked, then the typical majoritarian boost received by a large party in the nominal tier is not likely to be wiped away by proportional allocation from the list tier. Thus, the principle behind majoritarian systems – giving an advantage to a large party – remains in MMM system. On the other hand, MMP systems prioritize the list-PR tire, such that large parties do not receive a boost in overall seat allocation, or receive a smaller one than they would in an otherwise similar MMM systems (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2005: 13).

It is out of the scope of this article to analyze all existing mixed-member electoral systems.[[5]](#footnote-5) Therefore, an overall assessment will be made. Since the main purpose of this article is to find out whether it is possible to have “the best of both worlds” it will be analyzed first whether MMM electoral systems enables both fairness in the distribution of mandates and the direct accountability of members to the districts in which they are elected. From the experience of countries that have had MMM electoral systems the following conclusion can be made: MMM system indeed increases fairness in distribution of mandates in comparison with a pure pluralitarian system and enables more accountability of members of parliaments (MP) to the district in comparison to the pure PR electoral system. However, the opposite is also true: MMM system produces less fairness in the distribution of mandates than pure PR system and less accountability of MP to the districts than pure pluralitarian electoral system. In other words, MMM enables eating a half of a cake. However, the direct consequence is that one does not have another half of the cake. According to Sartori (1975: 75), while MMM advocates may believe “that they are bringing together the best of two worlds”, they are, in fact, more likely to obtain “a bastard –producing hybrid which combines [the] defects” of PR and pluralitarian electoral system. So, if MMM system does not offer the best of both worlds, does MMP system offer that? In order to answer that question, the next section analyzes German electoral system which has been a model for all other MMP electoral systems.

**4. Electoral system of Germany**

(West) Germany was first country that chose MMP electoral system. This electoral system was chosen as a result of bargaining between main political parties but also a result of prevalent will among establishment for a stable but also democratic political system.[[6]](#footnote-6) MMP system has been used in Germany since 1949. Since then, electoral system was slightly changed several times but the main characteristics of this system remain the same for 61 years. According to electoral law, half of representatives are elected in single-member districts (SMD) and another half from the party lists. Voters have two votes: one for the district and another for lists. However, in contrast to MMM system, the overall number of seats for one party depends on percentage of votes on the second ballot (party lists). In other words, one party gets approximately equal percentage of seats as percentage of votes (parties with less than 5 percentages of votes or less than three SMD winners are excluded). If number of seats won in SMD is lower than number of seats one party should get as result of the second vote additional MP are elected from closed party lists (parties decide about positions on the lists). However, if the number of SMD won by a party is higher than the number of seats allocated by the party’s proportion of list votes the party may keep the additional seats. In SMD it is enough to get plurality of votes.

So, what are the consequences of MMP electoral system? Does this electoral system enable the best of both worlds? The first thing that should be noted is that MMP system has the main attribute of PR systems – fairness in distribution of mandates. One party gets approximately the same percentage of seats and votes.[[7]](#footnote-7) Actually, the main obstacle for full proportionality in distribution of votes and seats are not SMD but 5% threshold (as in PR electoral systems). In other words, MMP enables eating of a cake. However, does it allow also having a cake? Or, does MMP system have attributes of plurality electoral law? One of the attributes of plurality system is accountability of MP to districts and in German electoral system half of representatives (elected in SMD) are accountable to electorate in districts. Hence, voters choose half of their representatives on their own and party bureaucrats decide – forming party lists – only about half of representatives. This means that MMP system enables better personalization of politics than classical PR system and, thus, more accountability of MP than PR system. Consequently, MMP system - keeping almost all advantages of PR system - allows some advantages of plurality system.

However, it is also obvious that Germany’s MMP system does not allow all the advantages of plurality system. It does not allow people to elect their prime minister[[8]](#footnote-8) and formation of government is a consequence of interparty bargaining. Furthermore, half of the representatives are not accountable to their districts. Voting method is more complicated than in plurality electoral law and enables strategic voting.[[9]](#footnote-9) Finally, as mentioned earlier, German electoral law does not allow full proportionality – because of threshold and extra seats in SMD – between percentage of votes and percentage of seats.

Nevertheless, experience with German electoral law shows that it is possible to have some advantages of one electoral system without eliminating all the advantages of another. Germany has fair distribution of seats having at the same time direct accountability of half of their MP to their districts. In other words, German electoral system shows that it is possible to eat a cake and still to have at least a part of it. Nevertheless, is it possible to have a bigger part of the cake than German electoral law enables? In other words, is it possible to further improve MMP system in order to have more advantages of both worlds? This issue will be analyzed in the next section.

**5. Is it possible to improve MMP electoral system?**

Previous section showed that German electoral law enables personalization of elections. Half of the representatives are elected from SMD. However, is it possible to have electoral system in which voters decide also about another half of representatives? German system has a closed list and voters cannot decide about position of candidates on the list. This means that candidates who are low on the list do not have much chance to be elected and those who are high on the list have secured membership in the parliament prior to the elections (if the party passes the threshold). However, some variances of MMP system enable voters to decide also about candidates on the list. The most logical solution is that position on the list depends on the number of votes a candidate receives in SMD. This means that the “best losers” in SMD (since winners in SMD are directly elected) are also elected in the parliament. And these “best losers” assure proportional distribution of seats in the parliament. According to Shugart and Wattenberg, (2005: 12-3),

There is no reason why a mixed-member system could not employ open lists in the list tier… Mixed-member systems lend themselves to lists ordered on the basis of which candidates prove to be the “best losers” in the nominal-tier districts in which they are nominated. Variations on the best-loser provision have been used in Mexico (1964-76), as well as by the Italian senate since 1993 and Japan’s lower house since 1996… best-loser lists do provide candidates with the incentive to be popular within their districts – even in districts that are “hopeless” for their party to win in the nominal tier – because more popular candidates will be elected from the list tier ahead of less popular copartisans. In a system that employs a best-loser provision on the list tier, there is no list, per se. Rather, parties simply nominate candidates in the nominal tier. Once nominal-tier winning candidates have been determined, any seats that a party may obtain from the list are taken from its pool of nominated candidates who did not win their races. Thus, under this system, the nominal-tier districts serve as de facto nominating districts for the list tier.

There are three possible criteria for deciding who the “best losers” are. The first criteria is percentage of votes, the second is the difference in number (or percentage) of votes between winner and loser. However, probably the best solution is overall number of votes. Such a criterion would stimulate a high voting turnout because districts with a higher turnout would have better chances to be represented with more than one representative.

One of the possible disadvantages of MMP system is, as mentioned earlier, strategic voting: voters split their votes in order to increase, artificially, the number of seats for a collation of parties they support.[[10]](#footnote-10) An easy solution against strategic voting is one vote instead of two. This vote decides who wins in SMD but also the overall number of votes for a party or coalition. Simply, votes for all candidates, in all SMD, can be summed up and in order to check the overall number and percentage of votes for a party or coalition on national level.[[11]](#footnote-11) Such a system eliminates possibility for strategic voting and possible manipulation with such a voting. If a voter has only one vote he/she cannot split votes in order to have additional seats in the nominal tire. With such a solution simplicity of voting in plurality electoral system can be combined with the fairness of PR electoral system. Furthermore, each party would be motivated to run with the most popular candidate because they run not only for themselves but also for the party as a whole. In addition, voters would be able to vote for individuals as in classical plurality electoral system. Consequently, voters would be able to eliminate party candidates that are not popular among voters, which is not the case with PR systems with closed list where position on the list and chances for getting seats in the parliament are decided by party bureaucrats.

MMP system may also solve an additional problem with PR system – overrepresentation of cities. According to Farell (2001: 80), “there is a danger the geographical location of MP… may be concentrated in the urban, more populated areas, leaving whole swathes of the population ‘unrepresented’.” However, MMP system with SMD prevents such a problem, because all the regions are represented in the parliament.

To summarize, an appropriate MMP electoral system may enable both: fair distribution of seats and a clear contact between members of the parliament and their constituencies. In other words, MMP system enables fully personalized proportional representation. To return to the mantra of this article, it enables eating a cake and still having half of the cake.

But, what is with the other half? Is it possible to have some additional advantages of plurality electoral law but on the basis of a fair (proportional) distribution of mandates? It was mentioned above that plurality electoral law usually enables people to choose the government. In contrast, in PR systems, the governing coalition is a result of bargaining among parties. So, is it possible to allow people to elect the head of the government having, at the same time, a proportional distribution of seats in the parliament? Answer to this question is a positive one. Israel had, from 1992-9, an electoral system which was almost fully proportional (legal threshold was only 1.5% and entire country was one constituency) having at the same time the direct elections for the prime minister.[[12]](#footnote-12) Such a system was a variance of MMP because it combined a nominal and a list tier in the elections and it enabled, obviously, even more direct influence of voters on head of a government than plurality electoral law.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, Israel has had a system with a closed party lists. This means that, under the law that existed from 1992-9, voters had an opportunity to vote personally only about prime minister without having influence on candidates on the list for the parliament. However, it is obvious that a personalized electoral system for the parliament (above described MMP system) can be combined with direct election of the prime minister.

Analyses above showed that it is possible to combine the main advantage of PR – fairness in distribution of seats – with almost all advantages of plurality electoral law: connection between people and MP, simple voting method, elimination of strategic voting and even direct election of prime minister. Nevertheless, is it possible to eliminate the last two advantages of plurality electoral law: neutralization of small parties and a stable one-party government? Before these questions are answered it should be noted that even plurality electoral law enables presentation of small parties in the parliament if they have regional strongholds. Parties that have disproportional weak performance are usually national parties with the exception of two strongest parties. The prime example of a party which is disadvantaged by plurality electoral law is Liberal Democrat Party in the United Kingdom.[[14]](#footnote-14) So, plurality electoral law virtually eliminates small national parties without regional strongholds. However, as mentioned above (see page 2) plurality electoral law usually produces a stable one party government. So, is it possible to have PR system and prevalence of stable one party government? Here, the answer is negative. The very essence of PR system is fair representation. So, on the basis of PR electoral system, no party has majority in the parliament without getting close to 50% of votes. Therefore, it is not possible to have ALL the best elements from both electoral systems. More precisely, it is not possible to have - on the basis of an artificial majority – a stable one-party government and to have a fair distribution of seats at the same time. Similarly, it is not possible to have proportional distribution of seats and to eliminate all small parties. In other words, in this respect, it is not possible to eat a cake and to have one.

Since PR system may allow dozens of parties to have their representatives in the parliament (see page 4) and since such a situation may cause very instable government, all countries with PR system have certain instruments that reduce number of parties. Even the Netherlands, country with the most proportional electoral system[[15]](#footnote-15) – because of a nationwide district and almost full proportionality – still has a 0.67 percent threshold. Numerous devices may boost the representation of largest parties in PR system. The most effective are: threshold, small district magnitude and D’Hondt electoral formula. However, these devices also decrease degree of proportionality and tend to eliminate small parties. So, can MMP system contribute to stability of government keeping fairness in the distribution of seats?

Brams and Fishburn (1984) proposed such an electoral system.[[16]](#footnote-16) The authors’ proposal has three main features:

1) Number of seats for each party would be determined by the sum of votes for all party candidates in SMD.

2) The legislature would consist of all representatives who win in the districts *plus* largest vote-getters among the losers, necessary to achieve PR.

3. The size of the legislature would be *variable*, with a lower bound equal to the number of districts (if no adjustment is necessary to achieve PR) and an upper bound equal to twice the number of districts.

The most important for this discussion is the fourth main provision:

4. *The addition of extra seats can never make the minority’s proportion in the legislature to exceed its proportion in the electorate.*

However, it is questionable how to decide who won majority? Usually, party that receives the most votes also wins the most seats. However, sometimes the second largest party, in terms of votes, wins the most SMD (for example, in Britain in 1974 and in New Zealand in 1978 and 1981, see Lijphart and Grofman, 1984: 11). Furthermore, small regional parties may have even better ratio between votes and seats in SMD than the winner of the elections. So, how to decide on who the winner is? This article has already proposed an electoral system which combines MMP electoral system with the direct election for prime minister/governor/mayor. Therefore, Brams and Fishburn’s (1984) proposal can be adjusted in the following way: no one party/coalition may have a better ratio between percentage of votes and percentage of seats than party that wins the race for prime minister/governor/mayor. The only exception would be when a party receives majority in more SMD than according to ratio between votes and seats. In order to clarify this provision a proposal for an electoral law will now be formulated.

**6. Proposed electoral system**

1. Voters vote directly for prime minister/governor/mayor. If a candidate gets more than 50% of votes, he/she is elected.
2. If no candidate receives more than 50% in the first round of voting there is a run-off between the top two candidates, and winner of the run-off is elected prime minister/governor/mayor.
3. Voters vote in SMD for members of the parliament (local assembly). Candidates who get more than 50% of votes in SMD are elected.
4. All the candidates from the same party as elected prime minister/governor/mayor (MGM) who receive plurality of votes in SMD are also elected.
5. Votes in all SMD for candidates from the same party as party of elected MGM are summed up and divided by the number of seats that this party win in SMD (on the basis of both plurality or majority of votes). On the basis of this calculation a ratio between votes and mandates is calculated.[[17]](#footnote-17)
6. Numbers of votes for other parties are calculated (sum of all the votes for candidates in SMD). Then, number of votes is divided by above mentioned ratio in order to calculate number of seats one party deserves with provision that no one party/coalition may have a better ratio between percentage of votes and percentage of seats than party that win the race for the chief of the executive.[[18]](#footnote-18) [[19]](#footnote-19)
7. If one party wins more SMD by majority of votes then this party deserves seats, (on the basis of overall votes) the party keeps extra seats.
8. When number of seats for each party is calculated, the distribution of seats follows the following order:
9. Candidates that win SMD by majority of votes;
10. Candidates that win SMD by plurality of votes (if not all of them can get a seat then those candidates who receive most votes are elected);
11. Losers in SMD who receive most votes.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**7. Advantages and disadvantages of the proposed electoral system**

Proposed electoral system would have the following attributes:

1. Voters would be able to elect directly the chief of executive branch.
2. Voters would be able to elect directly members of the legislative brunch.
3. Voters would be able to vote for candidates rather than for parties.
4. Since all the candidates would be elected in SMD, the system would enable a close connection between voters and their representatives.
5. Electoral system would assure representation of local interest and fair regional distribution of representatives.
6. Consequently, the system would eliminate unpopular politicians no matter which party they belong to. Similarly, it would promote those party members who are popular among voters, which means that electoral system would promote intraparty democracy. Furthermore, all the SMD would be important - even those in which it is very difficult to win - because number of seats would depend on the sum of votes in all SMD.
7. The system would enable a fair distribution of seats, in accordance with the percentage of votes for each party.
8. Independent candidates would have a chance to run for the parliament if they are able to win majority in their electoral districts.
9. Minorities would have chances to be represented because this system either does not demand threshold or threshold can be very low.
10. Since voters would choose the chief of executive, it would be relatively easy to form a government because the position of prime minister would not depend on bargaining among parties (this usually happens in countries with PR electoral system).
11. Since no one party may get a better ratio between votes and mandates than party that wins election for the chief of executive,[[21]](#footnote-21) the system would enable a higher level of stability of government than other PR systems.
12. The system would stimulate a high electoral turnout because SMD with high turnout would have better chances to have more than one representative.
13. Voters would be able to show their real preferences without fearing to lose their votes (as it is the case in plurality electoral system). In other words, the system would eliminate need for strategic voting.

However, the system would also have some disadvantages. Firstly, if the members of the parliament would not be able to vote about confidence for the government (in the case of presidential system) the parliament would have limited chances to control the government. In contrast, if the parliament would be able to vote about confidence[[22]](#footnote-22) government may have problems with stability (as in other countries with PR electoral system). However, as mentioned above, the system would enable a higher level of stability than other PR systems because of provision that no one party may have better ratio between votes and seats in the parliament than the party of elected chief of executive. Furthermore, it would be possible to increase stability by provision that vote of no-confidence cannot be held at least a year after elections. Such a provision is logical because there is no reason to allow parliament to challenge voters’ decision immediately after elections and elected officials should have time to show their qualities in office. In addition, same sort of qualified majority (for example, majority of all the members of the parliament should vote against prime minister or major in order to remove him/her from office) may also increase stability. In addition, stability can also be upheld by removing possibility that chief of executive may dissolve the parliament before the end of mandate (as it was the case in Israel). Finally, a modest level of instability can be advantage because it stimulates chief of executive to cooperate with the parliament and enables control of the chief of executive.

Secondly, an additional disadvantage may be a fact that a winner in SMD (by plurality of votes) may not be elected and a loser in SMD can be elected. However, such a provision already exists in countries with majoritarian electoral systems (where winners from the first round are not always elected) and it is a trade-off for a much more important advantage - fairness in the distribution of seats. Furthermore, it can be expected that a very few winners in SMD would not be elected. Finally, the very fact that a candidate did not get majority of votes shows that it is not unfair if he/she does not get a seat in the parliament.

Thirdly, it can also be argued that proposed system is complicated. However, the system would not be complicated for voters at all. They should just select a candidate for the parliament and a candidate for the executive they favor most. Furthermore, electoral commissions would also not have problem to “decipher” who win mandates.

Finally, the system would not allow a full proportionality (as a matter of fact no system enables full proportionality). However, this system would be very proportional (and fair) with a higher level of stability than similar PR systems.

To conclude, MMP electoral system which would combine improved German electoral system with the former Israeli electoral system (from 1992-9) would offer the best of both worlds – the direct accountability of MP’s to their districts and diverse partisan preferences.[[23]](#footnote-23) Of course, this system would not eliminate all disadvantages of PR and pluralitarian system but it would eliminate most of them. In short, to repeat the mantra of this paper, the proposed electoral system would enable eating entire cake keeping a three-quarter of it. However, only a practical implementation of this system would enable a real test of its advantages and disadvantages.

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 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Of course, in reality, mixed-member electoral systems usually emerged as a compromise between parties that wanted pluralitarian electoral law and those that wanted PR. However, it is out of the scope of this paper to analyze origins of these systems. For a comprehensive analysis of origins of mixed-member electoral systems see Shugart and Wattenberg (eds.), 2005, pp. 55-278. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Interestingly, Lijphart (1984: 207) also does not classify electoral system of Germany as mixed one. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For an overview of existing mixed electoral systems see Massicote and Blais (1999). See also analyses on country by country bases in Shugart and Wattenberg, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Scarrow (2005) explains how German electoral system was adopted. Consequences of German electoral system are examined in Klingemann and Wessels (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is the main reason why Lijphart considers electoral system of Germany as a variant of PR system (see Lijphart (1984) and Lijphart (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In countries with plurality electoral law people also do not elect prime minister directly but, since one party usually has an overall majority, people know that by voting for one party they also vote for leader of this party to become the prime minister. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Strategic voting means that voter may split their votes and vote for one party in SMD and for another with the second ballot. Since a party may keep extra seats won in SMD, strategic voting may produce better result for a coalition of parties than voting for the same party in SMD and in the second ballot. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. According to Klingemann and Wessels (2005: 287), approximately 20% of voters are ticket-splitters and this splitting is now predominately in favor of Christian Democrats (see Farell, 2001: 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Italy uses such an electoral system for election of Senate (see Katz, 2005, 115). Germany also utilized MMP electoral system in which voters had also only one vote in the 1949 elections (see Scarrow, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For the origin of Israeli electoral system see Rahat (2005) and for consequences of this system see Hazan (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Croatia has a similar electoral system for local elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For example, in the 1992 elections this party received 17.8% of votes but just 3.1% of seats (Farell, 2001:27). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For degree of (dis)proportionality see Lijphart (1999: 162). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This system has already been used in Puerto Rico (Still, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example, if candidates from party that won election for the chief of the executive received, altogether, 400,000 votes and 40 seats in SMD ratio is 10,000 votes for one seat. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example, if one party receives 53,000 votes, this party is entitled to 5 seats in the parliament or local assembly (see note above). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Theoretically, it is possible that no one candidate from party that won election for chief of executive wins plurality in SMD. In this case the most logical solution is that ratio between votes and seats is decided on the basis of result of a party that wins the most SMD. However, even in this case party that won election for chief of executive should have the best ratio between votes and seats getting extra seats in distribution of mandates for “best losers”. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Concerning the overall number of seats in legislature see Brams and Fishburn’s (1984) proposal. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Except in the case that one party receives extra mandates as a result of majority in SMD (see previous section). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In Israel, from 1992-9, parliament was able to vote about confidence for prime minister in spite of the fact that prime minister was directly elected by the people (see Hazan, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Proposed electoral also includes some advantages of majoritarian system. Furthermore, there are some similarities between the proposed system and single transferable vote electoral system because votes for candidates that are not elected are transferred to other candidates from the same party. In other words, proposed electoral system incorporates attributes of all the existing electoral systems. Of course, it also includes some of their disadvantages. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)