

Ranked Choice Voting System

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Ranked choice voting made its debut in New York City's mayoral primary in one of the most high-profile tests yet for a system gaining use in pockets across the US. In this article we try to know more about this system as well as review other electoral systems from UPSC point of view.

In news: What is ranked choice voting, which made its debut in New York mayoral polls?

Placing it in syllabus: Law & Policy

Dimensions

- What is a ranked choice voting system?
- How does it work?
- Advantages and Disadvantages
- Brief on other types of voting

Content:

What is a ranked choice voting system?

- In this system, rather than pick just one candidate, voters get to rank several in order of preference.
- Even if a voter's top choice doesn't have enough support to win, their rankings of other candidates still play a role in determining the victor.
- The system is based on a simple premise: Democracy works better if people aren't forced to make an all-or-nothing choice with their vote.

Electoral System:

- An electoral system or voting system is a set of rules that determine how elections and referendums are conducted and how their results are determined.
- Political electoral systems are organized by

governments, while non-political elections may take place in business, non-profit organisations and informal organisations.

- These rules govern all aspects of the voting process: when elections occur, who is allowed to vote, who can stand as a candidate, how ballots are marked and cast, how the ballots are counted, how votes translate into the election outcome, limits on campaign spending, and other factors that can affect the result.
- Political electoral systems are defined by constitutions and electoral laws, are typically conducted by election commissions, and can use multiple types of elections for different offices.

How does it work?

- In New York City's version, voters get to rank up to five candidates, from first to last, on their ballot.
- If one candidate is the first choice of a majority of voters – more than 50% – that person wins the race outright, just like in a traditional election.
- If nobody hits that threshold, ranked choice analysis kicks in.
- Vote tabulation is done in rounds. In each round, the candidate in last place is eliminated. Votes cast ranking that candidate first are then redistributed to those voters' second choices.
- That process repeats until there are only two candidates left. The one with the most votes wins.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

No Wastage of Vote

- One benefit of the system is that nobody “wastes” their vote by picking an unpopular candidate as their first

choice.

- A voter who ranked someone No. 1, even if he suspects that candidate doesn't stand a chance. If that person is eliminated, voters still get a say in who wins the race based on the other rankings.

Selecting Candidate with Broader Support:

- It's tough for someone to get elected without broad support.
- In a traditional election, it's possible for someone with fringe political views to win in a crowded field of candidates, even if they are deeply disliked by a majority of voters.
- That's theoretically less likely in a ranked choice system.
- A candidate could get the largest share of first-choice votes, but still lose to someone who is the second or third choice of a large number of people.

Disadvantages

Complexity

- The system is tough to grasp.
- It requires voters to do a lot more research.
- It also makes races less predictable.

Issues of Transparency and trust

- Transparency and trust are also potential problems.
- Ordinarily, candidates, the public and news organizations can see votes coming in, precinct by precinct, and know exactly who is leading and where their support is coming from.
- Under the modern ranked choice system, the process of redistributing votes is done by computer.
- Outside groups will have a harder time evaluating whether the software sorted the ranked votes accurately.

Scope for Public Mistrust:

- There may be instances where candidates who seem to have a comfortable lead in first-place votes on election night lose because relatively few voters rank them as their second or third choice. That could lead to people questioning the results.

Brief on Other Types of Voting

The Electoral Systems can be broadly divided into the following:

- Plurality systems
- Proportional systems
- Mixed systems

Let us know more about the basics of each of these:

Plurality Systems:

In Plurality voting systems, the candidate(s) with the highest number of votes wins, with no requirement to get a majority of votes.

The following are the major subsets of this system:

First Past the Post System:

- FPTP system is a plurality system used in cases where there is a single position to be filled.
- Voters cast their vote for a candidate of their choice, and the candidate who receives the most votes wins (irrespective of vote share).
- This is the second most common electoral system for national legislatures, with 58 countries using it to elect their legislatures, including the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections in India.

Plurality-at-large voting:

- **Multiple non-transferable vote (MNTV)**, also known as **plurality-at-large voting** or **block vote** is a plurality voting system for electing several representatives from a single multi-member electoral district using a series of check boxes and tallying votes similar to a plurality election.
- It is used in cases where there are multiple positions to be filled, most commonly in cases of multi-member constituencies
- Multiple winners are elected simultaneously to serve the district.
- The usual result is that where the candidates divide into definitive parties the most popular party in the district sees its full slate of candidates elected, resulting in a landslide.

General Ticket:

- General ticket representation is **a type of block voting** in which voters opt for a party, or a team's set list of candidates, and the highest-polling one becomes the winner.
- It, unless tempered to apply to a specific proportion, **arrives at a 100% return for one party's list** who become representatives for the membership or representative positions which are the purpose of the election.

Proportional systems:

- Proportional representation (PR) characterizes electoral systems in which divisions in an electorate are reflected proportionately in the elected body
- For instance in the European parliament, each member state has a number of seats that is (roughly) proportional to its population, enabling geographical proportional representation.

The most widely used families of PR electoral systems are

party-list PR, single transferable vote (STV).

Part list Proportional Representation:

- With party list PR, political parties define candidate lists and voters vote for a list.
- The relative vote for each list determines how many candidates from each list are actually elected. Lists can be “closed” or “open”.
- Closed lists are determined before the elections, usually by the party heads or by primary elections.
- Open lists allow voters to indicate preferences for individual candidates during the elections.

Single Transferable Vote (STV):

- In a single transferable vote system, voters can rank individual candidates, rather than just vote for a single “best” candidate.
- During the count, as candidates are elected or eliminated, surplus or discarded votes that would otherwise be wasted are transferred to other candidates in order of preferences, forming consensus groups that elect surviving candidates.
- STV enables voters to vote across party lines, to choose the most preferred of a party’s candidates and vote for independent candidates, knowing that if the candidate is not elected their vote will likely not be wasted.

Majority Bonus System (MBS):

- The majority bonus system (MBS) is a form of semi-proportional representation used in some European countries.
- Its feature is a majority bonus which gives extra seats or representation in an elected body to the party or to the joined parties with the most votes with the aim of providing government stability.

Mixed Electoral System

- A mixed electoral system is an electoral system that combines a plurality/majoritarian voting system with an element of proportional representation (PR).
- The plurality/majoritarian component is usually first-past-the-post voting (FPTP), whereas the proportional component is most often based on party list PR.
- A distinguishing characteristic of mixed systems is the fact that every voter can influence both the plurality/majoritarian and PR aspects of an election.
- In a hybrid system, by contrast, different electoral formulas are used in different regions of a country

The most prominent mixed electoral systems include: mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) and mixed member majoritarian (MMM) or Parallel Voting

Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP)

- It is also called the **additional member system (AMS)**
- It is a two-tier mixed electoral system, combining local non-proportional plurality/majoritarian elections and a compensatory regional or national party-list PR election.
- Voters typically have two votes, one for their single-member district and one for the party list.
- Parties that are under-represented by district elections are compensated by additional members, such that the total number of members of each party is proportional based on the party-list vote
- MMP generally produces proportional election outcomes, meaning that a political party which wins $n\%$ of the vote will receive roughly $n\%$ of the seats.

Parallel Voting or mixed member majoritarian (MMM)

- Parallel voting describes a mixed electoral system where voters in effect participate in two separate elections

for a single chamber using different systems, and where the results in one election have little or no impact on the results of the other.

- Specifically, it usually refers to the semi-proportional system used in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Russia, Mexico and elsewhere
- Parallel voting or MMM is distinct from mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) where a single election takes place, and the party vote determines what share of seats each party will receive in the legislature to “top up” its constituency seats.
- Parallel voting tends to produce semi-proportional outcomes: more proportional than a plurality/majoritarian system but less proportional than a PR electoral system

Mould your thought: What are electoral systems? Discuss the different voting systems found around the world, highlighting the chief feature of each with examples.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Define Electoral system
- Mention the broad categories of voting systems
- Discuss these system and their examples
- Conclusion