

FIRST-PAST-THE-POST ELECTORAL SYSTEM

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The most prevalent single-winner voting system, by far, is first-past-the-post (also called "simple majority voting", "plurality voting", "relative majority", or "winner-take-all"), in which each voter votes for one choice, and the choice that receives the most votes wins, even if it receives less than a majority of votes. The term first past the post (abbreviated **FPTP** or **FPP**) was coined as an analogy to horse racing, where the winner of the race is the first to pass a particular point on the track (in this case a plurality of votes), after which all other runners automatically and completely lose. There is, however, no "post" that the winning candidate must pass in order to win, as they are only required to receive the largest number of votes in their favor. This sometimes results in the alternative name "furthest past the post". This system is simply used for the election of heads of state. It awards a parliamentary seat to the candidate who receives the most votes regardless of whether the candidate receives a majority of votes. First-Past-the-Post means that each party only has one candidate, chosen by that party rather than by the electorate. So a person who wants to vote for their favorite party has no choice of candidate. Its technical name is Single Member Plurality. It is a plurality system. Under this system, there is one elected member for each electoral district, and voters vote for one candidate only. Whoever gets the most votes in an electoral district wins that seat and becomes the district's MP.

Therefore FPTP is regarded as a system that:

- encourages fewer, larger and inclusive political parties;
- tends to produce majority governments;
- is simple to use and understand;
- Maintains a direct link between a local representative and his or her constituency.

Many countries use this FPTP electoral system, the most commonly cited countries are the UK, the US, India and Canada.

MERITS AND DEMERITS OF FIRST-PAST-THE-POST ELECTORAL SYSTEM

A) Merits of FPTP electoral system:-

1. It is simple to understand than those majority or proportional representation system and thus does not cost much to administer and does not alienate people who cannot count.
2. Informal voting is negligible.
3. Minor parties and independents can sometimes win against the major parties without needing to secure 50% of the vote.
4. The voter can express a view on which party should form the next government and it tends to produce stable governments.
5. It tends to lead to a two-party system. The system tends to produce single party governments, which are strong enough to create legislation and tackle the country's problems, without relying on the support of any other party.
6. It provides a close link between the MP and their constituency.

7. The system represents the views of the people, as the candidate with the greatest support wins through a fair process.
8. The UK's democracy is one of the strongest in the world, it works and since no system is perfect, why should we go through the massive overhaul of changing?
9. It doesn't take very long to count all the votes and work out who's won, meaning results can be declared a handful of hours after polls close.
10. It encourages 'broad-church' centrist policies.
11. There is a close geographical link between voters and their member of parliament.
12. Election spending is geared towards only a small portion of the country, keeping costs down for our cash-strapped parties.
13. It tends to produce a strong opposition party (both the winning party and the main opposition party often receive a higher number of seats than their share of the popular vote).
14. It allows individuals who are not members of a political party to run as independents.
15. It tends to provide a clear-cut contest between two major parties
16. People are often fearful of change and slow to adapt, thus as we've got it now, so we may as well keep it.

B) Demerits of FPTP electoral system:-

1. A winning candidate may secure only a minority of the vote. The majority of voters may have supported someone else, i.e. huge numbers of votes are used to waste.
2. Minor parties and candidates can find it difficult to win against the combined weight of major party candidates.
3. Voters are represented unequally. In 2005, the average number of votes per MP elected was: 26,906 for Labor, 44,373 for Conservative and 96,539 for Liberal Democrats
4. There is a lack of choice given to the voters. The candidates are selected by a small number of party members, and voters can only choose between parties. If the candidate selected for your party has views with which you disagree, you are left with no alternative choice within that party.
5. Only one MP is elected in each constituency, so all the voters who did not vote for him or her are not represented. Their votes do not help elect anybody and so are wasted, they could have stayed at home and the result would not have been altered.
6. The system leads to many people casting negative votes i.e. voting against the candidate they dislike most rather than for the candidate they like best.
7. The way the boundaries of constituencies are drawn can affect the results. Governments are often accused of gerrymandering, adjusting the boundaries of constituencies to influence the results.
8. There is no individual as well as government mandate.
9. Parties which come second or third consistently tend to win large numbers of votes but few seats, meaning smaller parties are under-represented in the House of Commons i.e. there is second -place blues. In 1992, the Liberal Democrats won 18% of the votes and 3% of the seats.
10. Representatives can get elected on tiny amounts of public support.
11. It encourages tactical voting, as voters vote not for the candidate they most prefer, but against the candidate they most dislike.
12. FPTP in effect wastes huge numbers of votes, as votes cast in a constituency for losing candidates, or for the winning candidate above the level they need to win that seat, count for nothing. In 2005 election in UK, 70 per cent of votes were wasted in this way – that's over 19 million ballots.

13. FPTP severely restricts voter choice. Parties are coalitions of many different viewpoints. If the preferred-party candidate in your constituency has views with which you don't agree, you don't have a means of saying so at the ballot box.
14. Rather than allocating seats in line with actual support, FPTP rewards parties with 'lumpy' support, i.e. with just enough votes to win in each particular area.
15. With relatively small constituency sizes, the way boundaries are drawn can have important effects on the election result, which encourages attempts at gerrymandering.
16. Encouraging two-party politics can be an advantage, but in a multi-party culture, third parties with significant support can be greatly disadvantaged. In the 1983 general election, the Liberal SDP alliance won 25% of the vote, but gained only 3 per cent of the seats.
17. FPTP rewards organized minorities, deals ineffectively with the most disliked parties, ignores (and thus fails to deal with) views that don't look like challenging at the polls and can make certain areas feel neglected by the big political parties.
18. In 2005, Labour won 35.2% of the total vote cast, but got 55.1% of the seats in Parliament, giving them power to form a government. Taking into account the low turnout (61%), only 1 in 5 of the registered electorate actually voted for the Government.

In 2005, in Great Britain, 19 million voters cast ineffective votes - that is 70% of those who voted. A high proportion of these voters are the same people every time, e.g. Conservative voters in County Durham or Labour voters in much of Surrey.

