



Criteria for Electoral System Design



Introduction

- When designing an electoral system, it is best to start with a list of criteria which sum up what you **want to achieve**, what you want to **avoid** and, in a broad sense, what you want your **legislature and executive government to look like**



Representation



- ▶ Representation may take at least four forms.
- ▶ First, *geographical* representation implies that each region, be it a town or a city, a province or an electoral district, has members of the legislature whom it chooses and who are ultimately accountable to their area.
- ▶ Second, the *ideological* divisions within society may be represented in the legislature, whether through representatives from political parties or independent representatives or a combination of both.
- ▶ Third, a legislature may be representative of the *party-political* situation that exists within the country even if political parties do not have an ideological base. If half the voters vote for one political party but that party wins no, or hardly any, seats in the legislature, then that system cannot be said to adequately represent the will of the people.
- ▶ Fourth, the concept of descriptive representation considers that the legislature should be to some degree a 'mirror of the nation' which should look, feel, think and act in a way which reflects the people as a whole.



Providing incentives for conciliation

- ▶ Electoral systems can be seen not only as ways to constitute governing bodies but also as mechanisms for conflict management within a society. Some systems, in some circumstances, will encourage parties to make inclusive appeals for electoral support outside their own core vote base; for instance, even if a party draws its support primarily from black voters, a particular electoral system may give it the incentive to appeal also to white, or other, voters



Holding government accountable

- Accountability is one of the bedrocks of representative government. Its absence may indeed lead to long-term instability. An accountable political system is one in which the government is responsible to the voters to the highest degree possible. Voters should be able to influence the shape of the government, either by altering the coalition of parties in power or by throwing out of office a single party which has failed to deliver. Suitably designed electoral systems facilitate this objective.



Holding individuals accountable

- ▶ Accountability at the individual level is the ability of the electorate to effectively check on those who, once elected, betray the promises they made during the campaign or demonstrate incompetence or idleness in office. Some systems emphasize the role of locally popular candidates, rather than on candidates nominated by a strong central party. Plurality/majority systems have traditionally been seen as maximizing the ability of voters to throw out unsatisfactory individual representatives.

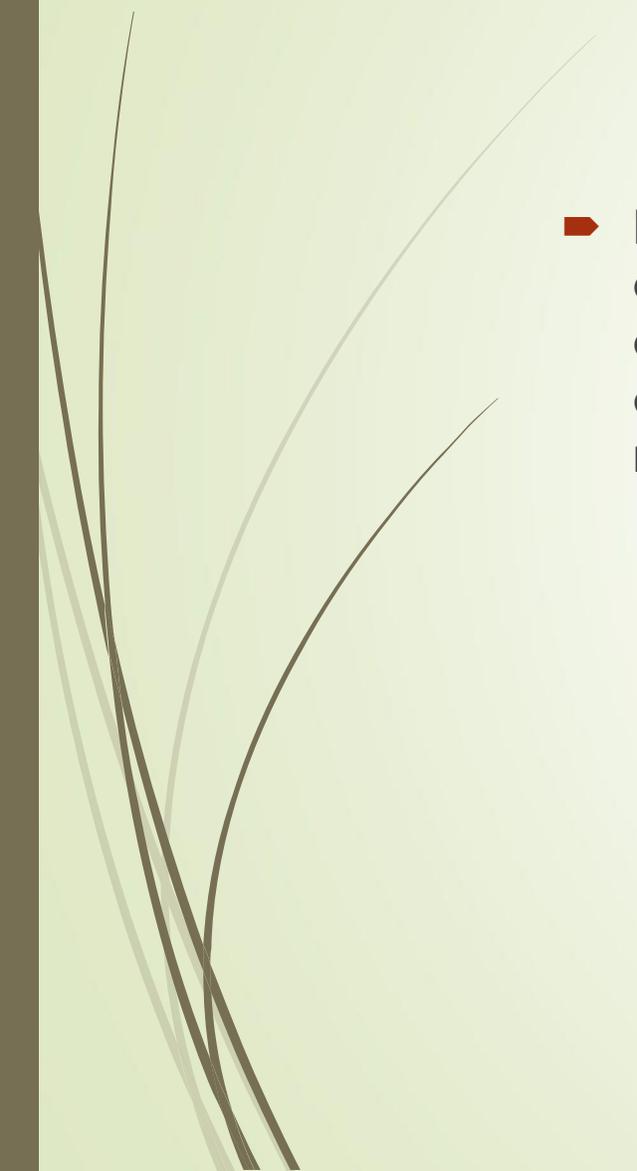


Encouraging political parties

- ▶ The weight of evidence from both established and new democracies suggests that longer-term democratic consolidation—that is, the extent to which a democratic regime is insulated from domestic challenges to the stability of the political order—requires the growth and maintenance of strong and effective political parties, and thus the electoral system should encourage this rather than promote party fragmentation.
- ▶ To do this, electoral systems can be framed specifically to exclude parties with a small or minimal level of support. The development of the role of parties as a vehicle for individual political leaders is another trend which can be facilitated or retarded by electoral system design decisions. Most experts also agree that the electoral system should encourage the development of parties which are based on broad political values and ideologies as well as specific policy programmes, rather than narrow ethnic, racial or regional concerns. As well as lessening the threat of societal conflict, parties which are based on these broad ‘crosscutting cleavages’ are more likely to reflect national opinion than those which are based predominantly on sectarian or regional concerns

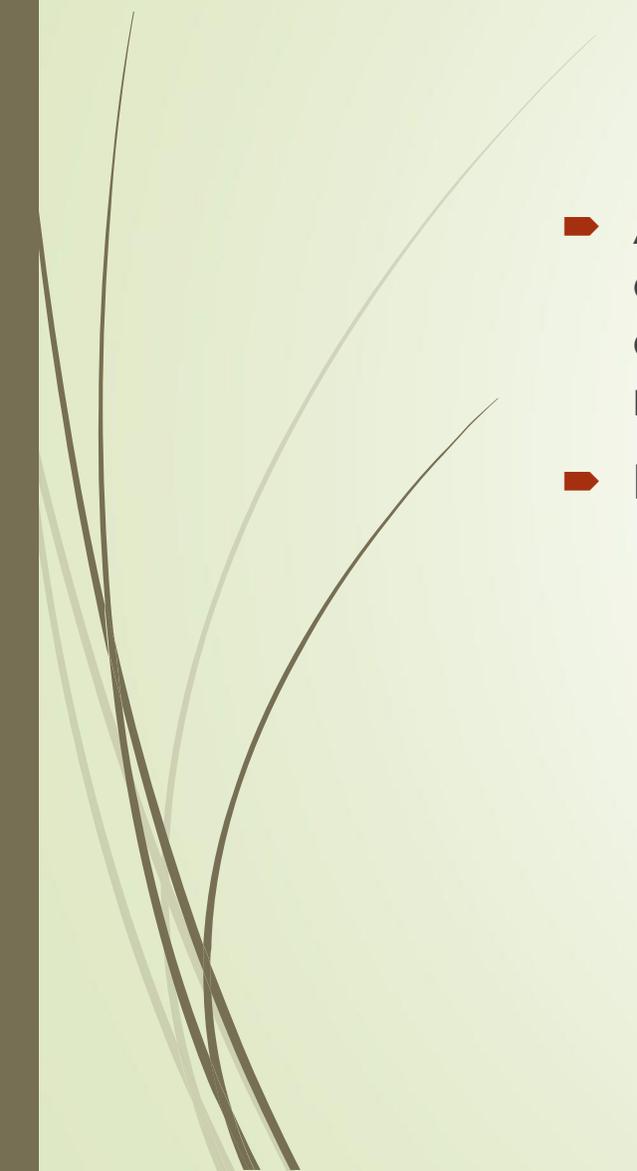


Legislative oversight

- ▶ Effective governance relies not only on those in power but, almost as much, on those who oppose and oversee them. The electoral system should help ensure the presence of a viable opposition grouping which can critically assess legislation, question the performance of the executive, safeguard minority rights, and represent its constituents effectively.
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Sustainability

- ▶ A sustainable political framework takes into account the resources of a country both in terms of the availability of people with the skills to be election administrators and in terms of the financial demands on the national budget.
 - ▶ Political costs of an electoral system
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Conclusion

- ▶ There is no perfect electoral system
- ▶ Trade offs is crucial in considering the type of electoral system for Somalia
- ▶ Political needs today for a country may not be the same in 50 years time, hence may require adjustment of electoral system