

### **The first past the post (FPTP) System**

The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system is also known as the simple majority system. In this voting method, the candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner. This system is used in India in direct elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Under First Past the Post (FPTP) system, a candidate who gets one vote more than other candidate (who comes second) is declared as winner. In India, all key representatives except President, Vice President, Members of Rajya Sabha and Members of state legislative council are elected via FPTP system. In recent times, questions have been raised as in 2014 election. In this election, NDA won only 31% of the total votes cast which means that the remaining 69% of those who voted did not vote in favor. Due to this system, the groups of parties which managed to get less than 50% of the total votes polled have managed to get more than 75% of the total seats in the parliament. The argument is that due to FPTP, certain groups of people will never get a share in the power structure.

#### **Merits of FPTP system**

1. *Simplicity*- The most significant advantage of the FPTP system is its uncomplicated nature using single-member districts and candidate-centred voting. Moreover, the FPTP system allows voters to choose between people as well as parties, with voters having the opportunity to assess the performance of a candidate rather than having to accept a list of candidates presented by a party, as under the list system.
2. *Stability*- The FPTP system has been known for stability in the electoral system of India. The Supreme Court in *RC Poudyal v. Union of India* (1994) had categorized the FPTP system as possessing 'the merit of preponderance of decisiveness over representativeness'. This implies that the FPTP system presents the advantage of producing a majority government at a general election by being decisive, simple and familiar to the electorate. This, at least in theory, assures stable terms for the party in power, with the requisite numbers in the House to ensure implementation of its policies.  
In practice, India has seen both stable majority and unstable coalition governments under the FPTP system, indicating that it is not this factor alone that assures the stability of the electoral system in India
3. *Other merits*
  - FPTP system encourages political parties themselves to have more broad-based participation. Moreover, it ensures that there is a link between a constituency and its representative in the legislature, and incentivizes representatives to serve their constituents well.
  - It gives rise to single party governments. The 'seat bonuses' for the largest party common under FPTP (i.e., where one party wins, for example, 45 percent of the national vote but 55 percent of the seats) means that coalition governments are the exception rather than the rule. This state of affairs is praised for providing cabinets unshackled from the restraints of having to bargain with a minority coalition partner.

- It allows voters to choose between people, rather than just between parties. At the same time, voters can assess the performance of individual candidates, rather than just having to accept a list of candidates presented by a party, as can happen under some List PR electoral systems.

### **Disadvantages of FPTP**

1. *Excluding Minority Parties from Fair Representation*- Ideally the word 'fair' in this context means that a party which wins approximately ten percent of the votes should win approximately ten percent of the parliamentary seats. The Indian National Congress won only about 49.10% of the total vote share in the 1984 General Elections to the Lok Sabha, but had a sweeping majority of 405 out of 515 seats in the House. In the 1983 British general election, the Liberal-Social Democratic Party Alliance won twenty-five percent of the votes, but only three percent of the seats. In the 1981 New Zealand election the Social Credit Party won twenty-one percent of the vote, but only two percent of the seats. This pattern is repeated time and time again under FPTP.
2. *Leaving a Large Number of 'Wasted Votes'*- Votes which do not go towards the election of any candidate are often referred to as 'wasted votes.' As a result the minority party supporters begin to feel that they have no realistic hope of ever electing a candidate of their choice. This can be a particular danger in nascent democracies, where alienation from the political system increases the likelihood that extremists will be able to mobilize anti-system movements.
3. *Being Unresponsive to Changes in Public Opinion*- A pattern of geographically-concentrated electoral support in a country means that one party can maintain exclusive executive control in the face of a substantial drop in popular support. In some democracies under FPTP, a fall from sixty percent to forty percent of a party's popular vote nationally, may represent a fall from eighty percent to sixty percent in the number of seats held, which does not affect its overall dominant position. Unless seats are highly competitive, the system can be insensitive to swings in public opinion.

### **Critical Analysis of FPTP system**

FPTP is useful because it is simple to use and easy to understand. It provides clear-cut choice for voters between two main parties. It provides clear-cut choice for voters between two main parties. It allows voters to choose between people rather than just between parties. Thus, voters can assess the performance of individual candidates rather than just having to accept a list of candidates presented by a party. It gives a chance for popular independent candidates to be elected. However, the issue is that the victorious party has most often not secured the majority of votes. It is possible for a party to win majority of the seats with just 20-26% of vote share; by the same token, a party may not get a simple majority even with 74% of vote share. There is, hence, a mismatch between the number of seats won and the percentage of vote secured by the party.

During the drafting of Indian constitution of India, various systems of proportional representation were considered, but the FPTP system was eventually adopted to avoid fragmented legislatures and to facilitate the formation of stable governments.