

PR Systems, Role of Political Parties and Representation of Minorities in Southern Africa

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Empirical studies demonstrate that proportional representation (PR) has generally resulted in good representation of minorities. However:

- In southern Africa, electoral system engineering was aimed at establishing a democratic dispensation while providing for meaningful minority representation and participation
- Closed list PR (in South Africa and Namibia) where party leaders are committed to include minorities in good numbers and good place on party list (ANC in South Africa)
- **Open list PR** systems do not have the same effect where voters tend to choose representatives from their own group. In the DRC the OLPR further affects minority representation because the country subdivided in numerous electoral constituencies

- Absence of an electoral threshold where some racial minorities are geographically dispersed has improved minorities in SA and Namibia. However, some tribal minorities in both SA and Nam are still under-represented
- Despite the use of a closed list PR, several other provisions in Mozambique affect minority representation. These provisions include:
 - An electoral threshold of 5% of the total national vote used until 2004
 - Excessive administrative requirements making the nomination of minority candidates difficult and undoing the benefit of removing the 5% threshold
 - Prohibition of political parties to identify with a particular religion, ethnic group or race, forcing parties to use ineffective campaign approaches

- Strong support of the proportional nature of the electoral system by the main political parties in the country (South Africa and Namibia)
- “Constitutionally-entrenched clauses” (those pertaining to issues of equality) which require more than an absolute majority (South Africa)
- Specially appointed MPs (Namibia) to correct some imbalances, including ethnic under representation (Namibia)

In conclusion, electoral systems are not just electoral formulas and do not work in vacuum. Their impact and effectiveness depends on several factors:

- Types of minority (geographical distribution, fragmentation versus unity)
- Party regulation and anticipated outcome its function of aggregation, articulation or blocking (+ combination)
- Centralisation of power in the presidency may make its control the only prize in a zero-sum political game
- Quality of election management
- Strength of parliament (e.g. weak parliament)
- Role of party leaders

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