

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE UNINOMINAL VOTING SYSTEM

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The contemporary constitutional regimes are generally using two types of electoral systems, which differ by the way of attributing the mandates: the majority rule and the proportional representation. Beside these two systems, the evolution of the constitutional systems, as well as practical necessities, led to the appearance of mixed systems, as they combine elements from the two systems considered to be the classic ones.

One does not randomly choose one or the other of the two systems. For instance, according to the “Westminster system”, which considers that the representative institutions are the “engine of the political system”, the majority rule is preferred, hoping for obtaining an organic, homogenous and stable majority. On the other hand, a strict interpretation of the principle of separation of powers leads to the proportional representation, as the parliament has to represent the general will, totaling, however, all the individual wills. The mixed systems sacrifice, at a certain extent, the pluralist principle, for the benefit of the stability and efficacy of the decisional body.

Majority Rule Voting System

When the majority rule voting system is used, the mandates are offered to the candidates or the lists of candidates obtaining the absolute or simple majority, depending on whether there is one round or two rounds.

According to the way of nominating the candidates, namely on lists or individually, we distinguish **the uninominal majority rule voting system** or **the party-list majority rule voting system**.

The **uninominal voting system** means that in one constituency only one deputy is elected, namely the candidate that gathers the greatest number of votes, this system being also referred to as the “winner-takes-all”. The election may be made in one round (relative uninominal majority rule voting system), in which case the candidate gathering the majority of the votes, irrespectively of their number, is declared the winner, or in two rounds (absolute uninominal voting system), in which case the candidate needs to obtain the absolute majority of the expressed votes. If such a majority is not obtained, a second round is organized, and this time the simple majority suffices.

This type of voting system has important consequences related to the constituencies and the relationships between the voters and the chosen candidate. The country’s territory is organized in as many constituencies as the number of mandates (corresponding to the number of deputies and senators). Naturally, the constituencies are smaller than the administrative units, and the voter votes for one candidate, the representation ratio being clearly defined from the point of view of the elements composing it.

Shortly, the uninominal vote is a direct voting mechanism for electing certain individual candidates and not a fixed list of candidates, drafted based on obscure criteria, by a political party.

In Europe, only Great Britain and France are exclusively using the uninominal voting system in order to elect the Parliament.

In Great Britain, the elections for the House of Commons are organized in one round (the relative uninominal majority rule voting system), while in France there are two rounds (the absolute uninominal majority rule voting system).

Advantages of the Uninominal Voting System

- the uninominal voting system is characterized by simplicity, as each constituency designates only one representative, and thus the voters have a better understanding of the voting process, increasing the social control of the election process, as all the operations begin and end in the constituency.
- it is also attractive for the voters who consider as unimportant the party doctrine as well as the parties' policies. These voters consider the elections as a means of designating their own emissary who should mediate their relationship with the State, and they are offered the possibility to elect the preferred candidate without offering their support to a list of candidates of no interest to them.
- it creates, at least apparently, the possibility of a strong connection between the chosen candidate and the voters.
- it offers the voters the possibility to penalize the disappointing representative. His party may still have the power if the voters agree with its policies, but without the Member of Parliament who disappointed his voters.
- it leads to a stable parliamentary majority, which is beneficial for the large parties and for the governing techniques. The uninominal voting system eliminates the small parties and leads to stable, one-party governments, unlike the proportional systems which offer an extremely important influence to small parties, often leading to political blackmail, as in Israel, Italy and Germany.
- it favors the governing by two parties or the bi-polarity of the political life, especially the one round voting system, which simplifies the voter's deliberation process when facing his possible ideological options.
- granting the power to one party only, it also invests it with the whole responsibility for the governing process. The uninominal majority rule voting system is also a very efficient instrument for changing a government. The ministers of an unpopular government are losing ground, in their constituencies, in front of some famous John Does of the opponent party, strengthening the idea that voting for one person is nothing but an illusion.
- it also offers a chance to the regional parties, representing the local interests of the voters, interests that are not represented by the national parties. Thus, the minorities' parties can concentrate their efforts in the areas where their voters are located.

Disadvantages of the Uninominal Voting System

- electing only one deputy in a constituency leads to situations where most of the voters in that constituency are not represented, if the winner gathers less than 50% of the votes.
- the uninominal voting system is not optimal for expressing political pluralism. It may generate an extremely dangerous conflicting situation, as the party having a relative majority of the votes may obtain an absolute majority of mandates.

At national level, the consequences of the majority voting system strongly favor the party obtaining the first position. Thus, on the occasion of the 2005 parliamentary elections from Great Britain, the Labour Party won the first place with 35% of the votes, but obtained 55% of the deputy mandates, meaning that it was on the first place in 55% of the constituencies.

In France, on the occasion of the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Union for a Popular Movement obtained, in the first round, 33.8% of the votes, eventually obtaining 357 seats, representing 62% out of the total.

- the uninominal majority rule voting system is as advantageous for the large parties as it is disadvantageous for the small parties. For instance, in 2005, in Great Britain, the Liberal Democrats was credited with 22% of the votes, but it holds only 62 constituencies out of 646, representing less than 10%. In France, the consequences are even more dramatic. The National Front obtained 11% of the votes, but it has no deputy, while the Union for French Democracy and the Communist Party obtained 4.8% of the votes each, so together they obtained fewer votes than the National Front, but they are represented by 29 and 21 deputies respectively. The explanation is that the National Front, due to its “extremist” image, had no allies in the few constituencies where it qualified for the second round.
- due to the large number of constituencies, the uninominal voting system involves great expenses with the electoral operations and the structures organizing and managing these operations.
- the uninominal voting system involves great expenses for the candidates who have to support their campaign, thus certainly favoring the ones who are able to bear them.
- in theory, it was often sustained that the parliament elected using a uninominal voting system is more of an elite body, obviously decreasing the political character. But a glance at the composition of the British House of Commons and of the French National Assembly immediately busts this myth. Out of 646 British deputies, only one is independent, and out of 577 French deputies elected in 2002, none was independent.

Even in the US Congress, where the candidates’ personality is of greater importance during the elections, there are only 2 independent congressmen out of 535, the rest of 533 belonging to the two important parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party.

Actually, unlike in the elections for mayor, a single seat, granting important powers locally, in the case of the parliamentary elections the voters are electing a government, while the deputies are only the supporting people of this government, and separated, they stand no chance in the parliament.

Implementation of the Uninominal Voting System in Romania

Together with countries as Italy, Spain, Portugal or Bulgaria, Romania has been using until now, in order to elect the deputies and the senators, the proportional representation voting system, consisting of only one round and a closed party list, the voter being forced to vote the list proposed by a party, without being offered the possibility of modifying it in any way whatsoever.

Even if they are also voting party lists, the citizens of Austria, Holland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Denmark, Slovakia, Latvia and Slovenia are checking the preferred candidate, just like the citizens of Ireland, Poland and Greece, who are writing down on the ballot paper the name of the preferred candidate. The Germans and the Hungarians are using the mixed system, some of the candidates being elected in uninominal constituencies while the others are elected based on party lists.

A reform of the electoral system is being foreseen in Romania, aiming at implementing the uninominal voting system in order to elect the members of the parliament. This type of system is strongly supported by the population, fact that shouldn’t be ignored.

According to the provisions of the project of the Electoral Code supported by most of the political forces and for which the Romanian Government takes responsibility in front of the Parliament, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies should be elected based on a **mixed compensation system, based on the one round uninominal majority rule voting system**. The proposed mixed compensation system (called by certain analysts “a system with proportional representation and personalized selection”) would suppose that half of the seats be won directly, at the level of certain

uninominal colleges, by the candidates obtaining most of votes in each of those colleges. The other seats would be allotted, at the level of the constituency (organized in each development region), to some of the candidates loosing the elections in the uninominal colleges in which they candidate.

This is done in order to ensure, for each political party, a proportional relationship between the electoral support that it enjoys at the level of the constituency and the total number of correspondent seats won in that specific constituency (seats won at the level of the uninominal colleges plus seats obtained in the constituency).

The advantages of the mixed compensation system are incontestable if compared to the uninominal majority rule voting system, which has, as shown before, the great disadvantage of generating disproportions, often quite serious, between the electoral support that the political parties enjoy and their parliamentary representation. Therefore, in order to ensure and maintain the representative character of the Romanian Parliament, it would be desirable to adopt the proposed Electoral Code, namely the version promoting such a voting system.