

COMPARING ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: FIRST-PAST-THE-POST (FPTP) VS.
PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR)



PARLIAMENT HOUSE COMPLEX



NEIGHBORHOOD FIRST POLICY: INDIA'S APPROACH TO REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT



PAKISTAN AND CHINA AGREE TO UPGRADE CPEC: AN OVERVIEW

COMPARING ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: FIRST-PAST-THE-POST (FPTP) VS.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR)

Context

- Following the recent declaration of Lok Sabha election results on June 4, a debate has arisen over India's electoral system. The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured 293 seats with a 43.3% vote share, while the Opposition bloc INDIA won 234 seats with a 41.6% vote share. Other regional parties and independents, who garnered approximately 15% of the votes, only managed to win 16 seats collectively. This has sparked discussions among experts advocating for a shift to a proportional representation system.

Overview

First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) System

- **Description:** Also called the simple majority voting system, FPTP is an electoral method where the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins.
- **Usage:** This system is prevalent in countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and India.
- **Mechanism:**
 - **Single-Member Districts:** Each constituency elects one representative.
 - **Plurality Wins:** The candidate with the most votes wins, regardless of achieving an absolute majority.

Pros and Cons:

➤ Advantages:

- *Simplicity*: Easy for voters to understand.
- *Strong and Stable Governments*: Often results in a clear winner, leading to stable governments.
- *Direct Representation*: Ensures geographic areas have dedicated representatives.
- *Accountability*: Representatives are accountable to their constituents.

➤ Disadvantages:

- *Disproportionality*: Mismatch between percentage of votes and seats won.
- *Wasted Votes*: Votes for losing candidates do not impact the election outcome.
- *Minority Rule*: A candidate can win with a minority of votes if the opposition is fragmented.
- *Geographic Concentration*: Parties with concentrated support can win more seats despite fewer votes overall.
- *Gerrymandering*: Can incentivize drawing of boundaries to favor a party.

• **Proportional Representation (PR) System**

- **Description**: PR aims to allocate seats in the legislature in proportion to the number of votes each party receives, providing a more accurate reflection of voter preferences.

- **Mechanism:**

- **Party Lists:** Voters cast votes for parties, which allocate seats to candidates based on vote share.
- **Multi-Member Districts:** Districts elect multiple representatives for proportional allocation.
- **Thresholds:** Minimum percentage of votes required for representation to avoid fragmentation.

- **Types of PR:**

- *List PR:* Parties receive seats based on vote share, filled by candidates from the party's list.
- *Mixed-Member PR:* Combines FPTP and PR. Voters cast two votes: one for a candidate, one for a party.
- *Single Transferable Vote (STV):* Voters rank candidates in order of preference, with votes transferred according to preferences.

- **Pros and Cons:**

- **Advantages:**

- *Fair Representation:* Accurate reflection of electorate's preferences.
- *Minority Inclusion:* Better representation for smaller parties and minority groups.
- *Reduced Wasted Votes:* Most votes contribute to the election outcome.
- *Encourages Voter Turnout:* Voters feel their vote has more impact.

- **Disadvantages:**

- *Coalition Governments:* Can lead to unstable governments if coalition partners disagree.
- *Complexity:* More complex for voters and authorities.
- *Fragmentation:* Can result in a fragmented legislature, complicating majority consensus.
- *Weaker Constituency Links:* Representatives may be less accountable to specific areas.
- *Influence of Party Leadership:* Centralizes power within party leadership.

International Practices

- **Presidential Democracies:**

- *Brazil and Argentina:* Use party list PR systems.

- **Parliamentary Democracies:**

- *South Africa, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain:* Use party list PR systems.

- **Germany:**

- The Bundestag fills 50% of its seats through FPTP and the other 50% through PR, with a 5% vote threshold.

- **New Zealand:**

- The House of Representatives fills 60% of its seats via FPTP and 40% through PR, with a 5% vote threshold.

Future Directions for India

•Law Commission's Recommendation (1999):

- Suggested introducing the Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) system on an experimental basis, with 25% of seats filled through PR.

•Upcoming Delimitation Exercise:

- A post-2026 census delimitation exercise will increase Lok Sabha seats, considering uneven population growth.
- Proportional seat allocation based solely on population may conflict with federal principles and disenchant certain states.

•Potential Solutions:

- Implementing the MMPR system for incremental seats or 25% of seats from each state/UT could balance representation and address concerns of smaller states.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE COMPLEX

About

The Parliament House Complex, located in New Delhi, comprises several significant buildings central to India's legislative functions:

- **New Parliament House:** Opened last year to accommodate the growing needs of the Parliament.
- **Old Parliament House (now Constitution House):** An iconic circular structure with historical significance.
- **Parliament House Annexe**
- **Parliament Library Building**

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha acts as the custodian of the entire complex.

Central Hall in Indian Parliament

The Central Hall, established in 1927, is a significant part of India's legislative history and democratic heritage.

Historical Background

- **Original Use:** It was initially a library for legislative members.
- **Constituent Assembly:** In 1946, it was modified to serve as the Constituent Assembly Hall, where the Constitution of independent India was discussed and drafted between 1946 and 1949.
- **First Independence Day:** On August 15, 1947, it hosted the historic transfer of power, marked by Jawaharlal Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" speech.

Architectural Features

- **Design:** The Hall is an octagonal structure with a distinctive dome.
- **Decor:** Adorned with portraits of key figures from India's freedom movement and former Presidents and Prime Ministers.

Functions and Usage

- **Joint Sessions:** Used for joint sittings of both houses of Parliament, including the President's speech at the budget session commencement.
- **Meetings:** Venue for informal discussions and meetings among parliament members.
- **Ceremonial Occasions:** Used for significant events like the swearing-in of Presidents and Prime Ministers.
- **Addresses by Foreign Heads of State:** Notable addresses include those by IPU President Duarte Pacheco (March 2021) and US President Barack Obama (November 2010).

Current Status

- While the chambers of the old Parliament House are not used for sessions, some offices of the Parliament Secretariat continue to operate there.
- **Can Central Hall be used by political parties or coalitions for private events?**
- Political parties and coalitions can hold meetings within the Parliament House Complex, subject to the following guidelines:

- **Custodian:** The Speaker of the Lok Sabha oversees the use of the complex.
- **Office Space Allocation:** Parties are allocated office space within the complex.
- **Meeting Venues:** Meetings can be held at designated venues, such as the Balayogi Auditorium in the Parliament Library Building.
- Historically, the Central Hall has hosted political events, including:
 - **May 2014:** Modi's election as the leader of the BJP Parliamentary Party.
 - **Recent Event:** PM Modi was elected as the NDA's Parliamentary Party leader in the Central Hall.
- Thus, while primarily reserved for official and ceremonial purposes, the Central Hall has been utilized for significant political gatherings.

Neighborhood First Policy: India's Approach to Regional Engagement

As Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi prepares to begin his third term, attention has turned once again to India's foreign policy, specifically the Neighborhood First Policy, which shapes the country's interactions with its immediate neighbors.

Overview

Neighborhood First Policy

- **Description:** India's Neighborhood First Policy is a strategic approach guiding the country's relations with its neighboring nations: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- **Objective:** The policy aims to enhance physical, digital, and people-to-people connectivity across the region, as well as to boost trade and commerce.

Significance:

- **Countering Chinese Influence:** Strengthening ties with neighbors helps India counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Support in Multilateral Forums:** Collaborating with neighboring countries enhances India's leadership role in representing the Global South in international forums.
- **Ensuring Territorial Integrity:** Cooperation with neighbors is vital for protecting India's territorial integrity and addressing separatist threats.

- **Increasing Maritime Security:** Enhanced collaboration improves maritime security, allowing India to tackle transnational security challenges.
- **Addressing Energy Security:** Close ties with neighboring countries are crucial for India's energy security, especially for importing oil and gas via sea routes.
- **Bridging Development Gaps:** Engaging with neighbors supports the development of India's northeastern states, reducing regional disparities.
- **Leveraging Soft Power:** India's cultural and historical connections with its neighbors strengthen its influence through soft power diplomacy.

Challenges

- **Geopolitical Tensions:** Border disputes and political disagreements can strain relationships.
- **Implementation Issues:** Logistical and bureaucratic challenges can hinder the execution of cross-border projects.
- **Economic Differences:** Varied levels of economic development among neighbors can affect the balance and effectiveness of cooperation.

Key Initiatives

- **SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation):** India has played a significant role in promoting regional cooperation through SAARC, though political differences, especially with Pakistan, have limited its effectiveness.
- **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation):** BIMSTEC has emerged as an alternative to SAARC, focusing on economic cooperation, security, and cultural exchange among Bay of Bengal countries.
- **Infrastructure Projects:**
 - **BBIN Initiative (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal):** Enhancing road and rail connectivity.
 - **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project:** Connecting India with Myanmar and further into Southeast Asia.
 - **Chabahar Port:** Developing a strategic port in Iran to improve connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Bilateral Ties

•Bangladesh:

- **Trade:** \$11,061 million (exports) - \$1,845 million (imports).
- **Relationship:** Deep historical ties with robust trade relations, including Indian exports of machinery and textiles and Bangladeshi exports of garments and fish.

•Sri Lanka:

- **Trade:** \$4,118 million (exports) - \$1,424 million (imports).
- **Relationship:** Ancient cultural connections with significant trade in petroleum and automobiles.

•Nepal:

- **Trade:** \$7,041 million (exports) - \$830 million (imports).
- **Relationship:** Open-border policy reflecting deep historical and cultural ties, with trade dominated by Indian exports of petroleum products and machinery.

•Maldives:

- **Trade:** \$892 million (exports) - \$87 million (imports).
- **Relationship:** Close ties maintained over the years, including Indian assistance in preventing a coup in 1988.

•Seychelles:

- **Trade:** \$76 million (exports) - \$9 million (imports).
- **Relationship:** Strategic partnership, particularly in maritime security and environmental cooperation.

•Bhutan:Trade: \$964 million (exports) - \$339 million (imports).

- **Relationship:** Long-standing friendship with significant economic and cultural exchanges, particularly in the hydroelectric power sector.

•**Mauritius:**

- **Trade:** \$778 million (exports) - \$74 million (imports).
- **Relationship:** Strong cultural and economic ties with significant bilateral trade.

The Neighborhood First Policy continues to be a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, aiming to foster strong, cooperative relationships with its neighboring countries while addressing regional challenges and leveraging shared opportunities for growth and development.

PAKISTAN AND CHINA AGREE TO UPGRADE CPEC: AN OVERVIEW

Why in News?

- Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is on a five-day visit to China. During this visit, he and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to upgrade the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), advancing high-quality development in its second phase.

What's in Today's Article?

- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
- Different Phases of CPEC
- Reasons Behind Stalled Projects Under CPEC
- India & CPEC
- Debt Burden of Pakistan and Role of China

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Inception: Launched during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Islamabad in April 2015, with initial pledges of \$46 billion.

Expansion: The commitment has grown to \$62 billion, representing one-fifth of Pakistan's GDP, covering numerous high-profile projects.

Route: Links Kashgar (Xinjiang region) with Gwadar, passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Objective: To modernize Pakistan's transportation infrastructure (road, rail, air, and energy systems) and connect Pakistan's deep-sea ports to China's Xinjiang province and beyond.

Different Phases of CPEC

First Phase: Infrastructure Creation

- **Agreements:** Focused on energy, infrastructure, port development, and railway construction.
- **Progress:**
- **Energy Projects:** Of 21 proposed power projects, 14 are completed, two are under construction, and five are yet to start.
- **Transport Projects:** Of 24 proposed projects, six are completed, and work on 13 has not started.
- **Investment:** CPEC brought \$25.4 billion in direct investment to Pakistan by 2022.

Second Phase: Industrial Cooperation

- **Initiation:** Began with the signing of an industrial cooperation agreement during the Pakistani PM's visit to China in February 2022. Focus: Development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and industrialization.

Reasons Behind Stalled Projects

1. **Chinese Concerns:** Issues with corruption, bureaucratic delays, and political instability in Pakistan.

2. **Security Issues in Gwadar:**

- **Balochistan Security:** Persistent terrorist attacks by Baloch militants, targeting Chinese nationals.
- **Local Discontent:** Baloch people view Gwadar as a symbol of economic injustice due to lack of quality jobs and benefits from CPEC.

Chinese Partnership Approach:

- **Local Job Creation:** Limited due to Chinese companies bringing their own labor and being tax-exempt. Employment: Far fewer jobs (less than 250,000) created than the expected 2 million.

India & CPEC

1. **Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity:**

- **Route:** CPEC passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, claimed by India but occupied by Pakistan.

2. **Security Threat:**

- **Chinese Military Presence:** Increased presence since CPEC's inception, including participation in Pakistan's military parades and deployment of naval vessels and submarines.

- **Strategic Encirclement:** China's naval base in Gwadar complements its base in Djibouti, encircling India in the Indian Ocean.

Debt Burden of Pakistan and Role of China

1. China's Growing Hold:

- **Debt Increase:** China's share of Pakistan's external debt has risen from \$4 billion in 2013 to \$30 billion out of a total of \$126 billion.
- **Debt Servicing:** Over 80% of Pakistan's bilateral debt service payments between July 2021 and March 2022 went to China.

2. Concerns Over Debt Dependency:

Unsustainable Debt: There are fears that Pakistan's debt dependency may make it a client state of China, drawing comparisons to the British East India Company's control over the Indian Subcontinent.

3. IMF's Role:

- **Bailout Package:** In March 2024, the IMF released the final \$1.1 billion tranche of a \$3 billion bailout package to Pakistan.
- **Future Assistance:** Pakistan is negotiating a new package (\$6-8 billion), but Chinese debt obligations are a significant hurdle. The IMF requires rescheduling Chinese debt to ensure its resources are not used to service Chinese debt.

Conclusion: The recent agreement between Pakistan and China to upgrade CPEC highlights the ongoing strategic and economic importance of the corridor. While it presents opportunities for economic development and regional connectivity, challenges such as security issues, project delays, and the debt burden continue to pose significant hurdles. The evolving dynamics of CPEC will have broad implications for Pakistan's economic future, its relationship with China, and regional geopolitics, particularly concerning India's security and territorial concerns.