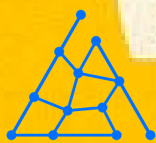


A stylized illustration on a yellow background. Several hands in various colors (blue, orange, red) are shown holding a white ballot box. The hands are rendered in a bold, graphic style with thick brown outlines. The ballot box is a simple white cube with a slot on top. The overall composition is dynamic and colorful.

# **ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN AMERICA**

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PROYECTO  
**BASE.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The regulation of electoral systems affects the right to vote in different ways. Depending on the system implemented, the degree of influence that the voters' decision has on the selection of their political representatives and the role played by political parties in the elections can greatly vary.

It is important to consider that there is no ideal electoral system. The political reality of each country is different and the way its citizens elect their rulers must be adapted to it. The selection of a system usually has advantages and disadvantages that can have a significant impact on the political interaction of the country.

## TYPES OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

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America has a variety of electoral systems:

### **In presidential elections**

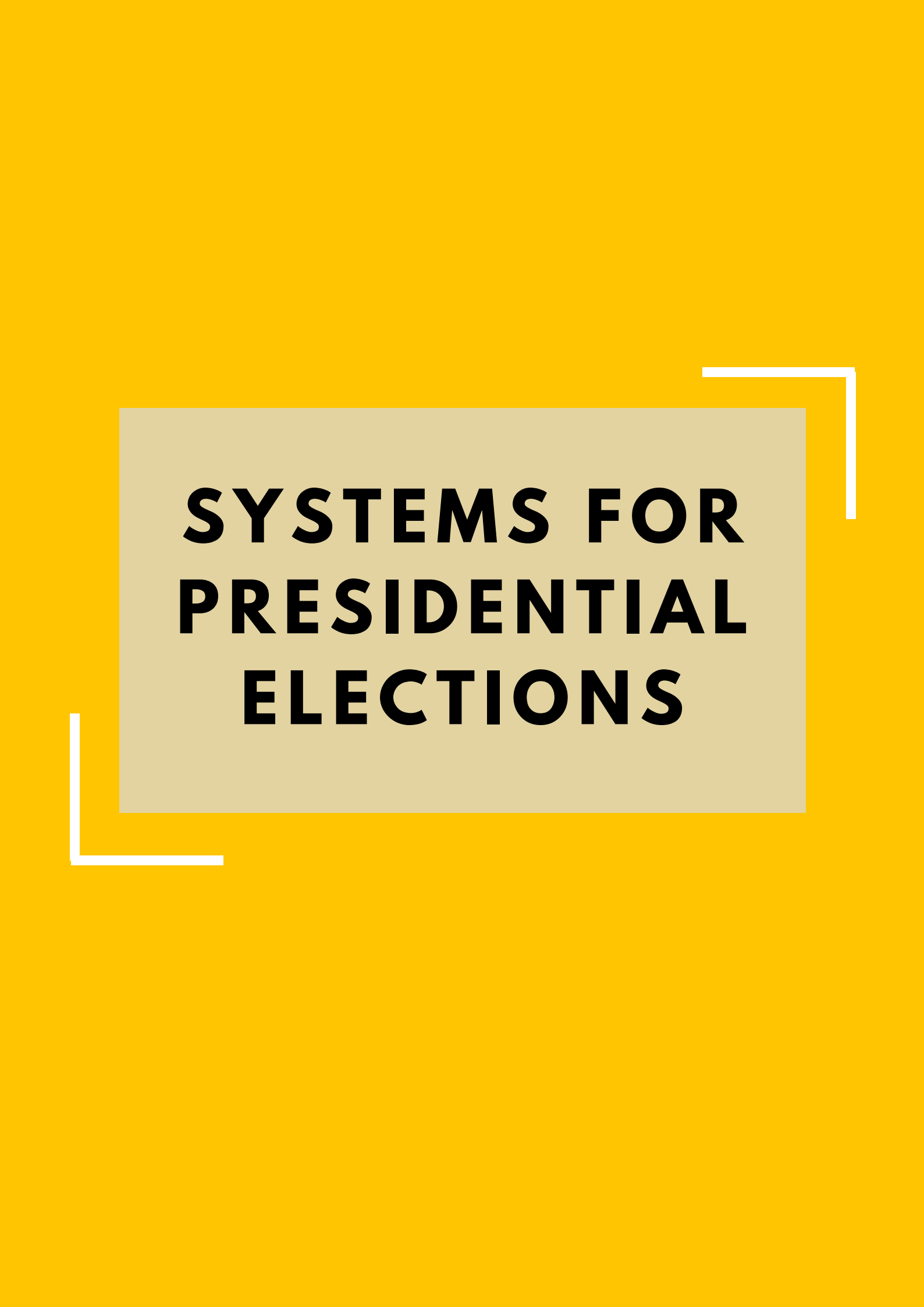
- Relative majority
- Absolute majority
- Indirect system of the electoral college

### **In parliamentary elections**

- Proportional representation
- Custom proportional representation

### **In the presentation of applications**

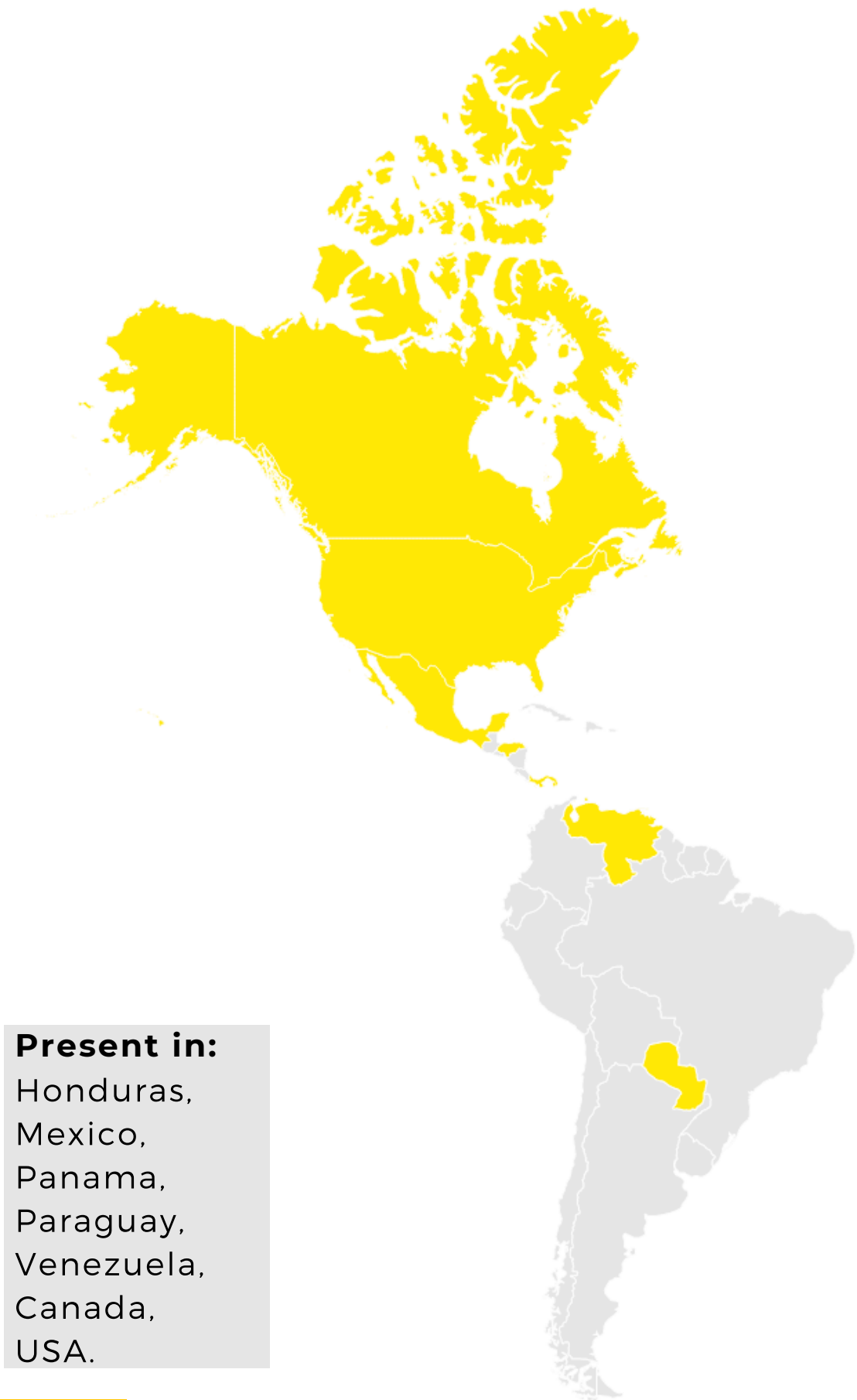
- Closed and blocked lists
- Closed and unblocked lists
- Open lists



# **SYSTEMS FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

# RELATIVE MAJORITY

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**Present in:**

Honduras,  
Mexico,  
Panama,  
Paraguay,  
Venezuela,  
Canada,  
USA.

# RELATIVE MAJORITY

The candidate who obtains the majority of the votes in the election is elected as the winner, regardless of how much the quantity of votes obtained differs from the candidate in second place.

## PROS:

- It provides a clearly defined choice for voters between two main parties or options.
- It favours broad-based parties. It is recommended in societies that are highly divided in regions or by ethnic groups, encouraging parties to "preach to all faiths" and to be very open and inclusive.
- It excludes extremist parties from any representation in the legislature. Unless the electoral support of an extremist minority party is geographically concentrated,

## CONS:

- It excludes minorities from fair representation.
- A large number of votes do not influence the election of any candidate.
- It can lead to a split vote among the different parties that do not need to form coalitions, a candidate can win just by having the highest percentage of votes. This can lead to further political polarization.

**THE MEXICAN CASE:** In Mexico, this electoral system favors the party Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) which represents the main opposition to a new electoral mechanism. Implementing another system, such as the absolute majority, would strengthen the opposition against this party. Among the reasons for the rejection of a new system mentioned by the party there are that, in a second round, where only the two candidates with the most votes remain in competition, the opportunity to form blocks between the parties with the least votes to face the leader in the elections arises, therefore being able to beat the mayoritary force.

# ABSOLUTE MAJORITY

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## **Present in:**

Argentina, Ecuador,  
Costa Rica,  
Nicaragua, Brasil,  
Colombia, Chile,  
El Salvador,  
Guatemala, Peru,  
Dominican Republic,  
Uruguay and Bolivia  
(second round  
through in Congress).

# ABSOLUTE MAJORITY

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A majority or, more than 50% of the votes, are required to be elected in the first round, in order to skip a second electoral process. If this is not the case, the candidates remaining in 1st and 2nd place will have to face each other again to determine who will hold the presidency.

## PROS:

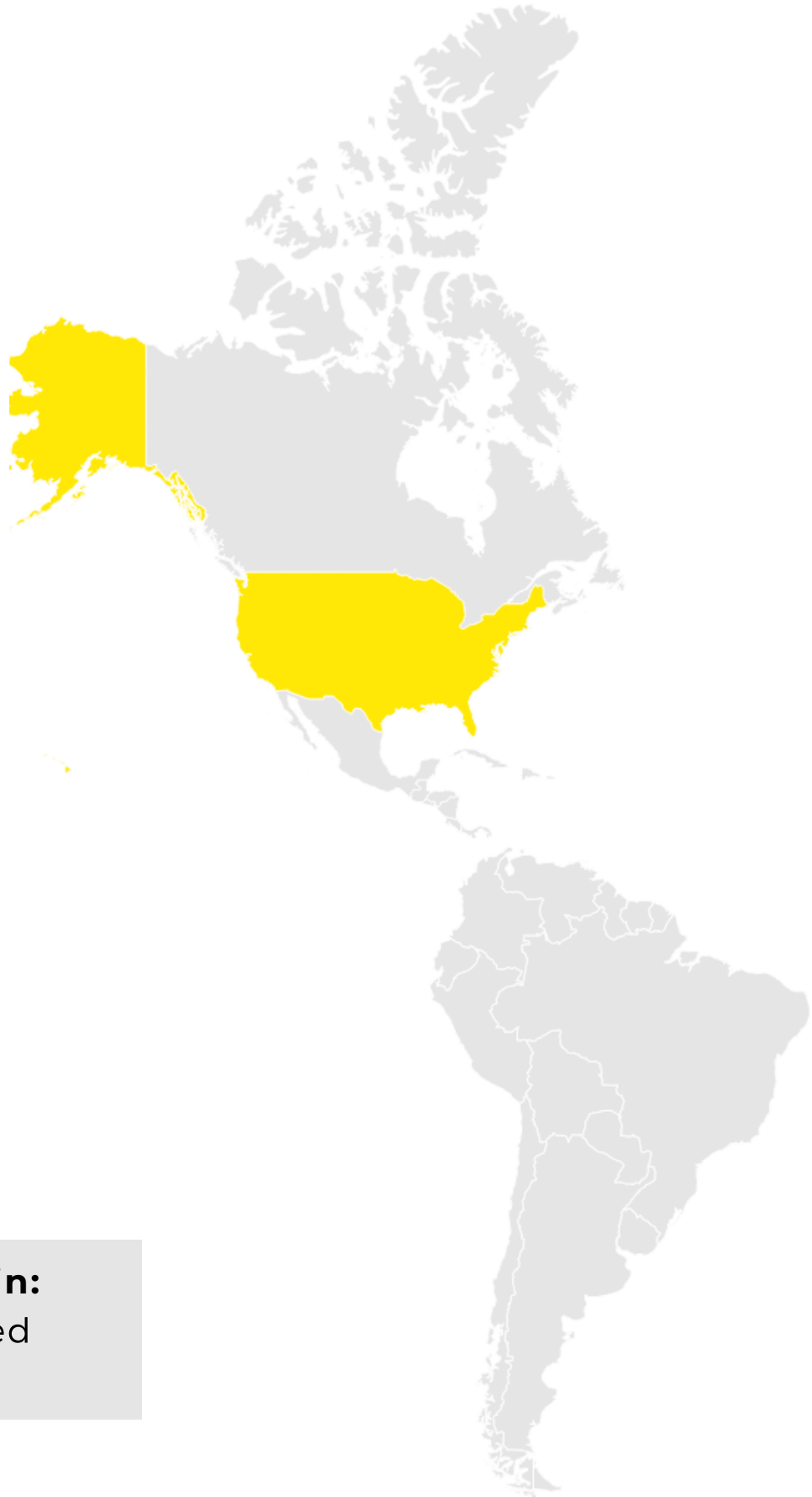
- It gives voters a second chance to vote for the candidate of their choice, and even to change their minds between rounds.
- It reinforces legitimacy, as the candidate undergoes two electoral processes.
- It prevents the winner from having less support than the hypothetical one created by the union of his rivals. The winner will be assured a higher percentage of votes than the opposition.

## CONS:

- It puts pressure on the electoral body by requiring it to organize two consecutive elections, increasing both the cost of the electoral process and the time between the election and the declaration of results. This can cause instability and uncertainty.
- It imposes an additional burden on the voter, with a usual decrease in participation in the second round.
- It generates presidents with artificial electoral majorities, confronting them with a Parliament in which they do not have a majority and can be hostile to him.

**THE ARGENTINEAN CASE:** Balloting was implemented in 1994, but has been only used twice: in the presidential elections of 2019 and in those that occurred in 2015, in which Mauricio Macri was elected as president. In these elections, Daniel Scioli was the most voted candidate in the first round, but failed to reach the threshold needed to win. In November 2016 they participated in the second round and Macri got 51.34% of the votes. This shows how an election result can change by giving electors a chance to change their minds.

# INDIRECT SYSTEM OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE



**Present in:**  
The United  
States



# INDIRECT SYSTEM OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

The citizens of each federal state vote for the members of the electoral college, who in turn cast their electoral votes for the presidential candidate of choice of those who elected them. The party that obtains the majority of these votes in each state receives the totality of the votes of that state, while the candidate that wins the election is the one that receives the simple majority of the votes, that is a minimum of 270 electoral votes.

## PROS:

- It corresponds to the federal system since each state, as an entity with specific economic and social characteristics, can use the method of its preference to elect voters, and citizens vote as members of its community-state.
- 90% of the presidential elections have been held in this manner.
- Although there is a possibility that a candidate who has the majority of the electoral votes wins without having the popular vote, this has only happened in four presidential elections to date.

## CONS:

- Indirect voting corresponds to a time when communication was difficult and citizens were not educated, while today in democracies, citizens should be able to choose their leaders directly, regardless of their education.
- Candidates often focus on campaigning in states where there is a greater uncertainty about preference, which demoralizes the voter and can cause abstention.
- The Electoral College voters may vote for a different candidate than the one they were entrusted to vote for.

**THE UNITED STATES CASE:** The Electoral College was created in 1787 by the "Founding Fathers" as a way to establish a counterweight to the decisions of the population. There were fears that factions would emerge and that voters would not make informed decisions, and it was believed that States with the largest voting populations would essentially end up electing the president, while some preferred the idea of the Congress electing this figure. The Electoral College represented a compromise, joining direct voting with certain barriers placed in the hands of highly knowledgeable people to safeguard American democracy.



# **SYSTEMS FOR LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS**

# PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

---



## **Present in:**

Argentina, Brasil,  
Colombia, Costa Rica,  
Ecuador, El Salvador,  
Guatemala, Honduras,  
Nicaragua, Panama,  
Paraguay, Peru,  
Dominican Republic,  
Chile and Uruguay.

# PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

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The percentage of votes obtained by the party translates into a proportional amount of seats allocated in the corresponding Parliament.

## PROS:

- It faithfully converts the votes won into seats and thus avoid some of the more destabilizing and "unfair" outcomes that plurality/majority systems foster.
- Encourages the formation of parties or political groups of candidates with common purposes for the creation of lists.
- It fosters greater continuity and stability in public policies. It is based on agreements and coalitions which help generate stability and coherence in decision-making.

## CONS:

- It can fragment parties. Extreme pluralism may allow minority parties to blackmail or handcuff large parties in the negotiation processes within a coalition.
- Small parties gain disproportionate power. A party that has only limited support in the vote can veto any proposal that comes from the big parties.
- It can be difficult for voters to understand.

**THE COLOMBIAN CASE:** In the House of Representatives (currently composed of 172 seats) there are five seats reserved for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities; everyone can vote for this representatives, even without belonging to the ethnic group. This has helped to generate representation of these groups in the legislature and has ensured their membership in the House, in contrast to other methods such as representation quotas, it ensures that the seats are occupied by these minorities.

# MIXED SYSTEM

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**Present in:**  
Bolivia,  
Mexico,  
Venezuela

# MIXED SYSTEM

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Under custom proportional representation systems, seats serve to offset any disproportionality produced by results in uninominal districts.

## PROS:

- Promotes representation of minority and ethnic groups.
- Proportional representation seats by list tend to offset, to a greater or lesser extent, any disproportionality produced by results in uninominal (majority) districts.
- It confers constitutional status to political parties, which otherwise would not achieve. It creates the possibility for the electorate to elect a popular representative based on its proposals, credibility and representativeness.

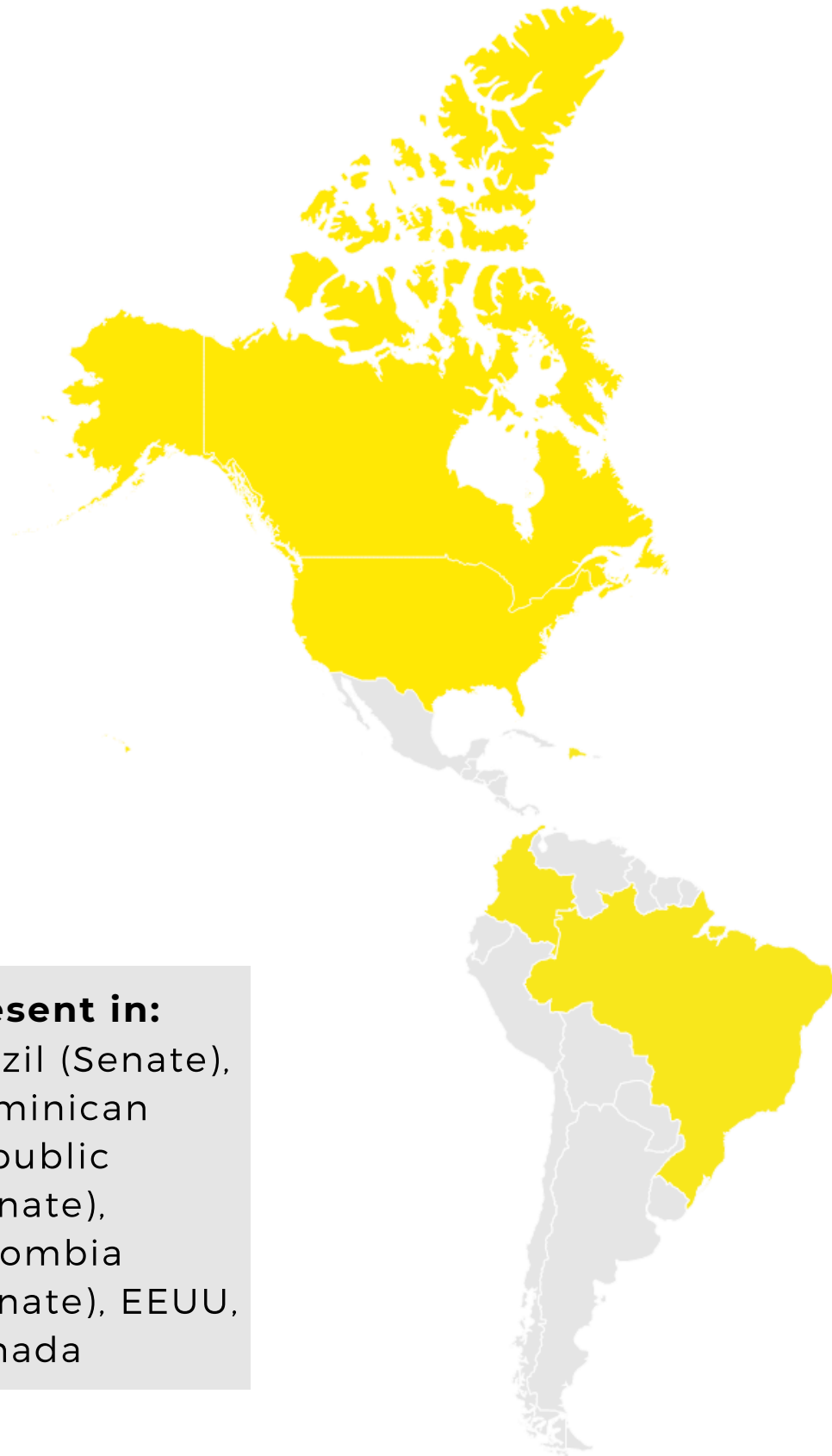
## CONS:

- It creates two classes of legislators, one responsible and committed to the electorate of a given area and another committed to the party leadership. This may have implications for the cohesion of the different groups of representatives elected by a party.
- Creates distortions in representation if districts are not established in a way that promotes equal opportunities for representation of different groups.
- Some groups may still be left out of the system by poorly demarcated districts.

**THE VENEZUELAN CASE:** In the system, the possibility of deviating the intention intended by the legislator and the constituent assembly through the "enmorchamiento" is observed. It consists of a system whereby a party nominates candidates for the seats chosen by lists while simultaneously running the same candidates, through another party, for the uninominal seats. Candidates are not obliged to run in both instances by the same party, thus, the seats obtained by "uninominal" candidates are not subtracted from those obtained by proportional vote, thus distorting the representativeness of the system.

# RELATIVE MAJORITY

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**Present in:**

Brazil (Senate),  
Dominican  
Republic  
(Senate),  
Colombia  
(Senate), EEUU,  
Canada

# RELATIVE MAJORITY

Relative Majority systems declare the candidate that obtained the majority of votes as the winner.

## PROS:

- Promotes an Assembly composed of a few parties and promotes a bipartisan orientation.
- Gets the electorate to speak out clearly about who they want to lead the government.
- Hampers the rise of extremist parties, as these options require a large number of voters to achieve a majority.

## CONS:

- Distorts representation, as parties that win the majority of votes are overrepresented.
- Hampers the arrangement of a pluralistic legislative body and the representation of minorities.
- Favors polarization.

**THE UNITED STATES CASE:** In the United States, both the House of Representatives and the Senate are elected through the "First Past The Post" system, where the candidate who gets the most votes is chosen no matter how many more they got in comparison to their opponents. In spite of its simplicity, this system tends to favor the election of candidates who do not truly possess a majority, but whose opponents and votes are divided, which favors the candidate who can gather the largest number of voters in a single option. This is most evident in elections where multiple candidates compete for a single seat, as the division of the votes can lead, in some cases, to a lack of the adequate expression of the majority.



# CLOSED AND BLOCKED LISTS

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A map of Latin America and the Caribbean region. The countries of Mexico, Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica), and South America (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina) are highlighted in yellow. The rest of the map, including North America and the rest of South America, is shown in light gray. There are yellow L-shaped decorative brackets in the top right and bottom left corners of the page.

**Present in:**

Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.

# CLOSED AND BLOCKED LISTS

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Voters must elect candidates according to the order established by the parties, so that no preferences can be established over any of the candidates.

## PROS:

- Since there are no post-election corrections to the order of the winning candidates, the will of the voters is respected and cannot be changed.
- Parties may include minority candidates on their lists (women, ethnicities, etc.) who would otherwise not be elected.
- It generates adherence of the members to the party avoiding personalism.

## CONS:

- It becomes more important for the candidate to secure a position on the lists and maintain a good relationship with the party leader, leaving the relationship with the electorate aside.
- It facilitates the destabilization of the party system. There is a possibility that polarized pluralism will allow small minority parties to put big parties in check during the negotiation processes of a coalition.
- It provides a platform for extremist parties.

**THE ARGENTINEAN CASE:** In Argentina, through closed and blocked lists, a quota law was successfully applied, which establishes that 30% of the candidates must be women and when implementing a blocked system, their election possibilities were increased.

# CLOSED AND UNBLOCKED LISTS

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**Present in:**

Brasil,  
Chile,  
Colombia,  
Panama,  
Peru.

# CLOSED AND UNBLOCKED LISTS

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The elector may alter the disposition of the candidates in the lists pre-established by the parties, thus electing who represents the party.

## PROS:

- For systems with flexible unblocked lists, it gives the voter the option to set their preference.
- Candidates are motivated to have a better relationship with the electorate in order to obtain a better position.
- It can lead to greater democratization within parties as candidates are chosen in a specific order to form lists.

## CONS:

- In the case of systems with unblocked lists with quotas or barriers, there is little possibility for voters to elect members because of the high percentages established.
- It creates the need for candidates to run personal campaigns. This may promote clientelistic behavior and increase the possibility of illegal practices for funding.
- A competition arises within the political party.

**THE BRAZILIAN CASE:** The voting system for the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies was changed in 2015. Previously, seats were allocated to the most voted candidates on each list; starting with the reform, seats are allocated to parties or coalitions according to the "hare quota" method, and later allocated to candidates who have obtained at least a 10% of the quota. Under this new system, it is more important for parties to nominate candidates who can obtain the 10% quota and more importance is given to the preferential vote of the electorate.

# OPEN LIST

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**Present in:**  
Ecuador

# OPEN LIST

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The elector may go beyond party boundaries and elect candidates from different lists.

## PROS:

- It gives citizens greater freedom in their choice as they can indicate not only their preferred party but also the candidate within the party lists.
- It favors democratic regeneration because it is possible to "punish" or "reward" with voting not only parties, but also concrete politicians.

## CONS:

- Internal competition is generated in the parties, causing instability.
- It requires greater knowledge of candidates by the electorate, which can have a demotivating effect on participation, especially in the most disadvantaged classes.
- It tends to generate clientelistic attitudes among representatives and the electors.

**THE CASE OF ECUADOR:** In Ecuador, the elector may issue his or her preference over the many lists he wishes to complete per constituency. The place on each list is calculated based on the votes each candidate obtains. Since 2012, the seats corresponding to the lists are distributed with the d'Hondt method (provincial and district constituencies) and with the Webster method (for the 15 assemblymen of the national circumscription). The seats are then distributed within each list to the most voted candidates.

# CONCLUSIONS

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- Electoral systems can have an effect on the electorate. They can be restrictive and manipulate the vote of citizens, as well as they can reduce the number of political parties. For example, in relation to lists, those that are closed and blocked offer little freedom to citizens over their choice, since the voting is based on lists established by the parties, while open lists offer the citizen great freedom to establish their preferences. Some experts therefore recommend flexible closed and unblocked lists as an intermediate point; it is also mentioned that it is preferable to implement open lists in broadly democratic states with strong institutions.
- On the other hand, in relation to the number of parties, in the majority systems, a party wins or loses, while in a proportional system the victory or defeat is expressed in the form of a greater or lesser part. In the latter, minorities are more likely to obtain representation, but this has not always been beneficial because there have been cases where these groups gain disproportionate power.
- It is important to stress that each system has its advantages and disadvantages and it is necessary to assess the political reality of each country in order to choose the system that is most beneficial; priority should be given to express the true will of the voters and to create conditions of negotiation between parties. Moreover, action must be taken in the light of clientelistic relations and political personalism, as well as the political culture of the region, in which citizens must be encouraged to participate and be better informed about their options.

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