

Study no. 7/2023

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# North Macedonia on the European electoral map: How proportional is the Macedonian Electoral Model?

Authors: Kristijan Fidanovski and Vlora Rechica

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April 2023



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Skopje, 2023

# Impressum

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**Title:** North Macedonia on the European electoral map: How proportional is the Macedonian Electoral Model?

**Original title:** Северна Македонија на европската изборна мапа: Колку е пропорционален македонскиот изборен модел?

**Publisher:** Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje

**Authors:** Kristijan Fidanovski and Vlora Rechica

**Editor:** Marko Troshanovski

**Translated from Macedonian language:** Vjosa Taipi

**Design:** Dejan Kuzmanovski

**Printing house:** Royal Art

**Place and year of issue**

Skopje, 2023

**Circulation**

30 copies

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# Abstract

This study analyzes the degree of proportionality between the distribution of votes and parliamentary seats in the Macedonian electoral model. In comparison to 31 other European countries, the Republic of North Macedonia is distinguished by (significantly) above-average proportionality based on three key elements of electoral models: constituency size (sharing sixth place from 32 states), the (non-)existence of an electoral threshold and its possible height (sharing first place), and the number of MPs (sharing sixth place). The only exception is North Macedonia's electoral formula, which is the least proportional - but also the most common - (d'Hondt's) formula in Europe.

Given the current electoral model's high proportionality, this study challenges some of the arguments of the proponents for an electoral reform toward (even) higher proportionality. Following existing research about the negative aspects of highly proportional electoral models, we argue that the eventual implementation of a (even) more proportional electoral model could seriously jeopardize the formation and stability of the executive, thus (further) weakening Macedonian democracy.

**Key terms:** proportionality, electoral models, constituencies, electoral formula, electoral threshold, number of MPs

# I. INTRODUCTION

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In political science, there has been a decades-long debate about what characteristics must a political system poses to be considered democratic. In the last few decades of the 20th century, the gradual democratization of several previously undemocratic territories (primarily in Eastern Europe and Latin America) produced a wide range of political systems, from full-fledged democracies to so-called “illiberal democracies”<sup>1</sup> and “sovereign democracies”<sup>2</sup> to “competitive authoritarian states.”<sup>3</sup> Although the precise definition of a fully-fledged democracy is debatable, fair and free elections are a basic requirement for a state to be called democratic, even under the most limited definition of democracy as a political system.

What does it mean to have “free and fair elections”? This term usually means that every citizen has the right to run for some political office and that every citizen has the right to vote for that candidate. Seemingly, the second part of this definition is not controversial:<sup>4</sup> every citizen has the right to fill out a ballot and expect their vote to bear the same weight as the votes of all other citizens. However, is this enough? Can an election be considered fair if a voter is blackmailed into voting a certain way to keep their job? Or if some candidates or political parties have more access to funding and media coverage? The subject of this study is one of the dilemmas from this list of questions: *What if the structure of the electoral model favours one candidate or party over another?*

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1 Zakaria, F. (1997). “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy.” *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 22–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20048274>.

2 Diamond, L. (2002), “Elections without Democracy: Reflections on Hybrid Regimes.” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2), 21–35. doi:10.1353/jod.2002.0025.

3 Lewicki, S., Wey, L. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: post-Cold War hybrid regimes* (Problems of International Politics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511781353.

4 However, even this right is sometimes challenged. The most well-known example is the prohibition on voting for convicted prisoners in some countries around the world, which has been characterized as a violation of basic human rights by numerous court decisions in international law.

## II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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An electoral model is a set of rules governing the relationship between the distribution of votes in a particular electoral cycle and the distribution of political power resulting from that cycle. Among the series of such rules, as well as types of election cycles in which they can be applied, for this study, we limit ourselves to parliamentary election cycles and four of their key elements:

- number and size of constituencies
- electoral formula
- electoral threshold
- the number of MPs

According to the definition given above, the degree of proportionality of an electoral model is based on the presence of these four (and other minor) elements, i.e., the degree of *proportionality* is a measure of how well the distribution of votes matches the distribution of power.

### Number and size of constituencies

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The constituencies are territorial units with a certain (and mutually equal) number of seats. The smallest number of constituencies possible in a country is one, which would result in identical ballots across the nation. The maximum number of constituencies is equal to the total number of seats in the country (in North Macedonia, this would be 120 constituencies). This option produces a **majority model** in which each constituency allocates one seat to the victor and none to the runner-up or any other candidate in that constituency.

On the other hand, **proportional models** encompass all other electoral models, including the single constituency model. In this manner, a single constituency represents the most proportional model possible, as the distribution of votes precisely matches the distribution of seats. Any increase in the number of constituencies means a less proportional model. For instance, the current number of valid constituencies in North Macedonia (six), at least when viewed in isolation,<sup>5</sup> means that a party must win at least 5% (100/20) of the votes in a particular constituency to secure a mandate in the 120-parliamentary seats (20 seats per constituency). On the opposite end of the spectrum is the model of a single constituency, in which a seat in the legislature would be assured with only 0.83 per cent of the vote (100/120).

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<sup>5</sup> As we explain further in the study, d'Hondt electoral formula complicates this calculations as it frequently increases the minimum share of votes required by smaller parties to win a parliamentary seat.

Nonetheless, if, for instance, the number of constituencies was doubled (to twelve), the degree of proportionality would be halved, meaning that a guaranteed parliamentary seat would require as much as 10% (100/10) of the votes in each constituency. Given that in the last of these three scenarios, a party with 9.99% of the votes may still be denied parliamentary representation, whereas, in the second scenario, such an outcome would be possible only for a party with 0.82% of the votes (or less), it is clear that the number of electoral units plays an important role in the proportionality of an electoral model.

## Electoral formula

The electoral formula is a mathematical expression determining how votes in *each constituency are translated into* seats. Today's most commonly used electoral formulas are the formulas of Hare, Hagenbach-Bischoff, Saint-Lag, Imperiali, d'Hondt and the principle of STV = Single Transferable Vote.

According to the classic typology of electoral formulas by political scientist Arend Lijphart,<sup>6</sup> these formulas can be ranked in order of how proportional they are:

Electoral formula	STV	Hare	Hagenbach-Bischoff	Saint - Lag	Imperials	d'Hondt	Majority Model <sup>7</sup>
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Take, for example, D'Hondt's formula in North Macedonia. Since this country's six constituencies use this formula, the (hypothetical) examples of converting votes into seats based solely on the number of constituencies does not fully apply. The conversion of votes into MPs (within each of the six constituencies) by the d'Hondt formula, in a manner whose complexity exceeds the objectives of this study, favours candidates from those candidate lists with a higher number of votes.

Let us examine how the d'Hondt formula affected the number of seats won by the country's two largest parties in the most recent parliamentary elections in 2020. If the number of constituencies were the only factor in the distribution of seats (i.e., if a fully proportional electoral formula were used instead of the d'Hondt formula), then the fact that each constituency has 20 seats would equate to one MP receiving 5% of the votes in that constituency. However, due to the advantage of the d'Hondt formula, VMRO-DPMNE in constituencies 3 (45.82% of the votes) and 4 (45.11%), as well as the SDSM-BESA coalition in constituency 4 (46.76%), won ten seats without having won 50% ( $10 \times 5 = 50$ ) of the respective votes, which reflects the importance of the election formula.

6 Lijphart, A. (1986) "Degrees of Proportionality of Proportional Representation Formulas." Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences, Bernard Grofman and Aren Leafart. New York: Agathon Press.

7 For the sake of consistency with the analysis of the remaining three elements of an electoral model, we treat the majority electoral models in the analytical sample as having a "majority electoral formula," because they are automatically less proportional than all other electoral models, given that a parliamentary seat in each constituency receives only the winner and all other votes "fail."

## Electoral threshold

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An electoral threshold is the minimum number of votes required to win at least one seat in the Parliament. This threshold is established at the state level and applies to all constituencies. Thresholds can be legally imposed (formal thresholds) or exist as a mathematical property of the electoral model (effective or natural thresholds). Higher electoral thresholds reduce proportionality by increasing the likelihood that some candidate lists (i.e., some parties) will not be represented in Parliament. A “high electoral threshold” is commonly understood to be set high enough to preclude parliamentary representation for all parties except a small (usually single-digit) number of parties. Even lower electoral thresholds reduce the proportionality of the electoral model (compared to a model without an electoral threshold). Still, thresholds don’t usually change the degree of proportionality already set by the number of electoral units and the electoral formula. Finally, the absence of an electoral threshold, as in North Macedonia, means that the remaining elements of the electoral model fully determine the degree of proportionality.

## The number of MPs

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The number of MPs is largely determined by the country’s population, with smaller states typically having fewer MPs. However, although it frequently lags behind the public debate on electoral models, the exact number of MPs, like the other three elements of electoral models, is a matter of political decision, as it is an important factor in the proportionality between the distribution of seats and the distribution of votes.

The number of MPs in North Macedonia is 120. If that number were doubled to 240, i.e., 40 (instead of 20) in each constituency, then almost every party previously represented in the Parliament would get one or more new seats. However, parties currently not in Parliament would be the biggest winners in this scenario. Doubling the number of MPs would automatically bring parliamentary representation to all parties, with at least half of the required votes to enter Parliament with 120 MPs. Of course, the opposite is also true: if the number of MPs was cut in half (from 120 to 60), i.e., 10 (rather than 20) in each constituency, some parties with a small number of seats would lose their parliamentary status, even if all other aspects of the electoral model remained unchanged.

### III. MAIN IMPLICATIONS OF ELECTORAL MODELS

The electoral model influences several parameters of a country's political life. In this study, we focus on the effects of electoral models on party systems, government formation and stability, and electoral turnout. Electoral models are typically treated as an exogenous (external) factor that influences these parameters of a country's political life. Still, they are frequently interconnected with broader political systems and phenomena in the country.

According to Duverger, electoral models have a "mechanical" and "psychological" impact on voters and parties, thus shaping the systems of political parties.<sup>8</sup> The mechanical effect refers to the fact that electoral models determine how citizens' votes are translated into parliamentary mandates, whereas the psychological effect shapes party and voter strategies in the face of the mechanical constraints of the electoral office.<sup>9</sup> However, it is important to note that political parties find ways to exploit electoral models to their advantage; that is, they create systems critical for them to gain or maintain power. The "Rokan Hypothesis," for example, attributes the introduction of a proportional electoral model in continental Europe to the expansion of voting rights and the establishment's need to protect its position while incorporating some representation of previously excluded groups of citizens.<sup>10</sup> Lipson (1964) also argues in her analysis of electoral models and party politics that party politics or political traditions encourage electoral models, not the other way around.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of proportionality between citizens' votes and the arrangement of power in the state is one key concept that is closely related to the question of how electoral models shape party systems. While proportional electoral models produce many parties, providing citizens with a more diverse choice, majority models produce a (de facto) bipartisan system, unevenly translating citizens' votes into seats, favouring larger parties.<sup>12</sup>

Given the influence of electoral models in shaping a country's party system and the composition of parliaments, they also influence the process of forming a government. In some countries, a coalition government is almost inevitable, while in others, it is nonexistent. In some countries, voters have a good idea of what kind of government their vote helps create; in others, voters only know that their vote helps a particular party, not knowing if that party could become part of the executive branch or whom its coalition partners could be. Identifiability - in other words, the ability of voters to identify the governance options offered - is influenced by the electoral model.<sup>13</sup>

The proportional model typically produces coalitions or even minority governments (where the ruling parties require at least one opposition party to pass new laws), whereas the majority electoral model typically produces a single-party administration. In the second scenario, voters elect their government, whereas, in the first scenario,

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8 Straeten, K.V. der, Sauger, N. Lasslier, J.-F., Blais, A., 2013. Sorting Mechanical and Psychological Effects in Candidate Elections: Assessment with Experimental Data. *British Journal of Political Science*. 43, 937-944. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000579>

9 Benoit, K. 2004. Models of change in the electoral system. *Electoral Studies*. 23, 363-389. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794\(03\)00020-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794(03)00020-9)

10 Rokan, S. (1970). Citizens, elections, parties: approaches to the comparative study of development processes Oslo: Universitetsforlaget. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000276427001400198>

11 Hacker, A. 1965. The Democratic Civilization. By Leslie Lipson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Pp. xiii, 614. 10.00.). *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 59, 520-521. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1953080>

12 Arts. K., Thomasen, J., 2008. Democracy satisfaction: are institutions important? *Electoral Studies*. 27, 5-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2007.11.005>

13 Powell, G. B. 2000. *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majority and Proportional Visions* Yale University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bwg8>

io, the composition of the government is determined through negotiations between party leaders following the elections. In countries without a proportional electoral model, the election results typically signal the conclusion of the competition to form the next government; in countries with a proportional model, they typically signal the beginning of the second and likely more crucial phase of the process.

In addition to affecting how governments are formed, electoral models also have much to do with how stable and long-lasting those governments are. A growing body of research contends that coalitions, characteristic of proportional electoral models, are not inherently ineffective or unstable and that there is not necessarily a trade-off between stability and proportionality.<sup>14</sup> Lijphart (1999), for instance, concludes that a coalition government is not any less effective than a single-party government and also performs better in nearly every dimension.<sup>15</sup> However, proportional electoral models demonstrate that they result in significantly shorter durations of government, which leads to more frequent early elections.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding turnout in elections, research by Blais and Carty shows that a proportional electoral model increases citizens' participation in elections.<sup>17</sup> Of course, a high level of proportionality cannot be the only reason for high election turnout; any analysis of this relationship must consider differences in political culture, social structure, and the party system. For example, some studies look at the effect of personal resources such as education, income, or interest in politics on citizens, finding that having more resources increases the likelihood of voting regardless of the electoral model.<sup>18</sup> However, research shows that if all other factors are equal, a proportional electoral model increases the likelihood of voter participation.<sup>19</sup> According to one estimate based on research in post-communist countries, a 10% increase in the percentage of seats elected with a proportional electoral model leads to a 1% increase in turnout.<sup>20</sup>

Based on the above literature summary, we conclude that majority and proportional electoral models have numerous advantages and disadvantages. As a result, political science suggests that each country select an appropriate electoral model for its particular context, while attempting to strike a balance between voter representation (typically stronger in proportional models) and stable governance (typically associated with majority models). Our study aims to locate the Macedonian electoral model on the European electoral map by comparing the Republic of North Macedonia to the rest of the continent using four main parameters of an electoral model discussed above.

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14 Farrell, D. M. 2001. *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction* Macmillan Palgrave. <https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/publications/electoral-systems-a-comparative-introduction>

15 Lijphart, A. 1999. *Models of democracy*. Yale University. Press. URL <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/9780300172027/patterns-of-democracy>

16 Taggepera, R., Sikk, A. 2010. Parsimonious model for forecasting the average duration of the cabinet based on the electoral system Party politics. 16, 261-281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809341058>

17 Blais, A., Carty, R. K. 1990. Does proportional representation encourage voter turnout? *European Journal of Political Research* 18, 167-181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1990.tb00227.x>

18 Anduiza Perea, E., 2002. Individual characteristics, institutional incentives, and electoral abstinence in Western Europe *European Journal of Political Research* <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1475-6765.00025>

19 Blais, A., Carty, R. K. 1990. Does proportional representation encourage voter turnout? *European Journal of Political Research*. 18, 167-181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1990.tb00227.x>

20 Kostadinova, T. 2003. Voter turnout dynamics in post-communist Europe *European Journal of Political Research*. <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1475-6765.00102>

## IV. REVIEW OF THE CURRENT DEBATE ON ELECTORAL REFORMS IN NORTH MACEDONIA<sup>21</sup>

Members of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia are elected for a four-year term by secret ballot in general, direct, and free elections. In the parliamentary elections, the citizens elect 120-123 MPs, while the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia allows for 120-140 MPs. MPs are elected using a proportional electoral model based on closed candidate lists, with 20 MPs elected in each of the country's six constituencies.<sup>22</sup>

Parties receive parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of votes received by their candidate list compared to the number of votes received by other candidate lists, according to the d'Hondt formula. In the distribution of seats, the number of candidates on the list is equated to the number of elected MPs. In addition, mandates are distributed to candidates in the order determined by the candidate lists. Voting abroad is only permitted if the number of registered voters matches the smallest number of votes with which an MP won a mandate in the most recent parliamentary election.<sup>23</sup>

In varying intensity over the years, these electoral rules have been the subject of debate on electoral reform. This debate focused mostly on the number of constituencies, the electoral threshold, the electoral formula, the voter list, and (to a lesser extent) the number of MPs. The last parliamentary elections, held in July 2020, were also not immune to this debate.<sup>24</sup>

In 2019, less than a year before the elections, then-Prime Minister Zoran Zaev<sup>25</sup> and the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) supported an initiative by smaller parties to change the electoral model toward the introduction of a single electoral unit.<sup>26</sup> The proposal of the small parties was later supported by the largest opposition party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE).<sup>27,28</sup> This initiative was not supported by the Albanian bloc, which believed that the tran-

21 Most of the data presented in this section of the study are extracted from the Electoral Archive. The Electoral Archive of North Macedonia Elections Since 1990 is a project of the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, with a representative office in the Republic of North Macedonia, that aims to collect all available documents on the country's electoral processes since the first multi-party parliamentary elections in 1990 to the present. Available at: <https://izbornaarhiva.mk/>

22 Electoral Code (draft consolidated text), an unofficial version prepared by the Expert Service of the State Election Commission ("Official Gazette", no. 40/06, 136/08, 148/08, 155/08, 163/08, 44/11, 51/11, 54/11, 142/12, 31/13, 34/13, 14/14, 30/14, 196/15, 35/16, 97/16, 99/16 136/16, 142/16, 67/17, 125/17, 35/18, 99/18, 140/18, 208/18, 27/19, 98/19 and 42/20).

23 Ibid.

24 These parliamentary elections were the fifth early election in a row in the last 12 years.

25 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2019. Zaev: "We support one constituency; there is time to change the electoral model; it would be a huge democratic step." Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2019. <https://vlada.mk/node/19647>.

26 Mitevska, M. 2022. 'Will the parties agree to change the electoral model?' Radio Free Europe. 21 January 2022. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/ke-se-soglasat-li-partiite-za-promena-na-izborniot-model-/31663679.html>.

27 360 degrees. 2020 'VMRO-DPMNE softens: One constituency for MPs, but also one election round for mayors'. 360 Degrees (blog). 14 September 2020. <https://360stepeni.mk/vmro-dpmne-omeknuva-edna-izborna-edinitsa-za-pratenitsi-no-i-eden-izboren-krug-za-gradonachalnitsi/>.

28 A1on. 2022. 'Miloshoski: VMRO-DPMNE Supports the Electoral Model One Constituency'. 2022. <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/miloshoski-vmro-dpmne-go-poddrzhuva-izborniot-model-edna-izborna-edinica/>.

sition to a single constituency would diminish the representation of Albanian voters in the Parliament.<sup>2930</sup> The two main Albanian parties, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and the Alliance for Albanians (AA) share this opinion. However, they do not agree on the best course of action. While DUI is opposed to change, without a clear position, AA<sup>31</sup> believes that dividing the population into eight constituencies would provide the most equitable representation for all citizens.<sup>32</sup>

The debate developed more extensively in 2020 after 12 MPs from smaller parties formed an initiative for a new electoral model with one constituency,<sup>3334</sup> which was not fruitful. The initiative is still active in the Assembly but has not yet reached any conclusion.<sup>35</sup> In December 2020, a few months after the parliamentary elections, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) established a working group on amendments to the Electoral Code.<sup>36</sup> However, there is little information available to the public about how frequently this body meets and who its members are. The news on the MoJ's website and in public focus only on this body's commitment to bringing about changes in an inclusive and timely manner for the next parliamentary elections.<sup>3738</sup>

In general, the discussion of possible changes to the electoral model is mostly led by smaller parties, which advocate the introduction of open lists and one constituency without an electoral threshold. They believe that one constituency can promote better democracy, pluralism and inclusiveness and that it will undermine the dominance of the two main political parties, giving smaller political actors more room for action.<sup>3940</sup>

Although the debate over electoral reform has been ongoing, most electoral reforms are implemented just before the next elections, limiting the space and time for an inclusive and transparent public debate. Such was the situation with the most important change to the electoral model in 2002. Just before the parliamentary elections, the Law on Constituencies was adopted, which established six electoral districts, dividing the country's territory into electoral regions with an approximately equal number of registered voters. According to the 2016 Electoral Code amendments, the number of voters in a constituency may vary by minus 5 to plus 5 per cent from the average number of voters, approximately 292,000 per constituency.

Before the early parliamentary elections in 2011, amendments were made to the Electoral Code, which allowed Macedonian citizens abroad to vote for the first time. On the eve of the early parliamentary elections in February 2020, additional amendments to the Electoral Code were voted on, intervening in constituencies in the country.

29 Sakam da kazham (SDK). 2016 "One constituency and open lists would restore democracy." Sakam da kazham (blog). 2016. <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/edna-izborna-ednitsa-otvoreni-listi-bi-ja-vratile-demokratijata/>.

30 MKD. 2019a. 'Alliance For Albanians Backs Eight Constituencies and Open Lists'. MKD.Mk. 2019. <https://mkd.mk/node/319902>.

31 MKD. 2019b. "Grubi: DUI is Against Changing the Election Model." MKD.Mk. 2019. <https://mkd.mk/node/316374>.

32 Mitevka, M. 2022a. 'Will the parties agree to change the electoral model?' Radio Free Europe. 21 January 2022. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/ke-ce-soglasat-li-partiite-za-promena-na-izborniot-model-/31663679.html>

33 Sakam da kazham (SDK). 2019. "A group of MPs has launched an initiative to create a new electoral model based on a single constituency." Sakam da kazham (blog). 17 September 2019. <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/grupa-pratenitsi-formirashe-initsijativa-za-nov-izboren-model-so-edna-izborna-ednitsa/>.

34 Chalovski, V. 2019. 'One constituency: who is "for," who is "against," and who is "we'll see."' IRL (blog). 21 September 2019. <https://irl.mk/edna-izborna-ednitsa-ko-e-za-ko-protiv-ko-e-vidime/>

35 The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia 2022. 'Session Details'. 2022. <https://www.sobranie.mk/detali-na-sednica.nspx?sittingId=ee77eea6-4e53-454d-a838-ee3b7b405bd6&materialId=299fe0e1-b59d-42af-a15c-87bfc4a97bd8;%20https://www.sobranie.mk/detali-na-materijal.nspx?param=299fe0e1-b59d-42af-a15c-87bfc4a97bd8>

36 MKD. 2020 'Task Force to Amend the Electoral Code' is being formed. MKD.Mk. 2020. <https://mkd.mk/node/289390>.

37 Academic. 2021. New Meeting of the Working Group on Electoral Code Amendments. 2021. <https://akademik.mk/nov-sostanok-na-rabotnata-grupa-za-izmeni-na-izborniot-zakonik/>.

38 Ministry of Justice. 2022. "Tupancheski: The MoJ Initiates Preparation of a New Electoral Code." 2022. <https://pravda.gov.mk/vest/6352>.

39 Blazevska, K. 2021. 'Trajanov: One constituency to be a government priority'. dw.com. 2021. <https://cutt.ly/s4ecPeK>

40 Blazevska, K. 2019. "One constituency - big theater." dw.com. 2019. <https://cutt.ly/A4evymT>

In line with the emerging changes, there was a reshaping of two constituencies – constituency 5 and constituency 6. The Municipality of Debar, with 16 polling stations and the Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostushe, with 30 polling stations from Constituency 5, crossed within the boundaries of Constituency 6, according to the current demographic situation in these constituencies.

These examples show that there has been no long, extensive, and substantive debate on key electoral changes to determine any electoral changes' positive and negative effects and that electoral reforms are not viewed strategically or as a tool for advancing democracy.

## V. ANALYTICAL SAMPLE

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The analysis of the four above-mentioned key elements of an electoral model was conducted on 32 European countries. The sample includes all European Union member states except Greece and Hungary, whose sui generis electoral model does not allow for a simple classification. In addition, the sample consists of the six candidate countries for E.U. membership in the Western Balkans (Western Balkans – 6) and the United Kingdom, a country with one of the longest parliamentary traditions in Europe. The results are shown below, first by individual parameters and then combined, to provide a comprehensive picture of the proportionality of these 32 electoral models and the relative position of our current model in relation to the rest of the continent.

## Results of the analysis

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### *Number and size of constituencies*

One of the main goals of constituency “design” is to create a direct link between the MP and the voters in the geographic area they are elected to represent. In a representative democracy, legislators are expected to represent the interests of the constituency to which they were elected, so it is recommended that constituencies not be too large to minimize the distance between voters and their representatives but also to avoid too many parties in parliament, which could jeopardize the formation of a government, as well as its stability and efficiency. On the other hand, any increase in the number of constituencies results in a less proportional model, which reduces the chances of smaller parties gaining parliamentary representation.

In terms of the size of constituencies, in European countries that use proportional representation, there are quite a few variations. At the lower end are Austria (4 seats per constituency), Bosnia and Herzegovina (4) and Germany (2), as well as the countries using the STV model: Ireland (4) and Malta (5). The list of countries with larger constituencies includes Lithuania (35), Latvia (20), North Macedonia (20), and Denmark (18), with four southern and eastern European states (Serbia, Slovakia, Kosovo, and Montenegro) at the top, being the only states in our sample with a single constituency system.

Generally, most European countries have an average size of constituencies between 4 and 15 seats. This ranking suggests that the current electoral model in North Macedonia, which is criticized by smaller parties as insufficiently proportional, actually has above-average large constituencies compared to the rest of Europe.

**Table 2:** Ranking of 32 European countries by size of constituencies  
(from most to least proportional)

Rank	Country	Average constituency size (in number of MPs) <sup>41</sup>	Number of constituencies <sup>42</sup>	Total number of MPs
1	Serbia	250	1	250
1	Slovakia	150	1	150
1	Kosovo	120	1	120
4	Montenegro	81	1	81
5	Lithuania	70	- single-member constituencies for 71 MPs (not counted in the calculation) - one constituency for 70 MPs	141
6	Latvia	20	5	100
<b>6</b>	<b>North Macedonia</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>120</b>
8	Denmark	18	- 10 multi-member constituencies (d'Hondt method: 135 seats) - 40 compensatory seats (Saint-Laguë method) - Faroe Islands and Greenland (2 members each)	179
9	Finland	16	- 12 multi-member constituencies - 1 single-member constituency (Åland Islands)	200
9	Luxembourg	15	4	60
11	Belgium	14	11	150
11	Czechia	14	14	200
13	Croatia	14	- 10 multi-member constituencies - 1 (diaspora, multi-member constituency) - 1 (national minorities, multi-member constituency)	151
13	Cyprus	13	6	80
15	Albania	12	12	140
15	Sweden	12	29	349
17	Poland	11	41	460
19	Slovenia	11	- 8 multi-member constituencies - 2 single-member constituencies for the Italian or Hungarian national community	90
18	Portugal	10	22	230

41 The total number of MPs is divided by the number of constituencies.

42 The majority of the data is from a database of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) "Comparative Table for the Allocation of Seats to Constituencies", while some of the data is taken directly from the electoral laws of the sampled countries.

17	Italy	9	- About one-third (37%) or 147 of the seats are allocated with a majority system (one-member constituencies) ( <i>not counted in the calculation</i> ); - The remaining roughly two-thirds (63%), or 253 allocated by proportional system (29 constituencies with multiple members; d'Hondt method).	400
19	Romania	8	43	330
19	Estonia	8	12	101
19	Netherlands	8	20	150
19	Bulgaria	8	31	240
20	Spain	7	- 50 multi-member constituencies - 2 single-member constituencies ( <i>not counted in the calculation</i> ).	350
24	Malta	5	13	65 (except for the 2022 parliamentary elections, when 79 MPs were elected)
25	Bosnia and Herzegovina	5	- The Federation elects 2/3 of the parliamentary seats (21 out of 5 multi-member constituencies by proportional representation, and 7 mandates are compensatory mandates - elected from the entire territory). - 1/3 of the mandates are elected by Republika Srpska (9 mandates out of 3 multi-member constituencies by proportional representation, and 5 mandates are compensatory mandates - elected from the territory of the Republic of Srpska	42
25	Austria	4	- one national constituency ( <i>not counted in the calculation</i> ); - nine constituencies based on federal states ( <i>not counted in the calculation</i> ); - 39 regional constituencies.	183
27	Ireland	4	40	160
28	Germany	2	299	598
29	France	1	577	577
29	United Kingdom	1	650	650

## Electoral formula

There are various electoral formulas with significant differences in how they translate citizens' votes into seats and, thus, their impact on the overall electoral model's degree of proportionality.

As can be seen from Table 2 below, the d'Hondt formula, which is also used in North Macedonia, is the most commonly used elective formula in the analytical sample. Given that six other formulas are used (individually or in combination) throughout Europe, our country has one of the least proportional electoral models in this regard. This finding seems to support the arguments for introducing a different electoral model with a higher level of proportionality. However, the fact that this formula is used in 14 countries, accounting for nearly half of the analytical sample, suggests that in this regard, we cannot single out North Macedonia as a significant anomaly.

In terms of geographic regions, it is difficult to spot some major trends: some of the Western Balkan countries, for example, are near the top of the table (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), while others (e.g. Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia) are among the countries with the least proportional formulas. Withal, it is important not to forget that the electoral formula is a relatively small factor in the overall proportionality of the electoral model. Suppose all other aspects of their electoral models were the same. In that case, the difference in proportionality between, say, a state using the Saint-Lag formula and a state using the d'Hondt formula would be insignificant (a maximum of several seats).

**Table 3:** Ranking of 32 European countries according to the proportionality of the electoral formula (from most proportional to least proportional)

Rank	State <sup>43</sup>	Electoral formula
1	Ireland	STV
1	Malta	STV
3	Cyprus	Hare
3	Lithuania	Hare
5	Slovakia	Hagenbach-Bischoff
6	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Saint - Lag
7	Kosovo	Saint - Lag
8	Latvia	Saint - Lag
9	Sweden	Saint - Lag
10	Austria	d'Hondt; Hare
11	Italy	Hare; majority <sup>44</sup>
12	Denmark	Saint-Lag; d'Hondt
13	Germany	Saint-Lag; majority shareholder
14	Czechia	Majority; Hagenbach-Bischoff; Imperials
15	Albania	d'Hondt
15	Belgium	d'Hondt

<sup>43</sup> All results in the table refer to national parliamentary elections.

<sup>44</sup> Five countries in the sample (Italy, Denmark, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland) use multiple electoral formulas; the rank for these countries is calculated by subtracting an average from the proportionality of all the formulas they use.

15	Bulgaria	d'Hondt
15	Estonia	d'Hondt
15	Luxembourg	d'Hondt
15	Portugal	d'Hondt
15	Romania	d'Hondt
<b>15</b>	<b>North Macedonia</b>	<b>d'Hondt</b>
15	Slovenia	d'Hondt
15	Serbia	d'Hondt
15	Finland	d'Hondt
15	Netherlands	d'Hondt
15	Croatia	d'Hondt
15	Montenegro	d'Hondt
15	Spain	d'Hondt
30	Poland	Majority; d'Hondt
31	United Kingdom	Majority
32	France	Majority

## ***Electoral Threshold***

As discussed above, an electoral threshold diminishes the proportionality of electoral models, particularly when set at a relatively high level, preventing smaller parties from entering parliament.

As seen in Table 3, most European countries have a low electoral threshold or no threshold in their electoral models. However, the most prevalent electoral threshold in the sample, observed in eleven countries, is atypically high (5%). In addition, in countries that do not have an electoral threshold in their electoral legislation, there is a hidden or so-called natural (de facto) threshold that depends primarily on the number and size of electoral units and the electoral formula.

For example, in the mixed electoral model of Germany, there is a threshold of 5% in the proportional section of the mixed electoral model. Given Germany's turbulent history with extreme political actors, the electoral threshold concept was introduced to limit the number of radical parties. In Germany, however, there are ways to go above the electoral threshold; for example, if a party wins at least three seats in one of the constituencies, it can go above the threshold regardless of the total number of votes received. Even when there is no formal threshold, the hidden or natural threshold, created as a mathematical by-product of electoral model characteristics, the most important of which is the size of the constituencies, has nearly the same effect. Political scientists frequently use the so-called Lijphart<sup>45</sup> formula to calculate the "effective electoral threshold" resulting from constituency size. In Ireland, for example, despite the lack of a formal electoral threshold, there is an effective threshold of 8-12% because each constituency contains between 3 and 5 seats, whereas, in Malta, the effective threshold is 12% due to the size of the constituency of 5 MPs. In other words, the smaller the constituency, the higher the natural (effective) electoral threshold.

<sup>45</sup> Lijphart's formula:  $\text{eff thresh} = 75\% / (m + 1)$ , where  $m$  is the size of the constituency.

To prevent small parties from being excluded from the legislature, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommends a threshold of no more than 3% for parliamentary elections.<sup>46</sup> Introducing an electoral threshold significantly reduces the chances of small parties entering the Parliament. According to the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) analysis, instituting an electoral threshold in North Macedonia would result in many "lost" votes for small parties, resulting in less representation in the legislature of the interests of various groups in society.<sup>47</sup> Because votes for parties that would otherwise gain representation are lost as a result of the existence of a legal threshold, the overall level of proportionality is reduced. Because of this, most states, including North Macedonia, have chosen not to have a formal electoral threshold.

However, although there is no legal threshold in North Macedonia, Liphart's formula calculates an effective threshold of 3% based on the number of seats in each constituency. Even when the effective threshold is compared to the formal thresholds in those countries with such thresholds, North Macedonia is among the more proportional countries in Europe in terms of the electoral threshold. As a result, the current electoral threshold in North Macedonia cannot be considered a compelling argument for shifting the electoral model toward greater proportionality.

**Table 4:** Ranking of 32 European countries based on the existence and height of the electoral threshold (from lowest to highest)

Rank	Country	Formal electoral threshold	Electoral formula
1	Malta	None	STV
1	Luxembourg	None	d'Hondt
<b>1</b>	<b>North Macedonia</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>d'Hondt</b>
1	Finland	None	d'Hondt
1	Ireland	None	d'Hondt
1	Portugal	None	STV
1	United Kingdom	None	Majority
1	France	None	Majority
9	Netherlands	0.7%	d'Hondt
10	Albania	1%	d'Hondt
11	Denmark	2%	Saint-Lag; d'Hondt
12	Serbia	3%	d'Hondt
12	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3%	Saint - Lag
12	Spain	3%	d'Hondt
12	Montenegro	3% (national level), 0.7% (for minorities no more than 15% and Croats)	d'Hondt

46 Resolution 1547 (2007); "The State of Human Rights and Democracy in Europe" <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17531&lang=en>

47 Atanasov, A., Dimitrievski, D., Krsteska, A., Naumovska, B., Cekic, A., Bliznakovski, J., Todorovska, M. 2022. The Electoral System of the Republic of North Macedonia: How to Ensure Equal and Fair Representation in the Assembly | National Democratic Institute [WWW Document] URL <https://www.ndi.org/publications/north-macedonias-election-system-how-ensure-fair-representation-parliament>

12	Italy	3% (parties), 10% (coalitions)	Hare; majority
17	Cyprus	3.6%	Hare
18	Bulgaria	4%	d'Hondt
18	Sweden	4%	Saint - Lag
18	Slovenia	4%	d'Hondt
18	Austria	4% or one core mandate (Direktmandat) in one of the regional areas	d'Hondt; Hare
22	Estonia	5%	d'Hondt
22	Kosovo	5%	Saint - Lag
22	Latvia	5%	Saint - Lag
22	Croatia	5%	d'Hondt
22	Slovakia	5%	Hagenbach-Bischoff
22	Czechia	5%	Majority; Hagenbach-Bischoff; Imperials
22	Romania	5%	d'Hondt
22	Belgium	5% (at the level of the constituency)	d'Hondt
22	Lithuania	5% (parties), 7% (coalitions)	Hare
22	Poland	5% (parties), 8% (coalitions)	Majority; d'Hondt
22	Germany	5%, or winning three seats in the constituency	Saint-Lag; majority

### ***The number of MPs***

Table 4 below indicates a significant diversity in the number of MPs across the analytical sample. The three countries with the most MPs (Malta, Montenegro, and Luxembourg) have at least ten times as many MPs per 100,000 inhabitants as the six countries with the fewest MPs (Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Spain). Some significant regional trends cannot be singled out, but what bounces back is that smaller states most often have larger numbers of MPs per 100,000 inhabitants, while almost all major states are in the second half of the list (except the Netherlands; each of the six states with the most lawmakers per 100,000 inhabitants is a state with at least 47 million inhabitants).

North Macedonia has an above-average number of MPs (6.4 per 100,000 inhabitants), which exceeds the average value across the sample (4) by over 50% and places our country in sixth place in the sample. Moreover, all five countries ahead of North Macedonia (Malta, Montenegro, Luxembourg, Estonia, and Cyprus) have a smaller population than North Macedonia. On the other hand, countries with similar population sizes, such as Albania (#10 in the sample) and Slovenia (#11), have significantly fewer MPs per 100,000 inhabitants. Slovenia, with a population of 2.1 million and 80 MPs, has one-third fewer MPs than North Macedonia. This demonstrates that not only is North Macedonia one of the countries with the highest number of MPs per capita in Europe, but that this number is higher relative to the majority of countries with comparable populations.

**Table 5:** Ranking of 32 European countries by number of MPs per 100,000 inhabitants (highest to lowest)

Rank	Country	Number of MPs (per 100,000 inhabitants)
1	Malta	14.3
2	Montenegro	13
3	Luxembourg	10
4	Estonia	7.7
5	Cyprus	6.5
6	Kosovo	6.4
<b>6</b>	<b>North Macedonia</b>	<b>6.4</b>
8	Latvia	5.2
9	Lithuania	5
10	Albania	4.9
11	Slovenia	4.4
12	Croatia	3.7
13	Serbia	3.6
13	Finland	3.6
15	Bulgaria	3.4
15	Sweden	3.4
17	Ireland	3.3
18	Denmark	3.1
19	Slovakia	2.8
20	Portugal	2.2
21	Austria	2.1
22	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2
23	Czechia	1.9
24	Romania	1.7
25	Belgium	1.3
26	Poland	1.2
27	Italy	1
27	United Kingdom	1
29	Germany	0.9
29	France	0.9
29	Netherlands	0.9
29	Spain	0.8
		<b>average: 4</b>

## VI. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current electoral model in North Macedonia is one of Europe's most proportional electoral models.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, North Macedonia is already in second place among the 32 European nations, contrary to the arguments of advocates for reforming the electoral model toward greater proportionality. Further confirmation of the high level of proportionality of the Macedonian electoral model is the fact that the country has no sub-average rank, i.e. a sub-average level of proportionality, according to any of the four parameters we consider in this study, as it even shares the 15<sup>th</sup> place (out of 32 countries) for electoral formula.

In doing so, the only overall higher-ranking country than North Macedonia is Malta, and only because of the extremely high number of MPs per 100,000 inhabitants since this country is one of the smallest in the analytical sample. If we consider only countries with a population of at least 1 million, which would exclude Luxembourg, North Macedonia has the most proportional electoral model in Europe. However, the strong correlation between the size of the states' populations and the proportionality of their electoral models (all thirteen top-ranking states have populations of less than 10 million inhabitants) partially suggests that it would be more appropriate to compare North Macedonia with other small states rather than the entire continent. In the analytical sample, there are countries with comparable population sizes to North Macedonia and a dramatically less proportional electoral model. For example, Slovenia, with a population of 2 million people, ranks 19th below average, indicating that population size does not play a significant role in the structure of the electoral model.

Another interesting finding from Table 6 is that North Macedonia has a generally more proportional model than all four European countries with one constituency (Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia and Slovakia). This finding indicates that the public debate about electoral reforms, which are frequently equated with "one constituency," is misnamed and frequently misguided.

The level of proportionality of an electoral model is determined by various factors, including the four parameters we considered in this study, where the number of constituencies is only one (and this is not the only one that matters). A recent study also highlighted this,<sup>49</sup> with a simulation of seat allocation based on 2020 election results using various electoral models. According to this simulation, a single constituency combined with a national electoral threshold of 5% (the most common electoral threshold in Europe, according to Table 4) results in fewer seats for smaller parties than the current six-unit electoral model with no formal threshold.<sup>50</sup>

Such a conclusion further undermines the case for electoral reform, as it presents its proponents with two mutually exclusive alternatives that appear less desirable than the status quo, albeit for entirely different reasons.

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48 The overall findings of this study are summarized in Table 6 below. The final four columns contain the previously discussed rankings of the degree of proportionality of the four main parameters of each country's electoral model from the analytical sample. The column "Total" contains the aggregate rank of countries, with lower values, i.e., higher rank, indicating a higher degree of proportionality. Note: The aggregate ranking in Table 6 is not intended to imply that the four parameters of the electoral models in this study must have equal weight in relation to the electoral model's overall proportionality. Each of these four parameters can play a significant role in overall proportionality if its value is extreme (e.g., an extremely high electoral threshold of 10% would likely result in a sub-average proportional model even if the most proportional electoral formula (STV) is used, while the use of a less proportional electoral formula such as the D'Hondt could result in a sub-average proportional model even with a (slightly) above-average electoral threshold, such as 3%.

49 Atanasov, A., Dimitrievski, D., Krsteska, A., Naumovska, B., Cekic, A., Bliznakovski, J., Todorovska, M. 2022. The Electoral System of the Republic of North Macedonia: How to Ensure Equal and Fair Representation in the Assembly | National Democratic Institute [WWW Document] URL <https://www.ndi.org/publications/north-macedonias-election-system-how-ensure-fair-representation-parliament>

50 Ibid.

Suppose one constituency is introduced without an electoral threshold (without changing the electoral formula or the number of MPs). In that case, North Macedonia will become an *even greater* anomaly on the electoral map of Europe, deviating even further from the average level of proportionality among electoral models and gravely endangering the formation and stability of future ruling parties. If, on the other hand, one constituency is introduced, but with an electoral threshold (and/or by changing one of the remaining two parameters in the direction of *less* proportionality), then we would obtain an electoral model that, in most cases, would not increase the parliamentary representation of smaller parties, thereby negating the sole argument for changing the electoral model in that direction. At the same time, in the last scenario, the regional balance between MPs could deteriorate, given that in one constituency, all MPs from a particular party would be part of one (centralized) electoral list.

As a result, this study recommends extreme caution in future public debates and legislative steps toward changing the electoral model to a higher level of proportionality. The negative relationship between a high level of proportionality on the one hand and the formation and stability of ruling parties on the other has discouraged most European countries from introducing electoral models with a higher level of proportionality than the Macedonian model. In North Macedonia, the difficulties in forming governments in the past (even with the current electoral model), the complexity of the party system, which continues to be dominated by ethnocentric parties, and the frequency of early parliamentary elections indicate even greater risks of a possible further increase in the proportionality of the electoral model.

Ultimately, it is necessary to acknowledge that the electoral model, regardless of its structure, cannot act as a magic wand to accelerate the democratization of the state, including breaking the vicious cycle of the (de facto) bipartisan system that has existed since independence. There are several structural factors, mainly in terms of deep (and dichotomous) social polarization on a variety of grounds (cosmopolitanism versus nativism, pragmatism versus identity politics, and even Yugo-nostalgia versus Yugo-phobia),<sup>51</sup> that are likely to continue to contribute (at least in time) to the dominance of two major parties regardless of the electoral model. Combined with a high level of clientelism and a low level of political culture, we conclude that there are far greater impediments to a more diverse party system in North Macedonia than the electoral model, whose further proportionality could have other gravely negative consequences for Macedonian democracy.

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51 Panov, T., Taleski, D. (2020) Nuances of Communism: The Foundations of Political Divisions in the Republic of Macedonia. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 1 September 2020; 53 (3): 22–42. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2020.53.3.22>

**Table 6:** Ranks 32 European countries according to the proportionality of their electoral model (from most proportional to least proportional)

Rank	Country	Total	Rank by constituency size	Rank by Election Formula	Rank by election threshold	Rank by number of MPs
1	Malta	6.75	24	1	1	1
<b>2</b>	<b>North Macedonia</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
2	Luxembourg	7	9	15	1	3
4	Montenegro	7.5	1	15	12	2
5	Kosovo	8.75	1	7	21	6
6	Finland	9.5	9	15	1	13
7	Denmark	9.75	8	8	12	11
8	Serbia	10.25	1	15	12	13
9	Latvia	11	6	8	22	8
10	Slovakia	11.5	1	5	21	19
10	Ireland	11.5	27	1	1	17
12	Cyprus	12	13	17	5	13
13	Albania	12.5	15	15	10	10
14	Portugal	13.5	18	15	1	20
15	Sweden	14.25	15	9	18	15
16	Estonia	15	19	15	22	4
17	Spain	15.25	5	15	12	29
18	Croatia	15.5	13	15	22	12
19	Belgium	15.75	11	15	22	25
19	Slovenia	15.75	19	15	18	11
21	Bosnia and Herzegovina	16.25	25	6	12	22
22	Bulgaria	16.75	19	15	18	15
23	Czechia	17.5	11	14	22	23
24	Netherlands	18	19	15	9	29
25	Austria	18.5	25	10	18	21
26	Romania	20	19	15	22	24
27	United Kingdom	22	29	31	1	27
28	France	22.75	29	32	1	29
29	Germany	23	28	13	22	29
30	Poland	23.75	17	30	22	26

# APPENDIX 1: A Brief History of Election Reforms in the Republic of (North) Macedonia

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In 2020, North Macedonia held its ninth consecutive parliamentary election and its fifth in a row snap elections within 12 years. Elections were held following the electoral rules established in 2002, when the parliamentary electoral system was defined as proportional, with closed candidate lists. According to these modifications, the state is divided into six constituencies, each with 20 deputies, and the results are calculated using the d'Hondt formula. Up to three deputies may be elected by voting abroad in one constituency.

However, the 2002 reforms are not the first or last electoral changes. Since its independence, North Macedonia has undergone several cycles of electoral reforms. Typically, these reforms were implemented before elections that were conducted in an exclusive and opaque manner. This observation is common and in progress in the European Commission's reports<sup>52</sup> on the country's progress in the integration process and in the reports of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission.<sup>53</sup>

If we consider the electoral reforms in a time line from the independence of North Macedonia to today, it can be seen that the Macedonian electoral system has undergone several substantial changes from independence to 2002, while in the years after that, electoral reforms were implemented, but there were no substantial changes to the electoral model. Political pluralism was introduced in 1989 when the formation of political parties was enabled. In 1990, the citizens in the then-Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM) had the opportunity to vote for the first time in multi-party elections.<sup>54</sup>

The 1990 elections were held under the two-round majority voting system, with 120 constituencies. The first elections were attended by 18 political parties and 43 independent candidates. In some constituencies, the parties participated individually, but in others, they formed pre-election coalitions with joint candidates.

The first parliamentary elections after the country's independence were held in 1994. Thirty-eight political parties nominated their candidates, and 283 independent candidates applied. These elections were also conducted based on the majority electoral model, and they were boycotted by the opposition parties at the time, the VMRO-DPMNE and the Democratic Party. They argued that there was a serious disruption of the election process in the first round and that electoral fraud and lapses in the organization of elections had occurred, especially around the voter lists.<sup>55</sup> The debate over the legitimacy of elections and allegations of electoral fraud will become a recurring feature of many electoral cycles, and it will be sparked by various political actors.

The electoral system will change in 1998 when the country's second consecutive parliamentary elections will be held. Two rounds of elections will be conducted under a mixed electoral system that combines proportional and majority voting models in two rounds. As a result of the amendments, out of 120 mandates, 85 were allocated to single-mandated constituencies. The remaining 35 were allocated using the proportional d'Hondt

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52 European Commission 2022. "Report on North Macedonia for 2022". 2022. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en)

53 OSCE/ODIHR. n.d. 'Elections in North Macedonia'. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/north-macedonia>.

54 Most of the data presented in this section of the study are extracted from the Electoral Archive. The Electoral Archive of North Macedonia Elections Since 1990 is a project of the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, with a representative office in the Republic of North Macedonia, that aims to collect all available documents on the country's electoral processes since the first multi-party parliamentary elections in 1990 to the present. Available at: <https://izbornaarhiva.mk/>

55 Ibid.

formula, with the entire state constituency counting as one mandate. For proportional lists, an electoral threshold of 5% was introduced. These elections were the first in the country to be monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR Mission. The general assessment in the monitoring report was that this election process had undergone significant improvements in comparison to the past due to changes in electoral legislation, a properly conducted election campaign, and a small number of isolated incidents of violence.<sup>56</sup>

The third parliamentary elections were held in 2002, shortly after the 2001 armed conflict between the security forces and members of the National Liberation Army (NLA), which ended with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. This election resulted in a change to the electoral model, and elections were held according to the proportional electoral model<sup>57</sup> in six constituencies.

All electoral cycles were subsequently held after this electoral system, with a turning point in the Macedonian political scene in 2006. The ruling SDSM became the opposition, and the former opposition VMRO-DPMNE won the majority in the Parliament. In 2008, two years after winning power, the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE accepted DUI's parliamentary initiative to dissolve the Parliament and organize early elections, the first early parliamentary elections in the country. These elections proved significant in that they strengthened the position of VMRO-DPMNE in the Parliament, which they maintained until 2016.

In 2011, there will be a second round of snap elections, which will be preceded by a complex political situation and political crisis. To resolve the crisis, the opposition demanded a consensus vote on amendments to the Electoral Law and forming a joint parliamentary committee to examine the Voters' List. Simultaneously, they threatened to boycott the elections if these demands were unmet. A satisfactory proposal was reached through negotiations, and elections were scheduled shortly after adopting electoral reforms.

This election is also distinguished because the number of constituencies increased from 6 to 9. With the three new units, one for Europe and Africa, one for North and South America, and one for Australia and Asia, coverage was expanded to include citizens living abroad. This change increased the number of seats in the Parliament from 120 to 123, i.e., one MP from each new constituency. The electoral model was slightly altered due to the ability to vote abroad. Thus, candidates were chosen using the proportional model in six constituencies on the territory of North Macedonia, while the majority model was used in three new units abroad.

The 2014 elections were the eighth parliamentary elections since the country's independence and the third in a row of early parliamentary elections. As in the previous election cycle, candidates for MPs were elected in six constituencies on the country's territory, according to the proportional model, and three abroad, according to the majority model. Observers pointed out several flaws in the election process. Among them, there was an inequality of vote due to the uneven distribution of voters in constituencies 7, 8, and 9 abroad and the difference between the number of voters in constituencies inside and outside the country. Concerns were raised about the voter register's accuracy, particularly given the large number of voters living at the same address. The legal provisions that allow political parties to challenge voter data in the Voters Register are deemed unclear and ambiguous in determining which institution is responsible for conducting the investigations.<sup>58 59</sup>

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56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

The 2016 parliamentary elections were the ninth parliamentary elections since the independence of the Republic of North Macedonia, making them the fourth early parliamentary elections. These elections were preceded by a deep political crisis, which also called for mediation from the international community. Electoral reforms were among the topics of discussion, although the main focus was on the purification of the voter list and the media reform part. These efforts will bear fruit in July 2016 with the signing of the so-called Przhino 2 agreement, which agreed, among other things, to resolve the issue of disputed voters on the voter list.<sup>60</sup>

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60 Ibid.

## Information about the Institute for Democracy (IDSCS)

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The Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje (IDSCS) is a Macedonian think-tank organization that is non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit. It was founded in 1999 by a group of intellectuals united by the ideas of democracy, solidarity, and civil society. The Institute for Democracy's long-term objectives includes work on socioeconomic development, active citizenship, and participatory political culture. In this regard, the Institute for Democracy focuses on the rule of law, good governance and multiethnic and multicultural coexistence. The work of the Institute for Democracy is primarily based on sociometric research and project-based activities. The Institute for Democracy believes that human capital is a key prerequisite for positive social change, as such, it actively works on projects that include capacity building based on skills and knowledge transfer. The Institute for Democracy also advocates for evidence-based policies.

### Contact details for IDSCS

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Address: St. Miroslav Krlezha no. 52/1 /2, 1000 Skopje  
Tel. no./fax: +389 2 3094 760  
e-mai: [contact@idscs.org.mk](mailto:contact@idscs.org.mk)

## Information for Authors

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**Kristijan Fidanovski** is a PhD candidate in family, social, and pro-natal policies at Oxford University. He has completed his undergraduate and postgraduate education in Eastern European Studies at University College London and Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., USA. He is the author of dozens of academic papers and columns in Macedonian and English on domestic and international politics, communicology, public health, and demography.

**Vlora Rechica** is a researcher and head of the Center for Parliamentary Support and Democratization (CPSD) within the Institute for Democracy (IDSCS). She holds an MSc in comparative politics from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), focusing on democracy and democratization. Her research and advocacy focus on parliaments and parliamentary democracy, institutional development, populism, and the democratization processes in new democracies.

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Study no. 7/2023

# **North Macedonia on the European Electoral Map: How Proportional is the Macedonian Electoral Model?**

Authors: Kristijan Fidanovski and Vlora Rechica

April 2023