



CENTER for DEMOCRACY &  
ELECTION MANAGEMENT

SCHOOL *of* PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# Minority Participation

## مشاركة الأقليات في الانتخابات

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# Outline

- **What is a minority: definition and types**
- **Basic minority rights**
- **Why minority representation**
- **The “mirror” notion**
- **Minorities electoral rights and how to preserve them.**

# Definition and types of minority

## Minority is

**"a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. "**

Louis Wirth

vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalized  
**"subordinate group" and "dominant  
group" rather than "minority" and  
"majority"**

# Types of minorities

**Socioeconomic terms : Ethnic, linguistic, religious, racial, others (combination, disability, geographic)**

**Economic terms: poor**

Minority rights cover: individual rights and collective rights **حقوق فردية، وحقوق جماعية**

- Protection from discrimination and persecution
- Protection of existence
- Protection and promotion of identity
- Participation in political life (particularly participate in the decisions that affect them)

# Minorities electoral rights

- The right to vote (usually less participation)
  - Citizenship:
  - Registration (language issues, nomads case, cost of registration)
- Fair representation
- Inclusion in the political process

# Why minority representation/inclusion

- Equality, fairness
- Legitimacy , stability



# The Mirror Notion

Mirror notion (descriptive representation):  
National parliaments or assemblies should reflect demographic, geographic, political and ideological composition of a society.

## Problems with the mirror concept

- Inclusion/exclusion (where to draw the line)
- Limits individual choices
- It might become an end (Lebanon case)

# How to achieve fair representation ?

- Electoral system design
- Boundary delimitation
- Quota system (most effective method)
  - Types of quota (legislated, voluntary)
  - Levels of quota (quota for candidates, quota for the elected reps)



## When to apply quota

- Situations where an unregulated distribution would cause unintentional imbalances and inequalities.
- Historic injustice or marginalization: more balanced access to political power (ethnic, racial, regional)
- Promote diversity



# Interventions to improve minority participation

- Systematic better than ad hoc
- Formal better than informal
- Designers must have a clear understanding of the situation of all ethnic, national religious and linguistic minorities, including numbers of minorities, geographical spread and levels of literacy.
- Electoral systems should be designed for the particular needs of the society and all minorities in it.
- No system should force electors and the elected into pre-determined identities.
- Special measures must be used, where needed, to ensure fair representation of minority women.



# Summary

The protection of minority rights is best achieved and articulated through a combination of majority sensitivity and minority inclusion