

EXPLAINER:

How do other democratic nations select leaders?

Associated Press

The way the United States will formally choose its president on Monday stands in stark contrast to how most of the world's democracies select leaders.

In other democratic countries, heads of government are either directly elected by voters or by a parliamentary system in which the party winning the most seats in the national assembly selects the head of state.

Some processes are complex and intricate, others more straightforward. Here is a look at how some of those countries choose their leaders — and how complications can arise.

South Africa: parties, not people

In South Africa, which held its first all-race elections in 1994, citizens vote for political parties rather than for candidates. The president is then chosen in a vote by the National Assembly. The party that won the majority of seats would be able to elect its own leader as president. The African National Congress, the liberation movement turned political party, has dominated politics since Nelson Mandela became president in 1994. In 2019, however, the ANC obtained its weakest victory, winning only 57% of the vote.

Poland: Democratic just Since 1989

In Poland, its democracy reborn in 1989 after the fall of communism across eastern Europe, a candidate who gets at least 50% of the popular vote becomes president. If no candidate gets at least 50%, a second round pits the top two vote-getters against each other. There has only been only one first-round winner, with the re-election in 2000 of Aleksander Kwasniewski, a former communist who transformed himself into a pro-democracy figure.

Even Lech Walesa, the famous founder of Poland's anti-communist Solidarity movement, needed a second-round vote to become Poland's first popularly elected president.

Spain: Congress of Deputies selects the prime minister

In Spain, the Congress of Deputies elects the prime minister. The party that wins the most seats but falls short of a majority must form alliances with other parties to select the country's leader. In 1996, this led to an awkward situation for the would-be prime minister. As votes were being counted, Jose Maria Aznar's conservative Popular Party thought it won enough seats to make him prime minister. Supporters, celebrating outside party headquarters in Madrid, aimed an ugly chant at Jordi Pujol, a diminutive politician from the autonomous region of Catalonia,



Denis Farrell/AP Photo, File

where Catalan is spoken. “Pujol, you dwarf, speak in Spanish!” they chanted. They had to swallow those words a few hours later when final results showed Aznar needed the votes of Pujol’s coalition to win easy election as prime minister. The conservatives wound up humbly wooing Pujol’s coalition and offering Catalonia even greater autonomy.

United Kingdom: Party leader becomes prime minister

U.K. voters elect a lawmaker for their local area. Then, the party that wins the largest number of the 650 constituencies generally takes power, with the party leader becoming prime minister. A coalition government might be formed if no party wins a majority of seats. The winning party is almost always the one that took the biggest share of the popular vote. It is rare for any party to win a majority of the popular vote because several parties compete.

Boris Johnson's Conservatives got 44% of the popular vote in the 2019 election but won an 80-seat majority in Parliament, allowing him to remain as prime minister.

Brazil: voting mandatory

Brazil chooses its president through direct election, held in two rounds unless the first-round winner gets more than 50% of valid votes. Voting is mandatory, leading to high turnout, and to a fair number of spoiled or blank ballots. In 2018, turnout was about 80%. The fine for failing to vote is less than a dollar.

South Korea: popular vote

The president is directly elected by a single-round, popular vote in which the candidate who gets the most votes wins outright. A person must be at least 40 years old to be eligible to run. The country's current president, Moon Jae-in, won a by-election on May 2017,

two months after South Korea's Constitutional Court formally removed his conservative predecessor Park Geun-hye from office over a corruption scandal. She is now serving a prison term for abuse of power, bribery and other crimes.

Taiwan: First popular vote in 1996

A constitutional amendment in 1994 instituted direct, popular elections for president. Previously, the office was filled indirectly by the National Assembly, dominated by the then-ruling Nationalist Party. The 1996 election marked the first time Taiwan selected its president by popular vote.

New Zealand: Prime minister is chosen by lawmakers

New Zealand's prime minister is chosen by other lawmakers and typically is the leader of the party which gains the most votes in the election. Under New Zealand's proportional voting system, parties must often form alliances to command a majority in the parliament. Although New Zealand functions as a fully independent and democratic nation, its head of state remains Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. That means the prime minister must officially be approved by the Queen's representative in New Zealand, the governor-general.

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Hong Kong secures 15 million vaccine doses

HONG KONG — Hong Kong has secured delivery of 15 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, with the first million to arrive as early as January, the city's leader said Friday, Dec. 11.

Hong Kong chief executive Carrie Lam said the city has reached agreements for 7.5 million doses each from Sinovac and Pfizer/BioNTech. As each person needs two doses, the 15 million would be enough to cover the city's population, she said.

At-risk people, such as the elderly and staff in nursing homes and in healthcare, will be given

priority, she said at a news conference.

She said Hong Kong also is negotiating with Astra-Zeneca and another manufacturer with the goal of securing a total of 30 million doses. Then, "if one type of vaccine proves to be problematic we have another alternative. And the amount of procurement will be twice the population of Hong Kong," she said.

The city is currently facing a surge in cases and has tightened social distancing measures. It has reported 7,378 infections, including 114 deaths.

— *Associated Press*