A Guarantee of Stability for Any Parliamentary Composition: The Constructive Weighted Crutch Option

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Brief overview: Whatever the level of fragmentation, the group that can rally the most elected members of parliament, from a single political party or any regrouped coalition, obtains a near-majority voting power in parliament for a reduced mandate length.

Abstract: At any point in time during a mandate, the biggest group of elected members claiming power, from a single political party or any regrouped coalition, can benefit from a weighted crutch option. Under this procedure, the biggest political party or coalition declared in parliament receives extra legislative weight in exchange for a proportionally reduced mandate length. The boost gives them voting power equal to that of all the opposition parties. The resulting dynamic produces a government that can ally with any opposition party (sometimes only one representative of the opposition) to adopt legislation. The positive elements of coalition government are brought into play, combined with the stability of a majoritarian system. This process, called the constructive weighted crutch option, produces stable governments for a reduced mandate length whatever the level of fragmentation in a parliament. The total duration of the mandate length will be the sum of each government's duration, but in accordance with the constructive vote of no confidence principle, there will always remain some government designated as the pluralitarian elected winner in the worst case. Hence, fully proportional electoral systems with highly fragmented representation ensure extreme stability. In fact, the more opposition parties there are, the more alternative majorities there are, the more stable the government will be.

1. Introduction and previous work

First, let us review some typical election results obtained for a representative assembly with a First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system: I will take the example of the last general election for the 43rd legislature in Québec which I know well, but please feel free to do the same exercise with any British-style parliament. The following column chart represents a segmentation of the electorate from the election held in Québec on October 3, 2022: can you identify the winners?

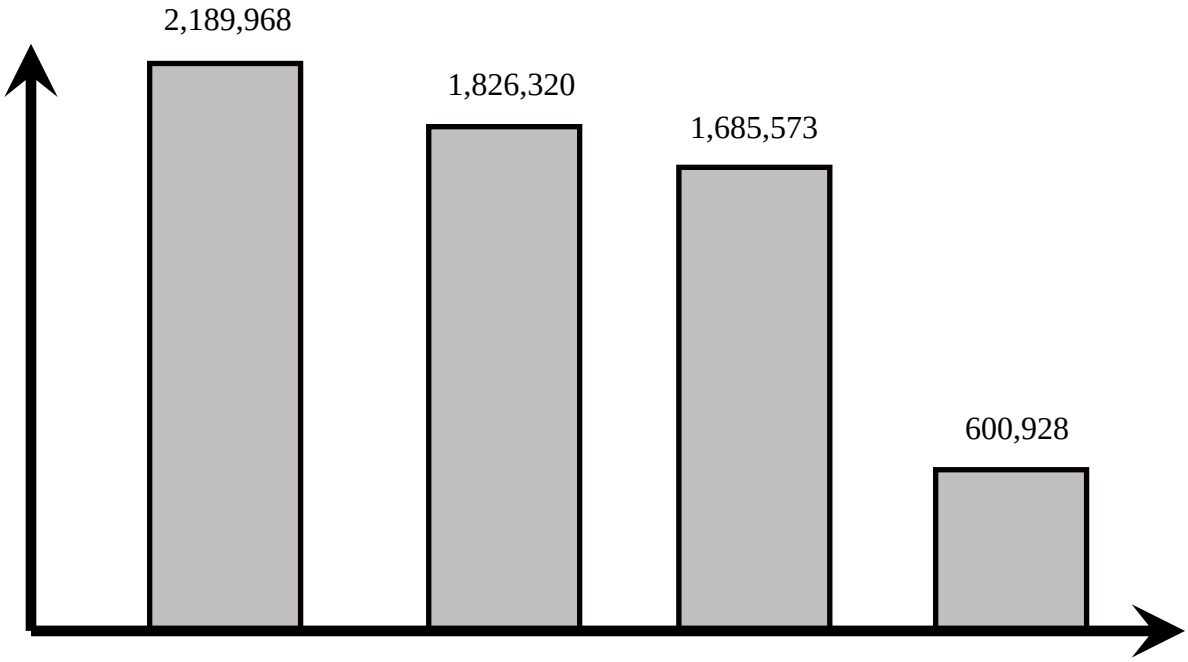

Figure 1. Segmentation of the electorate, province of Québec

Out of the total 6,302,789 eligible voters, the biggest segment represents the 2,189,968 abstentionists who did not get any representation in the National Assembly. The second rectangle represents the 1,826,320 supporters of all the opposition parties who together obtained 33 seats. The winning party received the support of 1,685,573 voters for 92 seats in the National Assembly. The last rectangle represents slightly more than one third of these winning voters who obtained no seat in the National Assembly. These are more than half a million (600,928) voters who had no voice at all (0 seats). Given the 92 seats obtained by the winners, it is no wonder these voters feel cheated, pointing to the "no taxation without representation" principle. They got a first-hand experience of a flawed democracy: instead of one vote one voice, they witnessed the absurdity of one vote gets no voice half a million times. Such discrepancies constitute the basic motivation of the current work. To get a fair distribution of seats, some form of proportional representation (PR) appears to be an obvious solution. Opponents to proportional representation usually argue that it causes instability issues. We show here that, especially for a very fragmented representation, it is possible to guarantee a very stable parliament.

Other stabilization mechanisms

We will refer to a stabilization mechanism if it helps the assembly autonomously resolve its conflicts. An assembly does not fulfill its role if it needs a newer version of itself or another entity to make decisions. The goal is to obtain an efficient assembly, not to replace it by an outside alternative. If it requires an external referee to solve an issue or if it prompts a premature general election, the assembly is not stable *per se*. In that sense, even though some elements can help a representative assembly to resolve conflicts, they are more replacement solutions. Most British-style parliaments using a single winner FPTP electoral system to identify a representative for each electoral district have no stabilization mechanism. Such a mechanism can affect the behaviour of the different players, by reducing their anticipation of the next election for example. It can modify the balance of power implied by the composition of parliament or provide an opportunity for another parliamentary group to govern within the same mandate after the previous one has lost the confidence of the assembly. Ideally, it should always be able to identify a functional government by default. Stabilization mechanisms are either electoral system components or parliamentary rules.

On the contrary, most European countries use a stabilization mechanism. Some of these mechanisms simply increase the probability of obtaining a stable assembly, without any guarantee. Compared to an FPTP-based electoral system, the Single Transferable Vote (STV) used in Malta and Ireland modifies the balance of power implied by the composition of parliament: as voters rally behind some yet unelected leaders, STV modifies the number of seats obtained by each elected political party, usually increasing the size of the major parties and the probability of forming a stable government. The transpartisan preferential ballot is the component that helps to gather some supports given at first to several different political factions. It could be incorporated into other electoral systems. An identical behavior can be obtained by transferring support between equivalent samples of the electorate. This is what a Stable, Preferential, Proportional and Acirconscriptive (SPPA) electoral system proposes, based on birth date (day and month, not year) to define equivalent virtual districts [1]. SPPA also gathers preferences with a transpartisan preferential ballot.

Another stabilization mechanism is used in several Eastern European countries: a repeated selection of the government leader by legislative assembly members. Instead of proceeding with a new general election as soon a government loses a vote of confidence, the first two times the assembly tries to elect a new prime minister. After a third failure, the country triggers an early general election. The repeated election of a government leader does not guarantee a stable government, it just offers other alternatives before proceeding with a premature general election. Note that again this stabilization mechanism only increases the probability of obtaining a longer delay before the next general election. There is no guarantee of success. Bulgaria, for example, is facing an unstable period from a parliamentary point of view: Bulgarians held seven elections over a period of three and a half years – from April 4, 2021 to October 27, 2024 [2]. Several interim governments were appointed by their president to compensate for the assembly's failure to identify a prime minister.

This last resort solution is not considered a stabilization mechanism because it relies on the influence of an outsider. The goal is to obtain an efficient independent assembly able to define legislations or make decisions on its own, not to replace it by an outside alternative, like a president. The same for the Swedish solution [3] that consists in intermediate general elections: although both help stability by reducing anticipation for the next election, they do not qualify as stabilization mechanisms. They are replacement solutions. We said that stabilization mechanisms are either electoral system components or parliamentary rules: the Swedish solution could be considered both. In summary, if the government collapses and a general election becomes necessary, this early election will not have any influence on the predetermined date for the next expected regular general election. Obviously, the replacement of the assembly cannot ensure a stable government in all scenarios, especially when the early result could lead to a more divided assembly: it directly triggers a temporary but premature general election.

Another option is the constructive vote of non-confidence provided for under article 67 of the German constitution of 1949 [4]. It allows a parliament to withdraw its confidence from a head of government only if there is a positive plurality for a possible successor. The basic idea is to favor a stable government by making sure that a replacement has more parliamentary support to govern than the incumbent. It has been adopted since in other nations like Spain (1978), Slovenia (1991), Belgium (1994), Poland (1997), Albania (1998), Israel (2001), and Hungary (2012). Note that again this stabilization mechanism only provides an opportunity for another parliamentary group to govern within the same mandate before the next general election. There is no guarantee of success.

The most efficient mechanism from a stability point of view is the majoritarian bonus used for example by Greece. Initially introduced in Italy in 1923, its implementation in Greece evolved from one legislature to the next. The last version of the majority bonus was enforced in June 2023 [5]. Greece uses a purely proportional system with a 3% electoral threshold to fill 300 representative seats. The party list coming first with at least 25% of the votes would receive 20 extra seats, with one more seat for every half percentage point above 25%, to a maximum of 50 extra seats at 40% (or more) of the votes. This stabilization mechanism can transform a minoritarian government into a majoritarian one. There is no counterpart to compensate the opposition parties in exchange for the bonus granted to the pluralitarian party. Even if the increase of probability is drastic, there is still no guarantee that the resulting government will be majoritarian or that it will remain stable.

2. Weighted crutch option

Many countries using FPTP electoral systems sacrifice some fairness in the distribution of the representation of ideologies in the electorate to enhance the government’s stability. The Greek mechanism follows the same logic. However, the stabilization mechanism makes it possible to postpone the sacrifice of representation should the results raise concerns about the government’s stability. In our previous work [6], we saw that it is possible to design a stabilization mechanism to ensure a relatively

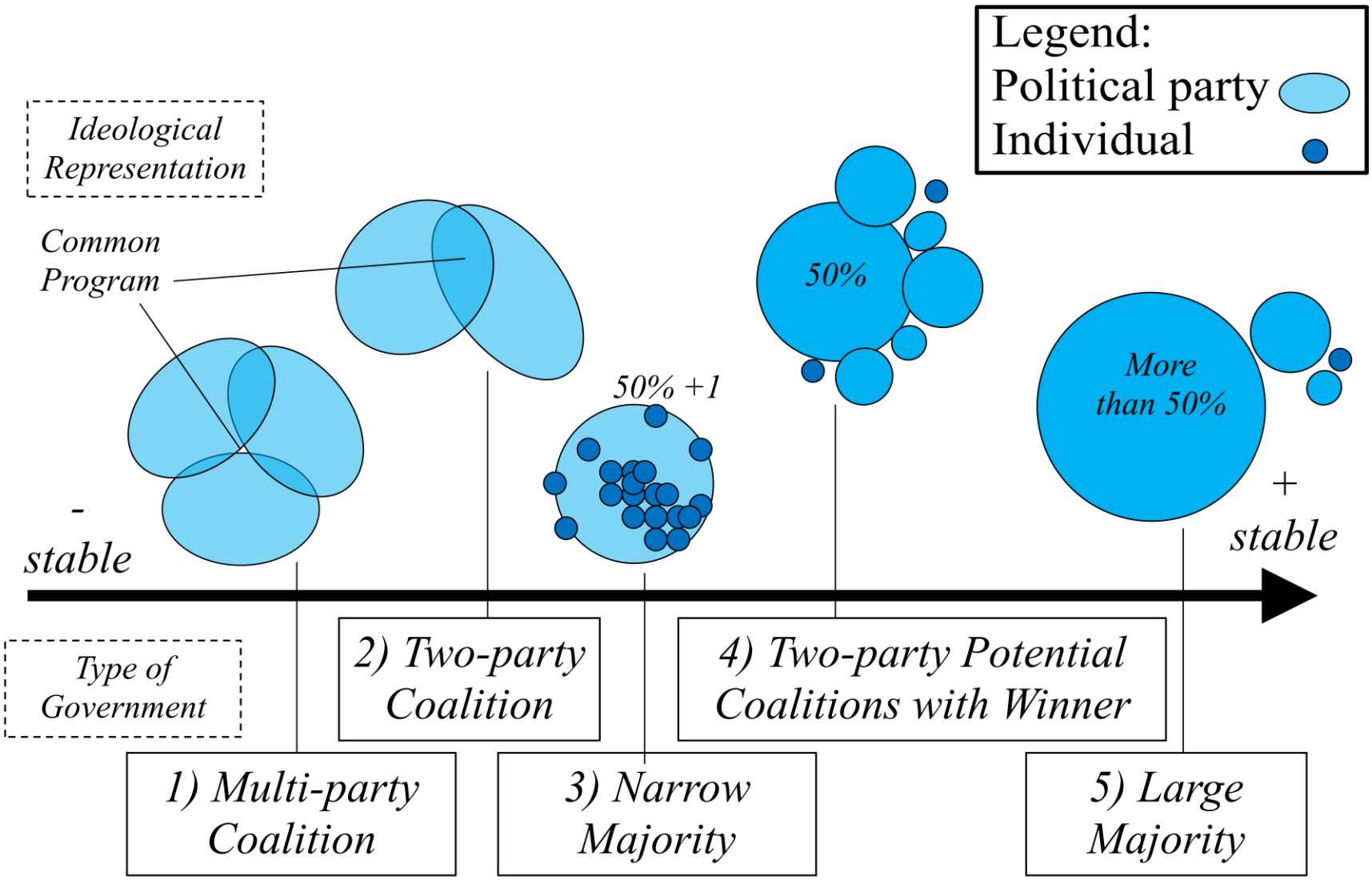

Figure 2. Different potential government scenarios according to the resulting seat distribution

stable government. Such an option can be put in place without adding extra representatives and reduces the concentration of power by allowing the extra representation to retain some relative independence from the winning party leader. This mechanism is fully compatible with British parliamentary dynamics: with a representative defection, a transfer of allegiance, coalitions and complementary elections.

A classification of electoral outcomes based on seat distribution

From a stability perspective, our previous work suggested five different scenarios: in ascending order of stability:

1) multiparty coalition of three (3) political parties or more.
2) a few potential combinations of two-party coalitions.
3) a majority party by a narrow margin (one or two seats).
4) multiple potential two-party coalitions built around a quasi-majority party.
5) a party with a strong majority (by more than two seats).

Figure 2 represents this classification [6]. The fourth scenario is the most interesting since the support of at least one opposition party is sufficient to obtain a majority. Scenario 3) could follow the same pattern if the fairly majoritarian winner wants to ensure a stronger majority.

Original version of the weighted crutch option

By boosting the winning party, scenarios 1) and 2) could turn into scenario 4) and become more stable. This idea is the basis of the original version of the weighted crutch option. Like the electoral system based on FPTP single-winner districts, it sacrifices some of the representation to gain some stability. Following the logic of the Greek stabilization mechanism, the correction is calculated after obtaining the results. However, the analysis of the need calibrates the bonus to boost the pluralitarian winner to reach the exact same voting power as all the opposition parties together. The resulting situation corresponds to scenario 4). As the winning party provides the assembly president, the government needs the support of any opposition party – or even of only any opposition member – representing half of its voting power to pass a legislation. In fact, if the winning party received more than 33.3%, convincing only one member of the opposition will suffice at the start of its mandate. As time passes and power erodes with resignations, transfers and complementary elections, the government might need the support of more members of the opposition to obtain a majority. Governments formed in this way are strong: this mechanism puts opposition parties in competition. Basically, the government needs only to convince one opposition party to pass a legislation. The more opposition parties there are, the more choices of allies the government can get, the higher the probability of obtaining a majority. In this situation, **stability increases with the number of opposition parties represented in the assembly**.

The crutch option provides a mechanism to ensure multiple potential two-party associations around the winning party. This is why the weighted crutch option is very efficient with a pure PR electoral system. It allows the proportionality principle to be

fully respected in a first stage and then the stability issue to be solved in a second stage if needed. But unlike the Greek stabilization mechanism, the weighted crutch does not create an artificial majority, and it respects the coalition principle. Additionally, it offers the opposition some compensation in exchange for the power bonus received by the winners: an inversely proportional reduction of the current legislature. The length of the term depends on the number of seats the winning party has obtained. Typically, to double its legislative power, the pluralitarian party accepts to half the length of its mandate. The further the party is from 50%, the shorter the time it will remain in office. The bonus can take the form of either added members from the list of the winning party or a higher legislative weight for each elected member vote from that party. The resulting total power of the winning party equals the total power of all opposition parties before it provides an assembly president. This mechanism **allows for both high political fragmentation in parliament and a stable government.** It forces the governing party to make compromises as the party must get the support of at least one opposition party to pass legislation.

New version of the weighted crutch option

In this constructive new implementation of the weighted crutch option, this stabilization mechanism is available at any time to any eligible party or coalition that can gather the most seats. As with the German stabilization mechanism, when the current government loses a vote, it does not lose the confidence of the assembly. As in the constructive procedure to maintain governments, a replacement vote is necessary to define a new government instead of simply losing a vote of confidence. In such case, the bonus given to the representatives of the incumbent government is cancelled. Then the vote to identify a replacement government or leader takes place. The group with the highest approval – old or new – forms the new government and can benefit from a new weighted crutch option applied to what is left of the length of the mandate. At any time during the legislature, if a faction or political party obtains a majority (more than 50% of the seats), the stabilization mechanism is no longer required. The transition from using the stabilization option or not is totally smooth, from using it to not using it, or in the reverse order, or even in combinations of several occurrences to follow several changes of government during the same legislature. The sum of the length of each of the mandates of these different governments represents the total length of the legislature.

Right after the general election, all political parties and coalition combinations are eligible. The default first government is the pluralitarian party. But a coalition could have more seats. If the biggest group gathers a majority of seats, it does not need a stabilization mechanism. If it represents a minority within the assembly, it can either decide to manage a minority government directly or claim a weighted crutch option. As time passes, British parliamentary dynamics usually erode the government in power until either the mandate length is reached, or a greater coalition claims power. As a new group replaces the previous government, the size of the new government should increase. Every time a government is replaced, the new government could claim, or not claim, a weighted crutch.

The last aspect to consider in order to ensure a stable government is managing the situation when a government gives up power. Usually used to trigger an election in the current systems, this move could also be used to disrupt stability despite our new stabilization mechanism. In such case, the next largest party in terms of seats is the default government. However, we do not want a previous government that renounced power to contest the smaller new one with a constructive challenge. Hence any government – of a single political party or coalition – that gave up power shall not be eligible for the rest of the legislature. This should prevent governments from giving up power for the purpose of triggering elections. However, any political party that was part of a previous government that renounced power is still eligible to be part of a constructive challenge if it is to be part of a different new government – by itself or as part of a new coalition – that never gave up power.

This stabilization mechanism should avoid repeated elections, as witnessed for example in Israel and Bulgaria in recent years. In other words, the weighted crutch option is a way to address a possible stability problem after having obtained a faithful representation. This latest implementation should allow us to slightly reduce the legislature mandate length before triggering a new general election.

3. Simulations

Any representative system could benefit from an appropriate stabilization mechanism. To validate our last proposition, we suggest simulating some typical assemblies. To properly study the impact of the weighted crutch stabilization mechanism, different scenarios should be considered: a single party essentially in power for the normal mandate length (4 years), two or many different governments during the same legislature and a dysfunctional government when the winning party obtains less than 25% of the seats.

The first scenario does not need any stabilization mechanism, at least as long as natural erosion of power does not make the government's majority disappear. Thus, we will use an example of a 100 seats assembly. Let us assume that the winning party loses a seat every year to opposition parties B, C, then D, starting from this distribution of seats as the result of the last general election:

Political Party	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Seats	52	25	12	6	3	1	1

Table 1. Distribution of seats from a fictional general election result (100 seats)

As the government, party A provides the assembly president. For the first two years, party A can still pass legislation if all its members agree. When a second seat is lost in favor of party C, party A then needs the support of any of the six opposition parties to pass legislation. After three years, when a third seat is lost to party D, party A could govern as a minority government with punctual support from any of the four largest opposition parties. But let us assume it still wants to be able to count on party F or party G to reach a majority and requests a weighted crutch option to reach the 51 seats of all

opposition parties combined. In this case, the last distribution of seats before applying the weighted crutch option would be:

Political Party	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Seats	49	26	13	7	3	1	1

Table 2. Distribution of seats after three years (100 seats)

To reach the 51 seats of the total opposition parties combined, every member of party A receives a legislative weight of $51/49 \simeq 1.04$ vote. Thus, before the participation of the assembly president, party A can gather 49.96 votes compared to 51 for the combined opposition parties. This means that convincing any member of the opposition helps the government win 50.96 votes compared to 50. In compensation for the bonus of power received by the government, the last year of the legislature is reduced by a factor of 1.04, which reduces the total length of the mandate by two weeks.

For the next scenario, let us consider this initial distribution of seats as the result of the last general election:

Political Party	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Seats	34	32	11	9	7	6	1

Table 3. Initial distribution of seats from a fictional general election result (100 seats)

For the first 6 months, party A leads a coalition with parties C and D. Then, after a crisis occurs and party C quits, the government becomes minoritarian. The remaining coalition requests a weighted crutch option. The legislative weight is $57/43 \simeq 1.33$ vote. That second government stays in place for two years. The next table shows the casting power of the parties during this time, as the remaining coalition will occasionally ally with smaller opposition parties or representatives to make decisions:

Political Party	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Casting Power	45.07	32	11	11.93	7	6	1

Table 4. Casting power of the different political parties after stabilization via the weighted crutch (100 seats)

At this moment, a constructive challenge is proposed by a coalition of parties B, E and F. Party C decides to stay neutral and the new coalition takes power with 45 votes to 44. This new tripartite coalition requests a new weighted crutch option to allow the party G representative the possibility to make a difference. The legislative weight is $56/44 \simeq 1.27$ vote. This last government holds power until the end of the current legislature. The following table represents the duration of each government:

Government	ACD	AD	BEF	Total
Legislative Weight	1	1.33	1.27	-
Real Duration (months)	6	24	12.7	42.7
Equivalent Duration (months)	6	32	10	48

Table 5. Duration of every government – basic 4-year mandate

In this simulation, even with two changes of government, the assembly would have been very stable before the next general election that would take place after 3 years, 6 months and 3 weeks (42.7 months).

Opportunity for a dynamic simulation in person

To convince yourself of the efficiency of the constructive weighted crutch option, try to destabilize a government that would be dysfunctional without a stabilization mechanism, typically when the winning party obtains less than 25% of the seats. For example, you could take the last results from either Bulgaria [2] – 7 elections in three and a half years – or Tunisia [7]. You can simulate it with simply a dozen persons: they will play the role of the assembly president, the party leaders and some potential dissident representatives. Consider that all unrepresented assembly members follow the party line and vote like their party leader. Simulate some critical legislation every three months. After an attempt to pass some consensual legislation, you can try some more extreme examples: for instance, for boundary management, the government could favor either complete autarky or total free access. This kind of extreme position on a subject should trigger a constructive challenge… If you prefer, I can provide a fictional example:

Political Party	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Seats	24	18	15	13	12	10	8

Table 6. Dysfunctional distribution of seats from a fictional general election (100 seats)

Remember that, after the assembly president is designated, a winning group with less than 33.3% of the seats needs to convince more than one opposition representative to pass a piece of legislation because its legislative weight is superior to two. And if the winning group represents less than 20% of the assembly, it then needs to convince at least three opposition representatives to adopt the legislation.

4. Conclusion

Voters are very attached to the principle of “no taxation without representation”. When we compare the number of voters who got no representation at all from an ideological point of view to the number of voters who won their election, many modern countries face a democratic deficit. This misrepresentation can be resolved using a PR model. It is possible to ensure stable governments for a slightly reduced duration of the legislature mandate. Despite many existing stabilization mechanisms or elements, none seems more efficient than the constructive weighted crutch. This parliamentary rule raises

the weight in assembly of the members of the winning party or coalition so that it obtains the same voting power as the opposition, while reducing its mandate length proportionally. The resulting balance guarantees a stable government for a reduced mandate length while respecting the "coalition" principle. As the governments need to convince only a small number of representatives from the opposition to adopt legislation, **the more opposition parties represented in the assembly, the more stable a government will be**. Pure PR then becomes a well-adapted electoral system.

What proportional representation implies about the medium- and long-term policies of countries is continuity. Indeed, most of the time, PR electoral systems produce coalition governments, representing a form of compromise for most voters. Only in very rare cases does no party from the previous government participate in the next one. These countries thus avoid very costly counter-reforms. PR appears "profitable" from an economic standpoint, if it generates a stable majority for a specific mandate length.

Even with other electoral systems, the weighted crutch mechanism appears useful. Over the last decade, various governments elected under different electoral systems have experienced recurring stability problems. This situation occurred under varying conditions and in different contexts. Some countries were unable to form a government over a period of several months. Belgium [8] twice had to manage more than a year without a government and Northern Ireland [9] almost two years. The Netherlands [10], Israel [11], Ireland [12] and Bulgaria [6], among other countries, also encountered stability problems.

We cannot fight the ultra-polarization of 2025 with the rules of representation and access to debate in parliament of 1776. At that time, founders and constitutionalists had no idea of what was to come: electricity, radio, television, mass media, internet, disinformation, social networks, artificial intelligence, deepfakes… Democracy needs an upgrade or at least an update. A constructive weighted crutch option would allow for the real diversity of opinions and society to be represented, while preserving coherency. It is the key to maintaining efficiency. It allows an assembly to autonomously assume its sovereignty without any mechanism of dissolution.

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