

## Report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System: Volume 2

Submissions from representative / campaigning groups

### Democratic Audit

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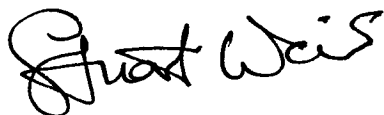
The Rt. Hon Lord Jenkins of Hillhead OM  
The Independent Commission on the Voting System  
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9<sup>th</sup> June 1998

Dear Lord Jenkins

You may recall that at the Commission's first public meeting in Cardiff, I spoke briefly about the performance of coalition governments in the postwar era and offered to provide you with more expert information about the Department of Government at Essex University. You indicated that the Commission would welcome this information. Professor Ian Budge very kindly agreed to write a paper which I enclose (with copies for your colleagues). I am sure that he would be pleased to supply any further information or to answer any questions any of you may have. We will be publishing Ian's paper in about two weeks' time and I would be grateful if the Commission would treat it as confidential in the meantime.

Yours sincerely



Stuart Weir

Director Democratic Audit



# **STABILITY AND CHOICE**

**Review of Single Party and  
Coalition Government**

**Ian Budge**

**Democratic Audit paper No.15**

***Confidential draft embargoed  
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**DEMOCRATIC AUDIT,  
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE AND DEPARTMENT OF  
GOVERNMENT, UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX**

## OVERVIEW

The Independent Commission on Voting Systems, under Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, set up by the government to look into a possible change in the voting system for Westminster, will recommend one alternative system of voting to be put to voters in a referendum against the current plurality, or "first past the post", system. The Jenkins Commission must make a choice based on the following formal criteria:-

- A requirement for "broad proportionality"
- The need for stable government
- An extension of voter choice
- The maintenance of the link between MPs and geographical constituencies.

This review summarises the general state of knowledge about single party and coalition governments largely in relation to two of these criteria - stability and voter choice. The idea of "stable government" bundles together several supposed attributes of single-party government in the United Kingdom. Plurality rule, or first-past-the-post elections, are said to give electors a choice between two parties of government which present them with alternative policy programmes at election time. These elections produce governments with majorities large enough to enable them to govern effectively over a parliamentary term of four or five years; and such stability gives them the opportunity to fulfil their election mandates. The Jenkins Commission must therefore consider how far broadly proportional alternatives to first-past-the-post elections can deliver similar benefits. This review compares and contrasts the actual effects of first-past-the-post and alternative electoral systems in liberal democracies in the postwar period; and examines how governments emerge from particular kinds of electoral and party systems and how they function.

In particular it looks at questions which are topical for the British debate on constitutional reform - namely:-

- do systems of proportional representation (PR) necessarily produce large numbers of parties?
- do large numbers of parties deprive electors of effective choice of and control over governments?
- do large numbers of parties necessarily lead to coalition government?
- are single-party governments more effective than coalitions?

The argument throughout is that sharp distinctions between single party and coalition governments are misleading. There are many different kinds of coalition in western Europe. Some are more effective than others: some emerge clearly from electoral verdicts, others do not. Thus the main question to ask when evaluating different electoral systems and their consequences is, "What do we want elections and governments to do?" Different systems produce different results. So a first step in debating arrangements for Britain is to see how they actually work in comparable countries.

## ELECTION RULES AND PARTY NUMBERS

All countries have large numbers of political parties: i.e., organisations which run candidates for political office.. The real question in regard to government is how many *significant* parties there are - significant in the sense of either affecting the formation of governments or having a "blackmail potential" to influence policy-making even from out of office (Sartori 1976: 121-517). In Britain, there are recent examples in the influence of Liberals on the Callaghan government from 1976-1978 and Ulster Unionists in the later years of the Major government.

The more significant parties there are, it is often argued, the more unstable governments will be. For if many parties contest an election, the chance of any one party getting a popular and legislative majority falls; and the absence of a majority then forces two or more parties to form a coalition government. Such a government has to be based on policy fudges and compromises, to enable the partners to join together. These are almost a recipe for indecisiveness and stalemate - which may have grave long-term consequences if a succession of such governments emerge. Italy is often cited as an example of crucial decisions delayed by the weakness and instability of its coalitions.

This line of argument has often been endorsed by British politicians who are opposed to switching from plurality rule to proportional representation for general elections to the House of Commons. Plurality rule elections may be unfair, they argue, in the sense of leaving political minorities unrepresented. But it does produce a decisive electoral and governmental result. The "elective dictatorship" is not only authoritative. It *is* effective and it *is* elected. This argument has respectable academic antecedents, going back to early postwar analysis of the weaknesses of democratic government. Both the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis in pre-war Germany, and the weakness of the French

**Table 1 Party Numbers and Electoral Systems in the Postwar Period**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Election System<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>No. of Parties (Average over postwar period)</i>
USA	FPTP	2
Australia <sup>2</sup>	AV (single-member constituencies)	2-3
Austria	List PR	3
Greece	'Reinforced' List PR (plurality party gets seats bonus)	3
UK	FPTP	3
Germany	AMS (high threshold)	3
New Zealand (to 1994)	FPTP	3
Canada	FPTP	3-4
Ireland	STV (small constituencies)	3-4
Spain	List PR (small constituencies)	4
Portugal	List PR	4

France	two-ballot run off in single member constituencies	4-5
Finland	List PR	4-6
Sweden	List PR	5
Norway	List PR	5-6
Netherlands	List PR	5-7
Switzerland	List PR	6-8
Italy (to 1992)	List PR	7-10
Denmark	List PR	8-10
Belgium	List PR	8-10

**Notes:**

1. Brief descriptions of systems listed. See Appendix 1 for further explanation of systems and terms used.

AV:	Alternative Vote in single-member constituencies
List PR:	Elections by Party List PR system in large districts with low threshold
FPTP:	First past the post (plurality rule) elections in small single-member districts
STV:	Single Transferable Vote
AMS:	Mixed system with plurality rule elections in small single-member districts with separate regional top-up

2. The Liberal-Country Party Alliance is counted as one party effectively.

Fourth Republic, were attributed to an extreme form of proportional representation and perpetually quarrelling, short-lived coalitions (see Hermans 1941; and Duverger 1954).

How correct is their diagnosis? There certainly can be little doubt that List PR systems generally have more parties than single-member plurality (FPTP), majority (AV) or mixed systems (see Table 1). But the fact that there are different forms of PR, with different effects on the number of parties, qualifies the simple thesis that it is just the PR counting rules at work. Particularly crucial are two aspects of PR systems:-

- the size of the "threshold": i.e., the percentage of votes a party requires to get any representation at all in the legislature. The purest PR systems set this as low as 0.66 or 1.00 per cent. This allows most small parties to be represented. The threshold in postwar Germany was, however, deliberately set high in the 1950s - at 5 per cent - to discourage small parties. This soon left only two and a half parties in operation, as in Britain (see Table 1), in spite of the other aspects of a proportional system being still in place. (Germany has large Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties and a small Free Democrat (Liberal) party with between 5 and 10 per cent of the vote. The "Greens" have usually crossed the threshold from 1981 onwards.)
- The other crucial aspect of PR systems which affects the number of parties is the size of the constituencies within which votes are counted and made proportional to seats. Where constituencies are small, national representation is less proportionate to the percentage of votes cast and larger parties gain. This is one reason why Ireland, with a form of PR (the Single Transferable Vote) in three to five member constituencies, has a party system which resembles Britain's (see Table 1).

Table 1 also makes another point. While the number of parties is related to the form of PR in operation, it is not exclusively dependent on it. The clearest example of this is Austria, with a relatively pure form of PR, low threshold and large electoral districts, but only three parties. This suggests that factors other than the mechanics of the electoral system affect the number of parties. This is indeed the consensus among scholars. They do not believe that the voting rules wholly determine the number of active parties; they take the view that the formation of parties results from an interaction between voting rules and the socio-economic divisions in society. I go into this argument in the next section.

## **CLEAVAGES, INSTITUTIONS AND PARTY NUMBERS**

A linking point is that the effects of the electoral system are not simply mechanical but also psychological and strategic. A small party which consistently fails to get a seat in Parliament, for example, will become discouraged and either dissolve or amalgamate with a larger one. Conversely, if most new parties can count on getting a seat, politicians feel more confident in breaking away from existing parties or in setting up initially on their own. As there are always issues and conflicts to exploit in any complex society, these considerations

can be important in determining whether they get direct political representation, or whether the groups involved have to form a broad electoral alliance with others.

In general it is easier to "go it alone" under a pure PR system with low thresholds. In one respect, however, the first-past-the-post system is more open to new party entrants. This is where they have a territorially concentrated support which enable them to compete with national parties effectively in a group of contiguous single-member constituencies. All they need is a local plurality to win all the seats. This factor accounts for the relative success of the Scottish Nationalist Party from 1970 onwards (though they would still have done better under PR) and the Liberal Democrat surge in representation in south west England.

The systems by which votes are transformed into seats thus closely affect the kind of societal divisions and cleavages which get political representation. This means that we have to be cautious about using the number of politically significant divisions (or *political cleavages* as they are called in the academic literature) to explain the number of parties. On the face of it, the more divided a society is (by class, religion, race, etc.), the more parties we should expect to emerge to represent the differences. But how do we know how divided politically the society is in the first place? By the existence of class-based, religious or minority nationalist parties! There is thus a potential tautology in using cleavages to explain parties. It is more correct to say they interact with each other, and with the election system, to produce the party system.

A specific example of this comes from Britain where the traditional class cleavage between Labour and Conservatives has been gradually transforming itself into a territorial cleavage between south east England and the rest of the UK. This is due in part to historical and social factors - manufacturing and extraction were located in the peripheries because of the availability of power and produced there the classical urban manual working class. This was always weaker in the service-oriented south east, outside inner London. Where Labour and Conservatives had more local supporters they built up their strength - eventually, through the operation of the first-past-the-post system, gaining all or most of the local constituencies. In this way we have arrived at the present situation where there are no Conservative MPs for Scotland or Wales (despite considerable voting support for their party) and only just over a quarter from outside south east England.

The British example demonstrates how the election system can interact with social divisions to produce a "cumulative" cleavage, where all the lines of division coincide to divide the two main parties - class, region, a dash of religious non-conformity (which is stronger on the peripheries).

Cumulative cleavages are not solely products of the election system. The reason why Austria has a "two and a half" party system, like Britain, is commonly thought to be the accumulation of divisions between the west and east of the country. The Catholic, socially conservative, rural and small-town west contrasts with the industrialised, urban working class east. The coincidence of these divisions is enough to promote support for the two large, disciplined Socialist and People's Parties in spite of the potential of the PR system to represent each separately.



Examples of the opposite phenomenon - "cross-cutting" cleavages, which create such groups as middle-class rural shopkeepers and farmers with separate representation - occur in Norway, under List PR, and in Canada, under first-past-the-post. In both countries such groups tend to be territorially concentrated and thus to get representation whatever the rules for counting votes. The recent Canadian experience incidentally also dispels one of the myths about FPTP - that it necessarily *stabilises* the party system. It does up to a point, by making it hard for new entrants to break in. Once they have done so, however, particularly if they are territorially concentrated, they can produce the sudden collapse of one of the major traditional parties, as Reform has with the Progressive Conservatives (from a Parliamentary majority to just two seats in one general election).

To sum up, the number of significant parties in any country results from an interplay between various factors. Some of these are institutional - the distribution of seats proportionally to people's votes as opposed to plurality election, electoral thresholds, size of constituency. These do not all work one way in barring entry to new parties, discouraging internal splits, and thus increasing or reducing party numbers and strength. The situation is compounded by the existence of underlying cleavages and social divisions. These interact both with each other and with the institutional systems to produce different patterns of party politics.

## **PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS**

Any constitutional engineering therefore has to take into account not simply the general influence of the electoral system it plans to put in place but also the way it will interact with cleavages. Another relevant factor, as the case of Austria illustrates, is the internal discipline and stability of the parties themselves.

It is often forgotten that parties are independent actors and manipulators of institutional arrangements as well as subject to them. Whatever constitutional changes are made therefore it is likely that the party system will react only slowly. Parties have already established their support basis, links with other important social actors such as business and unions, internal procedural rules, etc. These may be eroded over time under different social situations and institutional rules. Parties however still can shape both to their own advantage. Thus in talking about anticipated party change it is as well to see it as gradual - operating over 10 to 20 years rather than instantaneously. Thus, the introduction of a new electoral system in Britain would be shaped by existing political and social conditions and the parties' ability both to maintain their internal cohesion and to adapt to electoral reform and its effects.

The gradual nature of change is particularly true where large parties are concerned, as in the UK. One consideration which is overlooked by focusing on the sheer number of parties is whether one of them stands out in terms of size and strength from the rest and spends far more time in government. Such "dominant" parties often form single-party governments with an effective Parliamentary majority, even in PR systems with many parties. Sweden and Norway are the obvious cases that spring to mind here - countries that certainly compare well in terms of economic and social record with the UK. Table 2 shows that even under pure List PR systems producing five or more parties, dominant parties can thrive; and in the Nordic

cases, can actually win a larger popular vote than Labour or Conservative parties in Britain. It also reinforces the point that countries and party systems differ greatly in ways which cut across the divides between alternative electoral systems and sheer numbers of significant parties. These contrasts show themselves in varying patterns of party competition which directly affect the key issues of popular control of government and election mandates - with which we deal next.

**Table 2 The Role of Strong Parties under Alternative Electoral Systems**

<i>Two major parties compete (each with Usually 35-45% of the popular vote)</i>	<i>One major party (generally with 35-50% of the popular vote)</i>	<i>Three-five relatively equal parties (each with 20-25% of the vote)</i>
UK (FPTP)	Ireland (STV)	France (two ballot)
US (FPTP)	Sweden (List PR)	Netherlands (List PR)
Canada (FPTP)	Norway (List PR)	Belgium (List PR)
Australia (AV)	Denmark List (PR)	Finland (List PR)
New Zealand (to 1994 - FPTP)	Italy (to 1992 - List PR)	Switzerland (List PR)
Greece ('reinforced' List PR)		
Germany (AMS, high threshold)		
Austria (List PR)		
Spain (List PR, small constituencies)		

*See Table 1 and Appendix 1 for explanations of the electoral systems in use in different countries*

## **THE IDEA OF THE PARTY MANDATE**

The major justification for the current British arrangements for elections to Parliament and for forming and maintaining governments is the idea of the party mandate (see Table 3). The essential argument is quite simple. The party with a majority or plurality of the vote gains popular approval because of the attractiveness of the policies it puts forward. Its majority in Parliament enables it to form a single-party government endowed with popular authority. The majority gives it the necessary legislative votes to support its programme and carry it through. The success of the programme will then be judged by electors at the next election.

The party mandate thus offers a mechanism for linking electoral preferences to government action through the central party role in both. Without disciplined parties the electoral will would be subverted as the party most or a majority of voters chose would be impeded in carrying through the programme that attracted them. This is also true of any legislative attempts to block or change the winning party programme. The full operation of the mandate really demands that Parliament be totally subordinate to the government formed by the majority party. All opposition parties can or should do is try to rally popular support for alternative programmes in light of the next election. Attempts to give Parliament real powers of investigation or control subvert the "elective dictatorship" required by the idea of the mandate. Parliament should be no more than a venue for the debate between government and opposition, designed to influence the next election. Attempts to give Parliament real powers of investigation or control

subvert the “elective dictatorship” required by the idea of the mandate. Parliament should be no more than a venue for the debate between government and opposition, designed to influence the next election.

### **Table 3 The Idea of the Party Mandate**

The ‘party mandate’ is the idea that the party(ies) getting most votes in an election will form a government which will carry through their electoral programme, which has gained the support of voters. The details of the argument are given as separate propositions below:-

1. Voters choose between parties at least in part on the basis of their programme.
2. Such programmes are distinguishable from each other so they offer voters a basis for choice.
3. The party or parties which form the next government have a responsibility to carry out their programme in government, because this is a major basis on which they have been elected.
4. They also have the authority to carry out their programme in government, as it has been selected by at least a plurality of electors as the best short-term programme for the democracy.
5. Parties do seek to carry through the priorities in their programme in government (Accountability).

The argument in Britain is generally couched in terms which equate the majority in seats that a governing party has won in Parliament with a popular majority of the vote. It is on this basis that a government’s near untrammelled authority to act is justified. But things look rather different when the government only has a plurality of votes - often as little as 42 or 43 per cent transformed into a legislative majority by the operation of the first-past-the-post system. Only the United States, of all the countries examined in Table 1, normally generates a popular majority for the winner through having Presidential elections. In all the other countries which normally have single party majority governments, it could be argued that a popular majority has voted *against* the party which forms the government.

This criticism of plurality party government rests on the implicit idea that the median voter (the 50% + 1 voter) should be represented in government by the party he or she voted for. We shall explore this issue of majority representation - a broader version of “voter choice”, one of the Electoral Commission’s key criteria - which seems to underpin many coalition arrangements, below. Meanwhile, however, we should note the positive side of mandate arrangements, even when they do rest on a plurality rather than a majority of the vote. They have two interrelated strengths:-

- electors know what they are voting for and can cast their vote so as to enhance the chance of their preferred party forming the government and carrying through its programme

- the election result is "controlling", in the sense that the party with a plurality of the vote will form the government with a legislative majority. It has to be controlling, to guarantee electors a secured choice, so the two conditions are interlinked.

Mandate theory ceases to work so effectively, of course, once the number of parties increases to a point where no one of them can form a single party majority government. Different parties with different programmes coming together after the election to form a coalition do not seem to have a mandate in the same sense, even if they could all agree on a common programme (we shall see they often can). However, the majority often seems "manufactured" in the sense that one or even all of the partners may have lost votes in the election and still form a government; and also in the sense that it may be the product of unseen political dealings, perhaps even in "smoke-filled rooms" - the notorious image of continental practice often conjured up in British political circles.

A crucial empirical question, therefore, is how far parties can gain a mandate and elections influence the composition of government in countries with multi-party systems. As we shall see, most countries do have something like mandate arrangements but their operation depends very much on the pattern of party competition in the country. We examine variations in this next, before going on to examine how far the voters' election choices exercise a controlling influence on governments.

### **PATTERNS OF PARTY COMPETITION IN POSTWAR DEMOCRACIES**

The clearest form of party competition is the one we are familiar with in Britain, where two major parties compete for a majority or plurality of the votes and form a single-party majority government as a result. This is the classic expression of mandate theory. Close approximations to the party alternation envisaged in party mandate theory are found in the United Kingdom, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (to 1994). Single parties with a parliamentary majority form governments and alternate over time in office. This offers a clear choice of alternative programmes to electors wanting to vote for them. Austria has also followed this pattern at times (1966-1986).

But political systems where there are several equally-sized parties can come close to this classic situation. The most obvious case is where parties form explicit electoral alliances before the election. The allies proclaim their intention of serving together in government if they get a combined majority of the popular vote. Sometimes they even issue a common "Programme of Government" so electors know what government policies they are voting for.

Thus, election alliances can substitute quite effectively for single parties under the mandate model, particularly if one alliance of parties is lined up against another, so electors are able to choose between two clear-cut opposing alternatives.

Such alliances occur in most elections in Germany, where the Free Democrats generally form such an alliance with their current partner in government (either the Christian or Socialist Democrats) against the remaining large party. They also occur in Ireland, though not so frequently, with Fine Gael and Labour allied against Fianna Fail. In Sweden and Norway the "bourgeois" parties usually state their intention of forming a government together if they get a majority.

However, this case merges into another - where all the parties of the left join forces against an alliance of all the right-wing parties, with the intention of producing either a left or a right government depending on which *tendance* gets a popular majority. In this case, electors have a choice between left and right priorities (see Table 5 below). Sometimes, as in the famous French case of 1973, an alliance of parties may issue a "Common Programme of Government". France, indeed, is the best example of a country where a fairly fragmented party system is polarised into clear alternatives in this way. However, in Norway and Sweden, the contest is essentially between the bourgeois, centre-right alliance, and the left, represented by Social Democrats or Labour, the large party, and small left-socialist or Communist parties. If the left gets a majority a single-party Social Democratic or Labour government will form, supported by the smaller left party.

In these circumstances, the outcome of the vote is reasonably clear (though blurred a little by the question of which bourgeois government will form in the case of a centre-right majority - which not may not always include all the allied parties).

Less clear-cut is the outcome of left-right competition in more fragmented systems with larger numbers of parties. Here *some* party or parties of the left confront *some* party or parties of the right, while the centre party often stands clear of the competition. The contenders are usually too small to aspire to a majority, even in combination with the other parties of their ideological grouping. So they need the support of the parties not involved in the competition to form a government. This gives the decision as to whether the election result should be respected to the third party, and throws the formation of the government into post-election coalition negotiations rather than basing it on votes. Of course, the votes the parties have gained may enter as a consideration into the negotiations. But they need not, thus depriving electors of a very clear choice. Countries in this situation are Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and Italy (up to 1992). Finally, the mandate really breaks down in countries where all the major parties enter a "Grand Coalition" with each other, regardless of the election results, as happens in Austria (1945-1966; and from 1987 onwards). It is the permanent arrangement in Switzerland - where, however, referendums on all important policy questions ensure that majority opinion is heard through other channels.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTIONS ON MAKING GOVERNMENTS

The idea of the mandate requires that parties which are successful electorally (in terms of the prevailing political practices described above), go on to make up all or part of the succeeding governments. If a party gets into government, its policies have a better chance of being effected than if it does not. The extent to which

electorally successful parties form all or part of succeeding governments is also a key issue of voter choice which the Electoral Commission has been asked to consider.

Table 4 directly examines this issue of "election control". For each election, we can ask if the result influenced all governments in the subsequent inter-election period (total election control over composition); or whether it influenced only some (say, two out of four governments which formed before the next election - partial control); or whether it influenced none at all (no control).

As expected, there is near total "election control" over the composition of

**Table 4: Election Control over the Making of Succeeding Governments, 1950-90**

Country	No. of Parties	Total Control	Partial Control	No Control
<b>GROUP 1 (Single Party Competition)</b>				
United States (Presidential)	2	12	0	0
United Kingdom	3	11	0	2
Canada	3-4	12	0	2
Australia	2-3	12	1	4
New Zealand (to 1994)	3	12	0	2
<b>GROUP 2 (Electoral Alliances)</b>				
Ireland	3-4	11	0	2
Germany	3	7	4	0
<b>GROUP 3 (Left v Right)</b>				
Sweden	5	8	3	2
Norway	5-6	4	3	3
France (Parliamentary)	4-5	6	2	1
<b>GROUP 4 (Minority Party Competition)</b>				
Denmark	8-10	8	3	6
Netherlands	5-7	5	3	4
Belgium	8-10	2	4	7
Italy	7-10	2	0	7
<b>GROUP 5 (Permanent Coalition)</b>				
Austria	3	6	1	6
Switzerland	6-8	0	1	9

NOTE: 'Control' is measured by whether the party, or alliance, which is successful in an election forms (the) subsequent government(s). Election 'success' is estimated in terms of the type of competition described in pages X-X.

governments in the English-speaking countries with first-past-the-post and two major parties - with some slippages, generally when the voting pluralities are very close and the counting rules award a legislative majority to the party with slightly fewer votes (Group 1 in Table 4).

What is interesting, however, is that in countries with electoral alliances which give electors a two-way choice, election control over the governments which form is almost as complete (Group 2). An additional consideration is that in these cases (Ireland and Germany) the resulting governments and their programmes are based on a direct popular majority rather than simply on a plurality, as is mostly the case in the first group of countries. It may almost be said that the pure doctrine of the mandate is better served in these countries.

In countries where there is a general opposition between left and right, controlling elections outnumber others (Group 3). There is a certain blurring, however, because it is not always clear which parties on the left or right respectively will serve in government. If the left wins in Scandinavia, it is clear that there will be a single party Labour or Social Democratic government. It is not so clear what will follow if the left wins in France: will it be a coalition of all the left parties (which in a sense have the mandate) or just a single party Socialist government? In all these countries the same uncertainty exists if the centre-right wins - will it be all parties, just two or even one of them? This may make a considerable difference in terms of the policies being effected.

Election control is much less evident where two parties compete in elections but need the support of others actually to form a government (Group 4). This situation is produced by larger numbers of parties where three to five parties are relatively equal in terms of votes and seats and thus leave the balance of legislative strengths indeterminate. As the crucial stage in government formation is the post-election coalition negotiations, the actual results become less controlling. However, there is considerable variation between countries in this group. In Denmark, elections on balance are controlling, while in Italy from 1950-90, they hardly ever were. Where the major parties all go into coalition together whatever the election results, these are not controlling at all of course (Group 5). They can only be so when there are breaks in this pattern, as with Switzerland in the 1950s and Austria from 1966-1986.

The general conclusion from Table 4, therefore, is that election results generally influence governments more where there are fewer parties, regardless of the type of election system that operates. Even where there are four or five parties, as in France, however, the electoral stand off between left and right largely determines the government that forms. Only where the party system is extremely fragmented do elections cease to exert a broadly determining influence. Further, the mandate does operate outside two or three party systems. Thus, even if electoral reform in Britain did gradually increase the number of significant parties over time, there is no reason why the mandate need not operate as between election alliances of broadly left or centre-left parties and broadly right-wing parties.

## LEFT AND RIGHT: KEY ELECTION AND POLICY CONCEPTS

New Labour's shift to the right in the 1997 general election produced diagnoses of the "end of ideology". But in light of the role of ideological ideas in binding together election alliances which can substitute for single parties in obtaining and effecting a mandate, it is worthwhile at this point examining the idea of ideology more closely and checking out the theory of its decline. Further, as ideology is also important in examining an alternative concept of democratic representation to that of the mandate - the concept that the views of the median voter should be represented (see page X) - it is also useful to be able to gauge "voter choice" on a policy scale on which differences between parties are measured and a middle position located.

Everybody uses the idea of left and right in ordinary conversation, particularly at the time of elections. For example the concept of "Middle England" has been used a lot recently. The expression has the connotation of masses of undecided voters - "middle" either in terms of characteristics or policy preferences - who are not at the "extremes" of left and right. The expression "seizing the centre ground" is often heard in discussions of party strategies. Again, these discussions suggest that there is a line, stretching between left and right, along which voters can be located in terms of their overall priorities, and on which the broad party policy stances can also be located.

The traditional "left-right" difference between political parties is over the degree of intervention which governments ought to undertake - usually linked with protection of the weaker elements in society. Parties divided over this set of issues often also diverge between "realism" and "idealism" in foreign affairs. Should governments pursue national security through military strength and defensive alliances, or put their main effort into peaceful international co-operation and building supra-national institutions? There is ~~no~~ logical link between domestic intervention and foreign co-operation but socialist parties do tend to put them together and their rivals criticise both positions equally.

Of course, other kinds of issues are discussed by parties and enter into elections. Usually they get assimilated into left-right differences or fade out after one or two elections. They do blur the central party differences however. These also tend to dissolve into a number of different policy areas once a government is elected - mostly because of the division of policy between functionally specific ministries and a tendency to pass legislation or make decisions specific to these areas one at a time. It is not that general left-right differences lose their relevance in government. Rather they constitute a set of broad priorities, and through them are crucial in shaping and focusing election debates. Here if anywhere, therefore, one should be able to identify what the agreed public stand of the parties is.

A way of measuring party differences has been developed by the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). This consists in counting the sentences of each party manifesto in each election into one (and only one) of the set of 57 policy categories (see Appendix 2). These are a comprehensive listing of the policies parties talk about, based on readings not only of British but of many other postwar election programmes. Using them it is possible to assign almost all sentences to a particular category. With a "count" of all sentences over the whole of each manifesto, they can be standardised in



percentage terms. It is then possible to say which specific issues were most stressed by each party in each election. For example, in the 1997 British general election, both Conservatives and Labour stressed government efficiency and authority most (about 13 per cent of all sentences in each manifesto). Liberal Democrats stressed social services and environment most. From the amount of attention devoted to specific issues, we can construct an overall left-right scale by the following steps, illustrated in Table 5:-

- categorising some issues as "left" and some as "right"
- summing the total left percentage by adding up percentages in all left categories
- doing the same for the right
- subtracting the left percentage from the right percentage.

**Table 5: Left-Right Scale Constructed from Manifesto Policy Categories**

<b>Right Emphases (1)</b>		<b>Left Emphases (1)</b>
Pro-Military Attitudes		Decolonisation
Freedom, Human Rights		Anti-Military Attitudes
Constitutionalism		Peace
Effective Authority		Internationalism
Free Enterprise		Democracy
Economic Incentives		Regulate Capitalism
Anti-Protectionism	minus	Economic Planning
Economic Orthodoxy		Pro-Protectionism
Anti-Social Services		Controlled Economy
National Way of Life		Nationalisation
Traditional Morality		Pro-Social Services
Law and Order		Pro-Education
Social Harmony		Pro-Labour

1. Sum of percentages of sentences in the manifesto committed to right or left policies, attitudes, etc. See also Appendix 2.

**Source: Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994: 40**

This process gives a theoretical range of positions from +100 (all references in a manifesto are right-wing) to -100 (all references in a manifesto are left). In practice, of course, all manifestos will have both left and right emphases. They will also talk about other issues outside these areas. Parties therefore rarely go outside the -40 and +40 range. Within these limits, however, it is possible to examine their movements and check out such ideas as, for example, that there is an "End of Ideology" or that parties must occupy the "centre ground" to win elections.

Figure 1 shows how British parties have modified their left-right positions from 1945-97. It confirms the general impressions that the Conservatives moved substantially leftwards by accepting the "Social Democratic" consensus of the 1950s and then moved steadily rightwards, retaining a fairly extreme rightist stance up to 1997. Labour moved somewhat to the right under Gaitskell and Wilson, but in the 1970s lurched leftwards. Figure 1 confirms general perceptions of a rightward move by Kinnock in 1987 and shows, however, that Labour moved left again in 1992, and then right of the Liberal Democrats in 1997 following New Labour's tactics of "occupying the middle ground". Over the postwar period, the Liberals (and then Liberal Democrats) have mostly held the centre ground after indecisive oscillations both to left and right in the 1950s.

This method of mapping party movements thus has considerable "face validity" in the sense of confirming general historical impressions of where the parties were in terms of policy priorities over the postwar period. As the same methods have been applied in some 25 countries, and show the same conformity with historical analyses, they do possess considerable credence. They do not just confirm general impressions, however, but also refine them. For example, Figure 1 demonstrates (as general impressions cannot) that New Labour's move to the right in 1997 was much more substantial than Wilson's in 1964 and 1966 - to +8 compared to -12 and -10 respectively. On the other hand, there is still plenty of "clear blue water" between Labour and the Conservatives - more than many commentators would have us believe.

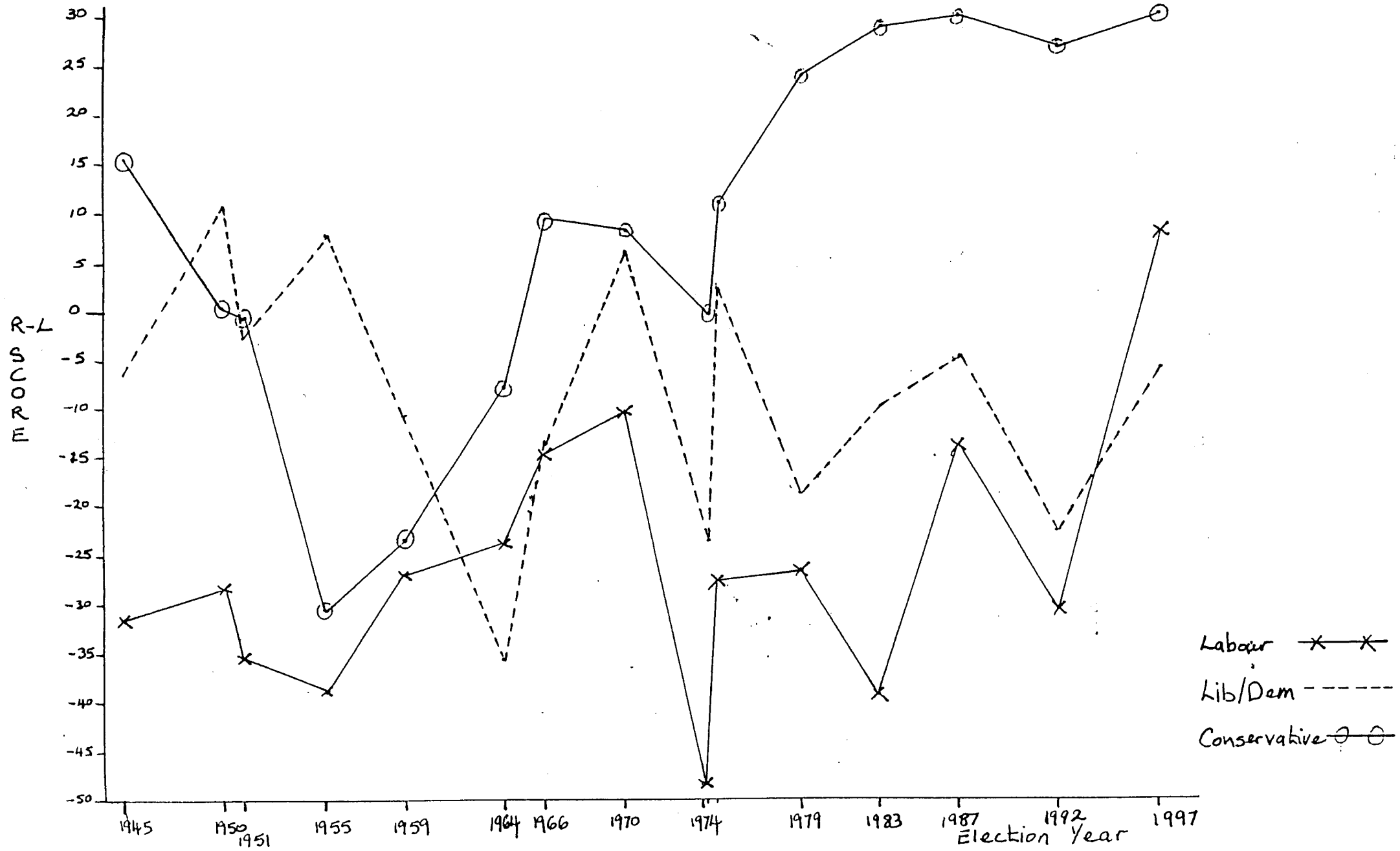
Measuring party positions relatively exactly and comparatively also enables us to ask how coalition governments form - do they group the parties closest to each other in policy terms for example? Or are the coalition parties really quite disparate and prone to internal quarrels? We investigate these questions below. First, however, we use Figure 1 to investigate a question more germane to British politics: how far does the average, middle or median voter get represented in British governments?

## **AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF VOTER CHOICE IN BRITAIN**

Mandate theory has legitimacy so long as a popular majority elects the government. As is well known, however, the parties which get a legislative majority in Britain and therefore form the government, do so on the basis of a *plurality*, not a majority, of the popular vote. Moreover, the size of their majority in Parliament, and thus their political power, is usually exaggerated and shaped by factors which have little to do with the governing party's popularity.

Figure 1

British Parties Ideological Movement on a Left-Right Scale, 1945-1997



**Table 6: When has the 'Middle Party' got into Government in Postwar Britain?**

ELECTION YEAR	1945	1950	1951	1955	1959	1964	1966	1970
Government Party After Election	Lab	Lab	Con	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Con
Middle Party on Left-Right Issues	Lib	Con	Con almost	Con	Con	Lab	Lab almost	Con almost
Did the Middle Party Win?	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
ELECTION YEAR	Feb 1974	Oct 1974	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	
Government Party After Election	Lab	Lab	Con	Con	Con	Con	Lab	
Middle Party on Left-Right Issues	Lib or Con	Lib	Lib	Lib-SDP-Alliance	Lib-SDP Alliance	Lib-Dem	Lab	
Did Middle Party Win?	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	

NOTE: Judgements on which party was in the middle on the most important issues of the elections are made on the basis of Figure 1 which shows their relative left-right positions over all postwar elections.

As a result, the government's electoral support does not necessarily include the "middle" or "average" voter. The government has often been on the left or right without including the middle. With the help of Figure 1, we can indeed calculate how often the middle party, which got the support of the 50% +1 voter, in fact formed the government over the postwar period. (We need Figure 1 because it shows how the parties are ordered in relation to their left-right priorities - essential in seeing which is the middle party.) Table 6 shows that in the 15 elections from 1945-97, the middle party got into government seven times, or at roughly half the elections. This is on the generous view that the Conservative positions in 1951 and 1970 almost coincided with those of the Liberals, and so can be counted as "middle", even though the Tories were very slightly to the right (and that Labour in 1966 also practically coincided with the Liberals).

What is more significant, however, is that six of the seven occasions on which the middle party, broadly defined, got into office after an election, occurred between 1951-70! In 1974, Labour won both elections on a relatively extreme left-wing election manifesto. And then an increasingly right-wing Conservative party remained in power from 1979-92. In other words, there has been a tendency for parties taking an extreme ideological position rather than one based on the "middle ground" to win office from 1971 onwards. In that sense, British governments have moved further away from reflecting majority opinion in recent years. Only New Labour, by shifting substantially rightwards, managed to re-occupy the centre in 1997 and make itself a more consensual government.

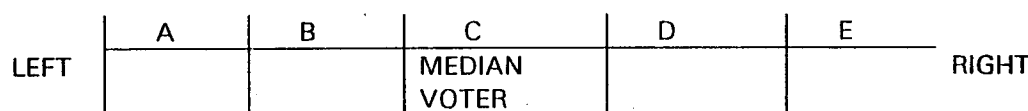
If Labour continues both to hold the middle ground and to win elections, then British politics should become less adversarial than they have been recently and more reflective of majority opinion - at least on the central issues where electoral choices are made. In this sense, voter choice would be reinforced. Close relationships with the Liberal Democrats should also strengthen these tendencies, as that party is quite likely to return to the centre position occupied from 1964-92. A coalition government of Labour and Liberal Democrats

would even rest on a popular majority, producing a genuinely majoritarian government for the first time in the postwar period.

Such outcomes are very contingent, however, being heavily dependant on the ebb and flow of electoral politics. The emergence of further non-majority-based governments from one or other ideological extreme remains a strong possibility. Indeed they are quite likely under the workings of the present electoral system. Alternative electoral systems are more likely to guarantee wider majority representation at all elections.

### WHY REPRESENTING THE 'MIDDLE GROUND' IS IMPORTANT

The view that the popular majority is better represented by a party in government which holds the "middle ground" can be expressed more generally in terms of the median voter's choice and its relationship to other voters' choices. If electoral preferences can be arranged along a left-right policy spectrum corresponding to the party positions in Figure 1, then the median voter is the one who pushes the count over 50 per cent, going from either left or right. A simplified illustration of this is given below, for an electorate of five voters:-



On this left-right dimension, voters are placed in terms of their policy preferences from left to right. C is the middle, or "median", voter. For a party to have a majority, it must get C to vote for it. In order to attract C, a party has to come very close to his or her position - otherwise, the other party or parties may come closer, get C's vote, obtain a majority, and form the government. Even where there is a large electorate, as in Britain, parties seeking extra votes will always have to move policy towards the median position.

On this argument, policy will always move towards C's (the median) position. This is very nice for C, of course, who will always get his or her way under ideal democratic conditions. But it is also a reasonable outcome for the other electors - indeed, the best they can hope for. A and B would much prefer to have C's policies adopted than those of D and E. Similarly D and E prefer C to A and B. Thus the power of the median voter, and the adoption of his or her preference by government, is the best way of meeting everybody's preferences under the existing distribution of opinion. The other voters do not get all they want, but they get more than if the opposing wing could simply impose their preferences.

In practice, of course, Britain has three large parties, so none can hope to get a majority on its own. However, if the party which the median voter supports gets into government, the policies pursued should approximate those which a majority vote would have got anyway, given the need to attract the median voter. Instead, from 1974-92, a party which was *not* responsive to the median voter got into government. This may

account for the relatively extreme policies pursued by Conservative governments during this period. It may also explain why the politics of the 1950-70 era seem more consensual than those of later times. New Labour now seem to have designed their policies to appeal to the median voter, perhaps ushering in a new era of (relatively) consensual politics.

When the mandates are given to parties supported by a plurality rather than a majority of voters, moderate "middle opinion" can thus get squeezed out in favour of a relatively extreme group. The resentment produced by Thatcherite governments perhaps results from the fact that we had a relatively extreme government, unusually far from average opinion, *claiming* to have a popular mandate which Figure 1 clearly shows it had not.

### **COALITION GOVERNMENTS AND THE MEDIAN VIEW**

By contrast, coalition governments are quite good at representing the median elector. The most authoritative survey of coalitions in western Europe up to the end of the 1980s, showed that 80 per cent included the "middle party" (Laver and Budge, 1992: 416). This may help explain why relations between the parties in coalition systems are often felt to be more consensual than those in competitive two-party systems where relationships between the major contenders are adversarial as they try to rally their relatively extreme voters (Conservatives and Labour in 1992). In coalition systems, average opinion tends to be accepted as government policy through the middle party's ability to play off one extreme against the other. Precisely because of the middle party's strategic position, it can be almost permanently in government, like the Dutch Christian Democrats - so elections are in that sense less controlling (cf Table 4). Where there are more than two parties or electoral alliances, there is clearly a trade-off between the clear choices offered by plurality mandate systems and coalitions responsive to the median voter. It depends whether one prefers choice over consensus and clearly this varies with other political circumstances.

### **FORMATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS**

As Table 4 shows, elections determine the formation of most governments, including coalitions, in Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Norway and France, owing to the existence of party alliances which simplify electoral choice to two broad alternatives. In the Low Countries and Italy, with fairly fragmented party systems, election results influence the composition of about half the governments which form. The other half emerge from coalition negotiations which basically ignore election results - which is also the case nowadays in Austria. The extreme case is Switzerland, where the existence of the "Magic Formula" of four-party coalitions ignores elections altogether.

Where election results are ignored, what *does* influence the formation of coalitions? The main factor here, certainly for the longer-lasting governments, is agreement on the major current issues (see Budge and Keman 1990: 83). In other words, election results are ignored where the "kingmaker" party, outside the main

party competition, decides in favour of the defeated side because it agrees with it more. This, of course, gives the ensuing government more of an agreed basis for effective action, contrary to the prevalent idea that two parties joining together must inevitably disagree and hence be unable to form a concerted plan.

Far from this being the case, potential partners often hammer out a detailed programme of government before setting up in coalition together. They thus have a programme more detailed than many single-party governments' manifestos to act on. This is particularly true of the Netherlands and Austria, for example, where the coalition agreement resembles a legally binding contract more than anything else.

How are the parties able to agree on this in the first place? The answer is that parties are specialists, each seeing different policy areas as requiring urgent action. Sometimes these areas of interest overlap a little between the partners, but of course this is no problem for getting government agreement and action. Mostly, however, they specialise in different policy areas and emphasise the priorities of "their" areas rather than confronting each other with different policies in the same area.

A common programme of government can thus be formed by emphasising action in - and diverting expenditures to- all the areas prioritised by all the coalition partners. Thus a coalition of Liberals and Socialists, for example, can agree on strict financial orthodoxy in regard to taxes and government spending, while protecting welfare provisions. This is not so different from New Labour's mix of policy in Britain at the moment, so can hardly be interpreted as more inconsistent than the internal compromises produced by single-party government.

An objection may be made - how can one pay for all the policies favoured by all parties, when one of the priorities is stabilising or reducing taxes? Does that not preclude increased welfare for example? The answer is that welfare can be paid for by one of the many creative devices employed by all parties, whether in coalitions or not, to achieve their objectives. For example, a coalition could impose a windfall tax on utilities just as New Labour did; extend the definition of disability to take in long-term unemployed people, like Dutch coalitions in the 1980s; or join the European Union and get huge agricultural subsidies like the Irish in 1972. A Liberal-Socialist coalition might well cut the military budget to pay for their other policies, in pursuit of their joint purposes.

There are, therefore, no "objective" constraints on what coalitions can do. In accommodating all the partners, they are limited simply by their own ingenuity just as single-party governments are.

## **THE DISTRIBUTION OF MINISTRIES**

A way of consolidating policy compromises in a coalition is to distribute ministries along the same lines - each partner taking the ministries in its own area of concern. This enables parties to implement the policy agreements they have reached at general coalition level and to extend them if they can through administrative action, e.g., by widening the definition of "war-injuries" to let more people receive a pension. As all western governments divide policy-making between a number of functional ministries, these are always available for distribution among partners. Possession of a ministry not only gives the party representatives administrative



powers. It also enables them to take the initiative in cabinet in their areas of interest. The general policy agreement between parties at governmental level, and possession of particular ministries at the administrative level, thus enable parties to drive on with the projects they are committed to by their programme and ideology.

**Table 7: The Government Ministry Preferences of European Parties (in order of preference)**

Party Types	Conservative	Liberal	Religious	Socialist	Agrarian
Government Ministries	Interior Foreign Affairs/ Defence	Economy/Finance Justice	Religious Affairs Education	Health/Social Affairs/Labour	Agriculture Fisheries
	Justice Agriculture Economy	Education Interior Trade/Industry/ Commerce	Agriculture	Economy Industry Education	
	Education/Trade/ Industry Commerce		Social Affairs/ Health/Labour		

Source: Budge, Newton et al (1994), *Politics of New Europe* (Table 12.2, p. 269)

The kinds of ministries preferred by each type of party are shown in Table 7. The explanation of why a particular kind of party would want a particular ministry is fairly obvious, given the kind of concerns mentioned earlier, e.g., of Socialists with health, welfare and employment or Agrarian (Farmers') parties with agriculture and fisheries. The success of Agrarian parties in getting the Agriculture Ministry in the coalitions they enter is particularly striking. They controlled that ministry in 83 per cent of the coalitions they entered in western Europe between 1945-89.

One of the important consequences of parties having preferences for particular ministries is that they may control that ministry almost permanently if they take part in most governments. Even the same person may hold that office for long periods, regardless of whether governments come or go. Thus, in Italy, though governments between 1945 and 1992 had an average life of only ten months, the Christian Democrat, Giulio Andreotti, was Foreign Minister and his colleague, Francesco Cossiga, was the Interior Minister for more than five years consecutively. This contrasts with the situation in Britain, where governments last four to five years but frequent "re-shuffles" bring down the average tenure of a ministry to only 18 months! (For more on these points see Budge, Newton et al 1997: 268-273; and Budge and Keman, 1990: 89-131.)

## **CAN PARTIES DELIVER THEIR POLICIES IN COALITIONS?**

Coalitions function through a division of labour between the partners - each agreeing to advance their own major policy priorities and to respect the others' priorities. Does this work?

As we have been talking about the ministries, a first question is how far control of ministries in a particular policy sector helps them get favoured policies through. Table 8 answers this question. The Table shows the types of fiscal policy which were pursued by particular types of party in control of the Finance. Economic and Labour ministries, as percentages of all their years in control of those ministries. Socialist parties obviously favour policies aimed at reducing unemployment and during two-thirds of the time they were in control within coalition governments, precisely such policies were followed. Market-oriented Liberal parties are more likely to favour cuts in government expenditure and while were in control, this was done for almost half the time (44 per cent). So the division of labour inside coalitions does seem to work out in the sense of parties implementing policies they favour

**Table 8: Party Control of Relevant Government Ministries and Fiscal Policy (in 19 Democracies 1965-82)**

Party family with most ministries in policy sector 2 <sup>2</sup>	Fiscal policy aimed at avoiding unemployment (Keynesianism)	Cautious orthodox fiscal policies oriented to avoiding inflation	Cuts and withdrawal of government expenditure	Fiscal policies aimed at having a 'minimal state'
Conservative	33	25	0	42
Liberal	30	22	44	4
Religious	52	28	16	4
Socialist	66	24	0	10

**Notes:**

1. Entries in the Table are percentages of the years that a particular party type held the ministry over all the democracies. The countries covered are mostly in western Europe, omitting Switzerland (but plus Israel)
2. The relevant ministries are Labour and Economy/Finance.

Source: Adapted from Budge and Keman (1993), *Parties and Democracy*, pp. 144-146

Is this reflected at the general level of government? Table 9 shows the extent to which governments pursued positive welfare policies as opposed to negative (cutting welfare) ones. Naturally we should expect Socialist and Christian Democrat parties to favour more welfare and the right-wing parties to oppose it (Liberals here are mainly market-oriented liberals of a Thatcherite stamp, not progressive liberals like the British). The Table is interesting because it not only reveals the expected contrasts between governments in terms of the parties which control them. It also compares their ability to get preferred policies through in coalition governments compared with single-party governments in the same countries. There are some contrasts - Socialists almost always pursue positive welfare policies in single-party governments formed by themselves. But they can also pursue them most of the time (three-quarters to two-thirds, depending on conditions) in coalition governments.

**Table 9: Party Control of Relevant Ministries and Socio-Economic Welfare Policies (in 19 Democracies 1965-83)**

Party type	Government type	Positive welfare mix			Negative welfare mix		
		% of country-years		Total	% of country-years		Total
		1965-1973	1974-1983		1965-1973	1974-1983	
1. Conservative	Single-party	34.2	25.7	23	65.8	74.3	53
2. Conservative	Coalition	32.3	53.9	25	67.7	46.1	35
3. Liberal	Single-party	50.0	41.7	9	50.0	58.3	11
4. Liberal	Coalition	73.3	60.0	20	26.7	40.0	10
5. Religious	Single-party	66.7	33.3	5	33.3	66.7	4
6. Religious	Coalition	83.3	57.9	26	16.7	42.1	11
7. Socialist	Single-party	86.4	69.8	48	13.6	30.2	17
8. Socialist	Coalition	72.2	66.7	31	27.8	33.3	14

Source: Budge and Keman (1993) *Parties and Democracy*, p. 149.

These findings can be and have been extended to other policy areas (Budge and Keman, 1993: 132-158). What they seem to show is that the difference between single-party and coalition governments in terms of effecting party preferred policies is a matter of degree. It is harder for parties to get everything they want, even in preferred policy areas, in coalitions. But it is far from impossible given the division of labour and the segmented policy agreements we have examined.

## HOW EFFECTIVE ARE COALITION GOVERNMENTS?

National well-being is hard to measure directly. Moreover, it is almost impossible to trace out exactly what is due to government action and what is due to other, often structural and institutional factors. So in talking about the general effectiveness of coalitions we can only offer relevant but not conclusive evidence. Where this evidence is most convincing, however, is in destroying any idea that there is a *prima facie* case against the effectiveness of coalitions in general. Indeed, if there is a *prima facie* case to be made, it is against the general effectiveness and efficiency of single-party governments. Erring on the side of caution, however, it is probably best to say that there are only limited grounds for claiming greater effectiveness of one side over the other.

**Table 10: Rates of Growth of GDP in Comparable Countries with and without Coalition Government, 1962-88\***

	Average GDP rate of increase for	
	1962-1972	1977-1988
France	4.7	1.6
Germany	3.6	1.3
Italy	3.9	2.2
UK	2.2	1.8
USA	3.0	2.3

\*Annual Percentage Rates of Increase in Gross Domestic Product)

Source: Ian Budge, 'Relative Decline as a Political Issue', *Contemporary Record*, vol 7, No. 1, (Summer 1993), p. 5.

The most commonly used measure of national well-being is economic growth, as measured by the annual increase in Gross Domestic Product. Table 10 presents average annual growth figures for the United Kingdom and the USA and broadly comparable countries in Europe (France, Germany, Italy) which have coalition governments, for the period we have generally been considering (1960-90). The growth figures are shown before and after the oil shocks of the mid-1970s. What they reveal is common knowledge. Britain's growth rate lagged behind the coalition countries in the earlier period, as did that of the USA. After the oil shocks the figures became more equal, but there is no sharp divide between countries with different forms of government. Britain and France parallel each other as do the USA and Italy. German growth temporarily slowed down but jumped again at the end of the decade (4 per cent in 1989). Growth in GDP hardly decides the matter of course. Various "quality of life" measures, recording the adverse affects of growth, show Britain performing better than Japan but hardly better than Germany and France.

The general point is, however, that even under a Thatcherite regime which concentrated the powers of single-party government to an unusual degree and focused on economic growth, Britain hardly stands out as exceptional. Even at best, it lags behind the country, Italy, whose coalitions could most justly be criticised for weakness and indecisiveness.

On the general historical record, too, postwar British governments do not appear as more generally successful than German - or indeed Italian - governments which in two decades brought the country out of occupation and defeat to prosperity and military security. Broadening the comparison, one could not say that Scandinavia, often under minority governments or coalitions, offers less quality of life than Britain; or the Low Countries either. Such general comparisons are about as far as we can take the matter and must be severely qualified. They certainly do not indicate, however, that coalition governments are less effective than single-party governments.

## **STABILITY AND DURABILITY OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS**

A more direct measure of effectiveness often applied to governments is how long they last. The argument is that governments must remain in existence if they are to carry out their mandates. Thus stability, one of the Electoral Commission's key criteria, is vital. And a change of government every 10 months, as in Italy and Finland, betokens weakness. This is plausible. However, some qualifications must be put on the argument:-

- (a) In countries with a flexible election date, which can be set by the government, the latter often capitalises on success by calling an early election. In this case duration could be an indicator of

lack of success, as when the Callaghan and Major governments hung on to near the end of their constitutional terms hoping for something to save them.

(b) In Scandinavia, on the other hand, elections are fixed for three or four year intervals and governments are often left to hang on to the end if an election date is near.

(c) Government instability may often mask ministerial stability (and vice versa), as we have seen (page XX). If the same parties continue in coalition with the same ministers in their posts, the practical consequences of a *crisi di governo* may be less than those of a re-shuffle in Britain, when half the cabinet may change or lose their old posts. If it is true that ministers need at least 18 months to get anything done in their department, British ministers are often pressing up against their time limit compared to Italians and Germans.

However, the argument in favour of longer-lasting government clearly has something in it. Table 11 shows the average duration of different kinds of government between 1950-83 within each country (which are generally the democracies which have endured over the postwar period). The Table shows again that there is no major contrast between countries where coalitions predominate and those which are generally run by single-party governments. Over the 33 years, German governments averaged 2.4 years as against the UK's 2.8 years. When the going got tougher from 1965-1983, British governments lasted longer than most (3 years compared to Germany's 2.3). This could, of course, have been a sign of weakness, as pointed out above, and on occasion was - though not surely in relation to Italian governments of seven or eight months on average.

**Table 11: The Duration of Governments, 1950-83**

Country	No. of governments		Average duration	
	1950-1983	1965-1983	1950-1983	1965-1983
Australia	19	13	1.8	1.4
Austria	16	8	2.1	2.3
Belgium	22	13	1.6	1.4
Canada	12	7	2.8	2.6
Denmark	21	11	1.6	1.6
Finland	35	17	1.0	1.1
France:				
Fourth Republic	16	-	0.6	-
Fifth Republic	21	15	1.6	1.3
West Germany	14	8	2.4	2.3
Iceland	12	6	2.8	3.0
Ireland	14	8	2.4	2.3
Israel	25	12	1.4	1.5
Italy	41	25	0.8	0.7
Japan	24	11	1.4	1.6
Luxembourg	10	5	3.0	3.6
Netherlands	18	11	1.8	1.6
New Zealand	15	9	2.3	2.0
Norway	16	11	2.1	1.6
Sweden	17	10	1.9	1.8
UK	12	6	2.8	3.0

TOTAL	380	195		
Average over all countries	19	9.8	1.85	1.92
% of total	100	51.6		

Source: Budge and Keman (1993), *Parties and Democracy*, p.160.

In general, single-party governments do last longer than coalition governments - whether between countries or within countries. But this is not a blanket contrast. It depends on the type of coalition - composed of many parties or only two - and where it is. German and Scandinavian coalitions, though shorter-lived than British governments, are clearly not unstable. Here, as elsewhere, sharp distinctions between the two types of government are misleading, and are often based on extreme examples (the case of Italy is commonly cited by

opponents of proportional representation; those of Germany and Ireland are not). There is much overlap depending on what coalitions and single-party governments, and which countries, are involved.

### **CARRYING OUT ELECTION MANDATES IN COALITIONS**

We saw earlier that parties can be quite effective in carrying through their policies within coalitions (see pp. XX-XX), though not quite as much as within single-party governments. Here we turn to a related question. How far are those policies related to the parties' election commitments? Does participation in coalitions limit the extent to which parties can fulfil the priorities and policies they presented to electors in their election programme?

The question does not arise, of course, solely in regard to coalitions. There is a lot of cynicism about the extent to which any party in any type of government will honour its commitments. However, this is often seen to be more difficult under coalitions, due to the various compromises that have to be made between partners. Of course, as we have also seen, this may depend very much on whether the coalition is formed by parties which were in an electoral alliance with a common programme, or came together after an election.

Direct evidence on how far programmatic emphases foreshadow government expenditures (surely a basic test of commitment to a policy area) can be presented from a comparative study in ten countries which had both single-party and coalition governments. Table 12 gives the overall correlation between manifesto priorities and government expenditure in each policy area for the whole postwar period. The highest correlation which could theoretically be obtained is 1.00 - signifying a complete match between what parties say in an election and what they do in government. The lowest is 0.00, signifying no match

**Table 12: The Relationship between Party Election Priorities and Party Spending in Government on the Relevant Policy Areas, 1950-92**

Country	No. of Policy Areas With No Correlation	Mean Adjusted Correlation*
Sweden	0	.58
France	0	.80
UK	2	.49
Canada	1	.57
Belgium	4	.49
Germany	2	.66
Netherlands	2	.54
USA	2	.52
Austria	0	.65
Australia	1	.40

\* adjusted  $R^2$  - Range 0.00-1.00

Source: Adapted from Klingemann, H-D, Hofferbert, R I, Budge, I (1994), *Parties, Policies and Democracy*, p.257.

at all. The actual correlations fall in a range from .40 to .80, showing a reasonable but not complete match between programmes and action.

However, these averages relate to policy areas where some relationship actually existed. In most countries there are about two areas where there was no relationship at all - falling to none in Sweden, France and Austria and rising to four out of the 11 examined in Belgium. Along with the lower correlation for Belgium for areas where there was a relationship ( $R^2 = 0.49$ ) we have to conclude that the programme-action link is very weak in Belgium - a country with large numbers of parties, and a record of weak and short-lived coalition governments. In that sense it is no surprise that it comes at the bottom of the Table - with its neighbour, the Netherlands, not too far away. These are also countries where governments often form without regard to election results (Table 4).

This is not to say, however, that the Table shows a sharp contrast between countries with coalitions and those with single parties alternating in government. Indeed, a major surprise of the whole research was, as the authors put it "the unremarkable Westminster system" (Klingemann et al. 1994: 260). The UK, Australia and USA perform less well than the other countries in terms of the strength of the relationship between programmes and expenditures. Austria, Germany and Sweden - countries with many coalitions - are at the top. The surprise is that the strongest relationships do not emerge under the Westminster model whose major justification is after all that it puts into power single-party government which deliver on their election mandates (Table 3). If it loses that argument, it is hard to justify the highly disproportional results of UK elections, especially when they are compared with those in other liberal democracies (Dunleavy et al. 1995 and 1997).



## WHY PARTIES CARRY OUT ELECTION COMMITMENTS IN GOVERNMENT

To say that parties stick to their election programmes is not necessarily the same thing as to say that these programmes were the ones electors voted for. As we saw from Table 4 on election control over subsequent governments, many parties enter coalitions even if they did badly in an election. They may stick to their election priorities but these have not been popularly endorsed.

In the majority of cases, however, the parties which enter governments do so because they *have* been popularly endorsed, in single party alternating and coalition systems. Carrying through their programme in government is essential if popular preferences are going to be represented and if democracy is going to work. The programme-policy linkage is a necessary though not sufficient condition for full democracy. In that sense, it is reassuring that it appears under some coalitions as strongly or more strongly as in Westminster systems.

Why should parties under any of these systems necessarily want to stick to their election programmes, however? The traditional answer is that they would be distrusted and punished by electors if they did not. Not carrying through their commitments would deprive electors of any reason to vote for them (on policy grounds anyway), since doing so would make no difference in terms of advancing their policy-preferences. Instead electors might be motivated to "kick the rascals out" in revenge.

It seems on the face of it unlikely, however, that electors would remember broken commitments from three or four years back. Other, more pressing concerns like unemployment and inflation are likely to weigh on their minds when assessing the government record (Sanders, 1997). This gives the parties considerable latitude to ignore what they previously said, certainly at the outset of a government.

However, as we have seen, expenditures do reflect programmes to a considerable extent. We should expect legislation and administrative action to follow even more closely. Most specific election pledges made by governments also get carried out (Rallings, 1987).

To explain this consistency we have to look to inner motivations of the parties rather than to external sanctions. These are really twofold:-

- a) parties do not have any alternative agenda for government other than their election programme
- b) parties are bound to their election priorities by their ideology - they *want* to carry their programme through because that is what they are in politics to do.

On the first point, the manifesto constitutes a fairly unique medium-term programme for democratic government, of a kind which only parties produce. They have no time in government to set out another so they fall back on the broad priorities of their election programme to guide them in office. It also forms a way of co-ordinating the actions of party representatives inside their different ministries. In this sense it is a blueprint and a plan for action in its own right as well as being (in most cases) electorally endorsed. Thus it has useful informational and technical functions which parties in office need to draw upon.

Programmes are also closely related to general party ideology - particularly to the clusters of left and right issues distinguished previously. Ideology has been defined as "a cognitive structure through which to

understand and interpret events" (Christenson et al 1972: 8) - and we may add, to react to them. In this sense, ideology cannot be shaken off because it pervades parties' interpretations of events and their reactions - in government as elsewhere. As well as using their political programmes, western parties also believe in them. That is a major reason for acting on them. Not doing so is likely to create internal tensions and divisions and to de-motivate members and activists, all of which are counter-productive both in government and at the next election.

These two considerations seem quite enough to motivate parties (if they can, in face of external events) to stick to their election programme. In so doing they forge an essential link in the democratic mechanisms which allow popular preferences expressed through voting in elections to influence subsequent government action - more under some types of governing arrangements than under others, of course.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This review has shown that the results of alternative systems of proportional representation and coalition arrangements differ a great deal among themselves and from one country to another. Which type of arrangement a British constitutional reform might produce would be affected by the existing party set-up, by the pattern of cleavages in the country and by the political culture and conditions as well as by the electoral system which was chosen. It also demonstrates that much of the debate on such questions has been very narrowly focused, and the public may well be excused at times for believing that proportional representation is employed only in Italy and Israel.

Taking a broader, more analytical view, we can safely conclude that:-

- Generally the more parties there are and the more equal they are in strength, the more likely it is that there will be a coalition government and the less likely it is that this will directly reflect the election result.
- On the positive side, such coalitions are likely to include the "middle party" which represents the "average" elector, and to avoid putting government in the hands of a fairly extreme plurality, which the majority might even be said to oppose. The problem for the "Westminster model", based on a plurality rather than a real majority of the popular vote, is that it cannot guard against this happening (as in the 1980s).
- Coalitions are more likely to represent the "average" voter than single-party governments, and to this extent, satisfy a wider concept of representation, or voter choice, than the classic mandate theory -

particularly as the coalition will come closer to representing the choices of voters from parties excluded from government than single-party plurality rule.

- Under many coalition systems, formal electoral alliances of two to five parties do offer electors a clear choice between two different programmes and produce a government with a genuine majority which includes the average voter. This is secured, however, by party strategies and behaviour, not by formal constitutional arrangements. On current form, Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the UK seem likely to form such an alliance after a shift to proportional representation. This would lead to a “German” situation of alternating majorities rather than the traditional Dutch one with the centre permanently in power.
- Tony Blair is said to fear that a small party in a pivotal position may wield disproportionate power in the formation of coalitions and their conduct in government. But this is an illusory danger, especially in Britain. The small Free Democrat Party in Germany is often given as an example of this danger: it is said to be permanently in power, with the inference that it is punching above its electoral weight and exerting an undue influence. But the FDP enters into electoral agreements with its larger partners and does not dominate the subsequent coalition governments. The greater danger, in fact, is that a large centre party may dominate coalition politics under a PR electoral system and choose political partners without regard to election results, as the Christian Democrats have done in Italy (until 1992), Belgium and the Netherlands.
- As a whole, coalitions are somewhat less durable than single-party governments and are probably no more or less effective in most cases. But this varies very much among coalitions themselves. Any British reform is likely to produce a stable “Scandinavian” or “German” situation rather than a “Belgian” or “Italian” one.
- Coalitions do not make it harder for parties to keep their commitments, owing to agreements among the partners which let each pursue their own differing priorities. Some coalition arrangements, as in Germany and Austria, are more likely to produce governments which stick closer to their manifesto priorities than single-party governments in Britain and thus to satisfy a broader section of society.
- The most sensible advice in the British case is therefore to tailor any constitutional change to the existing pattern of parties, and to simulate what they would be likely to do under the new conditions. A clear idea of what outcomes are desirable and which are not is absolutely essential: particularly whether government must be based on an actual electoral majority or whether it is sufficient simply to represent the “average” elector through the “middle” party.

As usual, more research and information about the exact links between election and party systems and types of government would be desirable. I would hope, however, that this summary is enough to caution against over-simplistic interpretations which see constitutional change as the only factor in the situation, and

which contrast single-party governments with coalitions, without taking account of the internal variation which exists inside each type.

## APPENDIX 1: SPECIALIST TERMS USED

*Additional Member System (AMS):* This is a "mixed" system in which a proportion of the legislature (usually a half) is elected by plurality-rule elections from single constituencies, while the remaining members are chosen from party lists (usually at regional level). Under AMS, the list seats compensate for any disproportionality produced by the local constituency results. Under the AMS systems to be introduced in Scotland and Wales, more than half the Parliament and Assembly will be voted for at local level; and in the "mixed" system for elections to the new Greater London Assembly, the local elections will be by the Supplementary Vote (a simpler variant of AV).

*Alternative Vote (AV):* A preferential, plurality-majority system used in single-member constituencies, in which voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper. A candidate who receives more than 50 per cent of first preferences is declared elected. If no candidate receives an absolute majority of first preferences, votes are re-allocated until one candidate has an absolute majority of votes cast.

*First Past the Post (FPTP):* The simplest form of plurality-majority electoral system, using single-member constituencies, within which electors may make only a single choice of candidate or party. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, but not necessarily a majority of the votes cast.

*List PR:* List PR, in its simplest form, involves each party presenting a list of candidates to the electorate. Electors vote for a party, and parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the national vote. Winning candidates are taken in order from the lists. In some forms of List PR, electors can express a preference for a candidate within a party list.

*Single Transferable Vote (STV):* A preferential proportional representation system, used in multi-member constituencies. Voters choose directly from a list of the candidates of all parties contesting the election and may thus choose between the candidates of each party, as well as between parties. To gain election, candidates must surpass a specified quota of first preference votes. Voters' preference are re-allocated to other continuing candidates when an unsuccessful candidate is excluded or if an elected candidate has a surplus.

*Threshold:* The minimum level of support which a party needs to gain representation: usually expressed as a percentage of the total number, or regional, vote.

## **APPENDIX 2: POLICY CATEGORIES USED TO GROUP SENTENCES IN PARTY MANIFESTOS**

### **Domain 1 - External Relations**

101	Foreign special relationships: positive
102	Foreign special relationships: negative
103	Decolonisation
104	Military: positive
105	Military: negative
106	Peace
107	Internationalism: positive
108	European Union: positive
109	Internationalism: negative
110	European Union: negative

### **Domain 2 - Freedom and Democracy**

201	Freedom and domestic human rights
202	Democracy
203	Constitutionalism: positive
204	Constitutionalism: negative

### **Domain 3 - Government**

301	Decentralisation: positive
302	Decentralisation: negative
303	Government efficiency
304	Government corruption
305	Government effectiveness and authority

#### **Domain 4 - Economy**

401	Enterprise
402	Incentives
403	Regulation of capitalism
404	Economic planning
405	Corporatism
406	Protectionism: positive
407	Protectionism: negative
408	Economic goals
409	Keynesian
410	Productivity
411	Technology and infrastructure
412	Controlled economy
413	Nationalisation
414	Economic orthodoxy and efficiency

#### **Domain 5 - Welfare and Quality of Life**

501	Environmental protection
502	Art, sport, leisure and media
503	Social justice
504	Social services expansion: positive
505	Social services expansion: negative
506	Education pro-expansion
507	Education anti-expansion

#### **Domain 6 - Fabric of Society**

601	Defence of national way of life: positive
602	Defence of national way of life: negative
603	Traditional morality: positive
604	Traditional morality: negative
605	Law and order
606	National effort, social harmony
607	Communalism, pluralism, positive
608	Communalism, pluralism, negative

## **Domain 7 - Social Groups**

701	Labour groups: positive
702	Labour groups: negative
703	Agriculture and farmers
704	Other economic groups
705	Underprivileged minority groups
706	Non-economic demographic groups



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<sup>1</sup> delete

<sup>2</sup> delete