

A New Agenda ... Values, World Society, Modelling

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A New Agenda seeks to explore all aspects of society using all the academic disciplines paying special attention to values ... with special interest in modelling ... not disinterested in practice ... and aspiring to high academic standards.

Commentary, September 2019

No. 69

Israel, Austria, Portugal ... Brexit, the M-distribution

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Distributions

The concept of a distribution is central in the study of statistics. There is a very sophisticated classification of types of distribution. Here however we simply note a simple classification:

- single peaked, middle peak
- single peaked, endpoint peak
- double peaked, U-shaped, two endpoint peaks
- double peaked, left endpoint peak and middle peak
- double peaked, middle peak and right endpoint peak
- double peaked, M-shaped, two middle peaks

multi-peaked

Statisticians are particularly interested in measures of central tendency ('middle') and spread. Sometimes peaks are in the middle and sometimes not. A major result of political theory is the median voter theorem: if people's preferences are single-peaked then the ideal preference of the median voter is the Condorcet winner.

The M-distribution

Recent elections in Austria and Israel, and recent polling in the UK, provide examples of the M-distribution. The percentages gained by the five parties in the Austrian election exhibit an M-shaped distribution when the parties are ordered along the Left-Right dimension – see Figure 1 below. There are two dominant parties separated by a squeezed middle party and each of the dominant parties has a smaller party on its extreme. A more elaborated version of the same pattern occurs in the Israeli election – see Figure 4 below. The UK situation is similar with Conservative and Labour being the two dominant parties and Liberal Democrats being the squeezed middle and with the Brexit Party on the extreme right and the Greens arguably on the extreme left – this pattern becoming more complicated with the salience of a second Brexit dimension. See Figures 7 and 8.

How might the M-distribution change from one election to the next? Overall it might become deeper or shallower. The change distribution would then be M-shaped or W-shaped. This pattern might be less apparent if there are more local changes between adjacent parties. The other change is that the M-shape may become more or less symmetrical as a result of shifts from one dominant party to the other, to the left or to the right.

How might the M-distribution have evolved? Evolution might have occurred through coalescing and extinction of many small parties or through fracturing and creation of one or a few parties. One notional path of evolution starts with just one party. A second party forms and a dynamics familiar to theorists takes place as both parties converge to the ideal position of the median voter. This gives space for a party to form at each of the two extremes. The two original parties retain dominance but move towards their respective extremes, allowing a centrist party to find support in the middle.

The M-distribution for party votes is in contrast with the shape for the distribution of the opinions of individuals, which a recent study shows to be the normal distribution. It might be said that parties distort the distribution of opinion in society ...

Stop press: Portugal election

Elections were held in Portugal on 6th October 2019.

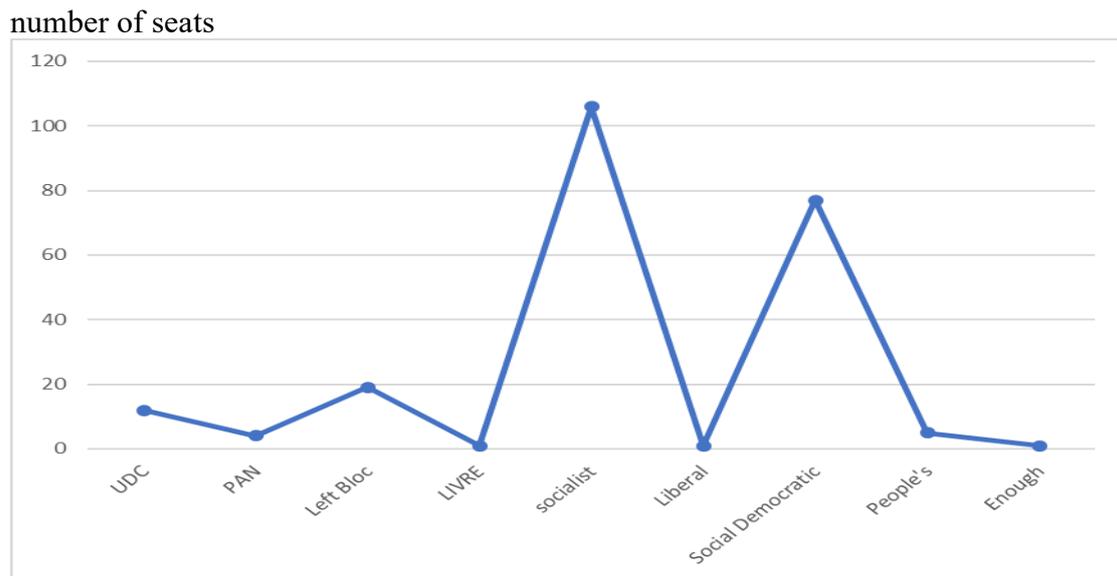
Table 1 lists the parties in Austria from Left (top) to Right (bottom). The first column gives the percentage vote. The second column gives the seats gained. The third column gives the change in seats from the previous election.¹

Table 0 Votes and seats, Portugal general election, October 2019

| | votes | seats | change in seats |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| Unitary Democratic Coalition | 6 | 12 | - 5 |
| People-Animals-Nature | 3 | 4 | + 3 |
| Left Bloc | 10 | 19 | 0 |
| LIVRE | 1 | 1 | + 1 |
| Socialist | 37 | 106 | +20 |
| Liberal Initiative | 1 | 1 | - |
| Social Democratic | 28 | 77 | -12 |
| People's | 4 | 5 | -13 |
| Enough | 1 | 1 | - |
| | | 230 | |

Figure 0 presents the frequency distribution for the number of seats (see the second column in Table 1 above). The frequency distribution is M-shaped. However were it not for the one seat won by the Liberal Initiative party the distribution would be single-peaked.

Figure 0 The M-shaped distribution of the number of seats, Portugal 2019



¹ Note: no seats were gained or lost by the Communist Party (0.7%) nor by the anti-capitalist party Der Wandel (0.5%); nor by the Austrian Beer party (0.1%).

Previous election: 15th October 2019

Sources: The Times (see above);

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Austrian_legislative_election

<https://wahl19.bmi.gv.at/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Austrian_legislative_election

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Austrian_legislative_election

Distribution analysis: the election in Austria

Elections were held in Austria on 29th September 2019. The headlines tend to highlight ‘the winners’ and ‘the losers’:

“Infighting grips far right after Austrian poll defeat.”

Moody, Oliver. *The Times*, October 1, 2019: 36.

But the detailed results report the percentages of votes for each party. The new seating in parliament is illustrated with the parties ordered along one dimension (usually from Left to Right).

This distribution of percentages along the dimension is a fundamental representation of the opinions of all the people. Distribution analysis involves looking at the shape of the distribution, looking at the properties of the distribution, and at the cumulative distribution, and paying particular attention to measures of central tendency, such as the mean, median and mode; and measures of spread such as standard deviation, and polarisation.

Table 1 lists the parties in Austria from Left (top) to Right (bottom). The first column gives the percentage vote. The second column gives the seats gained. The third column gives the change in seats from the previous election.²

Table 1 Votes and seats, Austria general election, 29th September 2019

| | votes | seats | change in seats |
|------------------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| JETZT | 1.9 | 0 | -8 |
| Greens | 13.8 | 26 | +26 |
| Social Democrat | 21.2 | 40 | -12 |
| NEOS [econ. Lib] | 8.1 | 15 | +5 |
| People’s Party | 37.5 | 71 | +9 |
| Freedom Party | 16.2 | 31 | -20 |
| | | 183 | |

Figure 1 presents the frequency distribution for the number of seats (see the second column in Table 1 above). The frequency distribution is M-shaped.

Figure 2 again presents the frequency distribution but now includes the cumulative distribution. The cumulative distribution for the results is close to the cumulative distribution for a uniform distribution. The figure also presents the median seat line.

² Note: no seats were gained or lost by the Communist Party (0.7%) nor by the anti-capitalist party Der Wandel (0.5%); nor by the Austrian Beer party (0.1%).

Previous election: 15th October 2019

Sources: The Times (see above);

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Austrian_legislative_election

<https://wahl19.bmi.gv.at/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Austrian_legislative_election

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Austrian_legislative_election

With 183 seats the median seat is 92. The median seat occurs in the People's Party: it occurs on the left-wing of the party. The People's Party runs from the 82nd seat to the 152nd seat. The median seat occurs 10/71 (0.14) across the range for the People's Party.

Figure 1 The M-shaped distribution of the number of seats, Austria 2019

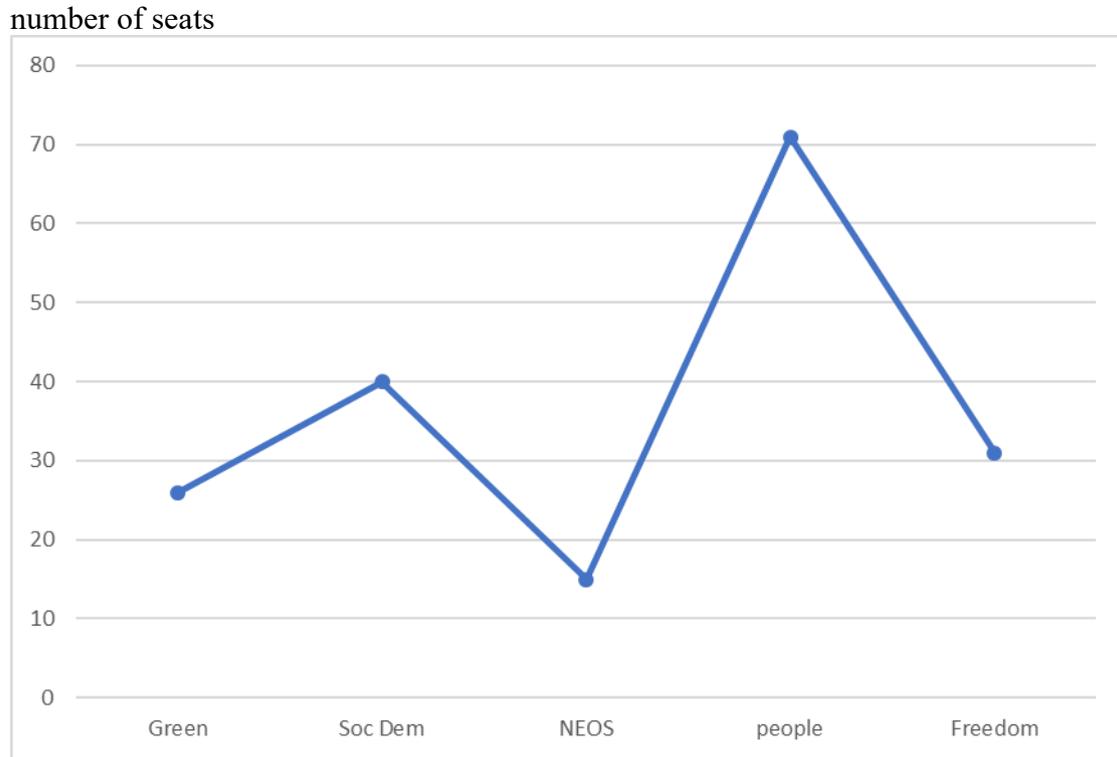
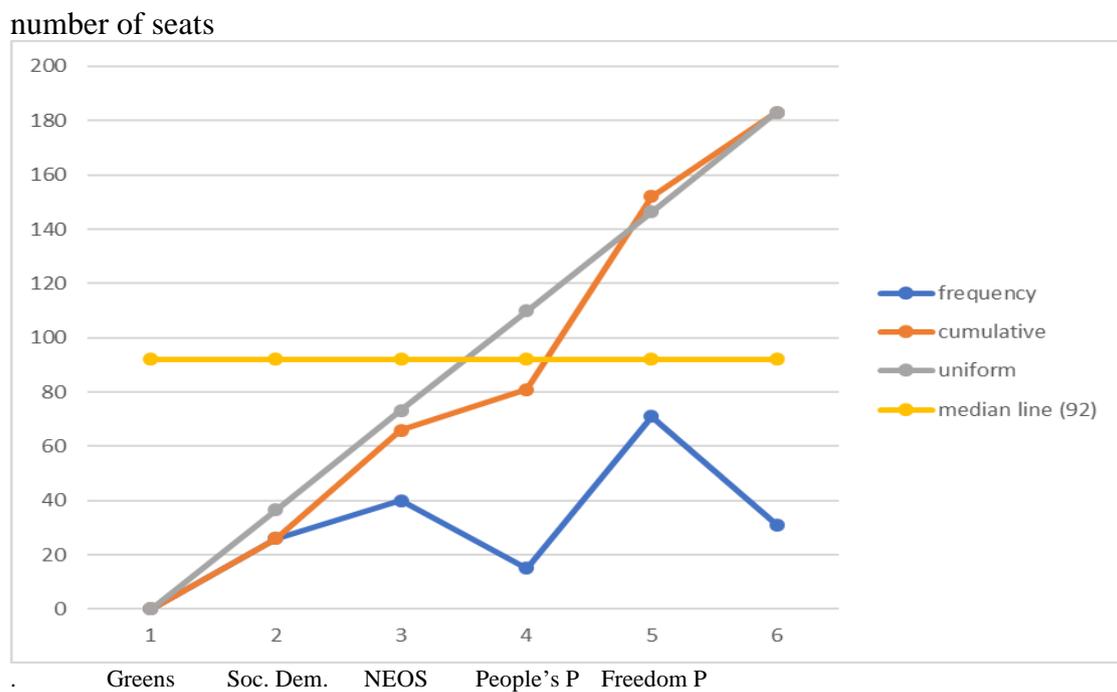


Figure 2 Number of seats; frequency, cumulative and median line (92)



We now suppose that each party has a numerical position along the continuum which we take to be the unit interval, [0,1]. The mean position is 0.56 using Points A; or 0.54 using Points B.

Points A: 0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75, 1.

Points B: 0.1, 0.3, 0.5, 0.7, 0.9.

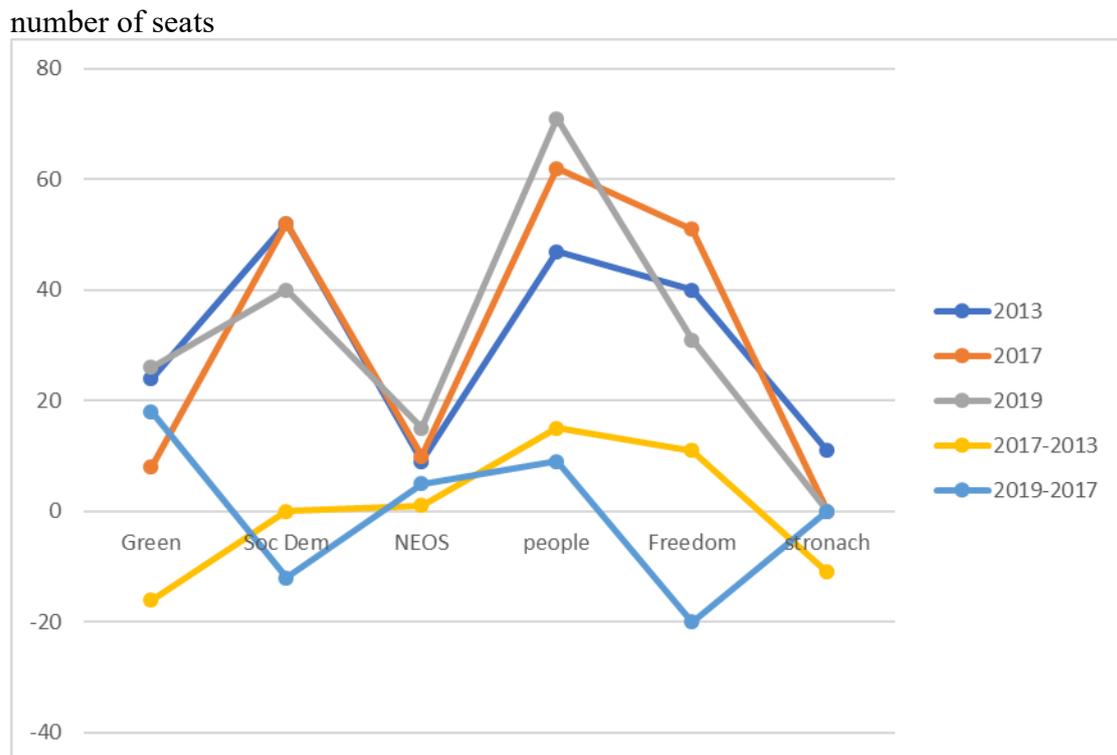
Table 2 The middle of the distribution

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Median seat | 92 |
| Median party | People's party |
| Position in median party | 0.14 in party range |
| Mean position | 0.56 (Points A); or 0.54 (Points B) |

We now consider the change in the number of seats from 2013 to 2017 to 2019. The frequency distribution is M-shaped in each of these three years. Figure 3 presents the frequency distribution for the number of seats and the distribution for the change in the number of seats, 2013-7 and 2017-9 (see the second and third columns in the table above).

Overall the change distribution, 2017 to 2019, slopes down from left to right indicating a shift to the left. At a more detailed level the change distribution is UV-shaped: the dominant left party losing seats to the extreme Greens (giving a U shape) and the extreme right losing votes to the dominant right (giving a V shape). The change distribution, 2013 to 2017, slopes down from right to left indicating a shift to the right.

Figure 3 The M-shaped distribution of the number of seats; the change distribution



Israel's election majority problem

“With no proper coalition since 2018, Israeli governance is lost in transition.”

Raphael Ahren. *The Times of Israel*, September 24, 2019.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/topic/2019-israeli-elections/>

The recent election in Israel has resulted in no majority for any one party or indeed for the previous right-wing bloc. Mr Netanyahu of Likud is not able to establish a right-wing government. Avigdor Lieberman of Yisrael Beiteinu has called for a ‘liberal’ unity government including Likud and Blue & White. Mr Netanyahu has suggested to Mr Gantz of Blue & White that they should set up a unity government. But Mr Netanyahu's call was dismissed by Mr Gantz within hours. The former military chief read out a statement saying,

"Blue and White, headed by me, has won the election" and "We will not be dictated to". "In order to form a unity government, we must not come with political blocs and spinning, but rather with honesty, patriotism, responsibility and seriousness," he added. "I am interested in and intend to form a broad and liberal unity government, under my leadership. A government that will convey the will of the people."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-49753221>

President Reuven Rivlin said he had heard "loud and clear the voices calling for a broad and stable national unity government" and praised the prime minister for "joining that call". Mr Rivlin will hold consultations with party representatives before nominating a candidate whom he believes has the best chance of forming a government.

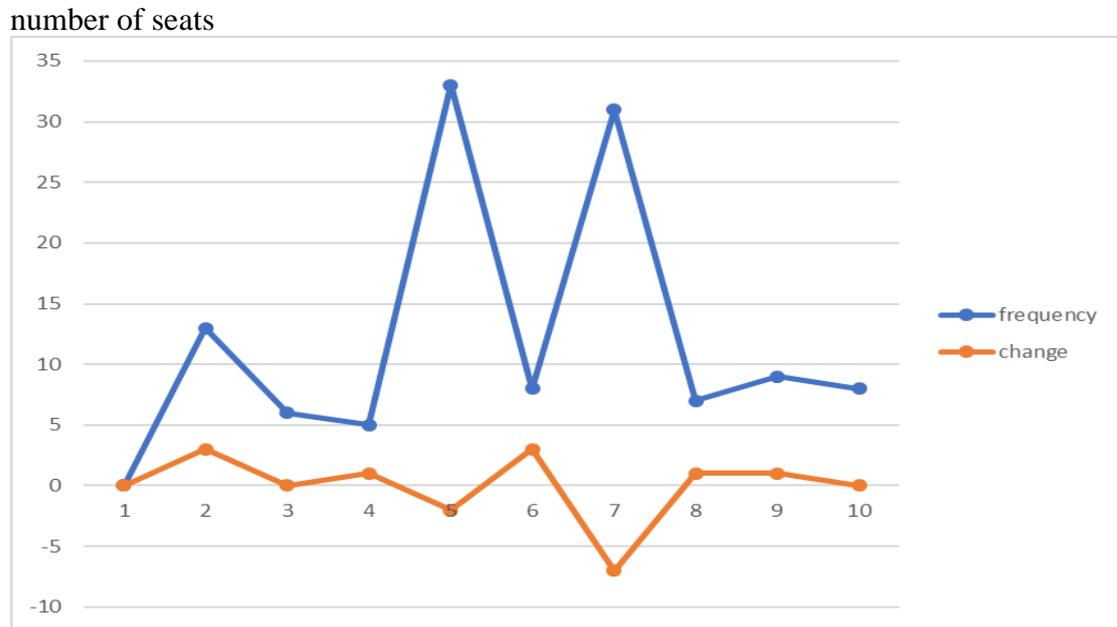
It is worth pausing to reflect on the words used and the underlying ideas. One set of ideas indicate *all of the people and the whole of society* ‘the will of the people’, ‘[national] unity government’, and ‘broad’. Another set of ideas indicate *subgroups of society*: ‘liberal’ and ‘right-wing’. Another set of ideas indicate *relationships, power and competition*: ‘headed by me, has won the election" and "We will not be dictated to" ... to *coalitions*: ‘political blocs’ ... *contrast of values*: ‘not ... spinning, but rather with honesty, patriotism, responsibility and seriousness’. Finally is the idea of stability: ‘stable’, ‘best chances of forming a government’. Table 1 presents the election results.

Table 3 Votes and seats, Israel general election, September 2019

| | votes | seats | change in seats |
|-------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------|
| Israeli Arab Joint List | 10.5 | 13 | +3 |
| Labour-Gesher | 4.8 | 6 | 0 |
| Democratic Union | 4.3 | 5 | +1 |
| Blue and White | 25.9 | 33 | -2 |
| Yisrael Beiteinu | 7.0 | 8 | +3 |
| Likud | 25.1 | 31 | -7 |
| Yamin | 5.9 | 7 | +1 |
| [Ultra-orthodox: | [13.6] | [17] | [+1] |
| Shas | 7.5 | 9 | +1 |
| UTJ | 6.1 | 8 | 0 |
| Total | | 120 | |

Figure 4 presents the frequency distribution for the number of seats (see the second column in Table 1 above). The frequency distribution is M-shaped – but with a smattering of seats at both extremes.

Figure 4 The M-shaped distribution of the number of seats, Israel 2019



How might a majority government be formed? There are 120 MPs. The halfway borderline is 60 MPs. At least 61 MPs are needed to achieve an overall majority.

One party. No one party comes anywhere close to this - the party with most MPs, Blue & White, has just 33 MPs.

Two parties. There is only one coalition of two parties which has an overall majority: Blue & White and Likud combined gives 64 MPs, just 4 MPs above the 60 borderline. This coalition has been proposed by Likud but rejected by Blue & White.

Three parties. Clearly any coalition of three parties which included both Blue & White and Likud would give an overall majority. Yisrael Beitenu has proposed that it be the third party in such a coalition. In contrast there are no three parties that could form an overall majority unless it included the two largest parties.

Four parties. There are some coalitions including only one of the two largest parties that could form an overall majority. For example $33+13+9+8=63$.

A key feature of the $33+13+9+8=63$ coalition is that it involves parties from across the whole spectrum. This is a positive feature in terms of representing the whole spectrum but it is difficult to achieve because parties like to join with other parties close to them. For example the voting system allows 'surplus vote agreements' and these were signed by Democratic Union and Labour-Gesher; Blue & White and

Yisrael Beitenu; Yamina and Yikud; and UTJ and Shas. Note that these agreements are all between adjacent parties in the ordering listed in Table 1 above.

We now consider coalitions of adjacent parties of minimal size. There are three.

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|------|----------------------------|
| Left-centre | 13+6+5+33+8 | = 65 | Gantz, Blue & White |
| Left-centre-right | 33+8+31 | = 70 | Lieberman, Yisrael Beitenu |
| Centre-right | 8+31+7+9+8 | = 63 | Netanyahu, Likud |

Each of the three is most naturally associated with a ‘natural’ leader and party. Which of the three will it be? President Rivlin has asked Mr Netanyahu to try to build a coalition ... but did he contemplate asking Mr Lieberman?

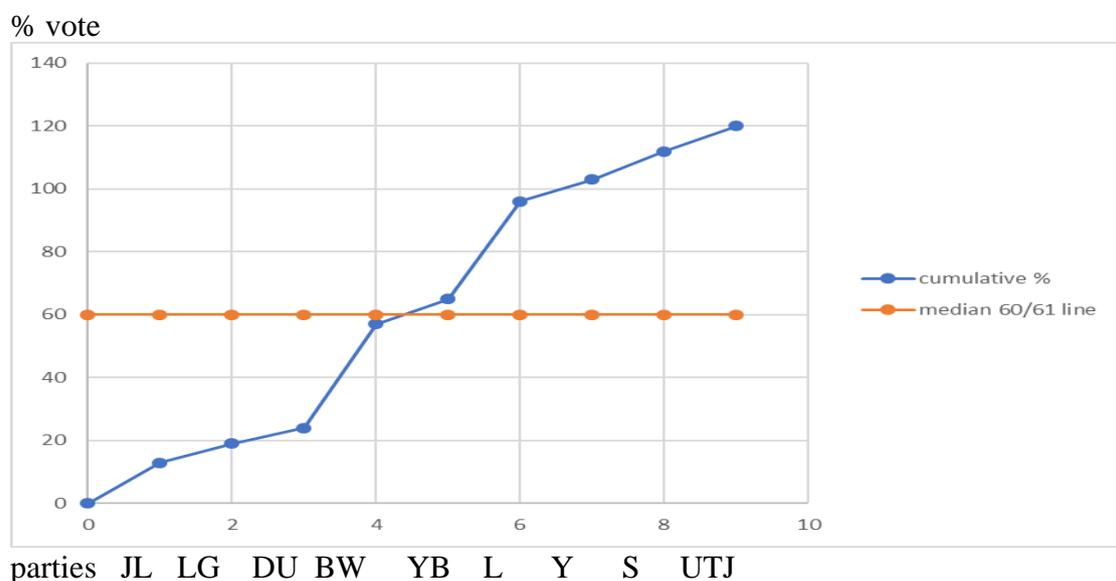
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/did-the-president-contemplate-asking-liberman-to-try-to-force-a-unity-coalition/>

We now reflect on the fact that the election was not decisive. This lack of decisiveness is due to two aspects, firstly the nature of the specific results, and secondly the nature of the criterion used, namely that the winner should be the party with an overall majority. There are a number of other criteria which do give a decisive result for this set of specific results:

- .1. The party with the most seats is the winner.
As we have noted this is Blue & White. Mr Gantz did indeed say: "Blue and White, headed by me, has won the election".
- .2. The party voted for by the median voter is the winner.
- .3. The Condorcet winning party is the winner.

Consider then the median voter criterion. Table 3 above considers the frequency distribution of seats. Figure x below presents the cumulative frequency distribution. It can be seen that this cuts the median 60/61 line somewhere in the YB zone (Yisrael Beitenu).

Figure 5 Cumulative distribution of seats in Israel parliament. The median 60/61 line



Consider now the Condorcet winning party criterion. Here too Yisrael Beitenu is the winner. Against any party on the left it receives at least the votes of the centre-right coalition. In particular it receives more votes than Blue & White. Against any party on the right it receives at least the votes of the centre-left coalition. In particular it receives more votes than Likud.

Note that the reasoning in the previous paragraph makes the assumption that preferences are single-peaked along the continuum. The fact that the median voter winner criterion and the Condorcet winning party criterion give the same result is a consequence of the median voter theorem.

UK: the M distribution in two dimensions?

Here we look at the YouGov opinion poll results for UK parties for the three days ending on October 1, 2019. Figure x below shows the M-distribution for the parties along the familiar Left-Right dimension. The distribution is single-peaked although there is a faint trace of an M shape. Indeed most of the other polls do show Labour ahead of Lib Dems they give a weak M shape.

Currently in the UK, as well as the familiar left-right dimension, a second dimension has high salience: the Leave-Remain Brexit dimension. On this dimension the distribution has an M shape, albeit a weak one, with the difference between Labour and LibDem being small. On the Brexit dimension, Labour is the ‘squeezed middle’ – as John Curtice notes in the following section.

Figure 6 UK: the M-distribution? on the Left-Right dimension

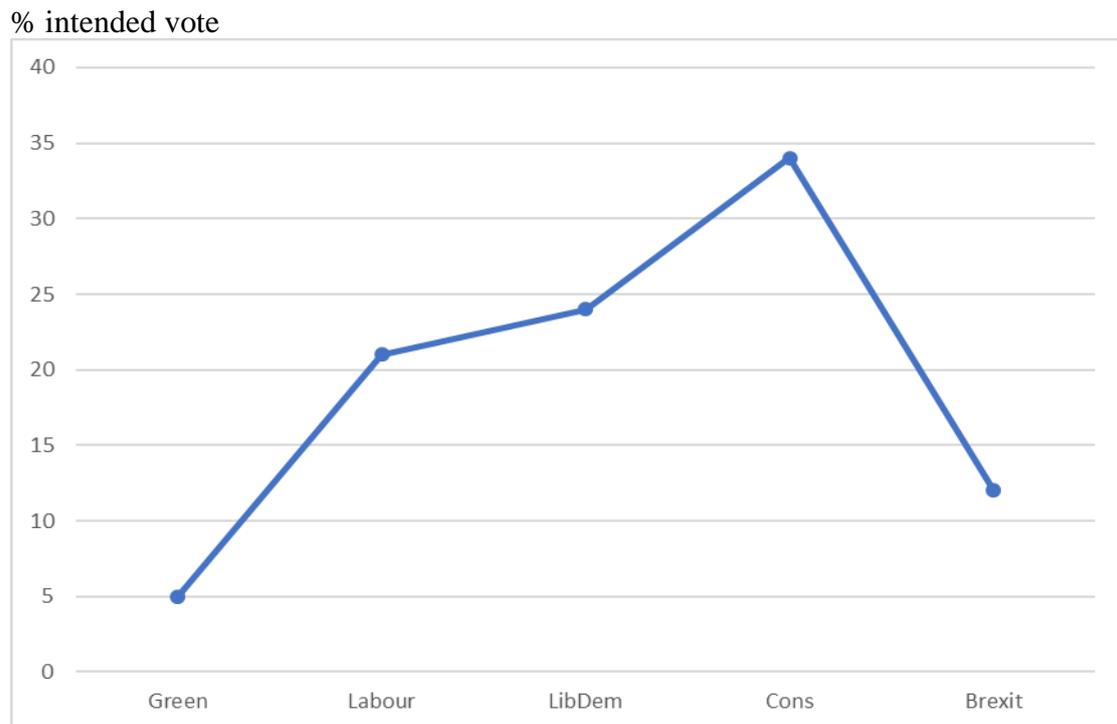
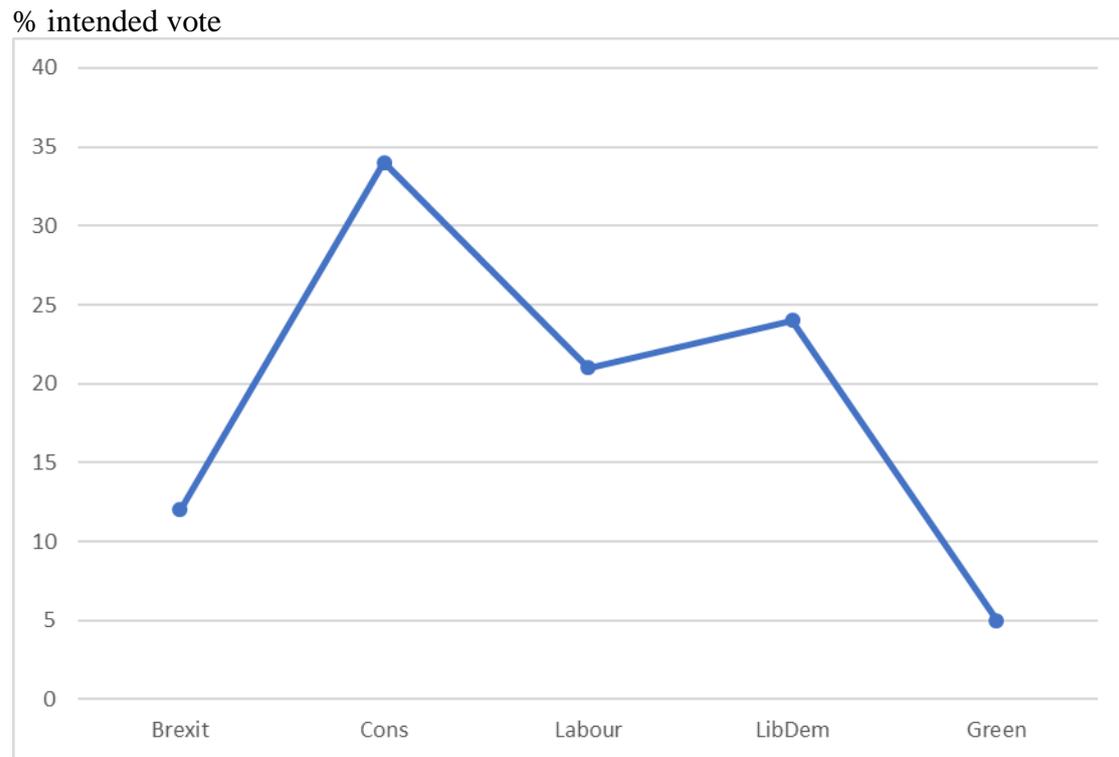


Figure 7 UK: the M-distribution on the Leave-Remain dimension



A compromise? ... how populated is the centre ground?

“Centre ground is not the way to win votes.”
Curtice, John. *The Times*, September 23, 2019: 7.

Earlier in the year, John Curtice noted that both Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn, were each pursuing policies in the centre ground (in relation to Brexit) of their respective parties. At that time, before the EU elections, their parties were doing not too badly in the opinion polls. Then there was the EU elections and a slump in popularity for both parties. Mrs May was replaced by a more extreme Brexit Boris Johnson and the Conservative vote partially recovered – albeit the Brexit Party is still a threat. The Labour party has stayed in (its) Brexit centre ground and their popularity has not increased. Curtice comments on Labour’s “insistence on seeking the centre ground of politics – but on an issue, Brexit, where that territory is thinly populated.” He adds: “all of his opponents have vacated the centre ground”.

The party’s policies

At the end of the Conservative party conference, Prime Minister Boris Johnson outlined his plan for Brexit. His plan involved a replacement of the Irish backstop with a rather more complicated arrangement. His presentation suggested it was a straightforward binary choice: his plan or No Deal. The previous week the Labour party had agreed that it would hold a referendum between an improved Labour plan and Remain. The Liberal Democrats had agreed to Revoke Article 40 and so Remain. Nigel Farage continued to advocate a clean break.

| | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------|
| No deal | Johnson's deal | May's Deal | soft deal | Remain |
| Brexit P. | Conservative |Labour.... | LibDem | |

Thus two parties are at either extreme and the other two parties are offering a binary choice. Boris Johnson's conservatives are offering the Johnson deal or no deal; and Jeremy Corbin's Labour party are offering a soft deal or Remain.

Brexit Interim Government ... the need for decisive procedures

Recent articles by Jenni Russell and Philip Collins and a Times editorial have referred to a cross-party group, a group leader, a compromise deal and an interim government. Russell envisages leaving with a deal without having to have a referendum. Collins envisages the need for a referendum.

My contribution to this discussion is to say that it may not be enough to propose simply one preferred option. There may need to be a decisive procedure to overcome the problem that 'there is no majority for anything'. A number of decisive procedures are available ... of which the Condorcet method has an intuitive appeal.

Here is what Russell, Collins and the Times editorial say. [To be provided].

Here's how I see things. Most MPs want to avoid a No Deal. Some want an election or a referendum or both. Meanwhile the Johnson government is seeking a new deal. 'Others' want the current parliament to approve a deal ... possibly a Johnson deal but only if it is not too hard ... but otherwise some other deal. Let these 'others' be 'Group X'.

Group X needs to decide on the deal it wants: 'Deal X'. It must get Deal X approved either under the existing government or, if that is not possible, under what might be called a Brexit Interim Government.

A Brexit Interim Government would come about by voting down the existing government. It would do just two things: put into effect Deal X; and then, when it has done this, call a general election.

Three choices need to be made:

Choose Deal X.

Choose an interim prime minister.

Gain parliamentary approval for Deal X.

It may be that parliamentary approval encounters a majority problem: deal X may not a majority. I assume the assumption is that there is a previous political discussion that builds up a majority. There is surely a concern though that that will not be enough ...

... instead I suggest that Group X adopts a decisive choice criterion – here I would suggest the Condorcet method: Deal X would be put in a pairwise tournament and the winner of the tournament would become government policy (maybe Deal X, maybe not). See next section.

It might help if Group X could demonstrate the Condorcet method by using the method in identifying its own preferred option Deal X – and indeed in its own choice of interim prime minister.

Russell, Jenni. “MPs must accept that nobody can win on Brexit. For the bitterness and paralysis to end, we need a solution where neither side feels vanquished. ... the lead set by Ken Clarke, Rory Stewart, Amber Rudd and David Gauke.” *The Times*, September 26, 2019: 32.

Collins, Philip. “Johnson’s folly gives rivals their best chance. The prime minister’s conduct has united his opponents behind a possible Brexit deal but only if Corbyn steps aside.” *The Times*, September 27, 2019: 29.

Editorial. “... In recent days a cross-party group of MPs led by Labour’s Stephen Kinnock, had been signalling its openness to supporting a new Brexit deal. ...” *The Times*, September 27, 2019: 33.

How parliament can solve Brexit: use a decisive procedure

Parliament is at an impasse because none of the proposed options would be able to obtain a majority in parliament. One approach to solving this problem is to identify a particular option and to hope that this will obtain majority support. An alternative approach is to abandon the majority criterion and adopt an alternative decisive procedure which is guaranteed to produce a winning option. In other words the impasse is to be solved not by identifying a majority option but by using a decisive procedure.

Parliament should use a procedure based on the study by Albert Weale of the UCL Constitution Unit, based on Condorcet voting.

<https://constitution-unit.com/2019/01/09/could-an-indicative-vote-break-the-brexite-logjam/#more-7424>

The aim is to identify that option which defeats all other options in pairwise competition. Two possible ways of doing this are:

(a) MPs are invited to register their ideal option for entry into the competition. MPs then rank the set of options in order of preference. The results are analysed to identify the option which defeats all the others in pairwise competition. Parliament agrees that the winning option is the one to be adopted by the government. This is the most straightforward approach.

(b) An alternative approach is to start with a putative winner and then have a sequence of pairwise votes against a sequence of challengers.

Example

Despite being defeated, Mrs May’s Deal is the option that has so far gained most votes in the House of Commons (arguably). So let us start by taking it as the initial putative winner.

As Albert Weale notes Mrs May argued that her deal was preferable to No Deal and preferable to Remain. This gives the first two contests.

Note: Mrs May's Deal here refers to the third one (the final one) that was voted on by the House of Commons:

1. May's Deal v. No Deal [voted against by parliament]
2. May's Deal v. Remain [note: the Lib Dem preference]

Stephen Kinnock has suggested that Mrs May's final version that was never put to the Commons is preferable

3. May's Deal v. Kinnock's May's Deal

Discussion have referred to 'Norway':

4. May's Deal v. Norway

... and 'Canada':

5. May's Deal v. Canada

The indicative votes in parliament in the spring offered a number of alternatives. Most votes went to Customs Union:

6. May's Deal v. Customs Union

Others were Malthouse, EFTA/EEA and Common Market

- 7-9. May's Deal v. each of the others in turn

Our new prime minister Boris Johnson and leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn both say that they can obtain a better deal.

10. May's Deal v. Boris Johnson's

11. May's Deal v. Jeremy Corbyn's

IF May's Deal defeats all the others then that is the Condorcet winner.

IF an option defeats May's Deal then that becomes the putative Condorcet winner and has to face challengers.

And so on.

Another example of Condorcet

Before the summer, a YouGov survey asked people to rank nine possible contenders for the Conservative leadership and presented the table of Condorcet all-play-all results:

See 'Head to Head Results' for 36 pairwise competitions on pages 8 to 11.

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/k0cbwax8xm/Results_190516_ConservativePartyMembers_1w.pdf

Decisive Brexit Voting Sheet

Below are listed some options for Brexit. Which do you prefer? Please rank them in order of preference: 1 for your best option, 2 for your second best option, 3 for your third best option, and so on ... Please make sure you give a ranking to all the options.

...

Brexit binary options

“Mr Johnson’s intention is to confront MPs with a binary choice of agreeing the revised deal or ensuring that Britain falls out of the EU without agreement at the end of the month.”

Elliott, Francis and Swinford, Steven. “Block Brexit delay, says Johnson. Prime Minister asks EU to rule out Article 50 extension. MPs face choice between deal or no deal this month.” *The Times*, October 1, 2019: 1.

Just as the joining of the European Union was a choice from two options so Brexit, the leaving of the EU, has been a process involving a number of decisions, each decision being a choice from two options: the 2016 referendum, the proposed second referendum, the various votes in parliament ... and now Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s.

The party conferences ...

The second half of September saw the annual conferences for the parties. Policies were discussed with a view to what might appear in their manifestos for the next general election. There was particular interest in party policies in relation to Brexit ...

Labour policy: a second referendum

The policy of some of opposition parties has been for some time to call for a second referendum. At its recent conference the Labour Party adopted a policy that they would hold a second referendum which had two options: Remain or a (renegotiated) Labour Leave Deal. Other advocates of a second referendum have suggested different options. A key question is:

Would Remain win a second referendum?

It depends on what is the other option. Remain would probably win against No Deal. It possibly would win against May’s Deal or a Johnson deal. But Remain is quite likely to lose against a Labour soft Brexit deal.

Some of the general issues raised by a second referendum are discussed in Appendix 1.

Labour leadership: Corbyn and Watson, 2015 and 2019

“Back Remain or be crushed at polls, Corbyn is warned.”
Swinford, Steven, Oliver Wright and Kate Devlin. *The Times*, September 23, 2019: 6-7.

“‘Planned and well-organised’: how the Brighton coup to oust Watson unfolded.”
Savage, Michael. *The Observer*, September 22, 2019: 6.

2019. There was turmoil in the Labour Party in the lead up to and during the party conference in September 2019. There was a questioning of Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership in view of low personal and low party ratings in opinion polls. There was also an attempt to oust Tom Watson from his post as deputy leadership.

2015. Both had been appointed to their respective roles in the summer of 2015. An analysis and discussion of the leadership elections at that time is given in: <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneDoxNzM4OGJlNzNiNzU1YTg>

LibDem Brexit policy: what the party wants? ... what society wants?

The Liberal Democratic Party Conference voted that if they won a majority at the next general election then on day one they would revoke Article 50. In other words the 2016 referendum vote to Leave would not be implemented - the UK would stay in the EU. This marks a change in party policy which hitherto had promised a referendum between Remain and some Leave alternative.

I now want to consider this policy and whether or not it is good for the party and good for society.

[In what follows I give quotations, 'PM', from a recent article by Polly Mackenzie, director of policy to Nick Clegg as deputy Prime Minister, 2010-2015.

"Playing dirty might serve the Liberals well, but someone needs to start building a consensus." *Daily Telegraph*, September 18, 2019: 4.

Also:

"The Lib Dems did not start this escalation of arms. They cannot be expected to sit on the sidelines of a shoot out, arguing it would be better to settle this with a cup of tea and an arbitration session."

https://twitter.com/pollymackenzie/status/1174024903827382273?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet

This is now the official party policy. But does everyone agree with it? Is it unanimous? Some of those at the conference, some party members and some party voters may have a different view. Are those with a different view willing to be tolerant and continue to support the party policy? Are those who do support the policy willing to be tolerant and continue to accept those with a different view? Is there mutual tolerance? Is the party a broad church?

Suppose now that the party wins the next election. Party policy becomes government policy. The argument of the previous paragraph follows but now in relation to all of the people, the whole of society. Does everyone agree or do some take a different view? Is there mutual tolerance?

PM refers to: "[the policy will] serve the party well ... but will it serve the country?"

Consider how the party relates to others – other individuals and other groups. Again the same argument applies: agreement or disagreement ... mutual tolerance?

Particularly in the case where there is disagreement, does the party policy occupy the centre ground? Is the party policy extremist or polarising (in relation to public opinion and in relation to this issue)?

In the case where there is disagreement is the party policy a unifying influence ... a bringing together?

PC refers to: "The party spent five years of coalition doing the honourable thing ... and was almost consigned to political history in 2015 for it."

What does a winner say? Are they magnanimous in victory?

[Margaret Thatcher said she would bring harmony ... Boris Johnson said he would unify.]

PM refers to: “ignores the legitimate claims of [the government’s] opponents ... winner-takes-all politics ... consent of the loser ... magnanimity of the winner.”

How much of a winner is the winner? What is the criterion for winning? Is it some kind of majority? Andrew Neil pointed out that a party might win with under 40% of the vote and yet overturn a referendum that had gained over 50%.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0008lkd/the-andrew-neil-show-series-1-18092019>

The new policy is a commitment, a promise. However it is a contingent promise – it is contingent on winning a majority. How likely is the contingency to occur? This is particularly relevant if the contingency has a low probability. Here it is highly unlikely that LibDems would gain a majority.

[In September they have been polling at between 16% and 20%. Post-conference: 24%]

Easy promises. Promises that are contingent on highly unlikely outcomes are easy to make in the sense that it is highly unlikely that they will be called upon.

Broken promises. In the 2010 general election the LibDems had a policy on fees for higher education. As a minority partner in the coalition with the Conservatives, the LibDems broke that promise and suffered an almost immediate halving of its voter support.

[Subsequently Daniel Finkelstein felt that Nick Clegg was to be praised because he had been persuaded that the alternative policy was a better one. Finkelstein was, it emerges, in weekly contact with David Cameron, taping interviews for Cameron’s future memoirs.]

What will the party do if the contingency does not arise?

We now consider what a modelling approach to policy/manifesto statements might look like. First it would specify the party’s value function. This would include a specification of its ideal preference. Thus: “Revoking Article 50 and Remaining in the EU is our ideal preference”. There would also be a specification of how the party valued other options: “the nearer an option is to Remain the more highly we value it and No Deal we place a very negative value on”. There would also be a statement about how decisions will be made: “when taking decisions we shall take our values about Brexit into account alongside other considerations including other values and constraints”.

PM refers to: “the most pure, uncompromising position ... the idea of dying in a ditch for your principles ... working out how to build a consensus ... bring the country back together ... care about the people who are not in the tribe as much as those who are.”

Political opponents have challenged this saying it is ‘undemocratic’ not to implement the 2016 referendum. The use of the word ‘democracy’ is discussed elsewhere. For the moment let us say that two opposing considerations are in play. Each consideration is the result of a national vote: the 2016 referendum and the result of the next general election. One vote is in the past, the other in a putative future. One vote concerns a single issue while the other concerns a whole range of issues.

PM suggests they would have a democratic right to do so if they won 350 seats.

For the people? ... by the people? It might be argued that policy may not be in accordance with public opinion (policy is not by the people) but it may be for the people in the people’s interest. For example perhaps in alignment with expert opinion.

All of this might usefully be placed within the context of a general account of the self and the other.

Parliament in anger

There were angry scenes in the House of Commons on 25 September 2019. Prime Minister Boris Johnson had hurried back from the UN to attend the first meeting of the resumption of the prorogued parliament. Proceedings were already under way and the atmosphere was already highly charged by the time he made his statement. Thereafter the atmosphere became even more highly charged with heated exchanges on all sides. This prompted widespread reaction amongst many people and groups in society and in the media. Here we report on the media reaction - a total of 70 headline comments over four days. Table 1 below provides the subsequent headlines in The Times, the Daily Telegraph and the Observer on the following four days.

First though, we note that at the beginning of September there had been a foretaste of what was to come:

“The anger in the Commons yesterday was something else. It wasn’t just political. It was personal. Steamingly, screamingly, personal. MPs flinging insults at one another is nothing new. But essentially it feels like a performance. Pantomime. Playing to the gallery. Not yesterday. This time, the hostility felt all too brutally real.”
Deacon, Michael. “The anger wasn’t just political it was personal.” *Daily Telegraph*, September 5, 2019: 2.
“The prime minister’s chief adviser launched a foul-mouthed tirade against Greg Clark [the former business secretary] ...”
Bennett, Owen and Mikhailova, Anna. “Tensions high after Cummings sabotages plan for compromise.” *Daily Telegraph*, September 5, 2019: 5.

Table 1 Subsequent headlines in the quality press

T, The Times; DT, Daily Telegraph; Ob, Observer. ‘1’ page number.

A total of 70 headline comments over four days: 7, 7; 16, 19; 7, 6; 8 lines

Thursday 26 September 2019

The Times

Commons hits boiling point. Bitter scenes as parliament returns. PM accused of using violent language. Deliver Brexit to stay safe, MPs, told. T1.

Insults fly across the floor as politics gets personal. T7.

This parliament is dead, says law chief as he defies critics. T8.

Cox accused of domestic violence ‘joke’. T8.

Verbal barrage from the flawed projector. T8.

... For the bitterness and paralysis to end, we need a solution where neither side feels vanquished. T32.

Daily Telegraph

‘Parliament must stand aside or face its day of reckoning’. Johnson accuses rivals of cowardice in refusing an election as Commons returns from prorogation. DT1.

Anger on benches of the ‘dead Parliament’. DT2.

What we are witnessing in Commons is a collective nervous breakdown. DT2.

MPs ‘living in fantasy world’ by hoping they can thwart Brexit. DT3.

The last thing we need is yet more mindless Remain windbagery. DT22.

Remainers have turned parliament into an anti-democratic monstrosity. DT22.

Friday 27 September 2019

The Times

‘Deliver Brexit or face riots’ Minister’s warning follows Commons uproar. Johnson calls for tempers to cool.

‘We’re enjoying this’, says PM’s top aide. T1.

118 bishops damn MP’s violent language. T1.

Divisive language harms chance of a deal, Tories warn Johnson. T6-7.
So many halos. It felt like stepping into the Book of Genesis. T7.
'My brother is using strongman tactics' T6.
'I'm scared Mum could be attacked.' T6.
Twitter abuse of MPs has doubled since start of year. T6-7.
'Noisiest MP' confronts Cummings. T8.
In my years covering parliament I cannot remember such hatred. ... these frustrated MPs see no end in sight. T9.
Polls show PM has a women problem. T9
... the prime minister's conduct ... T29.
... In contemplating the ugly scenes in Westminster this week ... 31
Unparliamentary language in the Commons. Letters (5) T32.
Bad language. Extreme rhetoric on all sides threatens to discredit parliament yet further while Boris Johnson's inflammatory language makes a Brexit deal less likely. Editorial, T33.

Cummings: what do MPs expect? Johnson's adviser says politicians who refuse to respect Brexit result should not complain of Commons rancour. ... situation can only be resolved by respecting Brexit result. 'All the Vote Leave team, we are enjoying this, we are going to win, we are going to leave, don't worry. DT1, 4.
MPs must not be bullied into curtailing their language, says PM. DT 4.
A rancidness is infecting debate and the rot is spreading – even as far as cosy Romsey. The mood was quieter but certainly not happier yesterday. Everyone looked on edge and badly slept. DT 4-5.
Battles on the Johnson home front. 'My brother Boris changes in the bully pulpit'. 'Cummings could be advising the PM to be extremely aggressive to secure his position as the tribune of the people.' 'My brother is using words like surrender and capitulation – I think that is highly reprehensible language to use. DT 4-5.
All politicians must show respect. 'When we disagree, we must get back to doing it respectfully. And that doesn't mean more censorship but better listening. DT5.
Boris is right: the only way to heal the rancour is to get Brexit done. The interminable waves of social media-amplified rage will not end until the debate is closed for good. T16.
Parliament's been a bear-pit since 1265. Honourable Members have been exchanging insults in the chamber since the days of Simon de Montfort. DT16.
Commons' reputation has sunk even lower. Trading insults is nothing new. What seem to make out this current period is the sheer vituperation.
Modern politicians seemingly no longer possess the rethorical skills their predecessors had. Editorial
Mud-slinging MPs do nothing to restore votes' faith in parliament. Letters (7), DT17.

Saturday 28 September 2019

The Times

Cummings is right to polarise the nation. Britain must choose either the route marked 'leave' or 'Remain' ... sitting down in the middle of the road is pointless. T25.
... If I can become as abusive as a politician and as brainlessly ambitious as an Apprentice wannabe, the sky's the limit ... The key to success is banging away really hard and shouting a lot ... T26.
For Brexit tribalists, there is no compromise. Elements of Leave and Remain are becoming so intransigent that it's no wonder there's talk of violence in the air. T27.
Toxic exchanges in parliament over Brexit. Letters (4), T28.

Daily Telegraph

I get racist abuse all the time – what Boris said is not in the same sphere. DT 6.
A nation in crisis needs leadership and vision, and Mrs Thatcher provided both. She succeeded thanks to an 'angry will' and hard thinking, a lesson our leaders should learn today. DT26.
Shutting down our freedom of speech. ... There is a tendency on the Left to view speech itself as harmful, the source of micro-aggressions'. Editorial, DT 27.
Remainers are demonising reasonable language to smear opponents. Letters (8), DT 27.

Sunday 29 October

The Observer

PM 'whipping up riot fears to avoid Brexit extension'. Ob 1, 2.
Barnier: PM's Behaviour has 'limited the chance' of a deal. Ob 7.
Bercow calls party leaders to peace talks. Ob 7.
In Westminster, MPs felt the Brexit fury. At home they see the hate rising. Ob 8,
Parents 'using teachers as Brexit punchbags. Ob 14.
We are seeing more violence at school, more confrontation. Ob 45.
Boris Johnson seeks to divide and conquer with his incendiary rhetoric. Ob 51.
Violent rhetoric is dangerous. Ob 56.

Brexit: the business section

What does the Governor of the Bank of England think of Brexit? It depends on to whom you are referring to. In February 2019 Mark Carney warned about the dangers of a No Deal. His predecessor Mervyn King however was critical of Mrs May's Deal and in March 2019 suggested a prepared No Deal.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2019/feb/07/bank-of-england-brexit-interest-rates-mark-carney-business-live>;
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/mar/29/uk-should-leave-eu-with-no-deal-says-former-bank-of-england-governor>;

The business section of newspapers regularly contains articles on Brexit. Opinions here too can be diverse.

“Once out of the EU, would we want to rejoin it? That is the acid test.”
Bootle, Roger. *The Daily Telegraph, Business*, September 23, 2019: 2.

“The central premise of Brexit – that Europe was falling apart – was wrong.”
Nixon, Simon. *The Times*, September 26: 47.

A coordination game for the family: reaching agreement

The people are impatient at politicians for taking so long and still never reaching agreement on Brexit. But perhaps it is the case that it just takes time for a group of people to reach agreement? I thought up a simple coordination game which illustrates this.

Case 1

When the family came up at the weekend I thought I would try it out. I was the organiser and Granny Catherine, son-in-law Carsten, and grandchildren Kaia 7, Rosa 5 and Rory 4 all took part.

“The game is simple. You all have a pencil and a sheet of paper. The aim of the game is for us all to write down the same number. We shall have a number of goes at this and we shall keep trying until we succeed. No talking unless I ask you.

The first step is to write down a number between 1 and 9. No talking. Have you all done this? All right, now each of you tell us what number you wrote down.

The numbers are different. So let us have a second round. Remember the aim of the game is for us all to write down the same number. The number you write down now can be the same or different from the number you wrote down before.

The second step is to write down a number between 1 and 9. ...

And so on ...”

The table below gives the results for each of the seven rounds. By rounds 6 and 7 four people had the same number and one had a different number. The adults were mindful

of the aim of the game and perhaps Rosa was too. About halfway through Carsten noticed and announced that Rory was following his own pattern – and this was then followed by Carsten and Catherine also – and later by Rosa. Rory confounded everybody in the last round by breaking his own patten. Kaia meanwhile stuck steadfastly to the same number 7 – was she deciding that everybody would follow her?

Table 4 The coordination game, Case 1 results

| . | Rosa | Carsten | Rory | Kaia | Catherine | |
|------|------|---------|------|------|-----------|------------------|
| Step | | | | | | |
| 1 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 9 | |
| 2 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 8 | two 7s |
| 3 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 3 | two 7s; two 3s |
| 4 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 3 | two 7s; two 4s |
| 5 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 5 | two 7s; three 5s |
| 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 6 | one 7s; four 6s |
| 7 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 7 | four 7s; one 9 |

Case 2

Catherine and I showed our grandson Callum (15) what his cousins had done. The three of us then had a go. With just three people it’s not too difficult. It took us three rounds.

Table 5 The coordination game, Case 2 results

| . | Callum | Gordon | Catherine | |
|------|--------|--------|-----------|----------|
| Step | | | | |
| 1 | 6 | 7 | 9 | |
| 2 | 8 | 6 | 6 | two 6s |
| 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | three 6s |

CRS 2019, Conflict in a Post-Liberal World: a personal selection

<https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburtmathsocsci/crs-2019>

Books

Amaral, Joanna. *Making Peace with Referendums. Cyprus and Northern Ireland*. Syracuse University Press, 2019.

Referendums have become an undeniably important, and perhaps inescapable, peacemaking tool in contemporary peace processes. As such, understanding the ways in which referendum outcomes are shaped by peace negotiations is vital. Drawing upon two case studies, Amaral presents an empirically rich comparative analysis of the Annan Plan in Cyprus and the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. She examines the negotiations, offering new interview material with key political and civil

figures involved in the peace negotiations and referendum campaigns in both cases. Amaral argues that referendums are unsuitable for traditional secretive and exclusionist peace negotiations that fail to engage and educate the public. They rather require inclusive negotiations that involve a broad spectrum of political stakeholders and civil society at the early stages of the process. This peacemaking approach can allow referendums to positively shape societies in conflict and be a crucial step toward lasting peace.

<https://press.syr.edu/supressbooks/110/making-peace-with-referendums/>

Emerson, Peter. *Majority Voting as a Catalyst of Populism. Preferential Decision-making for an Inclusive Democracy*. Springer: 2019.

This timely book presents a critique of binary majority rule and provides insights into why, in many instances, the outcome of a two-option ballot does not accurately reflect the will of the people. Based on the author's first-hand experience, majority-voting is argued to be a catalyst of populism and its divisive outcomes have prompted countless disputes throughout Europe and Asia. In like manner, simple majority rule is seen as a cause of conflict in war zones, and of dysfunction in so-called stable democracies. In order to safeguard democracy, an all-party power-sharing approach is proposed, which would make populism less attractive to voters and governments alike. In geographically arranged chapters, well-tested alternative voting procedures (e. g. non-majoritarian Modified Borda Count) are presented in case studies of Northern Ireland, Central Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Russia, China, North Korea and Mongolia.

Websites and contact

Brexit:

<https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburmathsocsci/central>

Brexit barometer:

<https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburmathsocsci/World-Society-Programme/brexit-and-uk-politics/brexit-countdown-daily-diary-issues-and-models>

All my writings:

<https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburmathsocsci/all>

Email:

Gordonjbert@gmail.com

Appendix **Some of the general issues raised by a second referendum**

[extract from *Brexit and the Majority Problem*, Tenth draft, 2 October 2019]

4.11 The options offered in a referendum ... the median voter

[updated 2 October 2019]

The suggestion of a second referendum prompts discussion about what the options should be: how many options there should be; and what content these options should have. The number and nature of the options chosen affect the outcome.

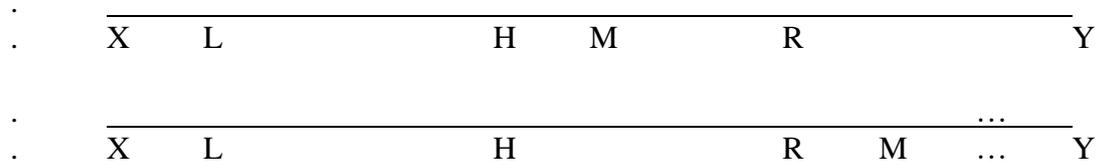
Clearly, the outcome will be one of the options on offer and certainly not one of the options not on offer!

Consider the set of all possible options. Suppose it forms a one-dimensional policy space. Suppose the ideal options of the voters are distributed along the line. Let the median of this distribution be M – this is the location of the median voter.

Here we consider only the case of a referendum which offers the voters just two options. There are criticisms of referenda which have just two options but despite these criticisms, the two-options case appears to be more usual. The situation where there are more than two options is more complicated.

Let the two options be L and R. Let the half-way point between L and R be H. There are two basic cases: the median M is between L and R (the usual case perhaps?); or the median M is outside the LR interval.

Figure 8 The two cases: M is between L and R; or M is outside the LR interval.



Suppose each voter votes for the option that is closer to their ideal position. This is quite a strong assumption, but even when it is not true for all voters it may be true approximately, or true with a random error.

Suppose the winning option is the option which obtains a majority of votes.

Result 1

The winning option is the option which is closer to the median voter M.

In Figure x above M is closer to R than to L.

In what follows ‘XH’ denotes the percentage of voters within the interval XH. Etc. The vote for L is XH and the vote for R is HY (because voters vote for the closest option).

$$HY = HM + MY$$

$$MY = 50\% \text{ (because M is the median)}$$

$$HY > 50\%$$

(assuming MY>0%; otherwise MY=0% and HY=50%; and there is a tie between L and R)

HM is the majority winning option.

The suboptimality of a set of two options is the distance of the nearest option from the median voter option. Optimality is when that distance is zero.

Result 2

The median voter option is the winning option against every other possible option. For the set of all options, the median voter option is the Condorcet winner.

A set of two options is optimal if and only if one of the options is the median voter option.

Result 3

Placing one of the options.

Given a fixed location for option L, then if option R is placed closer to the median M than L is, then R will win.

Result 4

Placing both options.

If option R is placed closer to the median than L is, then R will win.