Measuring parliamentary deviation

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Abstract. Deviation between party seat shares and party expected power in parliamentary winning coalitions is measured with a new formula. In analogy with electoral deviation, in which proportions of votes and proportions of seats for each party are compared, proportions of seats and the proportions of influence in parliamentary majorities for each party are compared. A new parliamentary power index, which can be applied to different criteria in coalition formation, is used for this purpose. Formal trends of parliamentary disproportionality are presented. An empirical application for real elections in the period 1972–1993 in five European countries with parliamentary regimes shows a positive correlation between electoral deviation and parliamentary deviation.

Introduction

In a representative democracy many collective decisions are made away from voters. There are at least two relevant stages that introduce distance between the expression of voters’ preferences and the institutional, enforceable collective choice. One is the electoral allocation of parliamentary seats on the basis of votes cast; another is the post-electoral formation of parliamentary majorities and governments. In presidential systems different elections for the legislature and the executive may give political power to different party majorities. This creates favourable conditions either for members of different majorities to share power, or for political conflict and deadlock. In parliamentary regimes legislative majorities tend to coincide with governmental support. However, parliamentary majorities formed with only a subset of the parliamentary parties increase to some extent the difference between voters’ preferences and the eventual collective choice.

Focusing on parliamentary regimes I will try to measure the deviation created in the second step, the formation of parliamentary majorities. A new post-electoral, parliamentary disproportionality index will be presented for that purpose. A series of formal calculations and an empirical test of the values of this index in several parliamentary countries will aid us in understanding certain trends in the ‘post-electoral’ process, as well as its relationship to the previous, ‘electoral’ process of parliament formation.
Measuring coalition deviation

Electoral deviation from proportionality has been measured with several indices, in which proportions of votes and proportions of seats for each party are compared (for discussion of several disproportionality indices, see Lijphart 1985, 1986, 1994; Taagepera & Shugart 1989; Gallagher 1991). In particular, the most standard mathematical measure of inequality or dissimilarity that has been applied to this subject is an index of electoral disproportionality developed by Loosemore & Hanby (1971), and widely used since then. This index parallels standard measurements in other fields of applied mathematics, correlates very strongly with other indices of electoral deviation (according to Gallagher 1991: 50), and has found wide acceptance in empirical calculations. Its formula is equal to the sum of the absolute values of all differences between the parties’ vote and seat shares, divided by 2:

\[ ED = \frac{1}{2} \sum |v_i - s_i| \]  

(1)

where ED is electoral disproportionality (if percentages are used for measuring vote and seat shares, then \( 0 = ED \leq 100 \)); \( v_i \) is the vote percentage of party \( i \); and \( s_i \) is the seat percentage of party \( i \).

I propose to compare in an analogous way the differences between the proportions of seats and the proportionate influence in parliamentary majorities of each party. However, while there are legal, formal rules to allocate seats from votes, usually called electoral formulae, there are not corresponding mechanical rules for the composition of parliamentary majorities. For this reason, we will rely upon the informal rules or political criteria used by parties when they choose their partners in the process of forming parliamentary coalitions. In this way we will approach the expected distribution of political influence among parliamentary parties on the basis of a given distribution of seats.

Coalition criteria

Except in parliaments where one party has an absolute majority of seats and tends to form a single-party government – a situation relatively frequent under plurality electoral rule – parties typically face parliamentary distributions of seats in which there are several possible majority or winning coalitions (WC). According to the political criteria used by parties for choosing partners, only some of these WC can be considered ‘viable’.

Several party criteria used in forming parliamentarian coalitions have been formalized. In particular, it has been assumed that office-seeking parties use some criterion of ‘size’, such as which leads them to form minimal winning coalitions (MWC) – coalitions in which no superfluous partner is included. It has also been assumed that more policy-seeking parties use some ‘policy-ideological’ criterion, such as which leads them to form minimal connected winning coalitions (MCWC) – coalitions between parties that are adjacent in one-dimensional policy space. These two criteria, MWC and MCWC, have proved to perform relatively well for explaining the actual formation of coalition governments in parliamentary regimes after the Second World War (Taylor and Laver 1973; De Swaan 1973; Browne 1973; summarized and updated by Franklin & Mackie 1984: 671–692; Lijphart 1984: 51–52; Laver & Schofield 1990: 89ff.). Policy party motives have also proven relevant for explaining the formation of viable minority governments (Strom 1990).

Focusing on parliamentary coalitions, it may be stated that if a majority coalition backs a minority government then its partners have legislative and policy powers (especially agenda setting power and power to amend and contribute to the approval of bills). If the legislative majority coincides with the government’s party-composition, then we can rely upon considerable empirical evidence to expect that governmental offices will also be allocated quite proportionally to each party’s seat contribution to the coalition (Browne & Franklin 1973; Browne & Freidreis 1980; Schofield & Laver 1985). It therefore seems reasonable to use the formal coalition criteria mentioned above to model the formation of parliamentary majorities, either if they correspond to the composition of majority governments or if they are only legislative majorities compatible with policy-viable minority governments.

Parties’ power index

Different power indices have been proposed for measuring the likelihood that a party will be a partner in a winning coalition. Each of them corresponds to different criteria in coalition formation, such as those mentioned above. Specifically, if it is assumed that only MWCs are viable, and that all the MWCs are equally probable, a rough power index of party \( i \) would be equal to the proportion of the MWCs to which \( i \) can belong. If it is alternatively assumed that only MCWCs are viable, and that all the MCWCs are equally probable, a similar power index of party \( i \) would be equal to the proportion of the MCWCs to which \( i \) can belong. (For definitions of the power indices that are relevant to this problem, their comparison and characteristics, see Banzhaf 1965; Brams 1975; Straffin 1978; Deegan & Pakel 1982.)

However, as I have discussed and explained elsewhere, it is possible to refine these indices not just to estimate the likelihood of a party being a partner in a winning coalition but also to measure the expected power of a party within a coalition. This proposal is based on the assumption that, other relevant things being equal, the internal distribution of power in a winning coalition is more rewarding for a party if it is in partnership with a small party than if it is in partnership with a bigger party.

Therefore, I estimate the parliamentary power of a party based not only on its likelihood of being a partner in a winning coalition, as the usual power indices do, but on its expected influence within the coalition to which it belongs, which is assumed to be proportional to its contribution to the
membership of these coalitions. This leads us to use a new ‘power index’, which has previously been presented and applied (Colomer & Martínez 1995). For a given party the index of parliamentary power equals the proportion of seats controlled by that party out of the total number of seats controlled by parties in all viable WCs. I formulate this as follows:

\[ \psi_i = \% \text{ of party } i \text{ legislators in the total of legislators in parties belonging to all viable WCs} \]  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where \( \psi_i \) is the power index in parliament of party \( i \) \((0 \leq D \leq 100)\); and viable WCs is the winning coalitions according to the criterion used by parties, for example MWCs or MCWCs.

Imagine, for example, a parliament in which three parties A, B, C are ordered on a policy dimension, ABC, and have, respectively, 45, 25 and 30 seats. If the viability criterion is coalitions must be minimal connected winning, then two such coalitions are available – AB and BC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats:</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viable coalitions: AB, BC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parliamentary power index of each party can be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party members in WCs</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viable coalitions (WCs):</td>
<td>AB</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total party members in WCs:</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party power index:</td>
<td>45/125</td>
<td>50/125</td>
<td>30/125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parliamentary deviation

Now it is possible to compare seats and post-electoral, parliamentary power in the same way as the standard Loosmore–Hanby electoral disproportionality index compares votes and seats in formula (1).

I thus present a new ‘parliamentary disproportionality index’ which equals the sum of the absolute values of differences between the proportions of seats and the proportion of power in parliamentary majorities for each party, divided by 2. Its formula is as follows:

\[ PD = \frac{1}{2} \sum |s_i - \psi_i| \]  \hspace{1cm} (3)

where \( PD \) is the parliamentary deviation \((0 \leq PD \leq 100)\); \( s_i \) is the seat percentage of party \( i \); and \( \psi_i \) is the power index in parliament of party \( i \), according to formula (2).

Following the same approach, it is also possible to calculate parliamentary advantage and disadvantage rates for each party. Inspiration also comes in this case from the electoral indices which compare the proportion of votes and the proportion of seats for a party, such as the ‘index of advantage’ proposed by Dahl (1956) and, more specifically, the ‘advantage ratio’ presented by Taagepera and Shugart (1989), in which

\[ A = \frac{s}{v} \]  \hspace{1cm} (4)

where \( A \) is the advantage ratio of a party; \( s \) is the proportion of seats of that party; and \( v \) is the proportion of votes of that party.

In our analogous case, the parliamentary advantage ratio is formulated as follows:

\[ PA = \frac{\psi}{s} \]  \hspace{1cm} (5)

where \( PA \) is the parliamentary advantage ratio of a party; \( \psi \) is the power index in parliament of that party, according to formula (2); and \( s \) is the proportion of seats of that party.

The extreme values of the parliamentary disproportionality index (3) would correspond to the following situations.

On the one hand, \( PD = 0 \) implies that each party in a parliament can expect a proportion of parliamentarian influence equal to its proportion of seats, a situation which would approximate either ‘national concentration’ governments, such as those that may be found during some wars and in some constituent processes. The advantage ratios of parties in these situations would be unity. Certain assembly regimes come close to this (for example, in Switzerland the Federal Council as well as the cantonal executives are composed of members of the four larger parties in proportion to their electoral strength, and the presidency is allocated by periodical rotation, which is not far from our ideal situation).

On the other hand, \( PD = 100 \) implies that a party with no parliamentary seats holds all the legislative and executive powers. The advantage ratio

As can be seen, this index captures the relative advantage of a centrally-located party when parties tend to form only minimal connected winning coalitions. Specifically, the intermediate or ‘centrist’ party B has more opportunities to be a partner in a viable winning coalition than the extreme parties and therefore has higher expected power than its share of seats (40 percent compared with 25 percent).

Using this index it is possible to estimate the expected influence of parliamentary parties in the formation of political majorities from a given distribution of seats, even if there are no mechanical rules to form such parliamentary majorities or to allocate governmental offices from seats.
would be equal to 100 for a party having one percent of seats and 100 percent of power. In the framework of parliamentary regimes, this situation would only be conceivable as a result of a political crisis which induces the parliament to transfer its powers to a non-parliamentary government, such as happened, for example, during the IV French Republic in the ‘soft’ coup d’état of General de Gaulle in 1958.

Obviously the distribution of power in most real parliaments is somewhere in between the rather extreme cases of the Swiss-style assembly and the Gaullist-style parliament voting an extra-parliamentary government. Some basic trends in the values of the parliamentary disproportionality index and the advantage ratios of each party will be assessed below by way of several formal and empirical applications.

**Formal trends of parliamentary disproportionality**

Values of the power index, the advantage ratio and the parliamentary disproportionality index for a series of situations with different distributions of seats among parties, and different party motives in forming coalitions, are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. In the situations with a single-party majority, different proportions of seats have been given to the majority party (Table 1). In the situations in which no party has an absolute majority of seats, different proportions of seats have been given to the small party. For every proportion of seats for the small party, the other parties have been given both equal proportions and unequal proportions of seats (Tables 2 and 3). Although we deal with a limited sample of hypothetical situations, these calculations allow us to present some significant relationships among the variables considered.

Table 1 shows simple situations in which a party has an absolute majority of seats. Party positions and motives are not relevant in this assumption since, if parties tend to form either MWCs or MCWCs, in all of the cases the single viable WC is formed only by the majority party.

In fact, the disproportionality index in these cases is equal to the difference between 100 percent and the proportion of seats of the majority party. In other words, it equals the loss of power by minority parties. The advantage ratio of the majority party equals to 100 – its parliamentary power – divided by its proportion of seats. Both the values of the advantage ratio and the parliamentary disproportionality index are thus higher, the smaller the majority party, independently of its position in the policy space and the relative weight of the minority party.

Table 2 shows situations in which no party has an absolute majority of seats and parties tend to form MWCs (that is, parties do not care about their relative policy-ideological distance and are ready to coalesce with any other necessary party to form a numerical majority). As can be seen, the smaller party or parties are always advantaged in parliamentary bargaining. The relative advantage of the small party’s bargaining power in relation to its proportion of seats is higher the smaller the party. In contrast, the larger party is always relatively disadvantaged in the parliamentary bargaining. Apparently this disadvantage is greater the higher the difference between the party seat share and that of the second party.

Regarding the values of the disproportionality index, the clearest thing that can be said is that they are relatively low in comparison with the values found in other sets of situations. In fact, the criterion of ideologically non-restricted coalition formation gives all parties with a proportion of seats above a given threshold the opportunity to be a partner in a winning coalition. The expected power for each party, derived from its partnership to an usually large set of MWCs, could then be considered relatively close to the effects
of the rotation rule in an assembly regime, which have previously been mentioned as an example of maximum proportionality between seats and councillor power for each party.

Finally, Table 3 shows situations in which no party has an absolute majority of seats, and parties tend to form MCWCs (that is, winning coalitions with the minimum size necessary to maintain ideological connectedness among their members). Parties are ordered in a single dimension, from A to B to C, in order to apply the ideological criterion. In the assumption of three-party systems, it is thus possible to distinguish between the ‘centrist’ party, B, and the ‘extreme’ parties, A and C. In systems with a higher number of parties, however, the distinction should be made between ‘pivotal’ and ‘non-pivotal’ parties or groups of parties, depending on whether a party does or does not have the possibility to form coalitions with parties located both at its left and at its right. I will use this distinction in the empirical analysis presented in the third section of this paper.

As can be seen, the centrist party is always relatively advantaged in parliamentary bargaining in these situations. The relative advantage of the centrist party’s bargaining power in relation to its proportion of seats is higher the smaller the party. In contrast, the extreme parties are always relatively disadvantaged in parliamentary bargaining, independent of their own seat-share.

The values of the parliamentary disproportionality index increase with the seat share of the centrist party (and obviously decrease with the joint seat-share of the extreme parties).

It may be concluded that parliamentary deviation is relatively high when the parliamentary majority is in the hands of a single-party, that is when there is no power-sharing among parties at all. If a single-party majority exists then lower disproportionality is attained the larger this majority, since in fact a large majority is an indirect way of power-sharing among representatives of relatively varied voters.

If there is no single-party majority but parties limit themselves to choosing partners only among ideological neighbours, then disproportionality is intermediate. If there is a centrist party which is in fact less limited in choosing partners than the other parties, because it is pivotal with partners at its left and at its right, then disproportionality increases with its share.

Parliamentary deviation is relatively lower when minority parties do not limit themselves when choosing partners to form majority coalitions and they are ready to coalesce with any other party in parliament. Then a large number of possible political combinations is produced and expectations to share power are distributed among a varied range of parties.

It is interesting to observe that strong ideological coherence of a parliamentary majority correlates with high parliamentary deviation. As can be seen in Tables 1, 2 and 3, the values of parliamentary disproportionality index are high when a single party has an absolute majority of seats and thus it can implement its own platform; they are intermediate when parties form minimal connected winning coalitions—that is, they care about ideology; and they are low when they form minimal winning coalitions – and do not care about ideology but only about size.

Some of these inferences will be tested with real examples, which will also allow us to compare post-electoral, parliamentary deviation with electoral deviation between votes and allocation of seats.

### Empirical test

Values of the parliamentary disproportionality index for real elections in the period 1972–1993 in Britain, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and West Germany (1972–1987) are presented in Table 4. This set of countries is chosen because all of them have parliamentary regimes, but also varied electoral systems and party systems, which can be expected to produce both extreme and intermediate values in our calculations. This sample of countries seems also appropriate to illustrate the differences between ‘majoritarian’ and ‘pluralistic’ forms of government.

In order to list all the minimal connected winning coalitions, it has been necessary to identify party orderings in policy space. Therefore I have distinguished six ordinal clusters in a single-dimensional space, which might be labelled extreme left, left, centre-left, centre-right, right, and extreme right, without much loss of precision. Observe that I do not give any particular value to each cluster nor to the ideological distance between adjacent parties, since I am only trying to ascertain relative, ordinal positions among parties of each country. In this way I derived the orderings presented in Table 5. These are ordinarily compatible with the slightly varying cardinal values based on several opinion polls and expert judgments published throughout.
Table 4. Parliamentary deviation in elections (MCWC criterion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Ideological connectedness among parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extreme left</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Liberals</th>
<th>Conserv.</th>
<th>Extreme right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>PCI/PDS</td>
<td>PSI, Rad</td>
<td>PSD, PRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>PCE/ IU</td>
<td>PSE, PSP</td>
<td>UCD, CDS</td>
<td>AP, PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>UPC</td>
<td>EE</td>
<td>PNV, ERC,CA, AI, PA</td>
<td>D66, DS70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The second country in our sample with higher levels of parliamentary disproportionality – quite close to Britain – is Spain, where a restrictive electoral system (small district magnitude; and D'Hondt formula) has manufactured three single-party majorities in six elections.

In third position we find both Italy and the Netherlands, two ‘pluralist’ regimes with proportional representation (PR) and multi-systems where no single-party absolute majority has been produced in the period considered. A common feature of these two countries is that the largest party (or the second largest in some Dutch elections), the Christian Democrats in both cases, is a centrist party which benefits from its pivotal position, thus introducing a relatively high level of parliamentary deviation for situations without a single-party majority.

Finally, the most proportional results are found in Germany, also a pluralist regime with PR where no party has obtained an absolute majority of seats. In this case, although the centrist party (the Liberals) benefits in its parliamentary power from its pivotal position, it is always a small party, thus introducing a low level of parliamentary deviation.

The basic trends in the index of parliamentary disproportionality found in the formal analysis are thus confirmed in the empirical elaboration. According to expectations, the highest level of parliamentary deviation is found in the parliament with the smallest single-party majority in the sample (50.2 percent of seats for the British Labour in 1974), while the lowest level of parliamentary deviation is found in a parliament in which the centrist, pivotal and advantaged party obtained its lowest results (the German Liberals, with 5.4 percent of seats in 1983).

A further finding of the empirical analysis – which would be difficult to find in formal terms – is a strong correlation between electoral deviation and parliamentary deviation (according to the respective values of the Loosemore–Hanby index and of my index as presented in formula (3)). As can be seen in the bottom row of Table 4, the ordering of the average-country values is the same for both indices: Britain, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany, ordered from higher to lower disproportionalities. Table 6 summarizes the values of the indices of electoral disproportionality and parliamentary disproportionality found in election by election calculations. These suggest that, when the allocation of parliamentary seats from votes to parties introduces a relatively high bias, the bias introduced by the subsequent parliamentary bargaining among parties can also be expected to be relatively high.

It seems possible to articulate a rather simple explanation for this striking result. It is widely known from many studies that all electoral systems introduce some degree of disproportionality between proportions of votes and
proportions of seats, always in favour of the larger parties. Our measurement of the relative bargaining power of each party in a parliament has found that, when parties keep their ideological links to form majority coalitions, the centrist, pivotal party is advantaged and, as a consequence, the parliamentary deviation is higher the larger the centrist party. If the larger parties are rather centrist and pivotal, or if there is a two-party system with a one-party majority, the bias introduced by the first institutional stage feeds the second one: the electoral step tends to favour the larger parties and, if these are pivotal, then the post-electoral, parliamentary step tends to favour them again. Some parties – large and pivotal – thus receive a double advantage, to the double detriment of the rest. Consequently, the higher the first, electoral deviation from the voters’ preferences, the higher the second, parliamentary one also tends to be.

As a result, extreme deviations between votes and parliamentary power of parties are likely to be found in countries with a restrictive electoral system, two large parties, and a parliamentary regime, such as ‘majoritarian’ Britain. In a typical situation, the electoral system manufactures a single-party majority of seats from a minority of votes, and then the parliamentarian majority party – which is always pivotal – forms a single-party government depriving all the other parties (which in fact have received a majority of votes) of all their parliamentary power.

The global effects of the two stages of decision-making may be evaluated in a more precise way by comparing proportions of votes and parliamentary power for each party. In an analogy with formulas (1) and (3), we obtain the corresponding formula of what can be called the ‘total deviation’ or ‘total disproportionality’ index which equals the sum of the absolute values of differences between proportion of votes and parliamentary power for each party, divided by 2. It can be formulated as follows:

$$TD = \frac{1}{2} \sum |v_i - \psi_i|$$  (6)

where $TD$ is the total deviation ($0 \leq TD \leq 100$); $v_i$ is the vote percentage of party $i$; and $\psi_i$ is the power index of party $i$ in parliament, according to formula (2).

Results can be found at the righthand column of Table 6 headed ‘total deviation’. As can be seen, the ordering from higher to lower values is consistent with the results of the two other indices previously presented in our test, from Britain to Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany. It can be observed that the absolute values of the total deviation index, although they are higher than any of the other indices, are not equal to but lower than the sum of the electoral deviation plus the parliamentary deviation values. This is obviously due to the fact that although the two stages introduce accumulative deviation in favour of large, pivotal parties they counterweight each other to some extent: large, non-pivotal parties benefit from electoral rules (for being large) but are at a disadvantage in parliamentary bargains (for being non-pivotal), while small, pivotal parties experience the opposite biases.

**Conclusion**

The deviation between the electoral expression of voters’ preferences and the institutional expression of this in a parliamentary coalition has been approached by an ‘index of parliamentary disproportionality’ which compares proportion of seats and parliamentary power for each party. Assuming different party motives in forming winning coalitions, it has been possible to estimate the bargaining power of each party in parliament from a given distribution of seats in spite of the absence of formal, mechanical rules to form such parliamentary majorities.

Both the formal analysis of the parliamentary disproportionality index for different distributions of seats among parties and the empirical elaboration with several country cases have shown increasing values of parliamentary disproportionality in the following situations:

1. When parties are not ideologically restricted from forming coalitions. This non-restrictive criterion produces low levels of disproportionality because it widely distributes the opportunities to be a partner in a winning coalition among parties.

2. When parties restrict themselves to forming coalitions only with ideological neighbour partners. In this case disproportionality is greater the larger the centrist, pivotal party. This is the result of that party’s advantage in bargaining as induced by its central position.

3. When a single-party has an absolute majority of seats. In this case disproportionality is greater the smaller this majority. At the extreme, a minimal single-party majority – a rather common feature in ‘majoritarian’ regimes and probably the most preferred situation for most parties – thus produce the highest levels of disproportionality in a parliament.

Electoral deviation has been found to correlate positively with parliamentary deviation. Therefore, those countries in which the electoral systems produce high levels of disproportionality in the allocation of seats in relation to the proportions of votes for each party are also likely to experience a high level of post-electoral disproportionality in the parliamentary process. According to this finding, it is possible to state that the two mentioned basic
steps in the process of decision-making produce self-reinforcing differences between voters’ preferences and the collective, institutional choice.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to Patrick Dunleavy for his encouragement and suggestions on a previous draft of this paper.

Note

1. I only know of one previous attempt to approach this subject – an article by Peter J. Taylor & Arend Lijphart (1985) which was presented as an invitation to ‘a new debate.’ Although the Taylor and Lijphart article contains suggestive insights, there are significant differences between their approach and my present proposal:

First of all, Taylor and Lijphart were concerned with normative purposes – ‘proportional tenure’ – rather than with positive or explanatory aims.

Second, their analysis was strictly empirical and based on average values for a set of countries, while I present both a formal analysis of general trends of the post-electoral deviation for different party motives in forming coalitions, and for different distributions of seats, as well as an empirical test of these general trends. Although my test deals with a rather small sample of countries, it not only takes into account their average values but their election by election results.

Third, and most important, Taylor and Lijphart compared the proportion of votes and the duration of ‘partnership’ to government for each party, independent of the number and the importance of the portfolios held by the party. They rightly noted that their formula ‘may be criticized for overestimating the importance of small parties in coalition government’ (p. 389), since in a multi-party coalition they gave the same value to each party. This was the case even if, say, one party held the presidency of the government and the largest number and the most important portfolios, and another party held only one low-budget, low-influential portfolio. In contrast, my formula focuses on parliament’s tries and tries to find a way to evaluate the relative power of each party in the bargaining process of majority formation, independent of the formation of a particular majority in a particular moment. It thus compares not the proportion of votes with partnerships to governments for each party, but the proportion of seats with the relative bargaining power in parliament for each party. This presumably better reflects each party’s legislative influence and the proportions of executive power that it can expect to achieve, according to its opportunities to be a partner in a majority coalition and to its relative membership.

I therefore consider the present proposal more appropriate for comparing electoral and post-electoral deviations, for establishing more precise tendencies based on relative distributions of seats among parties and different party motives, and for reaching more general conclusions about the parliamentarian process. In fact, the normative proposals of Taylor and Lijphart directed to attain ‘proportional tenure’ – large coalitions, rotation of different governments, proportional length of tenure – may find enhanced interest with this re-statement of the question.

References


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