

Do coalitions make better governments?

Summary Answer?

We find a positive correlation between the number of days that a country had a coalition government over a 50 year period and that country's Democracy Index after the end of that period.

From this we conclude that it is incorrect to assume that coalition leads to bad government.

Why is this important?

In the UK there is a common perception that when a single party has a majority we get strong government and that coalition leads to weak government. This research shows that that perception is not true.

Why did we suspect there is a relationship?

When a single party has a majority in parliament a single person has a lot of power in the short term. However many of our political problems require long term solutions. These include climate change, economic development, management of the NHS and even provision of sufficient runways.

When coalitions are common it is more likely that issues will be genuinely debated, more likely that consensus will be achieved, more likely that policy will survive a general election and more likely that the government will be able to deal with long term problems.

We would only expect this effect to become apparent if coalitions have been common over a long period.

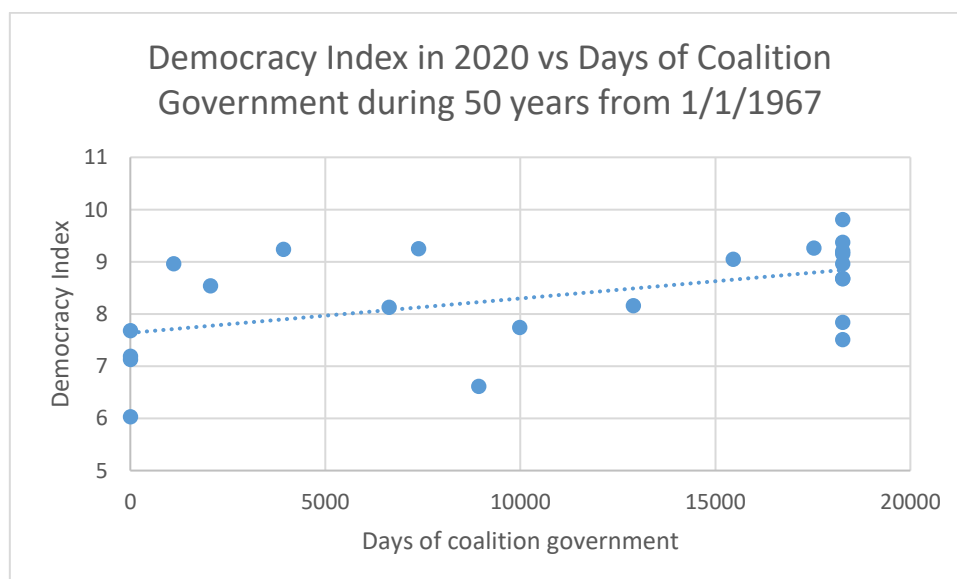


Figure 1

Approach?

We take the list of countries from [1]. We take the countries that are identified in that source as “Parliamentary republic with a ceremonial presidency” or “Constitutional parliamentary monarchy”. This produces a list of countries that have a political system that allows coalition.

We remove from the list any country where that system of democracy has not existed uninterrupted for the 50 year period from 1/1/1967 to 31/12/2016. That leaves the following 23 countries:- Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, United Kingdom.

We then collect data on the number of days when no party had a majority in those countries’ parliaments. We take the data from the general election results and ignore changes due to bi-elections. The data source was Wikipedia throughout.

We plot that number of days of coalition against the country’s 2020 Democracy Index as published at [2].

Findings?

Each of the 23 points on the graph in Figure 1 represents one of 23 selected countries. There is a correlation between number of days of coalition and the Democracy Index. The correlation coefficient of 0.51 shows that this correlation is strong.

For the same set of countries we also test correlation between Democracy Index and other variables. The results are shown in Table 1. No particular conclusions are drawn from these results.

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Latitude of Capital	0.31
Absolute Latitude of Capital	0.82
Longitude of Capital	0.18
Ex-dominion of British Empire	-0.37
Viking (including Norman) influence	0.75

Table 1

Other observations?

Figure 1 shows that the correlation between coalition days and Democracy Index is strongly influenced by the 4 countries which have had zero days of coalition - Jamaica, Malaysia, Malta and Singapore. If these are excluded the correlation is weak (0.16). Perhaps there are other effects in those countries that both prevent coalition and reduce Democracy Index.

References?

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_system_of_government

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index



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