

STRONG AND STABLE

A comparative analysis of the supposed link
between voting systems and political stability

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You only have to pay a brief glance at most of western Europe – where proportional representation (PR) has been the norm for democratic elections for a century – to notice that by-and-large it is hardly a sea of political chaos and crises; certainly not more so than Britain and France, the continent's only two non-PR-using democracies. And yet, one of the most common criticisms of PR in the British electoral reform debate has been its supposed association with political instability – a link long cultivated by opponents of fairer voting, often coupled with frequent allusions to Italy's admittedly rather messy politics. So, what is the truth here – do proportional voting systems, of the type used by countries like Germany and Sweden, actually effect levels of political stability? Is First Past the Post (FPTP) really that good at keeping Britain stable?

For such a commonly repeated argument, there's been little previous research into whether the link actually exists – to the extent that some supporters of PR themselves accept it is true, but a necessary trade-off for a far more representative parliament. To try and conclusively answer this question, we've created and analysed several measures of political stability across 17 established western parliamentary democracies during the 50 years from the start of 1973 to the end of 2022. Four of our countries – Australia, Canada, France and the UK – use non-PR systems and one – New Zealand – switched roughly halfway through our study period. Taken as a whole, these indices should give a good indication as to whether there is any truth behind the claim that PR inherently creates less stable political systems.

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Methodology

For this analysis, we have created ten core indices (as well as several additional ones) that measure a variety of forms of parliamentary and governmental stability – with each parliament, election, cabinet, minister, etc. during our fifty-year study period given a score according to these measures and those scores then averaged for each country. Throughout, average refers to a mean average. Of course, there are cases where some scores for individual countries are pulled in one direction by a handful of outlier results and it can be argued that taking a median average would give a result more representative in certain respects. So, for comparison, the median scores for all our indices are included in Appendix II, though using them instead would not have substantively altered any of our conclusions (only one measure shows noteworthy different results – Party Turnover – where a small lead for PR countries is replaced by a smaller lead for non-PR countries).

Across all measures, the inclusion criteria has been whether something had completed its term, left office or equivalent between the start of 1973 and the end of 2022 – i.e., the incumbent on 1st January 1973 is included in the sample, but the incumbent on 1st January 2023 is excluded. So, for instance, with British Prime Ministers, Edward Heath is included, but Rishi Sunak is not. This is because the future state of the incumbent is unknown – they could lose office tomorrow or stay in power for another decade. While it could be argued that only those that started and completed their term during the study period should be included, it was felt that including the known ‘overhang’ but not the unknown one allowed us to get as close to a full fifty years as possible, with cutting from both ends risking substantially restricting the coverage of certain countries (e.g., Switzerland with partisan composition would be restricted to 2007-15).

During measures that relate to parliamentary term length, the calculation has been simplified to be x years past the previous election date. Although in many countries the clock does not officially start until parliament meets, it is still generally customary to hold elections at x yearly intervals. As such, any sitting of a parliament or government beyond this date has been rounded down to 100% of the permissible term.

Additionally:

- Where referring to parliament, we are only referring to the lower house and elections to that chamber.
- The debate over what should be considered *a* government is dealt with in the relevant section.
- When measuring changes in partisan composition, predecessor/successor parties are treated as the same party and situations like Australia's Liberal-National Coalition and Germany's CDU/CSU are treated as a single party.
- Italy's semi-proportional voting systems used since 1994 have been classed as PR systems, due to containing a proportional element. However, it should be noted that all three post-1994 systems have produced election results with a Gallagher Index score exceeding 10.0 and only one of the eight post-reform elections has returned a score below 5.0, which would typically be expected of a proportional system.

Why these countries?

The 17 countries in our study are Australia (AUS), Austria (AUT), Belgium (BEL), Canada (CAN), Denmark (DEN), Finland (FIN), France (FRA), Germany (GER), Ireland (IRE), Italy (ITA), Luxembourg (LUX), Netherlands (NED), New Zealand (NZL), Norway (NOR), Sweden (SWE), Switzerland (SUI) and the United Kingdom (GBR).

These were chosen as they were all established parliamentary (or semi-parliamentary) democracies throughout our study period and for at least twenty years before, are at a broadly similar socioeconomic level and tend to have reasonably similar underpinnings for institutions like the party system. There are, of course, still differences between them – not least in a range of political cultures, which will be discussed in the analysis – but they are similar enough that we can analyse their performances across these measures without having to too frequently be diverted by additional variables such as differing levels of democratic or socioeconomic development.

While it might be typical to limit such a study purely to western Europe, it was felt that there was a need to include additional non-PR-using countries beyond France and the United Kingdom. It was actually the inclusion of Switzerland that was the most difficult choice, but it was ultimately decided that it had enough parliamentary features to qualify. Obviously, there are many unique aspects to the Swiss political system which do complicate certain measures and they are addressed when they arise. No doubt, the decision to include Switzerland was subconsciously influenced by the fact it is a highly stable country that uses a PR voting system, but, as this is a study attempting to see whether PR and stability can co-exist, it would be weird to ignore such an example.

Data Sources

Data used for this analysis has been compiled from a mix of official sources, the ParlGov dataset and reference works such as Nohlen, D. and Stöver, P. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Nomos: Baden-Baden; Siaroff, A. (2018). *Comparative European Party Systems: An Analysis of Parliamentary Elections Since 1945*. 2nd Ed. Routledge: Abingdon; Müller, C. and Strøm, K. (2000). *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press: Oxford; or Mortimer, R. and Blick, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Butler's British Political Facts*. Palgrave Macmillan: London. For cabinet ministers, Wikipedia was often the most comprehensive, consistent and accessible list available – though this has been cross-referenced against multiple language versions of the site and, where available, official sources.

Abbreviations

2RS	Two-Round System/Vote
AMS	Additional Member System
AV	Alternative Vote (aka Instant Runoff Voting)
FPTP	First Past the Post (aka Single Member Plurality)
GMS	Guaranteed Majority System
List PR	Party List Proportional Representation
MMM	Mixed-Member Majoritarian system (aka Parallel Vote)
MMP	Mixed-Member Proportional Representation
PR	Proportional Representation
STV	Single Transferable Vote

Charts

In charts throughout this report, countries/elections that use PR are colour-coded in **green** and those that use majoritarian voting systems in **purple**. Charts are aligned so the more 'stable' end of the scale is seen on the right.

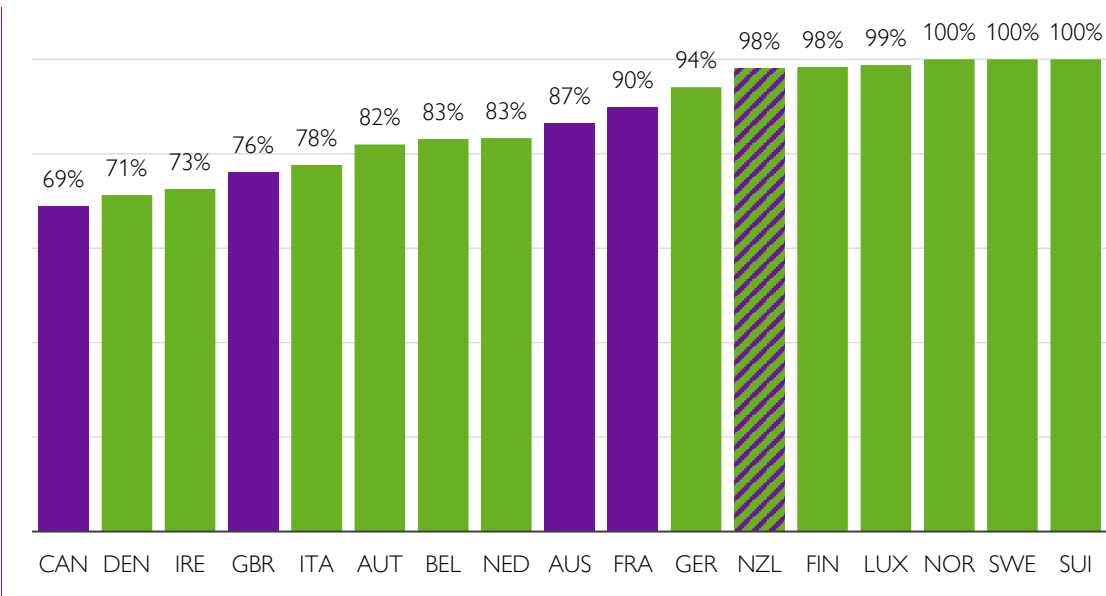
Parliamentary Stability

In most of our 17 countries, parliament is the only part of the political system that is directly elected. Therefore, if the voting system used for those elections has any notable effects on political stability, we should expect to see that most acutely in parliament.

Early Elections

Early elections are one of the simplest signifiers of political instability – even when not called due to a governmental or parliamentary crisis, they carry great risk and potential for surprises. They’re also a particularly common stick with which to beat PR – it being fairly guaranteed that any early election in a proportional democracy will be referenced with some sort of clichéd ‘thank god we don’t have PR here’ comment from its opponents. But do such countries actually have abnormally high rates of early elections or is this simply an inaccurate caricature.

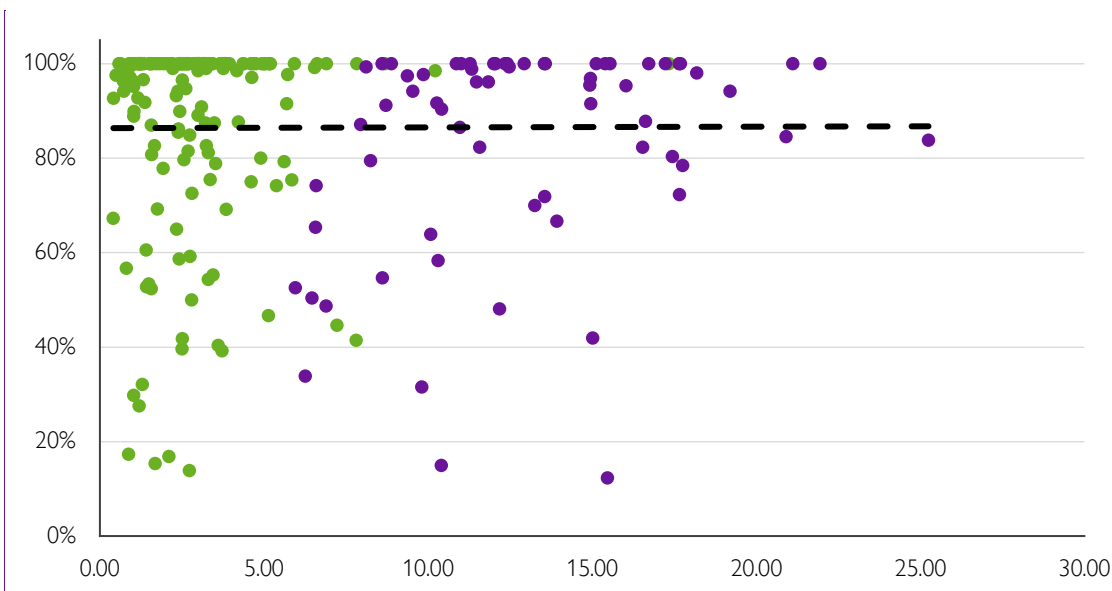
To test this out, we’ve calculated the term completion rate for every parliament dissolved within the last 50 years in our 17 countries. This is a measure of how long a parliament did sit relative to its term limit. So, for instance, a parliament that could have sat for four years but only sat for three would have a term completion rate of 75%.



Average Parliamentary Term Completion Rate, 1973-22

At one end you have Canada and Denmark who have held nine elections more than a year ahead of schedule in the last fifty years; at the other you have Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, all users of PR, who haven’t held a single election before it was due. There is clearly quite a significant range between countries, but what is most notable is the fact that a lot of this range is among both PR and non-PR users, with most of that range overlapping. There is no clear-cut case of parliaments elected by majoritarian voting systems lasting any longer than those elected by proportional systems (if anything, PR dominates the top of the table).

Indeed, if we plot the term completion rate for each individual parliament against its disproportionality (below), what we see is just no correlation between proportionality and parliamentary durability. It’s hard to see how a causal link could at all plausibly be painted here – PR just doesn’t create less stable parliaments.



Election Disproportionality and Subsequent Parliament Term Completion Rate¹, 1973-22

But, of course, there is a huge variation between countries, so what is causing that if it isn't the voting system? One such factor is differing abilities to hold snap elections – ranging from countries like Norway, where there is no mechanism for an off-schedule vote, to ones like Canada and Denmark, where the prime minister can call a new election at their discretion. This is undoubtedly part of the reason that the UK scores so lowly – prime ministers are able to call elections when they want, and some have held a preference for calling it at the four-year mark instead of seeing out the full five-year term. However, even if we concede that such 'controlled' early elections mark a completed term, the UK still does not score particularly highly – averaging at 82%, just above Austria.

But not all early elections in these low scorers are particularly voluntary, with many instead being caused by governability issues – i.e., governments no longer being able to effectively command a majority in parliament. Most commonly, this comes in the form of minority governments, a key factor behind many early elections in Canada, Ireland and the UK (where many governments with small majorities have struggled to govern effectively). Even Denmark, where minority government is the overwhelming norm, has needed new elections when intra-bloc co-operation has broken down². Some might blame such governability issues on voting systems, but we'll come on to governments later and it is undeniable that such crises affect countries using both categories of voting system – five of the 13 general elections in the UK in the last fifty years have been caused by such governability issues, a higher proportion than many PR countries.

Conclusion: PR countries do not have earlier elections than those that use non-PR voting systems. Indeed, on average, it is FPTP users like Britain and Canada who have some of the worst parliamentary term completion rates among western democracies.

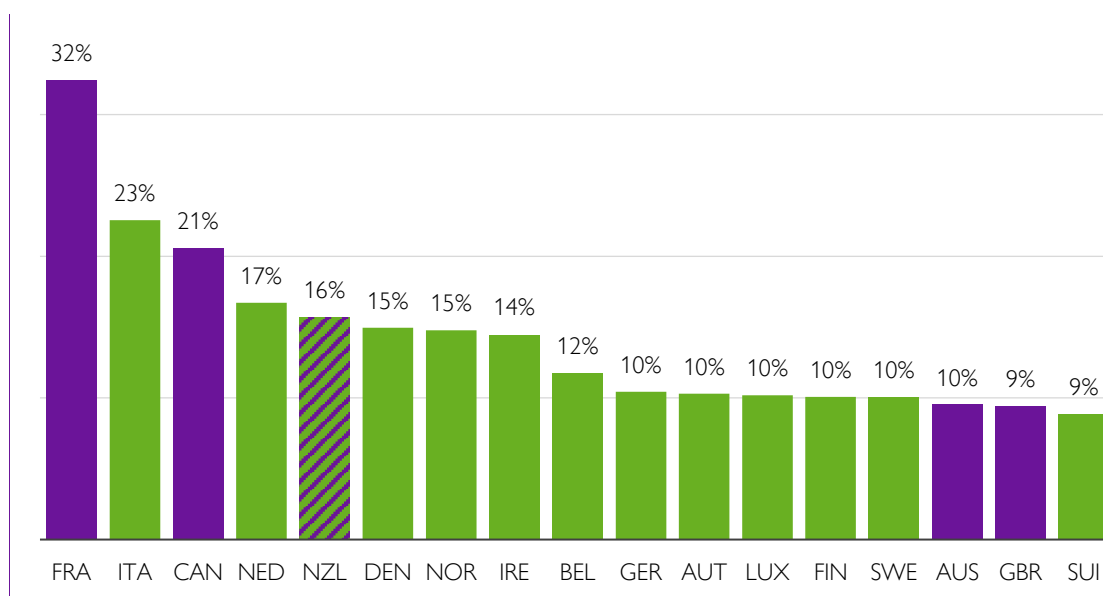
¹ X-axis: Election result proportionality, Gallagher Index (Gallagher, M. (2023). *Election Indices Dataset*. PDF. Available from: http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php); Y-axis: Parliamentary Term Completion Rate.

² During our study period, Danish governments held minority status in parliament for 97%, Norwegian governments for 77% and Swedish governments for 85%. The next highest are New Zealand (42%), Ireland (36%) and Canada (23%).

Electoral Volatility

Another measure of parliamentary stability is the volatility of its partisan composition – i.e., the net party seat change between one parliament and the next. PR has sometimes been accused of encouraging and enabling higher levels of electoral volatility, with the more fluid party systems of many continental European countries being pointed to as proof that PR does not create a long-term stable basis for government formation. Of course, it can conversely be argued that PR's more responsive nature gives voters control over the direction of the party system and allows them to evolve it in response to changing attitudes and priorities, rather than having to continually subsidise the electoral performance of two parties purely based on their historical status.

To measure parliamentary volatility, we've repurposed Siaroff's TVOL index for seats in the legislature³. This takes the absolute difference in seat shares between election A and election B for every party, sums them and divides that sum by two. A score of 0% would reflect a parliament in which there was no change in proportion of seats held by each party (as occurred in the 1975 Austrian election), while 100% would point to a parliament in which no seats were held by a party represented in the previous parliament (our highest score is 69% for the 2017 French legislative election).



Average Parliamentary Volatility Rate, 1973-22

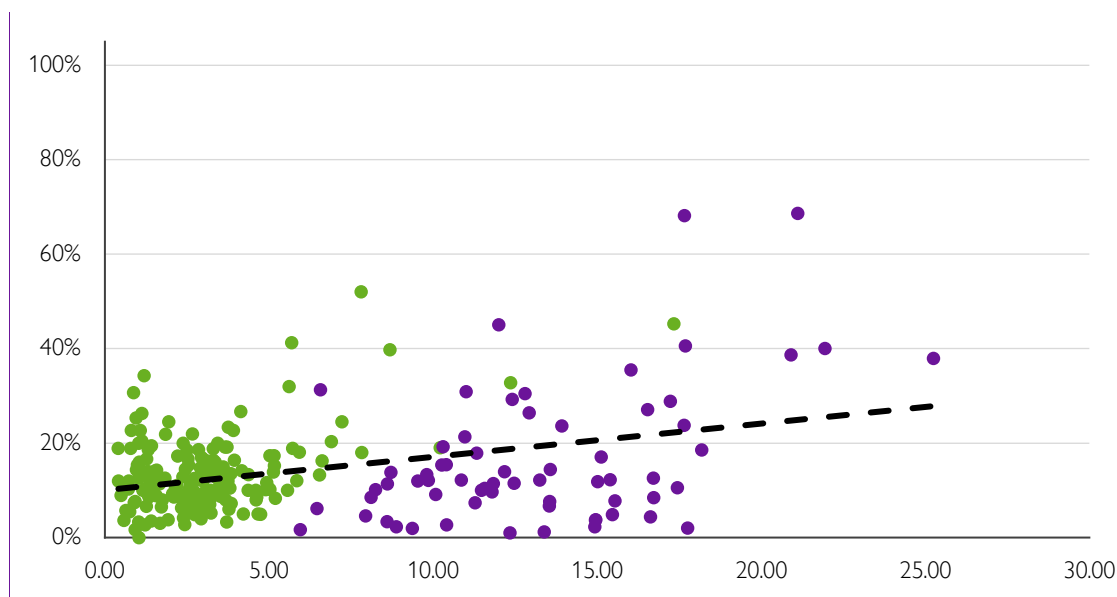
What perhaps stands out most is the sheer number of countries on an almost identical level – with just shy of half our countries hovering pretty close to the 10% mark, with there only being a short step-up to most of the rest of the pack. The other thing of note is the sheer split among non-PR users – with Britain and Australia clearly among the low volatility group, while France and Canada have two of the three most volatile parliaments in the study. Again, this level of variation between users of similar voting systems suggests that a causal link between the two factors is not particularly credible.

But it is worth highlighting that the kind of volatility seen in non-PR countries is of a different nature to that seen in PR countries, even if the aggregate levels are similar. Bar a few cases, such as the 2015 election, the volatility between British parliaments is almost entirely derived from the two main parties, with it frequently exaggerated – e.g., in the

³ Siaroff, A. (2018). *Comparative European Party Systems*. 2nd Ed. Routledge: Abingdon.

1997 election, there was a 24-point swing in seats between just the main two parties, despite only a 10-point swing in votes. But in most PR countries, the volatility is typically made up of smaller non-exaggerated changes between more parties – so lots of little changes, rather than one big one – arguably, less volatile⁴. Plus, in those PR countries where these parties arrange themselves into two blocs, the inter-bloc volatility is noticeably lower than the volatility under the UK or Australia’s two-party systems⁵.

For all the talk of PR encouraging more volatile election results, the only countries where there is a clear disconnect between volatility in vote and seat terms – i.e., where the voting system has created something that wasn’t there in the votes – are Canada and France (and, to a smaller extent, Australia, the United Kingdom and Italy since the move to semi-proportional systems in the 1990s). In other countries, the disconnect between electoral and parliamentary volatility for any election rarely differs by more than about 1-or-2-points in either direction. But, for Canada and France, the exaggerative qualities of their majoritarian voting systems can sometimes lead to parliamentary volatility being double the electoral volatility. For instance, in the 2002 French legislative election, 2RS managed to convert a fairly average net vote change of 13% into an extraordinary 40% net seat change. Similarly, in Canada in 2015, FPTP translated votes with an electoral volatility score of 21% into a House of Commons that registered 45% in terms of parliamentary volatility. Non-proportional voting systems there directly causing higher levels of parliamentary volatility and, thus, lower levels of stability in partisan composition.



Election Disproportionality and Parliamentary Volatility⁶, 1973-22

It is this exaggerative effect of majoritarian voting systems that means that, when you plot the disproportionality of an election result against the parliamentary volatility it has caused, there is actually a moderate correlation between less proportional elections and higher levels of volatility (i.e., instability). Of course, it is true that both the majority of non-PR and overwhelming majority of PR elections do broadly tend toward a standard level of volatility, but in terms

⁴ Average largest party seat share change in either direction: AUS 9.5%; AUT 7.8%; BEL 5.7%; CAN 17.9%; DEN 8.1%; FIN 7.2%; FRA 26.5%; GER 7.8%; IRE 11.0%; ITA 14.0%; LUX 6.6%; NED 9.6%; NZL 12.6% (Pre-1996 14.4%; Post-1996 10.5%); NOR 9.0%; SWE 6.6%; SUI 4.8%; GBR 8.5%.

⁵ DEN 4.4%; NOR 4.4%; SWE 4.1%.

⁶ X-axis: Election result proportionality, Gallagher Index (Gallagher, M. (2023). *Election Indices Dataset*. PDF. Available from: http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php); Y-axis: Parliamentary Volatility Rate.

of enabling higher levels of parliamentary volatility, it is undoubtedly in majoritarian elections where this is most apparent.

Conclusion: PR-using countries do not inherently have higher levels of inter-parliamentary volatility than non-PR-using countries, with non-proportional parliaments often seeing more substantive and exaggerated swings in partisan and ideological composition between elections.

Governmental Stability

While it is parliament that has the most immediate relationship with the voting system, it is ultimately, in a parliamentary system, the staging ground for the government – with the latter's stability often the biggest concern.

Measuring government stability, however, comes with its own problems. How, for instance, does one define what a government is? People might refer to the series of eight Conservative-led cabinets that have been in power since 2010 as one Conservative government, but it represents a series of new administrations, with new leaders, new governing arrangements and even changes in partisan composition and status in parliament. Many of those changes were the result of destabilising political crises – so is it reasonable to define it as a single government that governed without a hitch? Nonetheless, there are obvious elements of continuity across those cabinets.

As both the 'minimalist' and 'maximalist' definitions of what constitute a government have some validity here, we're going to look at it in turn from both ends of the spectrum.

Cabinet Durability

Let's start with the most basic version of what could be viewed as one government – cabinets. Even how to define this isn't without debate, with multiple definitions existing within the political science literature. The well-used ParlGov dataset defines a new cabinet as precipitated by at least one of the following: 1) "any change of parties with cabinet membership"; 2) "any change of the prime minister"; 3) "any general election"⁷. Additionally, ParlGov use a three-month rule for caretaker governments (i.e., it counts as a new cabinet if it last more than three months after an election) and count any "meaningful investiture procedure" or "meaningful resignation" as the start of a new cabinet, even if there has been no change in the three core criteria.

Siaroff's (2018) definition used in the authoritative *Comparative European Party Systems* analysis is broadly similar, viewing a new government as occurring with any of: a) "a change in the party membership of a cabinet"; b) "the loss of majority status of a government"; c) "the change of a prime minister"; d) "the (re)formation of a government after an election, even if nothing else occurs"⁸. Unlike ParlGov, Siaroff does not consider a cabinet that resigns and quickly reforms between elections without any other changes to be a new government.

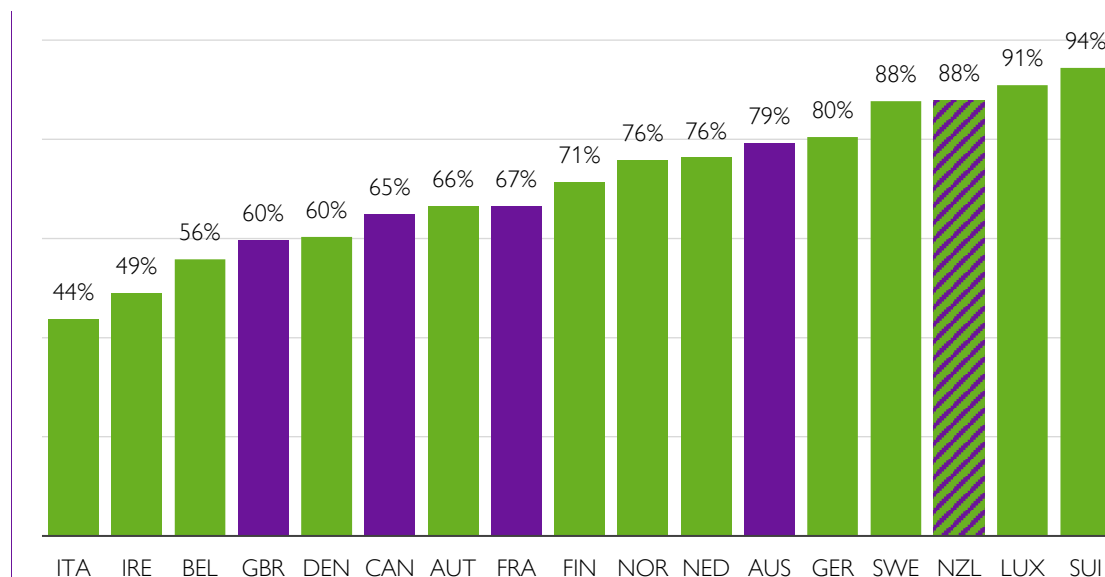
For our purposes, we're going to use the three points of agreement between the two definitions, i.e., a new cabinet is precipitated by any of the following: 1) change of which parties are in cabinet; 2) change of the prime minister; or 3) a general election. None of the supplementary criteria have used in our classification – holdover caretaker governments are considered as continuations of the original cabinet and a government losing majority status in parliament has been viewed as a change in its legislative status, rather than a new government (even if it does represent a destabilising event and such leniency does actually benefit the UK). This is the definition used in Müller and Strøm's (2000) seminal analysis of *Coalition Governments in Western Europe* and, using this definition, we can say that during the New Labour years, for instance, there were four cabinets – Blair I (1997-01), Blair II (2001-05), Blair III (2005-07) and Brown (2007-10)⁹.

⁷ <https://www.parlgov.org/data/codebook.pdf>

⁸ Siaroff, A. (2018). *Comparative European Party Systems: An Analysis of Parliamentary Elections Since 1945*. 2nd Ed. Routledge: Abingdon.

⁹ Müller, W. and Strøm, K. (2000). *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

To measure each cabinet's durability, we've calculated the amount of time it served in office as a proportion of the amount of time it could have served in office (i.e., until the scheduled date of the next election). So, in a country with four-year terms, a cabinet formed in the aftermath of an election that served for two years would have a completion rate of 50%; but a new cabinet that then served the remaining two years of the term would have a completion rate of 100%. This rate is capped at 100%, so those that continue as caretakers post-election cannot inflate their score.



Average Cabinet Duration Relative to Potential Maximum, 1973-22

Once again, we have a mixed picture among both non-PR-using countries and even more so among PR users, but with it undeniable that the countries with the most durable cabinets are largely those that use fairer voting systems.

There is, of course, clear variation, particularly among proportional countries. As is often the case with such divergence, the cause is a mix of the institutional – such as aforementioned differences in ability to call early elections – and the cultural – most notably the behaviour of political actors within the system, especially parties. Countries where early elections are rare, where relationships within the governing majority aren't notably fractious and where mid-term leadership changes in the prime ministerial party are uncommon are going to score highly on this measure. Where the opposite is true on even one of those factors, cabinet durability will suffer.

As with parliamentary terms, some might say that Britain is unreasonably underscored by treating four-year cabinets as incomplete, but, even if we do once again account for those that completely voluntarily ended their term prematurely with no governability issues, that still only raises the UK's score to 64%. The fact that only two of the last six British cabinets have sat for more than a quarter of their allowable term in office is one of the main reasons that the UK's score is dragged down so low. Indeed, when looking at just the five most recent cabinets in each country, the UK is dead last – only Austria also falling below 50%¹⁰. That is just not any definition of stable.

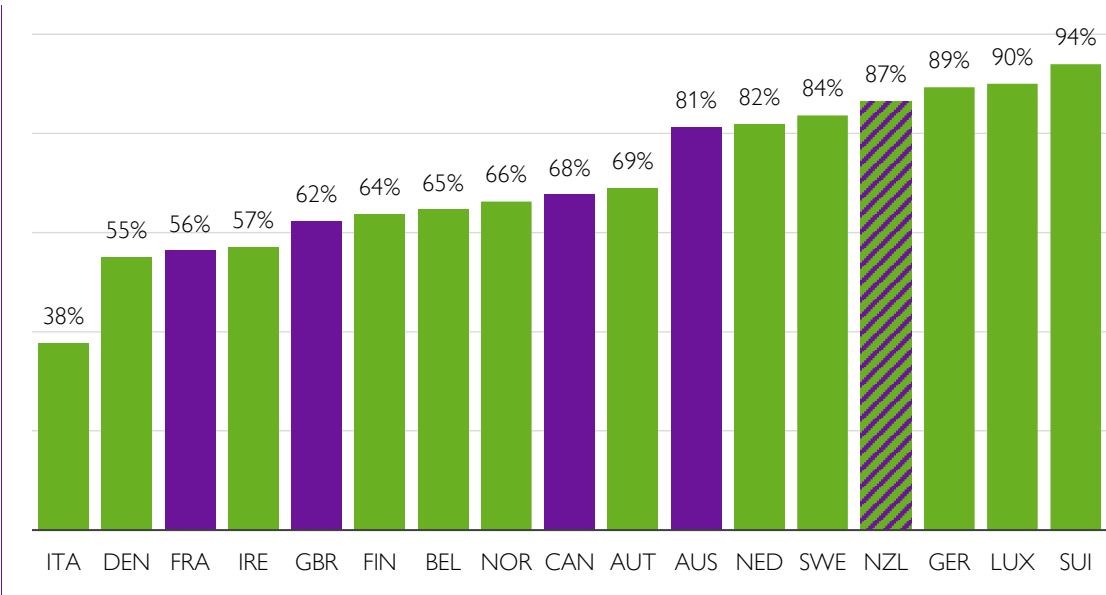
Fundamentally, Britain is just not comparable to countries like Germany, Luxembourg or Sweden, where it is the norm for a cabinet to be formed after an election and see out the full term without changes in prime minister or

¹⁰ Average durability of five most recent cabinets in each country: AUS 83%; AUT 31%; BEL 82%; CAN 74%; DEN 74%; FIN 59%; FRA 92%; GER 96%; IRE 54%; ITA 64%; LUX 98%; NED 84%; NZL 89%; NOR 55%; SWE 96%; SUI 86%; GBR 28%.

partisan composition. For all the tut-tutting from British commentators about the precariousness of European governments, the simple fact is that many of them can expect to last longer intact than their British counterparts.

Post-Election Cabinets

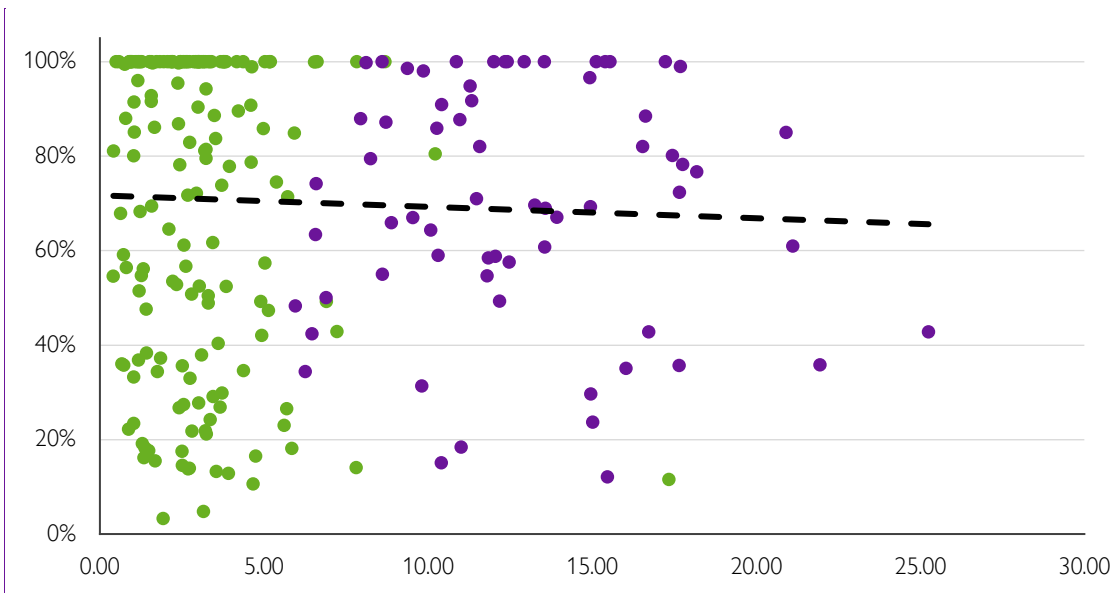
However, the problem with looking at *all* cabinets is that it is undoubtedly easier for later-formed governments to serve as long as they can compared to post-election governments formed at the start of the term. After all, even the shakiest coalitions or minority governments can usually survive a year or so before collapsing. So, to ensure including such cabinets isn't artificially boosting any scores, let's look at just the duration of the post-election governments – those which intended to, and which could have, lasted the full term in office.



Average Post-Election Cabinet Duration Relative to Potential Maximum, 1973-22

There are some noteworthy shifts in a few countries – France and Norway see their scores fall by 10 points, with Denmark, Finland and Italy also seeing sizeable drops – suggesting that replacement cabinets there are indeed better at seeing out their term. However, Belgium, Germany and Ireland all see clear shifts in the opposite direction, with such cabinets in those countries clearly being the ones that struggle to hold on – often, as with Germany's abnormally short-lived Schmidt IV cabinet or the later Cowen cabinets in Ireland, because they were the remnants of a coalition that had fallen apart and which couldn't last.

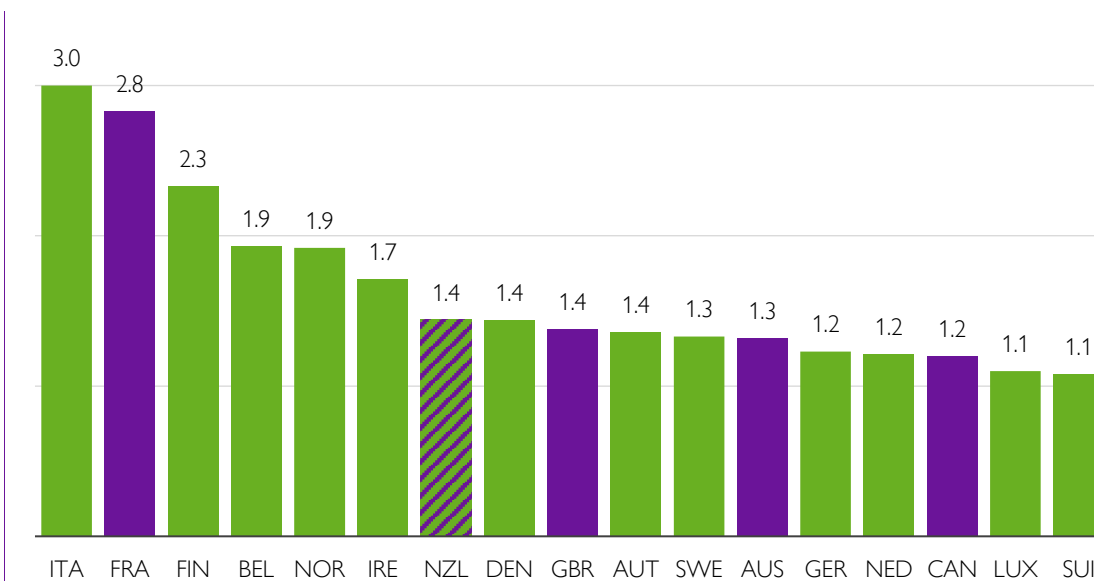
Altogether, though, there is little real shift in the broader picture in terms of the balance between PR and non-PR-using countries, with proportional countries overwhelmingly remaining the strongest performers and there still being a lack of evidence that PR leads to less stable governments. Indeed, if we plot the durability of post-election cabinets against the disproportionality of the election they were formed after (below), we actually see a small negative correlation between disproportionality and cabinet durability. This shouldn't be too surprising – after all, 38% of PR post-election cabinets make it to full term, compared to just 17% of those in majoritarian countries – but it just serves to underline that PR is, if anything, slightly stronger on this front than its alternatives.



Election Disproportionality and Post-Election Cabinet Durability¹¹, 1973-22

New Cabinets

An alternative way of looking at cabinet durability is to see how frequently new cabinets are installed mid-term. Below are the average number of cabinets per parliamentary term across our 17 countries.



Average Cabinets per Parliament, 1973-22

As with the previous measures, a mixed picture in terms of the balance between both categories of voting systems. However, looking at all the countries together, a much more united picture than above – with a clear norm of around 1.0 to 1.5 cabinets per parliament. Of course, such a measure does have a bias in favour of countries like the Netherlands, who generally go to an early election upon the collapse of a coalition, and against those like Norway,

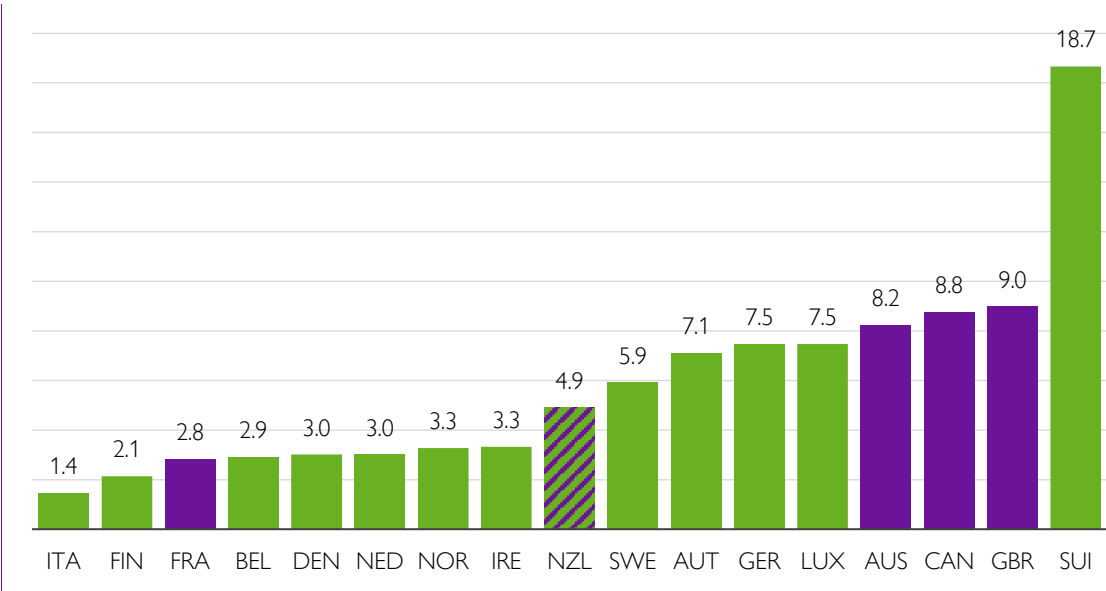
¹¹ X-axis: Election result proportionality, Gallagher Index (Gallagher, M. (2023). *Election Indices Dataset*. PDF. Available from: http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php); Y-axis: Post-Election Cabinet Durability Score.

where a new cabinet is formed instead; but then we're just returning to a central theme with this data – the variation is far better explained by differences in political culture and other institutions than with the voting system.

Conclusion: Cabinets in PR-using countries do not inherently collapse at a greater rate than those in non-PR-using countries, with some of the most durable cabinets being found in those that use a proportional voting system.

Government Partisanship

But does this tell the whole picture? Is a country where cabinets complete their term but are always made of different parties more stable than one where cabinets are shorter lived but rarely change in terms of partisan composition? The former might lead to greater short-term certainty, but the latter will likely allow for more policy stability in the longer term. So, instead of treating successive cabinets with identical partisan make-up as new governments, let's merge them together to identify how long countries last without partisan changes in terms of who is in government, regardless of intervening elections or changes in prime minister.



Average Duration (Years) Between Changes in Partisan Composition of Government, 1973-22

Non-PR users do clearly come out somewhat ahead on this measure – with Australia, Britain and Canada presenting a clear bloc of limited partisan alternation of power. Proportional countries tend to see which parties are in cabinet switching far more frequently, though there are some exceptions. Even without getting into Switzerland and their unusual semi-permanent grand coalitions, Austria, Germany and Luxembourg are all clearly capable of a similar, if marginally lower, durability of governing coalitions to the three high-performing majoritarian countries.

Country	Cabinet Parties	Years	Duration
Switzerland	CVP, FDP, SPS, SVP	1960-07	48.0 years
Sweden	SAP	1957-76	18.9 years
United Kingdom	Conservative	1979-97	18.0 years
Canada	Liberal	1963-79	16.1 years
Germany	CDU/CSU, FDP	1982-98	16.1 years
Ireland	Fianna Fáil	1957-73	16.0 years
Luxembourg	CSV, LSAP	1984-99	15.0 years
Austria	SPÖ	1970-83	13.1 years
Austria	SPÖ, ÖVP	1987-00	13.0 years
United Kingdom	Labour	1997-10	13.0 years

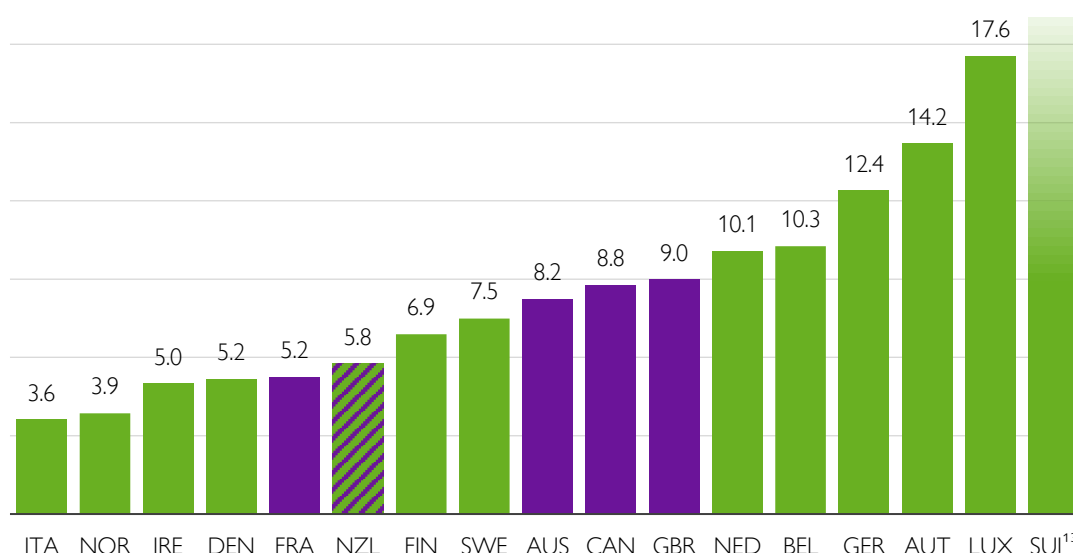
Longest Periods Without Change in Cabinet Partisan Composition, 1973-22

Indeed, the top ten of unchanged government party compositions (above) is filled with several periods of enduring single- or multi-party government under PR – showing that it is eminently possible. This suggests that there is an element of ‘correlation does not equal causation’ here and that it isn’t PR alone that is making some countries see frequent changes in government composition. As mentioned earlier, different political cultures are perhaps the biggest factor. In some countries, parties prioritise stability and sticking out the coalition, in others they are more interested in protecting their distinctive brand and will quit government if that looks damaged. Some countries see parties form unofficial semi-permanent partnerships with others, making durable coalitions easier; elsewhere, it’s always every party for themselves. Plus, different countries react in different ways to different types of government – for many, minority governments are highly vulnerable and to be avoided at all costs, but they are the norm in Scandinavia. In fact, Sweden’s 19-year uninterrupted one-party Social Democratic rule saw the party sit as a minority government for 17 of those years. Very few countries where that would be possible.

This is compounded by the measure potentially short-changing countries with a bloc-based party system where there is often a degree of intra-bloc fluidity between being within the cabinet and supporting it from outside. Parties joining or leaving the cabinet midway through a term without affecting the overall stability of the government is a semi-regular occurrence in Scandinavian countries. Take, for instance, Erna Solberg’s Høyre-led government that was in power in Norway from 2013 to 2021. Throughout its two-term stint in office, the governing majority comprised of the four parties of the blue bloc – but which of those parties were in cabinet changed three times. Was that really four governments serving an average of two years, or one government in power for eight¹²?

This ties to a broader issue of this measure treating any change in composition as the same, which favours countries like the UK where nearly all changes in partisan composition are ‘wholesale alternations’ – i.e., none of the parties from the previous cabinet are in the new one. But, in most of Europe, ‘partial alternations’ – i.e., where some parties from the previous cabinet are in the new one – are the norm and so there is often a degree of continuity between cabinets, even when there’s change. In the Netherlands, for instance, there hasn’t been a wholesale alternation since 1918.

¹² When considering blocs in bloc-based party systems as single units, Denmark’s score rises from 3.0 to 4.7 years; France’s from 3.2 to 7.3; Italy’s from 1.4 to 1.8; Norway’s from 3.3 to 4.5; and Sweden’s from 5.9 to 9.3 – placing them in second place, ahead of the UK.



Average Duration (Years) of Party in Government, 1973-22

If we instead look at the average time spent uninterrupted in government by party (above), non-PR countries do largely still perform well; but the issue is less clear-cut, with a number of proportional countries demonstrating a tendency for parties to stay in power for longer. This transformation is most notable with Belgium, where, despite the leaving and joining of parties in government being not infrequent, there is a real split between some parties who will tend to serve decades continuously in office, while other's time in power is more ephemeral.

Country	Party	Years	Duration
Netherlands	KVP/CDA ¹⁴	1939-94	55.0 years
Luxembourg	CSV	1926-74	47.9 years
Italy	DC	1946-94	47.8 years
Netherlands	ARP/CDA ¹⁴	1952-94	42.0 years
Belgium	CVP/PSC ¹⁵	1958-99	41.0 years
Sweden	SAP	1936-76	40.0 years
Finland	SFP	1979-15	36.0 years
Luxembourg	CSV	1979-13	34.4 years
Austria	ÖVP	1987-19	32.3 years
Austria	SPÖ	1970-00	29.8 years

Longest Uninterrupted Periods of Parties Serving in Government (excluding Switzerland)

¹³ Owing to its semi-permanent grand coalition, Switzerland is hard to count on this measure as most of the parties that have served on the Federal Council have never left power. The only two that have finished a term in office during our study period are the SVP (1930-07, 78 years), who returned to office a year later, and the BDP (2008-15, 8 years). Nominally, this gives us an average of 43 years, but only two data points is not really satisfactory to give an average and is not representative of the wider Swiss situation – with the other three Federal Council parties having served for 174 years (FDP), 131 years (CVP) and 63 years (SPS). If we pretend that all parties had left office at the end of our study period (2022), that would give us an average of 78 years. Regardless, Switzerland undoubtedly outperforms every country in our study on this measure.

¹⁴ The KVP (Catholic People's Party) and ARP (Anti-Revolutionary Party), as well as the CHU (Christian Historical Union), merged into the CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal), first as an electoral alliance for the 1977 election and then as a single party in 1980.

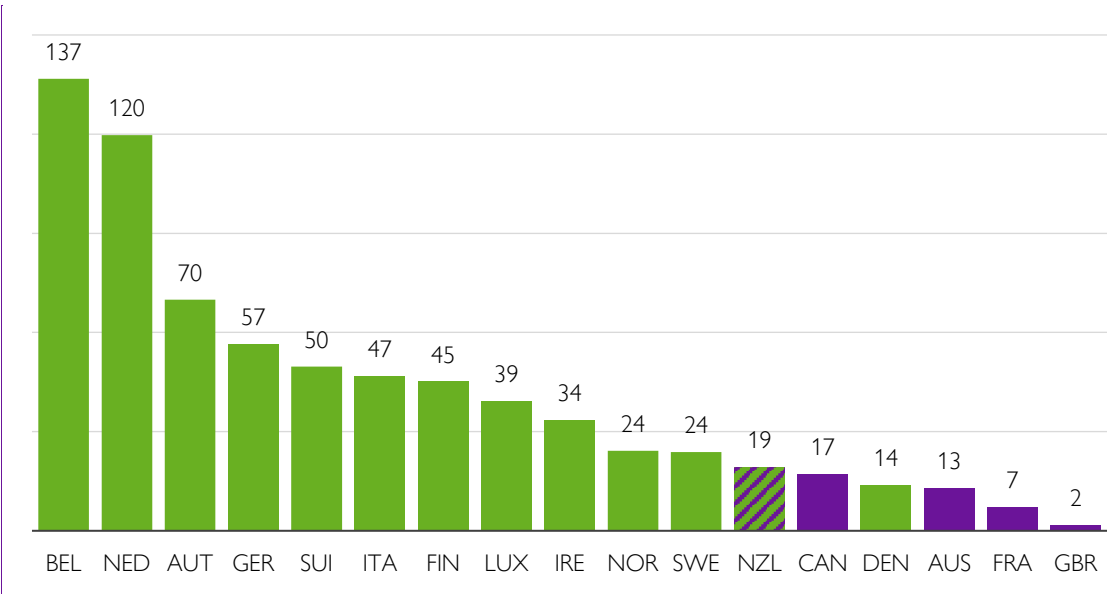
¹⁵ The CVP/PSC split into respective Flemish-speaking (CVP, Christian People's Party) and French-speaking (PSC, Christian Social Party) parties from 1968. They both, however, remained in government together until 1999.

When looking at the longest-serving individual parties, there are a few immediately standout points. 1) They are all PR users – pooh-poohing the notion that fairer voting systems automatically mean all new coalitions of all new parties every few years and suggesting that stability in some PR countries comes in a different form to that in majoritarian ones, with higher rates of (partial) alternation masking a level of continuity underneath that churn. 2) Even for us in the UK where changes in government are now taken to be once-in-a-generation, these decades-long stints in office are frankly alien. 3) Speaking to their dominance in the post-war period in continental Europe, seven of the ten longest stints are held by Christian democratic parties. And 4) For all the concern about PR allowing so-called ‘hinge’ parties to stay in office for extended periods, the only ‘non-prime ministerial’ party in the top ten is Finland’s SFP (Swedish People’s Party), a minority party representing the country’s small but significant Swedish-speaking population. Generally, it is larger parties who tend to have the longer uninterrupted stays in power.

Conclusion: PR does, on average, lead to slightly more frequent alternations in the partisan composition of government, though the difference is less clear when looking at the amount of time that parties spend in office – with the tendency towards only partial alternations in many PR countries ensuring a level of continuity and stability across governments.

Government Formation

But it isn’t just the duration of governments themselves under PR that has been queried in the past, the length of time taken to form those governments has also been frequently cited as evidence of PR’s supposed destabilising effects. Now, here, it is undeniable that British governments – as norm appointed the day after the election – are formed quicker than those on the continent, which can, in some countries, take months of negotiations. This extended period ‘without a government’ is said to lead to uncertainty, with potential knock-on effects to the economy.



Average Post-Election Cabinet Formation Period (Days), 1973-22

It is without doubt that Britain comes top of this measure and, more broadly, it is fairly clear that non-PR-using countries do substantively outperform PR users here. Somewhat obviously, it is multi-party government that is the deciding factor here – with post-election negotiations for coalitions or other agreements usually taking time that

doesn't need to be taken when one party holds a parliamentary majority. On this basic point, anti-PR advocates are undeniably (and highly unusually) correct. However, are things really this simple?

Firstly, the 'official' time taken to form a government is not necessarily accurate of how long it took to actually form it. Contrary to the 'rush to the Palace' we see in the UK, in most other countries (including fellow non-PR users), there are formalities, such as parliamentary investiture votes or waiting for election results to be officially certified, that stand in the way of an immediate appointment of the PM. The German Chancellor, for instance, is elected by the Bundestag, which doesn't meet until a month after polling day – making it impossible for a government to be in place any sooner.

Similarly, the formal formation period is not really indicative of how long there was 'uncertainty' about who would govern. While there are certainly some countries, like the Netherlands and Belgium, where coalition negotiations can be multi-round involving various permutations of parties, this isn't the experience everywhere or always. In countries with two-bloc party competition structures, such as Scandinavia, the post-election period is typically a case of deciding which parties in the winning bloc will sit in cabinet and which will support, with varying degrees of formality, from outside. Even in those countries where semi-official semi-permanent coalitions don't exist, the form of the government will often be apparent fairly quickly, with the weeks of negotiations merely being an attempt to agree to exactly what policies that government will pursue. The current Scholz cabinet in Germany officially took ten weeks to form, but it was within days of the election that it was apparent that a so-called 'traffic light' rather than a 'Jamaica' coalition would be formed – it was not ten weeks of uncertainty. Arguably this negotiation period actually allows for both state and non-state actors to better plan for changes in government, rather than simply lurching from a state of unknown to new government in less than a day.

Most importantly, much of the British discussion on this matter ignores the cultural differences that exist around the importance of swift government formation. In many European countries, it is viewed as preferable to take a while to build a coalition agreement that all partners can be happy with and which will be able to serve as a basis to govern effectively. We, however, view speed as important – which is something that has still been apparent in all three recent hung parliament situations at Westminster, with governments still always formed in under a week. Even with the Conservative-DUP confidence-and-supply agreement in 2017, which took nearly three weeks to be finalised, there was still enough of an understanding apparent after three days to allow a new cabinet to be formed. Fundamentally, there is no reason to believe that this kind of fast government formation could not continue if Britain adopted PR and hung parliaments became the norm. This can already be seen at the devolved level in Scotland and Wales. Because of the importance of avoiding post-election uncertainty in our political culture, so long as there is the political will to form governments fast, fast government formation will be possible, regardless of voting system.

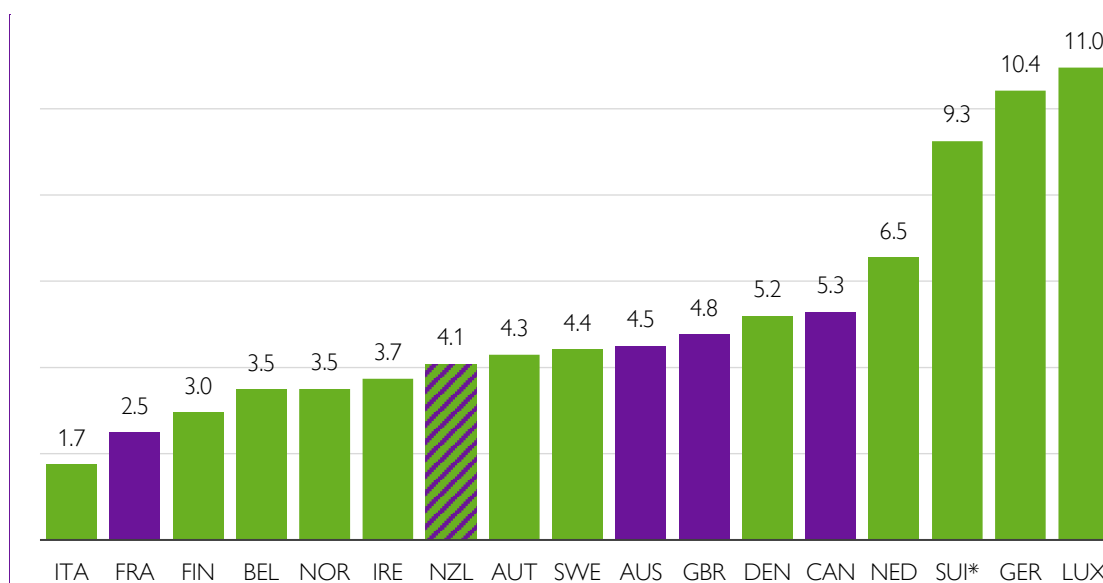
Conclusion: PR-using countries do – as a whole – take longer to form governments in the aftermath of an election. This is due to a mix of the differing institutional frameworks in which government formation occurs, differing cultural attitudes to the importance of quick government formation and, in some cases, varying levels of difficulty in forming coalitions. However, how much the effects of PR are responsible for this difference is debateable as, where the political will exists to form coalitions quickly under both types of voting system, it can clearly be done so.

Ministerial Stability

But governments aren't just single units made up of parties, they are also collections of individual ministers whose personal status in or out of cabinet serves not just as a public and visible shorthand for the stability of a government, but also has deeper effects on important matters like policy stability. A change in prime minister, even from the same party, will represent a change in direction or emphasis and often result from defeats or destabilising disputes. Ministerial changes within a department can similarly represent a change in policy priorities, while also disrupting ongoing departmental work and relationships between the ministry and external actors.

Prime Ministers

Prime ministers are not merely the heads of government, but also the personification of it – from the public consciousness to academic delineations. Changes in prime minister are thus important moments of political change, though they are rarely 'peaceful' – outside a few genuine retirements, they are near-exclusively the result of an election defeat, a dispute within a party, a dispute between coalition partners or even the outright collapse of a coalition – none of which scream stability. How frequently a country changes prime minister can thus give us a clue as to how frequently such crises arise.



Average Duration (Years) of Prime Ministerial Term in Office, 1973-22

* Switzerland's seven-member cabinet are all equally head of government with the position of chair rotating between members on an annual basis¹⁶.

Italy's status at bottom of the league will surprise no one – with the short-lived nature of their prime ministers a punchline in Italy and around the world. Nor will it surprise many that Germany, the country of 16-year Chancellors Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel, is sitting fairly close to the top. Britain's fairly middling average, though, might be a

¹⁶ Switzerland poses an interesting case. From a constitutional perspective, the seven members of the Federal Council are all equally head of government. But the 'chair' role, which rotates on 1st January every year between the Federal Councillors, is sometimes taken as the *de facto* equivalent of prime minister and it could thus be argued that Switzerland should instead return a score of 1.0 years. However, given that the rotation does not really affect the leadership of the government or result from inter- or intra-party issues, we have taken the constitutional position and averaged the terms in office of all Federal Councillors during our study period.

little surprising at first glance, but it's important to remember that for every Thatcher or Blair, there are Callaghans, Browns and even a Liz Truss.

Unlike some of our prior measures, the results here are fairly close to a normal distribution – most countries broadly converging around a similar average of around four to six years, with just a few outliers at either end. This typical average can be seen across both proportional and majoritarian countries suggesting that it is something of a 'natural' term of office for a leader in a parliamentary democracy.

But like many of our previous measures, we are once again confronted with an index with huge levels of variation between countries, though where the top performers are all users of PR. As before, a lot of the variation is explained by different political cultures, with intra-party dynamics a key influence here. One reason for Italy's notoriously low scores is that, during the era of Christian Democratic hegemony, who was prime minister was largely determined by factional games within the Christian Democrats, with there being no guarantee that the same faction was in control of the parliamentary party. This created a cycle of change and unstable government-parliament relations. In addition to other previously mentioned pressures on government durability, such as intra-coalition dynamics, it is this kind of factionalism that can quite often lead to premature changes in prime minister – countries with less factional parties or where questions of governmental leadership are somewhat separated from party political disputes are typically those that see less turnover at the top.

Perhaps the strongest indicator of the lack of a negative impact of PR on prime ministerial durability is the fact that the Netherlands, whose national list PR system is arguably the most proportional voting system in the world, is also one of the strongest performers. Considering it is also a country with a highly fragmented party system and where changes in partisan composition of government are reasonably frequent, such longevity in leaders is undoubtedly against the British conventional wisdom. But it just shows that these differences in political culture are the real determining factor here, with Dutch favouring of the incumbent prime minister to form a new government and their abnormally unified parties overriding any supposed influence of a PR voting system. Most critically, though, it just highlights that high levels of proportionality and stability are able to co-exist.

Country	Prime Minister	Party	Years	Duration
Luxembourg	Jean-Claude Juncker	CSV	1995-13	18.9 years
Germany	Helmut Kohl	CDU	1982-98	16.1 years
Germany	Angela Merkel	CDU	2005-21	16.0 years
Luxembourg	Pierre Werner	CSV	1959-74	15.3 years
Austria	Bruno Kreisky	SPÖ	1970-83	13.1 years
Netherlands	Mark Rutte	VVD	2010-	>12.8 years
Netherlands	Ruud Lubbers	CDA	1984-94	11.8 years
Australia	John Howard	Liberal	1996-07	11.7 years
United Kingdom	Margaret Thatcher	Conservative	1979-90	11.6 years
Canada	Pierre Trudeau	Liberal	1968-79	11.1 years

Longest Stints as Prime Minister, 1973-22 (excluding Switzerland)

This co-existability is confirmed if we take a look at just the top ten longest serving prime ministers during our study period (above) – the list dominated by PR-using countries, with some having multiple entries before you even get to the longest-serving non-PR PM. Indeed, pretty much every country in our analysis has, at some point, demonstrated an ability to keep a prime minister in power for a prolonged period. Except France and Italy, every country has had

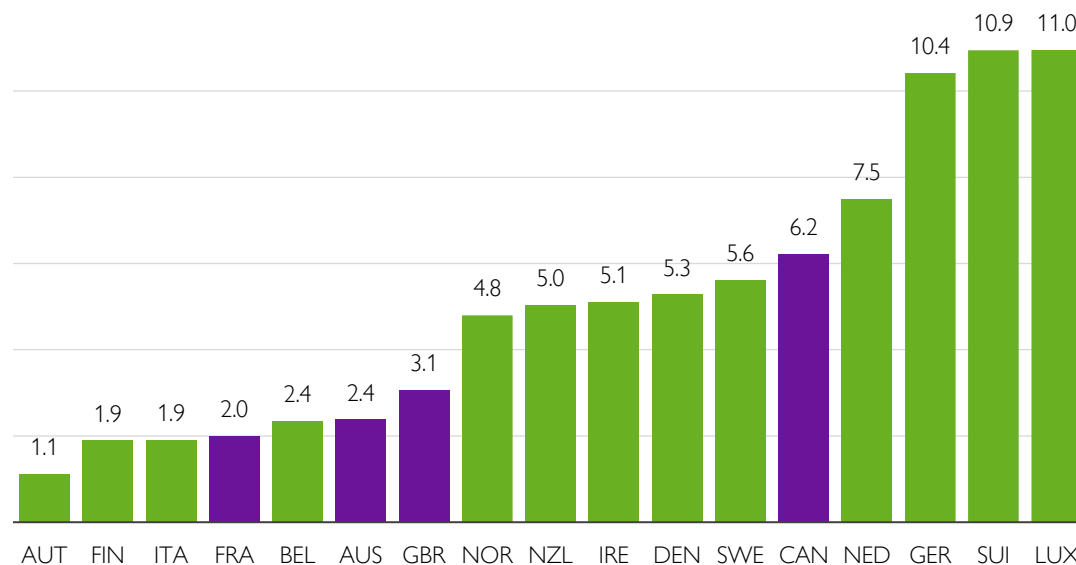
at least three prime ministers who have served five or more years in office and at least one who has got to eight years (well, Norway's Jen Stoltenberg served 7 years and 364 days and his successor Erna Solberg reached 7 years and 363 days). Once again, the ability for prime ministers to serve such long periods in power under PR voting systems just destroys the credibility of arguments that it is an inherently destabilising force.

Country	Prime Minister	Party	Year(s)	Duration
United Kingdom	Liz Truss	Conservative	2022	49 days
Austria	Alexander Schallenberg	ÖVP	2021	56 days
New Zealand	Mike Moore	Labour	1990	59 days
Finland	Anneli Jäätteenmäki	Kesk	2003	68 days
Canada	John Turner	Liberal	1984	79 days
Australia	Kevin Rudd	Labor	2013	83 days
Italy	Amintore Fanfani	DC	1987	102 days
Canada	Kim Campbell	PCP	1993	132 days
France	Bernard Cazeneuve	PS	2016-17	160 days
Belgium	Paul Vanden Boeynants	PSC	1978-79	165 days

Shortest Stints as Prime Minister, 1973-22

Perhaps interestingly, if we switch to the other end of the scale – shortest-serving prime ministers – we actually see a list that is disproportionately comprised of non-PR users, with six of the ten most quickly deposited leaders serving in majoritarian countries. Unsurprisingly, this includes our very own executive catastrophe – Liz Truss – the shortest-serving western leader in the last fifty years. Now, this isn't to suggest that majoritarian voting systems inherently create less stable political systems, just to further underline that the whole supposed link between voting systems and levels of political stability – that underpins a core anti-PR argument – is just very hard to align with the actual data.

Pivoting to a more present view, PR also stands in good stead if we look at how long just the most recent prime ministers have served in office (below). While not especially different to our main measure of prime ministerial durability, the increasingly multi-party nature of many parliaments in recent years, and proportional ones in particular, might be expected to have had a negative effect on stability.



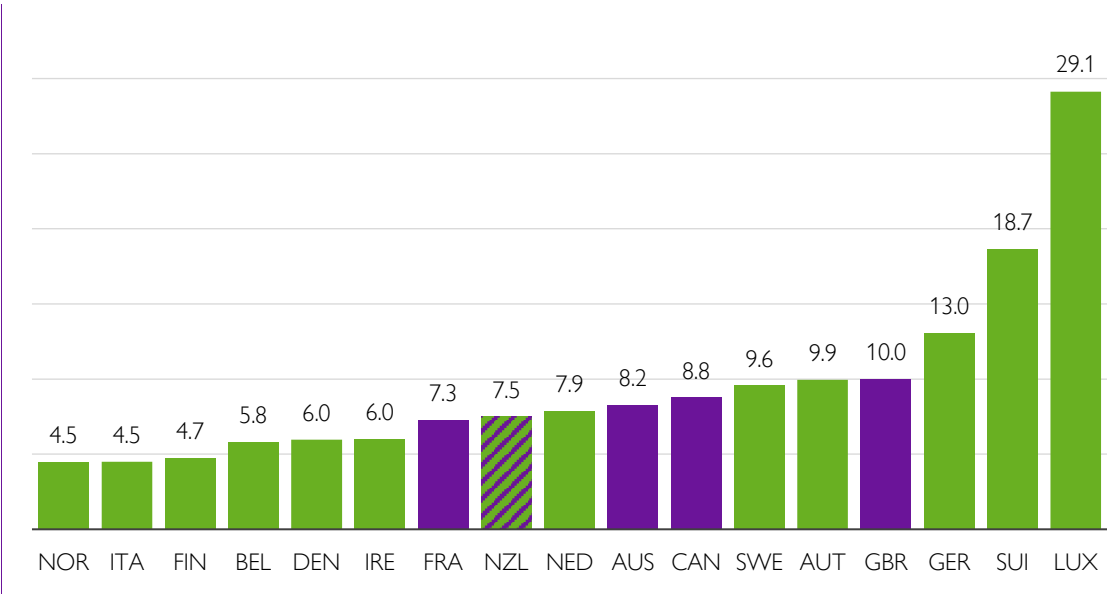
Average Duration (Years) of Last Five Prime Minister's Terms in Office

Far from it. Britain and Australia’s increasing propensity to change prime minister halfway through nearly every parliament makes for two of the clearest drops from the earlier fifty-year averages. Austria’s chaotic last decade, however, does mean that it is a PR user who has seen the largest fall when switching to this alternative view. Nonetheless, with PR countries taking nine of the top ten slots and Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden all showing clear improvements (especially impressive considering the Netherlands ever-increasing number of parties in parliament, currently 14 meet Siaroff’s criteria for significance¹⁷), it is hard to argue a link with shorter terms in office.

Conclusion: PR-using countries do not inherently see more frequent changes in prime minister than non-PR-using countries. In fact, the countries who tend to see the longest-serving heads of government all use PR to elect their national parliaments.

Prime Ministerial Partisanship

As with the earlier cabinet-governments distinction, some might argue that changes between prime ministers of the same party are not as inherently ‘destabilising’ an event as a change between parties – owing to the obvious greater continuities, even when the new leader pledges to take things in a new direction. So, instead, let’s turn to looking at how frequently the partisanship of the prime minister changes, rather than merely the individual.



Average Duration (Years) Between Changes in Partisanship of Prime Minister, 1973-22

Non-PR-users do here tilt slightly towards the higher end of the scale, but ultimately, it’s yet another case where there is so much variation between PR users that drawing any kind of causal connection isn’t viable. It’s worth noting that Italy’s score is pulled up a bit by the pre-1994 dominance of the Christian Democrats and, again, there are questions thrown up when considering what the ‘prime minister’ is in Switzerland¹⁸.

¹⁷ Siaroff (2018) uses a 2% of seats cut-off for measuring significant parliamentary parties.
¹⁸ As earlier, we have taken the constitutional position and decided to treat the partisanship of the head of government position as equivalent to the overall partisanship of the Federal Council, given that all seven members are equal in status (and not in the typical Prime Minister is *primus inter pares* legal fiction way). If you wish to take the alternative view, Switzerland’s score taking into (cont...)

Country	Party	Years	Duration
Luxembourg	CSV	1926-74	47.9 years
Sweden	SAP	1936-76	40.0 years
Italy	DC	1946-81	35.0 years
Luxembourg	CSV	1979-13	34.4 years
Austria	SPÖ	1970-00	29.8 years
France	Gaullists	1959-81	22.4 years
Belgium	CVP	1979-99	20.3 years
United Kingdom	Conservatives	1979-97	18.0 years
Netherlands	CDA	1977-94	16.7 years
Canada	Liberal	1963-79	16.1 years

Longest Periods Without Change in Prime Ministerial Party

(excluding Switzerland)

If we return to another top ten list (above), we yet again see a table dominated by PR-using countries – with a number of multi-decade periods of no partisan alternation seen in proportional democracies, something (again) seemingly a specialty for Christian democratic parties. This isn't to say that PR inherently leads to *longer* periods of one-party control, but to highlight that such situations aren't impossible under fairer voting systems.

Of course, whether such extended periods of one party being in the driving seat are actually desirable is another matter. While undeniably stable, it can be argued that limited alternation in power can bring stale-ty and complacency from governing parties, with extended stints of parties having access to power additionally linked to increased risk of corruption. This is particularly problematic in the UK owing to the near-exclusively single-party majority nature of our governments, the comparatively limited checks on executive power and the negligible ability of non-governing parties to meaningfully participate in the legislative process.

Conclusion: PR does not inherently lead to more frequent alternation in which party the prime minister is from, with the overwhelming majority of occasions of prolonged one-party control of the top job being in proportional countries.

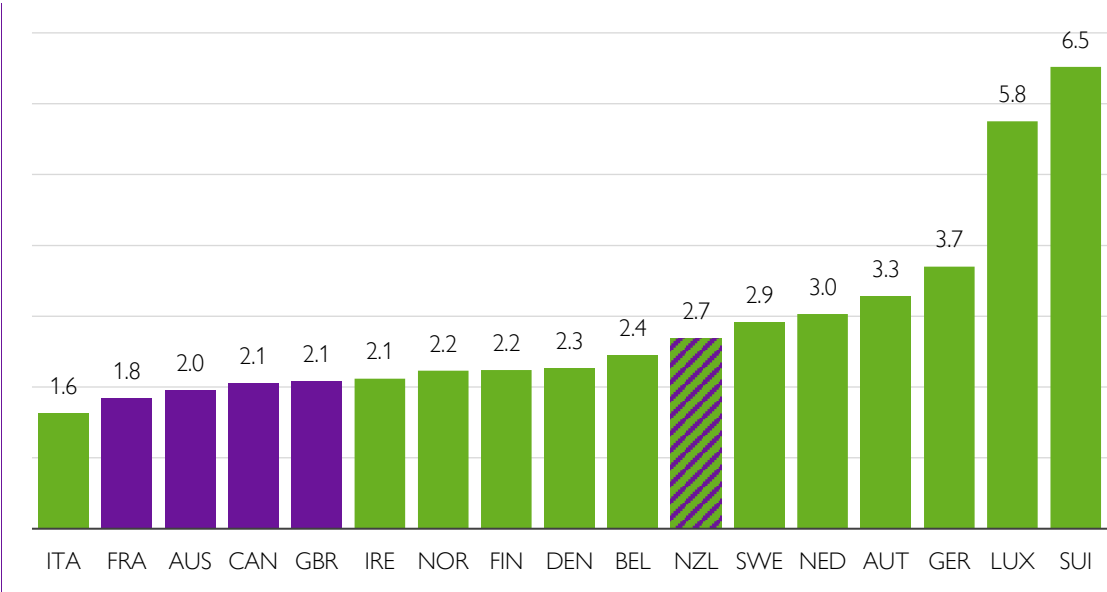
Cabinet Ministers

But for all their crucial status as figureheads, prime ministers are not the only part of the government; it is with their cabinet ministers where many day-to-day decisions on policy and implementation are made. Instability here in particular has the potential to have more direct knock-on effects on the wider world. If PR is the great destabilising force it is made out to be, we should expect to see greater ministerial turnover in PR-using countries.

To look at ministerial turnover, we're going to count how frequently there was a change in minister in each post (e.g., finance minister, interior minister, etc.). In cases where a minister remained in a portfolio that was renamed or partially but not substantively altered, as with Jeremy Hunt serving as Secretary of State for Health then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, this has been merged into one single term. In cases where an individual held multiple portfolios at once, for instance in Luxembourg where this is the overwhelming norm, these have been disentangled and counted separately (although, with the UK, some sinecure positions like the Lord Privy Seal have only been counted if they

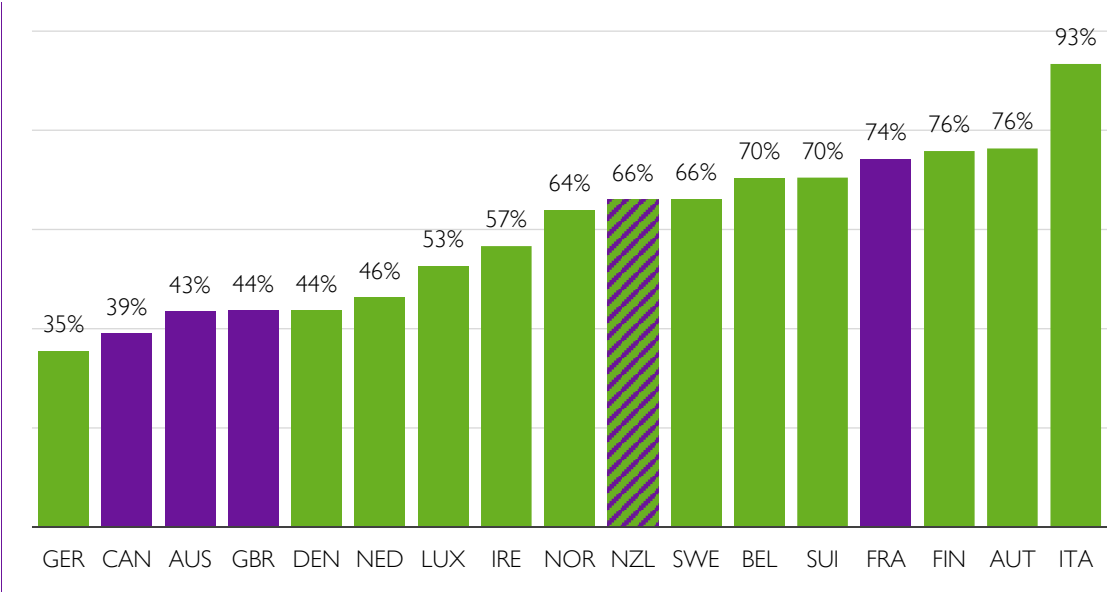
account chair rotation is 1.2 years (there are several occasions where the position was sequentially rotated between two members of the same party).

were held with no other portfolio). Only full cabinet ministers have been counted, owing to the major differences in the position (or existence) of junior ministers in different countries.



Average Duration (Years) of Cabinet Minister Term in Office, 1973-22

Although the non-PR users are all certainly clustered towards the bottom of the table, barring a few typical high-performing exceptions, there isn't really much variation between countries in how long a cabinet minister will stay in post – around two years seemingly be the norm, regardless of wider cabinet duration. Of course, the reasons aren't always the same – in Italy, that's roughly about how long a cabinet lasts, so you aren't seeing much change within that cabinet's lifetime. This can be seen (below) when looking at the frequency of ministerial changes relative to frequency of changing prime ministers – a rare opportunity for Italy to come out top and Germany bottom.



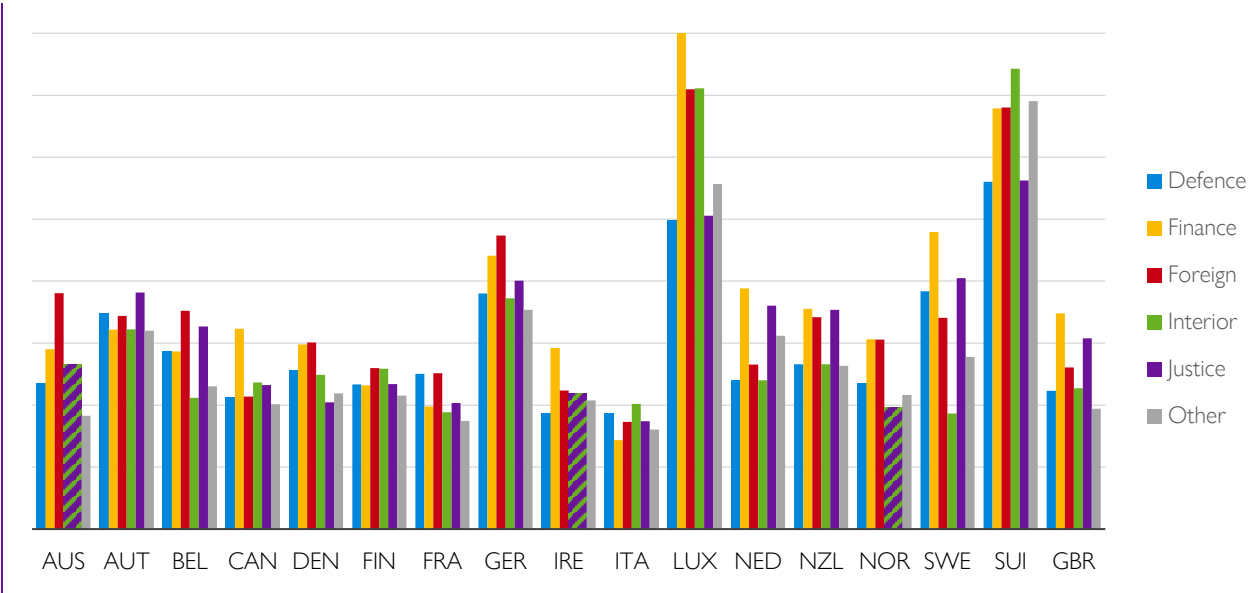
Ministerial Turnover Relative to Prime Ministerial Turnover, 1973-22

However, with Britain and other Westminster-style systems, a key part of the reason for the low scores is the presence of regular substantive cabinet reshuffles – whereby ministers (as well as some newly promoted backbenchers

or junior ministers) get put on a merry-go-round and moved between departments for a variety of reasons not particularly linked to government effectiveness. Indeed, these reshuffles are getting more frequent – with the average duration of a UK cabinet minister in one post falling from 29 months during the 1979-97 Conservative administrations to 26 months during the 1997-10 Labour governments to just 20 months since 2010.

By Portfolio

Not all ministerships are created equal though, with some portfolios carrying more weight, prestige and importance than others. While this isn't particularly connected to stability (although, as the ministers probably most familiar to the public, frequent turnover in such positions would project an image of instability), it is interesting to see whether these more 'senior' positions do see lower rates in alternation than those less prestigious roles. Obviously, what are considered the top jobs does vary a bit from country-to-country, but generally the 'big five' are defence minister, finance minister, foreign affairs minister, interior minister and justice minister (though the latter two are sometimes combined into one ministry).



Average Duration (Years) of Cabinet Minister Term in Office, by Key Portfolio, 1973-22

There's not really a huge amount of variation between portfolios, with roughly similar lengths in office present in most countries. The five senior portfolios do generally outperform the rest, though again, except in a few countries, the difference really isn't that marked. Where there are portfolios that tend to be longer serving, it often seems to be the finance and/or foreign affairs ministers. This shouldn't be too surprising – finance ministers are often the *de facto* second-in-command in a government, owing to their control of the budgets of other departments, and it is reasonably common in coalitions for the leader of the second largest party to be given the foreign ministry position.

Conclusion: PR-using countries do not see greater turnover in cabinet ministers than those that use majoritarian voting systems, instead seeing, on average, higher levels of portfolio stability across government.

Case Study: New Zealand

What's apparent across our examination of these 17 countries is that there is just so much variation in stability levels between countries who merely happen to share the same category of voting system – suggesting that it must be other factors, such as wider institutional or cultural differences, that are driving such vast ranges in performance.

To really gauge the effect of a single factor we'd need an example where one country changed their voting system and not much else. Luckily, we have New Zealand, who chose to move from First Past the Post to Mixed-Member PR in the mid-1990s – providing us with a unique example of an established western democracy undertaking wholesale permanent electoral reform in the modern era. If PR is the great destabiliser, as is alleged by its detractors, we should expect to see a significant impact on New Zealand's stability in the past 30 years...

	1973-96	1996-22
Parliamentary Term Completion	98.2%	97.9% of term
Inter-Parliamentary Volatility ¹⁹	14.4%	15.0% of seats
Prime Ministerial Turnover	2.98	5.40 years
Ministerial Turnover	2.63	2.70 years
Prime Minister Party Alternation	5.97	8.99 years
Cabinet Duration	90.8%	84.7% of term
Government Party Alternation	4.80	4.97 years
Party Duration in Government	4.67	6.37 years
Cabinets Per Parliament	1.50	1.38 cabinets
Post-Election Cabinet Formation	12	24 days

New Zealand Stability Before and After Introduction of PR

...and we don't. There are a few small changes – governments do take slightly longer to get formed (though all but the first post-1996 governments have been formed before the first meeting of parliament) and prime ministers do actually spend longer in power²⁰. But overall, it is almost shocking how similar most of the measures register when looking before and after the introduction of PR. Even the tiniest of gaps are often the result of one-offs – the slightly lower post-1996 score for cabinet duration solely down to some instability during the first (arguably transitional) term; it's 95% when looking at all later terms.

This is pretty much as clear-cut as we can get on this matter, it being fairly apparent that PR does not have any real impact on levels of political stability. New Zealand might now have more parties represented in parliament and have moved from an age of single-party majority government as standard to one where the norm is some form of multi-party governing arrangement, but this has not made the country's parliaments or governments any less stable.

Conclusion: Since the adoption of a proportional voting system, New Zealand has not seen any adverse change in its levels of political stability. As ever when we look at the effects of the 1990s Kiwi electoral reform, it is apparent that the advertised benefits of PR have arrived, while the claimed disadvantages have failed to materialise.

¹⁹ For the 1996 election, volatility has been calculated against what the 1993 election would have been under MMP, so as not to count the larger than average change caused by the switch in voting system as attributable to the new voting system itself.

²⁰ To some extent, this is due to the era-crossing term of Jim Bolger (1990-97) being counted in the latter era, but even if you move him across, PR still leads at 5.0 years vs 3.6 years in terms of Prime Ministerial Turnover.

Case Study: Italy

The only other country in our study that has undergone any significant electoral reform in the last fifty years has been Italy, who, after wide-reaching political scandals in the early 1990s that affected all five governing parties, sought to reform large parts of the political system that had been associated with the scandals. Part of this involved replacing Italy's highly proportional List PR system (*classica*) with a series of semi-proportional voting systems – first to a semi-compensatory mixed-member system (*mattarellum*) in 1993, then a Guaranteed Majority System (*porcellum*) from 2005 and finally to a Parallel Vote system (*rosatellum*) in 2017. It was hoped that the reforms could both increase political stability and encourage two-party competition, with the permanent governance of Christian Democracy (DC) and semi-permanent governance of the other members of the *pentapartito* widely accepted to have enabled corruption²¹. But has the change worked as intended?

	1973-94	1994-22
Parliamentary Term Completion	73.2%	81.4% of term
Inter-Parliamentary Volatility	9.7%	27.5% of seats
Prime Ministerial Turnover	1.48	2.03 years
Ministerial Turnover	1.48	1.80 years
Prime Minister Party Alternation	6.83	2.84 years
Cabinet Duration	31.1%	52.7% of term
Government Party Alternation	1.29	1.58 years
Party Duration in Government	5.12	2.83 years
Cabinets Per Parliament	4.00	2.71 cabinets
Post-Election Cabinet Formation	54	42 days

Italy Stability Before and After 1990s Electoral Reforms

Across most of our measures, stability has undeniably increased somewhat – parliaments complete more of their term, prime ministers and cabinets all sit for longer and post-election cabinets are formed slightly more quickly. But despite the improvement on many measures, the changes are still relatively small and not great enough to move the country significantly up the leader board, with post-1994 Italy still a worse performer than the other 16 countries in terms of turnover of prime ministers, cabinet ministers and parties in government. Post-reform Italy has also gone from having one of the least volatile parliaments in western Europe to one of the most volatile and, due to the demise of the once dominant Christian Democracy, the partisan alternation of prime ministers has actually become more frequent.

How much these changes – positive or negative – are really to do with the electoral reforms, though, seems slight. Firstly, this is because it wasn't really the *classica* voting system that was responsible for the political instability of pre-1994 Italy in the first place. Frequent alternations in prime minister primarily stemmed from the highly factional nature of the DC, who held the office for much of the so-called 'first republic'; with petty factionalism also present in the other significant parties. Additionally, regular changes in coalition composition were encouraged by the other four governing parties being aware of the limited options for DC (around 30-40% of parliament being taken up by the

²¹ The *pentapartito* (literally five party) being a set of five centrist parties – Christian Democracy (DC), the Socialist Party (PSI), the Democratic Socialist Party (PSDI), the Republican Party (PRI) and the Liberal Party (PLI) – that governed Italy in different combinations for most of the post-war period, with the term most regularly used to describe the 'coalition' or series of cabinets that largely included all five from 1981 to 1991.

off-limits communist PCI and post-fascist MSI) and thus knowing they could resign from office on point of principle, yet still be back in cabinet fairly quickly.

Instead, the small improvements in stability are largely down to changes in political culture – primarily in terms of new dynamics of party competition. Rather than a succession of centrist DC-dominated coalitions comprised of some combination of the *pentapartito*, elections are now fought and typically won by opposing left and right blocs – making ending a coalition riskier for participating parties, as your opponents could now get in, instead of just another similar coalition. Many of the parties that comprise these blocs also tend to be built more around an individual leader and their personal appeal, thus making internal power struggles that affect who the prime minister is less frequent or consequential.

While some might only link the change in party system to the change in voting system, the decline of the DC, recalibration of the former Communist Party as a centre-left party and the emergence of right-wing populists beyond the post-fascist MSI all began before the change in voting system, and, together, would likely have led to the emergence of a new inter-party dynamic anyway (particularly with DC's inability to claim to be the only way to keep the now defunct Communists out of power any longer). In all, it's just Italy being Italy.

Conclusion: Italy's political stability has marginally improved since the semi-deproportionalising electoral reforms during the early 1990s. However, such changes should not be overstated, with the country remaining a poor performer across most measures of political stability. Furthermore, the idea that it was the introduction of these less proportional voting systems that enabled such changes does not seem particularly compelling, with the changes in the structure of the party system and partisan competition more likely to have played a major role in altering the political culture.

Country by Country Commentary

Below is some country-specific commentary for each of our 17 democracies, including their overall ranking when considering their relative performance on all ten of our core measures.

Australia, AV, #5: Our most stable non-PR user, Australia typically scores on a similar level to fellow majoritarian system users Canada and the UK, while performing noticeably better when it comes to parliamentary and cabinet durability. Of course, unlike its Commonwealth cousins, Australia does possess a powerful Senate elected by the proportional STV, but that has clearly not negatively affected its overall stability levels.

The superior performance on relative measures may partially be because of the country's shorter parliamentary terms (only three years), but, given that the majority of Canadian parliaments this century haven't even reached three years, that's not the only reason. Nonetheless, Australia's increasing lack of qualms about deposing prime ministers mid-term – having done so in four of the five most recent parliaments – means that Canada and the UK do outperform it when coming to prime ministerial turnover.

Austria, List PR, #7: Historically more similar in stability to countries like Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland, a series of political crises in the last decade have brought Austria's scores down a bit, not least having changed Chancellors six times in the last eight years (the previous six changes took place over a 34-year timespan). However, these issues are not enough to entirely undo Austria's previous penchant for long-serving grand coalitions and limited changing of the partisanship of the Chancellor. Though its scores might be lower than they were a decade ago, Austria still remains an average or above performer across most measures, including in our overall ranking.

Belgium, List PR, #14: Famously the country that 'didn't have a government' for eighteen months, Belgian politics' status as a bit of mess isn't particularly new information. Here, it performs mid-table or below on nine of the ten measures. Of course, Belgium is hardly an anarchic disaster zone and does have a record of major parties spending decades in office uninterrupted, including the Flemish Christian democratic CVP holding the premiership for a solid twenty years from 1979. But it is undeniable that the party system – fractured on both ideological and regional/linguistic grounds – and its associated consociationalism between French and Flemish parties has not been a breeding ground for speedily formed cabinets that remain cohesive for a particularly long time.

Canada, FPTP, #10: A very unusual case. Has prime ministers who typically serve for a reasonably long time in office, but also the country in our study that has had the most early elections. This is largely down to an odd combination of Canadian parties not being particularly riven with leadership-ending factional disputes and an inability to adapt to the growing frequency of hung parliaments, despite the ability to reliably produce single-party majority governments being one of the supposed selling points of FPTP (though, of course, its desirability is hugely debateable).

Although no party has won a majority in five of the seven most recent Canadian elections, there has been a continued eschewment of coalition government and hesitancy towards things such as formal confidence-and-supply agreements that would otherwise be typical in such a situation. As such, Canadian minority governments don't tend to have a particularly strong underpinning and will often require early elections as a not always successful remedy to poor parliament-government relations.

Additionally, Canada has one of the most volatile parliaments in our study, with FPTP failing to prevent substantial party system change in the last few decades; has a longer average government formation period than PR-using

Denmark, despite speedy government creation being another advantage that allegedly only FPTP can bring; and, although notable for the durability of its prime ministers, has one of the lowest levels of wider ministerial durability.

Denmark, List PR, #12: For a PR-using country, Denmark is abnormally fast at forming governments – with the future arrangement typically ready-to-go in days. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, it is also home to fairly frequent changes in party composition of government. The first (and largely fair) assumption would be that this is because of Denmark's 'extreme' favouring of minority government. During our 50-year study period, they only had governments with a parliamentary majority for 20 months (3%), with, on average, cabinet parties holding just 37% of seats in the Folketing – making them particularly susceptible to the whims of non-cabinet parties.

But what the numbers don't always reflect is that, as with other Scandinavian countries, Denmark's largely two-bloc party system can allow parties to move between being in government and supporting it from outside without necessarily affecting the overall stability of government. This occurred in 2014, when the Socialist People's Party left the Thorning-Schmidt coalition after two-and-a-half years, but continued to support it from outside until it completed its four-year term; and again in reverse in 2016, when the Liberal Alliance and Conservative People's Party joined Lars Løkke Rasmussen's Venstre-led cabinet, having previously merely supported it.

Finland, List PR, #13: It may have a fairly inviolate parliament and be very good at avoiding early elections (with all parliaments reaching full term since 1983), but Finland performs fairly weakly across most other measures – most clearly with frequent changes in prime minister and partisan composition of government.

However, to some extent, this overstates the 'instability'. Finnish governments have typically been so-called 'oversized coalitions', whereby more parties are included in cabinet than are actually needed for a parliamentary majority. This stems from a historical situation in which the implementation of legislation could be delayed until after the following election by a one-third vote in parliament – making it beneficial for a government to hold two-thirds of the Eduskunta. But it does mean that, as is not uncommon in the final year of a parliament, one party is able to drop out of the coalition without particularly damaging it or impeding its ability to govern.

France, 2RS, #16: While one of the few users of a non-proportional system (except for the 1986 election), France is a below average performer on all but two measures and our second worst performer overall. This includes having some of the most frequent changes in prime minister and cabinet ministers, as well as a parliament noticeably more volatile than any other country in our study – its Two Round System clearly not helping to ensure a stable party system. The only matter on which France does perform notably well is government formation, as is typical (though not necessarily causally) of majoritarian voting system users.

Germany, MMP, #3: Given its politics' synonymity with stability, even boringness, it's probably not surprising to see Germany score fairly highly on most measures and take the overall bronze medal – with the country of 16-year Chancellors Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel seeing some of the lowest turnover in prime ministers or wider cabinet ministers, as well as scoring highly for cabinet durability. It is also a fairly consistent performer, falling below average on just one measure – government formation. Although pointing to Germany as evidence of the successes of PR is a little cliché, the reality is that it is just clear proof alone that proportional elections aren't really a gateway to chaos.

Ireland, STV, #15: Perhaps not the first country that comes to mind when you think of political instability, but Ireland scores below average on every major measure we examined. Given Malta, the only other country to use STV as the main voting system, would score highly on most measures had we included it in the study, it seems unlikely that the

rather unique voting system is the source of this. Instead, many of Ireland's scores are pulled down by a decade of instability in the 1980s and some short-lived transitional cabinets in 1994 and 2011.

Italy, List PR/AMS/GMS/MMM, #17: Italy's infamed status as an abnormally unstable country is very much backed up by the above data, with it never ranking higher than 12th out of 17 across any of our measures and last or second-to-last on eight – though being the most consistent country is probably not much of a consolation. Italy is undoubtedly a country that has frequent changes in prime minister and partisan composition of government, though its parliaments are actually slightly better at sitting out their term than British ones.

This instability extends to the voting system itself – with Italy undertaking several substantive electoral reforms in the past thirty years in the hope of engendering greater stability. There has been a small but noticeable improvement in a few indices since such reforms, but it seems likely that this is more attributable to the contemporaneous changes in the party system – i.e., the move to largely two-bloc structure of competition and the replacement of the dominant and highly factional Christian Democrats with personality-oriented parties where the leader is harder to replace – than it is to the decline in proportionality of election results.

Luxembourg, List PR, #2: Small, strong and stable – probably the most so of any proper parliamentary democracy. Its history of virtually uncollapsible centrist coalitions (only one government has ended prematurely in the last 50 years) and prime ministers who measure their terms in decades as standard (Luxembourg's third most recent PM took office in 1984, compared to 2019 for the UK) makes it a prime example of stability under a proportional voting system. It's also home to three of the four cabinet ministers in our study who served continuously in one office for more than twenty years, including Fernand Boden who was tourism minister (as well as other portfolios for shorter periods) for 30 years from 1979-09.

Netherlands, List PR, #8: Although Dutch prime ministers are typically relatively long-lasting, they tend to preside over multiple coalition configurations that can't always reach one whole term in office, let alone start a second. Due in part to a slow-moving formal negotiation process and lack of semi-permanent inter-party alliances, these coalitions also take a long time to get formed – four months is just an average. However, this doesn't seem to have had a particularly negative effect on the Netherlands' wider socioeconomic performance – suggesting that some things that are considered 'unstable' in the FPTP mindset don't have a particularly strong real-world impact.

New Zealand, FPTP/MMP, #8: The posterchild for successful electoral reform, the move from FPTP to the proportional MMP in 1996 has not had any noteworthy negative effect on the country's stability levels. If anything, it has actually slightly improved them – considering pre- and post-reform New Zealand as separate countries, MMP New Zealand rises to 7th of 18, while FPTP New Zealand falls to a joint 10th with Canada.

When considering this, plus the fact MMP has led to more representative election results, increases in political trust and enabled the development of a more powerful and pluralistic parliament, it's hard to see anything other than New Zealand's reform proving that the positive effects of PR do materialise, while the alleged negative effects do not.

Norway, List PR, #11: Other than in terms of never holding early elections, due to that being functionally impossible, Norway is, perhaps surprisingly, an average or worse performer in most other measures. This includes seeing the most frequent alternation in prime ministerial partisanship, though this is somewhat down to the pre-1994 dominance of Italy's Christian Democrats managing to push Italy marginally above Norway. Arguably, this again shows up how meaningless a lot of the discussion around this kind of 'stability' actually is – Norway is by no means a chaotic,

unsuccessful or ungovernable polity, yet it doesn't score particularly well on these measures. Fundamentally, if Norway is a below average performer for a PR-using country, perhaps PR just isn't that 'dangerous' after all.

Sweden, List PR, #4: An all-round solid performer, the only country other than Luxembourg not to fall into the bottom five on any measure, Sweden can add political stability to the long list of things that it overachieves on. Of note, however, is how consistently it outranks the other Scandinavian countries (Denmark on eight measures and Norway on nine of ten, with the tenth drawn) and how much variation there is between the three of them. Considering they all share broadly similar two-tier List PR systems, this just further underlines how little link there is between voting system design and stability.

Switzerland, List PR, #1: Undeniably the most politically stable country in our study, with Switzerland's practically permanent grand coalition model meaning that changes in party composition of government are rare and early elections non-existent. Though not truly a parliamentary democracy, the simple fact is that Switzerland is a country that uses PR and is incredibly politically stable – proving by itself that these are not mutually exclusive concepts.

United Kingdom, FPTP, #6: In one word – inconsistent²². Inarguably 'stable' in terms of factors like change in partisan composition of government or fast government formations (though whether the former is desirable is debateable and the latter seems more a quirk of British political culture than anything else), the UK is unexceptional when it comes to prime ministerial duration and noticeably below average when it comes to the durability of parliaments, cabinets and ministers. Despite the framing of the debate in the UK, we just aren't especially stable and certainly not in a position to lord it over PR users like Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden or Switzerland.

²² When it comes to standard deviation in rankings on individual measures, only fellow FPTP-user Canada scores higher. With France then in third, this suggests that majoritarian systems are very inconsistent when it comes to political stability – quite stable in some respects, quite unstable in others. This contrasts with PR users like Sweden who are consistently stable across the board. Standard deviations in rankings: AUS 3.60; AUT 3.79; BEL 3.73; CAN 5.20; DEN 3.73; FIN 4.08; FRA 4.74; GER 3.47; IRE 2.36; ITA 1.85; LUX 2.84; NED 4.24; NZL 3.13; NOR 4.56; SWE 2.66; SUI 3.75; GBR 5.08.

Overall Conclusions

Across our ten main political stability indices, there have been two main themes – a lot of variation and PR-using countries near-consistently outperforming conventional wisdom. On nearly every measure, it has been proportional democracies that have been the most stable of our 17 countries, with most PR users always reaching what would be viewed as a reasonable level of political stability. Sure, there have been cases where a small number of PR users performed poorly, but the same can be said for those that use majoritarian systems – 2RS-user France is practically as deserving of an ‘unstable’ reputation as the notorious Italy, who, let’s not forget, currently use the least proportional system of any of our PR users.

Throughout, there has been considerable levels of overlap between the two categories of voting system, though with a handful of PR countries top on nearly all measures – proving that the highest levels of stability are fully achievable under a fairer voting system. And with that the case, the only reasonable conclusion is that no noteworthy causal relationship exists between choice of voting system and levels of political stability. Indeed, if we actually look at the average performance of our PR and non-PR users across our ten main measures, even if such a relationship were to exist, it wouldn’t be in majoritarian systems favour...

	PR	Non-PR
Parliamentary Term Completion	88.8%	82.4% of term
Inter-Parliamentary Volatility	13.0%	17.6% of seats
Prime Ministerial Turnover	5.54	4.12 years
Ministerial Turnover	3.17	2.06 years
Prime Minister Party Alternation	9.93	8.28 years
Cabinet Duration	71.5%	70.1% of term
Government Party Alternation	5.45	6.93 years
Party Duration in Government	8.66	7.46 years
Cabinets Per Parliament	1.63	1.66 cabinets
Post-Election Cabinet Formation	54	10 days

Average Stability Measures Across our 17 PR and Non-PR-Using Countries

But this is not to say that the opposite is in fact true and that PR actually creates greater levels of political stability, rather to just highlight that looking at it purely through this voting system-based binary hides the significant amount of variation that exists between users of similar voting systems. And when you ignore that variation, you ignore the reality that it is deeper differences in political culture – particularly differing inter- and intra-party dynamics – that are the true shapers of levels of political stability. Of course, the voting system does have a degree of influence on said culture, but, if PR is playing a role in shaping the cultures of both the most and least politically stable western democracies, that suggests its influence on stability levels is weak or, at the very least, highly mitigatable.

The lack of a causal relationship is probably clearest when looking at our case study of New Zealand – where there has been negligible change in their levels of political stability since the introduction of a proportional system in 1996. This is despite election results becoming significantly more proportional, parliament becoming more multi-party, governments shifting away from single-party majorities as standard and associated reforms that have increased the power of parliament – all factors that British conventional wisdom holds should create a less stable politics. As ever, New Zealand’s reform demonstrates that the positive effects of PR, as heralded by its supporters, are real, while the

supposed negative effects, as claimed by its opponents, tend to be little more than baseless fearmongering derived from a few cherry-picked and context-shorn anecdotes.

Broadly, we'd expect something similar if the UK switched to a proportional voting system. The experiences of Europe and New Zealand just do not suggest that the adoption of a fairer voting system would affect the stability of our politics, certainly not by itself. And this works in both directions. We would neither plunge to the depths of Italian instability, but nor would we attain Luxembourg's levels of calm constancy – not without substantial changes to our wider political culture on a scale that did not materialise in New Zealand.

And this is because that is the fundamental reality of PR – it creates more representative parliaments, it makes votes matter, it ensures a more pluralistic range of voices are heard in the policy-making process – it's simply about proportionally representing the public. Everything that comes after that is down to the behaviour of actors in the political process. If they choose to form secure governments and maintain them throughout a parliamentary term, we will have stable governments under any voting system; but if they view constantly deposing leaders, resigning from cabinets and failing to create solid bases for governments in parliament as the right behaviour, we will have political instability, regardless of voting system.

So, is FPTP the one thing saving us from instability? Is it the only route to strong and stable government? Bluntly, no.

Ultimately, with all the evidence taken together, it is simply not plausible to claim that there is a substantive causal link between PR and political instability, nor is it credible to say that the UK would inherently become less politically stable if it adopted a PR voting system. Strong and stable governments are fully achievable under both types of voting system, with many of the strongest and stablest found in proportional democracies.

Appendix I: Summary Results of 10 Main Stability Indices

		Voting System	Parliament Term Completion	Parliament Volatility	PM Turnover	Minister Turnover	PM Party Alternation	Cabinet Duration	Govt Party Alternation	Party Duration in Govt	Cabinets per Parliament	Post-Election Cabinet Formation
			of term	of seats	years	years	years	of max	years	years	cabinets	days
AUS	Australia	AV	86.5%	9.5%	4.50	1.95	8.24	79.1%	8.24	8.24	1.32	13
AUT	Austria	List PR	82.0%	10.3%	4.30	3.28	9.94	66.4%	7.10	14.19	1.36	70
BEL	Belgium	List PR	83.1%	11.8%	3.48	2.45	5.80	55.8%	2.90	10.26	1.93	137
CAN	Canada	FPTP	68.9%	20.6%	5.28	2.06	8.76	64.9%	8.76	8.76	1.20	17
DEN	Denmark	List PR	71.2%	15.0%	5.19	2.27	5.96	60.3%	3.01	5.15	1.44	14
FIN	Finland	List PR	98.4%	10.1%	2.95	2.24	4.73	71.4%	2.13	6.89	2.33	45
FRA	France	2RS	90.0%	32.5%	2.49	1.85	7.29	66.5%	2.82	5.24	2.83	7
GER	Germany	MMP	94.1%	10.4%	10.42	3.70	13.03	80.4%	7.45	12.39	1.23	57
IRE	Ireland	STV	72.5%	14.5%	3.74	2.12	5.98	48.9%	3.33	4.99	1.71	34
ITA	Italy	Various	77.6%	22.6%	1.75	1.63	4.49	43.7%	1.44	3.61	3.00	47
LUX	Luxembourg	List PR	98.8%	10.2%	10.95	5.75	29.13	90.9%	7.47	17.55	1.10	39
NED	Netherlands	List PR	83.3%	16.7%	6.55	3.03	7.85	76.3%	3.01	10.06	1.21	120
NZL	New Zealand	Various	98.1%	15.7%	4.08	2.69	7.48	87.9%	4.89	5.75	1.44	19
NOR	Norway	List PR	100.0%	14.8%	3.50	2.23	4.45	75.7%	3.27	3.86	1.92	24
SWE	Sweden	List PR	100.0%	10.1%	4.41	2.92	9.56	87.7%	5.91	7.49	1.33	24
SUI	Switzerland	List PR	100.0%	8.9%	9.25	6.52	18.66	94.4%	18.66	²³	1.08	50
GBR	United Kingdom	FPTP	76.2%	9.4%	4.76	2.08	9.97	59.6%	8.98	8.98	1.38	2
New Zealand 1973-96		FPTP	98.2%	14.4%	2.98	2.63	5.97	90.8%	4.80	4.67	1.50	12
New Zealand 1996-22		MMP	97.9%	15.0%	5.40	2.98	8.99	84.7%	4.97	6.37	1.38	24
PR Average			88.8%	13.0%	5.54	3.17	9.93	71.5%	5.45	8.66	1.63	53.70
Non-PR Average			82.4%	17.6%	4.12	2.06	8.28	70.1%	6.93	7.46	1.66	10.05

²³ See relevant section for explanation of why Switzerland's score on this measure is hard to calculate, though, regardless of how it is done, comes out on top.

Appendix II: Summary Results of 10 Main Stability Indices (Median)

		Voting System	Parliament Term Completion	Parliament Volatility	PM Turnover	Minister Turnover	PM Party Alternation	Cabinet Duration	Govt Party Alternation	Party Duration in Govt	Cabinets per Parliament	Post-Election Cabinet Formation
			of term	of seats	years	years	years	of max	years	years	cabinets	days
AUS	Australia	AV	94.2%	10.0%	3.01	1.59	8.00	87.8%	8.00	8.00	1	11
AUT	Austria	List PR	92.5%	9.0%	2.45	2.38	6.93	70.2%	6.93	8.93	1	68
BEL	Belgium	List PR	93.0%	10.4%	2.03	1.83	4.49	42.9%	2.79	4.44	1.5	79.5
CAN	Canada	FPTP	71.9%	13.8%	4.33	1.78	9.43	67.0%	9.43	9.43	1	16
DEN	Denmark	List PR	75.0%	12.0%	4.00	1.92	5.79	56.7%	2.34	3.96	1	10
FIN	Finland	List PR	100.0%	9.3%	2.75	2.02	3.98	81.3%	1.61	3.93	2	42.5
FRA	France	2RS	98.1%	31.1%	2.14	1.86	4.90	61.3%	2.14	4.86	3	3.5
GER	Germany	MMP	99.0%	8.9%	8.38	3.74	14.49	100.0%	7.07	14.37	1	45
IRE	Ireland	STV	79.6%	12.9%	2.84	2.09	4.24	49.2%	2.53	3.99	1	20
ITA	Italy	Various	82.7%	18.9%	1.43	1.30	1.98	37.5%	1.17	2.65	3	40
LUX	Luxembourg	List PR	100.0%	10.1%	10.52	5.00	34.39	100.0%	5.22	10.44	1	40.5
NED	Netherlands	List PR	98.1%	15.7%	6.40	3.64	7.92	91.1%	3.00	4.97	1	98.5
NZL	New Zealand	Various	100.0%	15.1%	2.00	2.62	8.78	100.0%	4.17	6.27	1	15.5
NOR	Norway	List PR	100.0%	16.4%	2.93	1.84	3.99	100.0%	2.41	3.18	2	32
SWE	Sweden	List PR	100.0%	9.2%	3.20	2.68	7.99	100.0%	3.01	6.58	1	18
SUI	Switzerland	List PR	100.0%	9.3%	9.00	6.00	6.93	100.0%	6.93	²⁴	1	52
GBR	United Kingdom	FPTP	82.3%	8.5%	3.12	1.75	9.10	71.7%	5.17	5.17	1	1
New Zealand 1973-96		FPTP	100.0%	12.2%	1.50	2.51	6.27	100.0%	5.33	4.64	1	13
New Zealand 1996-22		MMP	100.0%	13.5%	6.17	2.67	8.94	97.7%	3.01	8.93	1	18
PR Average			93.6%	11.9%	4.72	2.86	8.61	78.2%	3.72	6.25	1.36	44.40
Non-PR Average			88.1%	15.4%	2.96	1.83	7.68	75.1%	6.09	6.62	1.44	8.44

²⁴ See relevant section for explanation of why Switzerland's score on this measure is hard to calculate, though, regardless of how it is done, comes out on top.

Appendix III: Breakdown of Cabinet Minister Turnover by Portfolio

Average turnover by key ministerial portfolios, with longest-serving portfolio (excluding the prime minister) highlighted. Where the longest-serving portfolio is not listed in the table, the longest-serving of those on it has been highlighted instead in a lighter shade²⁵.

	Prime Ministers	All Ministers	Min as % of PM Turnover	Min as % of Party Turnover	Senior Ministers					Other Common Ministers							
					Defence	Finance	Foreign Affairs	Interior	Justice	Agriculture	DPMs	Economy	Education	Health	Industry	Social Security	Transport
AUS	4.50	1.95	43.4%	23.7%	2.35	2.90	4.11	2.65		2.60	2.60		2.27	2.76	2.12	1.82	1.76
AUT	4.30	3.28	76.4%	46.2%	3.48	3.21	3.44	3.22	3.81	4.99	2.60	4.34	3.85	3.03		2.88	2.47
BEL	3.48	2.45	70.3%	84.4%	2.86	2.86	3.52	2.12	3.27	2.57	2.92	2.99	1.83	2.23	1.80	2.89	2.82
CAN	5.28	2.06	39.0%	23.5%	2.12	3.23	2.14	2.37	2.32	3.08	2.51	1.93		2.44	1.86		2.29
DEN	5.19	2.27	43.6%	75.2%	2.56	2.98	3.01	2.49	2.05	2.13		2.72	3.13	2.07	2.15	1.83	1.68
FIN	2.95	2.24	75.9%	105.4%	2.34	2.32	2.60	2.59	2.34	2.61	2.00		1.95		2.04	2.12	1.88
FRA	2.49	1.85	74.2%	57.8%	2.50	1.98	2.51	1.89	2.04	1.91		2.14	2.49	1.93	1.44	1.49	1.32
GER	10.42	3.70	35.5%	49.7%	3.80	4.41	4.74	3.72	4.01	4.31	4.01	2.88	3.82	3.50		4.48	3.04
IRE	3.74	2.12	56.6%	63.6%	1.86	2.92	2.24	2.19		2.80	2.54	1.05	2.04	2.43	1.94	2.31	1.71
ITA	1.75	1.63	93.4%	113.5%	1.86	1.43	1.73	2.02	1.74	1.80	1.74	1.17	1.80	1.87	1.56	1.93	1.63
LUX	10.95	5.75	52.5%	77.0%	4.98	9.72	7.10	7.11	5.06	4.48	4.89	6.37	6.40	5.26		6.24	5.60
NED	6.55	3.03	46.2%	100.4%	2.40	3.88	2.65	2.40	3.61	3.43	2.77	2.66	3.87	3.88		3.61	3.47
NZL	4.08	2.69	66.0%	55.1%	2.66	3.55	3.42	2.66	3.54	3.90	3.19	2.41	2.81	2.40	3.32	3.21	2.66
NOR	3.50	2.23	63.8%	68.4%	2.36	3.06	3.06	1.96		2.45	1.78		2.33	2.65	2.06	2.14	2.23
SWE	4.41	2.92	66.1%	49.4%	3.84	4.79	3.41	1.87	4.05	3.33	2.24	1.47	3.79	2.38	2.56	3.53	
SUI	9.25	6.52	70.5%	34.9%	5.60	6.78	6.80	7.43	5.62			6.13			7.78		
GBR	4.76	2.08	43.6%	23.1%	2.23	3.48	2.61	2.27	3.08	2.17	2.88		2.01	2.14	1.74	2.10	1.68

²⁵ On average, longest-serving portfolio by country: AUS: Minister for Foreign Affairs; AUT: Minister of Agriculture and Forests; BEL: Minister of Foreign Affairs; CAN: Minister of Finance; DEN: Minister of Education; FIN: Minister of Agriculture and Forestry; FRA: Minister of Higher Education and Research; GER: Minister for Economic Cooperation (International Development); IRE: Minister for Finance; ITA: Minister of the Interior; LUX: Minister for Tourism and the Middle Classes; NED: Minister of Finance; NZL: Minister of Trade; NOR: Minister of Finance and Customs; SWE: Minister of Finance; SUI: Transport, Energy and Communications Minister (Industry); GBR: Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance). Only includes portfolios that existed for more than half of our study period; where portfolio name has been changed, the 'modal average' of names has been used.

Appendix IV: Voting Systems

Listed below are the voting system types used by our 17 democracies during our period of study, alongside the years that this system was in use and the average disproportionality of election results (according to the Gallagher index) between 1973 and 2022 under that system²⁶. Typically, a Gallagher index score of below 5.00 is regarded as a proportional outcome. Non-major changes in the voting system have not been listed.

Country	Voting System Type	Years	Disp
Australia	Alternative Vote (Instant Runoff Voting in Single-Member Constituencies)	1918-	10.73
Austria	Quota-Tiered List PR	1923-	2.07
Belgium	Constituency List PR	1899-	3.45
Canada	First Past the Post (Simple Plurality in Single-Member Constituencies)	1966-	12.28
Denmark	Tiered List PR	1920-	1.42
Finland	Constituency List PR	1906-	3.27
France	Two-Round System (Majority-Plurality Runoff Voting in Single-Member Constituencies)	1958-85	15.96
	Constituency List PR	1986-	7.23
Germany	Mixed-Member PR (Compensatory Mixed-Member System)	1949-	2.82
Ireland	Single Transferable Vote	1921-	4.44
Italy	Quota-Tiered List PR	1956-93	2.61
	Supplementary Member System (Semi-Compensatory Mixed-Member System)	1993-05	8.31
	Guaranteed Majority System	2005-15	8.89
	Majority Jackpot System	2015-17	n/a ²⁷
	Parallel Vote (Non-Compensatory Mixed-Member System)	2017-	9.04
Luxembourg	Constituency List PR	1919-	4.13
Netherlands	National List PR	1917-	1.14
New Zealand	First Past the Post (Simple Plurality in Single-Member Constituencies)	1913-93	14.98
	Mixed-Member PR (Compensatory Mixed-Member System)	1993-	3.10
Norway	Constituency List PR	1920-88	5.16
	Tiered List PR	1988-	3.25
Sweden	Tiered List PR	1969-	1.67
Switzerland	Constituency List PR	1919-	3.05
United Kingdom	First Past the Post (Simple Plurality in Single-Member Constituencies)	1948-	14.42

²⁶ Data from Gallagher, M. (2023). *Election Indices Dataset*. PDF. Available from: http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php.

²⁷ The Italian electoral law of 2015, commonly known as the *Italicum*, was never used for an election, instead being replaced by the 'Rosatellum' electoral law in 2017, which was first used for the 2018 Italian general election.

Appendix V: Bounds of Inclusion

Below are the earliest and most recent parliaments, prime ministers, cabinets, prime ministerial partisanship periods and governmental partisanship periods included in our analysis of the relevant measures from each of our 17 countries.

Country	Category	Oldest Included	Newest Included
Australia	Parliament	Elected 02/12/1972	Replaced 21/05/2022
	Prime Minister	Gough Whitlam (1972-75)	Scott Morrison (2018-22)
	Cabinet	Whitlam I (1972-74)	Morrison II (2019-22)
	PM Party	ALP (1972-75)	Lib (2013-22)
	Gov Party	ALP (1972-75)	LNC (2013-22)
Austria	Parliament	Elected 10/10/1971	Replaced 29/09/2019
	Prime Minister	Bruno Kreisky (1970-83)	Alexander Schallenberg (2021)
	Cabinet	Kreisky II (1971-75)	Schallenberg (2021)
	PM Party	SPÖ (1970-00)	Ind (2019-20)
	Gov Party	SPÖ (1970-83)	Ind (2019-20)
Belgium	Parliament	Elected 07/11/1971	Replaced 26/05/2019
	Prime Minister	Gaston Eyskens (1968-73)	Sophie Wilmès (2019-20)
	Cabinet	G Eyskens V (1972-73)	Wilmès II (2020)
	PM Party	CVP (1968-73)	MR (2014-20)
	Gov Party	CVP/BSC; BSP/PSB (1968-73)	VLD/MR; CDV (2018-20)
Canada	Parliament	Elected 30/10/1972	Replaced 20/09/2021
	Prime Minister	Pierre Trudeau (1968-79)	Stephen Harper (2006-15)
	Cabinet	P Trudeau III (1972-74)	J Trudeau II (2019-21)
	PM Party	Lib (1963-79)	Con (2006-15)
	Gov Party	Lib (1963-79)	Con (2006-15)
Denmark	Parliament	Elected 21/09/1971	Replaced 01/11/2022
	Prime Minister	Anker Jørgensen (1972-73)	Lars Løkke Rasmussen (2015-19)
	Cabinet	Jørgensen I (1972-73)	Frederiksen I (2019-22)
	PM Party	SD/A (1971-73)	V (2015-19)
	Gov Party	SD/A (1971-73)	SD/A (2019-22)
Finland	Parliament	Elected 03/01/1972	Replaced 14/04/2019
	Prime Minister	Kalevi Sorsa (1972-75)	Antti Rinne (2019)
	Cabinet	Sorsa I (1972-75)	Rinne (2019)
	PM Party	SSDP (1972-75)	Kesk (2015-19)
	Gov Party	SSDP; Kesk; SFP; LKP (1972-75)	Kesk; UV/ST; Kok (2017-19)
France	Parliament	Elected 23/06/1968	Replaced 12/06/2022
	Prime Minister	Pierre Messmer (1972-74)	Jean Castex (2020-22)
	Cabinet	Messmer I (1972-73)	Borne I (2022)
	PM Party	UDR (1959-81)	PS (2012-17)
	Gov Party	UDR; CDP; RI (1969-74)	PS; PRG; RE (2016-17)
Germany	Parliament	Elected 19/11/1972	Replaced 26/09/2021
	Prime Minister	Willy Brandt (1969-74)	Angela Merkel (2005-21)
	Cabinet	Brandt II (1972-74)	Merkel IV (2018-21)
	PM Party	SPD (1969-82)	CDU (2005-21)
	Gov Party	SPD; FDP (1969-82)	CDU/CSU; SPD (2013-21)

Ireland	Parliament	Elected 18/06/1969	Replaced 08/02/2020
	Prime Minister	Jack Lynch (1966-73)	Micheál Martin (2020-22)
	Cabinet	Lynch II (1969-73)	Martin (2020-22)
	PM Party	FF (1957-73)	FF (2020-22)
	Gov Party	FF (1957-73)	FG; Ind (2016-20)
Italy	Parliament	Elected 07/05/1972	Replaced 25/09/2022
	Prime Minister	Giulio Andreotti (1972-73)	Mario Draghi (2021-22)
	Cabinet	Andreotti II (1972-73)	Draghi (2021-22)
	PM Party	DC (1946-81)	Ind (2021-22)
	Gov Party	DC; PSDI; PLI (1972-73)	M5S; Lega; PD; FI; IV... (2021-22)
Luxembourg	Parliament	Elected 15/12/1968	Replaced 14/10/2018
	Prime Minister	Pierre Werner (1959-74)	Jean-Claude Juncker (1995-13)
	Cabinet	Werner III (1969-74)	Bettel I (2013-18)
	PM Party	CSV (1926-74)	CSV (1979-13)
	Gov Party	CSV; DP (1969-74)	CSV; LSAP (2004-13)
Netherlands	Parliament	Elected 29/11/1972	Replaced 17/03/2021
	Prime Minister	Barend Biescheuvel (1971-73)	Jan Peter Balkenende (2002-10)
	Cabinet	Biescheuvel II (1972-73)	Rutte III (2017-22)
	PM Party	ARP (1971-73)	CDA (2002-10)
	Gov Party	ARP; KVP; CHU; VVD (1972-73)	VVD; PvdA (2012-17)
New Zealand	Parliament	Elected 25/11/1972	Replaced 17/10/2020
	Prime Minister	Norman Kirk (1972-74)	Bill English (2016-17)
	Cabinet	Kirk (1972-74)	Ardern I (2017-20)
	PM Party	Lab (1972-75)	Nat (2008-17)
	Gov Party	Lab (1972-75)	Lab; NZF; Grn (2017-20)
Norway	Parliament	Elected 08/09/1969	Replaced 13/09/2021
	Prime Minister	Lars Korvald (1972-73)	Erna Solberg (2013-21)
	Cabinet	Korvald (1972-73)	Solberg V (2020-21)
	PM Party	KrF (1972-73)	H (2013-21)
	Gov Party	Sp; V; KrF (1972-73)	H; V; KrF (2020-21)
Sweden	Parliament	Elected 20/09/1970	Replaced 11/09/2022
	Prime Minister	Olof Palme (1969-76)	Magdalena Andersson (2021-22)
	Cabinet	Palme II (1970-73)	Andersson (2021-22)
	PM Party	SAP (1936-76)	SAP (2014-22)
	Gov Party	SAP (1957-76)	SAP (2021-22)
Switzerland	Parliament	Elected 31/10/1971	Replaced 20/10/2019
	Prime Minister	Hans-Peter Tschudi (1960-73)	Simonetta Sommaruga (2010-22)
	Cabinet	Federal Council 1971 (1972-75)	Federal Council 2015 (2016-19)
	PM Party	CVP; FDP; SPS; SVP (1960-07)	CVP; FDP; SPS; SVP; BDP (2009-15)
	Gov Party		
United Kingdom	Parliament	Elected 18/06/1970	Replaced 12/12/2019
	Prime Minister	Edward Heath (1970-74)	Liz Truss (2022)
	Cabinet	Heath (1970-74)	Truss (2022)
	PM Party	Con (1970-74)	Lab (1997-10)
	Gov Party	Con (1970-74)	Con; LD (2010-15)

