

# Election Inversions under Proportional Representation

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It has been shown by Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard, using several empirical examples under the Danish electoral system, that proportional representation (PR) can produce 'election inversions' such that a coalition of parties collectively supported by a majority of voters fails to win a majority of parliamentary seats. However, Kurrild-Klitgaard's examples result from imperfections in the Danish PR system introduced to serve goals other than proportionality. In this article, Kurrild-Klitgaard's analysis is carried a step further by showing that election inversions can occur even under the purest type of PR – namely, one with (i) a single national constituency, (ii) no explicit seat threshold, and (iii) a highly proportional electoral formula. Inversions result from the unavoidable 'whole number problem'. Recent election data from Israel and the Netherlands is examined and examples of inversions under their relatively pure PR systems are found. Inversions are also found after recalculating seat allocations without a threshold, and on the basis of the most proportional electoral formulas and when the analysis is restricted to seat-winning parties. Kurrild-Klitgaard's Danish data is then re-examined in the same fashion, as is the most recent apportionment of seats in the United States House of Representatives, and more examples of inversions are found.

## Introduction

For more than a hundred years, political scientists and other commentators have observed that outcomes under 'majoritarian' electoral systems – in particular, single-member district plurality systems – do not stack up well when evaluated by proportional criteria. Kurrild-Klitgaard (2013), however, has shown that proportional representation (PR) systems, such as those used in all Scandinavian countries, do not always comply with a criterion that seems compelling by both proportional and majoritarian standards: more votes should mean no fewer seats. In particular, Kurrild-Klitgaard has shown that PR systems can produce 'election inversions' of the sort that awarded a majority of electoral votes (and the United States Presidency) to George W. Bush in 2000 despite the fact that more people had voted for Albert Gore. Since PR systems typically produce parliaments in which no

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party wins a majority of either votes or seats, in this context an ‘election inversion’ is best defined as a situation in which a coalition of parties collectively supported by a majority of voters fails to win a majority of seats and, conversely, the complementary coalition supported by only a minority of voters wins a majority of seats. Kurrild-Klitgaard identifies several examples of such inversions under the Danish PR system.

However, Kurrild-Klitgaard’s examples result from *avoidable* imperfections in the Danish, and many other, PR systems deliberately introduced to serve goals other than proportionality (e.g., to provide local representation, to deter excessive party proliferation). Here I carry Kurrild-Klitgaard’s analysis a step further by showing that election inversions can and do occur even under the purest type of PR – namely, one that (i) uses a single national constituency, (ii) imposes no explicit threshold for winning seats, and (iii) employs a highly proportional electoral formula. This is because even the purest PR systems have *unavoidable* imperfections that result from the *whole number problem* – that is, the fact parties must be awarded seats in terms of relatively small whole numbers, while their vote support comes in terms of far larger numbers, making party vote shares essentially continuous quantities. As a result, perfect proportionality can essentially never be achieved.

Having established this theoretical point, I examine recent election data from Israel and the Netherlands to look for empirical examples of election inversions. These countries are noted for having relatively pure PR systems in that they use a single nationwide constituency combined with a low threshold. However, both countries use the less proportional D’Hondt formula. I therefore also look for inversions after recalculating seat allocations on the basis of the highly proportional Largest Remainder and Sainte-Laguë formulas and without an explicit seat threshold and after calculating vote shares based on the vote cast for seat-winning parties only. I then re-examine Kurrild-Klitgaard’s Danish data in these respects, as well as the most recent apportionment of seats in the United States House of Representatives. Inversion possibilities are found in all of these datasets.

All Scandinavian countries have broadly similar electoral systems explicitly designed to ensure the fair representation of political groups. Thus, while Kurrild-Klitgaard’s examples were drawn from only one Scandinavian country and this article draws on data from outside Scandinavia, the phenomenon of election inversions under PR is clearly relevant to the analysis and evaluation of Scandinavia electoral institutions.

## Election Inversions

Following Miller (2012, 93), ‘an *election inversion* occurs when the candidate (or party) that wins the most votes from the nationwide electorate fails to

win the most electoral votes (or parliamentary seats) and therefore loses the election'. As noted above, the Electoral College in the United States produced an inversion in 2000; in like manner, the postwar Labour government in the United Kingdom was turned out of office in 1951 by the Conservative Party even though Labour candidates won more votes nationwide than the Conservative candidates. Each of these instances occurred in an essentially two-party context and entailed what we may call a 'partywise inversion' – that is, party A wins more votes than party B, while B wins more seats than A. Partywise inversions may also occur in a multicandidate or multiparty context. For example, in the four-candidate 1860 Presidential election in the United States, Douglas (Northern Democrat) received more popular votes than either Breckinridge (Southern Democrat) or Bell (Constitution Union), but Breckinridge and Bell each won more electoral votes than Douglas. These inversions were inconsequential since Lincoln (Republican) won a 39.65 percent plurality of the popular vote and a majority of electoral votes and the Presidency.<sup>1</sup> Inconsequential partywise inversions have also occurred in British parliamentary elections. For example, in 1997, the Ulster Unionist Party won ten seats with less than half the electoral support of the Scottish National Party, which won only six seats.

If the number of seats is even (as is true of the present Electoral College), even a strictly two-party (or two-candidate) contest may produce a tie with respect to seats, even though almost certainly one party (or candidate) wins more votes than the other. Regardless of whether the number of seats is even or odd, if three or more parties win seats, two (or more) parties may win equal numbers of seats, even though almost certainly one wins more votes. We refer to such events as 'partial inversions'.<sup>2</sup>

Every PR formula is (weakly) 'monotonic' with respect to parties – that is, if party A wins more votes than party B, A receives no fewer seats than B. But, as previously noted, in the context of PR it makes sense to focus (as Kurrild-Klitgaard does) on *coalitionwise* inversions, in which a coalition of parties collectively supported by a majority of voters fails to win as many seats as the complementary coalition of all other parties supported by a minority of voters. While partywise inversions cannot occur under an undistricted PR system, we shall show that coalitionwise inversions can occur under even the purest types of PR system.

## Election Inversions under the Danish Proportional Representation System

Kurrild-Klitgaard's (2013) empirical examples of election inversions under PR occurred under the Danish electoral system, which provides for: 135 seats apportioned on the basis of population among about a dozen multi-member districts of varying magnitudes; 40 national adjustment seats; and

two seats for each of two autonomous overseas territories (Greenland and the Faroe Islands). The latter four seats are guaranteed regardless of population and give the overseas territories representation greater than their populations warrant. The 40 national adjustment seats effectively create a single ‘continental’ constituency with 175 seats allocated among political parties on the basis of the (modified) Sainte-Laguë formula with a 2 percent seat threshold.<sup>3</sup> While the regional districts provide a measure of geographical representation, their existence has almost no impact on the overall allocation of seats to parties.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Danish system departs from pure PR primarily in two respects: the ‘federal’ status (to use Kurrild-Klitgaard’s terminology) of Greenland and the Faroe Islands and the 2 percent seat threshold. The two instances of election inversions that Kurrild-Klitgaard identifies are due to what he calls ‘federal effects’ and ‘threshold effects’, which result from these two imperfections in the Danish PR system.

‘Federal effects’ are a special case of what Miller (2012, 108ff) calls ‘apportionment effects’ in an electoral system based on states, regions or other geographically defined districts, and cannot occur in undistricted systems. A districted electoral system is *perfectly apportioned* if the number of votes cast in each district is precisely proportional to the number of seats (or electoral votes) at stake in each district. Given a system with *uniform* districts (each having the same number of seats), perfect apportionment requires that precisely the same number of votes be cast in each district. In practice, perfect apportionment cannot hold because districts inevitably are not precisely equal in population (or eligible voters) and voting turnout inevitably varies somewhat across districts. Given a system with *non-uniform* districts (such as states in the Electoral College), the same considerations lead to imperfect apportionment. Moreover, non-uniform districts cannot be allocated seats precisely proportional to their population (or eligible voters) for the same reason that parties cannot be allocated seats precisely proportional to their votes that is, the whole number problem. In addition, a districted system may be ‘federal’ in nature in that it deliberately favors some (typically smaller) districts in apportioning seats – for example, small states in the United States Electoral College and the overseas territories in the Danish electoral system. If different parties have differing strengths in different (e.g., smaller versus larger, low-turnout versus high-turnout) districts, imperfect apportionment may create partisan bias in the electoral system that in turn can produce election inversions.

Kurrild-Klitgaard (2013, Table 3) provides a hypothetical example of federal effects causing a partywise inversion in a PR system with two districts, the smaller of which has disproportionate representation. He also tracks down a possible empirical example of a Danish election inversion due to federal effects (Kurrild-Klitgaard 2013, Table 4). In 1971, the coalition of all center-right parties gained a bare majority of both votes and seats

in ‘continental’ Denmark, but a left-of-center coalition secured the support of three of the four overseas representatives, thereby securing a bare majority of seats in parliament without also securing a majority of the vote nationwide. However, due to peculiarities in the party systems in the two territories, this may not represent a true coalitionwise inversion.

Kurrild-Klitgaard’s more compelling example of an election inversion in Denmark was produced by ‘threshold effects’, which constitute a special case of what Miller (2012, 112ff) calls ‘distribution effects’. In non-PR systems, distribution effects result when one party’s vote is more ‘efficiently’ distributed over districts than another’s. For example, in a two-party system, party A may win a minority of districts (or states with a minority of the electoral votes) by large margins, while party B wins a majority of districts (or states with a majority of the electoral votes) by small margins, with the result that party B wins a majority of the seats (or electoral votes) with a minority of the votes.

Under PR, the principal source of ‘inefficiently’ distributed votes occurs when several small parties fail to win any seats, whereas a single larger party with the same total vote would win one or more seats.<sup>5</sup> Kurrild-Klitgaard (2013, Table 2) first provides a hypothetical example of such an inversion. A less hypothetical example of an election inversion under PR due to threshold effects might occur in the context of contemporary German politics, where recent elections have typically been contested between rival center-right (CDU/CSU+FDP) and center-left (SPD+Greens) prospective governing coalitions. If the smaller party in one coalition but not the other were to fall below the 5 percent threshold of the German electoral system, an inversion might occur, as illustrated in Table 1.<sup>6</sup>

Kurrild-Klitgaard’s (2013, Table 5) empirical example pertains to the 1990 election in which, with respect to ‘continental’ Denmark only, the parties of the left collectively won a bare majority of the votes but the parties of the center-right won a decisive majority of the seats, while no plausible accounting for votes in the overseas territories could give the center-right party an overall majority of the vote. The inversion resulted because a number of small leftist parties (but only one rightist one) fell below the 2 percent threshold and failed to win any seats, despite collectively winning 4.4

Table 1. A Hypothetical Election Inversion in Germany Due to the 5% Threshold

Party	Party votes	Coalition votes	Party seats	Coalition seats
CDU/CSU	46.0%	50.5%	289	289
FDP	4.5%		0	
SPD	42.0%	49.5%	264	311
Greens	7.5%		47	

percent of the total vote. Like supporters of minor parties under a plurality system, supporters of these parties ‘wasted’ their votes; if they had voted ‘tactically’ they could have concentrated their votes on a single leftist party that would have met the 2 percent threshold and won an (approximately) proportional share of the seats and given the left coalition a parliamentary majority.<sup>7</sup>

## Election Inversions under Pure Proportional Representation

We now show that neither federal (or other apportionment) effects nor threshold effects are necessary for election inversions under PR. The claim is that *provided that there are three or more parties, coalitionwise election inversions can occur under even the purest type of proportional representation – that is, one with a single nationwide district, no seat threshold and a highly proportional electoral formula.*

At this point, it is in order to note that the word ‘coalition’ is used in two distinct ways in formal political theory. In the more general sense, a ‘coalition’ refers merely to *any set* of players (e.g., voters or parties) – this is the standard terminology in the theory of simple games (e.g., Shapley 1962) and in voting power theory (e.g., Felsenthal & Machover 1998). In the narrower sense, a coalition is a *particular set* of players *who enter into a binding agreement* – for example, to form a coalition government. We use the term here mostly in the more general sense, but should note that Kurrild-Klitgaard’s examples of coalitionwise inversions in Danish politics pertain to sets of ideologically compatible parties that became (governing) coalitions in the narrower sense.

We now briefly discuss the specifics of several PR formulas.<sup>8</sup> Let us first define party *K*’s *quota*  $Q_k$  of seats as the ‘quantity’ (as opposed to ‘number’) of seats that is precisely proportional to its vote share, i.e.,  $Q_k = S \times V_k / \Sigma V$ , where  $S$  is the number of seats in parliament,  $V_k$  is the number of votes for party *K*, and  $\Sigma V$  is the total vote for all parties.

In the extraordinarily unlikely event that the quota for every party is a whole number, every party can be awarded seats equal to its quota and a perfectly proportional allocation of seats is possible (so the whole number problem does not arise); in this event, all PR formulas produce this perfect apportionment.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, parties cannot be awarded their precise quota of seats, and different formulas may produce different apportionments.

The most common PR formulas are the Largest Remainder-Hare (LR-H), Sainte-Laguë and D’Hondt systems. LR-H is a *quota* method: it gives each party its quota rounded down to the nearest whole number of seats and allocates any remaining seats to the parties with the ‘largest remainders’, where a party’s *remainder* is the difference between its quota

and its quota rounded down. Sainte-Laguë and D'Hondt are *divisor* methods: they divide each party's vote by a common divisor approximately equal to the ratio  $\sum V / S$  but adjusted so that, when the resulting *quotients* are rounded according to some rule, they add up to the number of seats available. Divisor methods differ according to the rounding rule used: under D'Hondt, quotients are always rounded down; under Sainte-Laguë, quotients are rounded in the normal manner – that is, up or down to the nearest whole number. The D'Hondt formula favors large parties and often violates 'upper quota' by giving some (large) parties more seats than their quotas rounded up; while it never violates 'lower quota' by giving any parties fewer seats than their quotas rounded down, the quotas of small parties are very likely to be rounded down. In contrast, LR-H and Sainte-Laguë formulas exhibit no tendency to favor either large or small parties (Schuster et al. 2003). By design, LR-H 'stays in quota' – that is, it gives every party its quota rounded up or down. Like every divisor method, Sainte-Laguë may violate quota, but it is less likely to do so than any other divisor method and in fact almost always stays in quota. (A number of nations, including Denmark, use a modified Sainte-Laguë formula that is slightly more favorable to large parties and slightly more likely to violate quota.) LR-H and (unmodified) Sainte-Laguë have been reckoned to be the 'most proportional' PR formulas, taking account of a variety of proportionality criteria simultaneously (Pennisi 1998), and they usually allocate seats the same way.

We are now in a position to demonstrate the central claim: given three or more parties, coalitionwise inversions can occur under even the purest types of PR. Since the theoretical claim is only that such inversions are possible, it is sufficient to provide a hypothetical example. Table 2 provides two closely related examples, both involving three parties and 35 seats. To implement the LR-H formula, quotas are calculated for each party. In the first example, the quotas rounded down sum to 34; party A has the largest remainder and gets the extra seat for a majority of 18 out of 35, despite

Table 2. Hypothetical Coalitionwise Election Inversions under Pure Proportional Representation (LR-H or Sainte-Laguë) with 35 Seats

Party	Party votes	Coalition votes	Party quotas	Party seats	Coalition seats
A	49.7%	49.7%	17.395	18	18
B	29.4%	50.3%	10.290	10	17
C	20.9%		7.315	7	
A	50.3%	50.3%	17.605	17	17
B	30.4%	49.7%	10.640	11	18
C	19.3%		6.755	7	

having fewer votes than the coalition of B and C. In the second example, the quotas rounded down sum to 33; parties B and C have the two largest remainders and get the two extra seats for a collective majority of 18 out of 35, despite having fewer votes than party A. The Sainte-Laguë formula produces the same seat allocations and thus the same inversion examples.<sup>10</sup>

Once recognized, the logical possibility of coalitionwise election inversions under PR may appear to be unsurprising, since the whole number problem is well known and frequently commented upon. However, to the best of my (and, evidently, Kurrild-Klitgaard's) knowledge, this possibility has never before been explicitly recognized, with one almost incidental exception. In a footnote, Van der Hout and McGann (2009, 744) give a hypothetical example (credited to Iain McLean) of an election inversion under PR (which they characterize as a 'manufactured majority'), but their example includes a small party that fails to win a seat and they appear to attribute the possibility of inversions exclusively to the presence of one or more small non-seat-winning parties. Table 2 shows that the presence of such parties is not necessary for inversions.

It is important to note that PR formulas treat 'coalitions' of parties and 'fusions' of parties differently, and therefore permit coalitionwise inversions but not partywise inversions. If parties B and C were fused into a single party, no inversions would occur. In the first example, adding the quotas of B and C gives the fused party the largest remainder and the extra seat. In the second example, adding the quotas of B and C gives the fused party 17 seats at the outset, but A now has the largest remainder and wins the extra seat. Sainte-Laguë (and D'Hondt) produces the same seat allocations and the same non-inversions. This illustrates the point asserted earlier that, if party A wins more votes than party B, every PR formula awards A at least as many seats as B. It also illustrates why the central theoretical claim requires three or more parties.

Clearly the vote profiles in Table 2 were carefully devised by giving party A either slightly more or slightly less than half of the vote and 'tuning' the division of the residual vote between parties B and C in relation to the total number of seats. Given only three parties, a coalitionwise inversion clearly is possible only if the leading party gets slightly more or less than 50 percent of the vote. However, we shall see that, if there are relatively many parties with varying levels of voter support, inversion possibilities may become more varied and probable.

While the logical possibility of election inversions under (pure) PR might be deemed unsurprising (since the whole number problem is well recognized), what is perhaps more surprising is that – contrary to my initial expectation that it would be difficult if not impossible to find empirical examples – this logical possibility is quite frequently manifested in empirical election data. The next section considers how to search efficiently for the



phenomenon in electoral data and section after that demonstrates that the phenomenon does in fact manifest itself with some regularity.

## Finding Inversion Possibilities

In the almost certain event that parties cannot be awarded their precise quota of seats, even under the purest PR system some parties get a (fractionally) greater ‘quantity’ of seats than their quota and other a lesser ‘quantity’. Let us call the difference between the number of seats a party wins (under a given formula) and its quota the party’s (positive or negative) ‘seat differential’. As an accounting identity, the seat differentials of all parties add up to zero.

Given a profile of party votes and seats, we can search for possible coalitionwise inversions by calculating seat differentials and then looking for coalitions that control a small majority of seats and are composed of parties all or most of which have positive seat differentials, and which therefore are likely to have the support of less than a majority of voters. This may not be possible because election inversions under PR are close-run things involving complementary coalitions, each with very close to half of the votes and seats, which many party configurations do not admit. Generally speaking, the likelihood of finding inversions increases as the number of parties and their variability of seat shares increase. Clearly if one party has a majority of both votes and seats, no inversion is possible. If no or few parties win just one or a few seats, it is less likely that we can find coalitions of just the right seat size. The effect of increasing the number of seats  $S$  is unclear. On the one hand, as  $S$  increases, PR becomes more proportional, the magnitudes of seat differentials become smaller relative to  $S$ , and generally the whole number problem becomes less substantial, suggesting the likelihood of inversions may decrease. On the other hand, as  $S$  increases, the share of seats won by the largest party can be expected to decrease and number of small seat-winning parties can be expected to increase (Taagepera 2007, Chapter 8), making it more likely that coalitions of just the right size exist.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, we may note that, as suggested by Van der Hout and McGann (2009) and by Kurrild-Klitgaard’s (2013) threshold effects example, there is one easy way to construct hypothetical examples of inversion possibilities. This is to allow the number of small non-seat-winning parties to proliferate to the extent that they collectively win a significant proportion of the total vote. It then will be easy to find coalitions of seat-winning parties that control a majority of seats with less than a majority of the total vote but nevertheless control a majority of the vote cast for seat-winning parties actually represented in parliament. Therefore, we further inquire whether

we can find empirical examples of election inversions under PR when vote shares are calculated on the basis of the vote for seat-winning parties only.

## Empirical Examples of Election Inversions

We first examine the most recent election data from Israel and the Netherlands to look for empirical examples of election inversions under PR. Both countries are noted for having relatively pure PR systems, particularly by having a single nationwide constituency combined with relatively low seat thresholds.<sup>12</sup> However, both countries use the less proportional D'Hondt formula. We therefore also look for inversions after recalculating seat allocations without a threshold and on the basis of the more proportional LR-H and Sainte-Laguë formulas. We also examine whether inversions occur when vote shares are calculated on the basis of seat-winning parties only.

Table 3 shows the results of the 2013 election in Israel. To say Israel has a multiparty system is an understatement. However, only 12 parties met the 2 percent threshold and were awarded seats. Since the Israeli parliament has an even number of seats (120), we might not expect to find examples of (full) inversions because a coalition with electoral support under 50 percent must control at least two more seats than its complement (61 versus 59). However, it turns out to be easy enough to find examples of inversions, as shown in Table 3. Coalitions whose members are marked with an 'X' control at least 61 (and as many as 65) seats, but are nevertheless supported by less than 50 percent of the voters.<sup>13</sup> When we restrict our attention to seat-winning parties, seat allocations and coalition possibilities remain as before but the vote shares of seat-winning parties increase as the votes cast for non-seat-winning parties are now excluded from the total vote. As a result, the vote support for every coalition also increases, but three of the coalitions still collected less than half of the total vote cast for seat-winning parties.<sup>14</sup>

Next we 'purify' the seat allocation by eliminating the seat threshold and replacing D'Hondt with LR-H or Sainte-Laguë (which in this case produce identical seat allocations), as shown in Table 4. The effect is to increase the number of seat-winning parties to 18 and to reduce the average magnitude of the seat differentials (and eliminate, among seat-winning parties, their correlation with party size). Despite proportionality that is as good as possible, we can again identify a number of inversion possibilities. Moreover, the effect of better proportionality is that every inversion holds up even when vote shares are calculated on the basis of seat-winning parties only.

Table 5 shows the results of the 2012 election in the Netherlands. Like the Israeli parliament, the Dutch parliament has an even number of seats (150), making (full) inversions more difficult. However, it is again easy enough to find examples of inversions, as shown in Table 5, including one which holds up when votes shares are based on seat-winning parties only. When we

Table 3. Israeli 2013 Election: Actual Seat Allocation

Party	Votes	Seats	Vote %	Quota	Differential	Coalitions	Coalitions	Coalitions
Likud Yisrael Beiteinu	885,163	31	23.338	28,006	2,994	X	X	X
Yesh Atid	543,458	19	14.329	17,195	1,805	X	X	X
Yisrael Labor Party	432,118	15	11.393	13,672	1,328	X	X	X
Habayit Hayehudi	345,985	12	9.122	10,947	1,053	X	X	X
Shas	331,868	11	8.750	10,500	0,500	X	X	X
United Tora Judaism	195,892	7	5.165	6,198	0,802	X	X	X
Hatenua	189,167	6	4.988	5,985	0,015	X	X	X
Meretz	172,403	6	4.546	5,455	0,545			
United Arab List	138,450	4	3.650	4,380	-0,380			
Hadash	113,439	4	2.991	3,589	0,411			
National Democratic Assembly	97,030	3	2.558	3,070	-0,070			
Kadima	78,974	2	2.082	2,499	-0,499			
Otzma Leyisrael	66,775	0	1.761	2,113	-2,113			
Am Shalem	45,690	0	1.205	1,446	-1,446			
Green Leaf – Liberal List	43,734	0	1.153	1,384	-1,384			
Eretz Hadasha	28,080	0	0.740	0,888	-0,888			
Koach Lehaspia	28,049	0	0.740	0,887	-0,887			
Hayisraelim	18,939	0	0.499	0,599	-0,599			
The Green and Young	8,117	0	0.214	0,257	-0,257			
Dor Bonei Haaretz	5,975	0	0.158	0,189	-0,189			
Chaim Bekavod	3,640	0	0.096	0,115	-0,115			
Da-am – Workers Party	3,546	0	0.094	0,112	-0,112			
We Are Brothers	2,899	0	0.076	0,092	-0,092			
Tzedek Hevrat	2,877	0	0.076	0,091	-0,091			
Kulanu Haverim	2,176	0	0.057	0,069	-0,069			
The Pirates	2,076	0	0.055	0,066	-0,066			
The Economics Party	1,972	0	0.052	0,062	-0,062			
Mitkademet Liberal Democrats	1,352	0	0.036	0,043	-0,043			
Light	1,027	0	0.027	0,032	-0,032			
Brit Olam	761	0	0.020	0,024	-0,024			
Hatikva Leshinui	649	0	0.017	0,021	-0,021			
Moreshet Avot	461	0	0.012	0,015	-0,015			
Total	3,792,742	120	100.000	120,000	0.000			
Coalition seats						65	62	61
Coalition vote % (based on total vote)						49.06	46.79	46.42
Coalition vote % (seat-winning parties only)						52.80	50.36	49.91
						61	61	61
						45.82	46.38	47.43
						49.96	49.91	51.04

Source: [http://www.bechirot.gov.il/elections19/eng/list/results\\_eng.aspx](http://www.bechirot.gov.il/elections19/eng/list/results_eng.aspx)

Table 4. Israeli 2013 Election: Seat Allocations under LR-H/Sainte-Lagué without a Threshold

Party	Votes	Seats	Vote %	Quota	Differential	Coalitions
Likud Yisrael Beiteinu	885,163	28	23.338	28,006	-0.006	X
Yesh Atid	543,458	17	14.329	17,195	-0.195	X
Yisrael Labor Party	432,118	14	11.393	13,672	0.328	X
Habayit Hayehudi	345,985	11	9.122	10,947	0.053	X
Shas	331,868	11	8.750	10,500	0.500	X
United Tora Judaism	195,892	6	5.165	6,198	-0.198	X
Hatenua	189,167	6	4.988	5,985	0.015	X
Meretz	172,403	6	4.546	5,455	0.545	X
United Arab List	138,450	4	3.650	4,380	-0.380	X
Hadash	113,439	4	2.991	3,589	0.411	X
National Democratic Assembly	97,030	3	2.558	3,070	-0.070	X
Kadima	78,974	3	2.082	2,499	0.501	X
Otzma Leyisrael	66,775	2	1.761	2,113	-0.113	X
Am Shalem	45,690	1	1.205	1,446	-0.446	X
Green Leaf – Liberal List	43,734	1	1.153	1,384	-0.384	X
Eretz Hadasha	28,080	1	0.740	0,888	0.112	X
Koach Lehaspia	28,049	1	0.499	0,599	0.113	X
Hayisraelim	18,939	1	0.499	0,599	0.401	X
The Green and Young	8,117	0	0.214	0,257	-0.257	X
Dor Bonei Haaretz	5,975	0	0.158	0,189	-0.189	X
Chaim Bekavod	3,640	0	0.096	0,115	-0.115	X
Da-am – Workers Party	3,546	0	0.093	0,112	-0.112	X
We Are Brothers	2,899	0	0.076	0,092	-0.092	X
Tzedeek Hevrat	2,877	0	0.076	0,091	-0.091	X
Kulanu Haverim	2,176	0	0.057	0,069	-0.069	X
The Pirates	2,076	0	0.055	0,066	-0.066	X
The Economics Party	1,972	0	0.052	0,062	-0.062	X
Mitkademet Liberal Democrats	1,352	0	0.036	0,043	-0.043	X
Light	1,027	0	0.027	0,032	-0.032	X
Brit Olam	761	0	0.020	0,024	-0.024	X
Hatikva Leshinui	649	0	0.017	0,021	-0.021	X
Moreshet Avot	461	0	0.012	0,015	-0.015	X
Total	3,792,742	120	100.000	120,000	0.000	
Coalition seats						61
Coalition vote % (based on total vote)						49.27
Coalition vote % (seat-winning parties only)						49.76
						61
						49.05
						49.54
						61
						48.41
						48.89

Table 5. Dutch 2012 Election: Actual Seat Allocation

Party	Votes	Seats	Vote %	Quota	Differential	Coalitions
People's Party (VVD)	2,504,948	41	26.580	39.870	1.130	X
Labour Party (PvdA)	2,340,750	38	24.838	37.256	0.744	X
Party for Freedom (PVV)	950,263	15	10.083	15.125	-0.125	X
Socialist Party (SP)	909,853	15	9.654	14.482	0.518	X
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	801,620	13	8.506	12.759	0.241	X
Democrats 66	757,091	12	8.033	12.050	-0.050	X
Christian Union (CU)	294,586	5	3.126	4.689	0.311	X
Green Left	219,896	4	2.333	3.500	0.500	X
Reformed Political Party (SGP)	196,780	3	2.088	3.132	-0.132	X
Party for the Animal (PvdD)	182,162	2	1.933	2.899	-0.899	X
50PLUS	177,631	2	1.885	2.827	-0.827	X
Pirate Party	30,600	0	0.325	0.487	-0.487	
Party for Men and Spirit	18,310	0	0.194	0.291	-0.291	
Sovereign Independent Pioneers (SOPN)	12,982	0	0.138	0.207	-0.207	
Party of the Future (PvdT)	8,194	0	0.087	0.130	-0.130	
Democratic Political Turning Point (DPK)	7,363	0	0.078	0.117	-0.117	
Libertarian Party (LP)	4,163	0	0.044	0.066	-0.066	
Netherlands Local (NedLok)	2,842	0	0.030	0.045	-0.045	
Liberal Democratic Party (LibDem)	2,126	0	0.023	0.034	-0.034	
Anti-Europe Party (AEP)	2,013	0	0.021	0.032	-0.032	
Political Party NXD	62	0	0.001	0.001	-0.001	
Total	9,424,235	150	100.000	150.000	0.000	
Coalition seats						76
Coalition vote % (based on total vote)						49.75
Coalition vote % (based on seat-winning parties only)						50.22
						76
						49.87
						50.34
						76
						49.79
						50.26

Source: Dutch Election Results since 1918 (<http://www.nlverkiezingen.com>).

‘purify’ the seat allocation by eliminating the threshold requirement and replacing D’Hondt with LR-H or Sainte-Laguë (which in this case produce slightly different seat allocations), we can still identify a number of examples of inversions, as shown in Table 6, including one which holds up when vote shares are calculated on the basis of seat-winning parties only.<sup>15</sup>

We next reexamine Kurrild-Klitgaard’s 1990 Danish example of an inversion due to threshold effects, but we exclude ‘federal effects’ by considering Denmark’s 175 ‘continental’ seats only. Table 7 reproduces his Table 5. The third coalition (that won 91 seats) – the ideologically coherent center-right coalition that actually formed the government – corresponds to Kurrild-Klitgaard’s inversion based on threshold effects (though his vote-share calculation includes the non-seat-winning right-of-center Justice Party). We see, however, that at least two other possible coalitionwise inversions exist, though none survives as an inversion with respect to vote shares of seat-winning parties only. Table 8 shows the seat allocation with the seat threshold eliminated and modified Sainte-Laguë replaced by either LR-H or pure Sainte-Laguë (which produce identical seat allocations). While the previously identified coalitions, including the governing one, lose their seat majorities, we can identify new two examples of coalitionwise inversions. Moreover, removing the threshold requirement and using the most proportional formulas means that all parties are seat-winning except the vanishingly small Humanist Party, with the result that the same coalitions provide examples of inversions with respect to votes shares of seat-winning parties only.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, we examine the most recent apportionment (based on the 2010 census) of the 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives among the 50 states. The apportionment of House seats is based on the population of each state and since 1940 has used the Hill-Huntington formula, which is a divisor method that uses ‘geometric’ rounding. As such, it is very similar to Sainte-Laguë but slightly more favorable to small states, though this slight bias effectively disappears with this many seats (Schuster et al. 2003, 675).<sup>17</sup> This data is useful for getting a sense of inversion possibilities when the number of seats increases somewhat and the number of (seat-winning) ‘parties’ (i.e., states) increases substantially. State ‘coalition’ possibilities are extraordinarily numerous and were not extensively searched, but what we can straightforwardly do is to rank states in order of their seat differentials and cumulate their seat and population shares until we approach a majority of 218 House seats. The most favored (with respect to seat differentials) states with 207 seats have 46.25 percent of the population. Adding the next most favored state (Michigan) produces a ‘coalition’ with 221 seats and 49.46 percent of the population. Replacing Michigan with the slightly less favored but also less populous Tennessee creates a ‘coalition’ with a bare majority of

Table 6. Dutch 2012 Election: Seat Allocation under LR-H and Sainte-Laguë without a Threshold

Party	Largest Remainder-Hare				Sainte-Laguë			
	Quota	Seats	Differential	Coalitions	Seats	Differential	Coalitions	
People's Party (VVD)	39,870	40	0.130	X	40	0.130	X	
Labour Party (PvdA)	37,256	37	-0.256		37	-0.256		X
Party for Freedom (PVV)	15,125	15	-0.125	X	15	-0.125		
Socialist Party (SP)	14,482	14	-0.482		15	0.518	X	X
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	12,759	13	0.241	X	13	0.241	X	X
Democrats 66	12,050	12	-0.050	X	12	-0.050		X
Christian Union (CU)	4,689	5	0.311		5	0.311	X	X
Green Left	3,500	4	0.500	X	4	0.500		X
Reformed Political Party (SGP)	3,132	3	-0.132		3	-0.132		
Party for the Animal (PvdD)	2,899	3	0.101	X	3	0.101		
50PLUS	2,827	3	0.173	X	3	0.173	X	X
Pirate Party	0,487	1	0.513	X	0	-0.487		
Party for Men and Spirit	0,291	0	-0.291		0	-0.291		
Sovereign Independent Pioneers (SOPN)	0,207	0	-0.207		0	-0.207		
Party of the Future (PvdF)	0,130	0	-0.130		0	-0.130		
Democratic Political Turning Point (DPK)	0,117	0	-0.117		0	-0.117		
Libertarian Party (LP)	0,066	0	-0.066		0	-0.066		
Netherlands Local (NedLook)	0,045	0	-0.045		0	-0.045		
Liberal Democratic Party (LibDem)	0,034	0	-0.034		0	-0.034		
Anti-Europe Party (AEP)	0,032	0	-0.032		0	-0.032		
Political Party NXD	0,001	0	-0.001		0	-0.001		
Total	150,000	150	0.000		150	0.000		
Coalition seats				76	76		76	76
Coalition vote % (total vote)				49.71	49.60		48.75	49.87
Coalition vote % (seat-winning)				50.02	49.90		50.22	50.34

Table 7. Danish 1990 Election: Actual Seat Allocation ('Continental' Denmark Only)

Party	Votes	Votes %	Quota	Seats	Differential	Coalitions
Social Democrats	1,221,121	37.695	65,967	69	3,033	X
Conservatives	517,293	15.969	27,945	30	2,055	X
Liberal Party	511,643	15.794	27,640	29	1,360	X
Socialist People's Party	268,759	8.296	14,519	15	0,481	X
Progress Party	208,484	6.436	11,263	12	0,737	X
Centre-Democrats	165,556	5.111	8,944	9	0,056	X
Radicals	114,888	3.547	6,206	7	0,794	X
Christian People's Party	74,174	2.290	4,007	4	-0,007	X
Common Course	57,896	1.787	3,128	0	-3,128	
Unity List	54,038	1.668	2,919	0	-2,919	
Greens	27,642	0.853	1,493	0	-1,493	
Justice Party	17,181	0.530	0,928	0	-0,928	
Humanist Party	763	0.024	0,041	0	-0,041	
Total	3,239,438	100.000	175,000	175	0,000	
Coalition seats						88
Coalition vote % (based on total vote)						47.68
Coalition vote % (seat-winning parties only)						50.11
						88
						91*
						48.28
						51.66

Note:

\*Governing coalition.

Source: Kurrild-Klitgaard (2013) and Danish Parliament website (<http://www.ft.dk>).



Table 8. Danish 1990 Election: Seat Allocation under L-R-H/Sainte-Laguë without a Threshold ('Continental' Denmark Only)

Party	Votes	Votes %	Quota	Seats	Differential	Coalitions
Social Democrats	1,221,121	37.695	65.967	66	0.033	X
Conservatives	517,293	15.969	27.945	28	0.055	X
Liberal Party	511,643	15.794	27.640	28	0.360	X
Socialist People's Party	268,759	8.296	14.519	15	0.481	X
Progress Party	208,484	6.436	11.263	11	-0.263	X
Centre-Democrats	165,556	5.111	8.944	9	0.056	X
Radicals	114,888	3.547	6.206	6	-0.206	X
Christian People's Party	74,174	2.290	4.007	4	-0.007	X
Common Course	57,896	1.787	3.128	3	-0.128	X
Unity List	54,038	1.668	2.919	3	0.081	X
Greens	27,642	0.853	1.493	1	-0.493	X
Justice Party	17,181	0.530	0.928	1	0.072	X
Humanist Party	763	0.024	0.041	0	-0.041	
Total	3,239,438	100.000	175.000	175	0.000	
CCoalition seats						88
Coalition vote % (based on total vote)						49.66
Coalition vote % (seat-winning parties only)						49.67

218 seats and only 48.31 percent of the population. It is possible but unlikely that there is another even more 'efficient' coalition; certainly there are many additional inversion possibilities.

The LR-H formula (which as the 'Hamilton method' has been used to apportion House seats in the past) produces the same apportionment of seats as Hill-Huntington. The Sainte-Laguë formula (which as the 'Webster method' has also been used in the past) produces an apportionment that differs from Hill-Huntington with respect to only two states. The most favored (with respect to seat differentials) states with 217 seats have 48.56 percent of the population. Adding the next most favored state (Hawaii) produces a 'coalition' with 219 seats and 49.01 percent of the population. We can replace Hawaii with the slightly less favored but also less populous North Dakota to create a 'coalition' with a bare majority of 218 seats and only 48.78 percent of the population. Again, it is possible but unlikely that there is another even more 'efficient' coalition, and certainly there are many additional inversion possibilities.

We can likewise examine inversions based on electoral votes, rather than House seats. As mentioned earlier, the apportionment of electoral votes deliberately favors (as a 'federal effect') small states by giving each state electoral votes equal to its total representation in Congress – that is, its House seats plus two (for its equal two seats in the Senate). In addition, the District of Columbia has three electoral votes, for a total of 538. The most favored (39 smallest) states with 255 electoral votes have 40.56 percent of the population. Adding the next most favored state of Georgia gives a majority of 271 electoral votes with only 43.70 percent of the population. We can replace Georgia with the slightly less favored but also slightly less populous North Carolina to create a 'coalition' with a bare majority of 270 electoral votes and only 43.65 percent of the population. Again, it is possible but unlikely that there is another even more 'efficient' coalition, and certainly there are a great many additional inversion possibilities. The unsurprising lesson here is that, while election inversions under more or less pure proportional apportionment are always close-run things, inversions become both more probable and more substantial given major 'federal effects'.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

It is well known that plurality systems based on districts can produce election inversions in which one party or candidate wins a majority of seats or electoral votes even though another party wins more votes. While it might seem that PR systems such as those used in Scandinavian countries cannot produce inversions, Kurrild-Klitgaard (2013) shows that Denmark's PR system has produced inversions in which a coalition of parties supported by a minority of votes won a majority of seats. However, Kurrild-Klitgaard's

examples rest on imperfections in Denmark's PR system, introduced to serve goals other than proportionality, which can produce inversions through 'federal' or 'threshold' effects. Moreover, Kurrild-Klitgaard's inversion examples do not hold when vote shares are calculated on the basis of seat-winning parties only.

Here we have shown that coalitionwise election inversions can occur even under the purest type of PR and even with respect to vote shares based on votes cast for seat-winning parties only. They result from the unavoidable whole number problem found in every PR system. Moreover, we have examined a variety of empirical election results in several countries, and in almost every case identified multiple inversion possibilities. This suggests that *potential* election inversions are typical, not exceptional, when PR systems produce a sufficiently fragmented party system that a number of barely winning coalitions exist – in practice, this means systems with a sufficiently low effective nationwide threshold (Taagepera 2007, 247–50).

Of course, many or most barely winning coalitions, in the general sense of sets of parties, are not plausible coalitions in the narrower sense of sets of ideologically compatible parties that might form a government and, even among coalitions of the latter type, at most one can actually form (and more broad based coalition may instead form). Thus, *realized* election inversions under PR are undoubtedly rather rare and, like most inversions in majoritarian systems, are close-run things and are probably not significant threats to political legitimacy. But proportional electoral rules deal only with numbers of votes and seats – not ideological relationships among parties and coalition formation, so it is worth recognizing that they also are unavoidably subject to the inversion phenomenon.

It may thus be worth considering what institutional reforms might be devised to mitigate or avoid the possibility of election inversions. 'Majoritarian constraints' in PR election laws (already found in some countries) and/or 'enhanced *apparentement*' to induce essentially bipolar electoral rivalry between center-right and center-left (or other) alliances would reduce, but not preclude, the possibility of election inversions. Beyond this, a simple but radical device could completely eliminate their possibility. Instead of (or in addition to) apportioning seats to each party, each party might be assigned a *voting weight* (to be used in all parliamentary votes) precisely equal (or proportional) to the number of votes it received in an election. These options – particularly the last one – are discussed in more detail in another article (Felsenthal & Miller 2014) that builds on the present article.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Public Choice Society, New Orleans, LA, 8–10 March, which in turn derived from discussant

commentary on an early version of Kurrild-Klitgaard's paper presented at the Second World Congress of the Public Choice Societies, Miami, 8–11 March 2012. I thank Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard, Friedrich Pukelsheim, Carolyn Forestiere, Anthony McGann and especially Dan Felsenthal for helpful comments.

## NOTES

1. However, as noted in Miller (2012), Lincoln would have won a majority of electoral votes even if supporters of the three other candidates had united behind a single ticket, which would have thereby won 60.35 percent of the popular vote, producing a massive election inversion.
2. The opposite type of partial inversion – when two parties are tied with respect to votes but one wins more seats than the other – is logically possible but obviously far less likely.
3. See Kurrild-Klitgaard (2013) and Elklit (1993). Our concern here is only how seats are allocated among parties, and not how individual candidates fill these seats.
4. However, a party retains whatever seats it wins at the district level, even if this gives it more seats than it is entitled to on the basis of its national vote (Elklit, 1993, pp. 42, 44).
5. Even in the absence of an explicit threshold, small parties may fail to win seats by virtue of the normal operation of the electoral formula applied to the numbers of seats available. But such an 'implicit threshold' cannot be specified as a particular percentage of the vote because under every PR formula the number of seats a party wins (and whether a small party wins even one seat) depends not only on its vote share, but also on how the rest of the vote is distributed among the other parties. It is precisely this fact that implies that coalitionwise, but not pairwise, inversions can occur under pure PR; it also leads to the distinction between 'thresholds of representation' and 'thresholds of exclusion' (Rae et al., 1971).
6. In the September 2013 election, the FDP did fall below the 5 percent threshold, with the result that the prospective CDU/CSU+FDP coalition won more votes but fewer seats than a (hypothetical) SPD+Greens+Left coalition. (However, the Left Party was considered an unacceptable coalition partner, so the election produced protracted negotiations that led to a CDU/CSU+SPD 'grand coalition'.) A provision of the German Federal Elections Act guarantees that a party (but not a coalition) that wins a majority of the votes must receive a majority of seats (Friedrich Pukelsheim, personal communication). A similar provision is found in the Dutch Election Act, but neither law addresses the converse case in which a party that did not win a majority of votes might be allocated a majority of seats, though the Israeli Election Law limits such a party to no more than half the seats (Dan Felsenthal, personal communication).
7. Thus, while the parties of the center-right failed to win a majority of the vote cast for all parties, they did win a majority of the vote cast for seat-winning parties. Monroe and Rose (2002) show how threshold effects in conjunction with non-uniform districts can produce partisan bias (and therefore potential election inversions) due to the 'variance effect' resulting from non-uniform district magnitudes (even if the non-uniform districts are perfectly apportioned). 'Reinforced' PR (as in Italy and Greece), which gives the party winning the plurality of votes a seat bonus, can straightforwardly produce election inversions.
8. This following discussion relies heavily on Balinski and Young (1982), who discuss PR formulas primarily in the context of apportioning United States House of Representatives seats among the states.
9. A formula that did not do this could hardly be deemed 'proportional'. Balinski and Young (1982, p. 97) call this minimal property 'weak proportionality'. But the only way to guarantee perfect proportionality is to provide that  $S = \sum V$  – that is, implement direct democracy.
10. To apply the Sainte-Laguë formula, suppose there are 1,000 voters, so the ratio  $\sum V/S \approx 28.571$ . In the first example, any divisor between 28.1 and 28.4 gives quotients that equal the seats shown when rounded in the normal manner. In the second example, any divisor between about 28.743 and 28.952 will do. D'Hondt gives the same seat

allocation in the first example but gives party A an extra seat at the expense of C in the second example and thus does not produce an inversion.

11. However, at the logical lower limit of  $S = 1$ , every PR formula is equivalent to plurality rule, so every configuration in which no party is supported by a majority of votes entails a coalitionwise inversion.
12. The Netherlands has districts, but they do not affect the overall allocation of seats to parties. Its threshold is 0.67 percent. The seat threshold in Israel, originally 1 percent, was increased to 1.5 percent in 1992, to 2 percent in 2003, and will be 3.25 percent in future elections.
13. The inversion possibilities listed in Table 3 and subsequently are illustrative and not claimed to be exhaustive.
14. None of the coalitions identified in Table 3 actually formed the government, but several are plausible governing coalitions. Indeed, the fifth coalition came close to forming a government, though ultimately a more broad-based government was formed. While Israeli coalition governments are noted for ideologically odd combinations, neither Hadash nor the National Democratic Assembly would be invited into a government, especially one led by Likud. Similar tables in an earlier version of this article pertaining to the 2009 election identified a number of inversions based on the actual seat allocations, none of which held up when vote shares were based on the vote for seat-winning parties, and others based on LR-H/Sainte Laguë allocations, some of which held up when restricted to seat-winning parties. The question arises as to whether an actual Israeli governing coalition controlling a majority of seats has ever been supported by less than half of the total vote. Dan Felsenthal (personal communication) has examined all Israeli elections and discovered that the governing coalition (of Likud plus several small parties) following the 1981 election controlled 62 seats but gained only 48.2 percent of the total valid vote cast. However, this represented 50.8 percent of the votes cast for seat-winning parties.
15. Similar tables in an earlier version of this article pertaining to the 2009 election identified a number of inversions based on the actual seat allocations (including the coalition that formed the government), one of which held up when vote shares were based on seat-winning parties only, and others based on LR-H/Sainte Laguë allocations, none of which held up in the latter event.
16. It is fair to report that I also examined the results of the most recent 2011 Danish election and found no inversion possibilities given either the actual or 'purified' seat distributions, because all coalitions composed primarily of parties with positive seat differential had substantially more than 88 seats.
17. In addition, the United States Constitution guarantees every state at least one House of Representatives seat – that is, the 'electoral formula' has a 'floor' rather than a 'threshold'. However, this guarantee has no present effect as every state is entitled to at least one seat based on its population, present House size and the normal operation of the Hill-Huntington formula.
18. The United States Senate provides the most notorious example. The 'coalition' of the 26 smallest states controls a majority of 52 out of 100 seats with only 17.83 percent of the 2010 census population.

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