

# Review of: "[Commentary] An Alternative Polity"

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## Review of 'An Alternative Polity'

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This is an interesting article that seeks to recommend an alternative mechanism for selecting representatives of the people. The research is based upon the system prevailing in The Netherlands, where political parties win seats in the Parliament on the basis of proportionate representation. In this system, the party leadership prepares the list of its candidates, which implies that the candidates must follow the diktats of the party leadership rather than the people who chose them. As the author mentions, "the party leaderships determine the policies, although these party leaderships are unknown and anonymous to the citizens." The proportional representative system has other flaws too. It does not take account of second, third, or other preferences of the voters, even if these may lead to different combinations of party situations in the Assembly.

The author suggests an alternate mechanism developed by Balinski and Laraki called the Majority Judgement, which combines various preferences to provide a median value for each candidate. The author adds the system called Range Voting that asks voters to give evaluations of all the candidates on a uniform scale. The author applies this principle to the formation of coalitions and even suggests that voters must choose the prime minister rather than leaving it to the politics of coalition. Interestingly, he extends the recommendation to discuss the need for competence in governance. He wants ruling parties to seek outside candidates if there is no qualified person within the elected party members.

There are some other interesting ideas that he suggests in this research manuscript. One such idea is the practice of party discipline that forces members to vote in accordance with the commands of their party leadership. He recommends that members must be permitted to follow their own insights rather than blindly obey the commands. Another idea is to block the appointment of elected representatives from being given lucrative public positions such as that of Mayor or directorship of public corporations. This would help break the nepotism and the indirect system of rewards that helps politicians attain power in the system. Another issue is about elected governments signing important treaties with world bodies or with other countries that have significant consequences for the people. The ensuing discussions are never shared with the people, and they are forced to accept these decisions. Similarly, the selection of judges is done by the political parties, and this is affected by political bias. Finally, the media is allegedly controlled by billionaires, and hence there is no system of checks upon the actions of the elected bodies. This dilutes the democratic process and leads to a

system where the will, aspirations, and desires of the people are thwarted.

In his alternative view, the author argues for a system whereby the political parties must “formulate their general points of view with respect to all foreseeable issues in every department or ministry” and individuals contesting on political party tickets must clarify issues on which they are willing to differ from party positions. The appointment of ministers must strictly be based upon merit, and any competent Dutch citizen could be selected for the job by all members of the Parliament. The ministers will be required to work closely with their civil officials, who are deemed to be experts in their respective fields. The judicial appointments must also be done in a similar manner. Many other checks and processes are suggested, including appointment for a period of 8 years with a change in ministry taking place sequentially.

The author claims that “Expertise, continuity, and consistency are three holy principles of the alternative polity,” which will ensure that expertise will guide long-term policies. Furthermore,

“In the alternative polity, there are no longer any party-political barriers for potential administrators. Ministers and secretaries of state do not have to think about the next elections and do not have to spend precious time on a long-lasting election campaign.” The author also recommends that this system be applied to provincial councils and municipalities.

I have several criticisms of this research manuscript. It is limited to European nations and seems specific to the Netherlands. Even in other European nations, the systems and processes are not exactly similar and will need tweaking to apply this alternative polity. This clearly has no applicability to most of the other parts of the world where the systems are radically different. For example, the American presidential selection cannot be done in the suggested manner. The parliamentary systems of India, the UK, and most Commonwealth countries are also different and are not conducive to this suggested polity. Accordingly, the contribution of the research manuscript is very limited.

There are several biases inherent in the suggestions made by the author. Educational qualifications appear to be the mark of expertise and competency without taking account of academic achievements and quality of learning that differs amongst the educational institutions themselves. It will be ridiculous to state that students of particular sets of universities will be deemed qualified as experts and to be appointed as ministerial experts. This will apply to judicial appointments too, where expertise will be difficult to assess. The author’s bias comes out in a glaring manner when he talks about the influence of world bodies in determining national policies. He argues that “many scientists of high standing and reputation tell us otherwise, see <https://clintel.nl>, in particular the movie *Climate: The Movie (The Cold Truth)*. If one realizes that CO<sub>2</sub> is only four percent of the atmosphere and that mankind is responsible for only 3 percent of this CO<sub>2</sub>, one knows that these stories serve another purpose: control of mankind.” Really! When the world is reeling under an intense heat wave with temperatures crossing 50 degrees centigrade and other natural disasters looming everywhere, this assertion only reflects the biased opinion of the author. In any case, it is unnecessary and has no bearing upon the theme of the research manuscript.

The major criticism of the research manuscript is also the fact that this alternative polity is ill-conceived, has no practical application, and remains untested. The author fails to provide any example wherein a similar electoral process has been experimented with or exists. It is debatable if voters are really perceptible and well-informed enough to make a

proper choice of their representatives. Politicians are quick to grasp their inclinations, biases, and frailties and can exploit them in a similar manner as happens now. How this process will get implemented is another major issue that remains unaddressed. Which politician, let alone political parties, is going to accept a system that puts them at a disadvantage? Accordingly, this set of suggestions remains a utopian dream, poorly conceived, and impractical. I cannot recommend publication in an international journal.

I suggest that in his revision the author addresses the following:

- Either limit the focus to the Netherlands and explain how it could be implemented.
- Or expand to European nations having similar electoral systems. In such a situation, it will be useful to identify even minor differences and then explain how the alternate vision can be applied.
- Rather than keeping it totally theoretical, it will be useful to seek data from previous elections and use it to demonstrate how such an alternative mechanism will lead to a different and hopefully more representative election.
- Identify the bodies and legal mechanisms that will need to be involved in imposing this new system. This could be considered by organizing a public referendum and adopting a path that leads to demands by the people to change the system.
- Limit the discussions about bringing competent administrators or policy makers outside the electoral process. It is well within the capability and administrative powers of all governments to seek the best advisors and use them in the service of the nation. There is no need to spell out detailed processes and make the recommendations even more complicated.
- Provide some specific examples where existing election systems have led to an unrepresentative elected body and hence emphasize the need to consider an alternative polity.