

Hung Parliament? Don't Panic

There is a distinct possibility that the next general election will return the UK's first hung parliament since 1974. Senior politicians in the Conservative and Labour parties dread such an outcome.

A new study argues that a hung parliament need not be a disaster – as long as politicians and the markets avoid post-election panic.

'In the UK political system, minority governments are often seen as weak, unstable and short term. They need not be,' said Professor Robert Hazell, director of the Constitution Unit at University College London and a co-author of *Making Minority Government Work*.

'Recent minority governments and parliaments in Scotland and New Zealand have been highly effective, running their full course, with clear strategies and programmes. Minority governments can work so long as everyone understands the rules of the new political game.'

If there is no overall winner in the general election, the incumbent government remains in office until it is clear who can command confidence in the new Parliament. The Queen then invites that person to form a new government. The civil service must stand ready to facilitate negotiations between the parties, and to advise the new government about the realities of minority or coalition government.

'The Conservatives would prefer minority to coalition government. A minority government can be a success at Westminster - as long as it does not seek to govern in a majoritarian way,' continued Hazell. 'It needs to reach out to the other parties in parliament to get its business through.'

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'A minority parliament requires the opposition parties to behave more responsibly, because their votes determine whether the government wins or loses' he commented. 'In Scotland the Conservatives have proved adept at doing deals with the SNP minority government, and have had more influence over legislative policies than Labour or the Liberal Democrats'.

'For politicians, parliament, the media and the markets, a hung parliament and would require a shift away from deeply held majoritarian assumptions. But in most parliamentary democracies it is already the norm. There is no need for anyone to panic. Everyone just needs to be ready and willing to learn a new set of rules.'

Making Minority Government Work is published by the Constitution Unit and Institute for Government, and available at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/files/publications/unit-publications/147.pdf>