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“Israeli politics is characterized by short-term coalitions in which big parties make concessions to smaller parties in exchange for their participation.” Dylan Mathew, the *Washington Post*.

“How would you like an anti-immigrant, racist, anti-abortion or fundamentalist religious political party holding the balance of power in Canada? And that party would then get to decide who governs and what policies they adopt despite getting less than five of the total vote? Welcome to the proportional representation electoral system, where extreme, minority and just plain bizarre views get to rule the roost.

...

Or how about a worse situation where a far-right party sets a ban on Muslim immigrants as the price to put a larger party in power? After seeing anti-immigrant parties gain huge support in Europe, it's clear that a similar party in Canada might get five to 10 per cent of the national vote.

Nigel Farage's openly anti-immigration party United Kingdom Independence Party has been widely criticized (<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukipbreaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>) for inciting racial hatred – and captured 12.6 per cent of the vote in the 2015 election.

Under proportional representation, UKIP would have won 82 seats and forced a coalition government on England – under the current first-past-the-post system, it took just two seats, because in each other riding another party took more votes than UKIP.

Proportional representation systems give parties with five per cent or even a lower share of the popular vote that percentage of the legislature's seats. They also get a disproportionate influence over who forms government and under what conditions.

This disturbing possibility is already a reality in many countries with proportional representation electoral systems, including Italy, Israel and Australia – where single-issue, religious fundamentalist, anti-immigrant and personal vanity parties regularly must be courted to create a coalition government.

Australia's One Nation party now holds four seats and the balance of power in that country's senate – making centre-right Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull dependent on senators like Malcolm Roberts, who has suggested that climate change is a “scam” created by “corrupt” United Nations reports and international banks.

... Another One Nation senator, Brian Burston, has described Islam as “an infringement on our culture.” And leader Pauline Hanson has claimed that: “We’re in danger of being swamped by Muslims. If you’re going to bury your head in the sand about it, you’re a fool” – even though followers of that religion account for only two per cent of Australia’s population.

Turnbull’s other unlikely allies are three senators from the Nick Xenophon Team – named after its leader, a group Labour Party deputy leader Tanya Plibersek described as a “rag-tag bunch of crackpots.” Xenophon himself is known for publicity stunts like wearing pajamas to an all-night legislative session and adamantly campaigning against both poker machines and wind turbines.

How did these two strange parties come to hold so much sway? Because Australia’s senate uses an even stranger Single Transferable Vote electoral system that claims to be proportional representation. ...

The result is that fringe parties win seats – often enough to command the balance of power.

Italy is another country with a proportional representation electoral system – and enormous instability. Its parliament has been forced to dissolve eight times in the past 40 years due to coalitions disintegrating. ...

But whatever system of proportional representation is used, minority governments, unstable coalitions, bizarre candidates and backroom dealing politics are common.

And the consequences can be not comic but tragic in a country like Israel, writes Alex Bain in an article for the Middle East Institute: “Israeli politics is notable for its wide array of parties and unstable coalition governments. The main institutional cause of this chronic instability is the system of nationwide proportional representation, which gives disproportionate influence to minor parties,” Bain says.

“Most critically, Israel’s deeply flawed electoral system has been an obstacle to Israel’s ability to reverse its ill-fated settlement and occupation policies and to make peace with the Palestinians.”  
[Bain]

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[All excerpts from “Proportional Representation Empowers the Extreme and the Bizarre” by Bill Tieleman - <http://theyee.ca/Opinion/2016/08/16/Proportional-Representation-in-Canada/> ]