

Democratic decision making and the parliamentary crisis in Thuringia

How should a free society treat those members of the society that aim to eliminate freedom? This is a dilemma: By excluding these members from the political process, the society reduces its degree of freedom. By allowing these members to remain active, they might – when successful – eliminate freedom entirely.

With the rise of the right-wing party “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) the public debate in Germany focuses more and more on this problem, fearing a demolition of the democratic system by sinister forces that ruled Germany during thirteen dark years. It is not the economist’s job to judge political values expressed in this discussion, but to question the underlying decision-making process Germany applies (and changes) in order to solve this problem.

Germany faces three interdependent problems: First, a fuzzy division of political power. Second, consecutive voting and time-consuming negotiations about coalitions, and third, a blockade of the parliamentary process by mutually excluding fractions of the parliament. (The problem of a blockade is also relevant for other countries, with Belgium as a striking example, where the election of a government required once 541 days.) The solution described here is to reestablish a clear division of power, to prevent repetitive voting by establishing a kind of “institutionalized allocation” of executive chairs, whenever negotiations remain fruitless, and by that, establishing incentives to overcome the blockade in a parliament. What we call an “institutionalized allocation” of chairs can be understood as an automatic but conditional application of the so called “Zauberformel” (magic formula), applied for nearly 60 years in Swiss national parliament.