

Blog: Why 300 seats is enough to govern and the Lib Dems are kingmakers

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If we start from the premise that no single political party will gain a majority after 7th May, then the prospects for Labour and the Lib Dems working together without the need for SNP support are irresistible. This is why Ed Miliband can reject Nicola Sturgeon's offer to lock the Tories out <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-32328664>

First, let's take a look at the numbers needed. In a Parliament of 650 seats, 326 is an absolute majority. Well, not quite. The Speaker of the House doesn't get to vote and Sinn Fein with their five seats don't sit in the chamber. That reduces a working majority for the main party to 323. With other Northern Ireland parties, Ulster Unionists and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, favouring the Tories and Labour respectively, it means 321 is enough to govern without an arrangement with another larger party. The Democratic Unionists with around 8 seats would be highly unlikely to vote against the Queen's Speech.

So, we are now below 320 for a single party to be able to govern alone. When we get below around 310 seats, the Lib Dems start to matter much more. Nevertheless, working with other parties on a "confidence and supply" basis, somewhere between 300 and 310 should be enough for a party to govern without resorting to formal deals.

The prospects for Ed Miliband and Labour based on the latest polling is that they will win somewhere between 276 and 285 www.may2015.com (The broader range is from 252 to 302). Currently polling has the Lib Dems on around 26 seats, a huge drop from their 57 seats gained in 2010. However, the way the numbers are currently working, it essentially makes the Lib Dems kingmakers again and means Miliband can refuse Nicola Sturgeon's hand of friendship, in public at least.

Just a footnote on who specifically the kingmaker for the Lib Dems might be. Lord Ashcroft's polling has Labour 2 points ahead in Nick Clegg's seat of Sheffield Hallam www.lordashcrofthpolls.com. If this is translated into votes on May 7, we are then looking at Lib Dem party, potentially in government and cleansed of its Tory-supporting leader. Farron or Cable are looking likely candidates to lead them in government. If Clegg hangs on to his seat, then a working arrangement would probably see him stay as leader. Would a Labour Lib Dem coalition with Clegg at the helm of his party do a lot more damage to their reputation? It is easy to see how it could.

