

## **Democracy: the worst system except all the rest**

### *Thought for the Day*

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It seems everyone's a bit bemused this morning, but I've got a good excuse! I've been out of the country for most of the last three weeks, and was cut off even from my usual diet of BBC news. So it was odd, having left to the din of battle, to come back to mere whimpers. The war may have been won, but now we have to work on the peace.

No; I am not talking about Iraq, but about our own dear Scotland. We may have more parties than ever, but the campaign has hardly even set the heather smouldering. The media seemed almost more concerned to predict the turnout than the result. Perhaps if one of the parties had promised more parties, at least some of us would have drunk to that!

Anyway, now it's over – except that it isn't. We know the winners in almost all the constituencies, but it will be a while before the number-crunching of proportional representation delivers the regional members. And even when we know the state of the parties, we still won't know the shape of the coalition that will form the new Executive.

At Westminster a party can win 40% of the vote and be rewarded with five years of virtual autocracy. In Scotland we do things better: if the party with 40% needs to trade horses with the party with 20% in order to govern, that means agreeing on a programme that 60% can give some measure of support. If that takes time, it is still preferable to the tyranny of a minority.

When the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, endorsed the legitimacy of majority opinion, it laid down one of the foundations of modern society. That is not to say democracy is perfect, but when I look at the rest of today's news it seems better than the alternatives, whether the anarchy of the anti-capitalism demonstrations or the terrorism of the suicide bomber. We should be very proud of the orderly transfer of democratic authority, and we should honour it, not with contempt, but with our participation.