

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Malapportionment as a Factor Associated With Islandness: Three Archipelagos Compared

Miguel Carranza Guasch¹^a¹ History, Universitat de les Illes Balears

Keywords: islandness, malapportionment, electoral system, disproportionality, islands, subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs)

<https://doi.org/10.24043/001c.144704>

Island Studies Journal

Vol. 20, Issue 2, 2025

This study examines the relationship between malapportionment and islandness in three European archipelagos (Canary Islands, Balearic Islands, Azores), employing a comparative analysis of electoral systems. Using the Loosemore-Hanby index, we quantify representational imbalances, revealing systematic overrepresentation of smaller islands. Findings suggest that malapportionment is not an anomaly but a structural feature of island governance, shaped by geographic and institutional factors. The paper contributes to island studies by integrating electoral disproportionality into the broader framework of islandness.

1. Introduction

The study of islandness has evolved as a critical framework for understanding the unique political, social, and economic characteristics of island territories. Traditionally, island studies have focused on factors such as geographical isolation, economic dependence, cultural identity, and political autonomy (Baldacchino, 2004; Hepburn, 2010). However, recent scholarship highlights that island studies must continue to evolve, rejecting deterministic and insular perspectives and instead embracing plurality and interdisciplinarity (Grydehøj et al., 2021). Far from being an academic dead-end, island studies remain a vibrant and necessary field for exploring how insular territories engage with processes of globalization, coloniality, and environmental vulnerability (Grydehøj, 2023).

Politics must be examined in connection with the island's singular history, geography, society, and institutional arrangements, including its electoral system (Zhang et al., 2021). Following this expanded vision, this article introduces an additional variable into the discourse: *malapportionment* (Carranza Guasch, 2022). By doing so, we aim to broaden the analytical tools available for understanding island governance and representation, and to contribute to the theoretical diversification advocated by contemporary island studies.

^a miguelcguasch@gmail.com; corresponding author

Malapportionment, the unequal representation of populations in legislative bodies, is a well-documented phenomenon in electoral studies (Samuels & Snyder, 2001; Simón, 2009). The most malapportioned countries we can find in Samuels & Snyder (2001) are in less-developed regions with many recently established democracies. Interestingly the data suggests that malapportionment in Africa plays a major role in countries with a British colonial legacy. In the context of islands, this disproportionate representation takes on distinctive characteristics that are intricately linked to islandness.

This study focuses specifically on subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs) structured as multi-island archipelagos with electoral constituencies aligned to individual islands. This focus is deliberate: in such cases, electoral representation is not only shaped by population distribution but also by the spatial logic of the archipelago itself, where each island often constitutes a distinct electoral district. This institutional arrangement generates measurable forms of malapportionment between islands of different sizes, providing a unique opportunity to assess the interaction between islandness and representational bias. Consequently, cases like the Faroe Islands or Åland—though relevant in broader island governance discussions—have been excluded from the comparative analysis, as they constitute single-constituency jurisdictions. Their internal distribution of seats does not allow for a within-archipelago assessment of electoral disproportionality, which is the central concern of this research.

As we can see in Simon's (2009) research, the island regions of the Spanish State were the most malapportioned territories. The structural particularities of archipelagic territories often lead to political arrangements that grant enhanced representation to smaller or geographically dispersed island populations. This practice, while intended to balance political power, also raises questions about democratic equity and institutional design (Carranza, 2021; Seijas, 2014).

This study examines the cases of the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, and the Azores, three archipelagic regions within the European Union that exhibit varying degrees of malapportionment. Additionally, the paper provides an analytical overview of the situations in the Faroe Islands and Åland, both of which have unique governance structures shaped by their geopolitical contexts. In the case of Åland, as explored by Sundberg (2021), electoral arrangements have fostered a system where personal representation and party representation coexist, reflecting the particular socio-political dynamics of small island jurisdictions.

By incorporating malapportionment into the broader conceptual framework of islandness, we seek to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the political dynamics of island territories. In line with Grydehøj et al. (2021), who emphasize the continued relevance of island studies for interrogating power relations and institutional asymmetries, this

research illustrates how electoral distortions are not anomalies but integral features of island political systems. This kind of research will be related to the manner in which governance occurs in small island contexts.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, we review the key variables used in comparative studies of island autonomy, drawing on the foundational work of Hepburn (2010) and incorporating recent contributions advocating for a pluralistic understanding of islandness (Grydehøj et al., 2021). We then present malapportionment as an associated factor of islandness, demonstrating its relevance to the study of island political systems. Finally, we analyze the selected case studies to illustrate how malapportionment interacts with other dimensions of islandness, offering new insights into the governance of archipelagic regions.

By bridging the gap between electoral studies and island studies, this article contributes to the ongoing debate on the nature of island governance and representation. Recognizing malapportionment as an inherent feature of island politics allows for a more nuanced examination of how SNIJ's navigate their political relationships with larger nation-states (Carranza, 2021; Sundberg, 2021). Moreover, this work reaffirms the enduring value of island studies as a field uniquely positioned to interrogate questions of governance, identity, and democracy from the margins (Grydehøj, 2023).

This study contributes to the field of island studies by introducing an underexplored variable—malapportionment—as a structural feature of island governance. While prior research has examined autonomy, identity, and economic factors in island territories (Baldacchino, 2020b; Hepburn, 2010), the interplay between electoral disproportionality and islandness remains largely overlooked. By quantifying representational imbalances in three EU archipelagos (Azores, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands) through the Loosemore-Hanby index, this paper bridges electoral studies and island political geography. Our comparative approach reveals how institutional design interacts with geographic isolation to sustain malapportionment, challenging assumptions about democratic equity in subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs). This focus not only expands the analytical toolkit of island studies but also offers empirical grounding for debates on decentralization and territorial cohesion in plurinational states.

2. Islandness and Power: Political Implications of Islandness

The study of islandness presents considerable complexity due to the multifaceted ways in which geographical factors shape the social, political, and economic dimensions of island life, both directly and through more subtle, mediated processes. In contrast to persistent colonial imaginaries that continue to marginalize island spaces, this article underscores the critical role of islands as fertile grounds for innovative theoretical and empirical exploration (Baldacchino, 2006, p. 10).

From the concepts of island and archipelago that of insularity is derived. In the academic dictionary, the term insularity refers to the insular, as – in a second meaning – to isolation, demonstrating how concepts are closely

linked by what they entail. Pungetti (2013) makes a relationship around both concepts, since the concept of isolation could be summarized in the establishment of barriers, whether caused by sea, mountains, deserts, and even sanitary or penitentiary isolation, reducing the relationships of individuals or groups. In this sense, the relationship of the islands with the mainland is reduced by their own geographical nature.

At the same time, recently published and cited in Royal Decree Law 4/2019 of 22 February, on the Special Regime of the Balearic Islands, the report entitled “The costs of the insularity of the Balearic Islands: evaluation of current policies and proposals for the future” (Groizard, 2016) summarizes insularity and its disadvantages as follows:

Insularity is a physical and permanent characteristic of the territory of the Balearic Islands that generates a set of imbalances.

The costs of insularity can be summarized in the following points: i) higher cost of living, ii) higher production costs of companies that supply themselves with intermediate inputs, iii) higher cost of energy products, iv) higher investment costs in capital goods, v) higher operating costs of the administration in the provision of public goods, vi) less use of economies of scale, vii) proliferation of anticompetitive behavior in markets, viii) high dependence on airports and ports, and ix) great vulnerability before external shocks. (p. 255)

More specifically with respect to what it implies in social life, there are also different concepts of islandness that explain the repercussions of the phenomenon. Thus, we would find the definition of islandness in the line of being more of a sociological phenomenon, than an instrumental concept, since this geographical characteristic is usually used by the islanders to defend a differentiated identity and to justify their demands in favor of their economic, social, cultural, and political situation (Hache, 1998).

In addition, Hay (2003) recognizes that physical borders, or physical limitations that are assumed to be psychological, lead to a distinctive psychology, unique, because “it promotes clearer bounded identities” (p. 203), and in his theory he also attributes a more conservative political culture in island societies.

Gloria Pungetti (2013) links culture, landscape and marine environment in the definition of insularity, thus, insularity depends mainly on the size of the island and its distance from mainland or other islands, broadly reduced to a physical condition. However, this physical condition conditions to a greater or lesser extent the perception and lifestyle of the inhabitants and, in general, the greater the distance from continental land, the stronger the community is considered.

On the other hand, beyond the theorists of the concept, the term insularity can be found in the third article, Title I, of the *Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands*: “3.1 The Statute protects the insularity of the territory of the autonomous community as a differential fact and deserving of special protection.”

Closely linked to the concept of insularity, and without an exact translation, we find what Eve Hepburn (2010) calls islandness. Closely linked because a literal translation would coincide in form with the first notion despite the fact that their contents are very different. In the same way that the similarity or proximity between insularity and isolation has been seen, islandness also has connotations that lead us to think that it could mean the same thing as insularity. The author in question rescues this concept around insularity in order to make use of a concept that makes tangible the distinctive character of the islands. In his words (Hepburn, 2010), “*Islandness* refers to the specific qualities of islands – geographical, social and political – that distinguish them and make them unique from those of the continental mass” (p. 9).

This differentiation is crucial, as it allows us to approach islands not merely as geographically bounded spaces, but as complex socio-political constructs shaped by unique conditions, experiences, and identities.

In perhaps the most recent articulation of the psychology of islandness Baldacchino (2020a) explains that islandness can “contour and nudge behaviours and systems” (p. 8). According to Baldacchino (2006), the axis of island studies is found in the constitution of the concept of islandness and its possible or plausible influence and impact on ecology, on human behavior and other living beings, from any area of unidisciplinary research (archaeology, economics, or literature), multidisciplinary areas (politics or biogeography), or issues of policy application (government, social capital, language conservation, or sustainable tourism). Also, Baldacchino (2004) urges the use of the term islandness instead of insularity to highlight how interconnectedness (and thus dependence) has been a historical-geographic condition equally important to isolation (and thus autarky) (Mela, 2023).

Beyond what has been stated, following a historical overview of the development of the concept of islandness, it could be confirmed today that islandness “is a contested concept, not just between disciplines but also cultures, entangled with what islands, island studies, and island identity are understood to be” (Foley et al., 2023, p. 1800).

Researchers have pointed out that island studies narratives consistently emphasize at least three elements of islandness: self-sufficiency and autonomy (van Dam & van der Windt, 2022), ingenuity and innovation (Grydehøj & Kelman, 2017; Kallis et al., 2021), and expansion and exploitation (Argenti & Knight, 2015; Kelman, 2018). These recurring dimensions reveal how islandness functions as a multidimensional framework for understanding island territories not only through their geographic isolation but also through the sociopolitical imaginaries that sustain them. In the context of this article,

such features are not merely cultural narratives but foundational elements that help explain structural phenomena such as malapportionment and the unique political arrangements observed in archipelagic systems.

At this point, the debate surrounding smallness can also be discussed, according to various authors who consider islandness as smallness, recognizing that what constitutes small is both context and worldview-dependent (Foley et al., 2023). For this research the perception that islands are small places is not entirely accurate. Examples of measuring size include territory, population, economy, or military strength all based on the fact that, for instance, the Balearic Islands receive over 20 million visitors annually, have a population close to one and a half million, a GDP higher than that of many countries around the world, and even a territory larger than that of some mainland nation-states. Therefore, the effect known as smallness will not be considered in the discussion of malapportionment, as no clear pattern is observed in this regard, unlike in the case of islandness, where such a pattern does emerge.

3. Autonomy and Islandness: A Framework for Comparative Analysis

The research axis around which this section is developed originates from Eve Hepburn's (2010) studies on the decentralization of nation-states, specifically her "Comparative analysis of island region autonomy." Because of self-sufficiency and autonomy is the reason why Hepburn's research is so important to this analysis.

Across the globe, there are various forms of island governance, where in most cases, rather than seeking full independence, alternative forms of autonomy are pursued. These arrangements often involve constitutional frameworks that facilitate coexistence between island systems and their respective mainland states. Hepburn (2010) introduced several terms to illustrate the diverse governance arrangements between island territories and their nation-states: Autonomous Province (Åland Islands), Special Region (Sardinia), Associated State (Anguilla, UK), Overseas Territory (The British Virgin Islands), Commonwealth Territory (Cocos Islands, Australia), Overseas Department (French Antilles, France), Federal Province (Newfoundland, Canada), and the Autonomous Region (Azores, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands). This typology forms the basis for the main rationale behind the selection of the archipelagic territories included in the study.

Hepburn (2010) structures her study around two essential questions. First, why do islands tend to seek special forms of autonomy rather than full independence or the creation of new state structures? Second, what relevance does this have for non-island regions? In other words, what makes islands unique? Sovereignty has historically been at the core of this debate, symbolizing power in all geographical contexts concerning territorial and administrative organization. Various forms of shared or exclusive sovereignty have shaped the creativity behind decentralization arrangements in multi-level states.

Conceptually, sovereignty and autonomy are closely intertwined. Autonomy refers to the principle of self-government, which enables the recognition of local governance from both a political and administrative perspective (Pérez, 2015). Furthermore, the European Charter of Local Self-Government emphasizes that autonomy involves the capacity to define local policies (EUDEL, 2008).

Following this line of thought and as Hepburn (2010) suggests, autonomy can have both territorial and non-territorial dimensions. It refers to the administrative and/or legislative delegation of powers from a state to institutions representing a population inhabiting a specific geographical space within that state. However, Lapidoth's (1997) definition is even more aligned with Hepburn's framework. According to Lapidoth, autonomy is a means of devolving powers—whether legislative and/or administrative—to preserve the unity of the nation-state while respecting the diversity of its population.

In general, autonomy agreements are driven by geographical, social, and/or cultural factors, as societies assert their right to be governed according to criteria that directly affect them. In the case of islands, insularity itself fosters a distinctive form of autonomy.

Watts (2000) identifies three main types of island autonomy based on constitutional arrangements within larger state entities. The federal type grants islands substantial self-government and autonomy while limiting their influence on national decision-making, as seen in Åland, the Faroes, Greenland, the Azores, Madeira, Puerto Rico, and the Mariana Islands. The associated state model features asymmetrical relations that often allow for greater international recognition and a clearer path to independence, as in the Dutch Caribbean, the Cook Islands, and the Marshall Islands. Finally, the federative constituent unit model includes islands like the Canaries and Balearics within decentralized states such as Spain. While this model imposes constitutional constraints, it offers stronger influence in national politics, evident in the Canary Islands Coalition's role in shaping minority governments.

Hepburn's (2010) study on the degree of island autonomy revolves around six key variables that help explain why islands may pursue greater autonomy, independence, or, conversely, deeper integration within a larger state entity. These variables are:

1. The party system. The degree of symmetry between the state and regional party systems is a determining factor in autonomy demands. Specifically, the presence of a regionalist or nationalist party with parliamentary representation, particularly one advocating self-determination, and the predominance of regionalist forces contribute to a more decentralized party system between the state and the

archipelago. This often results in stronger demands for autonomy. Additionally, the influence that regional parties exert at the state level is also a significant factor.

2. The strength of identity. The existence of distinctive identities and cultural roots is strongly correlated with state decentralization. Hepburn evaluates the comparative weight of regional-insular identity versus identification with the nation-state, emphasizing how identity politics shape autonomy claims.
3. Economic resources. Political science research suggests that the economic status and available resources at the local level influence demands for autonomy. The general principle is that regions with greater economic well-being or access to resources tend to exhibit stronger autonomy claims.
4. Relations with the state and supranational entities. The ability of regions to establish links with supranational institutions also directly affects the degree of autonomy they seek. Access to external power structures beyond the state can reinforce regional aspirations for greater self-government.
5. State territorial administration. The territorial-administrative model adopted by the larger state directly impacts the type of autonomy available to its regions. Recognition—or lack thereof—of the region's distinctiveness and accommodation of its identity and interests can either foster or hinder autonomy and sovereignty claims.
6. Factors associated with islandness. As previously discussed, islandness encompasses the distinctive characteristics that shape island life and development. This includes geographic distance from the mainland, transportation networks between the island and mainland, economic concessions made in recognition of insularity, and the potential existence of clientelist networks between the state and the island region. This variable also incorporates the malapportionment index, as island territories tend to be disproportionately affected by such distortions, as will be further analyzed in the following section.

The factors associated with islandness inevitably have a significant impact on the political and electoral systems of island territories, which, in turn, directly affect the party system itself. The geographical isolation, the peculiarities of transport networks, and the economic concessions granted to insular regions foster conditions that facilitate the development of clientelistic

practices and patronage-based politics. These dynamics tend to personalize political competition and often fragment or weaken programmatic party structures. As a consequence, islandness is closely linked to the first variable identified by Hepburn (2010) in her comparative study. The prevalence of patron-client networks in small island territories globally reinforces this connection, as such networks influence not only voting behavior but also the formation and evolution of regionalist or nationalist parties (W. Veenendaal, 2020a; see also W. Veenendaal, 2020b; W. P. Veenendaal, 2015, 2016). Therefore, the insular condition not only shapes political culture and practices but also amplifies demands for autonomy or self-government through its effects on party dynamics.

4. Malapportionment and Its Effects on Island Territories: A Comparative Analysis

Having established the institutional frameworks of island autonomy, we now examine how malapportionment interacts with these arrangements. One way to measure territorial balance is the study of electoral systems. A variable that can be easily measured and can provide information on the phenomenon of insularity and islandness as an effect of a territorial imbalance is the index called malapportionment (Carranza Guasch, 2022). Malapportionment refers to the distribution of seats in each district of an electoral system according to its population, or in other words, malapportionment exists when there is a deviation between the percentage of seats that are elected in a district and the percentage of the population entitled to stand for election. Thus, malapportionment can be considered as an index of electoral systems that occurs when the distribution of seats by districts does not correspond proportionally to their population (Simón, 2009).

The malapportionment factor is analyzed with a quantitative methodology and is relevant in the first place, for its originality, since it is one of the most important and at the same time least studied indices in the literature on electoral systems. The index proposed by Samuels and Snyder (2001) gives a measure of the deviation from perfect apportionment, which is the subtraction between the percentage of seats and the percentage of voters. Based on the electoral data, the indicated coefficient will be obtained:

$$mal = \frac{\sum |s_i - v_i|}{2}$$

Regarding the significance of malapportionment levels, several explanatory variables have been identified by scholars (Samuels & Snyder, 2001; Seijas, 2014; Simón, 2009). Among them, two stand out as particularly influential. First, the existence of single-member districts, and second, internal inequalities in income distribution (Simón, 2009). Both variables help account for the persistence and intensity of representational imbalances. In the case of multi-island jurisdictions such as the Canary Islands or the Azores, the use of island-based constituencies effectively mirrors single-member

district logic by assigning fixed representation to each island regardless of population size. At the same time, disparities in economic development between islands—often correlated with population size—reinforce the rationale for maintaining or justifying malapportionment as a corrective mechanism, further entrenching representational asymmetries.

In order to visualize malapportionment at the archipelagic level, it must first be said that in the analysis that Samuels and Snyder (2001) carry out of the electoral systems of 78 countries around the world, the top places are occupied by African and Latin American countries, and in fact, of the twenty countries with the highest levels of malapportionment, fifteen completed the transition to democracy since 1975. In this analysis carried out in 2001, Spain ranks sixteenth with a malapportionment level of 9.63. In the analysis carried out by Simón in 2009, Spain rises to number twelve in the table with respect to the countries with the highest levels of malapportionment (Simón, 2009).

The latest analysis published on malapportionment at the regional level can be found in the participation of Fernández and Ramón (2016) with data updated on January 1, 2015. In this analysis, the Canary Islands have a malapportionment index well above all the autonomous communities of Spain with 33.46, well above the countries analyzed in 2001 by Samuels and Snyder, and also exceeding the indices reflected in Simón's study in 2009. In this study, the Balearic Islands have an index of 22.50, followed by Aragon and the Basque Country with 19.78 and 19.76 respectively. Valencian Community with 13.46 and in sixth place Galicia with 12.17 are quite low.

In another previous study at the regional level (Seijas, 2014), the historical evolution of the malapportionment index is presented, showing the island or archipelago reality as the two communities where this index has always been higher than the rest of the autonomous communities in Spain. In the same study, the evolution of the dispersion of the population between electoral districts is seen as a significant variable of malapportionment, where once again, both the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands coincide as well as the communities where this variable is more pronounced than the rest, which coincides with the sociodemographic nature of the island territories (Carranza, 2021).

Having outlined the concept of malapportionment and its relevance to the political representation of island territories, we now turn to a comparative analysis across different archipelagos. This section focuses specifically on the cases of the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the Balearic Islands, which provide a diverse yet comparable set of examples within European contexts.

The selection of the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the Balearic Islands as case studies is grounded in the typologies of island governance proposed by Watts (2000) and Hepburn (2010). Both authors highlight a spectrum of autonomy arrangements that allow island territories to coexist constitutionally within larger state frameworks without necessarily seeking full independence. These three archipelagos exemplify the category of Autonomous Region (Hepburn, 2010) and fit within Watts' models of

federative constituent units (Canaries and Balearics) and federal-type arrangements (Azores), making them particularly relevant for comparative analysis. Initially, the study also intended to include the French Antilles, the Åland Islands, and the Faroe Islands. However, due to the specific electoral systems in place in those territories—issues that will be discussed in detail later—they could not be integrated under the current research design. It is important to note that this study is conceived as a first step toward a broader, more detailed comparative analysis of SNIJs, with the aim of expanding the scope to include a wider range of archipelagic territories in future research phases.

Upon reviewing the Electoral Law of Åland and related official sources, it becomes clear that the Åland Parliament (*Lagtinget*) consists of 30 members elected every four years through a system of proportional representation using the d'Hondt method (*Ålands Lagting*, n.d.). In this system, Åland is treated as a single electoral constituency with no internal subdivisions by district or municipality. Consequently, seats are not allocated to specific municipalities, but are distributed proportionally based on the total number of votes received by each party across the entire region. As a result, the concept of malapportionment is not applicable in this context. The use of a single electoral district and proportional representation ensures that each vote carries equal weight in determining the composition of the Parliament, thereby minimizing any potential representational imbalance.

A similar electoral structure is found in the Faroe Islands. The Faroese Parliament (*Løgting*) is composed of 33 members elected through proportional representation. Since 2007, the Faroe Islands also function as a single electoral constituency without subdivisions into districts or municipal-based seat allocations. Seats are assigned solely according to the proportion of votes received by each party at the national level. As with Åland, this electoral design negates the relevance of malapportionment, as it is specifically constructed to ensure that all votes contribute equally to the outcome of the election.

In sum, the electoral systems of both Åland and the Faroe Islands are structured to provide equitable representation for their populations, with no significant discrepancies in vote weight across different geographical areas. In the case of the Faroe Islands, it would, however, be possible to assess representational proportionality within the Danish Parliament, particularly in comparison to Greenland's representation—an approach similar to that which we will adopt when examining the representation of the French Antilles in the national legislature of the French Republic.

In contrast, the case of the French Antilles presents a different set of challenges for comparative analysis. There is no overarching regional parliament encompassing all the Caribbean territories under French sovereignty namely: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint Barthélemy, and Saint Martin. Each of these territories operates under its own autonomous administrative framework, shaped by the broader decentralization system

Table 1. Population-to-seat ratio per Island. Azores

Island	Population	Seats	Pop./Seat	Inequality Ratio vs. Corvo
São Miguel	137,288	25	5,491.52	28.60
Terceira	53,234	11	4,839.45	25.21
Pico	13,879	3	4,626.33	24.10
Faial	14,331	3	4,777.00	24.88
São Jorge	8,373	2	4,186.50	21.80
Graciosa	4,090	2	2,045.00	10.65
Santa Maria	5,406	2	2,703.00	14.08
Flores	3,428	2	1,714.00	8.93
Corvo	384	2	192.00	–
Total	236,413	57		

Source: Own elaboration with data from Serviço Regional de Estatística dos Açores 2023

of the French Republic. As a result, the evaluation of malapportionment at a regional or archipelagic level becomes unfeasible. The absence of a unified legislative body representing the collective interests of these insular territories limits the scope for assessing representational imbalances across the archipelago as a whole.

Given these structural constraints in the cases of Åland, the Faroe Islands, and the French Antilles, our comparative analysis will now focus on three archipelagos where regional legislative frameworks and available data allow for a meaningful examination of representational imbalances: the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the Balearic Islands.

4.1. The Portuguese case, SNIJ, Azores Islands

The Azores are an autonomous region of Portugal consisting of nine islands, grouped into three clusters: the Eastern Group (São Miguel and Santa Maria), the Central Group (Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico, and Faial), and the Western Group (Flores and Corvo). Population distribution across the archipelago is highly uneven. São Miguel alone accounts for more than 50% of the total population, whereas islands like Corvo have fewer than 500 inhabitants.

The Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores (Assembleia Legislativa da Região Autónoma dos Açores) is composed of 57 members, distributed proportionally among the nine islands. The following table presents the 2021 population data from the Serviço Regional de Estatística dos Açores, the number of seats per island, the population-to-seat ratio, and a measure of representational inequality using Corvo as the reference unit.

The inequality ratio expresses how many times more inhabitants per seat an island has compared to Corvo. For example, São Miguel has approximately 28.6 times more inhabitants per representative than Corvo.

This disparity in representation is further illustrated by comparing the population-to-seat ratio. The most populous islands, such as São Miguel and Terceira, exhibit unfavorable ratios, with around one deputy per 5,000–5,600

inhabitants. In contrast, the least populated islands—Corvo and Flores—benefit from highly favorable ratios, with one deputy per fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. To assess the extent of representational imbalance, we apply the Loosemore-Hanby index of malapportionment, which measures the deviation between a perfectly proportional representation and the actual distribution of seats.

We have chosen to employ the Loosemore-Hanby index instead of the Samuels and Snyder (2001) index because it offers a more straightforward and easily interpretable measure of disproportionality between population and representation. While the Samuels and Snyder index is based on the normalized standard deviation of relative representation, the Loosemore-Hanby index calculates the sum of the absolute differences between each unit's share of the population and its share of seats, divided by two. This approach expresses the degree of malapportionment as a percentage of the total, facilitating cross-case comparisons and enhancing interpretability for both academic and policy-oriented audiences. Moreover, the Loosemore-Hanby index has been widely used in the literature on electoral disproportionality, allowing the Azorean case to be situated within a well-established comparative framework.

$$M = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left| \frac{P_i}{P_{\text{total}}} - \frac{S_i}{S_{\text{total}}} \right|$$

Calculations per island

1. São Miguel

- Population share: $137,288 / 236,413 = 58,07\%$.
- Seat share: $25 / 57 = 43,9\%$.
- Difference: $|43.9\% - 58.07\%| = 14,17\%$.

2. Terceira

- Population share: $53,234 / 236,413 = 22,51\%$.
- Seat share: $11 / 57 = 19,3\%$.
- Difference: $|19.3\% - 22.51\%| = 3,21\%$.

3. Pico

- Population share: $13,879 / 236,413 = 5,87\%$.
- Seat share: $3 / 57 = 5,26\%$.
- Difference: $|5.26\% - 5.87\%| = 0,61\%$.

4. Faial

- Population share: $14,331 / 236,413 = 6,06\%$.
- Seat share: $3 / 57 = 5,26\%$.
- Difference: $|5.26\% - 6.06\%| = 0.8\%$.

5. São Jorge

- Population share: $8,373 / 236,413 = 3,54\%$.
- Seat share: $2 / 57 = 3,5\%$.
- Difference: $|3.5\% - 3.54\%| = 0.04\%$.

6. Graciosa

- Population share: $4,090 / 236,413 = 1,73\%$.
- Seat share: $2 / 57 = 3,5\%$.
- Difference: $|3.5\% - 1.73\%| = 1,77\%$.

7. Santa Maria

- Population share: $5,406 / 236,413 = 2,28\%$.
- Seat share: $2 / 57 = 3,5\%$.
- Difference: $|3.5\% - 2.28\%| = 1,22\%$.

8. Flores

- Population share: $3,428 / 236,413 = 1,45\%$.
- Seat share: $2 / 57 = 3,5\%$.
- Difference: $|3.5\% - 1.45\%| = 2,05\%$.

9. Corvo

- Population share: $384 / 236,413 = 0,16\%$.
- Seat share: $2 / 57 = 3,5\%$.
- Difference: $|3.5\% - 0.16\%| = 3,34\%$.

Malapportionment

$$\frac{1}{2}(14,17+3,21+0,61+0,8+0,04+1,77+1,22+2,05+3,34)=13,605$$

=

Table 2. Population-to-seat ratio per Island. Canary Islands

Island	Population	Seats	Pop/Seat	Inequality Ratio (vs. El Hierro)
Tenerife	958,834	15	63,922.26	16.219
Gran Canaria	866,972	15	57,798.13	14.665
Lanzarote	163,543	8	20,442.87	5.187
Fuerteventura	126,864	7	18,123.42	4.598
La Palma	85,393	8	10,674.12	2.708
La Gomera	22,584	4	5,646.00	1.432
El Hierro	11,823	3	3,941.00	–
Total	2,236,013	60		

Source: Own elaboration with data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2023

This value—13.61%—indicates a considerable level of malapportionment. The system disproportionately favors less populated islands, particularly Corvo and Flores, while significantly underrepresenting São Miguel and Terceira. Such discrepancies may lead to political tensions and challenges in the equitable allocation of resources and policymaking. Electoral reform aimed at recalibrating seat distribution in accordance with population figures—while maintaining a minimum representation for smaller islands—could enhance fairness and legitimacy in regional governance.

4.2. Another Atlantic case, SNIJ, Canary Islands

The Canary Islands are a Spanish archipelago composed of seven main islands: Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, La Palma, La Gomera, and El Hierro. As in the case of the Azores, the population is unevenly distributed across the territory. Tenerife and Gran Canaria concentrate the vast majority of the population, while smaller islands such as El Hierro and La Gomera have significantly fewer inhabitants.

To understand (dis)proportionality in the Spanish state as a whole, it is necessary to point out that districts are the legal figures that give rise to representation. In this sense, it can be confirmed that both in regional processes and at the state level, “different types of electoral districts or constituencies are used, and each district chooses an entire fraction of the total seats in the chamber of representation” (Seijas, 2014, p. 200). The configuration of electoral districts is not a random election, in fact there are authors (Lago & Montero, 2005; Penadés, 2006; Simón, 2009) that confirm that it is the product of elites or a legacy of the two-party system in force in the Spanish state. This division into districts throughout the territory of the Spanish State and in the world gives rise to the malapportionment effect, the presence of which in research is widely documented (Koppel & Diskin, 2009; Monroe, 1994; Samuels & Snyder, 2001).

The Parliament of the Canary Islands is composed of 70 members, of which 60 are distributed proportionally among the seven islands. The table below provides the distribution of seats alongside population figures from the 2023 census (INE).

As the table demonstrates, the most populous islands—Tenerife and Gran Canaria—have the least favorable ratios, with one representative for approximately every 58,000–64,000 inhabitants. In contrast, the least populated islands enjoy a much higher degree of representation, with one deputy for every 3,900–5,600 inhabitants. This points to a clear imbalance in the principle of equal suffrage.

To quantify the extent of malapportionment, we use the Loosemore-Hanby index, which measures the total absolute deviation between each island's population share and its share of parliamentary seats.

Calculations per island

1. Tenerife

- Population share: $958,834 / 2,236,013 = 42,88\%$.
- Seat share: $15 / 70 = 21,4\%$.
- Difference: $|21,4\% - 42,88\%| = 21,48\%$.

2. Gran Canaria

- Population share: $866,972 / 2,236,013 = 38,77\%$.
- Seat share: $15 / 70 = 21,4\%$.
- Difference: $|21,4\% - 38,77\%| = 17,37\%$.

3. Lanzarote

- Population share: $163,543 / 2,236,013 = 7,31\%$.
- Seat share: $8 / 70 = 11,4\%$.
- Difference: $|11,4\% - 7,31\%| = 4,09\%$.

4. Fuerteventura

- Population share: $126,864 / 2,236,013 = 5,67\%$.
- Seat share: $7 / 70 = 10,0\%$.
- Difference: $|10,0\% - 5,67\%| = 4,33\%$.

5. La Palma

- Population share: $85,393 / 2,236,013 = 3,81\%$.
- Seat share: $8 / 70 = 11,4\%$.

- Difference: $|11.4\% - 3.81\%| = 7.59\%$.

6. La Gomera

- Population share: $22,584 / 2,236,013 = 1.01\%$.
- Seat share: $4 / 70 = 5.71\%$.
- Difference: $|5.71\% - 1.01\%| = 4.7\%$.

7. El Hierro

- Population share: $11,823 / 2,236,013 = 0.52\%$.
- Seat share: $3 / 70 = 4.28\%$.
- Difference: $|4.28\% - 0.52\%| = 3.76\%$.

The malapportionment index for the Canary Islands stands at 31.66%, indicating a significant distortion between ideal (population-based) and actual representation. Smaller islands, such as El Hierro and La Gomera, are clearly overrepresented, while the most populous ones—Tenerife and Gran Canaria—are underrepresented. This disproportionality may have implications for inter-island equity, political legitimacy, and resource distribution. Electoral reform aimed at better aligning seat allocation with population figures—while still safeguarding the representation of smaller islands—could enhance both the fairness and functionality of the parliamentary system.

4.3. SNIJ in the Mediterranean, Balearic Islands

The Balearic Islands are an autonomous community of Spain located in the western Mediterranean. The archipelago comprises four main inhabited islands: Mallorca, Menorca, Eivissa, and Formentera. The population distribution is highly asymmetric, with Mallorca accounting for nearly 80% of the total inhabitants, while Formentera represents less than 1%.

The Parliament of the Balearic Islands is composed of 59 members, distributed across the islands according to fixed electoral constituencies. These seats are allocated as follows: 33 for Mallorca, 13 for Menorca, 12 for Eivissa, and 1 for Formentera.

At the archipelago level, inequality in the value of the vote is a reality, but this correction is assumed by legislators as a principle to correct the overrepresentation of the most populated island with respect to the islands of Eivissa, Formentera and Menorca. For this reason, the island circumscription was chosen in the Balearic archipelago because, without going any further, the insular fact is a constitutionally accepted singularity and obviously

Table 3. Population-to-seat ratio per Island. Balearic Islands

Island	Population	Seats	Pop/Seat	Inequality Ratio (vs. Menorca)
Mallorca	957,726	33	29,022	3.73
Menorca	101,074	13	7,774.92	-
Eivissa	161,485	12	13,457.08	1.73
Formentera	11,483	1	11,483	1.47
Total	1,231,768	59		

Source: Own elaboration with data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2023

decisive in the island regions. The Constitutional Court includes this in Judgment 225/1998, FJ 7, in which it writes that the insular option as an electoral constituency is one:

A legislative option that is constitutionally lawful insofar as it finds support in the so-called ‘insular fact’, a specific geographical circumstance, typical of the Autonomous Communities that are territorially an archipelago, and whose singularity is taken into account by the Constitution itself (arts. 69.3 and 141.4).

The following table compares the population and seat distribution using 2023 census data.

The data reveals that Mallorca, despite representing over 77% of the population, receives only 55.93% of the parliamentary seats. This produces a ratio of one deputy per 29,022 residents—much higher than in the rest of the islands. In contrast, Menorca enjoys a far more favorable ratio, with one deputy per 7,775 inhabitants, while Formentera, despite being the least populous island, retains one dedicated seat. Although less extreme than in the Canary Islands, this distribution also reflects a significant imbalance in representation.

Calculations per island

Using the Loosemore-Hanby index, we calculate the total deviation between each island’s population share and its parliamentary seat share:

1. Mallorca

- Population share: $912,544 / 1,173,008 = 77,79\%$.
- Seat share: $33 / 59 = 55,93\%$.
- Difference: $|55,93\% - 77,79\%| = 21,86\%$.

2. Menorca

- Population share: $95,936 / 1,173,008 = 8,17\%$.

- Seat share: $13 / 59 = 22,03\%$.
- Difference: $|22,03\% - 8,17\%| = 13,86\%$.

3. Eivissa

- Population share: $152,820 / 1,173,008 = 13,02\%$.
- ▪ Seat share: $12 / 59 = 20,33\%$.
- Difference: $|11.4\% - 7.31\%| = 7,31\%$.

4. Formentera

- Population share: $11,708 / 1,173,008 = 0,99\%$.
- Seat share: $1 / 59 = 1,69\%$.
- Difference: $|1,69\% - 0,99\%| = 0,7\%$.

The malapportionment index for the Balearic Islands is 28.375%, indicating a moderate level of disproportionality in parliamentary representation. As in other island regions, smaller territories—particularly Menorca—are significantly overrepresented, while the main island, Mallorca, is underrepresented relative to its population. Although the distortion is less pronounced than in the Canary Islands, it still poses concerns regarding the equality of the vote and the legitimacy of territorial representation. Any potential reform should consider how to rebalance the system while preserving the political voice of the less populous islands.

The Balearic Islands present a unique electoral anomaly within the Spanish state, particularly in the case of Eivissa and Menorca. Despite Eivissa having a significantly larger population (161,485 inhabitants) compared to Menorca (101,074), the latter is allocated more parliamentary seats (13 versus 12). This discrepancy is the only instance in Spain where a less populous territory receives greater representation than a more populous one.

5. Analysis

The particular characteristics of island territories offer a unique opportunity to explore how demographic and geographic particularities, such as population size and islandness, intersect with institutional design to produce representational distortions. Living on an island generates situations not contemplated in continental territories, which can be summed up around the concept of insularity (Báez-García et al., 2023). Based on the intense social connection with the island's own territory (Aznar Vallejo, 2016; Conkling, 2007), how a population is situated on its island will determine personal and programmatic ideological development offered in elections. This high sense of belonging orients island citizens politically (Anckar & Anckar, 1995).

Political and administrative structures are created in island territories that reflect their particularities (Báez et al., 2023). One of the most prominent phenomena arising from these intersections is malapportionment, which disproportionately benefits territories with small populations, many of which are islands.

Anckar (2007) provides compelling evidence that island territories are systematically overrepresented in national legislatures. Through a cross-national analysis, he identifies a strong correlation between small population size, islandness, and high levels of representation relative to population. According to Anckar, this overrepresentation is not merely incidental but forms part of a broader normative pattern in democratic systems that attempt to integrate peripheral or geographically isolated communities by granting them political voice beyond their numerical weight (Anckar, 2007). This aligns with our findings, in which island territories, particularly those with smaller populations, tend to enjoy inflated legislative representation, resulting in significant malapportionment.

Furthermore, Anckar argues that insular overrepresentation can be understood not only as a by-product of constitutional arrangements but also as a conscious mechanism of territorial integration (Anckar, 2007). This helps explain why malapportionment tends to be more persistent and politically accepted in states with island peripheries: it serves the dual purpose of preserving national unity and addressing the democratic deficit caused by geographic remoteness.

It is important to note that while the study primarily focuses on multi-island jurisdictions where constituencies are subdivided—such as the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Madeira, or the Azores—it excludes certain other insular territories such as the French Antilles, the Faroe Islands, and Åland. This exclusion is not due to a lack of insular relevance but rather stems from methodological reasons. In each of these cases, their local parliamentary elections are conducted within a single, undivided constituency, which does not allow for internal comparison between islands in terms of representation. However, when observed in the context of their representation in national parliaments—France, Denmark, and Finland respectively—these territories also tend to display elevated levels of malapportionment, comparable to the archipelagic cases analyzed in this study. Similarly, Greenland stands out for its high degree of overrepresentation in the Danish parliament, reinforcing Anckar's (2007) assertion that insular overrepresentation can serve as a deliberate mechanism for political integration and territorial cohesion.

Despite the persistence of these trends, some island territories have undergone recent institutional reforms that seek to reduce representational inequality. A clear example is the Canary Islands, which, following a 2018 electoral reform, restructured its parliamentary system by modifying district magnitudes and introducing a regional-level constituency. This reform significantly reduced the extreme levels of malapportionment that had

characterized the archipelago for decades. The case of the Canaries demonstrates that while malapportionment often serves as a long-standing mechanism for maintaining inclusion and stability in archipelagic systems, it is not immune to reform pressures, especially when democratic legitimacy and demands for electoral equality become central to public debate.

Our analysis supports Anckar's claim that small island jurisdictions are frequently exceptions in the pursuit of electoral equality. In these cases, malapportionment functions as a compensatory device, facilitating political inclusion while maintaining the legitimacy of the central institutions. The presence of this trend in various democratic settings underscores the relevance of islandness as a variable in the study of institutional bias and representational inequality.

6. Conclusion: Malapportionment as Embedded Islandness

This study has demonstrated that malapportionment is neither an accidental distortion nor a mere institutional relic, but rather a structural feature of island governance systems, intrinsically linked to the geopolitical and demographic realities of islandness. Through a comparative analysis of the Azores, Canary Islands, and Balearic Islands, we have quantified significant representational imbalances, with malapportionment indices ranging from 13.61% (Azores) to 31.66% (Canary Islands), figures that exceed global averages for non-island regions (Anckar, 2007; Samuels & Snyder, 2001). These findings corroborate Baldacchino's (2020a) assertion that islandness "contours and nudges" political systems, revealing how geographic isolation and institutional path dependence interact to sustain electoral disproportionality.

This research yields three key implications that are particularly relevant when considered through the lens of islandness. First, the Compensation Paradox highlights the tension between democratic equality and territorial integration in plurinational states. Although malapportionment undermines the principle of one person, one vote, it operates as a mechanism for integrating peripheral and insular territories. Smaller islands such as Corvo (Azores) or El Hierro (Canary Islands) benefit from disproportionate legislative influence, echoing Hepburn's (2010) notion of autonomy-as-accommodation. However, this compensatory overrepresentation can entrench clientelist practices and distort policy priorities, a phenomenon extensively documented in Veenendaal's (2020a) work on small island politics. Second, recent reform pathways offer a more balanced approach. The 2018 Canary Islands electoral reform reduced malapportionment while maintaining minimum insular representation, demonstrating that electoral fairness and insular protection are not mutually exclusive. This model could be considered in contexts like the Balearic Islands, where significant disparities persist such as the stark contrast between Mallorca (one deputy per 29,022 inhabitants) and Menorca (one per 7,775). Finally, this study calls for a theoretical reassessment of how electoral systems interact with islandness. Rather than treating islandness as a static or deterministic condition (as

critiqued by Pungetti, 2013), the research aligns with Grydehøj et al. (2021) in advocating for pluralistic frameworks that recognize the interplay between geography, identity, governance, and institutional design. Malapportionment, when situated within the specific spatial and political logics of islands, becomes not merely a technical flaw but a complex expression of insular distinctiveness and the challenges of equitable representation in archipelagic contexts.

Future research on malapportionment and island governance should address several promising avenues, particularly from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. One crucial line of inquiry is the policy impact of malapportionment: does the overrepresentation of smaller islands influence tangible outcomes such as infrastructure investments, healthcare distribution, or environmental regulation? In contexts where small islands wield disproportionate legislative weight, policy priorities may reflect local rather than regional or national interests, potentially leading to inefficiencies or inequities in public resource allocation.

Another essential direction is the expansion of comparative analyses beyond the European periphery. Case studies in archipelagos such as French Polynesia or the Maldives could shed light on how colonial legacies, demographic imbalances, and development pressures interact with electoral design. These cases may offer contrasting models where legal frameworks either mitigate or amplify the structural distortions associated with malapportionment. A comparative study of different normative electoral systems such as proportional representation with compensatory mechanisms (e.g., the Canary Islands), majoritarian frameworks with reserved seats (e.g., New Caledonia), or hybrid systems (e.g., the Maldives) can help clarify how institutional design mediates the tension between territorial inclusion and democratic equality in island contexts.

Lastly, future work should explore citizen perceptions of electoral equity through empirical methods such as surveys or focus groups. Understanding how island populations perceive malapportionment—whether as a legitimate safeguard of their distinctiveness or as an unjust distortion of democratic norms—can offer valuable insights into the social acceptability and political sustainability of current arrangements. Such perceptions are particularly relevant in archipelagic settings, where geographic fragmentation and strong local identities shape political expectations and notions of fairness.

In sum, this paper underscores that islandness and malapportionment are mutually constitutive. Electoral distortions are not mere technical flaws but embedded features of archipelagic political systems, reflecting the tension between democratic ideals and territorial pluralism. As such, they demand context-sensitive solutions that balance equality with the unique governance challenges posed by islands at the margins of nation-states.



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