'Political Institutions for the Future: A Five-Fold Package'

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Governments are often so focused on short-term gains that they ignore the long term, thus creating extra unnecessary burdens on their citizens, and violating their responsibilities to future generations. What can be done about this? In this paper I propose a package of reforms to the ways in which policies are made by legislatures, and in which those policies are scrutinised, implemented and evaluated (hereafter *The Proposal*). The overarching aim is to enhance the accountability of the decision-making process in ways that take into account the interests of persons in the future.

My package of policies has five parts, the first three of which are inspired, in part, by the system currently operating in Finland, although there are some key differences.[1] Given this it is appropriate to begin by introducing the Finnish system. The relevant features of the Finnish system for the purposes of this essay are as follows. First, the Government is required to issue a Report on the Future, where it addresses a particular issue chosen by the Prime Minister. In addition to this, there is a Committee for the Future. One of its roles is to assist the Opposition in preparing a response to the Government's Report on the Future. The Committee also engages in research on long-term trends.[2]

My *Proposal* builds on this, but extends and revises it considerably. It is as follows:

The Proposal:

i. Governmental Manifesto. First, one important mechanism for inducing politicians to govern in ways that protect persons' interests in the long-term would be to require incoming governments to issue a *Manifesto for the Future* that outlines their policies for addressing long-term trends, challenges and opportunities.[3] Unlike in the existing Finnish system, however, my proposal is that the Government be required to respond to the future social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities facing their society and the world, addressing the trends identified in the reports produced by an

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[1] For an informative account of the Finnish system see http://www.futurejustice.org/blog/guest-contribution/guest-article-a-committee-for-the-future/
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[2] For information see here:
https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/lakiensaataminen/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Pages/default.aspx
See also the instructive account given here by Paula Tiihonen, Counsel to the Committee for the Future: http://www.futurejustice.org/blog/guest-contribution/guest-article-a-committee-for-the-future/.

[3] See also the UK's House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee's report 'Governing for the Future', which argued that newly elected governments should issue a 'Report on the Future' (2007, p.31).

A related, but distinct, proposal is made by Dennis Thompson. He calls for the government to issue what he terms "*Posterity impact statements*". This would require governments "to issue statements justifying any adverse effects their actions might have on the democratic capacities of future citizens. … The statement would have to be defended before an independent authority, perhaps the trustees themselves" (2010, p.32: cf pp.32-33: also 2005, p.257). Note, his proposal concerns only the impact on the democratic character of the political system, and is not directed towards civil rights and social, economic and environmental justice.

independent Council for the Future (see proposal *iv* below). This innovation could be adopted as part of the ordinary parliamentary procedure in any legislative system.

ii. Parliamentary Committee. Second, the legislature should include a *Committee for the Future*. As in the Finnish system, the role of this Committee would be to report on the adequacy of the Government's *Manifesto for the Future*. However, by contrast with the Finnish political system, my suggestion is that *all* policies must go through this Committee for its scrutiny and evaluation. It would thus operate as a Select Committee. To perform this role the Committee would be empowered to call relevant Government ministers, the Prime Minister and civil servants to give evidence and be held to account for their decisions.

iii. 'Visions for the Future' Day. Third, to enable it to fulfil its role it is important to build into the parliamentary process a regular *Visions for the Future* day in the legislature (and perhaps more widely), in which the Government's *Manifesto for the Future* and its record is scrutinised by the Opposition. Crucially, Government representatives and representatives from the Opposition are required to justify their policies in a *public* deliberative forum. The process of public justification can have a chastening effect, and by instituting such a feature into the parliamentary process it would put pressure on politicians to take seriously the impacts of their decisions on the long-term.

iv. Independent Council for the Future. For the first three elements to work well, governments, the Opposition, civil society organizations, and the general public need to have access to reliable analyses of the impacts of government action and inaction. The fourth component of my proposal, then, is that there should be an external body (a *Council for the Future*) whose role is to produce periodic reports that (a) chronicle long-term trends and the likely impact of current policies and alternative policies, was well as (b) looking back to the past to draw attention to changes over time. The idea is that this is an independent body, whose members are selected by professional associations for the natural and social sciences and relevant humanities (such as history).

v. Performance Indicators. Finally, Government departments and the *Council for the Future* should (a) employ performance indicators that track the attainment of long-term goals (Oxford Martin School 2013, pp.7, 62), and (b) evaluate performance over long time periods, rather than annual or 3 yearly reviews.

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Why should we accept the five-fold Proposal I have outlined above? To make a compelling case for any set of proposals we have to start by considering the nature of the problem that they seek to address. Given this I shall start by outlining the problem of what I term *harmful short-termism* (Section II). I then set out four criteria by which we should address any proposals for addressing this problem (Section III). One obvious key consideration is whether the proposals are effective. However, to determine whether any given proposal would be effective requires us to consider the drivers of *harmful short-termism*. When we seek to address problems such as inflation or unemployment or rising crime we begin by examining what are the causes of these phenomena. Likewise, if we want to combat *harmful short-termism* we should start by considering what causes it. For this reason in Section III I identify what I take to be some of the main drivers of *harmful short-termism*. In Section IV I seek to show that my proposal addresses these drivers of short-termism, and, more generally, that it meets the four criteria set out in Section II. I hope to strengthen my case by noting how my proposal fares better than some other mooted alternatives (Section V). Section VI concludes.

I: The Problem

First, then, the problem. Many argue that existing political institutions focus unduly on the short-term and fail to give adequate protection to people's long-term interests. In their fascinating *The Blunders of our Governments* the distinguished political scientists Anthony King and Ivor Crewe conclude their analysis by arguing that one source of the 'blunders' that governments of all political persuasions have committed is that politicians lack accountability for the future impacts of their policies, and this leads them not to think policy through, often with disastrous results (King & Crewe 2014, pp.356-359 & 395). This concern is shared by some politicians. For example, in 2007 the UK's House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee published a report on *Governing the Future* that explicitly recognized the importance of governing for the long term and the problems that politicians face in doing so (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, 2007). It gave the example of pensions reform, noting that politicians delayed confronting this (2007, p.5).

But what exactly is the problem? After all, surely not all acting in pursuit of short-term gain is necessarily bad or undesirable. We need some criteria by which to ascertain when a failure to safeguard long-term interests is unjustified (hereafter *harmful short-termism*) and when it is not. In what follows I identify two ways in which a policy might be an instance of *harmful short-termism*.

First, there are cases when people (or their representatives) act in ways at t1 that, whilst they do not result in any cost at t2 (or may even promote a short-term benefit at t2) impose a much greater cost at t3 that thereby results in less overall good for themselves. The problem here is one of the *inefficient* pursuit of the interests of contemporaries because the agents in question (whether the citizens themselves or their representatives) are choosing a way of promoting their interests that is more costly than necessary. Short-termism here results in less good outcomes than are available. To illustrate: It might involve committing to an energy system now that then locks people in to using it in the future and foreseeably costs more money than an alternative would. Or it can take the form of people using renewable natural resources in an unsustainable way, thereby leaving themselves (as well as others) nothing in the future. The problem in these cases, then, is that individuals are choosing inefficient policies and/or their representatives are failing in their duty to promote the interests of their current citizens.

A second kind of *harmful short-termism* is when members of one generation act in ways which violate their obligations to future generations. Whereas the first kind focuses solely on current persons' long-term interests (and the reasons that their political representatives have to promote those), the second kind of harmful short-termism introduces a distinct consideration – intergenerational responsibilities. A full understanding of this second kind of *harmful short-termism* thus requires an account of intergenerational ethics. That one generation advances its own interests over future ones might not be wrong, depending on what obligations we think that generations have to those who succeed them. If, for example, someone endorses a sufficientarian account then so long as one generation complies with this it can, in a sense, be justifiably short-termist: it can, that is, privilege its short-term interests over the interests of others in the future so long as it meets the sufficiency constraint. Clearly, I cannot resolve the important question of what obligations one generation has to future generations here.[4] Instead, I shall work with a very rough normative standard: this holds that current generations should to realize a broadly egalitarian distribution of opportunities to enjoy good lives over time, but can depart from this where it is possible to improve the condition of some without too great cost to others.

[4] For instructive discussion see Gosseries and Meyer (2009).

Before proceeding further, it is worth noting that, like the first kind of *harmful short-termism*, this second kind is also concerned with the inefficient use of resources and time. For the inefficient management of resources can leave future generations without their fair share.

Having distinguished between two kinds of *harmful short-termism* I should perhaps make clear that some policies might be harmful in both senses, and in practice it may be very difficult to disentangle them.

With this in mind, it is worth considering some examples that illustrate the phenomenon of *harmful short-termism*. One example that exemplifies the first kind of *harmful short-termism* comes from the work of Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra on disaster preparation. They found that short-termism can result in governments making insufficient preparations for disasters, and that in the case of Hurricane Katrina, citizens ended up paying 15 times more on post-disaster work than preparation would have cost (Healy and Malhotra 2009, p.387).

A failure to think about the long term is also very damaging in foreign policy. Ronald Krebs and Aaron Rapport instance a number of cases where state's foreign policy has failed to take a sufficiently long-term perspective and has, as a consequence, resulted in policies that are much more costly in both financial terms and in terms of human life. To take one recent example, they note how those prosecuting the war in Iraq did not engage in long-run planning. They failed to address "the challenges of postwar state-building" and focused exclusively on short-term military strategy with a "relative neglect of "postwar" operations" (Krebs and Rapport 2012, p.532). This will likely impose greater than necessary costs on current generations but also future generations too.

Climate change provides another illustration of the importance of long-term thinking. It is widely recognized that there needs to be extensive mitigation now, and that political actors have delayed implementing the necessary policies. Furthermore, it seems plausible to suggest that this slowness to act has arisen, in part, because the costs of climate change fall most severely in the future, the effects of mitigation will not be felt for some time yet, and yet the costs of mitigation will be felt now (Gardiner 2011, Part C). Again, this is likely to impose greater costs than are necessary on some members of current generations. These costs might include many different kinds of loss – the loss incurred when people's lives are harmed by climatic impacts and also the costs involved when people have to pay for expensive mitigation and adaptation policies - losses and costs that could have been reduced, or avoided altogether, if mitigation had been adopted in a timely way. In addition to this, climate change will also impose severe unjustified burdens on future generations (including again, greater climatic harms and/or greater mitigation and adaptation costs than would have been the case if climate policies had been introduced in good time).

Harmful short-termism in both versions is, thus, a widespread and serious practical problem.

II: Evaluative Criteria

Having drawn attention to the problem, we now need to consider how we should judge proposals for responding to it. In what follows I suggest four criteria.

Effectiveness. The first, and most obvious, criterion by which to evaluate any proposals is whether they are effective in overcoming *harmful short-termism*. We need, however, to handle the notion of effectiveness carefully and be clear about what baseline we use. For example, it would be wrong to reject a proposal because it did not *eliminate* the problem. Suppose that although it

reduces *harmful short-termism* it does not eradicate it altogether. That should surely count in support of it. Someone might suggest that we should compare a proposal's success by examining how well it does compared to other proposals. Is this the right baseline? In reply: it depends. It might in principle be possible to implement several reforms, and the fact that A is more effective than B does not mean (bracketing other considerations for a moment) that B too should not be implemented. However, in practice, there may be limits on how many proposals one can implement (because of limits in energy, finances and political opportunities). In these cases proposals are in competition with each other; and in such circumstances it makes sense to judge effectiveness in terms of how well a proposal does in comparison to other proposals that could be adopted instead. In short, then, we should judge a proposal both in terms of whether it reduces *harmful short-termism* compared to a state of affairs where it is not implemented (*the non-implementation baseline*), but also consider whether it is more or less effective than other competing proposals (*the comparative baseline*).

Moral Legitimacy. The extent to which a proposal reduces *harmful short-termism* is not the only morally relevant consideration. We also need to consider whether the proposal meets other criteria. This takes us to the second criterion - what I shall term moral legitimacy. We can distinguish here between two relevant moral considerations. (a) a proposal might violate principles of substantive justice. It might, for example, create an unjust distribution of resources among contemporaries, or impose unreasonable demands on some contemporaries. Furthermore, (b) a proposal might violate principles of procedural justice. For example, many proposals for addressing short-termism call for a departure from democratic decision-making and compromise the procedural standards that we think should normally apply.

Political Sustainability. A third criterion is what I shall term 'political sustainability'[5], by which I mean its tendency to remain in operation over time.[6] For example, we should evaluate proposals to see whether they are designed in such a way that once implemented they are hard to undo. This might be true of an article in a codified constitution. Consider, for example, the US Constitution. Article 5 of the US Constitution states that in order to propose a constitutional amendment it is necessary to secure either a 2/3 majority in both Houses or the support of 2/3 of the state legislatures; and, it further insists that the ratification of a constitutional amendment requires either the consent of ¾ of the state legislatures or the consent of conventions in ¾ states. This constitutional framework – by imposing such high hurdles to constitutional change – promotes political sustainability.

Turning from constitutional rules, we should also consider whether a proposal generates its own sources of support among political actors and citizens. Is it self-reinforcing? At the other end of the spectrum: Might a proposal sow the seeds of its own destruction?

Now, of course, in some cases, whether a proposal is abolished or not is not going to be determined by that proposal. However, to the extent that it is possible to design proposal in ways that further their political sustainability then this feature should not be ignored. And it is noticeable here that several innovations that have been implemented to protect long-term interests have had a rather short life. For example, in Israel a Commission for Future

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[5] My term is similar to Buchanan's concept of 'feasibility' (2004, p.61). One difference is that I emphasize the fact that feasibility must involve being able to be applied throughout time perhaps more than he does.

[6] Note: I interpret a proposal's 'tendency to remain in operation over time' both in terms of whether it is hard to abolish it but also in terms of whether it has a secure source of funding in the future.

Generations came into existence in 2001 but was abolished in 2006 (Shoham and Lamay 2006). In addition to this, the UK also created a Sustainable Development Commission in 2000, whose role was to advise, monitor, and scrutinise government departments on the realization of environmental sustainability, but it was closed on 31st March 2011.[7]

One final point: we should make clear that the third condition applies only if a proposal performs sufficiently well on the first two criteria. We do not want a proposal to be longlasting if it is condemned by those two standards.

Political Accessibility. This leaves a fourth criterion: 'political accessibility'.[8] Put succinctly, this concerns whether and how likely it is that can we get from 'here' to 'there'. A proposal may be effective and not contravene any moral standards, but if there is no prospect of implementing it now or in the future then we have overwhelming reason not to pursue it. There might, in one sense, be nothing wrong with the policy, but if we cannot get from here to there then it would be wrong to spend time and effort on a forlorn project.

Having laid out my four criteria, it bears noting that they might full in different directions. There might, for example, be a tension between political accessibility and political sustainability. My reference to Article 5 of the US Constitution above can be used to illustrate the point. As I noted above, Article 5 makes it very hard to undo a proposal (so it scores well on political sustainability). However, and for the very same reason, it is also hard to bring about the necessary change in the first place (so it scores badly on political accessibility).

III: The Drivers

We are still not yet at a stage where I can directly argue for my proposal. Above I stressed the importance of effectiveness. However, if we are to judge policies on their effectiveness we need to consider what determines the effectiveness of a policy. And to do this, we need to know (a) *why* political leaders, political institutions and citizens have a tendency to adopt policies that result in *harmful short-termism* (what are the drivers of short-termism?), and (b) how the proposal responds to these drivers.

Consider the drivers first. We can identify several kinds of driver of harmful short-termism. One obvious problem is

> *1. Ignorance of the Future.* One factor that might lead political actors to take insufficient steps to protect long-term interests is ignorance of long-term trends.

In addition to this, however, the social, economic, political and legal context within which political actors make their decisions can encourage *harmful short-termism.* We might term these 'institutional drivers'. They would include the following factors:

> *2. electoral dependence: the electoral cycle and the length of tenure of politicians.* Politicians obviously have an incentive to win the next election (unless they are standing down) and so since they are dependent on popular support at election times will be incentivised to choose

[7] http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/.

[8] I borrow the notion of 'accessibility' from Allen Buchanan (2004, p.61). Note, however, I use it slightly differently from him. Buchanan writes that a "theory is accessible if [i] it is not only feasible, but if in addition [ii] there is a practicable route from where we are now to at least a reasonable approximation of the state of affairs that satisfies its principles" (2004, p.61: numbers added). I use it here to refer only to [ii].

policies that will secure them sufficient electoral support at the next election. In addition to this, the shorter the tenure they have in office the shorter the timeframe they must operate with.

3. economic dependence: political actors are often dependent (eg for financial support or because they exert enormous economic power) on the support of firms or other bodies with short-time frames.[9]

4. media coverage: the 24 hour news cycle puts a pressure on politicians to be able to respond quickly to show that they are taking action.

5. the duration of time which is used by government departments and by bodies auditing government policy: the shorter the timeframe, the more those being audited will focus on the short term.

6. what kinds of performance indicators are used: if these focus on short-term goals, then agents will naturally focus on the short-term.

In addition to these institutional factors, *harmful short-termism* arises in part because of certain features of human nature. Consider, for example, the following

7. Creeping Problems: Persons often fail to detect certain problems because they are gradual in nature and creep up on us slowly. As such we barely notice them on a day by day, year by year basis, and may only realize that there is only a problem when it is too late to address the causes, or when it is possible to do so but only at considerable cost. This is the challenge posed by what Michael Glantz terms 'creeping environmental problems' (Glantz 1999, p.4ff).

8. "Identifiable Victim" syndrome: It is widely recognised that whether humans take action to respond to people's plight depends a great deal on whether there are 'identifiable victims', in which case they feel prompted to act, or whether they know merely that some will suffer but do not know who the victims will be (Jenni and Loewenstiden 1997, pp.235-257). Since long-term impacts will fall on non-specified people this psychological tendency leads to less protection to future people's interests.

9. Vividness and hot and cold processing systems: Related to this, persons respond well to 'vivid' risks, ones which they personally experience or witness ('hot' mechanisms), but they do not respond well to information acquired not from personal experience from abstract, general social scientific trends ('cold' mechanisms). Elke Weber explains inaction on climate change in these terms (Weber 2006, pp.103–120).

10. Invisibility: 'Out of Sight/Out of Mind'. In addition to this, agents have a tendency to ignore what is not in front of them. If it is not in the forefront of their consciousness and their daily routine it can get pushed to the back of their list of things to do.

11. Positive Illusions: Human beings are prone to "positive illusions" - such as "over-estimation of capabilities", "illusion of control over events" and "perceived invulnerability to risk" (Johnson and Levin 2009, p.1597) - and these are often invoked in explanations of the failure to take action against climate change (Johnson and Levin 2009, p.1596).[10]

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[9] For salient discussion see Boston and Lempp (2011, pp.1006-1007).

[10] For a related phenomenon see Kahneman's discussion of the "planning fallacy". He employs this term to describe the tendency of planners to rely on optimal estimates for a project and to ignore costings from similar cases, thereby resulting in committing to projects that cost far more than originally anticipated (Kahneman 2011, chapter 23, especially p.250).

12. Self-interest: Of course, one factor is just that current generations may often prefer to promote their own self-interest over and above that of others.
13. Temptation and Weakness of the Will: Suppose that agents are aware of a long-term threat (or possible opportunity) and that they decide to avert the threat (or take action to exploit the opportunity), agents may often decide that a certain course of action is the right one, but then give in to temptation and fail to stick to the original decision. In short, agents suffer from weakness of the will and this can subvert the protection of interests in the long term.
14. Procrastination: Agents are also prone to procrastination and thus to delaying actions that need to be taken soon to prevent serious harms. It is a familiar feature of human nature that we often postpone confronting difficult and awkward choices (Andreou 2007; Andreou and White 2010). Procrastination is distinct from pure time preference (which is concerned with the valuation of outcomes) and is focused in particular on a reluctance to take action. It is also distinct from weakness of the will. For example, as Sarah Stroud observes in her illuminating discussion, whereas weakness of the will occurs when someone forms a judgement to do something but then acts contrary to it, procrastination need not take this form. It can involve not acting and not forming an intention to do something; it can simply take the form of delaying thinking about a problem (Stroud 2010, pp.51-67 esp pp.64-66).[11]

To this we should add that the problem of *harmful short-termism* is amplified by the existence of lock-in and path-dependence.[12] Decisions at one point in time can greatly shape, and constrain, people's opportunities in the future. As David Collingridge argues, this is often a feature of policies concerning technological innovation. He puts the point succinctly: "When change is easy, the need for it cannot be foreseen; when the need for change is apparent, change has become expensive, difficult and time consuming" (Collingridge 1980, p.11).[13] This magnifies the problems for if people could easily reverse decisions made at an earlier point then the problems of governing for the long term would be much easier. Unfortunately, it is often hard to change the direction of travel we are going once we have made some initial decisions.

Let us turn now from drivers to responses, and consider how one might respond to these kinds of drivers of short-termism. We can distinguish between three kinds of response. First, proposals might seek to *reduce, or eliminate*, the underlying psychological factors that cause short-termism (eg reduce lack of knowledge or tendencies to procrastinate). Second, they might not seek to reduce the psychological factors that cause short-termism, but rather try to *prevent these factors from affecting the policy-making process*. If self-interest drives short-termism, a proposal might seek to bind political institutions through, say, constitutional procedures and entrenched rights so as to prevent self-interest from having these harmful effects. In the same vein, one might try to minimize the extent to which decision-makers are dependent (eg for funding) on agents with short-term goals. The second strategy thus seeks to erect barriers between decision-making and the forces that promote short-termism. Most ambitiously, third, one might try to exploit some of the psychological factors listed above, and seek to channel and *harness them to promote greater*

[11] What of the common phenomenon of pure time preference? I here assume it is an upshot of some of the phenomena listed above, rather than a separate cause.
[12] For fascinating discussion see Paul Pierson *Politics in Time* (2004).
[13] Collingridge terms this the "dilemma of control" (1980, p.1: see also chapter 1)).

protection of long-term interests (something I will discuss more fully later on). The key point is that to be effective proposals must credibly respond in some way to the drivers of short-termism.

IV: Assessing the Five-Fold Proposal

Having set out the drivers of short-termism, I now want to show why I think my package of proposals performs well on the effectiveness criterion, and then how it performs well on the other criteria.

A. Effectiveness. The case for thinking that it will make a positive difference to the protection of long-term interests is that it responds to some of the factors that lead to short-termism.

Consider for example the human tendency to i*gnore what is invisible* and to focus predominantly on the problems one is confronting right now. My *Proposal* responds to this: for by institutionalizing a process that compels politicians to think about the long term and, to plan for it now, it makes what would otherwise be invisible because too far off become 'visible' and something that they must consider in the present. The *Manifesto for the Future* and the regular *Vision for the Future* days compel politicians to confront problems they might otherwise ignore. They ensure that the long term interests are in their 'in tray' as a matter they need to have thought about, rather than not on their agenda at all. The power to affect the legislative agenda is widely recognized to be a major source of power (Bachrach and Baratz 1970, p.43ff), and my *Proposal* utilizes this by ensuring that future-related issues appear on the agenda as something to be addressed.

Second, the Proposal also addresses the tendency for *procrastination*. As analyses of procrastination stress, one crucial feature of procrastination is that agents fail to make and put into place concrete *plans* to realize their goals. Though they might at some sense be committed to a specific goal, procrastinators tend not to take the steps needed to realize it including making the necessary plans. Given this, as Frank Wieber and Peter Gollwiter argue in their paper "Overcoming Procrastination through Planning' one "strategy to overcome procrastination" is to encourage "the formation of *implementation intentions*, which are specific plans detailing when, where, and how one intends to initiate an action that one is prone to put off" (Wieber and Gollwitzer 2010, p.186). The *Proposal* speaks to this because the process of public justification, and the scrutiny of policies for their long-term impacts, requires politicians and civil servants to have an answer to the question of what exactly they are doing to achieve those results and what concrete steps they are taking. If they know they will be scrutinised and assessed for what specific plans they have put in place to achieve long term goals then they have a powerful reason to do so.

Third, the Proposal also addresses *temptation and weakness of the will*: if one's future directed projects are not scrutinised then, notwithstanding any good intentions, it is very easy to engage in backsliding. The scrutiny process I am proposing makes that much harder to do that for others (the *Committee for the Future* and the *Council for the Future*) are charged with monitoring their compliance.

In addition to this, the process of public justification can also harness people's *self-interest*. (Recall the earlier discussion of three ways of addressing the drivers of short-termism: here I am suggesting a version of the third.) Politicians have an interest in not looking bad and ill-prepared. The accountability mechanisms that I describe utilise this to encourage politicians to think further ahead.

Finally, it puts a check on people's "positive illusions", because at each stage in the policy making process decision-makers are being held to account for their judgements and required to justify them.

In short, then, the first three elements of my *Proposal* tackle some of the key drivers that lead to short-termism. What they have in common is that they force policy makers to look up from their daily grind, to raise their heads from problems that are in the headlines, and to look ahead into the further future, and to do so on a basis that they have to be able to justify. The *Manifesto for the Future*, *Future Vision Days,* and the existence of two bodies (one inside Parliament and the other outside) whose raison d'etre is to ensure policy-makers safeguard the future combine to compel political actors to confront these problems. They make it hard (though not impossible) to avoid them. By requiring political actors to publicly justify their policies in terms of their impacts on the future they induce them to look at their own actions through the eyes of the future.

To use the framework devised by Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, my *Proposal* employs various mechanisms to 'nudge' people to engage in encourage forward-looking thinking (Thaler & Sunstein 2008). It is, moreover, well-grounded in recent research in psychology and behavioural economics. As Sunstein and Thaler note, there is extensive research on what is known as "priming", where this refers to the phenomenon that when individuals are asked about what their intentions are concerning a certain issue (such as asking 'what are you doing for the future?') this alters their behaviour (in this case, inducing them to reflect on what is best for the future and to put plans in place to realize that) (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, pp.69-71).[14] The first three elements of my Proposal – the requirement of a *Manifesto for the Future*, the *Committee for the Future*, and the process of public justification that is involved in the *Vision for the Future Days* – draw on precisely this kind of psychological mechanism.

Having defended the first three aspects of my *Proposal*, I turn now to the vital role that the two other aspects of my Proposal play.

For the *Committee for the Future* to perform its role, and for politicians and citizens to evaluate the government's *Manifesto for the Future* and its long-term performance it is crucial that each of these actors has an accurate understanding of the challenges and opportunities before us. This takes us to the fourth and fifth elements in my *Proposal*. The fourth, recall, calls for reports that (a) chronicle long-term trends and the likely impact of current policies and alternative policies, was well as (b) looking back to the past to draw attention to changes over time. This is essential to draw the attention of policy makers and the citizens to *creeping problems* (Glantz 1999). The reports make what would otherwise be invisible and imperceptible visible and something to be addressed.

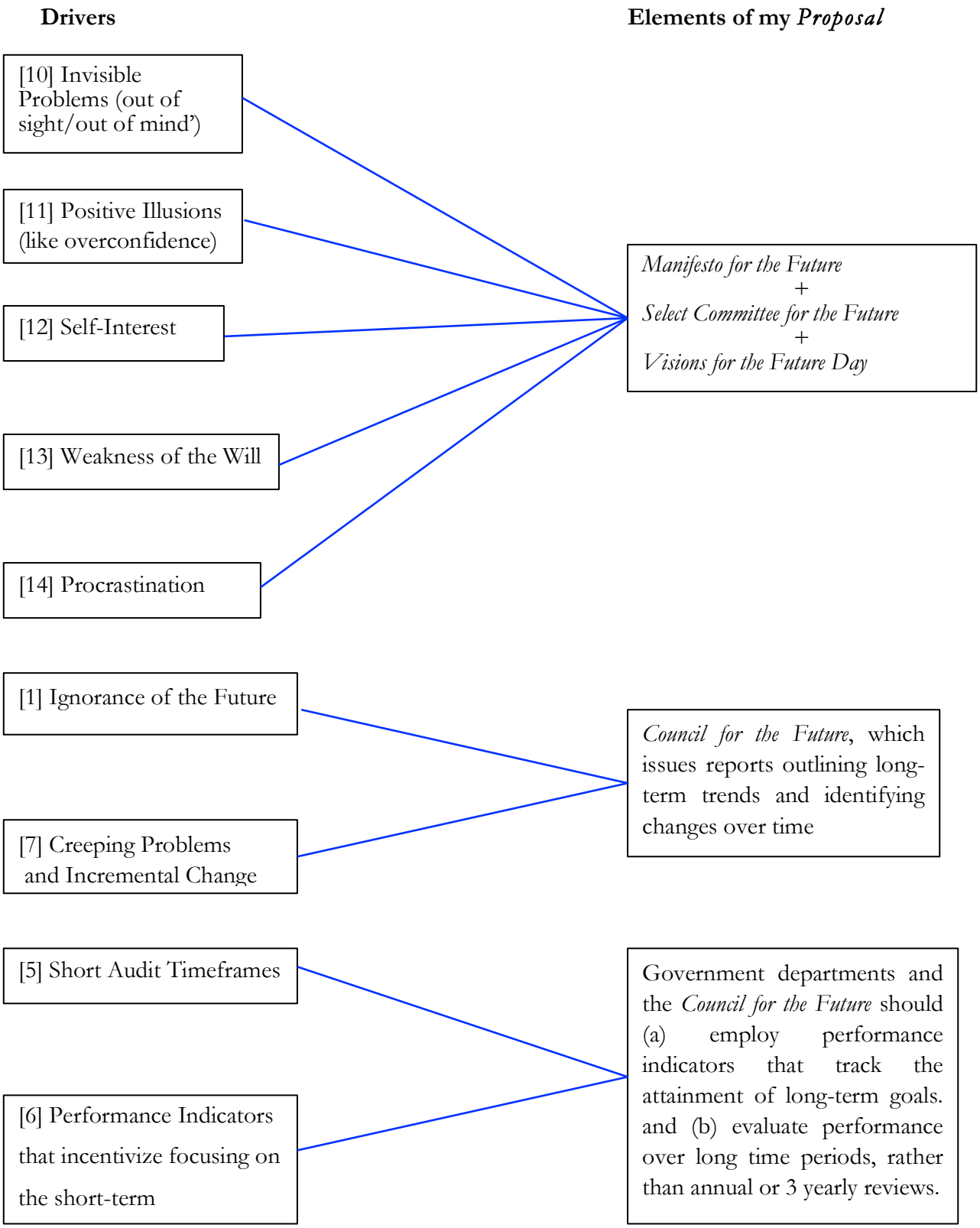
This leaves the fifth element. This, recall, calls for all political actors (a) to employ performance indicators that track the attainment of long-term goals, and (b) to evaluate performance over long time periods, rather than annual or 3 yearly reviews. Again, these tackle some of the drivers of short-termism. Given our tendency to ignore what is invisible and to discount the future, it is crucial to have performance indicators that accurately reflect *now* the impacts that our policies will have in the future (Oxford Martin School 2013, pp.7, 62). Furthermore – and this is a point stressed by King and Crewe (2014, pp.356-359 & 395) – to ensure long-term planning it is crucial to use longer time frames for auditing performance. This

[14] This is sometimes referred to in the psychological literature as the "mere-measurement effect". For relevant empirical evidence for it – on which Thaler and Sunstein (2008, p.70) draw - see Levav and Fitzsimons (2006), and Morwitz, Johnson and Schmittlein (1993).

helps reduce the tendency for self-interest (and a desire to look good) to focus on the short term, and instead channels it to promote longer-term goals.

The ways in which my *Proposal* responds to the various drivers of *harmful short-termism* is summarised below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. This shows which elements of the *Proposal* (outlined on the right hand side of the diagram) respond to which drivers of short-termism (outlined on the left hand side of the diagram).



B. Moral Legitimacy, Political Sustainability and Accessibility. Having argued for the effectiveness of my *Proposal*, I now briefly turn to the other criteria I stated above. To start with the second criterion, I can see no way in which my *Proposal* falls afoul of moral criteria. For example, my *Proposal*, unlike others to be examined below, does not involve ascribing political power to unelected leaders. Indeed, arguably it deepens democracy by encouraging deliberation. In addition to this, once the Proposal is implemented there is no reason to think that it is any easier to abolish than any other proposal (with the possible exception of constitutional articles for those countries with codified constitutions). So I see no reason to reject it on grounds of political sustainability. Finally, it is also clearly politically accessible.

V: Comparing it with Other Proposals

To further make my case for it, I shall now compare it to other proposals. Recall that where there is limited energy and enthusiasm for implementing proposals we need to consider which proposals are the most promising and so must engage in a comparative assessment. Doing so draws attention to two further strengths.

§1. First, note that my *Proposal* avoids problems that afflict other proposals. Some, for example, assume that whereas politicians and ordinary citizens are myopic, members of an independent central bank, would take a long term view. However, as Christopher Adolph has shown in his outstanding book on central banks, this turned out to be a 'myth' (Adolph 2013). A model proposed by Thomas Wells is vulnerable to a similar problem. He argues that "current citizens can't help but be short-sighted" and so will produce short-sighted policies (Wells 2014). As a solution he proposes that "civic organisations, such as charitable foundations, environmentalist advocacy groups or non-partisan think tanks" should have voting rights in a legislature (Wells 2014). But on what basis can we assume that NGOs are any less myopic than ordinary citizens? No explanation is given for the asymmetric assumptions about long-sightedness. My *Proposal* does not make any such assumptions. It assumes only that *if* politicians are required to justify the long-term impacts on their policy, and *if* a committee's role is defined in terms of furthering this, *then* this institutional mechanism induces them to think about matters that they would not otherwise focus on.

My *Proposal* also avoids other practical problems that beset competing proposals. For example, Well's proposal faces some challenging practical problems. He writes that "[t]o ensure that these voters have some political weight – but not too much – we might award eligible non-governmental organisations (NGOs) equal shares of a block of votes adding up to, say, 10 per cent of the electorate" (Wells 2014). But, which NGOs should be included? Who decides that? And why should the preferred NGOs have 10% of the vote as opposed to some other figure?

Similar problems also afflict other proposals that have been made. For example, Andrew Dobson (1996, pp.132-135) and Kristian Ekeli (2005, pp.429-450, esp p.434) have argued that a certain proportion of the legislature should be made up of elected representatives for the future. They differ on the question of who should be entitled to vote for these representatives of future generations, with Dobson restricting the vote to a "proxy electorate", comprising members of the "sustainability lobby" (Dobson 1996, pp.132-133) and with Ekeli arguing that all citizens should be entitled to vote for these representatives (Ekeli 2005, p.434ff). As Ekeli notes, Dobson's proposal makes some problematic assumptions. In particular, why assume that green voters are the only ones concerned about the long-term (Ekeli 2005, p.435)? Also, how do we

identify such voters? However, they both face the practical problem concerning how many future representatives should there be (Attfield 2003, p.120). If they are to represent all future generations then since we do not know how many there will, and also since the number is a function of what we do, it is hard to know how many representatives there should be. Ekeli proposes that 5% of the representatives in the legislature be "future generation representatives" (Ekeli 2005, p.434), but why 5%? Any number here seems somewhat arbitrary.

Thus far I have noted primarily practical and feasibility problems with other proposals. If we consider now my second criterion - moral legitimacy – we can see that other proposals fare less well here too. Well's proposal for example allocates political power to make laws to unelected bodies, and as such departs from democratic principles of government.

Other proposals also face both practical and moral obstacles. Some, for example, like Philippe Schmitter have proposed a system in which parents can exercise votes on behalf of their children (Schmitter 2000, pp.40-41).[15] But not only does this seem to violate political equality, it also faces considerable practical problems. If a couple has a child do they each get an extra vote or half a vote? What happens when families break up, and if some re-marry? Also, why assume that parents are necessarily any more longsighted than others? None of these problems arise for my proposal.

So, my first point then is that my proposal avoids practical and moral problems that beset other proposals.

§2. Second, we should also note that some other proposals for minimizing harmful short-termism depend for their success - or, more modestly, would be enhanced - if we adopted my *Proposal*. To illustrate: consider those who propose using courts to protect future generations. Given the current political system, this is an important source of action and there have been some successful cases of litigating to protect the interests of future generations. For example, the United States of America has seen the rise of what is termed 'Atmospheric Trust Legislation', which invokes the 'public trust' doctrine (which affirms responsibilities to act as trustees for natural resources).[16] Recently, there have been many attempts to employ litigation to ensure that governments comply with it.[17] However, the extent to which this approach can successfully reduce *harmful short-termism* depends on what laws or constitutional provisions are in operation in the first place. Courts can only use the existing legislation, legal doctrine, or codified constitution, and so, even with judicial activism the extent to which they can protect the future may be sharply constrained.

In light of this, we need legislatures to be sufficiently forward-looking to create laws or constitutions that promote persons' long-term interests and rights. And this is what my proposal seeks to do. So, whether we can pass forward-looking laws and constitutions will depend, to some extent on whether proposals like mine are implemented. To put the point another way: courts operate 'downstream' and have to work with whatever laws have been passed. This gives us reason to introduce intertemporal concerns 'upstream' where they can shape policy making.

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[15] See also the fascinating discussion in van Parijs (1998, pp.308-314). Van Parijs also draws attention to six other ways that the voting system could be reformed to promote the interests of the young (van Parijs 1998, pp.301-308).

[16] See also the decision of the Hague District Court on 24th June 2015 in *Urgenda Foundation* v *The State of the Netherlands (Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment)* C/09/456689 / HA ZA 13-1396. The Urgenda Foundation, an environmental NGO, brought a case calling for the Dutch state to adopt more aggressive mitigation targets and the Court found in its favour. See: http://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2015:7196.

[17] For a discussion of 'atmospheric trust litigation' see Wood (2014, p.220ff).

Another example illustrates the point: when considering temptation and weakness of the will some propose having arms-length institutions. Some, for example, might propose having a sovereign wealth fund such as Australia's Future Fund. This was set up to pay for the pensions of Australian civil servants (Clark, Dixon & Monk 2013, chapter 4). Again, however, we have to ask: What political environment is most hospitable for setting up such forward-looking schemes? For this kind of policy to be implemented we need to have legislatures that are sufficiently forward-looking to enact such policies. And that is what my *Proposal* is seeking to do.

VI: Concluding Remarks

This concludes my case for my *Proposal*. To sum up: the five-fold *Proposal* I have advanced responds to several of the main causes of short-termism; it helps make the future visible and designs the policy making process in ways that make it hard to ignore the future. In addition to this, it meets the three other criteria I set out. It enjoys many advantages over competing proposals. And, it helps realize other forward-looking initiatives.

It is also important to see how the *Proposal* hangs together as a coherent package whose separate parts combine in a mutually supporting way. The *Manifesto for the Future*, the *Select Committee for the Future* and the *Vision of the Future Days* work together to nudge politicians to consider the long-term. However, without the independent *Council for the Future* and its reports it is hard to assess the plausibility or otherwise of the Government's plans and the extent to which government policies do adequately reflect long-term interests. At the same time, these reports would not perform the valuable role that they are designed to do if they did not use performance indicators that accurately reflected people's long-term interests. Furthermore, the good work done by these initiatives would be undone if government departments had to work to short audit timeframes. So the first three elements of my file-fold package require the last two. To this we should note that without the first three elements the reports of the *Council for the Future*, and long-term performance indicators, would be much less valuable. Their contribution is greatly enhanced by the fact that the government would be expected to respond to the long-term trends identified by the reports and that the *Committee for the Future* will rely on them (and the long-term performance indicators) for its work, as will all political actors during the process of public deliberation and contestation that surround the *Vision of the Future Days*. The different parts of my *Proposal* thus combine so that each element contributes to the effectiveness of other elements, rendering each more effective than it would be on its own.

The *Proposal* should not be seen as a panacea that will eliminate *harmful short-termism*; but, we have reason to think that it would make a positive contribution, and do so in legitimate and feasible ways.

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