



Bridging Time Horizons: A Methodological Study of Scenario-Building in Parliamentary Foresight

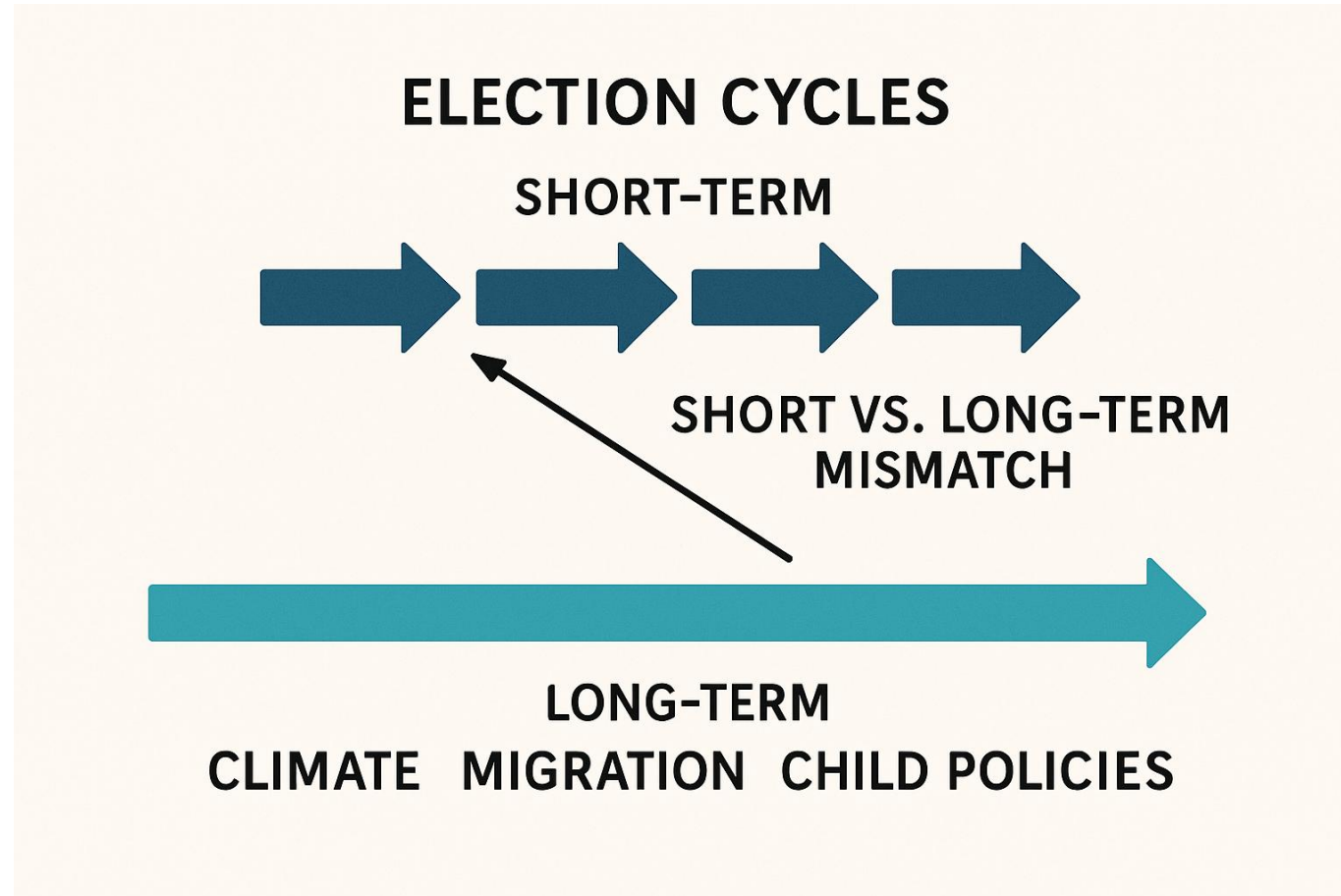
Dmitry Erokhin, PhD

Why foresight for parliaments?

- Research question: How can scenario-building be tailored to help parliaments bridge multiple time horizons?
- Policy volatility keeps spiking
- Mandates \neq Megatrends
- Momentum is building – 8 national parliaments now run “Future Committees”
- Global call to action
- Legitimacy & resilience payoff



Legislative time-horizon problem



Methodological lens

Foresight typologies

- Predictive
- Exploratory
- Normative

Scenario vs. backcasting

- Scenario-building: bottom-up narratives that project current drivers into multiple future storylines
- Backcasting: top-down design of pathways from a normative goal to present-day actions
- Combined use: scenarios expand the imagination; backcasting turns visions into concrete steps

Why “pluralistic” matters

- Diverse methods
- Stakeholder co-production
- Bias mitigation

Pluralistic backcasting explained

Define desired futures

- Convene MPs, experts & civil society to draft 2–3 vision scenarios
- Assign qualitative narratives + numeric targets
- Record core values, assumptions & success metrics

Map multiple pathways

- Chart 4–6 distinct routes from present to each vision
- Merge scenario models, workshop storyboards & Delphi polls
- Identify decision nodes: elections, budgets, policy windows

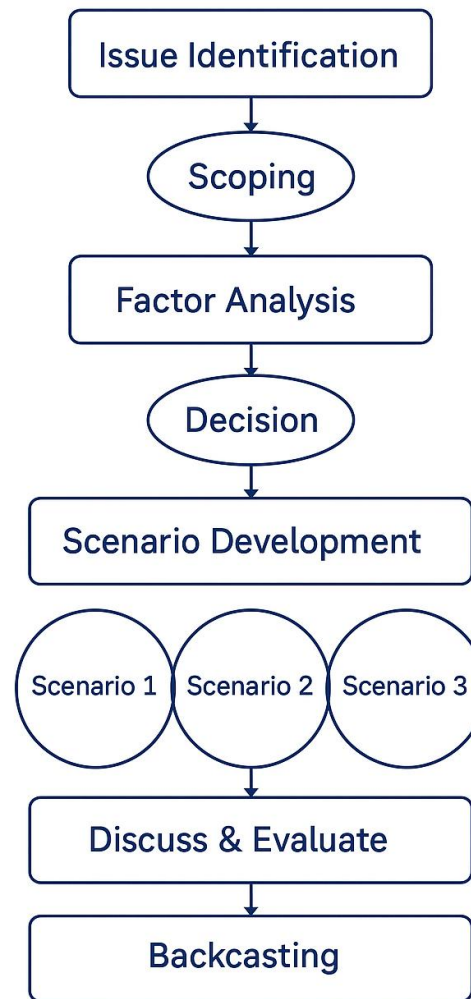
Stress-test & refine

- Expose routes to shocks: downturns, crises, tech disruptions
- Run “what-if” simulations & tabletop drills
- Prune weak paths, reinforce strong ones & flag contingencies

Time horizons framework

Time Horizon	Years	Typical Decision Levers
Short-Term	0–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operational adjustments• Budget reallocations• Quick policy fixes• Emergency responses• Pilot programs
Medium-Term	5–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic planning• Institutional reforms• Infrastructure investment• Scaling up programs
Long-Term	15–50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vision-setting• Long-range policy frameworks

Example



Scenario-Building Process in Parliament

Determining key factors affecting birth rates in Austria

Economic & financial factors

- Economic stability: income security, employment
- Housing affordability for young families
- Costs of childcare and education

Labor market & workplace factors

- Work-life balance: flexible hours, remote work
- Employment options post-parental leave
- Gender pay equity and

- career impacts

Social & cultural factors

- Societal attitudes toward parenting
- Gender equality in caregiving roles
- Intergenerational family support networks

Infrastructure & public services

- Childcare availability and quality
- Education services & extracurricular activities

Migration & demographic factors

- Immigration policies attracting families
- Integration and fertility patterns of immigrants
- Demographic shifts and population aging

Policy & institutional factors

- Family policy: allowances, parental leave, tax breaks
- Stability and continuity of family-friendly legislation

Constructing plausible scenarios

Factor / Dimension	Ambitious Reform ("A")	Moderate Growth ("B")	Minimal Reform ("C")	Undesirable Path ("D")
Financial incentives / Family policy	Strong financial incentives (allowances, tax breaks)	Gradual improvements	Limited increases	Economic constraints reduce support
Childcare coverage & quality	Rapid expansion of high-quality childcare	Gradual improvements	Limited increases, regional gaps	Stagnation/deterioration
Work-life balance & workplace reforms	Societal shifts, shared caregiving roles	Moderate workplace reforms	Low ambition, persistent gaps	Housing/cost pressures intensify
Integration of immigrant families	Effective integration	Steady integration	Slow change	Weak integration, growing distrust
Cultural adaptation / Gender roles	Societal shift to gender equality & shared roles	Gradual cultural adaptation	Slow cultural change	Growing distrust in institutions
Childcare and education costs	Affordable childcare & education	Improving affordability	Little change, high costs remain	Costs increase, affordability declines
Demographic adaptation / Aging	Addressed via reforms & integration	Some adaptation	Little adaptation	Sharp population aging, burden rises
Trust in institutions	High trust, effective support	Moderate trust	Stable but low ambition	Low trust, weak institutions
TFR outcome by 2040	TFR 1.8+	TFR 1.7	TFR 1.3–1.35	TFR 1.1 or lower
Population consequences	Sustainable, stable population	Moderate growth, manageable aging	Stagnant, slow decline	Decline, labor force loss, high burden

Backcasting – from vision to action

Long-term vision (2040)

- Achieve sustainable demographic balance (TFR ~1.7–1.8)
- Universal access to quality childcare
- Balanced gender roles in parenting and employment

↓ Backcasting steps

Medium-term milestones (2030–2035)

- Childcare coverage expanded by at least 40%

- Fathers' parental leave uptake reaches ~50%
- Housing affordability significantly improved for young families

Immediate actions (2025–2028)

- Introduce enhanced child allowances and flexible parental leave
- Immediate investment in expanding childcare infrastructure
- Incentivize family-friendly

workplace policies through tax benefits

- Strengthen migration and integration programs targeting young families

↓ Key decision nodes for parliament

- 2025: Election-cycle family-policy commitments
- 2028: Review and refine initial policy impacts
- 2032: Comprehensive parliamentary assessment of policy effectiveness

Implementation tips for parliament

- **Embed in existing structures**
 - Integrate foresight into regular parliamentary committee workflows
 - Utilize existing advisory structures (Budget Office, Research Service)
- **Establish cross-party foresight groups**
 - Form dedicated parliamentary working groups, ensuring cross-party representation
 - Schedule quarterly foresight sessions aligned with parliamentary cycles
- **Conduct scenario workshops**
 - Host structured half-day workshops with MPs, stakeholders, and experts
 - Include ministries (family, economy, integration), local governments, and civil society representatives
- **Use rapid evidence briefs**
 - Deliver concise, tailored scenario summaries (1–2 pages) for fast decision-making
 - Align briefs with parliamentary question cycles and urgent inquiries
- **Leverage visual tools**
 - Develop clear “scenario placemats” for quick MP comprehension
 - Use infographics and timelines to highlight decision points and policy impact

Thank you!

