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Coalition Governments in Western Europe

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Conclusion

Coalition Governance in Western Europe

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The European experience with coalition government is complex and evolving. Patterns of coalition membership, formation, governance, and performance vary from country to country and in many cases from era to era. The chapters of this volume have illustrated this diversity with greater specificity and in more intimate detail than any previous study of cabinet coalitions. Such an intensive empirical survey is timely for more than one reason. For one thing, all major existing surveys have become dated, since no comprehensive volume containing studies by country experts has been published since the mid-1980s. More importantly, however, our empirical knowledge of coalition politics has simply failed to grow apace with our theoretical understanding. For many years, the basic features of coalition politics in Europe were better known than understood. Particularly over the past decade or so, however, the theoretical literature on coalition bargaining has rapidly grown much more sophisticated. It has begun to focus on many aspects of coalition governance that have hitherto simply not been empirically explored in any systematic and theoretically guided manner. Thus, our understanding has leapt ahead of our knowledge. This volume attempts to redress that shortcoming in our empirical knowledge and, furthermore, to suggest new avenues for theoretical as well as empirical work.

The latter agenda suggests systematic analysis and extensions that go far beyond the confines of this volume. In the remainder of the current volume, we shall attempt something less ambitious and space-consuming, namely to provide an initial overview of the data from the country chapters. This concluding chapter thus summarizes, largely in a country-by-country manner, some of the main features of European coalition politics as presented in the individual chapters. The empirical information summarized here covers the entire post-1945 period, from the first post-war cabinet until 1 January 1999. While in the country chapters both governments and cabinets figure as units of analysis, this chapter will focus on cabinets almost exclusively. Only in the

analysis of electoral performance will we depart from this standard. A more exhaustive comparative analysis of the wealth of data provided in this volume is currently being undertaken.

Cabinet Membership

For present purposes, however, let us begin with the most standard information concerning cabinets, their incidence, and basic composition. Table 15.1 provides an overview. Altogether, 343 party-based cabinets have been identified within the parameters of this volume.¹ The countries differ widely in the incidence of cabinets, from a mere eleven in the case of Portugal to forty-eight for Italy. These numbers need to be qualified, however. While for the vast majority of countries, we cover the whole post-war period, beginning in 1945 or even 1944, there are three exceptions. The German case covers the life of the Federal Republic, and the analysis therefore begins in 1949. The French analysis is confined to the Fifth Republic and thus covers the post-1958 period exclusively. Finally, the Portuguese case picks up in 1978 with the consolidation of democracy.

Coalition and Single-Party Cabinets

We begin our survey with two characteristics commonly associated with cabinet strength. Traditionally, it has been thought that in parliamentary democracies strong government requires a single-party cabinet. However, although most countries in our sample have had some experience with single-party cabinets, coalitions account for 69 per cent of the cabinets (238 of 343 cases) analysed here. See also Figure 1.1 in the introductory chapter. Although the figure there presents data on the proportions of time in office, rather than on the relative numbers of cabinets, the results are broadly consistent. Coalitions are the only form of government that post-war Luxembourg and the Netherlands have experienced. They have been by far the most important form of government in Germany, where single-party cabinets make up 15 per cent of the cases (4 of 26) but in reality have been only transitional phenomena. To a lesser extent this is also true for Finland (11% single-party cabinets), Belgium (15%), Austria (23%), France (26%), and Italy (29%). The other countries have a more mixed record: Denmark (45%), Ireland (55%), Norway (61%), Portugal (69%), and Sweden (73%). Thus, three countries have experience more single-party than coalition cabinets, and the top two countries in this regard are both Scandinavian. Our findings thus confirm the Scandinavian tendency towards coalition avoidance (Strøm 1990).

¹ There are minor variations in the number of cabinets between the tables because of missing data, in particular for the first post-war cabinets in the Netherlands.

TABLE 15.1. *Parliamentary cabinets*

Country	Number of cabinets ^a	Mean number of cabinet parties	Minority cabinets		Single-party cabinets	
			Number	Percentages ^b	Number	Percentages ^b
Austria	22	1.86	1	5.5	5	22.7
Belgium	33	3.24	3	9.1	5	15.2
Denmark	31	1.97	27	87.1	14	45.2
Finland	44/37 ^c	3.49	11	29.7	4	10.8
France	23	2.26	7	30.4	6	26.1
Germany	26	2.08	3	11.5	4	15.4
Ireland	22	1.64	11	50	12	54.5
Italy	49/48 ^d	2.88	23	47.9	14	29.2
Luxembourg	16	2.13	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	22	3.23	3	13.6	0	0
Norway	26	1.73	17	65.4	18	69.2
Portugal	14/11 ^e	1.91	3	27.3	5	45.5
Sweden	26	1.42	19	73.1	19	73.1
TOTALS	354/343		128		106	
MEANS	27.2/26.4	2.3		37.3		30.9

^a Excluding the Parri and first De Gasperi cabinets in Italy; the Schermerhorn cabinet in the Netherlands.

^b Party-based cabinets only.

^c In all, Finland had 44 cabinets, 37 of which were party-based. The remaining columns take into account only party-based cabinets.

^d In all, Italy had 49 cabinets, 48 of which were party-based. The remaining columns take into account only party-based cabinets.

^e In all, Portugal had 14 cabinets, 11 of which were party-based. The remaining columns take into account only party-based cabinets.

Majority and Minority Cabinets

Another salient feature of coalition strength is whether or not the parties in the cabinet also control a legislative majority. In our sample, no fewer than 37 per cent of the 343 administrations are minority cabinets. The rather high frequency of minority cabinets, more than one-third, parallels other recent studies of this phenomenon (Strøm 1990; Laver and Budge 1992). Denmark clearly leads the pack with no less than 87 per cent minority cabinets, followed by Sweden (73%), Norway (65%), Ireland (50%), and Italy (48%). With the single exception of Luxembourg, all the countries covered in this volume have had their experience with this form of government. The countries not yet mentioned fall within the range from 5 per cent (Austria) to 30 per cent (Finland and France) (the actual numbers are: Belgium 10%, Germany 12%, the Netherlands 14%, France 18%, and Portugal 27%). In sum, a large proportion of European cabinets do not fall into the categories that have conventionally been considered 'strong'.

PARTY SYSTEMS

To understand the processes that lead to the formation of cabinets, whether majority or minority, single-party or coalition, we need to examine the context in which bargaining occurs. First and foremost, coalition bargaining takes place within party systems. Whether or not they can be properly regarded as unitary actors (see Laver and Schofield 1990, for the best survey of this issue), parties are surely the key actors in the game of coalition politics. Given the centrality of parties, party system format is a critical contextual factor in coalition bargaining. Consequently, party systems are generally considered *the* major explanatory variable in coalition politics, and debates concerning the motivations of parties, or party leaders, have been central to the development of the field (cf. Dodd 1976; Luebbert 1986; Laver and Schofield 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999).

The main, and typically competing, motivational assumptions have been that the behaviour of parties in coalition bargaining is driven by the pursuits of office (power) or policy, respectively. Pure office-seeking approaches (Riker 1962), which attempt to explain coalition behaviour without regard to the parties' policy preferences, generally have not performed well empirically (Lijphart 1984a; Laver and Schofield 1990: 91-7; Warwick 1994). 'Policy-driven' approaches which take into account the ideological distance between parties have done better (de Swaan 1973; Laver and Budge 1992). Such policy motivations have often been described with the help of models of spatial voting games. In one-dimensional accounts of cabinet formation, the median legislator thesis has proved useful (cf. Laver and Schofield 1990: 113). That is to say, where it is reasonable to portray the preferences driving party behaviour as aligned along a single continuum (often conventionally assumed to be a left-right axis), the party containing the median legislator is in a highly favourable bargaining position. This is because if unified, this party should under majority voting be able to block any move to a position other than its ideal point. We would therefore expect this party to be a frequent, if not constant, cabinet participant, with or without coalition partners (see e.g. Laver and Schofield 1990).

How well does this strong theoretical result hold up in practice? All of our contributors indeed report a left-right ordering of the relevant parties in their respective countries, based on an authoritative cross-national study and relevant country-specific information. Yet, party politics decidedly appears not always to be unidimensional. For ten countries, we have estimates of a second significant policy dimension, and one case (Belgium) even features a third important dimension. We expect the power of the median party to be somewhat attenuated in these cases.

The actual empirical patterns are interesting and somewhat counter-intuitive (Table 15.2). First, holding the median position does seem to give

parties important leverage in coalition bargaining, as such parties are clearly over-represented in government. In aggregate, 80 per cent of all party-based parliamentary cabinets that have been formed in our sample have included the median party. Only 20 per cent of the cabinets have not, and the vast majority of these cases (13% of all cabinets, or 64% of the cabinets without the median legislator party) have been minority cabinets. Thus, minority cabinets have been significantly less likely than majority governments to include the median party. This is interesting, since it has been argued that it is precisely because they control the median legislator that many minority cabinets are able to survive (e.g. Laver and Schofield 1990: 111).

There are only four countries in which the median party has been excluded in more than one or two cases. In Italy and the Netherlands, they have been excluded from no cases at all. Proportionally, the exclusion of the median legislator party has been most frequent in Denmark (58% of all cabinets), Belgium (42%), Ireland, and Norway (both 27%). There is probably no single factor that accounts for the anomalies represented by these four countries. The Danish case seems to reflect the frequency with which a smaller party, in particular the Radical Liberals, has controlled the median legislator but failed to participate in the government. This is probably due at least in part to the prevalence of two-bloc politics (socialists vs. non-socialists) and to the informal constraints that this division has imposed on coalition bargaining. In Ireland and Norway, the long-time anti-coalition stances of their respective dominant parties, Fianna Fáil in Ireland and the Labour Party in Norway, must clearly have been of major importance. These two parties have consistently been not only the leading parties in their respective countries, but also centrally placed in policy space. Their refusal to coalesce has ruled out a number of coalition cabinets that would have included the median party.

It is interesting to note, however, that the failure of median parties to participate in government does not seem in any systematic way related to the intrusion of secondary or tertiary policy dimensions. Only in Belgium does the occasional absence of a median party seem attributable to multidimensionality. One of these deviant cases (Denmark) has by our contributor been classified as one-dimensional. In the Norwegian and Irish cases a second policy dimension has been identified, yet at least the Norwegian party system has had a single dominant policy dimension.

Party Systems and Bargaining Complexity

Basic party system features provide a guide to the ease or complexity of coalition bargaining. The more unevenly and the more transparently some parties are favoured by the distribution of power, the more straightforward we would expect the process of forming and maintaining cabinet coalitions to be. Building on previous research along these lines, Warwick (1994) has

TABLE 15.2. *Government participation of parties with median legislator in Western Europe*

Country	Number of party-based cabinets	Median party (1st dimension) in cabinet?		Median party (2nd dimension) in cabinet?		Minority cabinets where median party (1st dimension) is not in cabinet
		yes	%	yes	%	
Austria	22	18	82	8	36	1
Belgium	33	19	56	15	45	2
Denmark	31	13	42	N/A	N/A	18
Finland	37	30	81	24	65	4
France	23	21	91	N/A	N/A	2
Germany	26	24	92	22	85	2
Ireland	22	16	73	15	68	2
Italy	48	48	100	43	90	0
Luxembourg	16	15	94	7	44	0
Netherlands	22	20	91	14	64	0
Norway	26	19	73	17	65	7
Portugal	11	9	82	8	73	2
Sweden	26	22	85	21	81	4
TOTALS	343	274	79.9	194	56.6	44

introduced the notion of 'bargaining complexity'. In his account of cabinet terminations, Warwick contrasts explanations that rest on ideological or policy differences within cabinets (the ideological diversity thesis) with accounts that are premised on changes in the strength and positions of the coalition parties that in turn provides them with incentives to seek alternative coalitions (the bargaining environment thesis).

There are at least three structural party system features that contribute to the simplicity or complexity of coalition bargaining. The more parties in parliament, all else equal, the more complex we expect the bargaining environment to be. Second, the greater the dispersion of support (e.g. the number of parliamentary representatives), the greater the complexity of the situation. By implication, the complexity of the bargaining environment should correlate positively with indices of party system fragmentation, such as Rae's *F* (1971) or the effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Finally, the more policy dimensions, the less simple (more complex) bargaining should be. We expect these various aspects of bargaining complexity to be positively correlated. We also expect to see systematic relationships between these measures and various features of the bargaining process (such as its length and complexity), as well as with properties of the cabinets that eventually form.

Let us first examine the intercorrelations between the different structural correlates of bargaining complexity (Table 15.3). Contrary to what one might

expect, there is no very strong relationship between the number of policy dimensions and party system fragmentation. It is true that Belgium, with a three-dimensional (or more) party system also features a large effective number of parliamentary parties. On the other hand, however, one-dimensional Denmark and France have almost as many parties. Overall, the relationship between the number of policy dimensions and party system fragmentation is a weak one, accounted for entirely by Belgium. The mean effective number of parties is 4.40 for systems with only one relevant policy dimension, 3.51 for two-dimensional systems, and 4.96 for the only three-dimensional system, Belgium. Thus, bargaining complexity may be a less straightforward matter than we were first inclined to believe.

TABLE 15.3. *Party system indicators in Western Europe*

Country	Number of relevant policy dimensions	Effective number of parties ^a	Number of parties in parliament ^a
Austria	2	2.68	3.50
Belgium	3	4.96	8.48
Denmark	1	4.48	7.68
Finland	2	5.06	7.73
France	1	4.32	5.04
Germany	2	2.59	4.04
Ireland	2	2.90	4.77
Italy	2	4.01	10.54
Luxembourg	2	3.30	4.81
Netherlands	2	4.68	9.86
Norway	2	3.39	6.42
Portugal	2	3.21	5.36
Sweden	2	3.29	5.35

^a Mean values per country.

CONSTRAINTS ON COALITION FORMATION

Yet, bargaining complexity is hardly the only factor that explains coalition politics. The formation and performance of parliamentary governments is often heavily affected by any number of factors that restrict the effective range of options available to the bargaining parties. We consider as constraints on coalition bargaining any restrictions on the set of feasible cabinet coalitions that is beyond the short-term control of the players, which in this context normally means the leaders of the coalitionable political parties (Strøm, Budge, and Laver 1994). We can distinguish between two major forms of constraint: institutional ones, on the one hand, and party system features, on the other.

TABLE 15.4. Institutional rules and conventions concerning cabinet formation

Country	Formal procedure of government formation	Use of <i>informateurs</i>	Discretionary power of head of state	Investiture vote required (First Chamber)	Investiture vote decision rule	Investiture vote required (Second Chamber)	Cabinet responsible to Second Chamber	Requirement of special majorities in legislation
Austria	Yes	No	2	No	N/A	No	No	Yes ^a
Belgium	Yes	Yes	0	Until 1995: Yes Since 1995: No	Until 1995: 50% + 1 of the votes cast Since 1995: N/A	Yes	Until 1995: Yes Since 1995: No	Yes ^b
Denmark	No	Yes	0	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
Finland	Yes	No	4	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes ^c
France	Yes	No	4	No	N/A	No	No	No
Germany	No	No	1	Yes	50% + 1 of all MPs for the proposed Chancellor (quorum 50% + 1)	No	No	Yes ^d
Ireland	No	No	1	Yes	(quorum 50% + 1 for the proposed PM (quorum 20 MPs)	No	No	No
Italy	Yes	No	2	Yes	50% + 1 for the proposed PM (quorum 50%)	Yes	Yes	No ^e
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	0	Yes	50% + 1	N/A	N/A	Yes ^f
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	0	No	N/A	No	(Yes)	No
Norway	No	Yes	0	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
Portugal	Yes	No	2	Yes	50% + 1 for government programme (quorum 50%)	N/A	N/A	No
Sweden	Until 1975: No Since 1975: Yes	(Yes) ^g	0	Until 1975: No Since 1975: Yes	Until 1970: No Since 1970: N/A	Until 1970: No Since 1970: N/A	Until 1970: Yes Since 1970: N/A	No ^h

TABLE 15.4. *cont.**Discretionary power of head of state*

- 0 No influence
 - 1 Selection of prime minister only, special situations
 - 2 Selection of prime minister and parties, special situations
 - 3 Selection of prime minister only, all situations
 - 4 Selection of prime minister and parties, all situations
- ^a Two-thirds majority in first chamber for constitutional amendments and several other laws.
- ^b Two-thirds majority in both chambers for constitutional amendments and several other laws.
- ^c Two-thirds majorities for tax laws. Until 1992 a minority of one-third of the MPs had a suspensive veto power which could delay legislation for two to four years. This, in turn, means that the veto could be avoided by rallying more than two-thirds of the MPs behind a specific law.
- ^d Two-thirds majority in both chambers for constitutional amendments and majority also in the second chamber (the Bundesrat) for a majority of laws.
- ^e A majority is required in the second chamber also.
- ^f Two-thirds majority in parliament for constitutional amendments.
- ^g President of Parliament (since 1975).
- ^h Until 1970 a majority was required in the second chamber also.

Institutional Constraints

Institutional constraints comprise the various and sundry formal rules, constitutional and otherwise, that define the options available to party leaders during coalition bargaining and, just as importantly, in office. Our contributors have paid particular attention to the rules under which cabinet formation takes place, since these have a direct and undeniable impact on coalition membership and policy (Table 15.4). Moreover, it is generally possible to formulate specific hypotheses concerning their effects, *ceteris paribus*, on coalition politics.

For one thing, parliamentary democracies vary substantially in the extent to which their constitutions, or other statutes or conventions, specify a formal procedure for coalition bargaining and formation. Where such procedures exist, they often privilege the largest parliamentary party, whose bargaining power is then presumably enhanced. As the preceding chapters have shown, European systems exhibit a surprising range of such institutional rules. Whereas the formation processes in Italy and Sweden are heavily regulated (thanks, no doubt, to their modern constitutions), those of Denmark and Norway are surrounded by very few formal rules. In these specific cases it is not clear, however, whether the denser institutional environments of the former states are any more conducive to large-party domination than the latter.

Table 15.5 provides information about the inclusion of the largest parliamentary party in the cabinet. In many political systems there is a strong convention that the largest parliamentary party moves first in cabinet formation. That is, the *formateur* in the first formation attempt comes from this party. As

Baron (1991) has shown, such a first-mover advantage can significantly enhance the benefits flowing to the party so privileged. According to Table 15.5 the largest party indeed seems to have an advantage, being represented in no less than 81 per cent of the cabinets formed. In Austria, for example, the largest party has made it into every post-war cabinet. Party size seems to be least important in the Netherlands and Norway. In both cases the Social Democrats have frequently been excluded from government even when they have been the strongest parliamentary party.

Parliamentary democracies also vary with respect to the role played by the head of state (president or monarch) in the bargaining process. Typically, presidents have more extensive real powers than kings, although formal constitutional rules might not always be of much help in describing these powers. Where the head of state plays a relevant and discretionary part in coalition bargaining, the result may be a potential distortion of that partisan game, in the sense that the weights and spatial positions of the relevant parties may not permit us to make any specific prediction. The Finnish president, for example, has occasionally contributed to coalitional solutions that would not otherwise have been predictable. As Magone and Verzichelli and Cotta show, the presidents of Portugal and Italy, respectively, have at times exercised similar powers.

Investiture vote requirements, such as are featured in the constitutions of Italy and Germany, make majority cabinets, as opposed to minority cabinets, more likely. The expectation that cabinets have to be formally invested by a parliamentary majority may deter some parties from attempting to form minority cabinets. Similarly, positive parliamentarism, in which voting rules require cabinets to have positive majority support rather than mere toleration, makes majority cabinets more likely, whereas negative parliamentarism tends to induce minority cabinets (Bergman 1993).

TABLE 15.5. *Cabinet representation of the largest parliamentary party*

Country	Largest party in cabinet ^a	Number of cabinets	Percentage
Austria	22	22	100
Belgium	26	33	79
Denmark	21	31	68
Finland	29	37	78
France	21	23	91
Germany	22	26	85
Ireland	16	22	73
Italy	47	48	98
Luxembourg	15	16	94
Netherlands	13	22	59
Norway	17	26	65
Portugal	11	11	100
Sweden	21	26	81

Note: This table excludes non-partisan cabinets.

Moreover, where the cabinet is responsible to a second chamber, broadly based coalitions (more precisely: coalitions which command a majority in both houses) have been more likely. As the contributors have shown, there are a number of countries in which cabinets are formally accountable to a second (upper) chamber, but few where this responsibility is enforced and thus effectively constrains coalition bargaining. Italy, however, is one prominent example. Finally, broadly based coalitions may be favoured by the existence of legislative rules requiring supermajorities for various types of legislation, such as budgets (Finland) or constitutional amendments (Belgium).

Party System Constraints

But constraints on coalition bargaining need not take the form of systemic institutional rules. Various features of the party system may have similar effects on bargaining. Examples are parties that because of their policy positions or histories are precluded from bargaining, parties that voluntarily exclude themselves through anti-coalition pledges, and temporary restrictions that follow from some particular political agenda.

1. *Anti-system or pariah parties.* Such parties may be excluded from coalition politics, which, in turn, reduces the number of feasible coalitions. Parties that have fallen into this category include (a) communist parties during the Cold War (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Italy); (b) populist protest parties (the FPÖ in Austria, the Progress Parties in Norway, Denmark, and temporarily also New Democracy in Sweden, and the ADR in Luxembourg); and (c) parties of the extreme right (the Front National in France, the MSI in Italy, and the Vlaams Blok in Belgium).

2. *'No coalition' pledges by major parties.* Ireland (Fianna Fáil) and Norway (Labour) are the classic examples of major (indeed, plurality) parties that have adopted a long-term policy of not entering into coalitions with any other party. Moreover, both Fianna Fáil and the Norwegian Labour Party have frequently made a campaign issue out of their very anti-coalition stance, stressing their coherence and stability in comparison with the unstable compromises of coalition politics.

3. *Constraints imposed by the political agenda.* The examples of situations in which the political agenda has restricted coalitional options include early post-war Austria (where the salient issues gave priority to economic reconstruction and getting the occupational troops out of the country) and Germany, in the case of the formation of CDU/CSU-SPD grand coalition in 1966. In the latter case, the political agenda was dominated by the economic situation and by proposed constitutional amendments.

COALITION FORMATION

Whereas studies of coalition politics normally have confined themselves to the coalitions that actually have been formed, this book is the first to address the government formation process itself in a comprehensive form and for a large set of countries. Our assumptions are that the process of negotiations may matter as much as the final results, and that inconclusive bargaining rounds are interesting in their own right. In previous sections, we have summarized cabinet membership data. The country chapters provide an unusually extensive and up-to-date analysis of these phenomena, but a more original contribution lies in the rich information we have acquired on the process and characteristics of cabinet bargaining and formation.

TABLE 15.6. *Cabinet formation*

Country	Number of parties in parliament		Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds		Number of days required in cabinet formation	
	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean
Austria	3-5	3.5	0-2	0.2	0-129	37.0
Belgium	4-14	8.5	0-7	1.3	0-148	37.8
Denmark	5-11	7.7	0-3	0.5	0-35	8.3
Finland	6-10	7.7	0-6	1.3	0-80	26.9
France	4-6	5.0	0-1	0.1	0-11	2.2
Germany	3-9	4.0	0-2	0.1	0-73	20.2
Ireland	3-7	4.8	0-1	0.1	0-48	15.7
Italy	8-16	10.5	0-3	0.5	1-126	29.5 ^a
Luxembourg	4-7	4.8	0-3	0.4	0-52	24.1
Netherlands	7-14	9.9	0-6	2.0	10-208	70.6
Norway	5-8	6.4	0-1	0.1	0-16	4.2
Portugal	4-6	5.4	0-1	0.1	0-45	22.5
Sweden	5-7	5.3	0-2	0.2	0-25	5.4

^a No data on five Italian cabinets regarding the number of days required in cabinet formation, and they were excluded in this calculation.

Formation Attempts

Coalition bargaining need not be complicated even when they involve a large number of players and strategies. If no uncertainty exists, party leaders should be able to correctly anticipate the behaviour of one another and thus to avoid abortive formation attempts. If the parties to the bargaining also have similar and non-trivial discount rates, cabinet formation should be concluded swiftly and predictably. One very interesting and hitherto inadequately addressed question is the extent to which inconclusive formation attempts actually happen. If inconclusive bargaining attempts are a stubborn

empirical regularity, it is a good indication that coalition politics in fact features significant private information. Moreover, under incomplete information, inconclusive bargaining rounds are not necessarily mistakes, but may serve important informational purposes for the parties involved. The chapters in this volume have shown that 'mistakes' and inconclusive bargaining do happen. Yet, they do not occur with anything like the same frequency from country to country. Empirically, we can distinguish three groups of countries:

1. The first group consists of countries in which elections largely decide cabinet composition, and where inconclusive bargaining attempts are rare. These include Portugal, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, France, and Austria. The average number of failed formation attempts per cabinet formed in these countries ranges from 0.1 to 0.2. In these countries, either elections often result in absolute or 'working' majorities (i.e. pluralities large enough to allow for the survival of relatively stable minority cabinets), or elections are contested on the basis of pre-electoral coalitions, electoral pacts, or other party precommitments. In the former case, the low number of inconclusive bargaining attempts probably reflects a high level of information certainty among the parties. In the latter case, the precommitments made may instead reflect deliberate attempts to deal with a high degree of uncertainty on the part of party leaders and/or voters about coalitional options and/or party preferences.

2. The second category includes countries in which coalition decisions are made after elections, but with clear patterns of what would constitute a feasible government. These systems include Italy, Luxembourg, and Denmark, where the average number of inconclusive bargaining attempts hovers around 0.5. These polities feature established coalition patterns ('formulas' or 'cycles' in Italy), and they tend to be dominated by pivotal parties. Commonly, the pivotal party remains in government regardless of its electoral fortunes (unless it voluntarily decides to seek refuge in opposition as the Luxembourg Christian Democrats did in 1974). This party then seeks a coalition party that represents the recent swing among the voters. Luxembourg is probably the clearest example. Among these countries is also one in which minority governments are the rule, namely Denmark.

3. In the third group, we find countries where post-electoral coalition negotiations are indeed decisive for coalition formation and where parties have a larger menu of choices: Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands. The average number of inconclusive formation attempts in these countries ranges from 1.3 to 2.0. These are systems in which bargaining is often truly complex, and in which uncertainty presumably is high.

Number of Days Required for Cabinet Formation

The number of aborted bargaining attempts sheds important light on the often poorly understood process by which cabinet coalitions, as well as other

types of cabinets, come into being. Yet, such data can still conceal substantively important aspects of the formation process. For example, some bargaining rounds may be brief and pro forma. Others may go on for months and directly or indirectly involve scores of negotiators. The duration of the bargaining process, the number of days spent in transition from one cabinet to the next, is therefore an equally interesting and complementary piece of information. Empirically, the coalitional parliamentary democracies of Western Europe sort themselves into four categories: (1) countries where cabinet formation routinely is swift and takes less than 10 days (France, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark); (2) an intermediate category, consisting solely of Ireland, in which cabinet formation on average takes between 10 and 20 days; (3) a set of countries in which cabinet formation is more protracted, taking between 20 and 30 days (Germany, Finland, Portugal, and Luxembourg); and (4) finally the four most complicated countries, in which cabinet formation more often than not takes more than a month (Italy, Belgium, Austria, and the Netherlands).

There is obviously a positive correlation between inconclusive bargaining attempts and the duration of formation. The more common failed negotiations are, the longer cabinet formation tends to take. For example, the Netherlands has experienced the highest average number of inconclusive bargaining rounds. At the same time, the average Dutch formation process has lasted almost twice as long as that in any other country. However, coalition formation may take a relatively long time not only because party systems are complex and therefore offer many possibilities. This is clearly demonstrated by Austria, which has a quite simple party system that does not allow for many alternative coalitions, but where cabinet transitions none the less tend to be lengthy. We will return to this question when we discuss 'tight' and 'loose' coalitions below.

COALITION GOVERNANCE

As we noted in the introductory chapter, the recent theoretical literature reflects a greatly enhanced interest in how governance occurs once a cabinet coalition has been formed. For example, in their influential work Laver and Shepsle (1990 and 1996) argue that coalition members have no effective mechanism to compel cabinet ministers to implement any policy position other than their own ideal points. Therefore, all parties to coalition bargaining resign themselves to the idea that the only feasible policy positions are the ideal points of whatever party holds the respective cabinet portfolios in the various policy dimensions. Cabinet portfolios, in this view, imply a powerful form of agenda control. Yet, it is not obvious that such abdication to minis-

terial government would be stable. Often, decisive coalitions of parties will prefer other policy positions to the solution implied by the set of ideal points of the cabinet parties in their respective jurisdictions. Under such conditions, it stands to reason that coalition parties would cooperate to limit the power of individual ministers to impose undesirable policy outcomes. Laver and Shepsle argue that there is no way in which the coalition partners could commit themselves to such solutions, but it is not self-evident that such mutually beneficial arrangements can be ruled out. One solution may lie in formal or informal coalition agreements that parties conclude before going into executive branch collaboration. This study has scrutinized such agreements in novel ways. Where coalition agreements have become available, the contributors have analysed their contents and examined the balance between policy commitments, portfolio and other office agreements, and rules by which coalition disputes are settled.

Coalition Agreements

As Table 15.7 demonstrates, of the 238 coalition cabinets analysed in this volume, 150 (63%) have been based on an identifiable coalition agreement. There are none the less great cross-national differences in the incidence of such accords. In Finland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden, all coalition cabinets have featured coalition agreements. This has also been the case in Austria ever since 1949. In contrast, coalition agreements are the exception rather than the rule in Italy, where only a single cabinet (or a mere 3%) has relied on such an agreement. The other countries cover the range from 80 per cent (Ireland) to 45 per cent (Germany).

While we refer to the country chapters for details, note that if there is a trend over time, it is towards the use of coalition agreements. Typically, formal coalition agreements have been introduced after some years of experience with coalition politics. Relevant cases are Austria (where this happened as early as 1949, after a mere four years of coalition politics), Belgium (where the first coalition agreement dates from 1958), the Netherlands (where the first coalition agreement was drafted in 1963), Germany (where the first experience with coalition agreements dates from the early 1960s, but where they have become a permanent feature of coalition politics only since 1980), and France (where coalition agreements were introduced as recently as the early 1980s).

Of the 150 coalition agreements (note that our actual observations here are cabinets and not agreements as such, since the latter may remain the same under successive cabinets), 123 (82%) were, when they were drafted, intended for publication. Coalition agreements have invariably been public documents in Finland, France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. Recall, however, that some of these documents have been pre-electoral coalition

TABLE 15.7. *Coalition governance*

Country	(1) Number of coalition cabinets	(2) Coalition agree- ment	(3) Agree- ment public	(4) Election rule	(5) Conflict management mechanism	(6) Coalition discipline in legislation	(7) Coalition discipline in other parliamentary behaviour	(8) Freedom of appoint- ment	(9) Policy agree- ment	(10) Junior ministers	(11) Non- cabinet positions
Austria	17	14	12	14	CoC, CaC, IC	1, 2	1, 2	17	0, 1, 2, 3	Y	9Y, 8N
Belgium	28	20	18	0	CaC, PS, IC	1, 2	4	28	0, 1, 2, 3	22Y, 6N	Y
Denmark	17	8	6	0	IC, CaC, PCa, O	1	1	17	3	N/A	Y
Finland	33	33	33	0	IC, CaC, PCa	2, 3	2, 3	28	1, 2, 3	N/A	Y
France	17	8	8	17	CaC, O, PS, CoC	2, 4	2, 4	2	0, 2	N	N
Germany	22	10	7	0	PCa, Parl, PS, IC, CoC, CaC	1, 2	1, 2	0	1, 2, 3	Y	Y
Ireland	10	8	8	0	Parl, PS	1, 2	1	10	0, 1, 2	Y	Y
Italy	34	1	0	0	CoC, PS	2	3	34	1, 2	33Y, 1N	33Y, 1N
Luxembourg	16	16	0	0	O, CoC, PS	2	4	16	3	9Y, 7N	Y
Netherlands	23	11	10	12	Parl, IC, CoC	2	4	23	0, 1, 2, 3	20Y, 3N	N
Norway	8	8	8	0	IC, CaC, PCa	1	2	5	1, 2, 3	5Y, 2N	4Y, 3N
Portugal	6	6	6	0	CoC, CaC, PS	2, 3	3	6	3	1Y, 5N	N
Sweden	7	7	7	0	IC, CaC	2	2	7	2, 3	Y	Y

Note: See Table 1.5 of the Introduction to this book for an explanation of the codes used in this table.

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manifestos (France, Portugal) or parliamentary bills spelling out alternatives to the government's budget (Norway). It should come as no surprise that these have been public documents. In the Netherlands (91%), Belgium (90%), Austria (86%), Denmark (75%), and Germany (70%), most coalition agreements have been in the public domain. In contrast, the coalition parties in Luxembourg and in the singular Italian case have kept their coalition agreements private.

Our contributors have collected and analysed coalition agreements from 12 of our 13 countries pertaining to 119 cabinets (occasionally, more than one cabinet has been based on the same coalition agreement) The summary data are presented in Table 15.8. Only in Luxembourg are coalition agreements generally not publicly available. In examining these documents, which have never before been subject to a systematic scholarly investigation of this scope, our collaborators have focused on the size, contents, and implications of these documents.

Size

The simplest measure by which coalition agreements differentiate themselves is size. As Table 15.8 demonstrates, the shortest coalition agreement identified and analysed in this volume is just over 200 words long (Finland), while the longest one contains more than 43,000 words (Belgium). The average size of coalition agreements is below 3,000 words in three countries: France, Finland, and Sweden. It is between 3,000 and 10,000 words in Denmark, Germany, Austria, Ireland, and Italy (the last-mentioned observation is based on a single agreement, however), whereas in the following countries it includes more than 10,000 words: Norway, Portugal, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Yet, there is substantial within-country variation. In Austria, for example, the longest coalition agreement on record is more than 30 times the size of the shortest one.

Size, we believe, reflects the bargaining situation and the nature of the inter-party agreement that is reached. Specifically, size is a rough indicator of the extent to which the negotiating parties try to anticipate the cabinet's policy agenda, and the extent to which they feel compelled to seek binding agreements *ex ante*. The more uncertainty the parties face, and the more critical this uncertainty is, the more extensive we expect their formal agreements to be. Also, parties that fear that their coalition partners would renege or drag their feet on any policy commitment not explicitly spelled out may wish to craft a very extensive policy document. Conversely, when the parties have a high degree of trust that potential policy disputes can successfully be sorted out as they emerge, they may content themselves with a very short agreement. A long agreement may thus reflect an attempt to anticipate policy issues in detail, and/or a lack of faith that informal inter-party coordination can be engineered in a more ad hoc manner. Yet, the correlation between uncertainty

TABLE 15.8. *Size and content of coalition agreements*

Country ^a	Size (in words)		General procedural rules (in %)		Specific procedural rules (in %)		Distribution of offices (in %)		Distribution of competence (in %)		Policies (in %)	
	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean
Austria (14)	700-23,300	6,593	1-50	18.6	0-44	14.1	1-30	10.8	0-24	8.1	0-98	48.2
Belgium (16)	3,150-43,550	14,166	0-5	1.3	0-14	5.0	0-3	0.5	0-3	0.6	83-99	92.8
Denmark (5)	910-5,613	3,619	0	0	6-30	12.4	0	0	0	0	70-94	87.4
Finland (33)	204-4,541	1,163	0-1	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	99-100	100.0
France (5)	870-3,390	1,976	0-5	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	95-100	99.0
Germany (10)	513-16,536	5,934	0-28	7.4	0-4	1.2	0-1	0.1	0	0	68-100	91.4
Ireland (6)	1,248-18,593	9,397	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100.0
Italy (1)	...	3,680	...	38.1	...	23	...	0	...	7.5	...	31.3
Netherlands (11)	3,100-36,000	14,223	0-16	2.9	0-29	4.1	0-3	0.3	0-9	2.4	52-98	90.3
Norway (8)	2,919-31,138	12,435	0	0	0-4	0.5	0	0	0	0	97-100	99.5
Portugal (3)	2,461-34,300	13,746	0-39	16.5	0-14	4.9	0-5	1.5	0	0	60-100	77.1
Sweden (7)	1,100-5,200	2,443	0	0	0-8	2.6	0	0	0	0	92-100	97.4

^a Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of cabinets on which this table is based. No data on Luxembourg.

and agreement size may not be quite that simple. Alternatively, a very short agreement may, for example, signal a high degree of uncertainty about the future policy agenda of the government. Size also reflects the contents of coalition agreements, as it generally takes more space and words to spell out policy agreements than it does to identify procedural rules.

Note that there is no immediately apparent relationship between the number of participating parties and the length of the coalition agreement. There may be a weak tendency for long agreements to emerge in complex bargaining situations, of which Belgium is a prime example. The length of Dutch and Portuguese agreements, however, suggests that bargaining complexity cannot be a necessary condition for lengthy agreements. These countries have tended to have very lengthy agreements, although the number of parties involved in negotiations has typically been limited. Conversely, the Danish case illustrates that even complex bargaining environments may give birth to short agreements. What these apparently deviant cases may reflect is the impact of the level of trust in the feasibility of informal coordination. Such confidence may be built over time, through iterated interactions, or it may decay for similar experiential reasons.

Contents

Exception for most Austrian agreements and the singular Italian case, the average coalition agreement has been concerned mainly with the policies the new government intends to pursue. As already indicated, however, there are significant cross-national differences in the attention given to policy versus procedural concerns. At one extreme, in Finland, Norway, Sweden, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, 90 per cent or more of the contents of coalition agreements have been concerned with policy. At the other extreme, the corresponding figures are 31 per cent for Italy and 48 per cent for Austria, which means that about two-thirds of the single Italian and about half the average Austrian coalition agreement have been devoted to non-policy matters. In between these extremes, the policy content is 87 per cent in Denmark and more than 70 per cent in Portugal.

The second most frequent purpose of coalition agreements in Western Europe has been to lay down the procedural rules of the coalition. There is only one country—Ireland—in which general and/or specific rules of the game have not made their way into coalition agreements. (However, Finland comes very close to Ireland.) On the Western European average, 6.4 per cent of the space in coalition agreements has been devoted to this purpose. As the tables in the country chapters show, though, the countries differ substantially, from 61 per cent of the single Italian agreement, to about one-third of the words in the average Austrian agreement, to less than 0.5 per cent in Norway.

In contrast, there are only few countries in which coalition agreements have dealt with the distribution of offices and competences between the coalition

TABLE 15.9. *The proportion of procedural rules in coalition agreements*

Country	Average share of procedural rules (%)
Austria	33
Belgium	6
Denmark	12
Finland	0
France	1
Germany	9
Ireland	0
Italy	61
Luxembourg	—
Netherlands	7
Norway	0.5
Portugal	21
Sweden	3
MEAN	11.8

partners. Austria has been in the lead, devoting on average almost one-fifth of the references in the coalition agreements' to these purposes. The general paucity of portfolio commitments in coalition agreements should not, however, be taken as an indication that these are minor concerns to bargaining parties. Such an inference would certainly fly in the face of the historical evidence and the interpretations presented by the various contributors. More likely, the coalition parties see formalized and publicized deals of this nature as unnecessary and perhaps embarrassing. As the country chapters and Table 15.7 show, a consensus concerning the distribution of sub-cabinet spoils between the coalition partners is much more frequent than the coalition agreements suggest. Apparently, coalition parties prefer to keep such agreements informal and, it would seem, as private as possible.

Tight and Loose Coalitions

One of the hitherto little-known aspects of coalition politics is the extent and nature of the commitments that exist between coalition parties. Quite obviously, coalition parties, like partners in other human relationships, differ substantially in the degree and ways in which they are tied to one another. We can place coalitions on a continuum ranging from 'tight' to 'loose' commitments. Think of a tight coalition as analogous to a classic Catholic marriage, while a loose coalition has more in common with an 'open relationship'. More specifically, parties which enter tight coalitions commit themselves to unconditional loyalty for the lifetime of their alliance. On the other hand, the looser a coalition is, the more relaxed the attitudes towards coalition loyalty.

The information summarized in Table 15.7 and in the respective country tables allows us to map our 13 countries by employing four variables, namely the degree of coalition discipline exhibited in election rules, legislation, other parliamentary behaviour, and policy agreements. An election rule reflects a very strong tie between coalition partners. Such rules imply that the coalition parties commit themselves to calling an election if they dissolve the coalition. The parties thus agree to subject themselves to immediate popular sanctions in the event that they decide to go their separate ways. Given the fact that voters are generally considered to be hostile to squabbling parties, such a rule may be a powerful deterrent against premature dissolution of the coalition. Of course, election rules can only be enforced under constitutions that allow the cabinet or prime minister (or, in most cases, a parliamentary majority) to dissolve parliament before the end of its regular term. For this reason, election rules are of questionable utility in some countries, e.g. Germany and Sweden, in which the opportunities or incentives for parliamentary dissolution are severely circumscribed. In Norway, such a rule is simply not feasible, since the Norwegian parliament cannot be dissolved before the end of its four-year term. None the less, election rules are in principle enforceable in most of the countries examined here. With respect to actual incidence, France clearly leads the pack, as all coalition cabinets have been based on an election rule. France is followed by Austria, where the vast majority of cabinets (82%) have featured an election rule. The Netherlands comes third with 58 per cent. In no other country have coalition parties ever made the commitments implied by an election rule.

Coalition Discipline

Likewise, coalitions in which the parties commit themselves to coalition discipline in law-making, which in our definition includes the budgetary process, must be considered tighter than coalitions that permit various exceptions, or that do not commit their constituent units to any legislative discipline at all. The same logic applies to discipline in other parliamentary behaviour (e.g. behaviour in committees of investigation, when questioning ministers, etc.). Our operational indicators of coalition discipline have been presented in the introductory chapter. We characterize discipline through the use of a four-category ordinal coding scheme, in which the code 1 means 'always discipline', the code 2 'discipline on all policies except those explicitly exempted', 3 'no discipline, except on those policies explicitly specified', and 4 'no discipline'. Tables 15.10 and 15.11 report cross-national differences in the average frequency of these various forms of coalition commitments.

The countries that exhibit particularly high levels of coalition discipline in legislation are Denmark, Norway, Austria, and Germany. The pertinent coalitions vary, of course, from mainly non-socialist ones in the two Scandinavian countries, to the centrist German ones, to the grand coalitions

TABLE 15.10. *Coalition discipline in legislation*

Country	(1) (Always discipline)	(2) (Exceptions from discipline)	(3) (Discipline as exception)	(4) (No discipline)	N
Austria	15	2	0	0	17
Belgium	2	26	0	0	28
Denmark	17	0	0	0	17
Finland	0	16	17	0	33
France	0	15	0	2	17
Germany	21	1	0	0	22
Ireland	8	2	0	0	10
Italy	0	34	0	0	34
Luxembourg	0	16	0	0	16
Netherlands	0	23	0	0	23
Norway	8	0	0	0	8
Portugal	0	5	1	0	6
Sweden	0	7	0	0	7

of Austria. At the other extreme, Finland and France show particularly low commitments to legislative discipline. Interestingly, both are also countries with strong presidents, as well as countries in which communist parties have occasionally been brought into the orbit of governance. However, whether these commonalities are necessary or sufficient to explain the lack of legislative discipline is beyond the scope of this study.

With respect to other parliamentary behaviour, just as for legislation, we find particularly high levels of coalition discipline in Austria, Denmark, and

TABLE 15.11. *Coalition discipline in other parliamentary behaviour*

Country	(1) (Always discipline)	(2) (Exceptions from discipline)	(3) (Discipline as exception)	(4) (No discipline)	N
Austria	14	3	0	0	17
Belgium	0	0	0	28	28
Denmark	17	0	0	0	17
Finland	0	16	17	0	33
France	0	15	0	2	17
Germany	21	1	0	0	22
Ireland	10	0	0	0	10
Italy	0	0	34	0	34
Luxembourg	0	0	0	16	16
Netherlands	0	0	0	23	23
Norway	0	8	0	0	8
Portugal	0	0	6	0	6
Sweden	0	7	0	0	7

Germany. Ireland is another system in which tight coalition discipline is expected, whereas all the Benelux countries fall at the opposite end of the spectrum. Although coalitions at either end of this scale tend to be similar in their partisan make-up, these commonalities apparently do not extend to the forms that parliamentary cooperation takes within the coalition.

Policy Programmes

As we have seen, most coalition agreements have a large policy component. Yet, coalitions vary substantially with respect to the comprehensiveness of their policy agreements (Table 15.12). As the reader will recall from Chapter 1, coalition policy programmes have been analysed with the help of a four-category ordinal coding scheme, in which the 'highest' category, code 3, means a comprehensive programme, 2 a policy programme with certain exceptions, 1 a programme in which commitment exists only on a few selected issues, and 0 no common policy agreement. In three countries, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Portugal, all coalition agreements have conformed to the highest level of commitment. In France, at the other extreme, two-thirds of all coalition cabinets have had no commonly agreed policy programme at all. Austria, Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands also feature at least one coalition cabinet a piece which fall into the latter category. Austria and the Netherlands exhibit the greatest variance in policy commitment. In both cases coalition agreements have become more policy comprehensive over time and in both cases this has paralleled a decline of traditional party loyalties and an increase in party competition. Coalitions that are based on a comprehensive policy programme should generally be considered tighter than coalitions in which this is not the case. Yet, there may be functional alternatives to comprehensive policy programmes. If the other three conditions of commitment are truly fulfilled, there may be no need for an explicit policy programme in order to 'tighten' a coalition. Austria is a case in point. The grand coalitions from the late 1940s to the early 1960s were certainly tight, even though they were based almost exclusively on procedural rules rather than on a comprehensive policy programme. High levels of commitment to legislative unity, coupled with a strong election rule, sufficed to produce a series of 'tight' coalitions.

Appointment Powers

Although formal coalition agreements tend to be silent on ministerial and other appointment powers, there can be no doubt that such matters weigh heavily on the minds of party leaders. Consequently, rules and norms certainly tend to evolve, and our contributors have used the best available evidence to characterize them. Some coalitions allow their parties full discretion in their choice of cabinet ministers ('freedom of appointment'), whereas others subject such appointments to mutual veto. Freedom of appointment has

TABLE 15.12. *Policy agreement*

Country	(3) (Comprehensive)	(2) (Variety of issues)	(1) (Only few issues)	(-) (No policy agreement)	N
Austria	5	2	9	1	17
Belgium	15	5	7	1	28
Denmark	17	0	0	0	17
Finland	13	6	14	0	33
France	0	5	0	12	17
Germany	5	8	9	0	22
Ireland	0	7	1	2	10
Italy	0	12	22	0	34
Luxembourg	16	0	0	0	16
Netherlands	8	3	8	1	20
Norway	5	1	2	0	8
Portugal	6	0	0	0	6
Sweden	4	3	0	0	7

been the rule in most of the 13 countries covered in this volume. Finland and Norway have been partial exceptions to this rule, whereas German and French coalition parties have often had little or no freedom of appointment.

Similarly, the coalition partners may include in their deals the appointment of junior ministers (second-level political appointees in various ministerial departments without cabinet rank and voting rights) and other political appointees (e.g. in various agencies in the public sector, or in EU institutions). Junior ministers exist in most of our 13 countries, as only Denmark and Finland do without them. As Table 15.7 shows, most coalitions indeed make the appointment of junior ministers a part of the deal between the coalition partners. Many of the country chapters highlight the role of junior ministers in coalition politics. From a coalitional point of view, junior ministers are particularly interesting in those cases where they come from a party different from that of their respective superiors, the cabinet ministers. (Consequently, the portfolio allocation tables in the country chapters have confined themselves to such cases.) Potentially, such junior ministers can foster either coalition stability or instability. If they manage to keep their party informed about potentially unacceptable policy developments in their respective departments, such appointments may allow coalition parties more effective agenda control in ministries that they do not hold, thereby avoiding conflicts in the cabinet or in parliament that could lead to cabinet termination. Yet, this is not the only role that a junior minister may play. Such an appointee may act more as a *'postillon d'amour'* of his or her department, or more as a *'watchdog'* of his or her party. However, as long as the prime concern of junior ministers is to prevent major coalition conflicts, we would expect them to ease

coalition governance and enhance coalition stability. However, if junior ministers—for career, electoral, or other reasons—are mainly interested in creating conflict, they can certainly be a thorn in the side of their respective ministers. Such relationships can exacerbate conflicts within the coalition and may well shorten its life.

Conflict Management Mechanisms

Table 15.7 also shows whether the coalition agreements have set up a specific conflict management mechanism, such as a coalition committee. Where such mechanisms do not exist, disputes and uncertainties presumably have to be resolved through existing constitutional mechanisms (such as cabinet deliberations) or through negotiations between coalition party leaders. Again, we have previously had little or no systematic knowledge of how such processes work.

The contributions in this volume have documented a great variety of mechanisms of conflict management. For example, coalition committees of some kind have existed in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Yet, while many of the parliamentary systems of central Europe have experience with this institution, there is no record of its use in any of the Nordic countries. Inner cabinets are an alternative institutional mechanism. The contributors have documented their use in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. That is to say, this less formal mechanism of coordination has found use in many of the same countries that have also experienced coalition committees. Note, however, that inner cabinets have found somewhat greater favour in Northern Europe, including the Netherlands. At a lower level perhaps, but still within the cabinet, coalition conflicts typically have been managed through cabinet committees in Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. In several countries, coalition parties have sought to contain conflict by drawing on parliamentarians, either exclusively (Ireland, the Netherlands), or in joint fora of MPs or parliamentary leaders and cabinet members (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway).

Finally, yet another forum for conflict management is party summits, i.e. meetings of the leaders of the coalition parties, whether or not these hold portfolios in the cabinet. This mechanism has been used in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Portugal. Again, there is no clear separation of the systems in which this institutional vehicle has been in use. Thus, a more definitive account of the choice and effects of different conflict management mechanisms must await further research. There can be no question, however, that conflicts or coordination problems often arise between different cabinet members, and that coalition parties have devised a multitude of institutions to resolve such conflicts and coordinate policy across ministerial

jurisdictions. Thus, the real world of coalition politics is a good deal more complex than the Laver and Shepsle model of ministerial government.

CABINET STABILITY AND TERMINATION

Recently, a rapidly growing literature has been devoted to the explanation of cabinet stability, as well as to the circumstances and causes of coalition termination (Warwick 1994; Lupia and Strøm 1995). Once again, the contributors to this volume have added substantially to our knowledge of these phenomena. In our brief summary of these findings, we shall focus first on stability, and then on the specifics of terminations.

Cabinet Stability

As the informed student of parliamentary democracies will know, the countries represented in this volume differ widely in cabinet stability. To be sure, the degree of cabinet stability or instability depends to some extent on the definition of 'government' or 'cabinet' (cf. Lijphart 1984b; Strøm 1988; Damgaard 1994). To reiterate, we define a 'cabinet' as an administration under the same prime minister, representing the same parties and uninterrupted by general elections. For the sake of simplicity, we also ignore differences in the maximum constitutional term of parliament (which ranges from 3 to 5 years in our study). Given these conventions and simplifications, we find clear cross-national patterns in cabinet stability (Table 15.13). Overall, we can distinguish between three rough categories of states: one exhibiting a high degree of government stability (with a mean cabinet duration of more than 800 days, including Luxembourg (with a mean of 1,171 days), Ireland (891), Austria (854), and the Netherlands (808)); a second containing countries with a medium degree of government stability (with a mean cabinet duration of between 500 and 800 days: Sweden (771), Norway (755), Germany (700), Denmark (626), France (625), Portugal (597), and Belgium (520)); and finally a set of countries with low cabinet stability (a mean cabinet duration below 500 days), namely Finland (453) and Italy (355). The overall cross-national patterns are certainly consistent with previous research and should be familiar to students of coalition politics.

Cabinet Termination

Coalition studies have recently come to the realization that coalition terminations may be as interesting and consequential as coalition formations and that one phenomenon cannot be properly understood except in the context of

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TABLE 15.13. *Cabinet duration*

Country	Number of cabinets	Mean duration	Minimum duration	Maximum duration	Standard deviation
Austria	21	854.3	160	1,431	447.2
Belgium	32	520.2	7	1,502	489.2
Denmark	30	626.4	40	1,337	323.9
Finland	36	452.6	36	1,409	365.0
France	22	625.1	31	1,191	376.5
Germany	25	699.5	14	1,452	504.9
Ireland	21	891.1	228	1,532	382.1
Italy	47	355.1	11	1,628	309.9
Luxembourg	15	1,170.5	153	1,936	694.8
Netherlands	22	808.1	80	1,638	539.8
Norway	25	755.3	24	1,435	404.6
Portugal	10	596.8	96	1,506	503.8
Sweden	25	771.0	167	1,468	403.2
MEANS	25.5	702	80.5	1,497	441.9

Note: This table excludes non-partisan cabinets.

the other. Yet, our factual knowledge of the histories of coalition termination has until now been rudimentary. The contributors have therefore made a major contribution to coalition studies by identifying what we have termed the mechanisms and causes of all cabinet terminations.

We distinguish technical from discretionary terminations. Technical terminations are those beyond the control of the relevant parties, namely constitutional mandated elections, the death or personally motivated retirement of the prime minister, and other constitutional provisions that require the cabinet's resignation (e.g. the accession of a new head of state). These causes are mutually exclusive, or at least individually sufficient. Discretionary terminations include early parliamentary dissolutions, voluntary enlargements of coalitions, parliamentary defeats at the hands of the opposition, conflicts between coalition parties over policy or personal matters, and conflict within any coalition party. These discretionary mechanisms need not, of course, be mutually exclusive.

Table 15.14 examines the mechanisms of cabinet termination. Collectively, our contributors have provided termination information on 331 party-based cabinets. While 128 (39%) have been terminated for technical reasons, various discretionary mechanisms account for the vast majority of terminations. Yet, the analysis reveals substantial cross-national differences. Discretionary mechanisms account for more than 80 per cent of all terminations in Ireland, Italy, and Belgium, and more than 75 per cent in Denmark. Clearly, in these cases, our record of cabinet changes is not unduly inflated by the rules by which we have counted cabinets. In other words, the vast majorities of such

TABLE 15.14. *Mechanisms of cabinet termination*

Country	Number of cabinets	Technical		Discretionary				Conflict between coalition parties		(8) Intra-party conflict in coalition parties
		(1) Regular parliamentary election	(2) Other constitutional reason	(3) Death of prime minister	(4) Early parliament election	(5) Voluntary enlargement of coalition	(6) Cabinet defeated by opposition in parl.	(7) Policy conflict	Personnel conflict	
Austria	21	7	2	0	9	0	0	6	1	3
Belgium	32	5	1	0	8	2	1	17	2	3
Denmark	30	1	3	3	18	1	10	2	0	1
Finland	36	9	7	0	1	4	2	14	0	1
France	22	4	5	0	4	0	1	2	0	6
Germany	25	11	0	0	2	3	2	5	2	8
Ireland	21	0	2	0	16	0	3	3	3	7
Italy	47	4	0	0	6	5	12	15	12	17
Luxembourg	15	9	1	1	2	0	0	3	1	1
Netherlands	22	10	1	0	4	0	1	6	0	2
Norway	25	13	5	0	0	1	3	2	0	2
Portugal	10	3	0	1	3	0	2	2	3	0
Sweden	25	16	2	2	1	1	0	3	0	0
TOTAL	331	92	29	7	74	17	37	80	24	51
MEANS/100	25.5	27.8	8.8	22.4	5.1	11.2	24.2	7.3	15.4	

Note: This table excludes non-partisan cabinets.

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changes that have been recorded here, have been due to the actions of the parties themselves, and not artefacts of our definitions.

On the other hand, only one in five cabinet terminations in Sweden reflects an actual discretionary change, and even in Norway and Luxembourg, the majority of resignations have been technical rather than discretionary. Specifically, most of these technical resignations have been due to general elections. In Sweden, this count is inflated by the fact that the parliamentary term for much of the recent decades has been limited to three years. In the remaining systems, the proportion of discretionary terminations ranges from 50 to 60 per cent.

Terminal Events

Our record of 'terminal events' represents the first systematic attempt to catalog the circumstances that have toppled specific cabinets (Table 15.15). These may in many cases be viewed as the initial developments that generate the conflicts discussed above. Critical events have featured prominently in the recent theoretical literature on coalition duration, but they have so far proven resistant to operationalization and empirical analysis. Our five types of events are: non-parliamentary elections, popular opinion developments, national security events, economic events, and personal events. Our contributors have identified terminal events for 91 of 331 cabinet terminations (27%). Personal events (29 cases/32% of terminal events) and economic events (24 cases/26%) have been the most numerous. International and security events account for only 14 (15%) cabinets. However, some of them (in particular, the beginning of the Cold War) have been of lasting importance, excluding some parties from the executive branch for decades. Finally, non-parliamentary elections (presidential and local elections) (13 cases/14%) and popular opinion shocks (11 cases/12%) have accounted for more than one-tenth of cabinet terminations each.

ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION

What do parties get out of governing? To a large extent, and to most voters, the primary answer has to be found in the policies that these parties have an opportunity to effect. Yet, it is obvious that parties keenly eye their pay-offs in future elections as well. Our contributors have examined the performance of incumbent parties and governments in such electoral terms. In many circumstances, the electoral performance of the government as a whole matters. If a government loses its majority, it is unlikely to remain in office (though occasionally this happens). Likewise, a government that has lost heavily in

TABLE 15.15. *Terminal events*

	Number of cabinets	(9) Elections (non- parliamentary)	(10) Popular opinion shock	(11) International or national security event	(12) Economic event	(13) Personal event
Austria	21	1	1	1	1	0
Belgium	32	0	1	0	0	0
Denmark	30	0	0	1	7	6
Finland	36	6	0	0	2	1
France	22	0	1	6	2	3
Germany	25	0	0	0	2	2
Ireland	21	0	6	0	2	4
Italy	47	4	1	1	0	2
Luxembourg	15	0	0	0	0	1
Netherlands	22	0	0	1	0	0
Norway	25	1	0	4	5	6
Portugal	10	1	1	0	3	0
Sweden	25	0	0	0	0	4
TOTAL	331	13	11	14	24	29
MEANS/ ^o / _o	25.5	3.9	3.3	4.2	7.3	8.8

popular vote may not be returned even if it manages to maintain a parliamentary majority, because political leaders feel the need to respond to signals from the electorate, or because they do not wish to burden an incoming government with the image of decline or defeat. In the final event, however, elections are contested by individual parties. What in most cases matters to the key actors in coalition politics is how their own party performs, not what happens to coalition partners. We therefore also explore the performance of governing parties in the elections that have immediately followed their government participation (Table 15.16).

Governments

When viewed in the aggregate, most governments do not maintain their strength in the elections that follow their term in executive office. Altogether, our contributors have collected data on the electoral performance of 277 governments. Of those, only 92 (33%) have been able to improve their electoral strength (in proportions of votes) in the election following their term in office, while 179 (65%) have suffered losses. Six governments have been returned with precisely the same combined electoral strength as previously. In 11 out of our 13 countries (with France and Germany as the exceptions), the size of

the largest recorded loss has been larger, and often considerably larger, than the maximum gains that any governments has made in any election.

Our 13 countries differ widely in the extent to which incumbency has been a liability or an asset. Only in Austria, however, have more than half of all governments improved their strength in subsequent elections. German and French governments have done so in almost half of the cases, whereas Danish and Italian governments have also done comparatively well. In all other countries the vast majority of governments have suffered electoral losses. Seventy per cent or more of the governments in Belgium, Ireland, the

TABLE 15.16. *Electoral gains and losses of government parties* (in % of total popular vote)

Country (N/N ^a)	Party			Government		
	Numbers of winning/losing cases (gains/losses)	Range of gains/losses in %	Losses in % of cases	Numbers of winning/losing cases	Range of winning/losing cases in %	Losses in % of cases
Austria (26/16)	12/14	4.8/-9.2	54	9/6	5.7/-12.3	38
Belgium (58/27)	20/35	6.4/-8.4	60	6/20	3.5/-15.4	74
Denmark (49/26)	19/30	11.0/-11.7	61	12/14	11.0/-11.7	54
Finland (61/36)	16/44	2.9/-5.0	72	8/27	3.5/-13.9	75
France (24/15)	9/15	27.0/-16.2	63	7/8	26.7/-22.4	53
Germany (30/23)	12/18	14.2/-6.4	60	11/12	11.1/-8.3	52
Ireland (28/17)	7/20	6.0/-12.1	71	2/13	3.9/-15.1	76
Italy (47/37) ^b	22/22	13.3/-18.6	47	16/20	14.3/-35.6	54
Luxembourg (24/12)	6/18	13.1/-8.1	75	2/10	5.8/-11.3	83
Netherlands (50/20)	19/31	6.5/-13.1	62	5/15	4.8/-21.0	75
Norway (32/20)	14/18	10.3/-11.2	56	7/13	7.0/-11.2	65
Portugal (8/7) ^c	4/4	20.4/-26.4	50	3/4	20.4/-26.4	57
Sweden (27/21)	7/19	4.7/-8.9	70	4/16	4.9/-8.9	76
TOTALS	167/288			92/179		
MEANS		10.8/-11.9	61.6		9.4/-16.4	64

^a Because some elections return the government and/or individual government parties with ± 0 gains/losses, the number of winning/losing cases can be smaller than the Ns. The first N is the number of government parties (each counted once per election), the second N is the number of governments.

^b We have excluded those parties for specific elections which run a joint list (PCI and PSI in 1948, PSI and PSDI in 1968 and 1972).

^c Though the second Soares government in Portugal included the Socialist Party (PS) and the Centre Social Democrats (CDS), it is not possible to calculate electoral gains/losses for the CDS in the following election because the party joined the Democratic Alliance (AD) in that election with two other parties: for the same reason, it is also not possible to calculate electoral gains/losses for that government. In the four Portuguese governments in which the AD participated, the AD is treated as a single party (though elsewhere it is treated as three separate parties), since it is not possible to break down the AD's electoral performance into the electoral performance of its three component parties.

Netherlands, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Finland have had to face electoral punishment. Portuguese and Norwegian governments on the average have done slightly better (though they have still lost ground in about 60% of the cases).

Government Parties

As our country studies demonstrate, parties serving in the same government often experience different fortunes at the ballot box. Some gain while others lose. Nevertheless, on the average, individual parties have performed exactly as poorly as governments overall. Of the 464 cases (i.e. parties contesting an election after having served in government for a whole or partial term), 288 (62%) have suffered losses, 167 (36%) have made gains, and a mere 9 (2%) have just maintained their electoral strength. Moreover, in 10 out of our 13 countries the largest recorded loss has been greater, and often considerably greater, than the largest gain on record (again with France and Germany, plus Luxembourg, as the exceptions).

It is worth taking a more disaggregated view of our 13 countries. Only in Portugal have as many as 50 per cent of the government parties improved their electoral position in elections following their incumbency (with the other half losing ground). For individual parties, government participation has on average been most likely to result in electoral losses in Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Sweden, where 70 per cent or more of incumbent parties have lost vote shares. The proportion of losers has been above 60 per cent even in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Our brief investigation of the electoral fortunes of government parties is not directly comparable to the classic study by Rose and Mackie (1983), who use different measures and examine a larger set of countries (in particular, by including countries that typically have single-party governments). Nevertheless, our results are quite consistent with theirs. Indeed, our data suggest that government incumbency has been even less of an electoral asset in the 1980s and 1990s than in the 24 post-war years which form the basis of their study.

CONCLUSION

In the introductory chapter to this volume, we discussed the many lacunae that still remain in our knowledge of cabinet coalitions in parliamentary democracies. The literature, we noted, has long suffered from one of the traditional Hollywood biases: much more attention has been given to identifying the right match, and to the process of courtship, than to the actual process of sharing a life (political or otherwise) and working out the concomitant

issues. The most important ambition shared by the contributors to this volume has been to go some distance towards redressing that imbalance, by in various ways enhancing our understanding of coalition governance.

The chapters here have been designed to convey detailed insight into the process of coalition governance in all of the 13 main parliamentary coalition systems in Western Europe. In this sample, we have included France, in the belief that its constitutional mechanisms of legislative delegation and accountability are not critically different from other parliamentary systems. We have focused on three general aspects of coalition politics: formation, governance in office, and termination. These, of course, are all identifiable concerns in the existing literature on cabinet coalitions. Our emphasis, however, has shaded much more in the directions of governance, first, and termination, second, than what has hitherto been common. Furthermore, we are convinced that these phases of coalition politics cannot fruitfully be studied in mutual isolation, since the game of coalition politics is so much one of strategy and anticipation. We have aimed to produce data that will facilitate the study of the interactions between different phases of coalition politics. Consequently, this is a much more complete survey of coalition politics than any study previously published, and it is one whose focus is more consistent with recent developments in the theoretical literature.

The bulk of the insight we have gained is contained in the series of country chapters. In this concluding chapter, we have sought to provide a first survey of these results. It has not been possible to analyse these data in detail or to explore the various ways in which formation, governance, electoral performance, and termination are interrelated. The research team that has produced this volume will pursue these questions in forthcoming publications. The answers, we hope, will interest students of parliamentary democracy, its practitioners, and, not least, those whom such governments are meant to serve.

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