



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Introduction: old puzzles, conceptual vagueness and new developments in the study of coalition governments

Dumont, P.; Grofman, B.; Bergman, T.; Louwerse, T.P.; Louwerse, T.

Citation

Dumont, P., Grofman, B., Bergman, T., & Louwerse, T. P. (2024). Introduction: old puzzles, conceptual vagueness and new developments in the study of coalition governments. In T. Louwerse (Ed.), *Studies in Public Choice* (pp. 1-16). Cham: Springer.
doi:10.1007/978-3-031-69347-2_1

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4214554>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Introduction: Old Puzzles, Conceptual Vagueness and New Developments in the Study of Coalition Governments



Patrick Dumont , Bernard Grofman , Torbjörn Bergman ,
and Tom Louwerse 

Abstract In political systems where the executive is responsible to the legislature, the process and outcomes of government formation are of prime importance for democratic governance and political representation. This is especially the case when legislative elections return a parliament where no single party wins a majority of seats, as several parties are then needed to build a coalition government that relies on the confidence of a majority of members of parliament. Given the substantive and empirical importance of the subject, coalition theory applied to the making and breaking of governments is one of the most flourishing areas of research in political science. Relying on recent reviews of the field, this introductory chapter identifies remaining research gaps and provides an overview of the volume's new developments in the study of coalition governments.

Keywords Government formation · Government termination · Coalition maintenance · Coalition theory · Concepts · Comparative Political Institutions

P. Dumont (✉)

School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University,
Canberra, ACT, Australia

e-mail: patrick.dumont@anu.edu.au

B. Grofman

University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA

e-mail: bgtravel@uci.edu

T. Bergman

Department of Political Science, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

e-mail: torbjorn.bergman@umu.se

T. Louwerse

Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

e-mail: t.p.louwerse@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

In political systems where the executive is responsible to the legislature, which make for the modal form of government at the world level, the process and outcomes of government formation are of prime importance for democratic governance and political representation. When legislative elections return a parliament where no single party wins a majority of seats (what is referred as ‘minority situations’), either a *minority* government is formed, or several parties manage to build a *coalition* government that relies on the confidence of a *majority* of members of parliament. In the former case, whether the government is made of only one or more than one party, it will need the support from additional parties in parliament, sometimes for its very inception, usually to pass legislation and in any case to survive non-confidence votes and retain executive power. In the latter case, two or more parties will have first negotiated a policy agreement and distributed ministerial portfolios amongst them; then, in principle, as long as the partners remain satisfied with this deal and ensure a sufficient level party discipline in parliament, a majority-based coalition government should be able to have the policies agreed among coalition parties voted on in the legislature and avoid being forced out of office.

Since one can reasonably expect that who is in power matters for public policy and for the representation of voters’ preferences, understanding the translation of parties’ electoral and parliamentary power into executive power when electoral outcomes are not decisive becomes “when all is said and done, simply one of the most substantive projects in political science” (Laver & Schofield, 1990: 89). This is the goal of one of the most flourishing areas of research in political science, which is often referred to as ‘coalition studies’, a term encompassing both coalition theory and its empirical testing, first applied to government formation and duration. As in these settings the executive depends on the support of the legislature, and that most of those countries use proportional electoral systems, the original natural field for coalition theory development and empirical analysis has been that of European parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. The latest authoritative data collection, which covers elections in 28 East and West European countries from 1945 (or their democratic transition) to 2023, shows that European parliamentary and semi-presidential systems remain fertile terrain: 85 per cent of those elections returned parliaments where the largest party did not hold a majority of seats (Hellström et al., 2023); and governments made of multiple parties formed in 80 per cent of these almost 400 ‘minority situations’.¹

Across democratic regimes, minority situations are only somewhat less frequent in pure presidential systems than in parliamentary systems. Crucially, in presidential systems, the most important political actor is not a government body headed by a prime minister, but the popularly elected president. The latter is elected for a fixed term to be both the head of state and head of government, and neither the president nor her government can be removed by a majority in the legislature. As a result,

¹Note that this proportion includes minority coalition governments. On the other hand, the formation opportunities which led to a non-partisan or a “new caretaker” cabinet (see Bergman and Lindahl in this volume) are discounted. Continuation caretaker cabinets have typically not been recorded separately.

when presidential parties do not have a majority in parliament, the incentives to build majority-based cabinets are weaker than in parliamentary systems, as the stability of the executive is not at stake. Still, Cheibub et al. (2004) found that coalition governments are the outcome in half of the minority situations occurring under pure presidential systems (see also Saiegh, 2015). Whilst the occurrence of ‘coalition presidentialism’ is greater in Latin America where this phenomenon has a longer history (see Albala, Borges and Silva in this volume), it is now present in all the main regions of the world, regardless of the political regime. As one would expect given differences in political competition, and as Chaisty et al. (2018) show, the probability of finding presidents whose party only wins a minority of seats in the legislature is greater in more democratic regimes than in partially democratic ones, and so is the likelihood of presidential parties forming majority coalition governments as a response. Still, the core message of these authors is that coalitions also exist in hybrid regimes. Recent research has even discovered that they have even become a regular outcome in dictatorships: Bokobza and Nystrup (2024) report that in the year 2020, almost 50% of dictatorships included multiple parties in their government. Whilst dictatorships had around one party represented in government before the end of the Cold War, the average number of parties in such governments today is 2.4 (Bokobza & Nystrup, 2024: 10–11).

Given the substantive and empirical importance of the subject, coalition theory applied to the making and breaking of governments is one of the most flourishing areas of research in political science. Without aiming at providing an exhaustive list, since the turn of the century one finds dedicated chapters in handbooks of comparative politics (Strøm & Nyblade, 2007; Müller, 2009), of political economy (Laver, 2008), of public choice (McGann, 2019) of comparative political institutions (Martin & Vanberg, 2015), of legislative studies (Martin & Vanberg, 2014a), of political executives (Schleiter, 2020), of party politics (De Winter, 2002; De Winter & Dumont, 2006), and, amongst others, of research methods (Martin & Vanberg, 2020). After decades of research by game theorists, country experts and comparative politics scholars on why some coalition governments form while others do not, how they distribute office and policy payoffs to their components, how they make arrangements to guarantee a certain level of stability, how they eventually collapse and the electoral consequences of their downfall, the field of coalition studies has become highly mature. This maturation is evident in the diversity of theoretical approaches and models that are competing, their degree of formalisation, the sophistication of statistical methods applied, the richness and expanding scope of datasets used for testing hypotheses derived from theory.

What those reviews of the literature remind the reader is that coalition theory is strongly inspired by rational choice theory. Classical proposals were about the types of coalitions that should form in minority situations. They first originated from cooperative game theory (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1953, Riker, 1962, for a

review see Le Breton & Van Der Straeten, 2017).² Under the reasonable working assumption that party leaders have the *office* goal to lead their party to power – as political competition is after all essentially structured as a choice between governments (Laver, 1998) – early models predicted that only coalitions in which each partner is necessary to reap the benefits of office (*‘minimal winning coalitions’*) should form, and that even within this set, the one with the fewest number of seats above the majority threshold would be the one maximizing the office payoffs of all its members and would therefore be the most likely to form (Riker, 1962; Gamson, 1961). With this aim in mind and looking at party seat shares only, minority governments and coalitions that contain a non-necessary (*‘surplus’*) partner should not form. The second *‘school’* or *‘generation’* of coalition scholars restricted the set of predicted coalitions by considering that party leaders would also care about *policy* when contemplating the potential coalitions they could be part of. The aim of those party leaders would then be to form as ideologically compact coalitions as possible (see Leiserson’s *‘minimal (policy) range coalitions’* (1966); Axelrod’s *‘minimal connected coalitions’* (1970); and de Swaan’s (1973) *‘closed/connected minimal range coalition’*) among the winning coalitions. Even if expanding the set of relevant factors to the ideological locations of parties allowed for the prediction of some policy compact *‘surplus’* coalitions, this move away from considering parties as pure office-seekers still did not account for the occurrence of minority governments, which can be considered as the original and enduring empirical puzzle encountered by coalition studies.

Predicting the formation of non-winning governments with only those size and ideology ingredients would take the more radical view of parties *only* caring about policy when forming governments. Drawing more explicitly on spatial theories of party and electoral competition (Downs, 1957; Black, 1958), Laver and Schofield (1990) argued that minority governments containing the party controlling the median legislator would actually be viable options. This is because when only a single policy dimension – such as the left-right opposition – is relevant, the median party cannot be beaten by a majority of MPs sitting on either side of its preferred position. Before this development in Laver and Schofield’s (1990) book-length classical synthesis, scholars had however found that empirical results of existing theories were largely driven by the set of countries included in the analyses (Franklin & Mackie, 1984; Grofman, 1989). This observation provided an incentive for looking into a new set of potential explanations for the formation, duration and termination of coalition governments, such as the institutions that may constrain political parties at the cabinet formation stage or more largely structure the relations between the legislative and executive powers. It is only with that institutionalist turn of the field,

²A basic difference between cooperative and non-cooperative games lies in the unit of analysis: as it assumes that players are always able to enforce cooperative behaviour, the former looks at competition amongst coalitions of players, the most valuable (however defined) of these coalitions being predicted to form, whereas the latter analyses the competition amongst individual players to form a coalition that is preferred over any feasible alternatives by all its members, i.e. an equilibrium solution (Laver, 1998: 4).

which can be seen as the third generation of coalition studies, that scholars started to craft explanations for the occurrence of minority governments (Strøm, 1990; Bergman, 1993; Strøm et al., 1994). Aside from tackling some of the empirical gaps from the previous literature, interest for the institutional context in which coalitions operate will also inform the most important developments in coalition theory since the 1960s. First, scholars started devising non-cooperative game theoretical models (Baron & Ferejohn, 1989; Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988; Morelli, 1999; Baron & Diermeier, 2001) specifying bargaining protocols for the cabinet formation stage and predicting outcomes such as the type of government or the payoffs for the *formateur* (typically expected to be advantaged given its role as ‘first proposer’ in the sequence of moves leading to a coalition outcome) and other coalition parties.³ Second, under the strong assumption that party leaders anticipate that future coalition policymaking will be guided by a high degree of ministerial autonomy, Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996), suggested their ‘portfolio allocation’ model of coalition formation.

The next important developments in coalition studies built on two core ideas that originated from that third generation of work. First, the idea that parties do not operate in a world free from institutional characteristics also led to considering other aspects of national-level bargaining contexts. Rather than approaching coalition formation as a discrete event, scholars started considering it as a repeated game taking place in the life cycle of governments: some (Franklin & Mackie, 1983; Tavits, 2008) looked at how the history of past partisan interactions impact current government formation, others investigated issues related to path dependence and transaction costs when considering the re-formation of an incumbent coalition (Martin & Stevenson, 2010). Second, this suggestion that the past would be influential for the coalition formation stage resonated with the need to tap into the phase that follows it, but remained the least researched aspect of the coalition lifecycle, that of coalition governance. Even though Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996) had argued that party leaders anticipated how coalitions would decide on policy after the formation stage, their model did not seem to reflect much of what actually happened in the real world. What these authors had suggested was that there were essentially no negotiations between parties going on at coalition formation stage or once governments had been formed, as each partner would implement its preferred policy within the realm of the portfolio jurisdictions they were in charge of.⁴ Instead, what had already been observed by country experts was that coalition partners are continuously negotiating and monitoring each other through the use of coalition governance mechanisms, essentially leading government policy to reflect a coalition compromise between its components (Müller & Strøm, 2000; Martin & Vanberg, 2014b). A series of

³Note that Bernard Grofman had previously made a seminal contribution by devising a multistage dynamic model of protocoalition formation in a multidimensional ideological space (Grofman, 1982).

⁴Note that the non-cooperative game theoretical models referred to earlier were based on specific bargaining protocols and take-it-or-leave-it offers, leaving no room for actual negotiations and therefore predicting that coalitions would form without delay.

publications would eventually emerge and expand knowledge about how coalitions actually govern, but also about how coalition governance is itself influenced by decisions taken at formation stage and in turn has an impact on government durability, termination and electoral consequences. First, responding to calls for instilling more dynamics into coalition theory and empirical studies (Laver, 1974, 1998, 2003; Druckman, 2008), Strøm, Müller and Bergman's (2008) edited book built on a 'coalition life cycle' framework and provided comparative chapters investigating the interdependencies between stages that had up to then been mainly analysed separately. Second, the Bergman et al. (2019, 2021) volumes pursued the identification and understanding of coalition governance regimes through updated and enlarged data collection relying on systematic country case analyses.

Our volume thus presents new research in times of burgeoning theoretical and empirical advances by coalition scholars. In the last few years, pursuing the agenda of making coalition theory more dynamic, we see the development of models endogenizing the choices made by party leaders through the life cycle of coalition politics (Chiba et al., 2015; de Marchi & Laver, 2023; Müller et al., 2024). Some of this work envisages government formation as a complex system within the broader context of party competition and therefore integrates the interplay between elections and coalition politics (Fortunato, 2021). Furthermore, the scholarly community also welcomes the provision of large comparative datasets containing information on an increasingly wide number of factors likely to affect coalition politics, as well as novel empirical material that will allow us to shed light on crucial outputs of government formations such as coalition agreements (Klüver et al., 2023). Methodologically, Martin and Stevenson (2001) have provided a quantitative template for testing alternative theoretical predictions against each other,⁵ survival analysis has been applied to the study of coalition durability and scholars have argued in favour of exploring new factors affecting coalition politics by intensively studying cases that are poorly explained by existing theories (Bäck & Dumont, 2007; Andeweg et al., 2011).

Taking stock of this rich literature up to its latest developments, the ambition of this book is not to engender a new 'generation' of coalition studies.⁶ Rather, several of the following chapters suggest a number of ways in which further progress in the dynamic conceptualization of coalition processes and outcomes can be pursued, and how new methods can be used to generate new insights in the study of coalition formation and governance. In addition, the new developments in coalition studies contained in this volume more distinctively build on three observations regarding the present state of the literature. First, whilst ever more sophisticated theoretical

⁵See also Bäck and Dumont's (2008) strategy which decomposes the search for a formateur party and the latter's selection of coalition partners.

⁶Interestingly though, the 29–30 April 2016 Rome workshop organised by Bernard Grofman and Patrick Dumont assembled actual generations of coalition scholars whose first publication in the field dated back from the 1960s to the 2010s. The editors of this volume thank all the participants for their intellectual input into the workshop's discussions, with a special nod of respect to Guillermo Owen.

and empirical work has been published, a systematic review and potential clarification of some concepts widely used in this literature is in order.⁷ Even though scholars and students of coalition politics have been aware that conceptual vagueness and poor operationalisations could be responsible for contradicting empirical results and might impede cumulative knowledge, not much has been done to remedy this state of affairs. Second, despite undeniable progress in our understanding of coalition politics, some very old empirical puzzles, such as the size of the coalitions that actually form, are enduring. In an attempt at providing new insights on that matter, a number of contributions attack that issue from a variety of different angles. Third, early coalition studies tested theories on data covering the experience of less than a dozen West European countries for the two or three decades that followed World War II. Since then, party competition has tremendously changed in these countries, which saw an increase in fragmentation of their party systems, electoral losses of the moderate parties that used to populate government and the emergence and breakthrough of new parties. Largely as a consequence of a succession of multiple crises in the region, these new parties shaking the old party system have increasingly been of the populist extreme left and right kind. Today, data is also available for three decades of coalition experience in Central and Eastern European countries since the fall of the Berlin Wall. In addition, parties compete for power at other levels than the national one, under different electoral laws and executive-legislative settings. Local politics as well as presidential systems provide new terrains on which to test classic hypotheses and derive new ones that account for different historical, political and institutional contexts.

Overview of the Volume

The first section of the book clarifies important concepts used and phenomena observed in coalition research that have up until now not received sufficient scrutiny. The three first chapters show a previously unexplored variety of forms of parliamentarism, modes of government termination, and types of caretaker governments. Shedding light on the heterogeneity of positive and negative parliamentarism, early elections and transitional cabinets with explicitly limited policy remit, the authors discuss the implications of their efforts at reconceptualizing and refining measurements for theoretical and empirical works on government formation, duration and termination. They also highlight connections with neighbouring or broader literatures such as the institutionalist perspective looking at the powers of parliaments,

⁷The title of the workshop organised by Torbjörn Bergman and Tom Louwerse at Arlanda airport, Stockholm on 17–18 July 2015, which turned out to be the first building block of this book project, was “Vague concepts and poor operationalization—solutions to measurement problems in studies of government formation”. The editors of this volume thank all the participants to the Arlanda workshop who contributed in one way or another to the publication of this book.

the political economy literature on opportunistic election timing, or that on technocracy as an alternative form of political representation to party government.

In his chapter “Investiture and Removal of Governments: ‘Positive’ and ‘Negative’ Parliamentarism”, Tom Louwerse investigates the distinction between ‘negative’ vs ‘positive’ forms of parliamentarism originally introduced by Bergman (1993). As in parliamentary democracies governments’ fate depends on their support in the legislature, investiture votes have been one of the first core political institutions of interest for coalition scholars, given that such institutional rules were expected to constrain government formation. The original distinction made by Bergman (1993), which led to the concept’s operationalization as a dichotomous variable in much of the empirical literature ever since, was between instances in which an investiture vote of some sort is required in parliament before a new government can assume its tasks. And more precisely, whether new governments must explicitly *win* a majority vote in parliament or not (i.e. no investiture vote or one in which support is assumed and only withdrawn if a majority votes *against* the new government). The author indeed found that when negative formation rules in place, minority governments are more likely to form (see also Strøm and McClean in this volume).

As a recent review on the institutionalist turn in coalition studies considered that ‘the importance of the investiture requirement for coalition formation is not settled theoretically or empirically’ (Martin & Vanberg, 2015: 182), additional work has been dedicated to unpacking investiture rules and investigating their impact on government formation in a larger set of countries than those originally covered by Bergman (Rasch et al., 2015; Cheibub et al., 2021). In his chapter Louwerse provides a fresh view on the matter. First, he provides a refinement of the measurement of existing investiture voting rules with an ordinal extension of the original dichotomy between positive and negative rules. Second, in order to grasp the relationship between parliament and government more fully, he follows De Winter’s (1995) suggestion and conceptualizes types of parliamentarism as positive or negative out of both the appointment *and* removal powers of parliaments. Analysing both the government investiture and removal voting rules of 29 European democracies from 1945 to 2023, he finds that a large number of combinations are in use but also that most countries adopt sets of rules that either make it at once more difficult to form and to depose governments, or that render both investiture and removal easier. The author empirically further shows that his advances at reconceptualizing and operationalizing positive and negative parliamentarism do not reproduce existing measures of parliamentary power. Finally, Louwerse shows how his ordinal measure of investiture voting rules provides a more nuanced picture of the occurrence of minority governments: as expected, systems requiring an absolute majority vote and those specifying negative investiture rules are those that respectively correspond to the lowest and the highest rate of minority governments; however, the difference in the frequency of minority governments between systems without investiture votes and those using a relative majority investiture vote is very limited (for further empirical analyses, see the chapters by Strøm and McClean, and by Hellström in this volume).

One of the early and still prevalent critique of coalition studies has been its static nature (Laver, 1974, 2008; Druckman, 2008; Müller et al., 2024), with the electoral

connection between government termination and government formation being one of the most fundamental of these understudied dynamics. Granted, some more or less formalised models that account for the potential impact of elections on the life and times of government have emerged (Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988; Müller et al., 2008). In addition, building on works on economic voting and the electoral accountability of incumbents, a whole research program on how voters perceive multiparty policymaking and whether it affects their electoral behaviour has developed (see Fortunato, 2021). Still, what remains is that, among the ‘office, policy and votes’ aspects that party leaders aim at maximizing or at least need to anticipate when negotiating the making or considering the breaking of coalitions, the electoral motivations of politicians have been the least studied and theorized about.

In their chapter, Petra Schleiter and Sukriti Issar argue that, despite recognizing that early elections may be triggered by different political actors’ behaviour, through different rules and under a variety of political and economic conditions, the government terminations and political economy literatures have mainly theorized and so far only empirically analysed early elections as a single homogenous type of outcome. Addressing these shortcomings, they conceptualize two types of early elections defined by the behavioural choices of political actors: on the one hand those that correspond to the idea of opportunistic, *political surfing*, election timing by an incumbent PM party expecting to consolidate its position by calling an early election; and on the other hand those that match the idea of a *failure election*, when going to the polls before the end of the legislative term is forced on the dominant governing party by the parliamentary opposition, a coalition partner or even public opinion. Schleiter and Issar lay down the constitutional, economic and political conditions that make the choice of each of these two types of elections more likely and show in an analysis of 327 East and West European elections that these indeed have clearly distinct predictors. Those two types of early elections are the result of distinct political processes; lumping them together has obscured the heterogeneity of those political outcomes and their likely consequences. Indeed, just like Louwerse’s contribution is likely to have implications beyond government formation (such as the size of the governments that form under different rules), extending to the study of government survival and termination, Schleiter and Issar’s reconceptualization of behavioural government termination can be expected to help scholars sharpen their analyses of different aspects of government formation, such as bargaining duration or the likelihood of incumbents returning to government.

In his review on government termination literature, Laver (2003) reminded that research on coalition duration is conditioned by the precise definition of what marks the end of one government and the beginning of the next (see Shomer et al., 2022 for a recent analysis using different definitions). In addition, bargaining models aimed at predicting coalition formation specify what the ‘reversion point’, or what happens when parties fail to agree on a new government, is, and scholars performing empirical work across the coalition life cycle have had to make decisions about which cabinets to exclude from or censor in their analyses. In the fourth chapter of this volume, Torbjörn Bergman and Jonas Lindahl aim at clarifying what caretaker cabinets are and what they are not. Despite its importance for both theoretical and

empirical research on government formation, duration and termination, this concept has not led to serious comparative investigations leading to a unified definition, and partially as a result has been operationalized in various ways. The authors discuss the constitutional necessity of such cabinets, and identify the key criteria that differentiate them from other forms of government, to arrive at a minimal and ideal typical definition based on their transitional character and the limitation of their policy remit (typically maintaining the status quo). They further discuss two main subtypes, “continuation” and “new” caretakers. The former are governments that continue in office after having resigned and do so under a restricted policy remit. Since these have often been disregarded in previous works, Bergman and Lindahl provide an analysis of their occurrence and duration. New caretaker governments, on the other hand, are specifically intended to be temporary cabinets and have been formally inaugurated to perform their tasks within a limited policy remit perimeter. As the authors argue, further research on what caretaker governments actually do under their limited policy mandate is in order, but their efforts at coming to a minimal definition and identifying subtypes with illustrative examples constitute a long awaited, much needed first step.

Whilst the first section of the volume was intended to delve into concepts often used in coalition studies but in need of clarification and refinements, the two following contributions rely on quantitative empirical analyses showcasing theoretical and methodological advances in the study of the impact of institutions on government formation. First, Johan Hellström argues that despite decades of comparative empirical research, there are few robust findings on how political institutions affect government formation. This is largely due to the fact that the institutional setting in which national governments form rarely changes. Indeed, the existence or absence of institutions is almost constant by country. As a result, despite the collection of ever larger datasets (for instance Hellström et al., 2023) allowing to test hypotheses across a wide range of countries longitudinally, we still have relatively few observations displaying sufficient variation to establish robust statistical relationships. The author selects a number of hypotheses that are representative of the institutionalist turn in coalition studies since the 1990s and suggests a novel method aimed at testing the robustness of associations between the existence of specific institutions and the formation of minority governments versus majority coalitions. In the *Extreme Bound Analysis* proposed by Hellström, about 16,000 regressions are performed with models containing each of the four institutional variables studied in different combinations and with a different set of controls. Some results that relate to Louwerse’s chapter in this volume are worth highlighting, such as the robust effects of *positive parliamentarism* and the existence of a *constructive vote of no confidence* in increasing the odds of majority coalitions rather than minority governments.

Another of Hellström’s results is that the effect of *bicameralism* on the government formation outcome is sensitive to alternative model specifications. This finding can be taken as a starting point for the following contribution to this volume, as bicameralism had been expected to play a role in government formation and duration since Lijphart’s seminal work on consensus democracies (Lijphart, 1984). In their chapter, Dianela Giannetti, Andrea Pedrazzani and Luca Pinto set out to

explore whether parliamentary structure could affect the process of government formation rather than its outcomes. Instead of conjecturing direct effects, they expect that bicameral legislatures exacerbate the effects of uncertainty and complexity of the bargaining environment already found to have an impact on bargaining delays. Their analysis of about 700 government formation processes in 28 European countries indeed shows that the impact of uncertainty and complexity on government formation duration is stronger in bicameral parliaments. More precisely, bargaining delays get especially longer after an election in the presence of strong upper chambers and as polarisation increases in those same contexts than in unicameral systems; on the other hand, the interaction between parliamentary structure and the effective number of parties does not reveal the expected conditional effect.

In order to address the most enduring puzzle in coalition studies, the formation of minority governments, Kaare Strøm and Charles McLean proposes the most comprehensive and systematic analysis to date of both their incidence *and* their performance. Building on scholarship that sought to identify the conditions that favoured the formation of minority governments, including *Minority Governments and Majority Rule* (Strøm, 1990) which remained the cornerstone for our understanding of the occurrence and workings of minority cabinets, the authors perform three sets of quantitative analyses testing a wide array of explanations for respectively their formation, their duration, and their subsequent electoral performance. One of their rationales for embarking on such a comprehensive reassessment of minority governments (the title of their article, *Minority Governments Revisited*, makes no mystery of their goal) is the availability of data covering the most recent decades and includes the Central and Eastern European experience, allowing for a systematic test of existing hypotheses in this broader context. Amongst the findings that prove robust across regions and periods, minority governments tend to form in parliaments where a larger number of parties are represented but bargaining power is disproportionately distributed (see also Dumont and Grofman in this volume), when even opposition parties can expect to have policy impact and, as found in the chapters of this volume dedicated to the impact of institutions on government formation, where a vote of investiture is not required. In addition, although less durable than other cabinet types, minority governments are remarkably successful at the polls.

Aside from their comprehensive reassessment of existing knowledge on minority governments, Strøm and McLean discuss, in a more exploratory manner, how those governments govern despite not relying on a stable majority in parliament. In that section of their chapter, the authors review at length the governance mechanisms through which minority governments may build legislative coalitions and secure their survival. This systematic discussion of the coalition governance under minority governments responds to a large extent to the Martin and Vanberg's (2015: 191) call for 'more detailed work on the variety of institutional mechanisms that are available to coalition parties'. In that same review of the literature, these authors also note that we still know little about 'the extent to which parties use these institutions as substitutes or complements in confronting the challenges of multiparty governance'. This is precisely the research gap that Alejandro Ecker, Thomas Meyer and Wolfgang Müller attend to in their chapter.

As argued earlier, the institutional turn in coalition studies has soon been followed by an increased interest in what happens between the formation and termination of coalitions. Despite the rapid development of a rich literature –through case studies or comparative analyses of the incidence and effectiveness of one or two coalition maintenance mechanism(s)– on what has been coined coalition governance, we still know little about how coalition governments combine them into ‘coalition governance regimes’. In their chapter, Ecker, Meyer and Müller use novel data on mechanisms of mutual control that parties can use to contain risks inherent to governing with coalition partners that diverge with their own interests and to deal with external shocks that may endanger the stability of the government. Based on existing knowledge they build a formal theoretical framework and derive hypotheses on the existence and efficiency of typical combinations of comprehensive coalition agreements, watchdog junior ministers, conflict resolution mechanisms and strong parliamentary committees one could expect to be put together by coalition government parties. Analyzing about 400 East and West European governments, they enrich our empirical knowledge of coalition governance by uncovering some complementary and synergetic patterns. A very important finding is that the majority of coalition governments choose a coalition governance architecture that seems to be ineffective or at least inefficient to cope with potential challenges of coalition governance. Further research will establish whether these ill-advised choices are consequential for their stability.

Switching back from the governance turn to the first generation of coalition studies, Patrick Dumont and Bernard Grofman examine whether a simple ‘size’ measure of power concentration helps explaining the distribution of minority, minimal winning and surplus coalitions formed. They derive hypotheses regarding the most likely type of government that would form based on the level of dominance exerted by the largest party in parliament and compare their results with those of Laver and Benoit (2015) who partitioned legislative party systems according to the combined relative seats shares of the largest, second largest and third largest party in the assembly. Note that both the chapter by Johan Hellström and that by Kaare Ström and Charles McLean also included a measure of the bargaining power of the largest party in parliament in their statistical models and both had found that this variable had a significant effect on the formation of minority governments, even controlling for a large number of alternative explanations, including ideological and institutional constraints.

The two final chapters of this volume highlight how coalition studies can make progress by investigating multiparty governments in other settings than the ones for which most of the theoretical work emerged and on which most of these theories have been tested empirically, i.e. West European parliamentary democracies. First, studies of coalitions at the subnational level emerged several decades ago. This move was considered most promising as, in comparison to the constrained set of democracies that returned minority situations in national parliaments, these studies could rely on a novel, large pool of local coalition formation opportunities; it also responded to an increasingly incestuous relationship between theory and data which tended to develop as a result of inductive theorizing on existing data in order to

improve the predictive rate of early coalition theories; finally, it allowed scholars to control for a number of cultural and institutional factors in their statistical investigations. As Anders Backlund shows in his chapter, the local level can also be the ideal setting to study emerging political phenomena that may not materialize, or may evolve at a different pace cross-nationally. One of the most striking developments in recent years is the accelerated loss of electoral support for previously core, moderate governing parties and, conversely, the rise of populist, radical left and radical right parties. What is the impact of the electoral success of ‘pariah parties’, those considered by all other parties as unfit to govern and cooperate with, on the size and ideological composition of governments? Backlund explores the changing coalition patterns at the Swedish local level resulting from the rise of the Sweden Democrats, which until the 2022 elections were systematically excluded from any form of formal political cooperation at the national level by other parties. Analysing those patterns in close to 300 municipalities and across three elections (2006, 2010, 2014), he shows that the presence and growth of this pariah party contributed to an increase in coalitions’ policy diversity, with other parties resorting to cooperation across the established blocs of left and right. But his analysis also reveals that there were early signs that the cordon sanitaire would eventually break (in 2018 at the local level and 2022 at the national level): while the left bloc was more dependent on negotiating parliamentary support across the blocs whenever the SD held the balance of power in the assembly, the right bloc on the other hand tended to form minority governments that relied on informal support from the radical right.

Finally, in her recent review of the literature, Schleiter (2020) reminded us that if work on bargaining about parliamentary governments had been foundational for coalition studies, the institutional turn of the 1990s in coalition studies soon inspired a number of scholars of presidential systems to start focusing their attention on how multiparty governance unfolds in a separation of powers regime and where presidents are popularly elected. In her call for more research on the influence of electoral motivations of politicians and parties on coalition choices the same author suggested to take a closer look at pre-electoral coalitions and their impact on the governments that eventually form in parliamentary and presidential settings (Schleiter, 2020). Our tour of recent advances in the study of coalition governments therefore ends with a chapter on the significance of pre-electoral alliances in shaping coalition government formation in presidential systems. Drawing on data from ten Latin American countries, Adrián Albala, André Borges and Thiago Silva show that the legally mandated duration of the transition period, the legislative seat share and the ideological polarization of the pre-electoral coalition contribute to their continuation as the eventual government formed after the election. Interestingly, whilst their results highlight the significance of pre-electoral alliances in shaping coalition government formation in presidential systems, the congruence between pre- and post-electoral coalitions does not appear to be affected by the powers of the president. Amongst other findings, this opens the door to further research comparing and contrasting executive coalition in presidential and parliamentary democracies, an area that is likely to occupy the next generation of coalition scholars.

In his recent book, G. Bingham Powell Jr. (2019) reminds us that elections are expected to induce ideological congruence between citizens and policymakers in representative democracies. Greater proximity between the two would favour government responsiveness and therefore contribute to a high level of democratic representation. Out of the three stages he examines—the other two being electoral competition and legislative representation—Powell finds that the government formation stage is the one where most of that congruence ‘goes astray’. Even though improving our understanding of how governments form, are maintained and terminate in situations where no single party wins a majority of seats in parliament is not the only important task for scholars studying democratic representation, it is for sure a key one to engage with. By providing new ways to approach, measure and (re-)assess coalition phenomena across a wide spectrum of contexts, all the chapters in this volume contribute to this agenda.

References

- Andeweg, R. B., De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (Eds.). (2011). *Puzzles of government formation*. Routledge.
- Austen-Smith, D., & Banks, J. (1988). Elections, coalitions and legislative outcomes. *American Political Science Review*, 82(2), 405–422.
- Axelrod, R. (1970). *Conflict of interest*. Markham.
- Bäck, H., & Dumont, P. (2007). Combining large-n and small-n strategies: The way forward in coalition research. *West European Politics*, 30(3), 467–501.
- Bäck, H., & Dumont, P. (2008). Making the first move: A two-stage analysis of the role of Formateurs in parliamentary government formation. *Public Choice*, 135(3–4), 353–373.
- Baron, D. P., & Diermeier, D. (2001). Elections, governments and parliaments in proportional representation systems. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(3), 933–967.
- Baron, D. P., & Ferejohn, J. A. (1989). Bargaining in legislatures. *American Political Science Review*, 83(4), 1181–1206.
- Bergman, T. (1993). Formation rules and minority governments. *European Journal of Political Research*, 23(1), 55–66.
- Bergman, T., Ilonszki, G., & Müller, W. C. (Eds.). (2019). *Coalition governance in Central Eastern Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Bergman, T., Back, H., & Hellström, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Coalition governance in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Black, A. (1958). *Theory committees and elections*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bokobza, L., & Nyrup, J. (2024). Authoritarian multiparty governments. *Democratization*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2024.2338858>
- Chaisty, P., Cheeseman, N., & Power, T. (2018). *Coalitional presidentialism in comparative perspective: Minority presidents in multiparty systems*. Oxford University Press.
- Cheibub, J. A., Przeworski, A., & Saiegh, S. M. (2004). Government coalitions and legislative success under presidentialism and parliamentarism. *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(4), 565–587.
- Cheibub, J. A., Martin, S., & Rasch, B. E. (2021). Investiture rules and formation of minority governments in European parliamentary democracies. *Party Politics*, 27(2), 351–362.
- Chiba, D., Martin, L. W., & Stevenson, R. T. (2015). A copula approach to the problem of selection bias in models of government survival. *Political Analysis*, 23(1), 42–58.

- de Marchi, S., & Laver, M. (2023). *The governance cycle in parliamentary democracies*. Cambridge University Press.
- de Swaan, A. (1973). *Coalition theories and cabinet formations*. Elsevier.
- De Winter, L. (1995). The role of parliament in government formation and resignation. In H. Döring (Ed.), *Parliaments and majority rule in Western Europe* (pp. 115–151). St. Martin's Press.
- De Winter, L. (2002). Parties and government formation, portfolio allocation and policy definition. In K. R. Luther & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *Political parties in the new Europe: Political and analytical challenges* (pp. 171–205). Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2006). Parties into government: Still many puzzles. In R. S. Katz & W. Crotty (Eds.), *Handbook of party politics* (pp. 175–188). Sage.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. Harper & Row Publishers.
- Druckman, J. N. (2008). Dynamic approaches to studying parliamentary coalitions. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(3), 479–483.
- Fortunato, D. (2021). *The cycle of coalition. How parties and voters interact under coalition governance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Franklin, M. N., & Mackie, T. T. (1983). Familiarity and inertia in the formation of governing coalitions in parliamentary democracies. *British Journal of Political Science*, 13(3), 275–298.
- Franklin, M. N., & Mackie, T. T. (1984). Reassessing the importance of size and ideology for the formation of governing coalitions in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 28(4), 671–692.
- Gamson, W. A. (1961). A theory of coalition formation. *American Sociological Review*, 6(3), 373–382.
- Grofman, B. (1982). A dynamic model of protocoalition formation in ideological N-space. *Behavioral Science*, 27(1), 77–90.
- Grofman, B. (1989). The comparative analysis of coalition formation and duration: Distinguishing between-country and within-country effect. *British Journal of Political Science*, 19(2), 291–302.
- Hellström, J., Bergman, T., Lindahl, J., & Sychowiec, M. (2023). Party Government in Europe Database (PAGED) – Basic dataset. Version 2023.12. Available on <https://repdem.org>
- Klüver, H., Bäck, H., & Krauss, S. (2023). *Coalition agreements as control devices: Coalition governance in Western and Eastern Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Laver, M. (1974). Dynamic factors in government coalition formation. *European Journal of Political Research*, 2(3), 259–270.
- Laver, M. (1998). Theories of government formation. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1(1), 1–25.
- Laver, M. (2003). Government termination. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6(1), 23–40.
- Laver, M. (2008). Legislatures and parliaments in comparative context. In D. A. Wittman & B. R. Weingast (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political economy* (pp. 121–140). Oxford University Press.
- Laver, M., & Benoit, K. (2015). The basic arithmetic of legislative decisions. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(2), 275–291.
- Laver, M., & Schofield, N. (1990). *Multiparty government: The politics of coalition in Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Laver, M., & Shepsle, K. A. (1990). Coalitions and cabinet government. *American Political Science Review*, 84(3), 873–890.
- Laver, M., & Shepsle, K. A. (1996). *Making and breaking governments: Cabinets and legislatures in parliamentary democracies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Le Breton, M., & Van Der Straeten, K. (2017). Government formation and electoral alliances: The contribution of cooperative game theory to political science. *Revue d'Economie Politique*, 127, 637–736.
- Leiserson, M. (1966). *Coalitions in politics*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Yale University.
- Lijphart, A. (1984). *Democracies: Patterns of majoritarian and consensus government in twenty-one countries*. Yale University Press.

- Martin, L. W., & Stevenson, R. T. (2001). Government formation in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(1), 33–50.
- Martin, L. W., & Stevenson, R. T. (2010). The conditional impact of incumbency on government formation. *American Political Science Review*, 104(3), 503–518.
- Martin, L. W., & Vanberg, G. (2014a). Legislative institutions and coalition government. In S. Martin, T. Saalfeld, & K. Strøm (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of legislative studies* (pp. 436–452). Oxford University Press.
- Martin, L. W., & Vanberg, G. (2014b). Parties and policymaking in multiparty governments: The legislative median, ministerial autonomy, and the coalition compromise. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(4), 979–996.
- Martin, L. W., & Vanberg, G. (2015). Coalition formation and policymaking in parliamentary democracies. In J. Gandhi & R. Rubén-Rufino (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of comparative political institutions* (pp. 181–194). Routledge.
- Martin, L. W., & Vanberg, G. (2020). Models of coalition politics: Recent developments and new directions. In L. Curini & R. Franzese (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of research methods in political science and international relations*. Sage.
- McGann, A. J. (2019). Logrolling and coalitions. In R. D. Congleton, B. Grofman, & S. Voigt (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of public choice* (Vol. 1, pp. 452–462). Oxford University Press.
- Morelli, M. (1999). Demand competition and policy compromise in legislative bargaining. *American Political Science Review*, 93(4), 809–820.
- Müller, W. C. (2009). Government formation. In T. In Landman & N. Robinson (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of comparative politics* (pp. 227–245). Sage.
- Müller, W. C., & Strøm, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Coalition governments in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Müller, W. C., Strøm, K., & Bergman, T. (2008). Coalition theory and cabinet governance: An introduction. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and coalition bargaining: The democratic life cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 1–50). Oxford University Press.
- Müller, W. C., Bäck, H., & Hellström, J. (2024). Coalition dynamics: Advances in the study of the coalition life cycle. *West European Politics*, 47(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2249316>
- Powell, G.B., Jr (2019). *Ideological representation. Achieved and astray*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108699785>
- Rasch, B. E., Martin, S., & Cheibub, J. A. (Eds.). (2015). *Parliaments and government formation. Unpacking investiture rules*. Oxford University Press.
- Riker, W. H. (1962). *The theory of political coalitions*. Yale University Press.
- Saiegh, S. M. (2015). Executive-legislative relations. In J. Gandhi & R. Ruiz-Rufin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of comparative political institutions* (pp. 162–180). Routledge.
- Schleiter, P. (2020). Government formation and termination. In R. B. Andrew, R. Elgie, L. Helms, J. Kaarbo, & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political executives*. Oxford University Press.
- Shomer, Y., Rasch, B. E., & Akirav, O. (2022). Termination of parliamentary government: Revised definitions and implications. *West European Politics*, 45(3), 550–575.
- Strøm, K. (1990). *Minority government and majority rule*. Cambridge University Press.
- Strøm, K., & Nyblade, B. (2007). Coalition theory and government formation. In C. Boix & S. C. Stokes (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of comparative politics* (pp. 782–802). Oxford University Press.
- Strøm, K., Budge, I., & Laver, M. (1994). Constraints on cabinet formation in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 38(2), 303–335.
- Strøm, K., Müller, W. C., & Bergman, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Cabinets and coalition bargaining: The democratic life cycle in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Tavits, M. (2008). The role of parties' past behavior in coalition formation. *American Political Science Review*, 102(4), 495–507.
- von Neumann, J., & Morgenstern, O. (1953). *Theory of games and economic behavior*. Princeton University Press.