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## R E P O R T

PARTY FACTIONALISM AND CABINET  
DURABILITY*James N. Druckman*

## ABSTRACT

Most studies of coalition behavior have treated political parties as unitary actors. Building on extant literature, this paper relaxes the unitary actor assumption in order to develop a theory about the impact of party factionalism on cabinet duration. Specifically, cabinets composed of factionalized parties are expected to exhibit less stability. Cross-national data corroborate the hypothesis, demonstrating the importance of intra-party characteristics in determining coalition behavior.

KEY WORDS ■ cabinet duration ■ coalitions ■ factionalism ■ principal-agent model

A century ago, A. Lawrence Lowell (1896: 73-4) put forth his 'axiom of politics' that 'the larger the number of discordant groups that form the majority, the harder the task of pleasing them all, and the more feeble and unstable the position of the cabinet' (Lijphart, 1984: 108-10). Despite this early beginning, the cross-national study of cabinet maintenance experienced a long hiatus such that in 1970, Sven Groennings commented: 'Although coalition government is the norm in European multiparty systems, scholars have offered hardly any generalizations about coalition maintenance or behavior within coalitions' (Groennings, 1970: 459). While the latter topic continues to receive limited attention (Laver and Shepsle, 1994), the former experienced a flurry of activity soon after Groennings's observation (e.g. Axelrod, 1970: 175; Taylor and Herman, 1971; Dodd, 1976) and has remained a topic of interest. Recently, a number of methodological and substantive advances have been made (e.g. King et al., 1990; Warwick, 1994; Lupia and Strøm, 1995), although much remains to be done. Indeed, one

only need turn to Groennings's article to discover a number of unexplored hypotheses about the role of intra-party characteristics in coalition termination (Groennings, 1970: 454).<sup>1</sup>

Most theories of coalition behavior treat parties as unitary actors. The paucity of work that has included intra-party characteristics remains either entirely abstract (e.g. Groennings, 1970) and/or anecdotal (e.g. Mintz, 1995). Despite over 30 years of otherwise exemplary progress, coalition theorists have yet to produce *and* systematically test even a rudimentary theory of intra-party determinants of coalition behavior. The aim of this paper is to remedy this situation, at least with regard to coalition duration. In the next section, I build on the extant literature to develop a theory of intra-party determinants of coalition termination. Specifically, I hypothesize that cabinets consisting of factionalized parties will be less stable. I then empirically test this proposition with data from eight parliamentary democracies and conclude with a discussion of some implications.

### Coalition Theory and Political Parties

Political parties play an integral role in democratic systems. Mény (1993: 122–7) describes parties as the 'essential agents in political life'. In addition to integrating, mobilizing and influencing voters, parties recruit politicians and design policy programs. Indeed, Robertson (1976: 1) states: 'To talk, today, about democracy is to talk about a system of competing political parties'. Studies on the internal workings of political parties hold an important place in political science (e.g. Duverger, 1954; Michels, 1962; Panebianco, 1988). Party scholars have emphatically proclaimed that '*neither* the party *nor* its individual faces may be regarded as a unitary actor' (Katz and Mair, 1992: 6; emphasis in original).

Surprisingly, the study of inter-party behavior, particularly coalition behavior, has all but ignored these classic studies. This gap has two explanations. First, despite the large amount of theoretical knowledge of intra-party functioning, little empirical data have been historically available for testing propositions. Second, the theoretical literature on inter-party competition often starts from the premise that parties are unitary, allowing for more parsimonious models.<sup>2</sup>

In their book on multi-party government, Laver and Schofield (1990: 15) defend the unitary actor assumption by arguing that 'parties do in practice tend to go into and come out of government as single actors'. However, this argument falls apart when one moves from static models of party interaction to dynamic models. Coalition scholars have long acknowledged the tenuous basis of the unitary actor assumption (e.g. Strøm, 1994b: 125; Mintz, 1995: 339–40); indeed, Strøm (1994a: 104) explains that 'ultimately, theories of party behavior must be grounded in some conception of internal party politics'. Hesitation to examine such a dynamic may be due to a folk wisdom

that has developed that internal party politics is 'unlikely . . . to be capable of integration into formal theories' of coalition behavior (Laver, 1986: 42). However, recent work by Laver and Shepsle (1990) and Strøm (1994b) has shown this may not be the case.

A promising approach that may lead to the integration of internal party politics with inter-party behavior has been developed by Cox and McCubbins (1993: 83-135). They view party leaders as solving a collective action problem among individual legislators (and activists) by internalizing the costs of collective action. Party leaders are responsible for the maintenance of the party label, which involves aggregating disparate interests into a coherent policy statement, bargaining in coalition negotiations, and various other collective actions. Leaders internalize the costs of organizational maintenance in return for receiving the prestige of their positions and the potential to become high-level national leaders. Of course, the party organization, consisting of activists and legislators, possesses mechanisms to control the party leaders such as selection and dismissal power. Thus, the party leaders, while pursuing their personal goals, must also satisfy the party at large. In essence, the party leaders act as agents of the party, which is the principal. The principal delegates responsibilities to the agents but also possesses mechanisms to control them.

If we subscribe to the view of political parties as delegation regimes, we can model internal party politics and how it relates to inter-party politics (see Strøm, 1994b). This general principal-agent approach is reminiscent of Luebbert's (1986: 52) assertion that 'most negotiation in cases of protracted government formation takes place between leaders and their followers'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Laver and Hunt (1992: 84) show that virtually all decisions of participation in government are made by party leaders (see also Mintz, 1995). Thus, party leaders negotiate as agents of their parties, which they must satisfy. An integral variable, then, is the constraints placed on leaders by their parties, both vertically from below and horizontally across rival leaders.

With regard to the role of these intra-party variables, Groennings (1970: 454) hypothesizes that less internally constrained parties are more likely to enter stable coalition arrangements than more constrained parties. A centralized party structure allows leaders to eschew pressures from below that emanate from district party leaders or activists and, thus, remain in coalitions. Additionally, 'a party weakened by fractional dispute will find it difficult to formulate a coalition policy . . . [and thus] the greater organized dissensus within a party, the lesser the tendency to coalesce [with stability], even if the dissensus has nothing to do with coalition policy' (Groennings, 1970: 454). Groennings expects internal incompatibilities to constrain a party from pursuing well-defined goals, which are essential to coalition politics. Strøm (1994a: 111) endorses a similar view that a decentralized party may be 'saddled with electorally suboptimal policy platforms and its leaders constrained in coalition bargaining with other parties'.<sup>4</sup>

Groennings (1970) and Strøm (1994a) largely concentrate on centralization rather than factionalism. In principal-agent parlance, this means that

the agents (leaders) have greater latitude in making decisions because of less pressure and oversight from the principal (the party). A potential problem with this argument is that it fails to account for the goals of the leaders (agents) by assuming that they will focus on distinct goals from the party (principal). That is, if the leaders' goals are commensurate with the party members' goals, the structure of oversight (degree of centralization) should make little difference (see Brehm and Gates, 1994). When there is disagreement between leaders and members (or across leaders/members), centralization should make a difference; however, even in a centralized party, enough disagreement can lead to problems.

Therefore, although Groennings and Strøm are correct, a stronger hypothesis concerns party factionalism; factionalized parties are expected to be relatively unstable cabinet participants due to the internal struggles that constrain them. This can be conceived of as disputes among various principals in the same organization (each with their own respective agents).

While factionalism has not been incorporated into the formal literature on coalition behavior (for an exception, see Laver and Shepsle, 1990), contemporary observers and descriptive studies have been quick to note the importance of this variable. Zuckerman (1975: 35) points out that 'cabinets frequently dissolve without the rupture of the interparty parliamentary alliances', especially because of factional politics (see Pridham, 1988: 8). Pridham states:

This internal party dimension introduces a range of problems that have hardly been considered by coalition theory. And yet the real world of politics demonstrates regularly that the traditional assumption in coalition theory about parties as unitary actors is questionable and cannot be literally true, particularly in a country with strong party factionalism.

(Pridham, 1988: 261)

Pridham (1986: 28, 1988: 183–308) emphasizes the importance of considering intra-party traits generally and factionalism specifically. However, deductively based and systematically tested theories on these issues are lacking.

In sum, despite consistent recognition of the need to examine intra-party traits systematically (see Browne et al., 1986: 647; Warwick, 1992: 340; Maor, 1995: 87), it has not been done. To remedy this, I examine the importance of party factionalism in explaining cabinet duration in eight countries. The hypothesis is that factionalized parties should participate in less durable cabinets.

## Analysis and Results

The cabinet duration data come from King et al. (1990) (see also Strøm 1990).<sup>5</sup> Briefly, the unit of analysis is each cabinet measured in months; a cabinet is defined as changing with a new prime minister, a change in party

composition, formal resignation, or an election. All governments that terminate in the 12 months prior to a scheduled election are censored. Resignations in this time period may be due to electoral posturing and not instability (see King et al., 1990: 853–5; Warwick, 1994).

The best available measure of party factionalism comes from Janda's (1980) cross-national survey of political parties. One of his 12 clusters of variables is 'coherence', which includes four measures of factionalism within political parties: ideological, issue, leadership and strategic factionalism (see Janda, 1980: 118–25).<sup>6</sup> Each measure is coded from zero to 6, with higher scores indicating increased factionalism. Scores for each party represent the state of the organization from 1950 until 1962. Janda (1980) coded 158 parties from 53 countries. In order to ensure broad coverage, he selected five countries from each of ten regions in the world, and within each country, he coded each party that had received at least 5 percent of the seats in the lower house in two successive elections (Janda, 1980: 7). While this scheme leads to the inclusion of a wide array of parties, it also results in the exclusion of several parliamentary democracies. Thus, seven of the 15 countries included in the King et al. data are not present in Janda's data. Countries included in both datasets (and thus available for this study) are Canada, Denmark, France (4th Republic), Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.<sup>7</sup>

Factionalism is operationalized by taking the average of the four scores for each party. For each cabinet, the (unweighted) average factionalism of all the parties in the cabinet is utilized (thus, each cabinet receives one score of factionalism). The unweighted average is used because any party in the cabinet, regardless of size, has the potential to bring down the government.<sup>8</sup> A final data issue concerns the fact that Janda's data are for the 1950–62 time period. This is an obvious constraint; however, instead of including only governments in this time period, which would substantially reduce the number of cases, all cases from 1945 to 1987 are analyzed. Although this is problematic, it is true that parties are generally conservative organizations with regard to internal change (Harmel et al., 1993: 1). Table 1 presents some descriptive statistics of factionalism scores by country.

With these data caveats in mind, I now turn to the analysis. I focus on the variables that King et al. (1990) and Alt and King (1994) found significant, including the existence of an investiture requirement, post-election status of the cabinet, caretaker status of the cabinet, numerical status of the cabinet as majority or minority, the number of formation attempts preceding formation of the cabinet, polarization of the parliament, and fractionalization of the parliament. Additionally, I use an exponential duration model in the knowledge that results are robust across different specifications (Alt and King, 1994: 198–200). Although not shown here, Alt and King's (1994: 199) results based on the full sample were replicated in the analysis. The results of the same model but for only the eight countries that have available factionalism scores are reported as model 1 in Table 2. The results are consistent with the full sample results with the exception of fractionalization, which

**Table 1.** Party factionalism scores by country

Country	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	No. of parties <sup>b</sup>
Canada	1.23	0.40	1.00	1.90	2
Denmark	0.31	0.35	0.00	1.10	4
France IV	2.29	0.37	1.37	3.40	5
Iceland	1.59	1.05	0.30	3.40	4
Ireland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3
Netherlands	2.24	0.12	2.03	2.49	5
Sweden	1.04	0.24	0.55	1.20	4
UK	2.01	1.54	0.60	3.60	2

<sup>a</sup> The mean factionalism score over all cabinets for each country.

<sup>b</sup> The number of (governing) parties coded by Janda for each country. The major parties are always coded; see Janda (1980) for details.

**Table 2.** Exponential survival models of cabinet duration

Explanatory variable	Model			
	1	2	3	4
Investiture	-.641** (.155)	-.684** (.157)	-.693** (.157)	-.710** (.159)
Post-election	.948** (.157)	.905** (.165)	.901** (.163)	.878** (.165)
Caretaker	-1.78** (.177)	-1.76** (.238)	-1.74** (.244)	-1.78** (.255)
Numerical status	.655** (.166)	.659** (.167)	.642** (.160)	.640** (.160)
Formation attempts	-.072** (.044)	-.059* (.045)	-.053 (.043)	
Polarization	-.033** (.010)	-.023** (.011)	-.020** (.008)	-.023** (.008)
Fractionalization	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)		
Factionalism		-.141** (.085)	-.149** (.085)	-.156** (.085)
Intercept	2.14** (.895)	2.65** (.901)	2.98** (.181)	2.94** (.181)
Log-likelihood	-488.87	-484.54	-484.59	-484.99

\*  $p \leq .10$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$  for one-tailed test of significance.

*Note:* Estimates are based on 155 observations. Estimated standard errors appear in parentheses under each coefficient. Twice the difference in log-likelihoods is distributed as a chi-square with the difference in the number of parameters as the degrees of freedom. Thus, model 1 compared to model 2 gives Prob ( $\chi^2_1 \geq 8.66$ ) = .01. Models 3 and 4 are not significantly different from model 2.



is not significantly different from 0 in the smaller sample. This is not problematic as King et al. (1990) and Alt and King (1994: 200) find that fractionalization is only marginally significant. Additionally, in a replication of King et al.'s (1990) results, Beck and Katz (1992: 27–32) find that based on several model selection criteria, the best model is one that excludes fractionalization.

Model 2 in Table 2 adds party factionalism to the analysis. The coefficient for factionalism is in the predicted negative direction and is significantly different from 0 at the .05 level (for a one-tailed test). Additionally, the log-likelihood value for model 2 is a significant improvement over that for model 1.<sup>9</sup> Models 3 and 4 drop the less significant variables; however, this has little impact on the overall model. On average, and all else being constant, a one-point increase in the level of factionalism in the cabinet leads to a 3.4 month decrease in expected cabinet duration.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, the inclusion of party factionalism considerably decreases the impact of formation attempts. Thus, it seems that inter-party bargaining difficulties are at least partially symptomatic of differences within parties. This finding, combined with the limited explanatory power of polarization and fractionalization, suggests that future work must pay more attention to the players involved in the coalition game (see Warwick, 1994).

## Discussion

This is a promising result as it is the first systematic cross-national evidence suggesting that parties are *not* unitary actors. Internal party characteristics are significant in determining coalition behavior; specifically, the more factionalized the parties in the cabinet, the shorter the cabinet's duration. This result demonstrates the importance of conducting further inquiries into the role of intra-party characteristics in coalition behavior.

Political parties vary in terms of structure, values and goals. These variations, in turn, determine party behavior. Future analyses of cabinet duration need to account for the impact of intra-party variables. Clearly, this can be done in a theoretical and empirically systematic manner. Likewise, as coalition formation models become more dynamic, it will be imperative to account for party variations. One step in this direction would be to flesh out the principal–agent model developed here. This would require a more rigorous theoretical framework, as well as more detailed data on party attributes.

In sum, recognition that coalition politics involve a dynamic interplay between and within parties will increase our understanding of coalition behavior. Indeed, 'what is really interesting and important about coalition government . . . may be left out by theories that cannot accommodate themselves to the processes of intraparty decision making' (Laver and Schofield, 1990; see also Daalder, 1983: 21).



## Notes

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- 1 This paper is generally focused on cabinet durability, but because in many cases the cabinet consists of a coalition between two or more parties, I use the words 'cabinet' and 'coalition' interchangeably.
- 2 A parallel literature on coalition behavior that is more descriptive and historical has paid greater attention to the importance of intra-party politics. For examples of this work, see Denters (1985) or Pridham (1986).
- 3 We can visualize cabinet termination as a process of reformation (see Lupia and Strøm, 1995).
- 4 Maor (1992, 1995) takes the opposite view. He argues that decentralized parties give activists an opportunity to voice concerns when they are dissatisfied whereas centralized parties only give the exit option. Furthermore, Maor argues that coalition participation invariably leads to dissatisfaction. Because the exit of activists threatens a party's survival, a centralized party will be forced to leave a coalition when dissatisfaction surfaces. In contrast, voice is not nearly so threatening and, thus, a decentralized party can remain in a coalition arrangement regardless of the dissatisfaction. The problem with this argument is that it fails to account for the costs and limited options of exit (i.e. a change in party allegiance), as well as the potential constraining effects of voice.
- 5 Ideally, investigation would take the form of measuring each party's level of factionalism and examining whether factionalism within the party is a prevalent cause of cabinet termination. However, this approach would require the construction of a coding scheme and actual coding of each party over time. Apart from the obvious dilemmas involved in this exercise (e.g. what defines a faction?), causes of cabinet termination would have to be coded. Past work on the causes of cabinet dissolution have focused on a finite number of causes and have not included intra-party determinants (e.g. Von Beyme, 1985: 375–406). An alternative approach, albeit less direct, is to use existing measures of these concepts.
- 6 In addition to these four measures, Janda (1980: 118–25) includes a measure of legislative cohesion and party purges. Because these are not direct measures of factionalism, they are not included (also, no parties in this study experienced any party purges).
- 7 Data are not available for Belgium, Finland, Israel, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain. Note that Italy is well known for both intra-party factionalism and short-lived cabinets, but it is not included here.
- 8 Certain small or recently formed parties are not included in Janda's data, and are left out of the calculation. Furthermore, uncoded variables are treated as missing. Note that the coding scheme uses thoroughly defined categories and, thus, it is not a strictly ordinal ranking but may approximate an interval scale.
- 9 Twice the difference in the log-likelihoods is distributed as a chi-square with the difference in the number of parameters as the degrees of freedom. Thus, model 1 compared to model 2 gives  $\text{Prob}(\chi^2_1 \geq 8.66) = .01$ .
- 10 This interpretation is based on the derivative method (King et al., 1990: 865–6)

assessed at the mean duration in the sample, which is 22 months. This gives  $-.156 \times 22 = 3.4$  (based on model 4). Similar calculations can be computed for each independent variable.

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