

# The Importance of Concurrence: The Impact of Bicameralism on Government Formation and Duration

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Recent research on parliamentary government demonstrates that institutions critically affect government formation and survival. Yet, surprisingly, virtually no work has explored the impact of *bicameralism* on coalitional politics, despite a burgeoning interest in the study of bicameral legislatures. Cabinet survival almost never depends on formal upper-chamber approval, but bicameralism does fundamentally shape policy outcomes. Therefore, coalition builders in bicameral systems might seek to obtain concurrent majorities in both chambers, to ensure that government policies pass into law. And governments with upper-chamber majority support should survive longer than those without. Examining data from 202 governments in ten countries, we find little evidence of bicameral effects on government formation, but strong support for the duration hypothesis—governments with upper-chamber majorities last substantially longer than those without. These results hold even in the face of variation in the constitutional powers and ideological compositions of upper chambers. Work on parliamentary government can no longer ignore the larger institutional context of bicameralism.

The defining feature of parliamentary government is that the executive branch (the cabinet) is chosen indirectly, by the people's elected representatives in the parliament. The parliament chooses the prime minister and other ministers of state and holds those cabinet members responsible for their actions by retaining the right to dismiss them at any time. And it is generally agreed that "parliament," in this formulation, refers to the popularly elected lower chamber alone. When political scientists build models to predict which governing coalitions<sup>1</sup> will form or how long they will endure, they invariably treat parliaments as if they were unicameral, despite the fact that "approximately one-third of the world's countries have bicameral legislatures" (Tsebelis and Money 1997, 1).<sup>2</sup> Does this simplification matter? Does bicameralism affect coalitional politics enough that theories that ignore it are incomplete?

Occasionally, the importance of bicameral majorities is brought into sharp relief. For example, in Italy in 1976, the Senate's (rare) constitutional

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<sup>1</sup>We are generally concerned with cabinet formation and duration, but because in many cases the cabinet consists of a coalition between two or more parties, we use the words "cabinet," "government," and "coalition" interchangeably (even though we include single party governments).

<sup>2</sup>Among the thirty-six "stable democracies" examined by Lijphart (1999, 212), twenty-two are currently bicameral.

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right of investiture doomed a government that lacked concurrent majorities (Ginsborg 1990, 402). In Japan after 1989 (Thies 2002) and in Ireland in 1994 (Coakley and Manning 1999, 200), the absence of upper-house majority support created serious policy-making problems for governments. And in 1999, Japan's LDP, which controlled a lower-house majority, created a coalition anyway, specifically to avoid the perils of parliamentary "divided government."

Yet, despite forty years of work on coalition formation and duration, as well as recent increased attention to bicameralism, no one has incorporated bicameralism into a theory of coalition behavior or empirically examined the impact of the upper chamber on coalition behavior.<sup>3</sup> Is this lack of attention justified? In this article, we address this question. This will not only have implications for the specific question of whether (and how) bicameralism influences coalition behavior, but also for the question of what motivates political parties in the first place. Our goal is to provide the first exploratory investigation into the effect of bicameralism on coalition behavior and to answer the question of whether it is appropriate to ignore upper chambers when studying coalition behavior.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review the literature on coalition government and make the case that bicameralism ought to matter for coalitional politics. We then use an original data set on upper-chamber support coalitions to test our two main hypotheses, about government formation and government survival, respectively. We also address the possibly complicating effects of variations in the "symmetry" and "congruence" of bicameralism (see Lijphart 1984). To anticipate, we find that coalition makers ignore the upper house at their peril: coalition governments that lack upper-chamber majorities are *significantly shorter lived* than those that enjoy such support, other things equal.

## Parliaments, Cabinets, and Bicameralism

The literature on cabinet formation and duration contains two identifiable strains, which derive from two distinct, albeit compatible, assumptions about what motivates politicians (Laver and Schofield 1990, 91; Strøm

1990a; Müller and Strøm 1999). *Office-seeking* approaches assume that parties seek to join governments and to share the spoils of office as narrowly as possible. Thus, these models predict that cabinets will be minimal winning (MW), so that the governing parties collectively control a majority of parliamentary seats, but only just so (e.g., von Neumann and Morgenstern 1953; Gamson 1961; Riker 1962; Dodd 1976). Early work on cabinet durability also examined variables derived from an office-seeking approach, including lower-house majority status, investiture requirements, and fragmentation of the party system (Strøm 1985; Laver 1998, 7).

These office-seeking approaches proved unsatisfactory, both because the prediction of an MW coalition is insufficient (in that a given distribution of partisan seat shares could produce several) and because the assumption that politicians care only about office seemed unjustifiably restrictive. Even if policy matters only because it allows office-seeking parties to pander to voters, it seemed logical that policy considerations ought to influence coalition formation and survival. Hence, *policy-aware* hypotheses predicted that cabinets would form only among parties ideologically adjacent to one another, or else of minimal ideological "range" (Axelrod 1970; De Swaan 1973).<sup>4</sup> The idea that drove these predictions was that cabinets containing ideologically similar parties would have an easier time striking bargains and would be less likely to fall apart over policy disagreements. On duration, Warwick (1992, 1994) shows that more ideologically compact cabinets endure longer.

While scholars continue to debate the relative importance of policy and office goals for parliamentary government,<sup>5</sup> they also have turned their attention to the question of how *institutional* structures affect parliamentary government. Institutional models examine how the details of the constitutionally mandated process for government formation and functioning, not to mention the larger institutional context, matter for which cabinets form and how long they last (see, e.g., Laver and Schofield 1990, 195–215; Strøm, Budge, and Laver 1994; De Winter 1995; Huber 1996; Mershon 1996; Grofman and Van Roozendaal 1997, 437; Martin and Stevenson 2001, 35–38). Variables such as the identity of the formateur, the presence of a formal vote of investiture, and the provisions for votes of no-confidence are

<sup>3</sup>The only exceptions we found are a few country-specific sources that make off-handed reference to how upper chambers might affect government functioning and survival (e.g., Lijphart 1984, 102–103; 2001, 199–200; Flores Juberías 1999, 286–287; Bergman 2000, 199; Saalfeld 2000, 38; Timmermans and Andeweg 2000, 290).

<sup>4</sup>Policy-seeking approaches such as these have become increasingly popular as data on party-policy positions have become available (e.g., Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Gabel and Huber 2000).

<sup>5</sup>Strøm and Müller explain, "The scholarly literature that examines political parties is enormous, and yet our systematic knowledge of party objectives and behavior is still quite modest" (1999, 5).

now recognized as constraining the choices of coalition builders and affecting the lifespan of governments. Furthermore, the costs and benefits of participation for parties were shown to be affected by such variables as the electoral rules (how accountable are governments to voters?) and the powers of parliamentary committees (how much extra influence does cabinet participation imply?).

In sum, there exists a consensus that (1) parties are motivated, at least to some extent, by policy, and (2) institutional detail matters for the functioning of parliamentary government. Given these two points of agreement, we find it remarkable that virtually no work on cabinet formation or duration has considered the influence of *bicameralism*. For example, in their extensive survey of the various institutions that might affect cabinet formation, Strøm, Budge, and Laver (1994) do *not* include bicameralism. Also, the recent stream of work on bicameralism does not explicitly consider its importance for cabinet formation or survival (see, e.g., Money and Tsebelis 1992; Riker 1992; Tsebelis and Money 1997, 1–2; Diermeier and Myerson 1999). All references in the coalitions literature to majority status in legislatures focus narrowly on the lower houses, with no attention to whether or not governments also enjoy majority support in upper chambers (see, e.g., Strøm 1990b). This is so, despite mounting evidence that upper chambers—even those with few formal powers—can and do affect policy (Hammond and Miller 1987; Tsebelis and Money 1997; Heller 1997, 2001; Thies 1998; Lijphart 1999).

Now, if the *only* reason that a parliamentary government aims for a *lower-house* majority is to survive a vote of investiture, or to guard against a vote of no-confidence, both of which powers are usually exclusive to lower houses, this one-chamber tunnel vision might be justified. However, if part of the desirability of a lower-house majority is because that majority is expected to provide the legislative votes for the cabinet's policy program, then the potential impact of bicameralism looms larger.<sup>6</sup>

Unless the cabinet can be sure that its proposals will garner majority support in *both* houses, it will be unable to enact policy (at least without some difficulty) and might soon be in crisis. A government unable to pass legislation will not survive for long. From this it follows that the anticipation of having to negotiate concurrent majorities ought to affect the formation of the coalition in the first instance and the longevity of the coalition in the second. *If policy matters to politicians, and if the upper house of parliament matters for policy, then the coalition's (major-*

*ity or minority) status in the upper house ought to affect government functioning (cabinet formation and duration).*

It is likely that the inattention to bicameralism in theories of parliamentary government is symptomatic of a general inattention to policy making in parliamentary systems. Even "policy aware" models of government formation assume away the actual post-formation process of converting cabinet preferences into law. The cabinet, one must infer, simply imposes its preferences until such time as it either breaks up or loses a vote of no confidence. This gap can be explained if the implicit theory of policy making underlying all these models is taken to be some form of what Laver and Shepsle (1996) call "ministerial government." That is, if the only job of the lower-house majority is to serve as an electoral college for the cabinet and if the cabinet is then delegated the task of making and implementing policy (with anything that requires legislative approval simply rubber-stamped by a passive parliament), then the formal legislative authority of an upper house, if one exists, is a moot point.

In what follows, we crack open the black box of parliamentary policy making to determine whether or not bicameralism matters for cabinet formation and durability. To the extent that politicians and parties really do care about policy, and parliaments really do participate in policy making, we ought to find that bicameralism matters. Specifically, we expect: (1) that cabinets with surplus support in one house generally need the surplus party or parties to ensure a majority in the other house,<sup>7</sup> and (2) that cabinets that control an upper-chamber majority will survive longer than those that do not (the lack of an upper-chamber majority should make policy making more difficult, thereby making cabinets less stable). Notice that these hypotheses make no mention of the partisan or ideological congruence of the two chambers (instead focusing on numerical status), or of variations in the powers of the upper chamber (see Lijphart 1984, 1999; Tsebelis and Money 1997). We will turn to an empirical examination of these concepts (in the context of cabinet survival) below.

To summarize—despite the fact that most upper chambers do not enjoy the privilege of voting on formal investiture votes, and may not topple governments through votes of no-confidence, upper chambers with the constitutional authority to obstruct cabinet policy proposals should influence the origin and survival of cabinets. Null findings—that bicameralism does not matter

<sup>6</sup>This would be true even if cabinet members care about policy only because they can use it to retain office.

<sup>7</sup>We refer to this as the Lijphart-Sjölin hypothesis since both authors predict that coalition builders will add surplus parties in the lower chamber in order to obtain an upper chamber majority (Lijphart 1984, 104; Sjölin 1993, 102; also see Verzichelli and Cotta 2000, 445).

for cabinet formation or for cabinet duration—would be surprising, but no less interesting. If the evidence shows that cabinet formation and duration are unaffected by the presence of an upper house, then one must wonder whether politicians care much about policy. Null findings would tend to support policy-blind theories of cabinet behavior, those that posit politicians and parties who are interested in office for its own sake.<sup>8</sup>

## Data and Analyses

Our analyses require us to combine detailed information on cabinets with data on party membership in upper chambers. For the cabinet data, we used Warwick's (1992, 1994) dataset, which covers cabinets in sixteen Western European parliamentary democracies for the entire post-war period until 1989.<sup>9</sup> We faced a much more difficult task in obtaining data on upper-chamber party composition. To the best of our knowledge, no one has constructed a comprehensive cross-national data set on upper-chamber party composition (although see Heller 2001 for some related data). Thus, we turned to a variety of country specific sources and were able to assemble time-series upper-chamber party composition data from ten parliamentary systems: Austria, Belgium, Denmark (1945–1953), France IV (1946–1958), Germany, Ireland (1973–1989), Italy, the Netherlands, Spain (1979–1989), and Sweden (1945–1970).<sup>10</sup> We added these data to

<sup>8</sup>Alternatively, a null finding might bolster the “ministerial government” model, as it could be interpreted as showing that bicameralism does not matter because parliaments are merely (unicameral) electoral colleges.

<sup>9</sup>We follow Warwick's (1992, 337; 1994, 32) preference for defining governments as including parties in the cabinet and parties who enter formal alliances with the cabinet or publicly declare their support. Warwick states that to ignore these support parties is to “elevate a formal or legal criterion over empirical reality” (1994, 122). We also followed Warwick's preference in defining a government as ending when an election occurs, the head of government changes, the party membership of the government changes, or the government resigns (regardless of if the resignation was accepted by the head of state). For other data details, see Warwick (1994).

<sup>10</sup>We exclude Norway and Iceland because for purposes of cabinet formation and dissolution, their parliaments operate as unicameral. Also, Finland, Luxembourg, and Portugal are unicameral. All upper-chamber data refer to the government's status at the point of formation. Details on data sources are available upon request. Note that Denmark abolished its upper chamber in 1953, and Sweden did the same in 1970. Finally, we were unable to find reliable data on party composition in the Irish Senate prior to 1973 because the party affiliations of the nonelected members are unclear (personal communication with John Coakley, 2/28/01). When we include speculative compositions based on Garvin (1969, 35–37), the results reported below do not change.

Warwick's data, resulting in a combined data set of 202 governments from ten countries.<sup>11</sup>

We present our main results in three parts. First, we analyze the numerical strengths of governments in both lower and upper chambers. Second, we investigate the possibility that governments include surplus parties in the lower chamber in order to obtain a majority in the upper chamber. Third, we examine how the upper-chamber majority status of governments affects cabinet durability. We then discuss the influence of the strength and ideological/partisan bent of the upper chamber (relative to that of the lower chamber) on cabinet survival.

## Government Status in Lower and Upper Chambers

We begin by reporting the number and percentages of all governments of the various “types” in each chamber. Table 1 shows that 14 percent of our 202 governments were minorities in both chambers, 20 percent were minimal winning in both chambers, and 38 percent were oversized in both chambers.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, then, 72 percent of governments had the same numerical status in both chambers. An even more impressive figure along these lines is that the correlation between the number of government seats in the lower and upper chamber is .940 ( $p < .01$ ). It also is worth noting that, as expected, governments were significantly more likely to have a majority than a minority in either or both chambers.

The strong correspondence between lower- and upper-chamber status suggests that we might not find much of an independent effect of upper-chamber status on cabinet behavior. Yet, Table 1 also reveals two intriguing deviations from the general trend of numerical status concurrence. First, 10 percent of governments are minimal winning in the lower chamber and oversized in the upper chamber (MW-oversized), while only 2 percent are of the reverse type (oversized-MW). This raises the question of whether or not parties are added to cabinets to ensure a majority in one chamber even though the addition results in oversized status in the other chamber. We investigate this next by looking at the

<sup>11</sup>When possible, we replicated analyses with data from Müller and Strøm (2000), which includes cabinets well into the 1990s. These additional data leave our substantive results generally intact. Also, like Warwick, our analyses include single party governments (which constitute about 19 percent of the sample).

<sup>12</sup>These percentages report the percentage of governments with the given statuses out of all governments; they are cell percentages. We report only the aggregate numbers in Table 1. Country-specific data from Table 1, and all other tables and discussion are available from the authors.

**TABLE 1** Lower Chamber Numerical Status by Upper Chamber Numerical Status

	Lower Chamber Minority	Lower Chamber Minimal Winning	Lower Chamber Oversized	Total
Upper Chamber Minority	28 (14%)	12 (6%)	0 (0%)	40 (20%)
Upper Chamber Minimal Winning	18 (9%)	41 (20%)	4 (2%)	63 (31%)
Upper Chamber Oversized	2 (1%)	21 (10%)	76 (38%)	99 (49%)
Total	48 (24%)	74 (36%)	80 (40%)	202 (100%)

importance of each member party in every government under consideration.

The other notable deviation is that 16 percent of governments (thirty-two in all) hold only a minority of seats in one chamber but not the other. Twenty of these governments are minority in the lower chamber but not the upper chamber, and the other twelve are minority in the upper chamber but not the lower chamber. Thus, a total of 30 percent of governments fail to command concurrent majorities.

These minority-majority variations may not be overwhelming in frequency, but they suggest an interesting possibility. It is well established that a government's majority status in the lower chamber plays an important role in determining the duration of the government, with majority governments surviving longer (e.g., Strøm 1985; King et al. 1990; Warwick 1992, 352–353; 1994, 67–72, 121). This makes sense, since holding a majority in the lower chamber makes a government less vulnerable to defeat by the parliamentary opposition. A cohesive lower-house majority can defeat motions of no-confidence and pass government legislation, despite the best efforts of opposition parties.

A related question is whether the numerical status of the governing coalition in the upper house (majority or minority) also affects government survival. Of course, the dynamic here would be different than that in the lower chamber—in nearly all cases upper chambers cannot censure governments directly, but they can affect governmental policy-making efforts in important ways. Thus, if government parties are at all policy-seeking, even as a means to retain office, then failure to secure concurrent majorities may impede the policy-making process, resulting in problems that cause government termination.

### Party Status in Lower and Upper Chambers

In this section, we examine more closely evidence for the proposition that governments add parties that generate

an oversized cabinet in one chamber (e.g., the lower chamber) in order to ensure a majority in the other chamber (e.g., the upper chamber). Lijphart (1984, 104) and Sjölin (1993, 102) suggest that governments might add an extra or surplus party in the lower chamber—making the government oversized—in order to obtain an upper-chamber majority (also see Verzichelli and Cotta 2000, 445). The implication is that parties that are surplus in the lower chamber will be necessary in the upper chamber. Table 1 raises some initial doubt about this hypothesis since only 2 percent of governments we examined were surplus in the lower chamber and minimal winning in the upper chamber. However, Table 1 by itself is insufficient to test the Lijphart-Sjölin hypothesis because the aggregate nature of the data prevents us from recognizing cases in which an oversized-oversized cabinet has different surplus parties in each chamber.<sup>13</sup> If this were the case, then there would be evidence consistent with the Lijphart-Sjölin hypothesis.

To check for this possibility, we classified each party in our sample as being “necessary,” “surplus,” or “nonexistent” in each chamber. A party is “necessary” if its removal results in the cabinet's support coalition shifting from a majority in the chamber to a minority, or if the cabinet is already of minority status. A party is “surplus” if its removal does not change the majority status of a majority coalition. A party is “nonexistent” if it holds no

<sup>13</sup> Suppose a three-party coalition A-B-C in which party A controls 30 percent of lower-chamber seats and 32 percent in the upper chamber, party B has 5 and 20 percent, respectively, and party C has 21 and 9 percent. A coalition of parties A and B would enjoy an upper-house majority, but would fall short in the lower house, while the opposite would be true of an A-C coalition. Thus, while the three-party A-B-C government is oversized in both houses, the “surplus” party in each house is necessary in the other house. No party can be jettisoned without losing at least one chamber majority (obviously, dumping party A would result in a bicameral minority government), so in a sense, we might call such governments “bicameral minimal-winning coalitions.” As it turns out, these are exceedingly rare phenomena, at least in the countries we examine here.

**TABLE 2** Classifying Parties in Governments

	Necessary in Lower Chamber			Surplus in Lower Chamber			Total Number of parties
	Necessary in Upper Chamber	Surplus in Upper Chamber	No Seats in Upper Chamber	Necessary in Upper Chamber	Surplus in Upper Chamber	No Seats in Upper Chamber	
Number of Parties	306 (49%)	47 (8%)	34 (5%)	9 (1%)	184 (30%)	44 (7%)	624 (100%)

seats in the chamber (this only occurs in the upper chamber).<sup>14</sup> Table 2 reports the (aggregate) number and percentage of parties of each type of status in the two chambers.

Table 2 shows that a vast majority of parties are one of two types—49 percent are necessary in both chambers while 30 percent are surplus in both chambers. We can confidently *reject* the Lijphart-Sjölin proposition that oversized coalitions are formed in the lower house in order to obtain minimal-winning coalitions in the upper house, since only nine of 624 parties (1.4 percent) are surplus in the lower chamber but necessary in the upper chamber. The other 228 lower-chamber surplus parties are either surplus in the upper chamber as well or else hold no seats in the upper chamber. More generally, this result means that upper-chamber considerations do not explain lower-chamber surplus governments.<sup>15</sup>

We also found that *all* of the oversized-oversized governments can be classified as “bicameral oversized,” meaning that they all could dispense with at least one party and still maintain concurrent majorities.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the table offers evidence that some parties are added to coalitions because they are necessary in the lower chamber, though surplus in the upper chamber (8 percent of parties fit this scenario). This is the converse of the Lijphart-Sjölin prediction and is not too surprising, since the costs of oversized status in the upper chamber (in terms of, say, distribution of portfolios) are less clear. Overall, then, we find scant evidence of a direct effect of bicameralism on the process of cabinet formation.

<sup>14</sup>These computations assume that all other parties remain in the cabinet.

<sup>15</sup>This is despite the fact that bicameral systems seem to generate oversized governments more often than unicameral systems. In Warwick's full sample, oversized cabinets make up 35 percent of governments in (the lower house of) bicameral systems whereas they make up 25 percent of cabinets in unicameral systems.

<sup>16</sup>An interesting tangential question is if these surplus-surplus parties receive discounted payoffs.

### Upper-Chamber Status and Government Survival

In Table 1, we found that 10 percent of governments had minority status in lower chamber but not the upper chamber, 6 percent had minority status in the upper chamber but not the lower chamber, and 14 percent were minority in both. As discussed, such variations in numerical status may affect government survival. The hypothesis that we test is that holding a majority in the upper chamber will increase the duration of the government, other things equal, as holding a majority presumably facilitates policy making.

We examine this hypothesis by incorporating upper-chamber status into the standard model of government survival, as established by Warwick (1992, 345; 1994). This model shows that the following variables affect government survival (Diermeier and Stevenson 1999, 1062): *Majority Status in the Lower Chamber*, with majority cabinets expected to last longer; the *Post-election status* of the cabinet, with cabinets formed immediately after an election expected to last longer; an *Investiture Vote* requirement, with cabinets in countries that require an investiture vote expected to collapse sooner; *Returnability* (the proportion of government parties that return to power after a termination), with cabinets in countries with higher levels of returnability expected to collapse sooner; and the *Left-Right (ideological) Diversity*, *Clerical-Secular Diversity*, and *Regime-Support Diversity* of the cabinet, respectively, with more diverse cabinets in any of these senses expected to collapse sooner.

To this model, we add a dummy variable indicating whether or not the government controlled a majority of seats in the upper chamber.<sup>17</sup> We present our results in

<sup>17</sup>We do not include time-varying economic variables (Warwick 1994) because our goal is to estimate the causal effect of upper-chamber majority status at the time of cabinet formation. Alt and King (1994, 209) advise that this goal means we should not include time-varying covariates since these variables may be a consequence of characteristics at the point of formation. They state that “models incorporating time-varying covariates are irrelevant to the goal of creating ex ante forecasts and causal estimates (see King 1991); indeed, including them will destroy the desirable properties of all of the ex ante causal effects” (also see King 1991, 1050).

**TABLE 3** Upper Chamber Cabinet Support and Government Survival<sup>§</sup>

Covariates	Data Set		
	Warwick's 12 Countries + Spain	Our 10 Bicameral Countries	Our 10 Bicameral Countries
Majority Status in Lower Chamber	-1.75** (.24)	-2.06** (.29)	-1.89** (.29)
Post-Election	-.60** (.19)	-.89** (.23)	-.84** (.23)
Investiture Vote	.69** (.18)	.83** (.24)	.82** (.24)
Returnability	1.76** (.54)	1.77* (.95)	1.27 (.87)
Left-Right Diversity	.33** (.12)	.33* (.15)	.32* (.15)
Clerical-Secular Diversity	.16** (.06)	.19** (.08)	.30** (.08)
Regime-Support Diversity	.17** (.06)	.10* (.06)	.11* (.06)
<b>Majority Status In Upper Chamber</b>	—	—	<b>-.83** (.29)</b>
Log Likelihood	-859.09	-592.17	-588.28
Number of cases	288	197	197

§ Coefficients yield the increase to the hazard of a coalition failing (interpretation in text).

Note: Estimated (robust) standard errors appear in parentheses under each coefficient. \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ .

Table 3. We analyze the data using Cox's partial-likelihood method, and Warwick's (1994, 29, 118) preferred censoring regime.<sup>18</sup> In interpreting the coefficients, recall that dependent variable is the hazard rate, which refers to the risk that a government will terminate at a particular point in time, given that it has not yet fallen. Higher hazard rates (positive coefficients) mean higher risk and thus shorter durations.

The first model in Table 3, using the same twelve countries as Warwick uses (1992, 345; 1994, 65) plus Spain,<sup>19</sup> basically replicates Warwick (1992, 345; 1994) and Diermeier and Stevenson (1999) and confirms the aforementioned hypotheses.<sup>20</sup> The second model repeats the analysis, but this time only on data from the ten bicameral countries in our sample.<sup>21</sup> It is reassuring that

<sup>18</sup>Results are robust to using alternative survival models.

<sup>19</sup>Warwick's (1992, 341; 1994, 55–56) analysis excludes Finland, Iceland, Portugal, and Spain due to missing data. We were able to add data for bicameral Spain (details available upon request); however, note that our results in Table 3 are robust to excluding Spain altogether.

<sup>20</sup>Significance levels are from one-tailed tests, since we have clear directional predictions (Blalock 1979, 163).

<sup>21</sup>The number of cases drops from 202 (as reported in the previous tables) to 197 because the left-right ideological diversity measure is not available for five early governments.

the substantive results remain largely unchanged. The third model adds to the analysis the dummy variable of interest to us: upper-chamber numerical status (majority or minority). As predicted, upper-chamber status is negative and highly significant (at the .005 level).<sup>22</sup> That the effect attains statistical significance is particularly impressive given the high degree of correspondence (congruence) between status in each chamber. Moreover, the result is robust to adding country dummy variables to the equation (and to several other robustness checks).<sup>23</sup>

Substantively, the coefficients can be interpreted as follows (see Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997). We can say that at a given time,  $t$ , there is a 56.4 percent decrease

<sup>22</sup>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, the model with upper-chamber status compared to model without it gives  $\text{Prob}(\chi^2_1 \geq 7.77) = .005$ —a significant improvement.

<sup>23</sup>The results are robust to the inclusion of a full set of country dummies or just one at a time. The results also are robust to the exclusion of one case at a time. So "odd" cases such as Italy (where the Senate may vote confidence), and Germany (where the Bundesrat represents the Länder and can shift in partisan control unpredictably) neither drive the results nor attenuate them in any significant way. For the sake of brevity, we do not show these results here, but these and other robustness checks are available from the authors upon request.

in the hazard rate when a government has a majority in the upper chamber relative to when it controls only a minority of seats. This is approximately the same decrease that comes about from a shift in post-election status (56.6 percent) and also compares to an 84.9 percent change due to different lower-house status. So while an upper-house majority is not as crucial for government survival as is a lower-house majority, it is nonetheless a highly salient factor.

Interestingly, if we parse the data and run the analysis twice—once for governments that have a majority in the lower chamber and once for governments that have a minority in the lower chamber—we find that upper-chamber status only has a significant effect in lower-chamber majority situations (although it is marginally significant in minority situations). This suggests that upper-chamber majority status does not counteract the well-known life-shortening effect of lower-chamber minority status (an intuitively pleasing finding), as much as affects survival when there is a lower-chamber majority.

### On the Congruence and Symmetry of Bicameralism

We have argued that, in the presence of bicameralism, governments will have an easier time passing their policy programs if they control concurrent majorities in both chambers. But political scientists have shown that bicameralism is not a dichotomous variable—merely present or absent. Rather, upper chambers vary along at least two dimensions. First, their legislative powers range from the purely ceremonial to complete symmetry with those of the lower chamber. Second, whatever the strength of the upper house, it is worth asking how likely the upper house is to disagree with the policy preferences of the lower house (how congruent are the two chambers in terms of partisan or ideological composition?). Bicameralism, the argument goes, is of greater consequence the more *symmetric* and the more *incongruent* the two chambers (Lijphart 1984; Tsebelis and Rasch 1995, 372). We examine these alternative hypotheses—focusing on government survival—by first looking at congruence and then looking at symmetry.

**Congruence.** A number of scholars characterize bicameral legislature in terms of partisan or ideological congruence—that is, the degree to which the two chambers have similar partisan or ideological compositions (these are continuous measures, as compared to our dichotomous majority-minority measures). Not surprisingly given Table 1, we find a high degree of partisan and ideological congruence in our sample—the seat share of the

average party differs by only 3.1 percent across chambers, with a standard deviation of 2.5 percent.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, we find that the two chambers had the same median *ideological* score nearly 65 percent of the time.<sup>25</sup>

The motivation for focusing on these types of congruence lies in the expectation that greater incongruence will increase policy disagreements between the two chambers, resulting in a potentially meddlesome upper chamber (e.g., Lijphart 1984, 99; 1999, 211–212; Tsebelis and Rasch 1995, 372; Tsebelis and Money 1997; Heller 2001). It follows from this that incongruent upper chambers might be more likely to have an independent effect on government survival, specifically, a life-shortening one.<sup>26</sup> We have downplayed the importance of these conceptions of congruence, however, because we do not expect them to matter for government survival. This may be surprising given the demonstrated importance of ideological divergence within the government in affecting government formation and survival (e.g., Warwick 1994). The logic there is that governments with smaller ideological divisions will have an easier time passing policies, and thus, will be more likely to form and last—major ideological divisions within the government can make compromise impossible.

The same logic does not apply to partisan or ideological divisions *across* chambers, however. To see why, consider the fact that even if the government maintains concurrent majorities, ideological divergence *within* that government majority can create problems for policy making. Moreover, when ideological disagreements surface between coalition partners, each partner maintains an exit option, which results in the downfall of the government. This stands in stark contrast to ideological or partisan divergence *across* chambers. If the government maintains an upper-chamber majority, then the government also controls policy making in the upper chamber.<sup>27</sup> The ideological or partisan differences between chambers become

<sup>24</sup>We measure *partisan* congruence with the formula:  $(\sum_{i=1}^n |UpperShare_i - LowerShare_i|)/n$ , where  $UpperShare_i$  is party  $i$ 's seat share in the upper chamber,  $LowerShare_i$  is party  $i$ 's seat share in the lower chamber, and  $n$  is the total number of parties (see Heller 2001, 47 for a similar conceptualization).

<sup>25</sup>Our ideology scores capture the left-right policy dimension; data come from the European Manifesto Project.

<sup>26</sup>We focus on government survival because incongruent chambers, the argument goes, can create policy-making problems which can affect survival. Congruence is less relevant to questions of government formation because at the point of formation congruence is invariant—that is, parties cannot affect the degree of congruence by choosing different coalition partners.

<sup>27</sup>As Heller states, “a party or coalition can better achieve its ideological policy goals if it controls a majority in both chambers” (2001, 39).



inconsequential because the government presumably can control policy, and this is why majority status is so important. In essence, ideological dispersion *outside* of the government (majority) is less important. By contrast, when a government *lacks* an upper-chamber majority, the upper chamber is more likely to wreak policy-making havoc, since its ideological or partisan preferences will likely differ from those of the government. Even in this case, however, it may be difficult to detect an effect for fairly subtle variations in the degree of divergence (controlling for majority status) since the lack of an exit option makes the impact indirect. In sum, we argue that for the purposes of government behavior, it is the numerical status (minority or majority) of the government in the upper chamber and *not* partisan or ideological congruence that matters.

Of course this is ultimately an empirical question, and we examined it by reestimating the final model from Table 3 in two ways, adding a different measure of congruence each time.<sup>28</sup> We also tried interacting each measure of congruence with our dummy variable for upper-house majority status. Consistent with our expectations, in no specification did any measure of congruence or any interaction with congruence attain statistical significance, or even come close. And, in no case did inclusion of a congruence measure weaken our finding about the importance of upper-house majority status, *per se*, for government duration.<sup>29</sup> While this does not mean that partisan or ideological congruence never matters for any type of policy (see, e.g., Heller 2001), it highlights the importance of carefully *operationalizing* different conceptions of upper-chamber and lower-chamber interests.

**Symmetry.** Upper chambers vary in terms of their power to legislate—ranging from cases of symmetry (where the upper chamber has virtually the same powers as the lower chamber) to cases of extreme asymmetry (Lijphart 1984, 1999). An obvious question is whether upper chambers with more formal powers (over legislation, or even investiture and confidence) have a greater impact on government survival. Of particular interest to us is whether upper-chamber numerical status has a greater impact in countries with more powerful upper chambers. To gauge the variations in the strength of our upper chambers, we

<sup>28</sup>The first measure was the (average) summed absolute value of cross-chamber differences in party seat shares, as described in footnote 24. The second measure is the difference in the ideological scores of the median party in each chamber, using left-right data from the European Manifesto Project.

<sup>29</sup>Results of these tests are not shown here, but are available upon request.

turned to the constitutional documents for each country, supplemented by the secondary literature.<sup>30</sup>

Among our ten cases, we found five examples of perfect or near perfect symmetrical bicameralism. The Italian Senate, the Swedish Landsting (until 1970), and the Danish Landsting (until 1953) were all coequal with their respective lower houses.<sup>31</sup> Next on our list come Germany and Belgium. In both of these parliaments, the upper chambers are coequal on some legislation—mostly that pertaining to the federal units in each country—but inferior to the lower chambers on other bills.<sup>32</sup> In the Netherlands, the upper chamber may veto any manner of legislation it dislikes, but its power is only negative and only of the “package” variety—it has no power of proposal or amendment. The Spanish Senate may express opposition, and offer amendments, but the lower house ultimately decides the final form of the bill.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the

<sup>30</sup>As far as we know for our time period, other than the reforms in Sweden and Denmark, which eliminated their upper chambers altogether, the only noticeable change over time in upper-house powers occurred in the French Fourth Republic (1946–1958), which saw a mild strengthening of the upper chamber around 1954.

<sup>31</sup>The Italian Senate even shares the powers of investiture and confidence with the Chamber of Deputies. In Denmark and Sweden, this power does not come up. Formally, these countries were quasi-presidential, with the King enjoying the formal right to veto legislation. In practice, especially by the twentieth century, the Swedish and Danish kings always deferred to their cabinets, but this could explain why there were no formal rules for investiture or confidence. In both cases, the cabinet was chosen by the King (albeit with recommendations from parliament), but the change to real parliamentarism (and a ceremonial monarch) was gradual, apparently, and done without benefit of formal constitutional amendments. On the eve of the constitutional elimination of Sweden’s upper house, Board wrote:

In general, it is fair to conclude that the Swedish system has been moving from separation of powers toward the British system for some time. . . . One of the main obstacles to a more complete assimilation of British practice may be the existence of *two equally powerful chambers* in the Riksdag. . . . The relationship between the Government and its support in Parliament is also unclear under the present practice. *At present, it is not quite clear whether the continuance of a Government depends on control of the Lower House alone or on a preponderance of votes in both Houses taken together. . . . there is no provision for a vote of censure. . . . Under the proposed new constitution . . . it will be possible for the Riksdag to move a vote of no confidence against the Government.* (1970, 171; emphasis added)

<sup>32</sup>Lijphart (1999, 212) ranks Italian bicameralism as somewhat less important than the German variety; however, this is due to its congruence and not the Senate’s powers *per se*.

<sup>33</sup>According to Article 90 of the Spanish constitution, the Senate may veto or amend lower-house bills within two months, by absolute majority vote. But the lower house may then override this veto with an absolute majority vote of its own. If the Senate takes no

Austrian, French, and Irish upper chambers are relatively weak. Their only formal power over legislation is to delay government or lower-house bills (eight weeks in Austria, two months in France IV, and ninety days in Ireland).

Rather than pretend that the above ordinal ranking of upper-chamber strength implies any sort of cardinality (we know that the Italian Senate is stronger than the Austrian one, but we have no reason to assign a numerical value to the difference), we take the conservative route and code our countries according to types of power: (in ascending order of importance) the power to delay, the power to veto, and the power to propose alternatives that the lower house must consider. Although the German and Belgian upper houses are not coequal on all bills, they are equal on enough bills during the life of a government to be coded as having both veto and agenda-setting authority, together with Italy, Sweden, and Denmark (also see Lijphart 1999, 212). The Dutch upper house has veto authority only, and Spain, Austria, France IV, and Ireland are coded as having neither veto nor agenda-setting authority.

To see if upper-chamber majority status is more important in countries with more powerful upper chambers, we again reran the final model from Table 3, adding a dummy variable for agenda-setting power (and then veto power) and interacting the dummy(ies) with our dummy variable for upper-chamber majority status. We also ran interactions with the ideological and partisan congruence variables described above. In none of these specifications did we find any extra influence of upper-chamber powers on government survival, and in no specification did the inclusion of these extra variables affect in any substantial way our core finding, that upper-house majority status matters.<sup>34</sup> Apparently, the importance of having an upper-chamber majority is not contingent on the specific powers of the upper chamber.

These supplementary findings are consistent with the arguments of Tsebelis and Money (1997) and Heller (2001) that bicameralism matters even when the upper chamber is relatively weak and generally congruent with the lower house (also see Lijphart 1999, 211–213). An upper house with the power to delay, and to make public pronouncements, may be able to embarrass the government, even if it cannot actually stop or amend bills that it

dislikes. The government, as a result, might preemptively alter bills to avoid such problems or might be obliged to resign early if the public is persuaded by the upper chamber's protestations.<sup>35</sup> None of the upper chambers we examined were precluded from interrogating government ministers or demanding documentation from the government. So, upper chambers are generally provided the wherewithal to discuss government policy decisions before they become law and to make their views known to the public to the extent they care to. Some upper houses may in fact be little more than "advisory bodies," but that does not necessarily make them irrelevant to either government decisions or government survival.

## Discussion

We began with the intuition that the presence of an upper house ought to affect governmental policy making, and, insofar as policy matters to politicians, the origin and survival of governments as well. We have found that governments that manage to command concurrent majorities *last longer* than governments with only minority support in the upper house, other things equal. We interpret this finding as supportive of the notion that policy-making success affects the longevity of governments in parliamentary systems, and we infer that politicians *ought* to pay attention to upper-house exigencies when constructing their governments in the first place. This is consistent with the assumption that policy concerns motivate party behavior (e.g., Strøm 1990a; Warwick 1994).

However, other than confirming that most governments do in fact command concurrent majorities, we find little indication that cabinet makers anticipate the importance of upper-house policy preferences by purposefully building coalitions that control both chambers. More to the point, taking account of the distribution of partisan strength in upper chambers does not seem to add much to our ability to predict which coalitions will *form*. For example, contrary to the Lijphart-Sjölin hypothesis, oversized coalitions (in terms of lower-house support) cannot be explained by the need to cobble together upper-house majorities.

This is an odd combination of findings. After all, since concurrence is beneficial for government survival,

action for two months, the lower house need only reaffirm its support for its own bill with a simple majority. Finally, the lower house may veto or accept upper-house amendments by simple majority vote, and its decision is final.

<sup>34</sup>Results of these tests are not shown here, but are available upon request.

<sup>35</sup>On the importance of public opinion for government survival, see Lupia and Strøm (1995), Laver and Shepsle (1998), Martin (2001); also see Flores Juberías (1999, 286–287) on the Spanish Senate and public opinion.

why don't coalition-builders go out of their way to ensure upper-house majorities? Perhaps the costs, in terms of the payoffs to the extra parties, are not worth the extra days in office. Or perhaps, à la Strøm's (1990b) analysis of minority governments, the failure to put together concurrent majorities is because the marginal parties themselves prefer to remain outside the government. Clearly, there are several factors that help to explain whether a government is minority, MW, or oversized (e.g., consociational concerns in places like Belgium or the Netherlands), and really all we have shown in the case of government formation is that the goal of concurrent majorities does not trump these other factors. But we have also shown the importance of concurrence: it extends the life of governments.

The present study represents only a first step in the investigation of bicameralism and coalition politics. We can imagine several avenues for further research, beginning with an expansion of the dataset.<sup>36</sup> Second, we are in the process of extending the analysis of government formation to take account of the potential coalitions that were *not* chosen, to determine whether or not bicameral considerations mattered (see Martin and Stevenson 2001). For instance, if what it takes to construct concurrent majorities is to violate connectedness, then we can determine which principle is more important, and under what conditions.

Third, we argued that governments that lack upper-house majority control would find it difficult to pass bills, and would collapse more quickly as a result. Of course, short of collapse, governments might react to upper-house minority status by altering their draft legislation to pick up the extra votes they need. Our results show that this sort of policy adaptation will not completely counteract the life-shortening effects of upper-chamber minority status, but it might help, and a proper test would require an examination of the legislative histories of bills. Finally, one might relax the parties-as-unitary-actors assumption (Druckman 1996), to take account of inter-chamber partisan differences, including the ability of the lower-house party caucuses to control the behavior of their upper-house members (Heller 2001). If party discipline weakens in the face of bicameralism, then surplus governments might result to counter the uncertainty of upper-chamber support.

Bicameralism does in fact affect coalitional politics. The main implication of this article is that work on par-

liamentary government that ignores the larger institutional context of bicameralism—as virtually all work over the last forty years has done—may do so at its peril.

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<sup>36</sup>It would be particularly interesting to add Canada (with its appointed upper house), and Australia, whose 1975 constitutional crisis over bicameralism is well studied (see Lijphart 1984, 102–103; 2001).

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