COALITION GOVERNMENT

IN BRITAIN:

LESSONS FROM OVERSEAS

Ben Seyd

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What strategies are open to, and used by, minority governments to secure their legislative programme?

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This report examines these, and other important, issues associated with the transition from single party to coalition government. The research is based on study visits undertaken in four overseas countries: Denmark, Germany, Ireland and New Zealand. Across these locations, a total of seventy interviews were carried out with government ministers, other politicians, civil servants, political advisers and commentators.

The aim of the report is to extend the awareness among policy makers in the UK of the methods by which coalitions in other countries are formed, operate and terminate. The report both describes and evaluates these arrangements, with a view to enhancing knowledge and identifying possible options for policy reform in the UK. Readers who want a brief precis of the findings and recommendations for each set of issues set out above will find them in the 'Conclusion' at the end of each chapter. A short policy briefing on the issues contained in this report is also available, from the Constitution Unit.

INTRODUCTION

The distinction between single party and coalition government

The United Kingdom has, for a long time, been one of the main exemplars of the 'majoritarian' system of democracy. The principal feature of this model is that executive power tends to be held by a single party and not shared between parties (Lijphart, 1999). By contrast, governments in many other countries are formed by two or more parties in coalition. It is true that, for a significant part of the twentieth century, the UK has been governed by coalition administrations (Figure 1). But this experience has always taken place in the context either of wartime or economic crisis or as a prelude to mergers between political parties (Bogdanor, 1983: 10-12). Two or more parties have never come together to share power outside these circumstances. Moreover, all the examples of coalition occurred prior to 1945.

Figure 1: Single party and coalition governments in Britain, 1900-2000
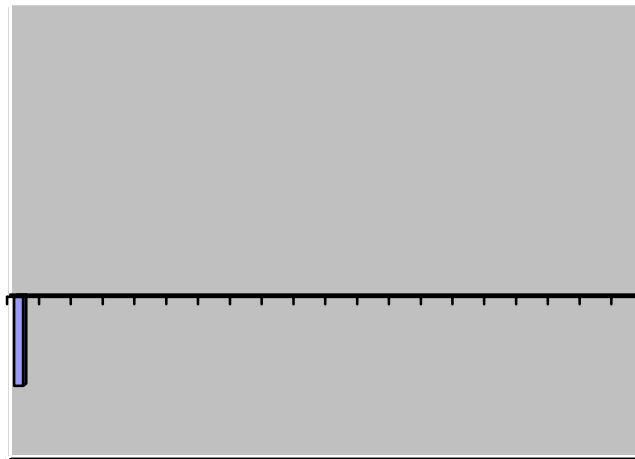
<u>Notes</u>

Positive value = single party government

Negative value = coalition government

Source: Butler, 1986: 36-7; updated by the author

As of 1999, however, government in the UK is no longer dominated by the single party model. The first elections to the Scottish Parliament were followed by the formation of a coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The Northern Ireland Assembly is also governed by a coalition, this time of four parties under a prescribed power sharing arrangement. The Welsh Assembly was initially overseen by a minority single party administration, but this lasted only a year and a half, at which point Labour formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats to give the government a majority in the Assembly. At Westminster, too, there is the possibility of reforming the electoral system in a way that would make coalition governments a more normal feature of our politics. The report of the 'Independent Commission on the Voting System', chaired by Lord Jenkins, proposed a semi-proportional electoral system which, it argued, would entail frequent, if not permanent, coalition

administrations (Jenkins, 1998). At the time of writing, the Jenkins Report has made little progress, and the chances of electoral reform for Westminster appear slim. But coalition politics in the UK no longer depends on the possibility of electoral reform for Westminster; it can now be seen in action in Scotland, Wales (see Box 1 for a précis of coalition formation in

Box 1: Coalition government in Scotland and Wales

Scotland

Nonetheless, significant practical and normative differences do exist between single party and coalition governments. The easiest way to highlight some of these practical variations is to follow the coalition government process, beginning with the formation of an administration, continuing with its operation and ending with its termination. Within each part of the process lie key sub-areas: the role of elections, negotiating a coalition, forging an agreement, managing relations between the parties and the rules covering the ending of a government. The following section examines each sub-area briefly, raising a set of issues or 'pressure points' that need to be considered as part of the transition from single party to coalition rule.

The role of elections

Majoritarian electoral systems encourage two party electoral competition which in turn promotes single party governments. In such conditions, it is normally clear to voters prior to the election what their vote will mean for government formation. Voters can thus use their ballot to determine the government that gets formed after the election. By contrast, under proportional electoral conditions, party competition is more fragmented and it is less likely that a single party will gain an outright majority of seats. In these conditions, governments are often formed only after post-election haggling, with voters potentially having little sense of what their ballot will mean for government formation. As described in Chapter 1, this feature of proportional electoral systems is held by some to weaken the power of voters over government formation. The two key questions that need to be considered in such a multi-party context are (a) how can voters be given a clearer role in government formation, and (b) how can voters identify responsibility for government activities when coalitions involve two or more parties sharing power?

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considers the function of external agents (notably the Head of State) in the formation process and the role of 'caretaker' governments, the administrations responsible for 'holding the fort' while a new government is being formed.

Underlying these specific questions are two more general issues. The first asks whether the parties be allowed a free rein when it comes to negotiating a new government or whether some constraints on their behaviour are necessary in order to generate more optimal outcomes? Constraints may serve to limit the bargaining power of some parties – particularly small ones – and prevent them from playing off other parties to extract the maximum possible advantage. Constraints, or rules, may also help prevent deadlock in the formation process. The second issue is whether new constitutional rules are needed to underpin the stability of coalition governments, since these tend to be less durable than single party majority administrations. In covering these issues, Chapter 2 examines how far constitutional rules that are appropriate in the context of single party governments remain so in the context of coalition administrations.

Negotiating a government

When governments are formed by single parties, no delay is necessary when one administration falls and another is formed. Thus, following government defeats at Westminster elections, the removal vans are usually parked at the prime minister's residence the day after the contest to remove the incumbent and install his/her successor. But in multi-party conditions, elections may not be 'decisive' and governments may only be formed following a process of inter-party bargaining. These negotiations, along with the formal written agreement to which they usually give rise, is the most obvious visible difference between single party and coalition administrations, and is dealt with in Chapter 3.

Compared to the almost instantaneous government formation process under single party conditions, the negotiations usually necessary for multi-party governments may take weeks or even months to complete. This raises the question of whether explicit or implicit time limits should be placed on the government formation process to prevent it dragging on and putting the 'caretaker' under undue strain. On the other hand, whereas individual parties may take months or even years to draw up detailed election manifestos, which then serve as the basis for decisions in government, proto-coalitions have only a relatively short period of time in

Coalition management
Government under single party conditions involves the constant coordination, negotiation

Table 1: The transition to coalition government: Key questions

Stage of the governmental process	Specific issue	General thematic question

Thus, in answer to the question of what difference power sharing administrations would make, this report builds on the observations of one British commentator, that coalition "cannot be understood unless it is recognised as a specific type of government with its own conventions and rules, all flowing from the fundamental principle of power sharing" (Bogdanor, 1983a: 263). Another has argued that "There is no change that would have more far reaching implications for [Britain's] political system than for hung parliaments to become the norm" (Butler, 1986: 16-17). This report examines some of these implications.

It is one thing to suggest that the transition to coalition government raises major questions for a country's constitutional and political system. It is another to argue that these issues cannot simply be accommodated by *ad hoc* changes to the existing system. Clearly, to some extent, they can; coalitions have been introduced in Scotland and Wales with relatively little contingency planning (certainly in the latter case) and, with the exception of some hiccups, the adaptation does not appear to have thrown up too many problems. But such benign outcomes are wholly dependent on the foresight, mutual trust and restraint of the major actors, notably civil servants and politicians. In circumstances where these conditions are absent, the outcome can be far less healthy. To take one recent example, in 1996 New Zealand changed its electoral system from single member plurality to a variant of the Additional Member system ('Mixed Member Proportional', or MMP, in New Zealand). The old system had tended to yield single party governments, while the new system was designed in part to produce power sharing between the parties. Yet, in spite of extensive preparation, the transition was not a success. The formation of the first coalition was a drawn out affair, and produced a result that few voters expected, leading to an unpopular government. The coalition also lacked internal cohesion and suffered from poor management and personality clashes. When the government fell, just

committed to its success and subsequently brought it down (Steel, 1980: 156; Hennessy and Masani, 1992: 8). However, the Lib-Lab pact has so far been a one-off, limiting the extent to which we can draw general lessons for power sharing situations. And it should be remembered that the pact was an example of minority government, not coalition government proper, since the Liberals were never formally brought into government. The experience thus hints at various considerations that will need to be taken into account should Westminster move to coalition government, but it hardly provides a rich source of information.

Nor can we glean much from other tiers of government. True, around one third of Britain's local authorities are currently 'hung', with no one party holding a majority of seats (Leach and Game, 2000). As a result, local councils have good experience of power sharing arrangements and minority administrations. But these arrangements tend to fall short of formal coalitions, since they usually involve the partners sharing the rewards of office (committee chairs) but not a common policy programme with structured coordination mechanisms. Formal coalitions are far rarer than power sharing arrangements, although they may be getting more common (Temple, 1999). Moreover, until recently, local authorities had no provision for executive cabinets, and therefore any power sharing was organised on a decentralised basis – through the committee system – rather than through a single central executive body. The infrequency of formal coalitions at the local tier, plus local authorities' very different institutional set-up, suggest that this level of government has only limited relevance to the national and regional tiers.

Learning from overseas

An alternative approach is to look further afield at overseas countries, where the incidence of coalition administrations at the national level is greater. One source of information is the voluminous secondary literature on coalition government. One of the major branches of research and writing within political science over the last few decades has concerned itself with multi-party bargaining in coalition situations. Yet much of this research is highly theoretical, being concerned primarily to explain how different forms of coalition are formed in the first place rather than how they operate in practice. Recently, a body of work has appeared that has more relevance for policy makers, focusing as it does on the way that institutional variables influence government formation (see Strøm, Budge and Laver, 1994). Comparative research also includes a greater empirical element, since the particularities of a country's constitutional and political system are now held to be an important part of explaining coalition behaviour. Notable in this respect is a recent edited collection of case studies from thirteen west European countries, which painstakingly records how coalitions form, operate and terminate (Müller and Strøm, 2000). This volume is an extremely useful source of information and data, as will be evident from its numerous citations in this report.

But short case studies can only convey a limited amount of information, and they are essentially descriptive rather than analytical. Sometimes, the data from case studies is brought together in a more comparative focus.[1] But these accounts often operate at a high

It is perhaps not surprising that the academic literature rarely engages in evaluation, since there is little demand for lesson learning among west European countries, which tend to have long experience of coalition government. We have to look further afield for such demand. A good example is New Zealand which, in 1996, changed its electoral system to a proportional model (MMP), and engaged in serious preparation for the transition to multi-party government. Changes that were foreseen included the need for specific mechanisms to manage and coordinate coalitions, a reduction in the power of the prime minister as a result of having to share power with one or more parties, the need to ensure balanced representation on cabinet sub-committees and an increase in the time taken to make decisions due to the requirement for greater consultation between the coalition partners. On the administrative side, civil servants would be faced with longer periods of uncertainty as new governments were formed after elections, and with the need to accommodate inter-party politics in their departmental policy role (Boston et al, 1996: 116-51). The preparations undertaken to meet these challenges included systematic planning by teams of civil servants (James, 1997), overseas visits by officials and parliamentarach.01 Tw70.08 0 070.082770.8 55 As

The country case studies

The countries examined in this report are Germany, Denmark, Ireland and New Zealand. All are 'parliamentary' systems, in which executive authority is drawn from an elected legislature rather than being the subject of a separate vote. Moreover, in each, the executive holds office only with the support of the legislature, thus being distinct from systems (eg. Switzerland) in which the legislature cannot dismiss the executive. The study countries also share reasonably similar party systems to that in the UK, since they are broadly unidimensional (oriented around a single ideological structure) rather than multidimensional (with a more complex set of 'cleavages' structuring party competition) (Budge and Laver, 1992).

Table 2 shows the patterns of government in the four study countries over the last thirty years. It can quickly be seen that the experience of coalition government varies between country. Germany has a well developed system of coalition government; more than nine in ten governments formed during the twentieth century have involved two or more parties (Müller and Strøm, 2000: 2). Both Denmark and Ireland have relatively mature coalition systems, although coalition has only become the norm in Ireland since 1989, when the dominant party, Fianna Fail, ended its moratorium on sharing power. New Zealand has a more limited experience of coalition government, dating only from the mid-1990s. This range in the maturity of coalition administrations allows the research to explore both the short term implications of a shift to power sharing governments (New Zealand) as well as assessing the arrangements in systems which have had longer to adapt to coalition conditions (Germany, Denmark, Ireland).

Table 2: Governments in the four study countries, 1970-2001

	Denmark			**Germany**	
Year	*Government*	*PM*	*Year*	*Government*	*PM*
	SD	SD		**SPD-FDP**	SPD
1973*	Lib	Lib	1972*	**SPD-FDP**	SDP
1975*	SD	SD	1976*	**SPD-FDP**	SPD
1977*	SD	SD	1980*	**SPD-FDP**	SPD
1978	SD-Lib	SD	1982	SDP	SPD
1979*	SD	SD		**CDU-CSU-FDP**	CDU
1981*	SD	SD	1983*	**CDU-CSU-FDP**	CDU
1982	Con-Lib-CD-CPP	Con	1987*	**CDU-CSU-FDP**	CDU
1984*	Con-Lib-CD-CPP	Con	1990	**CDU-CSU-FDP**	CDU
1987*	Con-Lib-CD-CPP	Con	1991*	**CDU-CSU-FDP**	CDU

analysed coalition government in Germany's federal system, drawing on practice both at the centre and at the state level.[3]

But while these factors help explain why my four study countries provide a useful source of policy learning for the UK, their political systems vary in important ways, such that any lesson learning needs to be undertaken cautiously. For a start, three of the countries are far smaller than the UK, although closer in population to Scotland and Wales. This is not a trivial point in the context of the operation of coalition government. As I describe more fully in Chapter 5, the management and coordination of coalitions depends to a high degree on close personal contacts and mutual trust. The smaller the polity, the greater the likely contact between ministers and between other important political actors, and the lesser the need to resort to formal coordination mechanisms.[4]

A second distinction relates to the countries' political institutions and culture. The UK's democratic system is an example of the 'Westminster' or 'majoritarian' model, key features of which include the concentration of power in single party cabinets, the domination of the executive over the legislature, a majoritarian voting system and a dominant two party pattern of electoral competition (Lijphart, 1999: 9-31). The UK shared these conditions with New Zealand until the latter's switch to a proportional electoral system in 1996. Ireland exhibits a less majoritarian political system and Germany even less so. Denmark, in contrast to the UK, has a political system often described as consensual; certainly political authority is far less concentrated in the cabinet, and more dispersed to the legislature, than in the UK (Lijphart, 1999: 248).

In important ways, the, the four study countries differ from one another and from the UK. But they also share sufficient features in common that comparisons can be made between them. This raises the question of how far the UK can learn from the practice of coalition government in different contexts. We must always be careful about seeking to transfer institutions or arrangements that work well elsewhere to our very different domestic conditions. In general, the closer the political systems and conditions between the host and study countries, the easier it is to engage in policy transfer. But the efficacy of lesson learning also depends on what is being examined. In this case, the success or failure of different coalition models depends to a large extent on relationships between the key political actors. Such 'soft' or informal norms and mechanisms are *sui generis* and not transferable between countries or, indeed, within countries over time. More amenable to cross-jurisdictional lesson learning are 'hard', or formal, mechanisms such as rules and institutions (Rose, 2000: 637-8). These tend to operate 'mechanically' or 'quasi-mechanically' in that they exert a strong influence over outcomes independently of other background variables. If a particular institution produces a specific outcome in one country, it is highly likely to do the same in another. The mechanical rules of most interest in this context are those covering the formation and termination of governments. For example, one of the features often held to contribute to the relative stability of government in Germany is the constitutional rule that the opposition parties can only pass a motion of no confidence in the government if they also nominate a

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[3] The state, or

successor at the same time. This 'constructive no confidence' provision has subsequently been extended to Spain and Belgium, and has recently been recommended for adoption by Ireland, as a means of avoiding parliamentary deadlock (Constitution Review Group, 1996).

Given this caveat about drawing lessons from overseas, what does this report aim to do? In part, it aims to extend the level of awareness among policy makers in the UK of the methods by which coalitions in other countries are formed, operate and terminate. There are a wide range of ways in which coalition governments are structured, and this report adopts a *descriptive* approach to highlight some of these. The greater the knowledge among domestic policy makers of coalition models in other jurisdictions, the wider their range of options in

same time. On the one hand, government formation and termination in the devolved areas is already covered by a detailed set of constitutional rules. The report briefly examines the rules in Scotland and Wales, not in the belief that – if found to be ineffective or inadequate – they could be wholly rewritten, rather that minor amendments or additions may be possible. Nonetheless, the existence of a detailed constitutional framework in Scotland and Wales means that policy makers there may find more of value in my discussion of 'softer' issues, such as how coalition governments operate in practice, and the dynamics of sub-national coalitions. When it comes Westminster on the other hand, there is clearly little point in discussing in detail how a potential coalition regime might operate; rather, it is far better to

CHAPTER 1: Coalition Governments and Elections

A frequent criticism of proportional electoral systems is that they change the relationship between voters and governments, weakening accountability and responsiveness in the following ways:

> If governments are only formed after elections on the basis of horse-trading between the parties, voters may have little way of knowing before the election how their vote will translate into government outcomes.
>
> Multi-party governments, where responsibility for decisions is shared between two or more parties, may make it difficult for voters to attribute responsibility for policy outcomes.
>
> Parties that perform poorly at elections may get a 'second bite at the cherry', by negotiating successfully to enter government. Moreover, small parties tend to gain government rewards out of proportion to their electoral performance.

The primary focus of this section is on the relationship between voters, parties and governments. The questions raised are that subject of a very livwhile and videtails consideratifTJ21.1603 0 T literature. In this section, I do no more than5.1(aioo.2(Twwause) smesof thiema)n r

Under majoritarian arrangements, so the argument goes, voters (a) know what they are voting for and can thus use their vote to register their desired outcome; because (b) elections are 'controlling' in allocating to the party with the largest share of seats a legislative majority (Budge, 1998: 6).[9] The question I want to explore is the first part of the argument namely, under multi-party conditions, how do voters know what they are voting for; how can governments be 'prospectively' accountable? (The second part of the argument, is a question about how decisive electoral success is for the formation of government, and is dealt with below; pages 30-1)

In multi-party systems, the link between electoral preferences and government composition is surely weaker than under majoritarian conditions, since governments are usually only formed via a process of post-election bargaining by the parties, over which voters have little control. In fact, bargaining after the election can be shaped by voters' actions under two conditions (Budge, 1998: 7). First, when the party system 'cleaves' into two distinct blocs, usually of the right and left, and when governments adhere to these blocs (avoiding cross-bloc governments containing parties of both the left and right).[10] The second condition is when parties make clear to voters prior to the election the likely configuration of post-election governments (Powell, 2000: 71-2). This is usually done through pre-electoral alliances, and it is these arrangements that I explore here.

Pre-election alliances

What indications regarding government formation

But parties do not necessarily indicate their coalition preferences in order to maximise voters' information. In fact, in two of my study coun

to work with in a coalition government". In Scotland, a majority (53%) agreed with the statement, while in Wales, a plurality (41%) did so, with less than one in five disagreeing (Curtice et al: 2000: 26-7).

The importance of pre-election alliances depends somewhat on what voters believe the purpose of elections to be. If, on the one hand, they believe the role of elections is to choose a government, then information on parties' government preferences will be important. If, on the other hand, voters are happy to let the pa

on preferential voting behaviour which I cannot cover here. However, some evidence casts doubt on the extent to which voters use their ballot to signal which parties they would prefer to see in government.[15]

In Ireland in the post war period, levels of vote transfers between Fine Gael and Labour have increased noticeably at elections in which the parties have formed alliances. In other words, voters appear to respond to their party leader

Electoral responsiveness

Further down the chain, the question arises of how far electoral performance shapes government formation. Do parties that have been punished at elections manage to stay in office? Do parties that have won only minor shares of the vote gain undue reward in terms of office? The first question concerns the responsiveness of elections, the second the proportionality of the rewards. If governments are formed through a process of post-election inter-party bargaining with little reference back to the election results, then executives cease to be responsive to the preferences of their citizens.

It is perfectly possible for parties that have won minor shares of the vote to gain a place in government. For example, the FDP has participated in two thirds of post-war German governments, yet has never polled more than 13% of the vote. But while small parties may participate in government, they tend only to command limited resources. The allocation of ministries across countries tends to reflect party strength, so that portfolios are distributed broadly in line with the proportion of seats each partner contributes to the coalition. The only exception to this is the slight bonus that small parties are often given; but this rarely adds up to anything more than a single additional post (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 171-3).

When it comes to forming, and participating in, a coalition, comparative analysis suggests that electoral success is an important factor in determining which party(ies) becomes the *formateur* (lead party in the formation process) and ends up in the coalition (Warwick, 1996). But electoral responsiveness varies between countries. Analysis of the Netherlands and Norway shows that, while responsiveness in the former is very low (ie. there is very little relationship between how well parties fare at elections and their chances of getting into government), it is higher in the latter, mainly due to the organisation of the parties into two opposing blocs (Narud, 1996a: 492-3). A larger dataset reveals considerable variation between countries, with the highest score attached to the UK on account of its majoritarian electoral system (Strøm, 1990: 75).[17]

One way of analysing the responsiveness of elections is to examine whether the largest party (measured here in terms of vote share) gets to form a government. Across a basket of west European countries, I have found that they generally do.[18] The exceptions are Denmark and Sweden (where the Social Democrats have sometimes been the largest party but have been outnumbered by coalitions among the 'bourgeois' parties) and Ireland and Norway (where Fianna Fail and Labour, respectively, have often refused to enter coalition).

An alternative measure is to examine whether parties that have lost ground at elections have still managed to gain a place in the resulting governments. I have examined election results for nine west European countries[19] in the post-war period, to see how far coalition formation is either mildly unresponsive to elections (defined as a party entering a government when its vote share – although not necessarily seat share – has slipped slightly from the previous election), or more egregiously unresponsive (defined as a party entering a government when it has suffered a 6% or more drop in vote share from the previous election). It is frequently the case that parties lose vote share at an election yet make it into government. The countries

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[17] Note, however, that the UK scores a less than perfect 0.94 on a scale of 0-1, since there have been occasions (eg. Feb/Oct 1974) when a party without a plurality of the vote has formed a government.
[18] The countries I examined are: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden
[19] As per the above, minus France and Portugal.

comparative analyst has suggested that, while coalitions may be replaced in between elections in Belgium, Denmark and Finland, there is a presumption in favour of seeking an electoral mandate in the Netherlands and Sweden (Bogdanor, 1983a: 274-5). In fact there have been three non-electoral substantive shifts of government in Denmark in the post-war period: 1950, 1982 and 1993. Other country case studies suggest an 'electoral rule' (whereby any substantive shifts in coalition membership must receive the mandate of the voters) is very strong in Austria and the Netherlands, fairly strong in Germany and Ireland, and not strong in Belgium and Norway, where there have been several coalition shifts since 1945 without recourse to elections (Müller and Strøm, 2000a: 574). This convention is also claimed to have applied to Sweden since the late 1970s (Boston, 1998: 106-7), although in 1990, the resignation of a Social Democrat administration did not lead to elections, but to a request from the Speaker of the Riksdag to the Conservative Party opposition to try and form an alternative government, an attempt which ultimately failed (Bergman, 2000: 203).

There has only been one coalition 'shift' in Germany, in 1982 when the Free Democrats left their SPD partner for the CDU/CSU. However, concern that this move might be thought illegitimate prompted the new Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, to call for fresh elections – via an engineered vote of confidence – six months later. Ireland has also only seen one substantive change of coalition without an election, in 1994, when Labour ended its coalition with Fianna Fail to join with Fine Gael and the Democratic Left. Evidently, this shift caused fewer problems, since no election to legitimate the new government was held for another two and a half years.

CHAPTER 2: Forming and Terminating Governments

This chapter examines some of the 'pressure points' that may arise when governments form and fall, in multi-party conditions. In particular, it examines whether the constitutional rules in place under majoritarian conditions can survive the transition to a situation where coalition governments are routine.

The impact of constitutional rules

By constitutional rules, I do not refer simply to those articles found in a country's written constitution. A quick scan of the constitutions of west European countries shows that their dictates rarely extend to the formation of governments (since they were largely drawn up prior to the growth of political parties and the introduction of proportional electoral systems which gave rise to multi-party politics; Bogdanor, 1983a). There are exceptions; Germany's Basic Law, for example, refers to the need for an alternative chancellor to be put forward in cases where the opposition parties move a no confidence vote. Such formal or 'hard' rules tend to be specific and legally enforceable. But government formation is also subject to a host of informal or 'soft' rules; stipulations that are often less specific and which are sometimes

2. The means by which a government is chosen
   The role of the Head of State

3.

Table 5: Rules covering government formation and termination in selected western democracies

	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Ireland	Netherlands	New Zealand	Norway	Scotland	Sweden	Wales
Formal rules covering government formation?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No[1]	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Involvement of Head of State?	Yes	Yes	No	No[2]	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No[3]	No
Designated *formateur*?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes[4]	No
Rules for choice of *formateur*?	Yes[5]	Yes[5]	No	-	No	-	-	Yes[5]	-	No	-	No	-
Use of *informateurs*?	No	Yes	Yes[6]	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Investiture vote required?	No	Yes	No	Yes[7]	No	Yes[7]	Yes[7]	No	No	No	Yes[7]	Yes[7]	Yes[7]
Government resignation at election?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Dissolution power of PM?	Yes[8]	Yes[8]	Yes	Yes	No	No[9]							

Table 6: Rules covering government formation and termination in the UK

	Westminster	Scottish Parliament	Welsh Assembly	N Ireland Assembly
Constitutionally stipulated deadline for recall of parliament after election	None; convention of one month or less	Seven days	First meeting called by Secretary of State. No provision for Assembly to be reconvened thereafter.	Eight days

Figure 2 sets this out in diagrammatic form. Within this schema, Scotland and Wales exhibit a hybrid position.   In both, the executive may be overthrown if a no confidence motion supported by a relative majority is passed. But to achieve office, a government must clear a 'positive' parliamentary hurdle in the form of the election by the legislature of the First Minister. This requirement, similar to that in Ireland, represents a *de facto* investiture vote, with a relative majority required for the Head to be appointed.

These rules would be of interest mainly to constitutional lawyers were it not for the fact that they have a strong influence on the type of government formed. In particular, the nature of the investiture rules shapes the likelihood of a majority or minority government being formed. Thus, comparative studies have found that, among countries with positive formation rules, minority administrations constitute one quarter (25%) of all governments formed between 1945 and 1987, a far lower level than in countries with negative formation rules, where the proportion of minority administrations is almost half (48%) (Bergman, 1993: 60-1).

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government is often confused. For example, the conv

Figure 2: 'Positive' and 'negative' parliamentary rules

POSITIVE PARLIAMENTARISM   NEGATIVE PARLIAMENTARISM

| Investiture vote held | | Investiture vote held | | Investiture vote not held eg. Austria, Denmark, France, Netherlands*, New Zealand, Norway, UK |
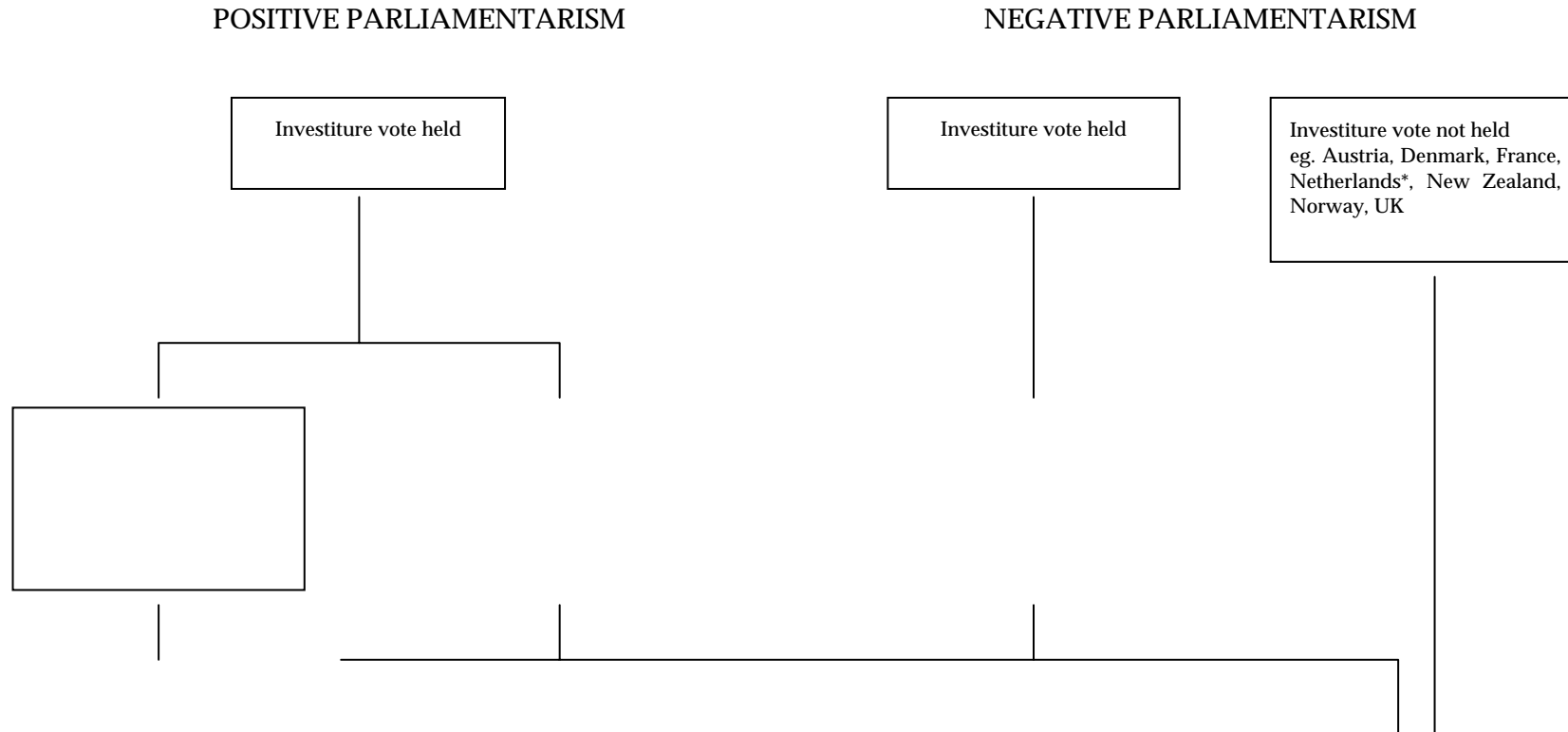
* The convention is that a government must command an absolute majority in parliament.
Sources: Bergman, 1993; de Winter, 1995; Boston, 1998; Strøm and Müller, 2000

Identifying a prime minister

> "… offer an advantage to the incumbent prime minister by yielding him or her a strong tactical position in the confused aftermath of an indecisive election. Since the rules encourage the formation of single party minority governments, they strengthen the position of the major parties at the expense of the minor ones, freeing a prime minister from the need to consult with other parties or to negotiate the formation of a government which can command a majority in the House of Commons." (Bogdanor, 1995: 163)

In countries operating an ordered process of coalition formation, the incumbent prime minister doesn't occupy a privileged position. He or she will merely be one of the players considered as a potential *formateur*. But in unordered systems, the initial advantage in government formation often accrues to the incumbent. In most countries, prime ministers are not expected to resign immediately before or after an election, but may stay in post until ejected by a replacement. Under these arrmad.1(n863 (n)-1ag(o (n)-1expecd by him/4.1.5(rong)6( ).398

However, if governments may remain in office after an election, but lack the power to gain a dissolution of parliament, then the advantages of office decline somewhat, and a more level playing field between the parties is possible. In this situation, there is less need for a government to have to resign. But an additional appropriate safeguard requires any new government to demonstrate some level of parliamentary support, via an investiture vote (pages 47-9). In an unordered bargaining system, with no requirement for a new government to test its support in parliament, an initial sensible step might be to require the incumbent government to resign at an election to nullify any advantage it might gain in an inconclusive bargaining situation.

well be a major player themselves, and thus have their own interests to look after. For this reason, one commentator (Bogdanor, 1995) has cast doubt on the idea that the British monarch might look to the incumbent for advice after an election. In Denmark, my interviews suggested that the role of the incumbent prime minister had not generally proved controversial, although there have been instances where some small parties have queried the interpretation of their recommendations.

The Head of State might avoid courting controversy in designating a prime minister by transferring this responsibility to an independent figure, or *informateur*, a senior political figure not engaged closely in partisan party matters. The job of the *informateur* is act on behalf of the monarch in exploring the viability of different coalitions. However, the specific role of this figure varies between countries. In Belgium, he or she may start inter-party negotiations by drawing up a list of items for discussion. In the Netherlands, the job entails discussions with the parties and the identification of the most suitable figure – the *formateur* – to lead the negotiations (de Winter, Timmermans and Dumont, 2000: 309-10; Timmermans and Andeweg, 2000: 362-3). But the use of *informateurs* has gained little support in Britain. One concern is that the selected figure might themselves behave in a partisan fashion (Butler, 1986).[28] A second is that the model is just not needed in Britain, since the monarch already has a circle of expert advisers (notably her Private Secretary) on whom to draw for advice (Bogdanor, 1995: 169-72).

An ordered or unordered formation process?

Government formation proceeds through one of two models. The first leaves the bargaining process to the parties, the winner being whoever can command the support of parliament. The second restricts the parties' bargaining options by giving a single party the first 'bite of the cherry'. Having outlined the main features of the two models, I now explore briefly their relative merits.

What criteria should be used in reaching judgements? I suggest the following:

> *The speed of the process*: While the formation of a government is not to be rushed, it is also undesirable for the process to become drawn out. Is there any evidence that an ordered bargaining environment is more or less prone to such an outcome than an unordered one?

> *The clarity of the process*: It is desirable that the bargaining process be clear and orderly, without the parties bargaining incessantly among themselves to maximise their own advantage.

> *The balance between the parties*: As a general rule, the chances of a party taking part in bargaining and entering government should grow as that party increases its share of seats. In other words, bargaining power should be weighted in broad proportion to a party' size. The formation rules should thus avoid undue weighting of power, either to large parties that can then ignore smaller ones, or to smaller ones to play off large parties.

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[28] This is also seen as a problem with an even more radical solution, the Swedish arrangement by which the Speaker of the Riksdag, not the Monarch, leads government formation. But disputes between and within the parties in the 1970s over whom to nominate as Speaker highlight the often partisan process from which the Speaker emerges (Bogdanor, 1995: 172-4). The fierce and divisive contest for the Speaker of the House of Commons in October 2000 hardly suggests that the UK looks to the Swedish arrangements for inspiration.

The position of the Head of State: The balance between ensuring the impartiality of the monarch and providing for a non-partisan external 'agent' to help break any deadlock in the formation process is a crucial one. However, the role of the monarch opens a host of issues in its own right, and has been dealt with extensively elsewhere (eg. Bogdanor, 1995;

parties may take some time to adjust to a coalition environment; it was only in 1997 that the parties may be said to have adapted fully to coalition politics by forming two main pre-electoral alliances that facilitated a speedy change of government after the election (Mitchell, 1999: 243-4). On the other hand, the first coalition in Scotland was put together in 1999 quickly and with minimum fuss (although this was no doubt aided by the limited party system fragmentation, the existing close relations between the coalition partners and the existence of a 'pariah' party, the Scottish Nationalist Party).

Provided that the main actors – the political parties – behave sensibly and with an eye to the legitimacy of the political system as a whole, I see no reason to impose constraints on the bargaining process.[30]

The first is not a particularly serious issue. In countries without investiture requirements, a government is likely to have to convince the Head of State that it is viable, in the sense of not being opposed by a majority in the legislature. If there is any miscalculation and a government is installed that is not viable, it should be an option for the Head of State to allow the other parties to form an alternative government, and not to give the failed incumbent the opportunity of a second chance via a dissolution of parliament and fresh elections (see next section).

The second issue asks whether an incumbent administration can, in the absence of an alternative stronger government, merely continue in office after an election? As I noted above, in only a few west European countries must a government resign at elections. In countries such as Britain, Denmark and New Zealand, no investiture vote is required and it is thus an option for a government to remain in office in the aftermath of an election. Governments in all parliamentary democracies only hold office by virtue of the support of parliament, and in this sense, even governments that face no investiture vote still face parliamentary tests each time they expose themselves to the possibility of a no confidence vote. But in a situation in which a government can hold office without a formal vote at the outset, the incentives and constraints differ from a situation in which an investiture vote is required, and in a way that favours the incumbent government. Thus, in the absence of an investiture vote, the burden of proof passes to the opposition to demonstrate the unsuitability of a government via a no confidence vote. A no confidence vote is not merely the obverse of an investiture vote, since a party may be unwilling to unseat a government that is already in office, but less reticent about voting against a potential administration at the investiture stage. The absence of an investiture vote thus privileges the incumbent government, which represents the "reversion point" in the event that the other parties fail to agree an alternative government (Strøm, Budge and Laver, 1994: 311-2).

For this reason, I think it desirable that any new government should have to demonstrate at least some support in parliament before taking office. Put simply, governments could not just 'trundle on' after an election; the legislature would need to actively assent to their continuation.

But what level of support should be required? The basic distinctions are between systems that require governments (or nominated prime ministers) to have the support of an absolute majority, those requiring the support of a relative majority and those that switch the burden of proof and require the opposition to show that they command the majority. The first two are features of the 'positive' model of parliamentarism, the third a feature of the 'negative' model (pages 38-41). Governments formed under positive investiture rules need not command majority support; Italy's 1976 government under Giulio Andreotti won its investiture vote despite only being supported by 258 deputies out of 630.ative poo of -5.4(voiy2 TDto ac th.260011 Tc0.087

support in the legislature? In multi-party situations with proportional elections, this question effectively asks whether a government should command majority support among the electorate, to which the answer must, in ideal conditions, be yes. Under majoritarian electoral systems, government majorities are frequently constructed on mere pluralities of the vote, while proportional systems reduce, if not end, such 'anomalies' (Powell, 2000: 127-36). But this is not to say that a coalition government should only take office if it holds more than half the seats in the legislature (effectively the German system, where a government must win an investiture vote with an absolute majority). It does no harm to the majoritarian principle for a – minority – government to pass an investiture vote with the support of only a relative majority and to then form coalitions in the legislature with one or more of the opposition parties to gain passage for its programme. In such situations, a government may not gain the active support of an absolute majority at the start of its term or during that term as it puts legislation before parliament. But it gains the *de facto* support of parties not opposed to its existence and thus willing to tolerate the administ

What about the performance of minority governments? Since policy effectiveness is influenced by a wide range of institutional and non-institutional factors, evaluations of minority governments must draw on alternative measures. One analysis examines the mode of government terminations, on the basis that the circumstances surrounding a government's demise provide an indication as to its effectiveness. On the one hand, we have terminations due to 'defeat or crisis' (when a government is forced to resign, through a parliamentary no confidence motion, or does so under adversity), becoming more benign with 'voluntary' resignations (when a coalition is under no strong pressure to resign, but does so to change its membership) and finally – and most benign – 'technical' resignations (as when a government continues in office after an election, so that its termination is merely a function of a rule that counts elections as marking a change in government). Empirical analysis shows that, while less than half of majority single party governments terminate due to defeat or crisis, six in ten minority governments fall in the same way. But this is a lower rate than for majority coalitions, over 80% of which fall due to defeat or crisis. Minority governments are more likely than majority coalitions to terminate voluntarily. But overall, the data suggest that minority governments – which may, of course, be single party – are no less internally riven and unstable than majority coalitions (Strøm, 1990: 117-23).

There is thus little case on purely pragmatic grounds for designing an investiture vote so as to ward off the possibility of minority governments (there are, of course, normative objections, referred to briefly in Chapter 6). If an investiture vote is to be held, this implies that an incoming government must either gain the support of a majority of legislative votes actually cast (a relative majority) or must merely avoid a majority voting against it. The latter is, of course, a less onerous position for the government, and may allow it to take office without making concessions to the opposition parties.   Where a government must win the support of a relative majority, it may have to compromise to gain the support – or at least avoid the hostility – of one or more of the opposition parties. A decision on which form of investiture vote is most suitable will be shaped by the importance attached to a minority government having to compromise its positions, and by the question of the desirable balance of power between the government and opposition.

But what of the recurring concern among many commentators that minority governments might be more unstable and prone to collapse than majority governments? Would it be wise to balance permissive investiture requirements with a more restrictive set of termination rules, to make it more difficult to bring down a government? This issue is dealt with on pages 55-7.

The dissolution of parliament

Once in office, what powers does a government have to dissolve the legislature and trigger fresh elections? This is an important power for any government, since it allows it to call elections when its poll ratings indicate it is likely to perform well. It is also an important weapon for a government in a multi-party situation. It allows a minority administration to threaten the opposition with early elections if it acts against the government. It also allows the larger party in a coalition – which will generally hold the prime minister's post – to wield the same threat over a recalcitrant junior partner.

Very few countries allow the incumbent prime minister no rights to a dissolution of parliament (see Table 5). Norway is one such, since its parliamentary term is fixed. In Sweden, early elections may be held, but these must be in addition to, and not replace, the regular four yearly contests, thus reducing the attraction of the dissolution option (if the

Scottish Parliament is dissolved more than six months prior to a regular election date, here, too, the regular election must be held). Some countries set conditions which must be cleared before the head of state can grant a dissolution. For example, the German Constitution (Art. 68) stipulates that a chancellor may only gain a dissolution if he has called and lost (ie. by failing to gain an absolute majority) a vote of confidence in the government. An absolute majority is also required for a dissolution in Belgium, although the opposition can instigate a no confidence vote without having agreed a successor, unlike in Germany (if the opposition in Belgium does nominate a successor within three days of a successful no confidence motion, this person is sworn in by the monarch). In Austria and the Netherlands, a dissolution requires the support of a relative majority in parliament. A higher threshold is in place in Scotland, where a dissolution must attract the support of two thirds of all MSPs.[34] Some countries, such as the UK and Denmark, place no formal limits on the power of the prime minister to gain a dissolution.

Constitutional rules and practice in Ireland offer an illuminating example of the controversies that might face Britain if it moved to multi-party government. Under the Irish constitution (Art. 13.2.2), the President "may in his absolute discretion refuse to dissolve Dáil Éireann [parliament] on the advice of a Taoiseach who has ceased to retain the support of a majority in Dáil Éireann". This power has never been used, although in 1994, Mary Robinson threatened to refuse any dissolution request from the prime minister, Charles Haughey who, having lost the support of his junior partner, Labour, now headed a minority administration. In the event, Haughey resigned and Fianna Fail left office, with the government switching to a Fine Gael-Labour-Democratic Left administration without any recourse to an election.

The question that arises is how a far prime minister who appears to lack majority support – either because their own party or coalition partner has deserted them – can gain a dissolution? In essence, this focuses attention on the proper extent of the Head of State's discretion. If it is thought that the only clear indication that a government has lost majority support is an explicit no confidence vote or defeat on the budget, the prime minister has *carte blanche* to gain a dissolution at all other times. This would effectively end any discretion for the Head of State to prevent fresh elections by establishing whether an alternative government can be found (Laver, 1996: 476-7). The rationale for such a step is that it limits the Head of State playing any sort of political role. If, however, it is thought undesirable for a prime minister to have a guaranteed recourse to a dissolution, then the Head of State may be given the discretion to put on hold a dissolution request until potential alternative governments have been tested. This arrangement waters down the prime minister's power, thus avoiding too lopsided a balance between the executive and legislature (*ibid*; Ward, 1996).

At Westminster, the Prime Minister holds the right to request a dissolution, with the power to authorise or reject the request being held formally by the monarch (although such a request has not been refused for over a century). In trying to resolve the issue of what principles the monarch should follow, precedent offers only a limited guide. All of the dissolution requests made by prime ministers of minority administrations (in 1905, 1910, 1924 and 1974) did not take place against the backdrop of alternative majority administrations in the House of Commons (Bogdanor, 1995: 160).[35] Some commentators favour an automatic acceptance to a

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[34] As noted earlier, there is no provision for the dissolution of the Welsh Assembly.

[35] In 1924, the King made sure of this, by enquiring of the two opposition parties whether they could form an alternative government before granting a dissolution to the Labour minority government under Ramsay MacDonald (Bogdanor, 1995: 160).

parliamentary approval does not end 'partisan' dissolutions (terminations of parliament purely for party electoral advantage), since governments can still force a dissolution by engineering a vote of no confidence in themselves (as happened in West Germany in 1972 and 1983: Bogdanor, 1995: 175-7).[39] This option is far less likely in the Scottish case, given the need to gain two thirds support in the Parliament. More substantively, withdrawing dissolution powers from the prime minister may advantage the opposition parties, who may weaken a minority government by thwarting its legislative programme without allowing it a dissolution, or agreeing a successor among themselves (Bogdanor, 1995: 175-7). This deadlocked situation could be broken, of course, by the government simply resigning. But it may not be willing to concede office in such a manner, preferring instead to force the opposition parties to vote it down. One means of preventing deadlock from becoming drawn out would be to introduce the French rule that allows government to make its legislative proposals matters of confidence; the opposition in this case can veto legislation only if it is also willing to oust the government (Lijphart, 1999: 304).

In relation to the relative advantages and disadvantages of conferring on a prime minister the authority to dissolve the legislature and force fresh elections, two commentators conclude, "The choice in constitutional design, then, is what price to pay in partisan opportunism for the flexibility and safety valve that dissolution powers represent" (Strøm and Swindle, 2000: 25). The need for a degree of flexibility suggests that constitutional designers should avoid the restrictions on premature dissolutions in Germany. Under the Basic Law, a chancellor can only request a dissolution if he has failed to secure an absolute majority in a confidence vote. This makes sense in the German context since "the inability of the Bundestag to end its own term of office is the logical corollary of the constructive vote of no confidence procedure" (Paterson and Southern, 1991: 85). The intention behind protecting governments from parliament would be frustrated if the government itself could dissolve the legislature. But this means that, if there is a mid-term change in government, the German Chancellor can only gain a dissolution to test the legitimacy of the new arrangements by engineering a no confidence vote in himself (exactly what Helmut Kohl did in 1983 after having taken the chancellorship from the SPD).[40] On the other hand, in a multi-party situation, it seems

comes first: an election or the formal resignation of the prime minister. Two other conditions are also commonly held to indicate the end of one government and the start of another: a change of prime minister and a change in the parties comprising a coalition (Strøm, 1990: 57-8).

From this brief discussion, it can be seen that measuring changes in government is a difficult task. Tricky questions also arise in measuring duration. One method is simply to count the months between a government taking and leaving office. On this measure, single party majority governments tend to last longer than coalitions or single party minority administrations (*ibid*: 116). But this is a generalisation across and within countries, rather than a rule for any one government. More seriously, as I noted above (fn. 32), there are considerable variations between countries in the maximum period that a government can remain in office without calling an election (and thereby terminating itself under the counting rules). Thus, while governments in New Zealand can only remain in office for three years, most west European countries allow for four years between elections, while the UK and a few others stretch this to five years. In other words, assuming that administrations always run their full course, governments in New Zealand will appear far less stable than those in the UK.

For this reason, a better measure of government stability is mean *relative* duration, that is the duration of a government as a proportion of the maximum time it could spend in office (Saalfeld, 2001: 13). I divide sixteen west European countries[41] into 'coalition models' (that is, those ruled by coalition governments for more than half the time between 1945-99) and 'single party models' (those ruled by single party administrations for more than half this period). The mean duration for the nine 'coalition' countries is 59% of the maximum, while that for the seven 'single party' countries is 68% of the maximum (*ibid*: 12). As I pointed out earlier (page 49), the mean relative duration of governments in countries that frequently resort to minority administrations is not appreciably lower than in countries where majority coalitions are the norm.

Mean relative duration as a measure has problems just as the simpler mean duration does. A government may decide to cut short its term by calling an early election if it feels it can capitalise on favourable opinion polls and thereby extend further its tenure in office. This is typically true of governments in Britain, which partly explains why governments here score well on mean duration, but less well on mean relative duration. Yet such behaviour may well be an indication of government strength, not weakness. By contrast, weaker governments may be forced to 'go the whole way', since no

Attributes of the political system: It has been found that the greater the fragmentation of the party system, the lower the average duration of governments (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 156-8).

Attributes of the coalition: Governments controlling a bare majority of seats ('minimum winning' coalitions) are more durable than those with a 'surplus' majority of seats ('oversized' coalitions) (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 150-55). Duration also increases if a coalition includes a stable 'core' or 'strong' party (Budge and Keman, 1990: 19-26; Laver and Shepsle, 1996: 69-78).

Attributes of the main political institutions: For example, the degree to which a government controls the legislative agenda influences the 'costs' of forming or terminating a government and thus the incentives for parties to form or end a coalition (Mershon, 1999)

Attributes of the players: Notably the degree of familiarity and trust between the actors,

The no confidence vote

The first option is to make it more difficult for governments to be brought down by the opposition. In terms of the formal rules, British governments may fairly easily be unseated; all the opposition must do is to pass a no confidence motion by a majority of those MPs voting. Relative majorities are also all that is required in Denmark, Ireland and New Zealand, among my study countries. In practice, of course, opposition parties find it far more difficult than that. Nonetheless, they face less of a struggle than their counterparts in countries such as Sweden, who can only bring down a government if a majority of all MPs vote in favour.

but does not need to. If the opposition is united against the incumbent but not in favour of any one replacement, a successful no confidence vote simply leads to fresh elections (De Winter, Timmermans and Dumont, 2000: 342; Ward, 1996).

The ability of governments to go about their business without the constant fear of being ejected from office by a parliamentary vote is a *sine qua non* of effective policy making. Without it, governments would cease to engage in long term policy planning and would undertake far more short term measures designed to win support in the legislature and thus maintain their tenure in office. Such stability becomes potentially less secure if governments command only a minority of seats in the legislature. Minority administrations are far more prone to the threat and the reality of terminal defeats by the opposition parties. Protection for such governments might be engineered by making it more difficult for the opposition to bring down an administration. On the other hand, this should not be at the expense of depriving the opposition of its powers. For this reason, rather than insisting that governments are only overthrown via a constructive no confidence vote, it seems preferable to insist on the milder rule that an absolute majority of the legislature must vote against a government for it to fall. If the opposition parties mustering an absolute majority can simultaneously nominate a successor prime minister, this 'automatic replacement' provision might be adopted to ensure there is no hiatus between administrations.

Fixing the legislative term

The second way in which governments could be made more stable is by removing the power or incentive to hold early elections. For a British prime minister, the only constr27 Tw[tr,a0.2iDaliove

Semi-fixed parliamentary terms are held to enhance government stability by making it less attractive either for the opposition to bring down a government or for the government to dissolve parliament. Government effectiveness is only really enhanced in the first case, since restricting the incentives for opposition parties to overthrow a government helps avoid the incumbent from always having to look over its shoulder. Such defensiveness is seen to take a toll on a government's ability to introduce effective and long term policy measures. By contrast, governments usually seek a parliamentary dissolution in order to capitalise on favourable electoral conditions, which are often the result of good performance in office. In other words, the ability to gain a dissolution provides a positive incentive for governments to operate effectively throughout their period in office; removing this power might encourage governments to 'back load' their policy programme; to become more active or responsive when they know an election is imminent.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what impact the semi-fixed nature of the Riksdag has had on the stability of Sweden's government. The country has only seen one premature election, in 1958 (Boston, 1998: 116). Early elections were discussed in the context of government crises in 1978 and 1981, but ruled out on both occasions since regular elections would need to have followed shortly afterwards (Bergman, 2000: 199). If government duration is measured as a proportion of the possible maximum time an administration can be in office, Sweden performs well; its mean relative government duration is 80%, well above the European average (Saalfeld, 2000: 12). Thus, the Swedish experience suggests – no more – that a semi-fixed parliamentary term enhances government durability, although to what degree it is impossible to tell.

A fixed or semi-fixed parliamentary term was proposed for New Zealand as a response to the instability of its governments in the run up to, and immediate aftermath of, the introduction of a proportional electoral system (Boston, 1998: 114-21). Fixed or semi-fixed terms would have wider implications for the balance of power within coalitions and between the executive and parliament, as well as for relations between voters and their elected representatives. It is for some of these reasons that many commentators in the UK have argued for fixed legislative terms, notably to reduce what is seen as an unfair advantage of the incumbent government in being able to decide the date of the poll (Blackburn, 1995: 49-65). In coalition situations, the ability of the prime minister to call snap elections is usually seen as a means of coercion over the junior partner in cases of dispute. But the power that dissolution affords the prime minister can also be helpful when the government only commands a minority of seats, and can similarly coerce parties in the legislature in order to get measures passed; my interviews suggested that this was a real weapon for minority governments in Denmark where the prime minister has an absolute right to a dissolution.

However, it is arguable that such coercive powers are less suitable in a situation of majority coalitions, a more likely scenario if the Westminster electoral system moved to PR. I have suggested above a relatively unrestricted rule for the investiture of a new government, although a higher hurdle when it comes to its termination. This combination might be sufficient to underpin government stability, although constitutional design for any multi-party situation at Westminster should evaluate what impact the semi-fixed legislative term for the Scottish Parliament has had. Ultimately, however, the arguments for and against fixed terms may be influenced more by the perceived need to limit the discretionary power of prime ministers and/or by the need to maximise accountability of governments to voters (on which see Strøm, 1997).

Keeping the show on the road: The role of caretaker governments

Having examined the constitutional rules covering government formation and termination, I conclude this chapter by examining a less high profile, but nonetheless important, issue: what happens in the period between one government resigning and another taking up office, a period usually overseen by a 'caretaker' government.

Britain has little experience of caretaker governments. Following a government defeat at an election, the opposition leader is normally sworn into office the following day and the government fully replaced within the next 48 hours. But in countries where proportional electoral systems do not produce such clear winners, the formation of a new government may take far longer. The longest period required to form a new government in the last fifty years in a west European country is the 208 days taken in the Netherlands in 1977 (Müller and Strøm, 2000: 570). But the Netherlands is an outlier; the average across twelve west European countries excluding the Netherlands is 19 days, or just under three weeks. What happens to government during this period? In most west European countries, as noted above, incumbent governments are not forced to resign at, or after, an election; rather, they may continue in office until ejected by an alternative administration. But if they do resign – either because they have clearly lost the election or because they have failed to form a new government – they usually continue in office until a new government is sworn in, as a caretaker government. Given that caretaker administrations may be in office for several weeks, what rules cover what they may or may not do?[45]

In few countries is the role of caretaker governments covered by clear constitutional or cabinet rules. A survey of the constitutions in six west European countries by the New Zealand State Services Commission (1995: 81) identified only Denmark as formally setting out the rules for caretaker governments.[46] But most countries make up for this with informal understandings that caretaker governments avoid taking major policy decisions, for example by not introducing substantive bills to parliament, although minor bills, particularly on supply issues, continue. The exception is Ireland, where caretaker governments wield broadly undiminished powers, and have occasionally made appointments to very senior political posts (Laver and Shepsle, 1996: 47). Civil servants in Dublin appear sanguine about the role of caretakers. Caretaker administrations are formally informed of the need to avoid committing any future government to expenditure. Officials also point out the unlikelihood that major policy decisions would be taken by a caretaker administration, since such decisions would require ratification by cabinet which tends not to meet frequently either side of an election. But appointments can be made without cabinet meetings, and are thus easier for a caretaker administration to push through. The lack of self-restraint on the part of caretaker governments in Ireland has prompted one observer to call for the introduction of a 'constructive' no confidence provision – so that the fall of one government is contingent on another being ready to take up the reins of power immediately – and for an addition to the constitution stipulating that the decisions of a caretaker "be confined to those [matters] required to ensure the essential good government of the State" (Laver, 1996: 479-80).

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[45] In some countries (eg. Australia), governments assume full caretaker status immediately the legislature is dissolved pending elections. With the legislature not in session, there can clearly be no scrutiny of executive activity. For this reason – and for the more prosaic one that most government ministers will be out campaigning – executive activities are reduced to a minimum immediately prior to an election (Boston et al, 1998b: 644-6).

[46] A caretaker "… shall do only what is necessary for the purpose of the uninterrupted conduct of official business" (Section 15: 2).

There are partial exceptions to the 'caretaker' status of outgoing governments. In Norway, where the timing of elections is fixed, an outgoing government will remain in office for the three weeks or so that it takes to present the annual budget (elections are held in mid-September and the budget delivered in early October). Thus, in 2001, the Social Democrats suffered a humiliating election defeat on 10th September, remained in office while bargaining with the Christian Democrats to form a coalition and, when this failed and the bargaining switched to the parties on the right, issued a budget one month later. In instances when an election produces a change of government, it is usual, however, for the new administration to amend the budget in line with its own policies, with the outgoing government's budget

discussions between the outgoing and incoming government over the role of the caretaker include how the state should behave in Bundesrat votes. Apparently, tight votes in the Bundesrat have sometimes been tipped by the vote of a caretaker state government, which is

'positive' or 'negative') affects the type of government likely to be formed, specifically whether a majority is stipulated or minority administrations are also possible. If governments that command only a minority of legislative seats are deemed undesirable, a positive investiture vote will be introduced. If, however, minority governments are not deemed undesirable, a negative vote might be sufficient. Within the 'negative' form of investiture votes, minority administrations are most likely when the onus rests with the opposition to prove that an alternative majority exists; the system in Scotland and Wales places the onus with the government-elect, although only to demonstrate a majority among those voting ('relative majority'). For Westminster, the latter might be the most realistic of the negative investiture ope9(ions .)]TJ0 -1.2787 TD0.Tc0 Tw( )Tj20-1.2732 TD0.001 Tc0.13096Tw[(iUdesran auoriesrd oba

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CHAPTER 3: Negotiating a Coalition Government

Perhaps the most noticeable difference between single party and coalition conditions is that

Judged against these examples, the negotiating teams used by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland were broadly in line with practice elsewhere; the Liberal Democrats used a team of eight figures, with Labour drawing on five people (Finnie and McLeish, 1999).

But while small teams around the party leaders may aid swift, trusting and leak-free negotiations, they are likely to increase the concern among the parties' elected members and supporters that their interests will be compromised. What mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the leaders do not 'sell out'? How is the wider party involved in coalition negotiations? A desire to maintain tight control over the leaders' activities is usually strongest among 'policy oriented' parties, that is parties whose supporters and elected members have a strong concern with maintaining a set of policy stances rather than simply with attaining office. An example is the Labour party in Ireland. Following a coalition with Fine Gael between 1973 and 1977, ending in the loss of office to Fianna Fail, party members placed limits on the delegation of authority to the party leaders by insisting that any subsequent coalition agreement be put to a special conference of party delegates for approval (Farrell, 1987: 138-9; Laver and Higgins, 1986: 174-7).

Comparative research suggests that parliamentary party groups are often involved in the negotiation and ratification of coalition agreements. Thus, among fourteen west European countries, in only six are parliamentary actors not involved in formation talks. And in just two – Belgium and Italy – are the party groups not consulted on the talks. When it comes to ratifying the agreement, it is rare for party members – as with the Labour party in Ireland – to have a formal veto; more common is for the agreement to go for approval to either the party executive and/or parliamentary party. This process does not normally involve major changes being made to the agreement, except in the Netherlands and here only in relation to a particular party (De Winter, 1995: 128-34; Timmermans and Andeweg, 2000: 366).

Danish parties maintain a strong control over their leaders when it comes to government formation. For example, the parliamentary group of the Social Liberal party – the junior coalition partner to the Social Democrats in the previous government – would meet prior to coalition negotiations to decide what their leaders' bargaining strategy should be. When the Conservative-Liberal coalition fell in 1993, the Social Democrat leader sought his party's permission before starting negotiations to form an alternative coalition. The party groups of both the Social Liberals and the Social Democrats also have a formal role in ratifying any coalition agreement. The parties in Germany are involved in coalition bargaining via their caucus leaders who usually form part of the negotiating teams. In addition, agreements are sometimes put before special party conferences, as with the SPD and Greens in 1998 (Saalfeld, 2000: 47-8). The policy oriented Free Democrats (FDP) also ratify any coalition agreement through its parliamentary group (De Winter, 1995: 134). In New Zealand, the agreements reached after the 1996 and 1999 elections have both been subject to approval either by the parties' parliamentary groups or by a special delegates' conference. In fact, it was the caucus of New Zealand First that, officially at least, had the responsibility in 1996 for deciding

parties; the lower the trust, the greater the incentives for the parties to commit one another to specific policies at the outset.

Bearing in mind that coalition negotiations often last only for a week or two, how can agreements be reached on potentially complex policy matters? What kind of arrangements

parties in Scotland did on the issue of student finance, for example. This approach avoids causing friction at the outset of a government, and aids speedy resolution of the negotiations.

Use of advisers

As I suggested above, there are various situations in which parties bargaining to form a coalition may not wish to spend long around the table. If the executive enjoys a high degree of control over the legislature, if the parties trust one another and/or if there is little public demand for a detailed agreement, there are few incentives for a drawn out negotiating process. Rather, areas of disagreement can be resolved later, on an ongoing basis. However, if these conditions do not exist, the parties may well wish to hold fuller policy discussions. Parties in this situation clearly need to have a good grasp of the main policy issues if they are to reach realistic and informed agreements quickly.

This rarely poses problems to a party that is already in government, since it will already appreciate the opportunities and constraints on the policy agenda. The picture may not be so rosy for parties negotiating to form a wholly new government, however, and the prospect may be still more daunting for small parties without the resources available to their larger counterparts. For instance, in Ireland in 1997, the Progressive Democrats negotiated to form a government with Fianna Fail. Despite having been in office with the same partner just four years previously, the junior partner found conducting detailed policy negotiations a strain. It had just a couple of advisers, while Fianna Fail – which, in addition, is far more used to political office and thus the wider policy agenda – had access to a far larger resource pool. The junior partner did have access to civil servants from the Finance Department for help in costing any policy commitments. And more liberal information regimes plus the posting of economic data on the web means important material is often readily available. Nonetheless, some Progressive Democrats involved in the negotiations would have liked additional resources, in the shape of 2-3 civil servants, to advise the party on its policies, in particular on their 'downstream' implications. This plea was echoed in Ireland by Labour figures involved in the negotiations with Fianna Fail in 1992-3, and in Germany by members of the Green party who negotiated a coalition with the SPD in 1998. Following the 1996 election in New Zealand, the negotiating parties were allocated around £150,000 to employ external advisers. Maybe not surprisingly, only the newest and smallest party, New Zealand First, drew upon this fund (Boston and McLeay, 1997: 228).

Civil servants in Ireland appear to be becoming more involved in providing advice to coalition negotiations. This may be because the country has only been in a system of coalition politics for twelve years, since Fianna Fail ended its refusal to enter power sharing administrations. The issues on which the parties typically seek civil service advice are the costing of programmes, the state of the social partnerships (agreements between government, employers and the unions), matters that require discussion within the European Union and the internal structure of government. There are no formal arrangements in Ireland covering the provision of such advice. Requests made by the parties are sent to the relevant department, not via the Government Secretariat. These unregulated arrangements seem to work well; I encountered no concern either within the civil service or among the parties about access or equity issues, and no calls for more formal rules.

Coalition bargaining in Denmark is not informed by civil servants, who play no role in advising the parties on financial matters or policy implementation. In part this is because coalition agreements rarely contain this level of detail, since Denmark's governments tend to

autonomy, it is only individual heads of departments that have the power to enforce agreements (Laver and Shepsle, 1996). Thus, parties will seek particular portfolios since

In Scotland, the junior partner, the Liberal Democrats, gained only two out of the eleven portfolios up for grabs (18%), a slightly lower total than might have been expected from their seat share within the coalition (23%). Nor were they compensated by a larger share of junior posts or by senior ministries (although the Liberal Democrat leader, Jim Wallace, took the Justice Portfolio which allowed him to bring forward freedom of information legislation, an important policy goal for his party). In Wales, the share of portfolios allocated to the junior partner (22%), again the Liberal Democrats, was broadly in line with their seat share (18%), and they were also given the important policy post covering economic development. The position enjoyed by the Liberal Democrats in Wales may simply reflect the small size of the ministerial 'cake' in Cardiff; it is easier to produce a proportional allocation of ministries the more portfolios are on offer. But it may also reflect the greater need that Labour in Wales had for a coalition partner, and consequently the weaker its bargaining position.

It is not unusual for coalition partners to squabble about the number of portfolios each is to be allocated. How are these disputes resolved? In systems where the size of the ministerial cake is not fixed (among my study countries, Denmark, Germany and New Zealand), it is possible to accommodate parties' demands by increasing the number of portfolios available. Such a strategy has sometimes been resorted to in Germany, but this is exceptional and not frequent (Norpoth, 1982: 22). This would also be possible for the Scottish Executive and at Westminster, where there are no restrictions on the size of the cabinet. But in Wales[51], along with Ireland, the number of cabinet posts is fixed. Disputes among coalition partners in Ireland have sometimes been resolved by creating a 'super' junior minister, with the right to attend cabinet meetings although not to cast a vote, or by increasing the number of ministers of state (Garry, 1995: 198). Allocation of posts also extends beyond ministerial portfolios to include other agency and political offices (Mitchell, 2000: 143-5).

Party behaviour in bargaining situations

Bargaining between parties to form a coalition can proceed in one of two ways. The first is for a lead party or group of parties to emerge and to begin negotiations. These continue until it is clear that a government can or cannot be formed. The other parties remain aside from the negotiations until the lead parties' bargaining collapses, in which case they may enter the ring. Under this model, bargaining follows an order and is thus *sequential*. The alternative is for one party – usually the pivotal centre party – to negotiate with more than one other party simultaneously, a process of *parallel* bargaining.[52] There are no intrinsic reasons to favour one model over the other. There is insufficient comparative data to show whether parallel bargaining processes tend to be more drawn out than sequential ones (although the experience of New Zealand in 1996 is one example where parallel bargaining strategies almost certainly stretched the time taken to form a government; Boston and Church, 2000). The key distinction between them is that the parallel model allows pivotal parties (those able to form a viable coalition with more than one partner) to play off their potential partners against each other, thereby maximising their bargaining capacity. This was the strategy of New Zealand First in 1996, when it held discussions at the same time with the larger National and Labour parties. Are there any conventions on whether bargaining should be sequential or parallel?

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[51] Under Standing Order 2.5, the maximum number of Assembly Secretaries is fixed at nine.
[52] Where there are formal constraints on the bargaining process – by the designation of a lead negotiator or *formateur* – the parties are forced to operate sequentially. Thus it is only in 'unordered' systems (see Chapter 2) in which parties have the option of bargaining in parallel.

In Ireland, no parallel bargaining was possible until 1989, when Fianna Fail lifted its self-imposed moratorium on participation in coalition administrations. In 1992, Labour emerged from the election as the 'winner', having made the highest gain in vote share among the parties. Although in terms of seats, it was only the third largest party, Labour thus had the

Limiting the duration of government formation

How long should a coalition take to negotiate, and are there any reasons for placing limits on this process?

First, what is the typical duration of coalition negotiations elsewhere? I showed at the start of this chapter that the average duration varies significantly between countries. Taking these averages across the eight west European countries surveyed recently (Müller and Strøm (2000: 570) in which more than half of the post-WWII period has been overseen by coalition governments[54], the mean government formation period is 23 days. This is one benchmark.

A second is to ask how long *should* it take to form a coalition? The last elections in Germany in 1998 saw bargaining between the SPD and Greens, a combination previously untried at the federal level (although piloted at state level) with, in addition, the Greens lacking any experience of federal government. In spite of the junior partner's lack of resources to evaluate policy issues, the negotiations were completed in 30 days. Senior figures from the Green party who were involved in the negotiations did not think this was too short a period. The same is true in Ireland, whose most recent negotiations, in 1997, brought together a Fianna Fail-Progressive Democrat coalition to replace a left of centre coalition. Although negotiators from the junior party felt under pressure from voters for a quick bargaining process, none thought the three week period too short. This lack of concern may be due to the fact that the leaders of the two coalition partners had held discussions prior to the election to minimise their policy differences during the campaign (Mitchell, 1999: 249-51). There had thus been some contact between the parties, paving the way for rapid agreement after the election. In general, the closer the relations between parties prior to elections, the quicker the formation process afterwards.

In spite of the good personal relations between the Labour and Liberal Democrat party leaders in Scotland, the formation of the coalition in 1999, in only eight days (with the actual negotiations lasting only five), was admitted to me by one of the senior negotiators to be too short. The speed was in large part induced by the parties themselves – although reinforced by the media and civil servants – since there was a fear that a longer formation process would be viewed unfavourably by voters, accustomed

resulting in the Chancellor being elected before coalition negotiations are fully completed (see footnote 48.)

Is there any evidence to suggest that coalitions are taking longer to form? Might such a trend hint at the need for external constraints on the

formed. Should inter-party bargaining be necessary to form a government, there are no time limits to help constrain this process.[56]

If is difficult to assess how far time limits for the recall of parliament act as a *de facto* constraint on duration of coalition negotiations. Of the 17 coalitions in Germany in the post-war period that took more than a single day to form, ten took longer than the 30 day recall deadline, although six of these extended the deadline by no more than one week. Both of the last two coalitions, in 1994 and 1998, were formed in exactly 30 days, suggesting that the recall of parliament may have played a role in the bargaining parties' behaviour (Saalfeld, 2000: 49). There is evidence, too, from New Zealand's bargaining process in 1996 that the parties worked towards the deadline for recall of parliament – eight weeks – suggesting that the

CHAPTER 4: The Coalition Agreement

This chapter examines the outcome of the negotiating process described in the previous chapter: the coalition agreement. The principal question driving my analysis is what kind of agreement is most conducive to an effectively managed coalition? Clearly, there is no ideal blueprint that can be identified and transferred across countries. But are there specific features of coalition agreements that appear to play an important role across time and space in underpinning healthy inter-party relations?

The functions and use of coalition agreements

Agreements are often used by the junior partner as a way of binding in the larger party. The larger party has significantly greater power as a result of its size. It is not usual for disputes to be resolved by votes, where the larger party could get its way by virtue of controlling more cabinet seats. Nonetheless, the larger party will control more portfolios and, in the person of the prime minister, sometimes has the means to end the coalition by calling for a dissolution of parliament. Comparative studies have shown that written coalition agreements are more likely in situations where the prime minister holds the power to terminate the government in this way; they are a means by which the junior partner can restrict the prime minister's power by preventing him/her from using this authority unilaterally (Strøm and Müller, 2001: 16).

Agreements can be thus used to reassure or inform a governing partner or members of a party ('internal' function) or to do the same for voters ('external' function. Alternatively, their function can be see in relation to party members and voters ('vertical' role) and to a coalition partner ('horizontal' role) (Strøm and Müller, 1999, 2001).

To assess the use of coalition agreements, I draw on a recent comprehensive comparative study of these documents, analysing cabinets in 15 west European countries between 1945-99. The study found that almost two thirds (65%) of cabinets were found to rest on formal written agreements. Moreover, there is more frequent use of agreements. Thus, during the 1940s, less than half of all coalition governments were based on a written agreement, while by the 1990s, this figure had risen to 70%. One reason given for the greater use of formal agreements is the increase in competition between political partie

The majority (67%) of coalition agreements analysed were struck after elections, with a fifth (21%) concluded during the electi

identified in the theoretical literature is that coalition agreements are not subject to any third party enforcement except, indirectly, through electoral sanctions. In response to the question of how to 'lock in' the coalition partners ('endogenous compliance'), one lesson is to spread the advantages that each party derives from the coalition (its 'payoffs') across the lifetime of the government. Each party should, in other words, avoid 'lumping' the advantages accruing to the other at the early stages of the coalition's life, otherwise that party will have little incentive to keep the agreement once it has gained what it wants. Insofar as they can, therefore, contracting parties sh

detailed agreement which encouraged both parties to take an almost legalistic approach in ensuring that 'their' policy commitments were met. However, even very long agreements cannot determine in advance the government's actions in office. Civil servants I spoke to in New Zealand suggested that, while the 1996 agreement played a role for the initial 12-18 months of the coalition's life in signalling its policy direction, thereafter it became a less important guide to what needed to be done. In fact, it became an encumbrance, since the parties often stuck to their original commitments even when circumstances demanded a different policy course.

The coalition agreements in Scotland and Wales are, as noted above, relatively modest in size. Yet both make up for this by including a high degree of policy specificity. The Scottish agreement is organised into eleven policy sections, the Welsh into nine. Each contains an initial set of 'Principles' followed by specific 'Initiatives'. In the Education section, for example, thirteen (Scotland) or fourteen (Wales) initiatives are set out, some of which are couched in very general terms, while others make clear pledges. The lists of initiatives are longer than the equivalent section in New Zealand's 1996 coalition agreement between National and New Zealand First, generally seen to be too prescriptive on policy matters (Boston, 2000: 255-7). They are also more specific than the education section in the agreement of the current Fianna Fail-Progressive Democrat coalition in Ireland. For example, the commitment of the Irish coalition to pre-school education runs merely to the provision of a specific budget, while the agreements in Scotland and Wales guarantee to provide a nursery place for every three and four year old, in Scotland's case by a set date. The extent to which coalition agreements set out specific policy commitments depends, of course, on factors such as the perceived importance of the policy in question, its level of development (targets for delivery can only be made if the budget and infrastructure are already in place) and the political style of the administration (the setting of measurable targets is a particular feature of contemporary British governance). Yet, in comparative perspective, what the Scottish and Welsh coalition agreements lack in size, they make up for in the specificity of their policy commitments. It will be interesting to see whether, next time around, the coalition agreements become rather more general, in line with practice in countries such as Denmark, Ireland and New Zealand.[58]

Finally, coalition agreements only serve as contracts (with other parties, party supporters or voters) if they are systematically monitored. This is difficult for groups outside the coalition, such as party supporters and voters, although the ultimate sanction at their disposal – voting out of office a government that fails to meet its commitments – is severe. But what about the coalition partners themselves: how is the agreement that they sign monitored for compliance? I have only a couple of observations to make here. The first is that monitoring does not seem to be a major preoccupation for coalition governments. It is reported that coalition agreements in Germany are systematically monitored by civil servants in the relevant ministries as well as in the Chancellor's office (Müller-Rommel, 1994: 165). The role of bureaucrats in the German system may be explained by the fact that senior civil servants are often political appointees for whom monitoring of the coalition agreement would be an appropriate role. I was told on my study visit to Berlin that the current SPD-Green coalition

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[58] It will also be interesting to see whether any subsequent power sharing arrangements are referred to as *coalitions* or, as is the case in Scotland and Wales at present, as *partnerships* for fear that coalition might create negative impressions. Power sharing governments in Ireland also prefer to call themselves 'partnerships' rather than 'coalitions'; evidently, it is not only "England [that] does not love coalitions", in Disraeli's famous aphorism.

agreement is not monitored by the civil servants in the Chancellery, but by the parties (this may reflect the fact that some in the coalition find it difficult to trust civil servants on account of the long period of right wing government prior to 1998). Even this monitoring of the agreement has decreased as the coalition has worn on, suggesting either that the parties have grown more trusting of one another or, more likely, that many of the important commitments have already been met.

In systems without dedicated resources, it may be difficult to monitor detailed coalition agreements. New Zealand First, the junior coalition partner in the 1996-98 administration, and lacking the necessary personnel, found it too time consuming to monitor the very detailed agreement it had signed. In Ireland, the detailed coalition agreements signed between Fianna Fail and Labour in 1992, and Fine Gael, Labour and the Democratic Left in 1994, were monitored by dedicated political advisers, Programme Managers (whose role is described in the next chapter). Monitoring of coalition agreements outside Germany appears, then, to be an ad hoc exercise, largely dependent on the necessary resources being available.

The 'tightness' of coalition agreements

As I explained above, there are strong incentives for parties, especially small ones, to push for detailed coalition agreements that bind in their partners. Against this, coalition agreements are contracts signed with imperfect information, since the parties can never know what lies around the corner. What balance, then, should be struck between detail and flexibility?

The agreement forged between the SPD and Greens in 1998 is the longest Germany has seen. The Greens had pushed for a tight agreement concerned, as coalition 'novices', to rein in their larger partner at the outset and to make sure that their priorities did, in fact, get delivered. But while, unsurprisingly, political advisers attached to the SPD bemoaned the constraints imposed by the agreement, such sentiments were also shared by Green politicians, who thought the agreement too specific and inflexible. The concern of the junior partner had led, unusually in Germany, to the inclusion in the agreement of various procedural rules (Saalfeld, 2000: 56). However, these rules, unlike the policy commitments, were not highly specific (for example, in setting out how often the main coalition coordinating committee should meet). My interviews with Green party figures suggested that, with hindsight, the party might have been better off insisting on more specific consultation mechanisms than on stipulating a detailed policy agreement.

New Zealand's second coalition under PR conditions, the Labour-Alliance partnership formed in 1999, explicitly took the view that inter-party cooperation was better served by effective procedures than by detailed policy agreements. The 65 page agreement reached by the previous coalition partners, National and New Zealand First, was in part the product of the junior partner trying to ensure that its policy demands were met in government. It also reflected distrust within National of New Zealand First, particularly since the junior party's leader, Winston Peters, had negotiated tenure of the key post of Treasurer with control over public spending. Some of New Zealand First's members still support its approach to the agreement – pointing out that it helped prevent backsliding by National once in office – although most commentators see the agreement as excessively detailed and rigid, leading to difficulties when circumstances changed (Boston, 2000: 255-7). It also provided the opposition parties and the media with sticks to beat the coalition when promised initiatives didn't materialise. While the first agreement was, at around 17,000 words, long in comparative perspective, the second, at only 500 words, was extremely short. The brevity of the agreement

was helped by the personal relations between the parties' leaders and advisers, by the high level of knowledge each had of the other's policies and by the relative congruence of the parties' programmes. These factors appear to have offset the concer

future, and the greater their mutual mistrust, the more likely they are to form 'tight' agreements that bind each other through policy commitments and/or procedural rules. While there is no 'ideal' coalition agreement, the parties should weigh up the pros and cons of a tight or loose set of commitments. The agreement should not be so detailed that it prevents flexibility and compromise between the partners on a day to day basis. But while the senior coalition partner may prefer a very short agreement, this may be less optimal for the junior partner. Indeed, a certain level of detail is useful for both parties, since each can point to concrete commitments to assuage the fears of party supporters. Some of the considerations parties will face in deciding on the form of the agreement are listed in Table 7.

Table 7: The pros and cons of different forms of coalition agreement

	Pros	*Cons*
Tight policy agreement (ie. extensive list of policy commitments)	£ Reduces extent of (time consuming) consultation later on	£ May take a long time to negotiate after an election
	£ Enhances the visibility of the junior partner. Evens up the bargaining power of partners on a day to day basis	£ Encourages parties to think of government as maximising 'their' policies, rather than forging a genuine partnership
	£ Greater accountability to voters and parties	£ Provides a stick with which the coalition can be beaten if it fails to honour promises
Loose policy agreement (ie. minimal list of policy commitments)	£ Greater flexibility should the political environment change	£ Reduces the bargaining power of the junior partner, unless sufficient consultation and decision making procedures are also built into the coalition

CHAPTER 5: Managing Coalition Governments

This chapter analyses one of the inherent difficulties with power sharing executives. How, with two or more parties sharing power, are decisions made that reflect the will of the government as a single entity? Given the organisation of modern governments into more or less distinct departments or ministries, how are policy decisions made genuinely collective? In what follows, I examine the *political* coordination of government business, that is to say, the coordination of issues between coalition partners. This is to be distinguished from *functional* coordination, which involves policy issues that cut across departments. While in practice the two forms of coordination may not be wholly distinct, I separate them out to distinguish the kind of coordination that is largely unique to power sharing executives, as oppoTwes e the

Coordination via portfolio allocation

A coalition partners' attempts to ensure close coordination of their work in government begins during their negotiations. At this stage, they will decide how portfolios are to be allocated, and what procedures will underpin the operation of the government. These matters are crucially important, yet are rarely included in the final public agreement. Only in one of twelve west European countries recently surveyed (Austria) is more than 10% of the typical coalition agreement taken up with the distribution of offices. Internal coalition procedures are more in evidence in coalition agreements; across the same twelve countries, just over 10% of all agreements is concerned with such procedural rules (Müller and Strøm, 2000a: 576-8). I examine below in more detail the main variants of these coordination arrangements.

What I analyse in this section is the way that the allocation of ministries is used to achieve a coordination function. In particular, I look at the role of junior ministers from one party who co-exist within a department headed by a senior minister from another party. I term such allocation patterns 'pooled' ministries, while ministries that contain senior and junior ministers only from one party I term 'segregated' ministries, since the immediate responsibility for decision making rests with one party only (although, as we shall see, control of a ministry does not entail full control over decision making even if ministries are segregated). Most west European countries have the potential to use portfolios as a coordination tool, since only in Denmark and Finland do junior ministerial posts not exist (Müller and Strøm, 2000a: 582). The executives in Scotland and Wales both contain junior posts; each Scottish ministry is allocated a single Deputy Minister, while in Wales, there are fewer Deputy Ministers (five) than cabinet posts (nine), with one junior minister covering a number of departments.[60]

Comparative studies show that it is extremely common – and, indeed, becoming more prevalent over time – for coalitions in west European countries to use pooled ministries (Strøm and Müller, 2001: 12). The allocation of junior ministries helps serve a 'governance function' in two ways. The first is essentially defensive: to keep each partner in touch with what the other is doing and to make sure that the coalition agreement is adhered to (the junior post as monitor or watchdog). The second is more proactive: to bring the perspectives of all the coalition partners to bear on decision making on a day to day basis, recognising that leaving such coordination to higher level bodies (eg. the cabinet or coalition committee) may be ineffective or slow down decision making (the junior post as coordinator) (Müller and Strøm, 2000a: 582-3).

But pooled ministries may only play a full coordination function if the duties of the senior and junior ministers are shared. If duties are divided (ie. a segregated pattern within a pooled ministry), there will be fewer opportunities for the ministers to agree a common programme of work. So my first question is how far pooling ministerial posts really represents a tool of coalition management?

In Germany, pooled ministries are a frequent occurrence, although their role in coalition management is often limited. During the Schmidt and Kohl-led coalitions of the 1980s and early 1990s, junior ministers from the senior party were often placed in ministries controlled

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[60] Junior ministers in Wales can play only a restricted role in relation to coalition management, since they are clearly subordinate to cabinet ministers; for example, they are not allowed to see policy advice from civil servants, unless this is authorised by the senior minister.

by the Free Democrats (notably foreign affairs and justice) as 'watchdogs' (Saalfeld, 2000: 71). My interviews in Berlin suggested that junior ministers often have a specific role in helping the senior minister liaise with parliament. This is an important function for any government (especially minority administrations; see Chapter 7), although not one directly designed to facilitate coalition coordination. The current SPD-Green coalition has made use of pooled ministries in three departments: an SPD junior minister in Foreign Affairs, a Green junior in Economic Cooperation and, since earlier this year, a Green senior/SPD junior minister in Agriculture. Again, the presence of the SPD in the foreign ministry and the Greens in economic cooperation is designed to give this party a voice and watchdog role in an important policy field.

Pooled portfolio allocations have also become more prevalent in Ireland, with the key ministries (eg. finance, industry/enterprise and foreign affairs) now being routinely split between the coalition partners (Mitchell, 2000: 143-7). The current junior partner, the Progressive Democrats, decided against pushing for more than one senior minister or outright control of one ministry, in favour of having a presence – via junior ministerships – in important departments (foreign affairs and the environment/local government). Recently, pooled departments have tended to be segregated internally, so that the senior and junior minister take charge of different policy areas. Thus, the Fianna Fail minister at foreign affairs covers relations with other states in general, while the Progressive Democrat junior takes control of overseas development aid and human rights. Such specialisation helps boost the collective capacity of government, although it does little to improve the coordination of coalition business.

Unlike in Germany or Ireland, junior (or 'associate') ministers in New Zealand are not allocated to a single ministry, but usually cover a range of departments. It is also possible for cabinet ministers to perform associate ministerial functions, although most associate posts are allocated to ministers outside the cabinet. The two coalition governments since 1996 have both used associate ministers to create 'pooled' ministries, usually where an associate minister from the junior partner sits within a ministry headed by the senior partner. This gives the junior partner a voice in portfolios they don't control, and this function is helped by the practice of giving associates clear areas of responsibility within the department. Thus, in the current coalition, the Alliance cabinet member responsible for women's and youth affairs, Laila Harre, is also associate minister for commerce, in which role she takes particular responsibility for intellectual property issues. The use of pooled ministries appears to have more to do with giving the junior coalition partner a voice in important issues where it does not control the portfolio, than with coordinating coalition decision making within departments.

Within the Scottish Executive, ministerial allocation has also followed a pooled pattern. Thus, the Justice and Agriculture departments, controlled by the Liberal Democrats, have Labour juniors, while the opposite pattern is the case at Education. The coalition partners also share responsibility for parliamentary liaison. Within pooled ministries, functions tend to be segregated, so that the junior ministers in the Justice and Agriculture departments, for example, have distinct areas of policy responsibility. The Welsh administration has also used pooled ministries, so that the Liberal Democrat-controlled economic development and culture portfolios have Labour juniors, while the Labour-controlled local government portfolio includes a Liberal Democrat junior. The role of junior ministers appears to have more to do with lightening the load of senior ministers (by carrying out second tier policy work and attending events) than with coalition management.

Given the often limited purposes for which pooled ministries are used, what contribution do they make to coalition governance? In Ireland, pooled ministries appear to work successfully as devices for giving parties a voice in departments they don't control, as well as allowing small coalition parties to take responsibility for high profile issues or areas of importance to their supporters. The strong collective ethos of Irish government means there is less need for portfolio allocation to contribute towards coalition coordination, a role it does not appear to play.

A broadly similar picture emerges from New Zealand's more limited experience of coalition management. Here, however, the success of pooled ministries has been less even, with some ministries being undermined as the senior and associate minister fought for control of decision making (a good example is the health ministry during the 1996-98 coalition, where the New Zealand First associate minister eventually had to be sacked by his party leader after repeatedly clashing with his National senior). Some associate ministers from New Zealand First had taken their role to involve vetoing departmental initiatives they didn't like, leading in some cases to conflict between the parties. Learning from these pitfalls, the Alliance party was careful in 1999 to select associate status in Labour controlled ministries only on areas of key concern to its supporters, such as labour issues and overseas development (for which the party takes responsibility within the Foreign Affairs portfolio, just like the Progressive Democrats in Ireland). The junior coalition partner has also ensured its voice is heard in departments controlled by Labour by insisting that some of its associate ministers are given 'Joint Ministerial Status', giving them full input into policy making and a veto on final decisions. Thus, Laila Harre, as associate minister for commerce, takes delegated responsibility for some areas (eg. intellectual property), but has ministerial status on issues of particular concern for the Alliance party (eg. competition policy).

Pooled ministries play a similar role in Germany, but are seen as less successful. In large part, this is to do with the strong principle of ministerial autonomy, which constrains the ability of junior ministers to make their voices heard (Müller-Rommel, 1994). Indeed, I was told that it was a recognition of the impotence of junior ministers that persuaded the CDU/CSU under Helmut Kohl to relinquish its junior foreign affairs minister in the mid-1980s.[61]

A second point is that pooled ministries can sometimes work against junior coalition partners, especially if they are new to government as the Green party is in Germany. Ministers from such parties will often place a high premium on political colleagues and officials who support them and whom they can trust. This may be less likely if the minister has to share power in his/her department with a member from the coalition partner. The decision for small parties

junior coalition partner in

analyse arrangements in each study country, plus Scotland and Wales. Following these case studies, I conclude by assessing the effectiveness of the various models on offer.

Distinctions and classifications

Across my four study countries, let alone across west European countries more generally, there are a wide variety of structures and processes by which coalitions are managed.[64] At the outset, then, it is helpful to make some distinctions between different forms and levels of management and coordination. I use these distinctions in the later sections when analysing coalition management arrangements in Scotland, Wales and overseas.

1. Arenas for coordination

I deal with two arenas in which the day to day business of coalition governments is usually subject to some form of coordination. The first is within the executive itself, with ministers from the parties managing their relations with one another. The second arena is between the parties in the executive and the parties in parliament; these links can be both intra-party (relations between ministers and the parliamentary group within the same party) and inter-party (relations between ministers of one party and the caucus of their partner party).

I don't deal extensively with relations between actors in the executive and those in the legislature. But these links are extremely important for the effective management of coalitions. Members of the executive will have concerns that, since coalitions often command only a slim majority in the executive or no majority at all, the defection of only a few MPs may be fatal to its chances of survival. Members of the parliamentary parties will be concerned that ministers (their 'agents') will compromise their party's policies in reaching agreements with the coalition partner. A case study of co

Coalition management in Scotland and Wales[65]

The coalition agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland, signed in May 1999, binds the parties to collective decision making while respecting each other's identity. There is a strong commitment to collective responsibility, so that all ministers must have knowledge of each policy decision, spending commitment, piece of legislation and public appointment, and must support any decision taken in cabinet. The fulcrum of the coalition is the relationship between the First Minister and Deputy First Minister[66], with all decisions concerning portfolio allocation, the modus operandi of the executive and dispute resolution – in addition to those items subject to collective responsibility – being decided jointly by the two party leaders. The approval of both figures is also required for items to be included on the cabinet's agenda. To help the Deputy First Minister, he, along with the First Minister, must be copied all papers relating to significant policy issues or appointments, and is given additional support to help him carry out his coalition role. The agreement does not specify party discipline within the Parliament beyond a commitment on the part of two party caucuses to "operate in support" of the executive, with each party using its own internal procedures to ensure such support.

The flow of information between departments is subject to clear guidance[67]; the main recognition of the government's coalition status is the stipulation that important material be copied to both the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The same concern is also reflected in the requirement to copy to the Executive Secretariat any civil service advice to departmental ministers as well as the minutes of any formal meeting between ministers.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister do not take part in any routine decision making outside their own particular areas of policy responsibility. Where any problem or disagreement arises, ad hoc meetings of one or both figures – and maybe the Finance Minister and/or Minister for Parliament – along with the relevant minister(s) can be held, serviced by civil servants from the Executive Secretariat. The principle of collectivity does not mean that all decisions need to be taken at the weekly cabinet meetings. Indeed, the executive's internal guidelines encourage issues to be dealt with prior to cabinet or, where an issue is controversial, for the points of disagreement to be clarified, and for attempts to resolve the issue to be exhausted, before cabinet. Nonetheless, cabinet meetings tend to involve fuller discussion of issues than is the case in Whitehall, and thus function as an important cog in the collective machinery. Where the interests of two or more departments overlap on a major policy issue, a ministerial committee or working group may be established (no formal cabinet committees exist). Representation of the two partners on such bodies tends to be more equally balanced than the proportional norm used for the allocation of cabinet seats. Thus, on the committee set up to discuss the divisive issue of student tuition fees, each party was represented by three people. Papers for such bodies are available to all ministers, and a minister outside the principal departments concerned may attend meetings subject to the

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[65] This section draws on various primary and secondary sources, as well as on interviews with key personnel conducted during study visits. These visits were undertaken in July 2000 (Scotlandbo40erce and cipal d4o40

chairman's approval. The Executive Secretariat must be kept informed of the work of such bodies, and may well provide support facilities for them.

Two features stand out from this brief overview of the coalition management arrangements in Scotland. The first is the central role of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. My interviews sl- My

Labour was good at government but bad at coalition, while the Liberal Democrats were good at coalition but bad at government (meaning that Labour still had to get used to consultation and negotiation, while Liberal Democrat backbenchers had to get used to the compromises necessary when taking decisions).[71]

collective responsibility only on devolved matters, with the parties free to take whatever position they wish on reserved matters. Where reserved matters impinge on areas of Assembly competence, the guidelines state that the coalition partners should:

"strive for agreement in any public comments, in so far as this remains consistent with

collective decision making; under Article 65, ministers must conduct the affairs of their departments on their own, subject only to the direction set by the Chancellor.

Coalition management arrangements rarely form part of the written agreement between the parties. Only in 1961 and 1998 have agreements contained explicit procedural rules, on both occasions at the insistence of the junior partner to prevent the domination of the senior partner (Saalfeld, 2000: 58-9; personal interviews). The current coalition agreement stipulates a dedicated committee to ensure coordination between the partners, discipline on all matters in the Bundestag, as well as in other key forums such as European Union bodies, no outvoting in cabinet on any issue that one partner deems important and the agreement of the junior partner to appointments to cabinet committees and before any major departmental reorganisation.

The cabinet is not used as a forum for coalition management, with areas of disagreement between the parties dealt with at a lower level. Although Germany has a well developed system of coalition committees presided over by the Chancellor or Vice Chancellor, their role is primarily administrative rather than political. The main feature of coalition management in Germany is the use of informal channels of communication – particularly bilateral discussions between the Chancellor and his deputy – and the involvement of the leaders of the parliamentary parties in these channels. Nonetheless, when inter-party relations have become strained, a common strategy has been a resort to formal coordinating bodies that meet more frequently (Saalfeld, 2000: 60-3).

The current SPD-Green coalition marks to some extent a move away from coalition management by informal channels and political appointees, resonant of the Kohl era. In the early 1990s, the CDU/CSU-FDP coalition was managed through weekly meetings of an informal coalition 'circle' or 'round' (*koalitionsrunde*), comprising the party leaders, the chairs and leaders of the parliamentary groups and the heads of the party organisations. But more strategic matters, plus any disputes that arose in the committee, were dealt with by a smaller group that met in the evenings, comprising the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor along with the chairs of the parliamentary groups and party organisations.[74] This smaller group became increasingly important as the coalition became more internally divided and Kohl increasingly distrustful of his ministers. This concentration of power helped speed up decision making, but at the cost of concerns among ministers and the parliamentary parties that they were being excluded from decision making.

Under the current SPD-Green coalition, the main management forum has transferred to a formal coalition committee (*koalitionsausschuß*). This committee comprises eight members from each party – thus institutionalising the principle of the coalition as an equal partnership – and meets at the behest of either partner. This is usually every two months or so, although the coalition's teething problems in its first two years meant that the committee initially met every fortnight. The committee is primarily concerned with conflict management, and thus convenes whenever a problem arises. The difficulty with such irregular patterns is that they signal to the outside world the existence of dissonance within the coalition, rather than being seen as a regular part of the coordination process. Indeed, this is the role the Greens would like to see the committee play, and are pressing for it to be convened more regularly. For the junior partner, the continued use of informal procedures to coordinate coalition business hinders its role across government, as well as leading to an external perception that the

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[74] The so called 'elephant round' on account of its members' seniority.

government is dominated by the SPD. In spite of a range of formal structures, major issues affecting the coalition tend to be worked out in meetings of the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, rather than involving a wider group of ministers.

Much of the coalition's ongoing management takes place at the parliamentary level. Each

personal trustworthiness is another; the transition between governments may be a period when both of these desiderata are hard to satisfy.

The political officials in each department liaise closely with their equivalents in the Chancellor's office, and meet with them each week prior to cabinet. The *Bundeskanzleramt* is huge, at around 500 staff. It reports to the Chancellor, not the cabinet, and is responsible for keeping him informed of activity across the departments (thus, although the office helps the government as a whole by coordinating coalition activity, it does so on behalf of the Chancellor in his capacity as the leader of the government).[76] The office gets involved in policy planning at an early stage; on very significant or cross-cutting issues, responsibility can ke16 be tra adat mirr.786behal20.715 Tct

Coalitions in Denmark are based on a strong convention that no government measure be introduced without the support of all the partners. In practice, this means that any departmental decision is the subject of consultations with other affected ministries and with the coalition partner (often via its parliamentary spokesperson); no issue can be put before parliament without having first been ratified by cabinet. Cabinet meets once a week, but does not engage in substantive discussions, rather signing off matters discussed in a lower tier of forums. If disputes do arise in cabinet, formal voting is not resorted to; instead the matter is sent back to a cabinet committee or other forum for further work (Christensen, 1985: 119-20). Cabinet committees are an important part of government administration in Denmark, although they tend to aid coordination on specific policy issues or themes (eg. financial relations between central and local government) rather than across the coalition as a whole. However, since membership of cabinet committees sometimes includes the leaders of the parliamentary parties, they do offer a forum for coordinating relations between the executive and legislature (*ibid*: 129-30).

There are two committees whose work is highly relevant to the management of coalition governments. Since 1982, there has been a formal Coordination Committee, which has become the main forum for conflict management and strategic direction of the government (*ibid*: 130; Wolf, 1995: 37). It comprises 4-6 members: the Prime Minister – who sets the agenda – and the leader of the coalition partner[77], plus a few senior ministers (membership is balanced between the coalition partners, whereas that of the Economic Affairs Committee is determined by functional criteria). It meets weekly[78] and is serviced by senior civil servants from the Prime Minister's office, along with the Permanent Secretary from the Finance Ministry. Its role is to oversee the strategic direction of the coalition and its political management and to deal with major policy issues. It not only works via face to face meetings; its members also receive papers relating to government initiatives, press events and notice of cabinet agenda items.

The political management role of the Coordination Committee is complemented by the budgetary planning role of the Economic Affairs Committee. This committee considers all issues with public spending implications; any disputes that cannot be resolved in this forum are sent to the Coordination Committee. Generally, ministers will make every effort to avoid taking disputes to the Coordination Committee, which is the final 'court of appeal', since this is seen to reflect poorly on their own abilities to resolve conflicts. If an issue cannot be agreed by the parties in the Coordination Committee, either wields a veto over its further progress. In practice, this option is never resorted to, since it would signal a real crisis within the coalition. Contentious matters tend to be resolved through meetings between the prime minister and the other party leader(s).

In spite of the role played by such formal committees, government in Denmark tends to be pragmatic and consensual, based on informal methods of coordination and dispute resolution

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[77] There is no position of deputy prime minister in Denmark, and the leader of the junior coalition partner is not allocated any staff beyond those that serve him/her in a departmental capacity. The leader of the junior partner is not consulted on day to day departmental issues, which are dealt with by

rather than formal structures. The prime minister plays an important role in liaising with ministers and senior parliamentar

Ministry of Finance are involved in meetings of the Coordination Committee (Christensen, 1985: 135). Officials thus play a functional role that complements ministerial political structures. But in the absence of a cadre of political advisers[80], senior departmental officials are also called on to provide more political advice for ministers, a role that becomes more acute when the government is a coalition or enjoys only minority status (Wolf, 1998: 35-6). The permanent secretary heading the department controlled by the junior coalition party leader, currently Economic Affairs, will be expected to represent that party's views in any officials' meeting, not just the interests of his/her department. He or she will also liaise closely with the Finance Ministry's permanent secretary in resolving conflicts that arise in the economic field. But while civil servants may take the lead in consulting across government on technical aspects of a proposal, more political negotiations within the executive and with parliament are the preserve of ministers.

Coalitions are also reinforced by strong discipline when it comes to voting in the legislature (Damgaard, 2000: 247-8). But while MPs are expected to support the government at the voting stage, they expect – and appear to get – a greater input further upstream. Each week, departmental ministers will meet with the relevant spokesperson from their, and/or their partner's, party group in parliament. This is a means of sharing information and concerns between the executive and legislative tiers. In addition to their role as conduits, party spokespeople also take the lead for their party if the portfolio in question is held by the coalition partner. In the absence of junior ministers, the spokespeople thus aid coalition management by acting as ministerial 'shadows'. They then provide an information flow to their ministers through meetings of the whole caucus, which can take place three or four times each week. Strong links are also maintained between the parliamentary groups and the centre of government; each week, the chairs of the coalition partners' caucuses meet with the prime minister, other party leaders and the finance minister to discuss coalition business and any conflicts that have arisen between the parliamentary groups and the executive.

Ireland

Under its constitution (Art. 28.4.2), Ireland's governments serve as united entities, underpinned by strong collective cabinet responsibility. But ministers are expected to restrict their activities to their own departments, with only the Taoiseach (prime minister) commenting on broader pan-government issues. The focus of conflict management is seen to be the cabinet and, above this level, bilateral meetings between the Taoiseach and Tanaiste (deputy prime minister) (Mitchell, 2000: 140).[81] The cabinet – which meets weekly – remains the key forum for the discussion and debate of important issues, and its decisions must be adhered to by the parties although, in recognition of this fact, formal votes are rarely resorted to (Mitchell, 1999a). Some commentators believe that the advent of permanent coalition government since 1989 has served to weaken the discipline of collective cabinet government (Chubb, 1992). Others perceive the collective ethos to have weakened during the first coalitions in 1948-51 and 1954-57 as ministers construed their loyalty as much to their parties as to the government as a whole. Significantly, it was these administrations that introduced

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[80] There are some political advisers attached to departments, but these tend to focus on press work or on relations with the parties, rather than on coalition management.

cabinet committees, to compensate for the high degree of ministerial autonomy in decision making (Cohan, 1982: 271-2, 276). But committees are used less than in other European countries and, while ad hoc committees are established under coalition conditions to help resolve disputes on particular issues, thorny issues still tend to be resolved at cabinet level (Connelly and O'Halpin, 1999: 257-8).

The demands of informal management styles under coalition conditions have had some effect on the role of cabinet. During the 'Rainbow' coalition (Fine Gael-Labour-Democratic Left) of 1994-7, much management of the government took place during meetings of the three party leaders immediately prior to cabinet. As a result of such 'pre-cooking', levels of discussion in cabinet fell with some cabinet members becoming concerned at their detachment from decision making. Meetings of the party leaders before the full cabinet have continued during the present coalition, although there is less sense that these sessions channel important issues away from cabinet.

Nonetheless, coalition management in Ireland appears to have stuck closely to the 'Westminster' model with relatively few adjustments in the transition from single party rule. Coordination tends to be achieved through informal ministerial meetings or occasionally via ad hoc committees. Parties in government, until recently, were happy to subsume their identities under that of the government as a whole, reducing the scope for conflict (Farrell, 1993: 147). As a result, informal mechanisms of coalition coordination were seen to work effectively (Farrell, 1994: 74). In terms of arenas, coordination takes place primarily within the executive (horizontal relations) rather than drawing in parliament (vertical relations). The Irish legislature follows Westminster in according relatively few powers to TDs. The policy role of legislators, unlike their counterparts in Denmark and Germany, is restricted to checking unpopular initiatives rather than taking a proactive role in policy development (Gallagher, 1999: 194-8).

The levers available for government management at the centre have strengthened, mainly as a result of increased capacity in the Taoiseach's office. This person, along with the Tanaiste, plays the key role in coalition coordination (Farrell, 1994: 81).[82] But the formal role of the Tanaiste – whose post is statutory – is limited to standing in for the Taoiseach should he be away or die in office. It was only in 1993, when Labour went into government with Fianna Fail for the first time, that the deputy's office ga

Taoiseach who is seen to operate outside departmental boundaries (Farrell, 1993: 156-8; Mitchell, 2000: 149).

Along with an enhanced role for the Tanaiste, the Fianna Fail-Labour coalition of 1993-4 was notable for an attempt to introduce a more formal process of coalition management. Labour wanted a means of exerting more control over decisions made by the government as a whole, as well as a mechanism for ensuring compliance with the highly detailed coalition agreement signed by the two partners. Previously, the implementation of coalition agreements had been the responsibility of individual ministers, with little recourse available if a partner believed a particular minister was dragging his/her heels (Farrell, 1993: 159). The result was a system of 'Programme Managers', a set of senior figures from inside and outside the civil service attached to ministers and tasked with ensuring the implementation of the agreement as well as with general coalition coordination.[84] Each minister had one Programme Manager – although some senior ministers (eg. the Tanaiste) had two – whose responsibility was to his/her minister rather than to the department as a whole.

The role of the Programme Managers was to see and exchange information relating to the coalition's activities, to offer a liaison point with each minister and to aid conflict resolution. They were intended to make the coalition more dynamic (ie. ensuring the commitments made in the agreement were delivered), give the junior partner a greater say in decision making and free up the cabinet's time for strategic issues. Each partner's Programme Managers would meet in separate caucus on Monday prior to cabinet on Tuesday. The Taoiseach or Tanaiste's Programme Managers would lead these meetings, having been copied all the cabinet papers. The senior Fianna Fail and Labour Programme Managers would then meet with their respective party ministers on Tuesday prior to cabinet to brief them and alert them to any problems. The Taoiseach (Albert Reynolds) and Tanaiste (Dick Spring) would then meet before cabinet to compare notes based on the reports from the departmental Programme Managers. All the Managers would meet the day after cabinet to be briefed on the decisions that ministers had taken. To ensure that the commitments made in the coalition agreement were acted on, the Taoiseach and Tanaiste's Programme Managers also sat on the Legislation Committee, a body also established in 1993 to monitor the progress of draft legislative bills.

Ireland had had experience of political advisers before the introduction of Programme Managers, although the reforms introduced a far more political aspect to government administration than hitherto. While Labour chose all their Programme Managers from outside the civil service, Fianna Fail – with the exception of one minister – relied on career officials. The pros and cons of both groups are, of course, standard to both single party and coalition administrations. In summary, career officials tend to bring a better appreciation of the workings of government[85], while political appointees may be less constrained by established working methods and more able to engage with a wider set of actors, such as the coalition partners' parliamentary groups and the press. There is still debate about whether

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[84] The function of the Programme Managers was distinct from that of the more usual political advisers; the former were specifically responsible for the implementation of the coalition agreement, while the latter had a broader role in policy formulation within their subject department (Murray and Teahon, 1997: 43). In fact, the Fianna Fail-Labour coalition wanted to establish the kind of *cabinet* system used in other European countries alongside the Programme Managers, but this plan was rejected by officials in the Taoiseach's office who opposed the creation of large pools of ministerial advisers (Connelly and O'Halpin, 1999: 261).

[85] The Programme Manager to Albert Reynolds, the Taoiseach, had been private secretary to three Taoisigh, and was thus particularly knowledgeable about the operation of government.

the civil service or political appointees were the more effective. The Fine Gael-Labour-Democratic Left coalition that succeeded the

The number of Programme Managers was seve

Under this scheme, the minister in each portfolio area is twinned with a minister from the coalition partner.[89] The portfolio minister must brief his/her consultation minister on significant policy developments and appointments (this task is often undertaken by the minister's political adviser). To enforce this scheme, any submission to the cabinet or cabinet committee must be accompanied by a form which details consultation with the appropriate minister. While this arrangement ensures the sharing of information with the junior partner, it also allows objections to be made if the portfolio minister proposes a course of action or an appointment with which the consultation minister is unhappy. In these situations, the ministers bring the matter to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister's chiefs of staff. If the issue is thought to require consultation with the parliamentary party groups, it is the job of the consultation minister to brief his/her party caucus. The advantage of this scheme – similar to the earlier Danish model – is that it allows the junior partner a formal role in decision taking in departments it does not control.[90] It also allows early notice of decisions; although each partner is represented on cabinet sub-committees – to which issues will often pass after the consultation process – many decisions have already been taken by the time this part of the process is reached.

The downside of the arrangements is their time consuming nature. The limited policy content of the coalition agreement has meant that the coalition partners engage in more day to day consultation to resolve political issues than might have been the case with a fuller agreement. They also have a commitment to consensual decision making, enshrined in the coalition agreement; decision making cannot resort to voting within cabinet. Yet the time involved in consultation means that the requirement to involve the coalition partner is sometimes not adhered to. This is but one example of the potential difficulty in coalition situations of fully engaging the partners in decision making at the same time as ensuring that decisions are taken promptly where necessary. Most of my interviews suggested that the pace of decision making had slowed somewhat, to take account of the formal consultation procedures. But this was not seen as a problem, since greater consultation often helped improve the quality of the policy outputs. Neither does it seem to prevent rapid decisions being taken where necessary, since the parties can, and do, agree to fast track any pressing issue.

The second novel feature of coalition management under the current government is its provision for the parties to disagree with one another on key issues; the so called 'agree to disagree' clause set out in the coalition agreement. If disagreement between the parties arises on an issue deemed by either partner to be vital to its "identity", and if the coalition management committee agreed, the issue could be designated one of "party distinction". This allows the principle of collective responsibility to be suspended for that issue, and for the

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[89] The 'Consultation Ministers' are, as their name suggests, all ministers, usually with cabinet status. This avoids the problem of using members of the parliamentary party. The use of parliamentary spokespeople in coalition consultation is common, particularly for the junior partner if it lacks many ministers. However, it becomes difficult under official confidentiality rules for cabinet papers to be shown to members of parliamentary groups. Such constraints hindered the National-New Zealand First coalition between 1996-98. Spokespeople from the junior partner sometimes complained that they weren't being shown all the relevant papers, but this was often inevitable given that many documents were restricted to cabinet members only. In the current coalition, although it is only ministers that are involved in formal consultation arrangements, in practice over-burdened Alliance ministers often use their parliamentary spokespeople to assist with advice and recommendations.

[90] Although it also places a great burden on the junior partner whose ministerial pool is far smaller than Labour's. For example, the Alliance Deputy Prime Minister, Jim Anderton, is Consultation Minister on 43 portfolio areas.

parties to both campaign and vote in parliament on different lines. The agreement stressed that it expected such occasions to be infrequent and, indeed, the clause has only been invoked once, over a free trade agreement with Singapore, to which the Alliance objected. The clause is seen as applying to exceptional issues, not the core issues on which the coalition has been formed. In this sense, the 'agree to disagree' clause represents a slight watering down of the principle of collective responsibility, designed to protect the junior coalition partner, rather than any wholesale shift away from the principle of unified government.

Although New Zealand's current government has established collegiate structures for coalition coordination and rules covering the exchange of information, day to day management tends to be informal and takes place outside collegiate forums (such as cabinet, whose role appears not to have diminished with coalition but which is now the end of the decision making chain, with much negotiation and brokerage taking place before the weekly meetings).[91] Much of the coordination is undertaken by the political advisers attached to each minister. Advisers combine advice on subject policy issues with wider coalition management; one adviser suggested to me that the balance between the two tasks works out at, respectively, 40% and 60% of his time. Each party's pool of advisers meets regularly with the chief of staff in either the Prime Minister, or Deputy Prime Minister's office. They also meet together about once a month to review the coalition's operation: the state of internal communications, any bottlenecks within the system and future activities. The role of advisers around the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and in the departments, is perhaps the main distinction between the current coalition and its predecessor. The Labour-Alliance coalition has developed a more systematic approach to political management, based on networks of advisers with knowledge or experience of the government system.

The current coalition also exhibits an interesting balance between centralised and decentralised decision making. On the one hand, the heart of the coalition is the relationship between the Labour Prime Minister (Helen Clark), Finance Minister (Michael Cullen) and Chief of Staff (Heather Simpson) and the Alliance Deputy Prime Minister (Jim Anderton) and his Chief of Staff (Andrew Ladley). Many of the major decisions are taken within this group, and disputes from lower down in the system resolved. In part this centralised style reflects the personalities of the two party leaders. But it also rests on a belief that, in a political system relatively new to power sharing governments, it is imperative to develop effective working relations and mutual trust between the parties. This is clearly much more difficult if decision making is conducted in more open forums or large collective bodies, or if it is decentralised to individual ministers. The danger with this strategy is that it cuts out – or appears to cut out – other political actors. And there has been criticism from the wider parties, particularly on the Alliance side, of what is perceived to be a small decision making group.

This criticism may have had more validity during the coalition's early days. But as it has matured and become accustomed to power sharing, and as Alliance ministers and backbenchers have got used to government, management has increasingly been devolved to individual ministers and their advisers.[92] This has removed some of the pressures from the

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[91] An informal management style is helped by the physical location of ministers and their advisers. Unlike in most other western countries, the key government personnel are located in one central building adjacent to the parliament, and not in separate departments. This makes face to face consultations and discussions far easier.

[92] Decentralised political management is also facilitated by non-detailed coalition agreements. The more policy is determined at the outset, the greater the subsequent monitoring and control by the centre and the lesser the latitude for individual ministers.

party leaders' offices, which has enabled them to move onto more strategic issues and resolution of disputes. The demands made by coalition government are less acute for Helen Clark's office than for Jim Anderton's office since, as Prime Minister, Clark enjoys the backup of the Cabinet Office. The Deputy Prime Minister's office, by contrast, consists of a handful of advisers; these limited resources strain the ability of the Alliance to respond to all the issues they are initially faced with, and sometimes produce a bottleneck in the decision making process. There was some support among my interviewees for increasing the number of political advisers in the two coalition leaders' offices, although expanding these resources should clearly not be at the expense of the close personal relations on which much of the coalition already hangs.

Decentralised arrangements tend to reduce blockages in the system, but they also make it more difficult for each coalition party to keep track of what its ministers are engaged in. Alliance consultation ministers, for example, can take decisions without referring them to Jim Anderton, but this means that his office has little record of what is being agreed to. Concerned by this, the Alliance parliamentary caucus experimented with keeping a register of all consultation papers sent to its ministers, but this initiative had not been maintained. However, this is not a severe problem for the Alliance, since it holds frequent meetings between ministers and MPs which serve as important intra-party information and coordination forums.

Civil servants in New Zealand operate to broadly the same system as their counterparts in the UK and Ireland; thus, they are involved in policy planning, but not in managing the relations between the coalition partners. However, civil servants have had to change their behaviour with the transition to power sharing executives (exacerbated in the case of the current coalition by its minority status), notably by becoming more sensitive to the different agendas of the coalition partners[93], and by factoring in the need for inter-party, not just intra-party, consultation. Civil servants have taken time to adjust to the extra demands that consultation requires in coalition situations. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) has recently introduced monthly meetings of all departmental chief executives (permanent secretaries) to provide a forum for communicating to departments the government's overall approach and strategy. In part, these meetings reflect the centralised style of the coalition leaders, although they also reflect the perceived need to give senior civil servants a stronger steer on political management within the coalition.

Officials based at the DPMC perform additional roles to support the coalition. At a basic level, they help ensure that formal consultation arrangements are adhered to by checking that cabinet and committee papers have been seen by the proper Consultation Ministers. Within the DPMC there is a Policy Advisory Group (PAG) of fourteen civil servants, whose function is to provide the Prime Minister with strategic policy advice and options. But the PAG liaises closely with ministers and attends some cabinet committees and, in effect, will provide leadership on issues that are causing problems lower down the line. In other words, civil servants in this office continue to work only on policy issues and not on political management, but are often used by the Prime Minister's office to help resolve problems facing

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[93] My interviews suggested that civil servants were more attuned to the needs of Labour, the senior partner, than to the Alliance, the junior partner. This is perhaps unsurprising among officials used to servicing single party governments; my interviews in Scotland suggested the same was true of officials there.

the coalition. In this way, the DPMC compensates for the small pool of political advisers available to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

These arrangements seem to provide adequate mechanisms for consultation and information sharing between the coalition partners. Of more concern to Alliance figures is the strength of their party within the government, particularly the extent to which its policy concerns are met. For this reason, there is some pressure from the Alliance for more regular meetings of the main collective coordination body, the Coalition Management Committee, which I was told has met only once (Labour sees the committee as a forum of last resort in cases of dispute, and is not keen to see it meet). Informal mechanisms tend to privilege the party that controls the most ministries and the most senior portfolios, in this case Labour. Collegiate forums on which the parties have equal representation tend to even up bargaining power.

Assessment of coalition management models

I have summarised the essential features of, and differences between, the various methods of coalition management in my study countries in Table 9. Given the variety of methods by which the business of coalition governments is coordinated, how are we to assess their

Table 9: Features of coalition management

	Denmark	Germany	Ireland	New Zealand	Scotland	Wales
Formal arrangements for information sharing between the partners	Not beyond normal cabinet procedures	Not beyond normal cabinet procedures	All papers copied to Taoiseach and Tanaiste	All information shared with 'Consudo206et procedures		

In analysing the models identified in my study countries, I employ the different 'tiers' for coalition management highlighted above, namely: information exchange, inter-ministerial coordination, collective structures and dispute resolution (page 93). In terms of the 'arenas' of coalition management – within the executive, within and across parties, and between the executive and legislature – I limit my comments to the first. It is important to note, however, that coalition management in Denmark and Germany involves parliamentary actors almost as much as ministerial ones. This is less true in Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales – all systems in which the executive is dominant over the legislature – and would also be less likely at Westminster should coalition government became established in the UK.[94]

The exchange of information

The effective functioning of collective coalition governments depends, at the very least, on arrangements to ensure that each partner has information on what the other is doing. How far does this involve going beyond the normal cabinet requirement for inter-ministerial consultation? One case that clearly goes beyond the normal cabinet dictates is the current New Zealand coalition's scheme of 'Consultation Ministers'. This scheme ensures, for the most part, that the junior partner is kept abreast of what is going on in the portfolios over which it has no direct responsibility. It is a response to the perceived inadequacy of normal cabinet procedures for information exchange. Its downside is the amount of information that the junior partner must deal with and the demand on resources this makes. A less stringent arrangement is that adopted in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, for all important documents and draft policy papers to be copied to both the leader and deputy leader of the coalition. Even this, however, may overload small ministerial offices unless greater resources are made available.

In countries with 'strong' legislatures, such as Denmark and Germany, the parliamentary

minister and deputy prime minister; the need for mutual trust and confidence probably dictates this. But it is also important that responsibility for day to day coalition management be devolved to departmental ministers; it is not possible to run a coalition from the party leaders' offices. Ultimately, a balance will have to be struck between the informality of inter-ministerial coordination, and more formal arrangements that come with collegiate bodies and structures.

Cabinet

It is often assumed that, under coalition conditions, the cabinet plays a less important role in decision taking. In part, this reflects the way that cabinet seats are allocated, usually in proportion to the parties' strength in the coalition. Since small parties may only command one or two cabinet seats, their bargaining power may be limited. To avoid the junior partner being outnumbered on key issues[96], preliminary decisions are often taken before cabinet, either in bilateral meetings between the party leaders or ministers, or through cabinet committees or coalition management bodies on which the partners can be more equally represented. Another potential reason why cabinet's role might be weakened is that decisions that need to be agreed between two or more parties may be expected to generate more discussion and dissent than those which only need to be agreed within a single party executive. Under multi-party conditions, cabinet meetings clearly cannot accommodate all the partners' concerns, which thus tend to be dealt with in various forums beforehand, leaving cabinet free to take decisions and deal with the major issues facing the government.

Collective responsibility is seen to have weakened in Ireland with the advent of coalition government in the 1940s and 1960s, whose members sometimes viewed their primary loyalty as laying with their party rather than the cabinet as a collective whole. With recent moves to a more overtly 'political' style to coalition management – involving a cadre of special advisers or Programme Managers – concerns have also been raised that cabinet has been sidelined as a discussion and decision making forum. The role of cabinet may also have been downgraded towards the end of the Kohl-led coalitions in Germany during the 1990s, when decision making was conducted primarily through small groups of trusted politicians. In New Zealand, contrary to many civil servants' fears, there appears to have been little waning in the role of cabinet with the move to coalition government.

Overall, there is little evidence that coalition government leads to the downgrading of cabinet. What it almost certainly entails is a new tier of consultation and deliberation that occurs prior to cabinet, to ensure each partners' concerns are met. The result of such 'pre-cooking' tends to be that many 'second order' issues are resolved prior to cabinet. But it is rare for important or strategic issues to be settled before cabinet discusses them.

Coalition committees

It is interesting that among my study countries, the only two that routinely use formal bodies to help coalition management are Denmarxsut it ewb1(xn)-1.peOveral.00erestinpow4 0sh4.131153- cadr9(g

of his office; both give the senior partner ample scope to oversee the coalition without the need for additional structures. New Zealand's

disputes will be dealt with by ministers or in meetings of the prime minister and his/her deputy. It is instructive that the National-New Zealand First coalition in New Zealand between 1996-98 established a Coalition Dispute Committee which only met once. Certainly this was not due to harmonious relations between the parties, since within two years, the coalition had collapsed amid acrimony!

The role of political advisers

Among my study countries, only in Denmark are political advisers not used in coalition management. Here, political management is the job of ministers, although senior civil servants have to be aware of political sensitivities and issues even if they don't themselves formally get involved. As for the other countries, Ireland and New Zealand operate similar systems, in having one or two advisers in each department combined with a handful of

the desirability of a formal system of political advisers – but not in a far larger, less personal

advantage of the limited strategy is that it concentrates the resources of the junior partner; a focus on a few key issues also enables voters to more clearly identify its role and thus its achievements. The disadvantage, of course, is that it is seen to be making only a minor contribution to government and is associated with decisions made by its coalition partner (in the other portfolios) over which it has very little say.

In practice, junior coalition partners tend to adopt the latter course; they try to play a role

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Scotland prior to devolution – through the former Scottish Office – many officials continued to treat Labour ministers as 'the government' even after the formation of the coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Second, junior parties coming into a government with an incumbent party

themselves from collective decisions. Given that the clause has only been invoked once, it remains to be seen whether it represents a significant concession to partners facing decisions they disagree on or merely a device that assuages the fear of party supporters when the coalition is being formed.

As I have pointed out, collective cabinet responsibility is usually closely adhered to even under coalition conditions, so such opt out clauses are relatively rare. Where used, they have often been a response to power sharing between ideologically disparate parties, such as the UK's National Government in 1932, where the parties agreed to suspend collective responsibility (Bogdanor, 1983). It is thus somewhat surprising to find an opt out clause in New Zealand, since the coalition in this case is ideologically close, or 'connected'.

Conclusion

The political management of multi-party governments can be achieved in a number of different ways. The most important features of a cohesive and effective coalition, however, are the attitudes and behaviour of the key actors; any lack of mutual trust and understanding can only partly be compensated for by well designed mechanisms for inter-party coordination.

Parties need to begin thinking about political management at the time the coalition is formed. The way that portfolios are distributed – involving shared positions with 'pooled' ministries or shared ministries in adjacent policy issues – can aid coordination, although such devices are often more effective in giving each partner a voice in important policy issues.

Coalitions depend on a good flow of essential information between the partners, which demands explicit arrangements that go beyond the normal cabinet rules for the exchange of papers. In political systems new to multi-party governments, it may be necessary to institute formal procedures for information sharing. But any such arrangement will almost certainly place pressures on the coalition partners, and may require additional resources to be provided to enable information to be adequately tracked. An alternative is for the partners to draw more systematically on their parliamentary spokespeople and experts than will probably be the case under single party conditions. Such figures are an important resource for under resourced coalition partners and, subject to cabinet confidentiality rules, might be brought more fully into the information loop.

Coalition governments almost certainly entail a shift of decision making away from cabinet. This body may not be downgraded, but tends rather to become the location for the ratification of decisions that have been discussed and negotiated in a host of lower level forums. Power sharing executives may spawn formal coalition committees, although the role of these bodies is often limited to dispute resolution. Generally, coalition business is transacted in more informal settings, while formal bodies are often resorted to when trust between the coalition partners breaks down and informal relations no longer become effective. However, in principle, coalition committees offer the parties – in particular the junior partner – a means for managing a high level range of issues on the basis of equal representation.

Ministers are hard pushed to meet all their departmental responsibilities, let alone spending valuable time on coalition management issues. For this reason, a system of political advisers is desirable. Any pool of coalition advisers should be relatively limited, to allow for good personal relations between the individuals involved. Ideally, too, at least some of the advisers

should be located at the departmental level. While the party leaders need their own resources to help them oversee the coalition (this is particularly true for the deputy prime minister, since rarely does this figure command any significant resource base), the management model should be decentralised to avoid bottlenecks at the centre and to allow individual ministers to play a role in coordinating coalition business.

Power sharing governments face a constant task in coordinating relations between the partners who will have interests that occasionally or frequently diverge. Most of the management structures I have described work to bring the parties together so that the coalition functions more cohesively. But there is also a role for occasional behaviour that breaks such cohesion, ranging from allowing a partner a specific policy 'win' to a relaxation of collective responsibility on key issues. The latter are likely to be very difficult for new coalitions to manage, although they do allow for flexibility on issues that threaten the very survival of a coalition.

clearly involve a more complex set of interactions than single party minority governments, which can focus more squarely on cutting deals in the legislature.

The main sources I draw on in these tasks are Denmark and New Zealand. Over one third of all governments formed in western Europe since 1945 have been minority administrations (Müller and Strøm, 2000: 560-1). However, the tendency towards minority governments varies considerably between countries, as Table 10 shows. Denmark is clearly a prime case study, given its long history of minority governments. I also consider the case of the Labour-Alliance minority coalition formed in New Zealand in 1999, although for the opposite reason, namely the country's rather limited experience of such administrations since reform of its electoral system in 1996.

Table 10: Incidence of minority administrations in western Europe, 1945-99
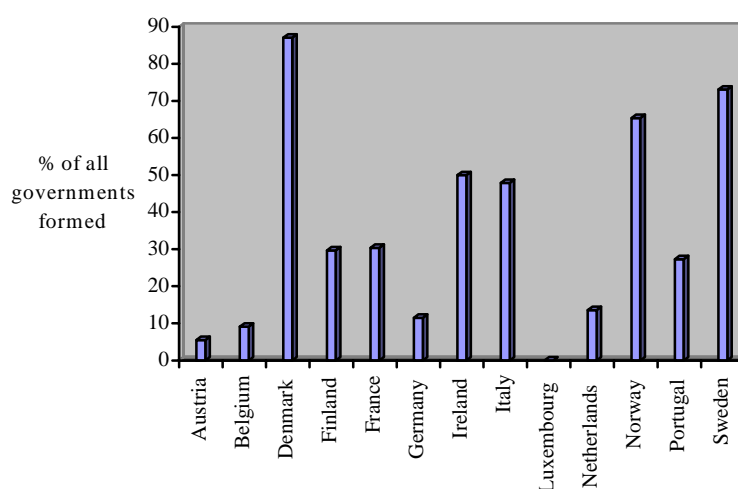
Source: Müller and Strøm, 2000: 561

All governments need to be able to get their legislation passed in parliament (they need to be able to 'win'). But this may not require governments to hold a majority of seats in the legislature. The theoretical literature has shown how minority governments can reach an "effective decision point" if a plurality of votes will suffice to see its measures pass (Strøm, 1990: 39). The theoretical literature goes on to point out the conditions under which minority administrations may be preferred by the parties.[103] Parties may prefer to remain outside government, rather than joining a coalition, if being in office would entail taking decisions that would alienate their supporters, resulting in punishment at future elections (the 'incumbency effect'). The incentives are increased if governments lack the power to dissolve parliament[104] and have to share policy making authority with the legislature. This is the case where parliaments are 'strong', characterised by limited executive control over the parliamentary agenda and strong legislative committees, capable of forcing changes to legislation proposed by the executive, and in some cases of initiating legislation themselves.

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[103] The puzzle for theorists has been to explain why, if a government holds only a minority of seats, the opposition parties don't immediately vote it down and take power themselves. The challenge has thus been to explain the behaviour, not of the party taking office, but of the parties forming the opposition.
[104] Although the constitutional rules in Denmark, which has a high incidence of minority governments, give the prime minister absolute discretion over a dissolution.

In other words, minority governments are typically found when the benefits of government office are low and where there is a limited "policy influence differential" between the executive and legislature (Strøm, 1990: 37-52; Müller and Strøm, 1999: 288). These conditions are not typically found in 'majoritarian' or 'Westminster' democracies, such as the UK, although the relatively active Scottish Parliament begins to create the conditions in which minority administrations might be a rational option for the parties.

Comparative studies suggest that minority governments are most effective in political systems characterised by a high level of policy consensus between the parties , such as in Denmark (Nousiainen, 1993: 278). However, analysis of the incidence of minority administrations suggests that they are also common in 'Westminster' democracies, such as Ireland. Here, minority governments are a response to adversarial party relations and reflect a jockeying for electoral advantage of parties trying to secure a majority mandate at a later date; these administrations are best described as "imperfect majority party government" (Strøm, 1990: 90). What this suggests is that, while minority governments are often formed in *adversarial* conditions, they may require a certain level of *consensus* in order to operate beyond a short term timescale.

Minority governments' legislative strategy

In the comparative literature, minority governments are seen to rest on one of two types of support (Strøm, 1990: 61-2, 94-6). The first is where the government is supported by one or more parties in a deal negotiated before the government is formed, involving an explicit, comprehensive commitment to the government's policies ('formal minority governments'). The alternative is for the supporting party(ies) to sign up only after the government takes office and without a clear written agreement ('substantive minority governments'). Under formal minority conditions, the government commands effective majority status, except that one partner chooses to remain outside the cabinet. With such guaranteed support, formal minority administrations can operate day to day in a fairly straightforward way. Substantive minority governments – the more common model – by contrast, only negotiate legislative support once in office, and have a far wider set of options (or constraints) facing them, notably on membership consistency (a stable support party or 'shifting coalitions' between different parties) and duration (short v long term support arrangements) (*ibid*: 97-9). It is the choices open to substantive minority governments that the following sections focus on. In particular, I examine the option of securing majority support on an issue by issue basis, often with different parties, against that of tying one party into a medium term support arrangement, which might not guarantee a government continual support, but which provides greater stability than ad hoc, or 'shifting', majority arrangements.

I don't address the issue of which arrangements deliver the best rewards for minority governments. This issue has been dealt with in the theoretical literature, and suggests that the strategy adopted by a minority government will depend on its strength and level of risk aversion. If a government is 'strong' (meaning it enjoys high bargaining power with potential partners by virtue, for example, of occupying the centre or 'median' position in the ideological spectrum, and/or because the executive has high 'agenda control' over business in the legislature), it is more likely to negotiate majorities on an issue by issue basis. Such 'shifting' patterns will tend to maximise its policy payoffs. If, however, the government is 'weak' or risk averse, it may maximise its impact by avoiding constant negotiations and instead trying to forge longer term support arrangements (Strøm, 1990: 108-9).

Under majority coalition conditions, the 'action' occurs primarily between the parties within

party from a different point on the ideological spectrum. This has made life more difficult for minority governments, and their average duration has fallen since the 1945-70 period (Saalfeld, 2001: 12-13).

One of the results of the more stringent conditions post-1973 is that the 'parliamentary' basis of government has been weakened. Prior to the 1980s, if a government suffered a defeat in the Folketing on an important matter, it would resign. Since then, governments have accepted defeats without these being seen to compromise their position (Damgaard, 1992: 31-3). The series of minority coalitions between 1982-93 headed by Poul Schlüter, for example, were frequently defeated in the Folketing; only economic policy issues were designated by the government as critical to its programme and on which defeats would be deemed fatal.

This shift in constitutional convention slightly reduces the need for governments to consult with opposition groups. If legislative defeats are deemed to be critical, governments must do anything to avoid them, including factoring in the views of key opposition parties when preparing initiatives. If, on the other hand, defeats are not fatal, there is less incentive for pre-legislative cooperation, although a government will still wish to avoid being defeated since this gives the impression of weakness.[107]

The behaviour of the support parties has also been influenced by the more competitive political environment since the mid-1970s. The higher the level of electoral volatility (that is, the shift of voters between parties from one election to the next), the more concerned party leaders will be about the future impact of their actions. If electoral volatility is high, this may induce the support parties to avoid long term, binding forms of cooperation in favour of short term agreements through which they can maximise their bargaining power (Strøm, 1990: 47). This situation is exactly what minority governments have faced since the early 1970s. As electoral competition has increased, governments have found it more difficult to forge cross-bloc legislative coalitions, but have had to rely more on forming ad hoc alliances with whichever party is closest to its stance on the issue in question (Damgaard, 1992: 29; Arter, 1999: 203-4).[108] Thus, during the 1985-6 session, the four party right of centre coalition tended to look to the centrist Social Liberals for support on economic policy, but to the Social Democrats for support on defence and legal issues (Damgaard and Svensson, 1989: 737). In the previous parliament, policy formulation by the Social Democrat-Social Liberal coalition

the transport portfolio, the two key centre/centre left parties tended to support the coalition when it came to railways, but not on road building projects, for support on which the coalition had to travel to the opposite end of the political spectrum to the right wing Conservative party.

But this does not mean that minority governments face a constant test of survival. While the degree of shared policy goals between the parties has narrowed, governments and opposition parties retain a shared commitment to negotiate and compromise during policy formulation. Thus, governments' legislative programmes tend to be set out at a broad level, and anticipate the reaction of opposition parties. This year's Finance Bill, for example, included various issues where the government indicated it wished to consult more widely. Beyond specific legislative items, there is a widespread view among the parties that, on important issues, the majority supporting a measure should be as broad as possible to provide it with greater legitimacy. Governments often try to form 'oversized' legislative coalitions rather than 'minimal winning' ones; coalitions that go well beyond the minimum level of support needed to give the government a majority.

The main expression of this consensus is the existence of medium to long term agreements signed between the parties. These agreements range from the specific to the general. At the former end of the spectrum, are one year concords over specific measures, notably the budget which, as noted above, involves considerable inter-party negotiation before its details are worked out. Parties can also agree on specific measures (eg. an increase in science spending) over the timescale of a few years. More general agreements are also signed on key areas of government policy, but without specifying parties, gor exe)]TJ-21..go s0 .2732 TD0.0013 Tc0.09882Tw[(

from the original proposal. Governments then have two options: to accept the amendments and support the legislation or to drop the proposal. Both are slightly unsatisfactory; the first may cloud the issue of policy responsibility, the second may stymie policy initiatives. Danish governments thus present an example of a normative difficulty with minority governments, that they tend to erode the parliamentary principle, which states that governments take responsibility for legislation until they lose the confidence of the legislature. Instead, Denmark's 'policy influence differential' referred to above is reduced almost to nothing, making it difficult for voters to identify responsibility for any particular measure (Damgaard and Svensson, 1989).

Denmark offers a corrective to those who believe that minority governments cannot deliver effective public administration and leadership. Those I spoke to in government rejected the idea that a highly negotiated form of policy making led to a slow decision making process; parties are aware of the need to take rapid decisions if need be. Nonetheless, the high rate of government turnover and relative weakness of the executive in Denmark are causes for concern among some commentators, since they are believed to encourage short term policy

interesting point arises from this sequence of events. Under a proportional electoral system, the balance of power between the parties might well be extremely fine, coming down to the allocation of a handful of seats. If the final tally is not known until a week or more after the first election results are announced – due to the counting of special votes or recounting ballot papers – the government formation process might take place under false conditions and effectively lock out a party whose bargaining power is subsequently shown to merit a place at the negotiating table. This is indeed what happened to the Greens in New Zealand, and it was only the fact that the Greens were highly ambivalent about participation in government – eventually rejecting the offer of places in the coalition – that prevented the bargaining process from becoming more controversial. As it was, the Greens remained frustrated at having been ignored by Labour and the Alliance in their coalition negotiations (Boston, 2000: 245-53). The situation in which the parties' bargaining power alters as late results become known is clearly unsatisfactory. The obvious solution is that ballot counting should proceed far faster than the ten days taken in New Zealand. If the process could be shortened to a few days, it may be that the announcement of the result should be delayed until then, to prevent the possibility of negotiations beginning under false information.

The Labour-Alliance coalition began life two seats short of an overall majority. In order to provide it with a stable majority in parliament, the government began negotiations with the Greens to draw up a formal protocol to define each side's rights and responsibilities. This written document committed the Greens to support the government on all confidence and supply issues, as well as on procedural motions s34wtcthat5-5otiat.6(r)2.6(than G far fast)4ted tod at

The ad hoc nature of the support system might commit the Greens to less, but also delivers a lower level of cooperation from the government. Where there are good links between ministers and Green party spokespeople, the support party tends to get well briefed – albeit on an issue by issue basis rather than through regular meetings – and its concerns sometimes taken on board. But elsewhere, the Greens complain that decisions are often taken without having been the subject of consultation and that policy papers are not made available to party spokespeople until they appear in the public domain (Bale and Damm, forthcoming). The party could increase its bargaining power by agreeing to support the government on an issue by issue basis and withholding its support if its demands were not met. But such horse trading is inimical to the Greens. To compensate for this, if the Greens form a support arrangement after the next election, they are likely to push far harder for more regular meetings with government ministers as well as greater resources. They might well revisit the proposal made in 1999, but rejected by the coalition, of a placement inside the government. This arrangement was successfully trialled by the Social Democrat minority government and Centre party support in Sweden between 1995-97, whereby a Centre party official was located in the Finance Ministry and acted as a liaison between the government and support party (Boston, 1998: 82-4). Such a device might also have helped the operation of the support arrangements for Britain's most recent experience of minority government; the 1977-78 'Lib-see Box 2).

Box 2: Britain's experience with minority government, 1977-78

The   on   e
the government with support on confidence and supply. In return, the Liberals were involved in
the planning of government business via a dedicated Joint Consultative Committee. Regular
bilateral meetings were held between ministers and their Liberal 'shadows' and between the
prime   also gained access to Whitehall documents, thus   minister
providing   on which to base their decisions. However,
neither party was committed to supporting the position of the other (Maor, 1998: 119

While this inter-party machinery looked impressive on paper, the procedures did not work well
in practice. In particular, the Joint Consultative
not prevent disagreements between the two parties. The Liberal leader at the time, David Steel,
argued
reach a collective agreement, and that the forum should have taken the form of a cabinet
committee

For the New Zealand government, the key feature of the agreement was to remove the threat of a successful no confidence motion and thus provide it with some stability. It would be perfectly possible, of course, for the government, having secured this promise from the Greens, to seek ad hoc support from other parties on specific legislative items, depending on which other party it could strike the most favourable deal with. Although the government keeps open the option of bargaining with New Zealand First – to maintain the threat to the Greens – it has not thus far taken this route. Generally, the government has done well from the support arrangement, since the Greens are in a relatively weak bargaining position. But the need to consult with the support party has slowed down the policy process, to the frustration of some ministers. This is partly the result of the limited size and experience of Green MPs, who are not equipped to take decisions promptly. Resource constraints are also felt on the government side, since much of the consultation is are undertaken by the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, who is also responsible for relations within the coalition. Minority coalitions require greater capacity not just for the support party, but also for the government itself.

Overall, the minority arrangements in New Zealand since 1999 have worked reasonably well, although the balance of power clearly lies with the government. In the absence of formalised information and bargaining arrangements, consultation with the Greens has relied on the quir Minis,n

CHAPTER 7: Sub-National Coalitions

Coalitions are never formed in a vacuum. The decisions of participants are shaped by past patterns of behaviour as well as by the potential implications of their actions in the future. The actions of party leaders are constrained by having to factor in the views of a range of other actors, such as their parliamentary groups, party members and voters. Timeframes and actors are just two of the variables impinging on coalition behaviour; but territory is also an important factor. In unitary states, executives at the centre rise and fall with little reference to patterns of party competition and government form

government). I attempt to shed light on these questions by reference to a case study of Germany's federal system. Single case studies rarely enable categorical answers to be provided to broad analytical questions, since the features identified are often particular to that country and may not be generalisable or amenable to cross-national transfer. So, whereas in previous chapters I have been able to compare institutions and practices across countries and thus, to a limited extent, to identify generic features, in this chapter, my aim is purely descriptive. That is to say, I take Germany as a case study of how sub-national coalitions operate in a highly decentralised political system. In some ways, Germany is not an ideal case study for the UK, since it is clearly a federal state, while the UK was, until recently, a unitary (or 'union') state and has only recently begun the process of decentralising authority. But given that the function of this chapter is purely descriptive, the choice of a country located at the far end of a spectrum along which the UK is now travelling is instructive if for no other reason than that it highlights sharply the kind of issues that political actors in the domestic setting may well have to grapple with.

My case study draws on interviews conducted at the centre (Berlin) and in one *Land*, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. This *Land* is located in the former East Germany, about 150 miles north west of Berlin. I chose it for three reasons. First, as a recent member of the Federal German Republic (since reunification in 1990), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern might still be adapting to the federal system, of which states in the former West Germany have fifty odd years of experience. In other words, coalition formation in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern might be expected to show more of the strains arising from membership of a federal system than the states of the former West Germany. The second, and more pertinent, reason was that the coalition in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is 'partially congruent' with the administration at the centre. I wanted to examine the dynamics of federal-state government relations in a situation where one party shares office at both tiers, but with different parties. This situation gives rise to more complex dynamics than those in which the parties at the two tiers are either all different ('incongruent' membership) or all the same ('congruent' membership). The particular question I can explore in a partially congruent situation is whether the congruent party – the party in power at both levels, in this case the SPD – is by this fact subject to particular tensions or to particular advantages in relation to its sub-national coalition partner. The nature of this partner was the third consideration in choosing my *Land*, since Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is the first case in Germany in which a mainstream party has entered government with the former East German communist party, the PDS, which remains a pariah party in much of the former West Germany. This pariah status might, again, be expected to produce particular strains within the different tiers of the mainstream coalition partner, the SPD, and thus highlight intra-party dynamics in a decentralised political system.[112]

The – rather limited – secondary literature on sub-national coalitions points to several factors that influence the coalition behaviour of party actors at the centre and regional tiers. One set of factors relates to the internal organisation of political parties (eg. their degree of centralisation or decentralisation), and factors such as career ladders. Another reflects the nature of electoral competition. Thus, the greater the electoral volatility (variations in party

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[112] At the time of my study visit to Germany (March/April 2001), the SPD was involved in eleven of Germany's sixteen *Länder* governments. In four its partner was the Greens (congruent coalitions), with the rest being partially coalitions with the CDU (four *Länder*), the FDP and the PDS (one *Land* each). The final case is Saxony Arnhalt, where the SPD governs alone as a minority administration, although tolerated by the PDS.

In terms of the operation of coalitions, Germany's federal system introduces various points of tension, but also provides means by which disputes can be resolved. An obvious source of potential tension arises from the asymmetrical nature of national and sub-national electoral cycles. State elections are both frequent – there are sixteen states, only one of which holds its election on the same date as the federal tier – and important for the federal parties, since they affect the balance of power in the Bundesrat and may well stabilise or destabilise the coalition depending on how each partner fares (Roberts, 2000: 107). State elections in Germany are used as barometers of public opinion by the federal parties, in part because Germany's electoral system does not provide for by-elections which would serve the same function. Thus, one of the reasons why the FDP switched coalition partner in 1982, from the SPD to the CDU/CSU, was a belief – based on state election results – that its fortunes were on the wane due to its cooperation with a left of centre party (Broughton and Kirchner, 1986: 83).

But in spite of the significance of sub-national elections, they do not induce the federal coalition partners to resort to formal protocols to keep their relations with one another on an even keel; rather, the partners observe informal agreements that restrain their behaviour. Nonetheless, sub-national elections increase the points at which the federal coalition partners may find themselves in electoral competition.[116] For example, the need for coalition unity has not stopped the Greens from calling for rises in fuel taxation during *Land* election campaigns, a policy anathema to their coalition partners, the SPD.

The day to day interaction between state and federal coalitions is more tricky in Germany than in Britain. For a start, there are more sub-national units: sixteen *Land* compared to the three main units in the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). In addition, while the Labour government at Westminster is currently faced with two identical partially congruent coalitions in Scotland and Wales (both Labour-Liberal Democrat), the SPD-Green coalition in Berlin is faced with a far wider range of coalitions in the *Länder*. This means that the interests of the states vary considerably depending, for example, on whether the coalition in power is of the centre right (CDU-FDP) or centre left (SPD-Green). These variations also affect the parties themselves. The SPD, in power with the Greens at the federal level, may be faced with a *Land* SPD whose participation in government is linked to the right of centre CDU (as is the case in Brandenburg and Bremen). An alternative scenario faces the PDS, which is in coalition with the SPD in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (and provides legislative support to the SPD in Saxony-Arnhalt), but in opposition to the same party at the federal level.

The tensions between incongruent coalitions are a matter for the two tiers of government, and are worked out either in the Bundesrat[117] or through informal channels, such as direct contacts between federal ministers and state prime ministers (*Ministerpräsidents*). But relations within parties also require close management. The task of ensuring that the *Land* SPD parties are content with the activities of the federal party falls in the first instance to the federal party's chief whip, who frequently meets with SPD deputies in the Bundesrat. Before each sitting of the Bundesrat – usually once or twice a month – the Chancellor will meet with the prime

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[116] While the SPD and Greens are currently in coalition together in four states, the SPD is in coalition with another partner – the CDU, FDP or PDS – in a further six. Thus, while the SPD may be campaigning for a continuation of a coalition congruent with the federal level in some states, it may be campaigning for a different coalition configuration in others.

[117] The importance of the Bundesrat means that the agreements signed between coalitions at the *Land* level often include clauses stipulating the agreement of both partners before the state votes in the Bundesrat (Sturm, 2000: 119). In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the coalition agrees on its behaviour in the Bundesrat at full cabinet meetings.

ministers from SPD-controlled *Länder*; the party will also involve the prime ministers in regular monthly meetings of its Prasidium, the highest of its executive boards. The Greens also involve their state parties in regular meetings with the federal party leadership to ensure a common approach to high profile policy issues, such as nuclear power. Generally, the federal government will try to prevent sub-national coalitions voting against its measures in the Bundesrat. However, while the actions of state parties in the *Länder* may be difficult for their federal party offices, especially if the state party pursues different policies to those favoured at the federal level, the federal parties cannot impose their will on the sub-national tier.[118] Partially congruent sub-national coalitions will often be pushed into taking a different line from that of the federal government because of the non-congruent partner. Thus, in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the SPD is pulled to the left by the PDS, while in Bremen and other states, it is pulled the opposite way by virtue of its CDU coalition partner. In these situations, the federal government might buy the support of the non-congruent partner via extra financial incentives, or this task might be left to the SPD at state level.

Within coalitions at the *Land* level, are the dynamics between the parties altered if one is simultaneously in coalition at the federal level (ie. a partially congruent situation)? For instance, does the SPD in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern have an advantage over its coalition partner, the PDS, by virtue of also being in coalition – with the Greens this time – at the federal level? In decentralised political systems in which the activities of the federal and regional tiers overlap strongly ("interlocking federalism" in Germany; Sturm, 2000), such a possibility might arise, since the interests of the states are highly affected by the activities of the federal government. Indeed, some of the political actors I spoke to in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern agreed that SPD ministers did have an advantage over their PDS counterparts by virtue of gaining early warning of upcoming federal government initiatives. The PDS has minimised their disadvantage, however, by using their Bundestag members to keep the *Land* party informed of federal activities (and since all matters affecting the *Länder* go before the Bundesrat, for which the PDS ministers are sent all the relevant papers, this forum, too, helps the non-congruent party keep abreast of developments). In other words, the advantage that can be gained in an interlocking federal system by one coalition partner in office at both tiers can be counter-balanced by virtue of institutions – such as regional representation in the Bundesrat – that reflect the interlocking distribution of responsibilities.

Finally, and interestingly in the context of devolution in the UK where the division of power between tiers remains a contentious issue, tensions between the two coalition partners is Bundesrate-3

– and the constraints each imposes on the other

Using Germany as a test case, it appears that sub-national coalition formation rarely escapes at least some constraints being imposed from the centre. On the other hand, regional parties will often try to assert their autonomy, particularly if electoral competition revolves around a sub-national set of issues. This need not be a wholly negative feature for the parties at the centre, since they can use coalition configurations at the sub-national level to inform their own coalition strategies. Nonetheless, while devolved political systems require forums for governments at different tiers to interact (the Bundesrat in Germany; the Joint Ministerial Council in the UK), so coalitions at different tiers require forums for interaction within the parties. The range of bodies that bring together the federal and state 'arms' within the German parties is testament to this.

Relations between coalition partners may become more difficult around elections, particularly if there are coalitions at both national and sub-national level with differing memberships ('incongruent' coalitions). Thus far, conditions in the UK have been relatively benign, since the two coalitions in Scotland and Wales share the same partners, and are 'partially congruent' with the centre. But should coalitions become the norm at Westminster, these conditions may become more difficult and require more concerted intra-party, as well as inter-party, management.

ANNEX 1: Details of study visits and acknowledgements

I conducted around 70 interviews for this project, as follows:

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