

Government Formation and Termination

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Abstract and Keywords

Most of the time government formation and termination in parliamentary, semi-presidential, and presidential democracies entails a degree of bargaining between political parties and, where relevant, the president. This chapter reviews the literature that analyses these bargaining processes and their outcomes. It examines the motivations and resources of parties and presidents in negotiating cabinet representation, the attributes of cabinets, their durability, the different modes of cabinet termination, and the methodological challenges that studying cabinet formation and termination gives rise to. Since the 1990s, I argue, the confluence of the institutionalist turn in the literature on parliamentary governments and the rising interest in cabinet formation and termination among scholars who study semi-presidential and presidential democracies has lent increasing realism to models of government formation and termination. At the same time, the merger of these different research traditions highlights new challenges which are identified in the chapter's conclusion.

Keywords: government formation, cabinet survival, cabinet termination, parliamentary governments, semi-presidential governments, presidential cabinets

15.1 Introduction

BARGAINING between politicians about government formation and termination counts among the most consequential negotiations in democratic politics. Which parties enter or leave office has far-reaching implications that affect every group in society. It determines which manifesto pledges may be translated into policy, shapes taxation and spending, the scope and quality of public services, regulation of the private sector, and government priorities in areas such as education, inequality, and immigration.

Since cabinets are the nexus through which democracies funnel representation, the constitutionally structured system of democratic representation determines who bargains about cabinets, and what their institutional resources are: Voters in parliamentary democ-

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racies are represented by parliament alone, to which government is exclusively responsible. Hence parliamentary governments are negotiated and broken by legislative parties. Semi-presidential democracies complement a government that is responsible to parliament with a popularly elected president, who then generally becomes an additional participant in negotiations about government formation and termination, endowed with greater or lesser constitutional powers. Presidential constitutions, likewise, represent voters via a popularly elected president and assembly, but make the president head of the government, to whom the cabinet is exclusively responsible. Under presidential constitutions, it is the separation of powers that requires presidents, who wish to enact their policies through legislation, to negotiate about their policy programme, and therefore potentially about their cabinet choices, with the legislature. In sum, cabinet formation and termination is negotiated between the popularly elected national representatives of the electorate, that is, legislative parties, and where applicable, the (p. 295) president. The more presidential the constitution, the greater, on average, the institutional resources that presidents bring to the table.

Politicians bargain about government formation and termination, whenever a single political party—or in presidential systems, the presidential party—does not control a legislative majority, as is the case in most democracies, most of the time. Hence, across parliamentary, semi-presidential, and presidential democracies, coalition government is the norm (Müller and Strøm 2000; Amorim Neto 2006: 427; Samuels and Shugart 2010: 57–60). This raises a plethora of questions: What motivates politicians in forming cabinets and which resources enable parties (and presidents) to secure cabinet representation? What are the attributes of cabinets that form? How is power distributed within cabinets? How durable are they? What drives politicians to terminate cabinets and under which conditions do different modes of cabinet termination occur?

While the current understanding of coalition bargaining has its roots predominantly in the literature on *parliamentary* governments, the 1990s marked a turning point in the study of governing coalitions. The confluence of two independent intellectual developments opened up new research agendas that now define the field: First, motivated by the failure of institution-free explanations, to predict which *parliamentary* governments actually form, scholars began to give due attention to the institutional context in which bargaining over governments unfolds (Baron and Ferejohn 1989; Laver and Shepsle 1990; Strøm 1990a; Lupia and Strøm 1995). Indeed, since the 1990s, research in the field has recognized that the explanatory power and accuracy of accounts of government formation and termination depends on the incorporation of the institutional rules that shape who bargains and what resources these actors can bring to bear. Second, the durability of *multiparty presidential* and *semi-presidential* democracies shifted the focus of work on these political systems in the late 1990s from a preoccupation with their presumed propensity to collapse, to the study of multiparty governance with popularly elected presidents in practice (Altman 2000; Elgie 2004; Amorim Neto 2006; Cheibub 2007; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009b; Alemán and Tsebelis 2011; Martínez-Gallardo 2012; Camerlino and Martínez-Gallardo 2017; see also Chapter 21 in this volume). The institutionalist turn in the literature on parliamentary coalition governance struck a chord with these scholars

who were working on political systems where the institutional resources of presidents—in addition other factors such as the size and ideology of parties—clearly play a major role in shaping coalition bargaining.

To review these developments, this chapter is structured as follows: the first half focuses on a discussion of the literature on *government formation*; the second half on *government survival and termination*. In both areas of research, work on bargaining about parliamentary governments is foundational, and I begin by reviewing this work along with the institutionalist turn and recent theoretical and methodological advances. I then explore how this new, institutionally grounded understanding of bargaining about parliamentary coalition governance complements—and contrasts with—the literature on coalition formation and termination in semi-presidential and parliamentary systems. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research agenda and potential synergies between these research streams.

(p. 296) **15.2 The Literature on Government Formation**

In the context of West European parliamentary democracies, the motivations of politicians in coalition bargaining are typically taken to reflect the broader aims of political parties, which include securing office, policy, and votes (Riker 1962; Axelrod 1970; De Swaan 1973; Strøm, 1990b). That is, in forming coalitions, the interest of parties may lie in controlling governmental office and the privileges that flow from it, in shaping policy and deciding distributive conflicts, and in positioning themselves for electoral contests. All of these considerations will normally play some role in parties' decisions to join (or indeed, leave) a coalition, although their relative weight may vary across parties and over time.

With these goals in mind, coalition bargaining centres on a range of *outcomes*. Most fundamentally, parties must negotiate whether to seek office at all by forming and supporting a fully empowered party-based government, or whether a technical or caretaker government is preferable. If a party-based government is to be formed, and no single party has a parliamentary majority, the government's coalition status must be negotiated, the alternative being a single party minority government. Once parties choose to form a coalition, they need to decide its majority status, that is, whether majority status is desired, and if so, how large that majority ought to be. Parties must also consider the composition of the government, for instance, its ideological connectedness, whether to include the median party, and the reputation of potential coalition partners for smooth (or poor) collaboration. Scholars have studied these outcomes using three types of dependent variables: the attributes (or type) of coalition formed, the coalition inclusion probability of individual parties with particular attributes or resources, and the formation probability of a particular coalition that has specific attributes and includes particular parties.

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Early accounts of coalition formation made the complexity of these choices tractable by making a series of simplifying assumptions about the motivations of parties and the irrelevance of the institutional environment they bargain in. For instance, seminal work by Gamson (1961) and Riker (1962) assumed that parties are driven exclusively by the motivation to seek office. According to these studies only minimum winning coalitions (which include only the minimal number of parties required to form a legislative majority) are expected to form because they enable governing parties to maximize office benefits. Yet, these expectations were manifestly at variance with the observed distribution of cabinet types (Laver and Schofield 1990): minimal winning coalitions account only for about a third of all cabinets and other types of governments such as minority governments or surplus coalitions (which include more parties than is required to form a legislative majority) remained entirely unexplained from this perspective.

In a next step, scholars therefore incorporated into their models more complex assumptions regarding the motivations of parties by adding policy considerations. (p. 297) According to Axelrod (1970) and De Swaan (1973), for instance, coalitions of ideologically compatible parties are more likely to form. Laver and Schofield (1990) suggested that governments are likely to include the median party, which provided a rationale for the formation of minority governments in the context of an ideologically divided opposition. This research programme, which relied extensively on formal theory and spatial modelling, made considerable contributions. Most notably, it laid strong theoretical foundations for the field and produced the first hypotheses about the effect of party size and ideology on coalition formation. Yet, its empirical success remained limited. Attention to policy considerations yielded only modest improvements in the ability of coalition theories to predict which coalitions form. Moreover, disturbingly, the findings of studies appeared to be driven more by the countries included than by theoretically relevant explanatory variables (Franklin and Mackie 1984).

Responding to this challenge, scholars began to scrutinize institutions—such as who can propose governments and what level of legislative support is required for a coalition to govern successfully—as a key source of country-level heterogeneity in cabinet bargaining. Research began to introduce institutional context into the study of government coalitions, focussing in particular on political institutions that (i) regulate the government formation process and (ii) affect policy-making once a coalition is in office.

The assumption underpinning the first strand of literature was that the *institutions, which structure the process of coalition negotiation*, confer bargaining power to some actors, making them disproportionately successful in securing their inclusion in government. Foundational for much of this work was Baron and Ferejohn's (1989) sequential bargaining model, which draws attention to the importance of *proposal power* in coalition bargaining. According to Baron and Ferejohn (1989), parties that are empowered to make the first offer in coalition negotiations (also known as *formateurs*), enjoy disproportionate success in securing office and extracting a disproportionate portfolio share. Despite the absence of empirical support for that expectation (Laver et al. 2011), this model proved tremendously influential because it opened the door to the consideration of the institu-

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tional resources and constraints that shape actors' strategies in bargaining about government formation.

Subsequent work considered the *recognition rules* employed in different countries (Diermeier and van Roozendaal 1998) that determine which actor is asked to form the government—that is, to assume the role of the *formateur*. Several studies identified the *continuation rule*, which enables the incumbent to act as *formateur* after an election, as central in accounting for the striking advantage of previous incumbent parties in negotiating their return to government (Warwick 1996; Diermeier and van Roozendaal 1998; Martin and Stevenson 2010). However, the attention to *formateur* power per se ultimately yielded limited empirical success. As Bassi (2013) notes, this is not surprising given that *formateurs* are often not chosen on the basis of exogenous rules, but emerge endogenously from the bargaining situation in parliament. Moreover, the disproportionate focus on *formateur* power distracted from other institutions that shape coalition bargaining. This variation has hardly been explored. A rare exception is Strøm's (1990a) work, which notes the importance of *investiture rules* in advantaging coalitions with majority status (p. 298) over minority coalitions in bargaining about government formation. According to Strøm (1990a) the absence of a formal *investiture* vote in parliament raises the odds of minority government formation.

In addition scholars began to pay attention to *institutions that condition a coalition's success once in office*. The insight underpinning this work is that parties care not only about office, but also about achieving policy goals. Hence, their choices in bargaining about coalition formation can be expected to take account of the institutional environment that conditions their ability to pursue those policy goals. Laver and Shepsle (1990) introduced this intuition through the concept of the structurally induced equilibrium, which suggests that parties negotiate coalitions in the light of anticipated government behaviour. They assumed that government behaviour is shaped by the ability of individual ministers to set the legislative agenda in their policy area, which made it possible to account for a range of outcomes, including minority cabinets. While scholars subsequently rejected as unrealistic the assumption that ministers are policy dictators in their area of responsibility (Warwick 1996; Martin and Stevenson 2001), Laver and Shepsle's (1990) work inspired scholars to pay close attention to the institutions that condition a cabinet's legislative success and the opposition's policy influence. Institutional rules that generate incentives to form surplus coalitions, for instance, include bicameralism (Druckman et al. 2005) and supermajority requirements for legislation crucial to the government's programme (e.g. a government may wish to enact constitutional amendments that require a supermajority). Conversely, strong legislative committee systems raise the incidence of minority cabinets by enabling potential minor coalition partners to exercise policy influence from the opposition benches instead of joining a government, when the anticipated electoral costs of doing so are high (Strøm 1990a).

Recent work has contributed to a better understanding of cabinet formation in two further respects. First, scholars have provided a more nuanced account of the *motivations*, beyond the office and policy concerns, which may cause parties to enter, or refrain from

joining, coalitions. Work on the importance of pre-electoral pacts and anti-pacts in coalition formation, for instance, draws attention to the influence of parties' *electoral motivations* on their coalition choices (Laver and Budge 1992; Golder 2006). Other research has foregrounded the anticipated *transaction costs* of governing. For instance, Tavits (2008) finds that following a coalition breakup, the conflicting parties are less likely to form another coalition in future, while Martin and Stevenson (2010) show that governments whose members have demonstrated a capacity to rule together without public conflict are likely to remain in office (see also Glasgow et al. 2012). These results are consistent with findings in social psychology that negotiators consider the anticipated transaction costs of working with 'angry' partners, whose demeanour is difficult, and shun such coalitions when they can (van Beest et al. 2008).¹

Second, scholars made progress in empirically modelling the government formation process in more adequate ways. Thus, Martin and Stevenson (2001) suggested that the (p. 299) conditional logit model offers an appropriate way of analysing the central problem in coalition formation, that is, the selection of a single coalition from the set of all possible coalitions. This approach models government formation as an 'unordered discrete choice problem where each formation opportunity (not each potential coalition) represents one case and where the set of discrete alternatives is the set of all potential combinations of parties that might form a government' (Martin and Stevenson 2001: 38). Subsequently, Glasgow et al. (2012) proposed the use of a mixed logit model with random coefficients to take account of unobserved heterogeneity in the government formation process and of potential violations of the assumption of the independence of irrelevant alternatives. Both approaches offer more appropriate ways of modelling coalition choice than traditional linear regression models, moreover, in practice, they often yield similar results.

How well, then, does this scholarship account for government formation outcomes? In a recent controversy, Golder et al. (2012) cast radical doubt on the insights gained, and propose a 'zero intelligence' model of government formation, based on two minimal assumptions (an incumbent government always exists and all governments must enjoy majority legislative support). This approach is categorically rejected by Martin and Vanberg (2014), who argue that conclusions about the predictive success of the 'zero intelligence' model are based on inferential errors. Once these are corrected, the 'zero intelligence' model makes no better than random predictions. Moreover, it is based on the implausible behavioural assumption that party leaders have no preferences over alternative viable governments. Hence, Martin and Vanberg (2014) conclude that scholars would be ill-advised to reject the considerable insights generated by existing coalition theories.

15.2.1 Government Formation in Semi-Presidential Regimes

Many of the insights that derive from by the literature on cabinet formation in *parliamentary* democracies generalize to *semi-presidential* regimes, and in fact early studies typically did not differentiate between the two constitutional formats. That changed when the institutional turn in work on parliamentary coalition formation connected with a budding in-

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terest among scholars of semi-presidentialism in the performance rather than the survival of these regimes from the 1990s onward. The central insight generated by the confluence of these research streams is that semi-presidential constitutions render the popularly elected president an additional actor with bargaining power in coalition formation. The institutions that condition this bargaining power include the president's prerogatives to affect (i) negotiations about government formation; (ii) the policy process (and hence, the success of coalitions once in office); and (iii) the survival of governments.

Shugart and Carey's (1992) seminal analysis began to map the tremendous institutional variation in presidential powers in each of these areas. In government formation negotiations, for instance, presidents may be veto players, empowered to approve or veto a new government; they may be *formateurs* with discretion to name a prime minister (p. 300) designate, subject to assembly approval; or they may be able to appoint a prime minister and government without assembly investiture. In the legislative process, presidents may have proposal, veto, and executive decree powers. With respect to government termination, they may have prerogatives to dismiss the government and a role in the process of assembly dissolution (Shugart and Carey 1992; Strøm and Swindle 2002; Goplerud and Schleiter 2016).

Several important insights resulted from the literature that explored the implications of these powers for government formation. First, the institutional variation within semi-presidential regimes, like that among parliamentary systems, is consequential when it comes to government formation: Generally, the greater a president's institutional powers in these three areas, the more extensive their influence on cabinet composition, other things equal (Shugart and Carey 1992; Protsyk 2005; Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a).

Second, presidential influence on the cabinet affects party political participation in government. When semi-presidential regimes grant presidents a role in making and breaking governments and in shaping their legislative success in office, they empower an actor with a separate electoral mandate that may diverge from the mandate of a legislative majority and even from that of the president's legislative party (Samuels and Shugart 2010). This reduces the influence of legislative parties on cabinet formation and may also decrease their utility from participating in cabinet. Hence, compared to parliamentary democracies, semi-presidential regimes feature non-party, president-supported ministers more frequently, and occasionally even fully non-party, technical cabinets (Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009c).

Third, when cabinets are formed with the support of legislative parties, presidential bargaining power affects their coalition and majority status. A president who has the power to block or affect the formation, policy success, and survival of a government has resources to negotiate coalition participation for his or her party. Other things equal, this makes the formation of coalition governments more likely (compared to single party minority governments) and it tends to make coalitions larger. That is, compared to parliamentary regimes, coalitions in semi-presidential systems typically control a *larger* num-

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ber of legislative seats: they are more likely to have majority (rather than minority) status and to be oversized, that is, to include more parties than is necessary to control a parliamentary majority (Cheibub 2007: 81; Mitchell and Nyblade 2008: 229).

Finally, semi-presidential regimes (unlike parliamentary or presidential systems) have unique flexibility in sourcing political support for cabinets, which may come principally from the assembly, or the president, or both actors, depending on their formal powers, capacity, and willingness to collaborate, and their electoral support (Pasquino 1997; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009b). Thus, over time, most semi-presidential regimes have formed governments supported and directed by the assembly and the president collaboratively, but at other times had governments controlled by the parliamentary opposition to the president (a situation also known as cohabitation), or presidential, technical governments without active party participation. This flexibility can facilitate effective governance when the parliamentary party system is weakly institutionalized or (p. 301) fragmented, but also entails the potential for conflict between president, assembly, and government (Protsyk 2006; Elgie 2011).

15.2.2 Government Formation in Presidential Democracies

Compared to semi-presidential democracies, presidential democracies shift the balance of influence regarding government formation further in favour of the president in three areas: (i) The power to appoint presidential cabinets, and hence the role of the *formateur*, always lies with the president, regardless of the size of his or her legislative party. (ii) Presidential cabinets do not depend for their survival on legislative support, but solely on the president. (iii) The legislative powers of presidents tend to be greater in presidential democracies (Shugart and Carey 1992).

Since presidential cabinets do not require legislative support to remain in power, office motivations cannot be the driver of a president's choice to form coalitions under presidential constitutions. For this reason, scholars initially expected coalitions to be an exception in presidential democracies (Mainwaring 1993; Linz 1994). Yet multiple studies document that coalition cabinets frequently form (Altman 2000; Amorim Neto 2006; Alemán and Tsebelis 2011; Martínez-Gallardo 2012), which raises the question why presidents choose to invite legislative parties into the cabinet and what characteristics these coalitions have (see also Chapter 20 in this volume).

The literature on coalitional presidentialism focusses overwhelmingly on policy motivations, arguing that presidents form cabinet coalitions to construct reliable legislative support for their policy agendas. Consistent with that assumption, multiple studies show that coalition participation in presidential democracies is predicted by many of the same characteristics as in parliamentary or semi-presidential democracies, for example party size and ideology (Altman 2000; Amorim Neto 2006; Cheibub 2007; Alemán and Tsebelis 2011; Martínez-Gallardo 2012). Even the policy motivation to form coalitions, however, is weaker than in semi-presidential democracies because, on average, presidential legislative powers tend to be greater in presidential democracies (Shugart and Carey 1992).²

As a result, the attributes of presidential cabinets differ significantly from those of parliamentary and semi-presidential cabinets. Since the president is always the *formateur*, the presidential party is typically included in cabinet regardless of its legislative size and of its ability to negotiate a legislative majority. Even if a presidential party only commands a minority of assembly seats and fails to enter a coalition, it may rule on its own, precisely because the cabinet does not depend on assembly confidence. Hence, given a minority situation, coalition formation, while significantly more common than originally (p. 302) anticipated (Mainwaring 1993; Linz 1994), is less likely than in semi-presidential and parliamentary democracies. According to Cheibub (2007: 81), for instance, the share of coalition governments formed in minority situations by presidents is 52 per cent compared to 75 per cent in parliamentary and 86 per cent in semi-presidential democracies. In addition, cabinets that form are less likely to have majority status (Amorim Neto 2006; Cheibub 2007: 81). Portfolio allocation is on average also less proportional than in parliamentary systems because cabinets in presidential systems tend to represent the president's party to a greater extent than is warranted by its legislative size (Amorim Neto and Samuels 2010: 17). Moreover, presidential cabinets include a greater share of non-party ministers—around 21 per cent compared to 2 per cent in parliamentary and 7 per cent in semi-presidential regimes (Amorim Neto and Samuels 2010: 14). This reflects the tensions that the distinct electoral mandates of president and assembly may engender between the president and his or her party, as well as the extensive powers of presidents to determine cabinet composition (Martínez-Gallardo and Schleiter 2015).

In sum, presidents' strategies for using cabinet formation as a tool to construct legislative support can vary from cooperative to unilateral. Moreover, a president's reliance on coalition building is systematically related to his or her need to negotiate with opposition parties in order to achieve his or her policy objectives, which varies with the president's political and institutional powers (Camerlo and Martínez-Gallardo 2017).

15.3 The Literature on Government Survival and Termination

In the study of government termination, as in government formation, research on parliamentary democracies is foundational. It identifies political parties—motivated by office, policy, and electoral concerns—as the central actors and focuses on two types of outcomes: government duration (i.e., how long a government survives) and the nature of government terminations (i.e., how a government terminates).

Early accounts of cabinet survival in parliamentary democracies built directly on the research concerning government formation and sought the causes of government termination in the *structural attributes* of cabinets, their parliamentary and political environment. This work in effect treated the causes of cabinet duration as *fixed* at the point of government formation and found that a cabinet's vulnerability to early termination rises in cabinet fragmentation and the ideological diversity of the cabinet, minority and coalition status. Yet, as critical events theorists argued, cabinets typically terminate in response to un-

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predictable events such as scandals, sudden shifts in public opinion, crises, deaths, or illness of the prime minister, which makes the determinism of explanations that solely rely on the structural attributes inappropriate (Freundreis et al. 1986). This analysis gave rise to the understanding that government termination is—at least in part—the product of a stochastic process (King et al. 1990). However, as Strøm (1988) (p. 303) notes, the overwhelming majority of government terminations are not the automatic consequence of events, instead they result from the *strategic political choices* of parties inside or outside the government in response to such events.

Lupia and Strøm's (1995) game theoretic model of government termination proved seminal in developing an understanding of these strategic choices. It made clear that politicians may choose several mutually exclusive ways of terminating a government early, that is, early elections, and the non-electoral replacement of a government during a sitting parliament. It also provided a bargaining-theoretic account of how politicians' choices between these options are shaped by the value of the current coalition, transaction costs, and the payoffs promised by their outside options in light of exogenous shocks. This work triggered two major developments in the study of cabinet survival. First, Diermeier and Stevenson (2000) demonstrated that the twin risks of early government termination identified by Lupia and Strøm (1995) are empirically distinguishable and have distinct correlates. This transformed the study of cabinet survival into the study of *competing risks*. Second, the formulation of an explicit bargaining model by Lupia and Strøm (1995) made it easy to see that the literature up to this point had not adequately captured how political *institutions* structure bargaining about cabinet termination.

The first of these developments caused scholars to pay closer attention to the previously unexplored variety of ways in which governments terminate. The differences in the mode of government termination, this research argues, are important because they indicate an underlying diversity in the causal processes, political actors, and motivations that precipitate cabinet terminations. Schleiter and Issar (forthcoming), for instance, shed light on the heterogeneity of early elections. Merging the literatures on cabinet termination and opportunistic election timing, they characterize the difference between opportunistic elections that are used by the prime minister's party to consolidate its position, and failure elections, directed against the prime minister's party when its hold on power slips (see also Schleiter and Tavits 2016). Similarly, Fernandes and Magalhães (2016) contrast non-electoral replacements in which the prime minister's party does and does not change. Both papers show that politicians who terminate governments early choose between a considerably more complex range of outside options than Lupia and Strøm (1995) had originally anticipated. The two papers also offer a first account of the constitutional, economic, and political circumstances that make each type of early termination more likely and show that their predictors are distinct. In short, these contributions reconceptualise the dependent variable in work on government termination and duration (i.e., the competing termination types of which governments are at risk), and change our understanding of the causal processes that precipitate those terminations.

In a second development scholars explored the effect of *institutions* on bargaining about cabinet termination. As in the literature on government formation, the institutionalist turn drew attention to institutions that (i) regulate the government termination process and (ii) affect the value of the cabinet to parties by conditioning its ability to pursue its policy goals. This work highlighted that constitutional powers to influence (p. 304) and manage government termination (e.g. by withholding confidence or invoking confidence motions, dismissing the government, or calling early elections) confer bargaining power on specific actors (Baron 1998; Strøm and Swindle 2002; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a; Schleiter and Tavits 2016; Evans 2017). Similarly, researchers showed that the value of cabinets to political parties, and hence government survival, is influenced by institutions which structure the life and work of cabinets once in office. These institutions include, for instance, the vote of investiture, opposition influence in parliament, the prime minister's agenda setting powers and bicameralism (King et al. 1990; Druckman and Thies 2002; Tsebelis 2002; Bergman et al. 2003; Saalfeld 2008).

15.3.1 Government Survival and Termination in Semi-Presidential Regimes

As in the literature on government formation, many of the insights generated by the literature on cabinet duration and termination in *parliamentary* democracies generalize to *semi-presidential* regimes. Moreover, the institutionalist turn made it easy to see that a president's constitutional powers were likely to translate into bargaining leverage over cabinet terminations.

Nonetheless, any bargaining theoretic assumptions remained implicit in early work on the durability and termination of semi-presidential governments, which developed instead the general expectation that a popularly elected president, as an additional actor with influence on government survival, renders semi-presidential cabinets less stable than parliamentary governments (Linz 1994). However, this expectation receives no support in systematic controlled comparative studies of government survival in semi-presidential and parliamentary regimes. The majority of this work finds that a popularly elected president *per se* has no significant effect on cabinet durability (Strøm and Swindle 2002; Cheibub and Chernykh 2008: 279; Somer-Topcu and Williams 2008; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a: 510; however see Saalfeld 2008 for a divergent conclusion).

Scholars therefore turned to the specific sources of presidential bargaining power and initially privileged presidential powers of cabinet dismissal. According to Shugart and Carey (1992) a president's power to dismiss the cabinet distinguishes two types of semi-presidential constitutions with distinct arrangements regarding authority over the cabinet: premier-presidentialism (which makes the cabinet responsible only to the assembly, not the president), and president-parliamentarism (which enables cabinets to be dismissed by the assembly and the president). President-parliamentarism is generally expected to give rise to less stable cabinets than premier-presidentialism (Shugart and Carey 1992: 118–21). The primary concern is the potential under president-parliamentary constitutions for conflicts between president and assembly over control of the govern-

ment, which is thought to contribute to unstable patterns of cabinet appointment and dismissal (Shugart and Carey 1992: 121; Elgie 2004, 2011). Although Sedelius and Ekman (2010) find support for this expectation in a sample of Central and East European (p. 305) democracies, it remains unsupported in research that uses a larger sample of democracies (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a).

Responding to such contradictory findings, recent scholarship has refined its approach in three respects. First, there is, by now, a recognition that presidential bargaining power in relation to cabinet survival is likely to arise from an array of institutional prerogatives—including powers of assembly dissolution, cabinet dismissal, and the popular mandate (Strøm and Swindle 2002; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a; Fernandes and Magalhães 2016). When studies omit some of these rules, their conclusions regarding the institutional sources of presidential leverage are likely to be characterized by omitted variable bias.³ Second, attention to the counterfactual, to which the influence of presidents is compared, is essential. In samples that comprise parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies, for instance, presidents with influence on parliamentary dissolution do not raise the risk of early elections compared to the baseline constitution which enables governments to trigger early elections for partisan gain (Strøm and Swindle 2002; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a). However, in a restricted sample of semi-presidential democracies, where powers of parliamentary dissolution either fall to the president or tend to be heavily constrained, presidential dissolution powers, in fact, raise the risk of early elections (Fernandes and Magalhães 2016). Put differently, there is a growing recognition of the need to distinguish the effect of cross-national and, indeed, cross-temporal confounders from the effect of presidential powers. Third, recent work has begun to pay attention to the heterogeneity of cabinet termination modes. Fernandes and Magalhães (2016), for instance, find that presidential powers of cabinet dismissal make major inter-electoral government replacements more likely in which the prime minister's party loses office, but not those in which a minor coalition partner changes.

15.3.2 Government Survival and Termination in Presidential Regimes

In presidential democracies, the president's fixed term and the independence of cabinet survival from assembly confidence have two implications. First, presidents can replace ministers without having to preserve a supporting majority in the legislature. Second, the inability of coalition partners to bring down the government weakens the bargaining power of legislative parties and hence their ability to extract concessions from the president in return for their continued support of the cabinet. This renders cabinet (p. 306) participation less valuable for assembly parties and weakens the incentives for legislative parties to maintain party discipline (Clark et al. 2009: 447). As a result, the commitment of assembly parties and the president to coalition governance is, on average, less reliable than in semi-presidential in parliamentary democracies so that presidential coalition cabinets tend to be less stable.

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Moreover, these differences alter the political implications of cabinet stability in presidential democracies (Camerlo and Martínez-Gallardo 2017): Since party discipline tends to be weaker in presidential democracies, it is not always clear to what extent party affiliated ministers in fact act as agents of their party in government. For instance, it is not uncommon for party affiliated ministers to lack political leverage within their party, in which case their departure from the cabinet may have no effect on their party's relationship with the government. This implies that the most common way of determining when a presidential cabinet terminates, which focuses on changes in the party composition of the cabinet (in addition to elections), becomes a less reliable indicator of cabinet change with less obvious political implications.

Despite these caveats, however, there are significant differences in the duration of presidential cabinets. On average, presidential coalition cabinets are more durable when presidents have weak legislative powers (Amorim Neto 2006), and when the legislature is effective (Martínez-Gallardo 2012), so that presidents have incentives to seek stable support from legislative parties in order to advance their policy goals. Conversely, when parties that pursue particularistic goals (rather than programmatic policy) control a larger share of the legislature, presidents are more likely to form flexible coalitions, and to change the party composition of their cabinets more often (Kellam 2015). Finally, legislative parties are less likely to defect from presidential cabinets when the executive is successful and effective, that is, when the government is performing well, the president is popular, the cabinet is less fragmented, and when the government controls a larger share of legislative seats (Martínez-Gallardo 2012; Shin 2013). These findings suggest that coalition stability in presidential systems rises in the policy, office, and electoral benefits for parties of participating in cabinet, which is consistent with work on government stability in semi-presidential and parliamentary democracies.

15.4 Future Research Agenda

As this review has demonstrated, extensive progress has been made in understanding cabinet formation and termination, in particular since the 1990s, when the institutionalist turn in the literature on parliamentary governments was complemented by the rising interest in cabinet formation and termination among scholars who study semi-presidential and presidential democracies. These developments lent increasing realism to models of government formation and termination, and yielded significant improvements in the ability of scholars to account for observed outcomes. At the same time, however, the confluence of these different research traditions highlights new challenges and opens up (p. 307) new avenues for research in many areas. In this concluding section, I focus on five particularly urgent challenges.

Traditionally, research on government formation and termination has assumed that politicians are motivated by three concerns in negotiating about cabinets: office, policy, and votes. Of these, office and policy concerns have received by far the greatest attention, ever since foundational models of parliamentary government formation foregrounded

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these concerns. There is, however, growing evidence that our conception of politicians' motivations remains (i) underdeveloped and (ii) too narrow. First, electoral motivations remain strikingly understudied despite their centrality in Lupia and Strøm's (1995) influential model of coalition termination. Changing electoral expectations can be expected to affect the coalition exit and inclusion probabilities of parties. Yet, to date, no dynamic account of coalition termination and formation exists that measures and probes the effect of these changing expectations.⁴ Scholars have also paid relatively little attention to pre-electoral coalitions, which are routinely formed in many democracies, and play a central role in accounting for the coalitions that politicians form after elections in parliamentary as well as presidential democracies (Golder 2006; Freudenreich 2016). In short, the role of electoral motivations in government formation and termination deserves greater attention. Second, policy, office and vote-related motivations fail to capture a range of additional concerns that demonstrably affect coalition politics. Several studies indicate, for instance, that the desire to avoid the transaction costs of coalitions with potential partners who invite conflict is a powerful motivation in cabinet formation (Tavits 2008; van Beest et al. 2008; Martin and Stevenson 2010). Moreover, in new and less developed democracies, completely different motivations may drive the making and breaking of cabinets. For instance, Kellam's (2015) work on presidential cabinets highlights that some parties focus primarily on particularistic benefits rather than policy. Hence, the formation and maintenance of coalitions with such parties may depend critically on president's budgetary authority and ability to channel particularistic benefits to these parties, rather than on the effective pursuit of shared policy goals. One challenge for future work on government formation and termination is therefore to construct accounts that integrate a broader and more accurate range of political motivations.

Equally important is more detailed attention to the institutional environment in which politicians bargain about cabinet formation and termination. Institutions, in particular presidential powers, have been a natural focus in the literatures on presidential and semi-presidential cabinets. However, in work on *parliamentary* governments, the implications of several types of institutional rules for government formation and termination remain, as yet, surprisingly poorly understood despite the institutionalist turn in this literature. These understudied institutions include the formal powers of *indirectly* elected presidents to exercise leverage in negotiating about cabinets (Tavits 2009), and the bargaining power that government and opposition may derive from variation in (p. 308) some of the most consequential institutional rules in parliamentary democracies: confidence and no-confidence vote procedures (Evans 2017).

In the literature on cabinet survival, a distinct challenge remains the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the dependent variable, that is, the nature of cabinet terminations. For instance, major government replacements, in which the prime minister's party changes, and minor replacements, in which the dominant governing party carries on, are likely to have divergent predictors, not only in semi-presidential democracies (Fernandes and Magalhães 2016), but also in parliamentary regimes. Likewise, early elections in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies may require further disaggregation. Powers to trigger premature elections may not only lie with the government and its par-

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liamentary majority, but also with the president (Goplerud and Schleiter 2016). Presidents have been shown to use this power for partisan gain (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2017), and they are likely to deploy it under conditions that diverge from those under which governments and assembly majorities may seek early elections. This heterogeneity of outcomes presents challenges for work on cabinet termination: Studies that elide these differences in termination outcomes yield results that average across qualitatively distinct outcomes and are unlikely to characterise termination causes accurately.

In addition, formidable inferential challenges arise from the fact that government formation and termination are jointly determined outcomes, which should be, but are not usually, analysed as such. The two outcomes are jointly determined because (i) cabinet formation opportunities are the result of strategic choices (rather than random events), and (ii) politicians select and form coalitions which are likely to be durable.

As strategic models of cabinet termination make clear, the decision to topple a cabinet and form a new one is a political choice (Strøm 1988; Lupia and Strøm 1995). Hence cabinet formation opportunities result from the strategic choices of politicians, such as, for instance, a president's dismissal of the cabinet, a prime minister's decision to schedule an early election, or a minor coalition partner's choice to withdraw and topple the government. In each of these instances, political actors may choose to terminate a government precisely because that choice has implications for their party's electoral prospects, chances of claiming portfolios in the next government and the pursuit of their policy goals. Put differently, the choice to create a government formation opportunity and the formation outcome are likely to be endogenous to a range of variables that jointly predict both. Similarly, politicians do not choose the cabinets that they form at random, but with an eye to their durability (Chiba et al. 2015). As a result, the cabinets that form are on average, significantly more likely to endure than cabinets that do not form. Thus, the choice to form a cabinet and that government's duration are likely to be endogenous to a range of variables that jointly predict both. Unless this endogeneity between cabinet formation and survival is taken account of, inferences regarding the predictors of both outcomes are likely to be biased. However, the task of theorizing and modelling this dependence between government termination and formation is methodologically challenging and, as yet, only in its infancy.

(p. 309) Chiba et al. (2015) make a seminal contribution in addressing this challenge in the study of cabinet survival. Their argument is that the cabinets which politicians choose to form are on average significantly more likely to endure than potential cabinets that do not form. Thus the durability of observed cabinets is biased upwards and unless that selection process is corrected for, inferences about the causes of cabinet duration will be biased, too. Chiba et al. (2015) address this problem by modelling the sample selection bias using a copula framework, and apply this approach to the study of parliamentary coalition governments. Work on the duration of semi-presidential and presidential cabinets, however, has yet to address the challenges of selection bias. Similarly, the literature on government formation is yet to theorize the dependence between government termination and formation. These challenges are likely to require not just econometric solutions

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(Chiba et al. 2015), but will also benefit from identification strategies anchored in careful research design.

Finally, bargaining between politicians about government formation and termination has attracted such extensive scholarly attention because it is expected to impact on real world outcomes such as elections, government spending, tax regimes, and policy with respect to education, inequality and immigration. Yet, very few studies link cabinet formation and termination to outcomes in the electoral or policy arena. One rare example is a study by Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2017) which shows that presidents in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies use their influence on the calling of early elections for partisan benefit and are able to affect the electoral success of incumbents. Likewise, recent work by Heller (2016) begins to explore how the 'exit power' of governing parties affects economic policy. Yet, these are only first steps in the process that requires much greater efforts to map how bargaining over cabinets affects outcomes in the electoral and policy arenas.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ This work forms part of a wider literature which draws attention to the impact of psychological factors in coalition bargaining (see van Beest 2011 for a review).

⁽²⁾ Recent work by Freudenreich (2016) suggests that electoral motivations and the widespread use of pre-electoral coalitions also play a role in motivating the formation of cabinet coalitions in presidential democracies. This finding is consistent with work that stresses the importance of pre-electoral coalition for government formation choices in parliamentary democracies and opens up a promising new avenue for research on coalitional presidentialism.

⁽³⁾ An interesting and perhaps surprising finding of this literature is that cohabitation, that is, the co-existence of a president with a prime minister and cabinet of a different political persuasion, does not in and of itself raise the risk of early cabinet termination (Strøm and Swindle 2002; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a; Fernandes and Magalhães

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2016). In all probability this null finding suggests that the effect of partisan conflict is mediated by presidential powers and the likelihood of parliamentary override, which is often not explored.

(⁴) Note, however, that two recent working papers by Heller (2016) and Kayser et al. (2017) explore this theme.

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