Flying Solo: Explaining Single-Party Cabinets Under Minority Presidentialism*

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accepted by the *European Journal of Political Research* on 14 February 2018
final pre-publication version: 27 February 2018

Abstract. In recent years, the comparative literature on presidential democracy has emphasized the role of coalitional politics in attenuating the 'perils' facing minority presidents. Yet since the beginning of the Third Wave of democratization in 1974, a surprising number of minority presidents have eschewed cabinet coalitions (defined minimally as the awarding of at least one portfolio to a party other than the nominal party of the president). We observe unipartisan governments just under half of the time. What explains the adoption of single-party cabinets by minority presidents? We employ cross-sectional time-series analysis to address this question. We test hypotheses relating to the size and distribution of the formateur (presidential) and largest non-formateur parties that make up the legislature; the nature of party linkages and ideological distance between the president and possible partisan allies; and the extent of reactive veto powers held by the president.

Keywords. Presidentialism, cabinets, minority government.

Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that many presidents whose parties lack majority support in legislative assemblies attempt to overcome their minority status by building cross-party alliances. Like prime ministers in parliamentary systems, presidents do this through the formation of cabinet coalitions, defined minimally as the awarding of at least one portfolio to a party other than the nominal party of the president. Since the start of the Third Wave of democratization, the preponderance of minority presidents and coalition governments has increased as party systems have become more fragmented. Over this period, just over half of

* The authors gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference RES-062-23-2892). We also thank José Antonio Cheibub and Sebastián Saiegh for sharing their dataset, Malu Gatto for research assistance, and David Doyle and the anonymous *EJPR* reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

all minority presidents in political systems that meet minimum democratic standards have governed with multiparty cabinets.

Yet notwithstanding the recent growth in coalitional presidentialism, minority presidents have governed with single-party cabinets approximately 49 percent of the time since the advent of the Third Wave in 1974. This contrasts sharply with parliamentary systems, where on average minority prime ministers have governed 'alone' (i.e. without cabinet coalitions) less than 20 percent of the time since 1974. This fact suggests that the strategic response of chief executives to minority situations in presidential and parliamentary systems may not be as analogous as some of the literature has proposed.[1]

Differences between the institutional sources of government survival in parliamentary and presidential systems provide one obvious basis for explaining this contrast. In parliamentary systems, the frequent need for investiture[2] and the danger of losing votes of confidence mean that minority prime ministers have many more incentives to make coalition government work,[3] whereas the survival of presidents can be challenged only in exceptional circumstances. Presidents in most cases also have the unilateral power to determine the composition of their executives, and their separate electoral mandate provides a source of authority independent of legislative assemblies. Yet the separation of powers also creates negative externalities for presidents (Linz 1994; Mainwaring 1993), and in practice these 'perils' have frequently been mitigated by the formation of interparty alliances (Cheibub, Przeworski & Saiegh 2004; Cheibub & Limongi 2010).

The benefits of coalitions to minority presidents are immediate, direct, and observable, and have been exhaustively described in the literature. Portfolio coalitions provide presidents with important payoffs to party allies on the floor of the assembly, which are used to guarantee the support needed to enact their legislative agendas and to defend against their partisan opponents (Amorim Neto 2002; Raile, Pereira & Power 2011).

Minority presidents objectively raise their 'batting average' (the share of their legislative proposals that are turned into law) when they form coalitions (Saiegh 2014).[4] Coalitions enlarge the 'legislative shield' (Pérez-Liñán 2007) that can protect presidents from impeachment or removal in times of crisis. For all these reasons and more, the fact that many presidents still desist from coalitional solutions to minority situations is puzzling and requires explanation.

In this article we consider the reasons why minority presidents may favour single-party cabinets over multiparty cabinets. Our analysis focuses on several intuitive explanatory variables. These include the relative size of the presidential party and rival parties; the predominant form of linkages in the wider party system (whether programmatic or particularistic); the depth of ideological divisions between the president and possible partisan allies; and the president's ability to block unfriendly legislation approved by the assembly.

We estimate the effects of these variables by conducting cross-sectional time-series analysis on all situations of minority presidentialism in both democracies and semi-democracies between 1974 and 2013. Our analysis covers 610 country-years of minority presidential situations, in which we observe a roughly even split between cabinet coalitions and unipartisan government. Following convention, our dependent variable is based on inspection of formal cabinet membership (i.e. portfolio allocation to identifiable political parties). In other words, a *cabinet coalition* exists whenever at least one portfolio is held by a party other than the presidential party.

We recognise that this decision rule simplifies the actual practice of coalitional politics. In multiparty presidentialism, executives trade in *multiple* currencies with legislators; these currencies include jobs and public spending, among other 'coalition goods' (Raile et al. 2011). Nonetheless, in this article we use portfolio allocation as our sole

indicator of coalitional overtures. While our focus on portfolios underestimates the de facto legislative ('floor') alliances that support presidents around the world,[5] cabinet composition has the advantage of providing a clear and meaningful indicator of presidential strategy. Our observational study is based on the presence or absence of cabinet coalitions in a given country-year (the political configurations are valid as of 31st December of each year).[6] With its broad geographic and temporal coverage, our dataset allows us to investigate the broad tendencies latent in a large-*N* data set on minority presidentialism around the world.[7]

We show in this article that the decision of minority presidents to 'fly solo'—that is, to appoint a cabinet made up exclusively of co-partisans—is a function of four main factors: the size of the president's own party, the concentration of legislative seats in the hands of one non-formateur party, the degree of particularism in the party system, and the institutional capacity of the president to kill or amend unwanted legislation passed by the assembly. Minority presidents who are close to a majority in the assembly, who face a dominant alternative party on the floor, who coexist with party systems in which particularism predominates over programmatic politics, and who possess strong veto powers are significantly more likely to preside over unipartisan governments. Other factors that have been hypothesized to affect presidential strategies, for example the imminence of presidential elections, are found to have little or no effect on this most fundamental of cabinet choices. All of these findings are robust to the inclusion of regional controls.

Minority presidents and cabinet coalitions

As Golder (2015) notes, the government formation process works differently in parliamentary and presidential regimes: in the latter, 'the president is the formateur and the president's party is always represented in the cabinet' (Golder 2015: 7). In this article, we

are unconcerned with the reasons why the formateur starts from a minority position. Early comparative research established quite convincingly that the probability of minority presidentialism is a function of the type of electoral system, the number of political parties, and the electoral calendar (e.g. Shugart & Carey 1992; Jones 1995; Cheibub 2002). Rather, we are interested in the behaviour of minority presidents when they take office: will they or will they not reach out to other parties? As noted earlier, our measure of 'reaching out' is restricted to formal inclusion in the cabinet.

Recent research on presidential democracy has increasingly focused on the dynamics of multiparty coordination. Concentrating largely on Latin American democracies, scholars have been concerned with factors shaping the formation of cabinet coalitions (Altman 2000; Alemán & Tsebelis 2011); the impact of multiparty portfolio allocation on the survival and performance of governments (Martínez-Gallardo 2012); and the policy payoffs of cabinet membership for political parties (Gaylord & Rennó 2015). In much of this literature, the assumed payoff for presidents of building multiparty coalitions is support from those parties on the floor of the assembly. Cabinet coalitions are understood as a way of cementing the legislative support that minority presidents need (Amorim Neto 2002, 2006; Saiegh 2014).

Cabinet coalitions are not unique to Latin American presidential systems. The analysis in this article uses global data for *all* minority presidents in hybrid and democratic regimes for the period 1974 to 2013. These annualised data extend those originally gathered by Cheibub et al. (2004).[8] Using Cheibub et al.'s coding of presidential systems, which largely excludes mixed forms of presidentialism,[9] we find that coalitions across the globe have increased since the start of the Third Wave, tracking the proportion of minority presidents (Figure 1). These trends have been reinforced by the democratisation of presidential systems in non-Latin American states since the early 1990s. As Table 1

suggests, minority presidents in Africa, Asia and Europe have been even more likely than Latin American presidents to govern with multiparty coalitions.

[FIGURE 1 AND TABLE 1 HERE]

These coalition data are supported by the expectations of legislators in minority presidential systems across the globe. Interviews conducted by Nic Cheeseman and ourselves with legislators in Africa, Latin America and the former Soviet Union in 2012-2015 uncovered strong evidence to substantiate quantitative data on the importance of multiparty cabinet coalitions for minority presidents. Our survey included a question that asked legislators to rank, in order of utility, five potential tools that minority presidents have used to form coalitions in their country (Chaisty, Cheeseman & Power 2018).[10] Of 338 legislators surveyed across nine countries, some 49 per cent ranked cabinet powers as the most effective tool and over 70 percent as one of the two most effective. Aggregating the data at the country level (Armenia, Benin, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Kenya, Malawi, Russia, and Ukraine) over forty per cent of our interviewees ranked cabinet powers as the most important resource used in coalition building in seven out of the nine cases.[11] When we asked the MPs an open-ended question—'In general what are the rewards or benefits for parties or politicians that join the presidential coalition?'—and then hand-coded the 15 most frequently volunteered responses, we found that 'cabinet positions' was the single most popular answer, cited spontaneously by 131 of 355 interviewees (36.9%).[12]

Given this strong evidence of the importance of cabinet coalitions to both presidents and legislators, the fact that such a large proportion of minority presidents continue to govern with single-party cabinets is puzzling. In the next section we introduce some of the explanations that may account for this.

Accounting for single-party cabinets under minority presidentialism

Given that we know that minority presidents can raise their legislative success rates by forming coalitions (Saiegh 2014), why would they choose to go it alone? Given that cabinet composition is at the discretion of the president, we are concerned primarily with the motivations for why minority presidents would desist from forming cross-party coalitions. Our executive-centered approach assumes that all minority presidents are endowed with formateur potential but that some choose not to exercise it; this is different from a party-centred approach, in which the focus would be on why certain political parties might decline to support elected executives.

Which baseline conditions shape presidential strategy? Our approach highlights the political and institutional powers available to the directly elected executive. We organise these determinants of single-party cabinet formation into three categories. In a first cluster, we examine factors associated with the *size* and mathematical distribution of the formateur (presidential) and non-formateur parties that make up the legislature. Second, we distinguish among key facets of *party systems*—i.e., the linkages (clientelistic or programmatic) that parties use to connect with voters, as well as the ideological differences between them. Core party system characteristics shape the importance of policy spoils to potential coalition parties and as well as policy costs of portfolio sharing to the president. Third, from a neo-Madisonian perspective, we isolate how the reactive legislative power of the president shapes the propensity to recruit potential partisan allies into the cabinet.

In highlighting these proposed causal factors, we control for both geographic and temporal effects. As can be seen in Table 1, there is notable cross-regional variation in the preponderance of single-party cabinets, with US and Latin American minority presidents the most likely to desist from coalition formation. We also control for the 'honeymoon' and

'lame duck' effects that are known to affect presidential politics. For example, we investigate the extent to which impending elections might exacerbate conflict between parties and alternative future formateurs, resulting in unipartisan cabinet outcomes.

Although the phenomenon of minority governments in presidentialism was highlighted in an influential study by Cheibub et al. in 2004, in the intervening years the question of why some minority presidents do *not* form multiparty coalitions is not one that has exercised scholars of comparative presidentialism. In the course of preparing this article, we came across just one study (Figueiredo, Canello & Vieira 2012) that had dealt with a related question—minority cabinets—albeit in a Latin American context.[13] Despite the paucity of contributions, both Figueiredo et al. and the broader extant literature on coalitional presidentialism provide a solid basis for hypothesis formulation.[14]

Party size and seat configurations

While under parliamentarism, potential formateurs of coalitions can often come from a range of parties, separation of powers systems have only one possible formateur: the directly elected president. Given that their electoral mandate is independent from that of the assembly, it is acknowledged that presidents typically enjoy higher discretion than prime ministers when it comes to cabinet composition (Amorim Neto 2006). Yet this comparison with parliamentary systems may obscure differences between majority and minority executives under the separation of powers, and in particular, may lead us to overlook important differences *within* the subcategory of minority presidents. A minority president whose nominal party controls 15 percent of the seats in the assembly is in a very different position from the minority president whose party has 48 percent of the seats. The former may see coalition formation as unavoidable, whereas the latter may conclude that she/he is

within ‘striking distance’ of approving key legislation in the assembly even without opening the cabinet to other political parties. It may be possible to work with a large, albeit minority, presidential party and negotiate with other legislators on an ad hoc basis. This idea of striking distance yields our first hypothesis about minority presidents:

> *H1:* The greater the size of the presidential party, the greater the probability of single-party cabinets.

In practice, however, the impact of presidential party size is also shaped by the ability of minority presidents to secure additional support from non-formateur parties.[15] Presidents whose parties failed to win control of the legislature are innately vulnerable, and such executives have to take into account the potential for development of rival centres of power both in the assembly and in the electoral arena. In particular, presidents must monitor the ambitions of other leading parties that may wish to launch presidential contenders of their own, and the size of these parties is often a good indicator of whether they are capable of emplacing viable candidacies. Meanwhile, large and prominent rival parties have a strategic calculus of their own. Holding a sizeable bloc of seats, they may well occupy strategic leadership posts in the assembly and jealously guard its agenda. Such leading parties are likely to be reluctant to enter cabinet coalitions if they plan to run against the incumbent, and this may predispose them to oppose or obstruct the president’s legislative programme on the floor. Neither the president nor the largest alternative party may wish to give aid and comfort to the other side. This phenomenon, akin to magnetic repulsion, is likely to become more acute when a single party dominates the non-formateur contingent in the legislature, thus providing an alternative centre of gravity in executive-legislative relations.

Thus, we hypothesise that the probability of unipartisan cabinets is likely to increase along with the relative dominance of a single non-presidential party within the non-formateur bloc of parties:

> *H2:* The greater the dominance of the largest non-formateur party (LNFP) over the non-formateur contingent in the assembly, the greater the probability of single-party cabinets.

The nature of party linkages: programmatic versus particularistic

The likelihood that minority presidents will form single-party cabinets is shaped by not only by the *number* of the parties that make up the assembly, but also by their *nature*. Party linkages to society (i.e. to constituents) vary immensely, and are typically arrayed along a spectrum ranging from programmatic to particularistic. Programmatic parties are policy seekers (De Swaan 1973; Strom 1990), and presidents should expect to have to make some policy concessions in order to include such parties in a cabinet coalition, especially if these parties prioritize national over local issues. Clientelistic parties, often parochial in nature, are less wedded to ideology and programmatic concerns. Parties such as these may be satisfied with non-policy spoils—such as budget rents, patronage, campaign finance or other favours—and this gives presidents ample latitude to negotiate the support of these parties without awarding them a seat at the cabinet table. As Kellam (2015) has shown in her work on Latin America, when parties are 'particularistic'—i.e. when they trade support for the president in return for 'locally targeted policies'—presidents are less likely to form cabinets on a majority basis. Thus, we expect that minority presidents who coexist with legislatures wherein party linkages are predominantly particularistic or clientelistic are more likely to form single-party cabinets.

H3: The greater the particularistic or clientelistic nature of party linkages, the greater the probability of single-party cabinets.

However, even in party systems where overall programmaticity is low, ideology can still affect coalitional choices. Some scholars of parliamentarism (e.g. Austen-Smith & Banks 1988) have emphasized the distribution of policy preferences in explaining the emergence of minority governments. In adapting the Austen-Smith and Banks bargaining model to presidentialism, Cheibub et al. (2004: 566) posit that 'when the policy differences between the formateur party and some other parties which together would constitute a legislative majority are small, the formateur party governs as a minority, making the necessary policy concessions to other parties.' The assumption is that where preference congruence among a *set* of parties are high, minority presidents will desist from portfolio coalitions. Our approach is different: we focus on the salience of a *single* rival party or center of power in the legislature—the largest non-formateur party—and on the dyadic ideological distance between the LNFP and the presidential party. Our focus on this party (see H2 above) underlines the fact that not all multiparty scenarios are equivalent. In some, the minority president faces a highly fractionalized environment of many small parties; in others the formateur contends with a small number of similarly sized rivals (closer to the original Austen-Smith & Banks game-theoretic model of three-party competition); and in still others, the bloc of non-formateur parties is dominated by a large rival to the president. When the LNFP dominates the non-presidential bloc of seats in the assembly, we assume its dyadic ideological distance to the president will reinforce the potential rivalry. This leads to the following extension of H2:

H4: The greater the ideological distance between the president and the largest non-formateur party, the greater the probability of single-party cabinets.

Reactive legislative powers: the salience of the veto

The relative distribution of power between the presidents and their assemblies is also likely to affect the probability of single-party cabinets.[16] Scholars of Latin American politics have found a strong inverse relationship between the concentration of legislative power in the hands of presidents and the existence of multiparty coalitions (Amorim Neto 2002, 2006; Figueiredo et al. 2012; Martínez-Gallardo 2012, 2014). If presidents follow a law-making strategy that deploys unilateral and reactive legislative power—such as decree and veto power—they are less likely to appoint multiparty cabinets (Amorim Neto 2006: 417). The logic behind these arguments is straightforward: minority presidents who have the power to make policy independently of assemblies are less likely to concede executive power to non-formateur parties for the sake of securing legislative support.

Measures of presidential power often lump together both proactive and reactive legislative powers, but it is useful to disaggregate these in order to provide a sharper theoretical focus on specific domains of executive-legislative relations. An emphasis on reactive powers provides us with the strongest and clearest test of the hypothesized inverse relationship between presidential power and coalition formation. Proactive powers—e.g exclusive initiative or urgency provisions—endow presidents with a first-mover advantage, but do not necessarily guarantee that their preferred policies will be enacted; by way of contrast, robust reactive powers (such as a strong veto) can lead presidents to conclude that alternative, unfriendly proposals will *not* be enacted. The strategic calculus rides on whether the assembly can override a presidential veto. As the ability of a minority president's supporters to block veto overrides increases (i.e. as the size of the legislative majorities required for override rises), the formateur's willingness to seek coalition partners is likely to erode. Conversely, minority presidents with weaker veto powers may opt to seek coalition

partners as an insurance policy (Negretto 2006). These observations yield the following hypothesis:

> *H5:* The stronger the reactive veto power of the president, the greater the probability of single-party cabinets.

Controls

Finally, we introduce control variables that are likely to affect the probability of single-party cabinets under minority presidentialism. We divide these into temporal and regional factors.

The fixed terms of presidentialism make time important in politics, as is observable via well-known 'honeymoon' and 'lame-duck' effects (Shull 1997; Howell & Mayer 2005). Operational challenges inevitably emerge over the course of a president's term and these can erode the presidents support base as the task of re-election, or electing a suitable successor, becomes more pressing (Amorim Neto 2002; Pereira, Power & Rennó 2005). As Altman argues, the preoccupation of coalition partners is likely to shift from spoils and policy rewards to vote maximisation as elections approach (Altman 2000: 268). Given that even loyal coalition partners may wish to trial a presidential candidate of their own, the impulse of non-formateur parties to distance themselves from the president is likely to increase as election day draws nearer. Therefore, we include a control variable measuring the temporal distance to the next presidential election, with the expectation being that the sign will be negative.

Also, regional differences between the countries selected for analysis may be expected to affect the likelihood of single-party cabinets. The regional categories profiled in Table 1 exhibit considerable heterogeneity in terms of historical sequencing (i.e. the timing of the introduction of presidentialism and/or democratization) and of potential diffusion effects. Therefore we introduce binary variables identifying the principal world regions

relevant to this study. The excluded category is the Americas (North and Latin America),[17] the region with by far the longest historical experience with presidentialism. In all of the countries in this category (save Guyana, which gained independence in 1966), presidentialism was introduced prior to or during the First Wave of historical democratization.

Data, method and results

The universe of cases covers 610 years of minority presidentialism between 1974 and 2013. Minority presidents are defined as presidents whose parties commanded less than or equal to 49.9 percent of the seats in the lower or unicameral chamber of the national legislature. We included country-years with a positive score on the Polity IV scale.[18] This yielded a global sample of 38 countries, with an average of 16 years of minority presidential governance each (Table 1).

Our dependent variable—the presence of single-party cabinets—is dichotomous. This variable is coded as 1 when the cabinets of minority presidents consist exclusively of the formateur's party or no party at all.[19] In our dataset, single-party cabinets were present in 297 of the 610 country-years; this is just under half (49.4 percent) of the observations.

We operationalize a number of independent variables to test the hypotheses outlined above. In order to explore the 'striking distance' hypothesis (H1), we include an indicator measuring the proportion of seats held by the minority president's party in the legislature (0 to .498). We also record the size of the largest non-formateur party (LNFP) relative to the entire non-presidential contingent in the assembly: we refer to this as 'dominance of the largest non-formateur party' over the rest (H2).[20] To test for the effects of party-system characteristics (H3), we draw on the V-Dem expert assessments of the predominant party

linkages in each country-year. This variable is coded so that higher values represent more particularistic or clientelistic patterns of party behaviour.[21] To test our hypothesis about the ideological distance between the presidential party and its main potential rival (H4), we use annualised data on party orientations towards economic policy (from rightist to leftist) to calculate the ideological distance between the formateur party and the largest non-formateur party.[22] To gauge the president's reactive legislative power, we use V-Dem expert assessments of presidential veto power in practice (H5).[23] Finally, we control for temporal and regional factors by coding proximity to the next presidential election (in years),[24] and by assigning all country cases into five categories covering the Americas, the Former Soviet Union, Africa, Asia and Other Europe. Descriptive statistics for the independent variables (with the exception of the regional categories described in Table 1) are provided in Table 2.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

Logistic regression was used to estimate the effect of each variable on the probability that minority presidents would form single-party cabinets. The results are summarised in Table 3. They provide evidence to suggest that a combination of the size of the president's party, the relative dominance of the largest non-formateur party, the particularistic nature of the party system, and the power of the president to veto legislation account for almost 20 percent of the variance in cabinet composition. These findings are significant after controlling for the electoral timetable and different regional contexts. They are also robust to the exclusion of the United States from the dataset, and to the inclusion of additional controls for the level of democracy.[25]

[TABLE 3 HERE]

Of all the predictors, the size of the formateur party in the legislature (H1) was the strongest stand-alone predictor of single-party cabinets. When all the other variables were held at their means, executives whose parties controlled 49.8 percent of the seats in the

assembly (the maximum value for a minority president in this dataset under our coding rules) were 47 percentage points more likely to form a unipartisan cabinet than presidents with zero legislative co-partisans.[26] These predicted probabilities are presented visually in Figure 2, which illustrates the effects of four key independent variables when set to their maximum and minimum values as observed in the dataset.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

In inspecting the impact of the 'striking distance to a legislative majority' on the calculus of minority presidents, we note that this effect takes a linear form. Figure 3 plots the mean probability of a unipartisan cabinet by the size of the formateur party, holding all other predictors at their means. As can readily be seen, there is no threshold or inflection point: the probability of a non-coalitional outcome increases more or less monotonically in line with the size of the formateur party.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

The dominance of a single party over the bloc of non-formateur parties in the assembly (H2) was also highly significant. When we control for the striking distance of the president to a legislative majority, the prominence of the largest non-formateur party (LNFP) was strongly associated with the decision of minority executives to 'go it alone.' When all other variables were held at their means, those non-formateur parties that controlled 100% of the non-formateur bloc were 46 percentage points more likely to coexist with single-party governments than those LNFPs that held less than 10% of the seats within the non-presidential contingent (see Figure 2).[27]

The predictors used to capture party system attributes conform only partially to our theoretical expectations. Minority presidents operating within party systems characterised by clientelistic and particularistic linkages (H3) were statistically more likely to have single-party cabinets than minority presidents in political systems characterised by programmatic

parties. This is consistent with Kellam's recent work on Latin America, which suggests that presidents are often content to leave clientelistic parties outside the cabinet and engage with them via particularistic transactions (Kellam 2015). As can be seen in Figure 2, minority presidents operating within party systems characterised by particularistic linkages were 18 percentage points more likely to have single-party cabinets than minority presidents facing programmatic party systems.

However, contrary to our expectation, those minority presidents embedded in party systems displaying clearer traits of ideological polarization (H4)—wherein the ideological distance between the formateur party and the largest non-formateur party were at their greatest on economic questions (a classic left-right cleavage)—were no more likely to desist from coalition formation. Therefore, in the multivariate model our findings about the role of the LNFP are mixed: we find that the size of this rival party matters, but its dyadic ideological distance to the president does not.

Of the remaining variables, the strength of presidential veto power was the most significant. Minority presidents who commanded strong veto powers were 46 percentage points more likely to form single-party cabinets than presidents with no veto power, holding all other variables at their means (H5). This suggests that minority presidents may view strong veto powers as an effective weapon in deterring the emergence of coordinated opposition; if presidents can more easily kill or amend undesirable legislation emanating from the assembly, they have less incentive to recruit additional parties to the cabinet.

We note that the V-Dem measure of veto power is a *de facto* rather than a *de jure* indicator; it captures what experts believe is the likelihood that the president could sustain a veto in practice. These expert perceptions could potentially be affected by what the coders already know about the size of the formateur party. However, the expert-coded veto variable appears to capture more than just the size of the president's party. When we remove the veto

variable from the model, the effect of the formateur party size variable does not increase significantly, and the goodness of fit of the model declines.[28] Furthermore, substitution of the V-Dem veto variable with a measure of veto powers based on constitutional powers alone (a *de jure* indicator) produces results very similar to those shown in Table 3.[29] With a reduced sample of 367 cases,[30] the coefficient for the formateur party variables changes only trivially when the V-Dem coding is substituted by the formal-constitutional version of the variable.[31] Thus, we conclude that the influence of the V-Dem veto variable is independent of formateur party size.

The results suggests that four independent variables—the size of the presidential party, the relative dominance of the largest alternative party, the particularism of the party system, and the potency of the veto pen—have a pronounced impact on the cabinet choices of minority presidents. These findings were significant after controlling for temporal and regional factors. The electoral cycle control variable failed to achieve statistical significance. Of the regional dummies, only the variables for Asia and the former USSR were statistically significant. After controlling for all other predictors in the model, post-Soviet minority presidents were more likely than their counterparts in the Americas to form unipartisan governments, whereas Asian presidents were significantly more likely to build cabinet coalitions than presidents in the Americas.

These statistical effects are well supported in the dataset by concrete cases. Examples of minority presidents who fit the 'striking distance' profile (those with large pluralities in the legislature but without cabinet coalitions) include Argentine President Carlos Menem in his first term (1989-1995) and Malawian President Bakili Muluzi for most of his second term (1999-2004).[32] Instances of minority presidents who governed with single-party cabinets when facing dominant non-formateur parties headed by presidential rivals include Costa Rican President José María Figueres (1994-1998) and Honduran

President Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009, when he was deposed). Minority executives with substantial veto power and unipartisan cabinets include Zambian President Rupiah Banda (2008-2011) and first-term Russian President Vladimir Putin (2000-2003).

Generalizing broadly, these results suggest that presidential authority—whether political (in terms of legislative support from nominal copartisans), relational (in terms of the size of the leading non-formateur party), systemic (in terms of the particularistic nature of the party system), or institutional (in terms of reactive legislative power)—are key factors in determining the likelihood that minority presidents will choose to 'fly solo.' The greater discretion that presidents enjoy vis-à-vis their cabinets is therefore buttressed in minority situations whenever their political, situational, systemic and institutional advantages are *relatively* enhanced (bearing in mind that we are comparing minority presidents to each other, and not to their majoritarian counterparts). Other factors that may appear to influence the choice of single-party cabinets when they are analysed separately—ideological polarization, the electoral cycle and regional differences—fall away when we control for the partisan and lawmaking resources of the president, the salience of the leading non-formateur party and the overall degree of programmaticity of the party system.

Conclusion

This article began with a puzzle: if coalition formation is known to strengthen the position of minority presidents, why do almost half of them continue to rely on single-party cabinets? Our ability to unravel the puzzle is constrained by our large-*N* cross-national research design. Some variables that are intuitively very promising—such as the precise ideological placements of presidents and potential coalition partners, the internal discipline of parties, the use of pre-electoral alliances between these same parties, and (especially) the

number and position of viable presidential candidates—could not be included in the present study.

However, even with a smaller number of independent variables than we would have preferred, we were able to identify a number of rather stable patterns within a global dataset of 610 country-years of minority presidentialism. Four variables—presidential party size, the relative size of the leading nonpresidential party, executive veto powers, and the prevalence of particularistic exchanges in party politics—proved robust to a number of alternative estimations. There is no evidence that the proximity to presidential elections has an effect on the decision by presidents to govern with single-party cabinets, and there is only fragmentary evidence in favour of cross-regional differences. Rather, we suggest, the decision by presidents to govern alone is better captured by the simple mathematics of executive-legislative relations, the reactive veto power in the hands of the president, and the degree to which the broader party system converges on nonideological, clientelistic linkages. We have identified a number of 'prime suspects' for future research and have moved a bit closer to solving a vexing puzzle about minority presidents.

The takeaway message here is that presidential authority matters, and it has specific and directional impacts on minority presidents. Their cabinet decisions are affected not only by how close they are to a working majority, but also by the size and salience of prominent non-formateur parties. Presidents whose parties do not control a majority of the assembly are keenly aware of legislative mathematics. These mathematics, i.e. seat distributions, can be measured in different ways, normally by the widely used effective number of parties (Laakso & Taagepera 1979) or by a Herfindahl fractionalization index (cf. Figueiredo et al. 2012). Yet statistics such as these are aggregate measures, and they are blind to the size and identity of really-existing political parties. What we have done here is to profile the nonpresidential contingent in a completely different way, by measuring the dominance of a

single non-formateur party within this bloc. Our LNFP indicator is far more actor-sensitive than measures of party fragmentation: it captures the relevance of any *organized alternative* to the party of the incumbent. It can be thought of as a measure of positional rivalry or competition rather than one of dispersion.[33]

There are several reasons why a concentration of seats in the hands of a leading nonpresidential party is likely to lead to the results we have observed. First, where the dominance of one party within the non-formateur bloc is absolute, as in the United States (which typically has only one nonpresidential party in the legislature), we are approaching the logic of a winner-take-all two-party system in which coalitions (absent war or crisis) are likely to be rare or nonexistent. Second, in both two-party and multiparty systems, a leading LNFP likely to be an obvious source of future presidential candidacies. Third, we suspect that the presence of a leading nonpresidential party shapes not only the perceptions of the president concerning his/her vulnerability, but also the strategic calculi of the remaining non-formateur parties in multiparty systems. The more consolidated an alternative centre of gravity in the assembly, and the more the smaller parties may hedge their bets about the future of the presidential party, the less magnetic is the incumbent. Simply put, the *configuration* (as opposed to the fragmentation) of the nonpresidential contingent in the assembly may affect not only the likelihood that invitations to join the cabinet will be issued, but also the probability that these invitations will be accepted.

We hypothesized that a greater ideological distance between the presidential party and the LNFP would increase the likelihood of unipartisan cabinets (H4). This contrasts with Cheibub et al. (2004), who assume that when policy differences between the formateur party and rivals are small, the president will form a minority government and buy legislative support via ad hoc policy concessions. Our assumption, highlighting the dyadic relationship between the formateur and the LNFP, was more or less the opposite: when policy

differences (proxied here by economic ideology) between these two parties are large, the aggregate space for coalition formation will be narrower and minority government will ensue (controlling for the relative size of the LNFP). Although our measure of dyadic ideological distance is signed positively according to our expectation (Table 3), it does not reach statistical significance. However, additional analysis of the LNFP ideological distance variable suggest that it could be further explored as a possible alternative to the Austen-Smith & Banks policy proximity model of minority government formation.[34]

Yet presidential party size, or an advantage relative to an organized alternative, are not the only factors in play. When presidents contemplate coalition formation, party system attributes also appear to matter. Although particularistic parties may well seek cabinet posts in order to attain the spoils of office, our findings suggest that presidents are reluctant to provide these opportunities. This is consistent with the findings of recent research on Latin America, which has emphasised presidential concerns about 'agency loss' as a motivating factor in decision-making on the allocation of cabinet portfolios (Martínez-Gallardo & Schleiter 2015). Thus, our analysis concurs with recent work that places greater importance on the non-cabinet strategies that presidents use to manage particularistic parties (Kellam 2015; Chaisty & Chernykh 2017).

In addition, the reactive legislative powers of presidents matter. Far from what is implied in a textbook 'separation of powers' model, most directly elected presidents around the world have substantial legislative authority, including the power to veto bills either wholly or partially. Again consistent with the extant research on Latin America (Amorim Neto 2002, 2006; Figueiredo et al. 2012; Martínez-Gallardo 2012, 2014), we find that the extent of veto powers affects decisions in cabinet composition and coalition formation. Specifically, we find that those minority presidents with strong reactive vetoes are more likely to form unipartisan governments.

Our global, large-*N* research design has traded away some 'depth' in return for 'breadth.' However, the findings here suggest promising avenues of inquiry for presidentialism research in regions where data quality is high and omitted variables can be reinserted (e.g. Latin America), and may help establish us some parameters for crafting appropriate case-study research on the strategic choices of minority presidents.

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Table 1

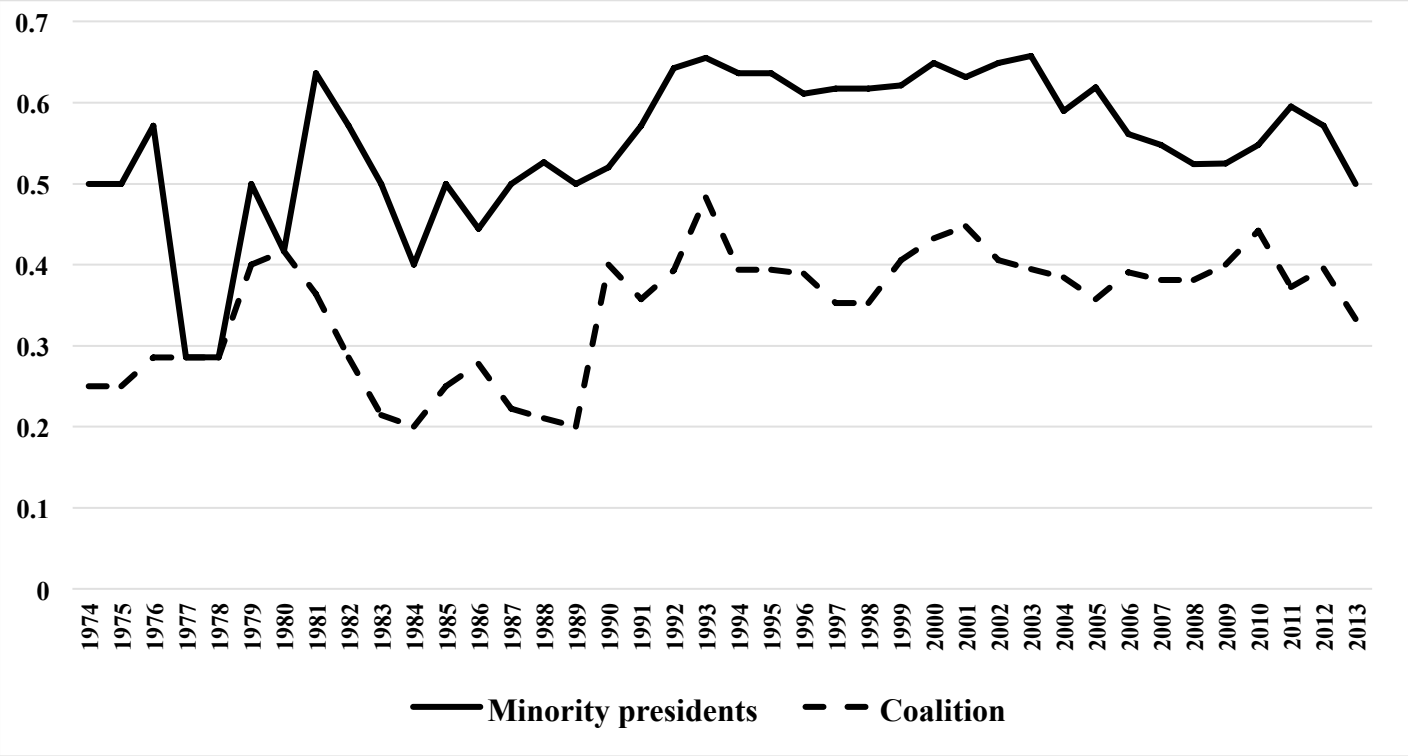
Regional Distribution and Cabinet Outcomes in 610 Country-Years of Minority Presidentialism, 1974-2013

Category	**Countries in Category**	**Years of Cabinet Coalition (N)**	**Years of Cabinet Coalition (% within category)**	**Years of Single Party Cabinets (N)**	**Years of Single Party Cabinets (% within category)**	**Total Years of Minority Presidents (N)**	**Category as Contribution to Dataset (%)**
North America	United States	0	**0**	26	**100.0**	26	**4.3**
Latin America	Brazil, Guyana, 17 Spanish-speaking republics	158	**45.5**	189	**54.5**	347	**56.9**
Former Soviet Union	Russia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia	19	**54.3**	16	**45.7**	35	**5.7**
Africa	Benin, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zambia	44	**53.7**	38	**46.3**	82	**13.4**
Asia	Indonesia, South Korea, Philippines	31	**68.9**	14	**31.1**	45	**7.4**
Other Europe	Cyprus, Switzerland	61	**81.3**	14	**18.7**	75	**12.3**
TOTALS	38 countries	313	**50.6**	297	**49.4**	610	**100.0**

Source: for 1974-1999, data compiled by Cheibub et al. (2004), extended through 2013 by authors.

Figure 1

Minority Presidents and Cabinet Coalitions in Presidential Regimes, 1974-2013



Notes: Solid line is the proportion of directly elected presidents whose nominal parties have less than 50% of the seats in the legislature. Dotted line is the proportion of presidential regimes with more than one political party formally represented in the cabinet.

Source: same as Table 1.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

Variable	*Mean*	*Median*	*Max*	*Min*	*SD*
% Seats Formateur Party	.31	.33	.498	0	.139
Dominance of Largest Non-Formateur Party (LNFP)	.48	.44	1	.09	.214
Particularism of Party System	1.68	1	3	0	1.10
Ideological Distance Formateur-LNFP	.93	1	2	0	.766
Presidential Veto Power	2.47	3	4	0	1.07
Proximity to Next Election	1.86	2	5	0	1.40

Table 3

Predictors of Single-Party Cabinets Under Minority Presidents, 1974-2013

Predictor	*Coefficient (standard error)*
Formateur Party Size	4.236 (0.863)***
Dominance of Largest Non-Formateur Party	2.165 (0.570)***
Particularism of Party System	0.238 (0.097)*
Ideological Distance Formateur-LNFP	0.177 (0.137)
Presidential Veto Power	0.514 (0.131)***
Proximity to Election	-0.092 (0.066)
Africa	-0.268 (0.314)
Asia	-0.800 (0.385)*
Europe	0.178 (0.472)
Former Soviet Union	1.013 (0.420)*
Constant	-4.100 (0.584)***
N Observations	610
Pseudo R^2	0.19

Notes: cases are country-years of minority presidents in presidential systems with Polity scores of 1 or greater, 1974-2013 inclusive (see text). Entries are logistic regression coefficients. The model excludes three country-years for which we had missing data on the ideological distance variable: Nigeria 1979, 1980, 1981. The reference category for the regional dummy variables is the Americas (see note 17).

p-values *<.05 **<.01 ***<.001

Figure 2

Predicted Probabilities of Unipartisan Cabinets for Four Key Causal Variables, at Minimum and Maximum Values with Cis

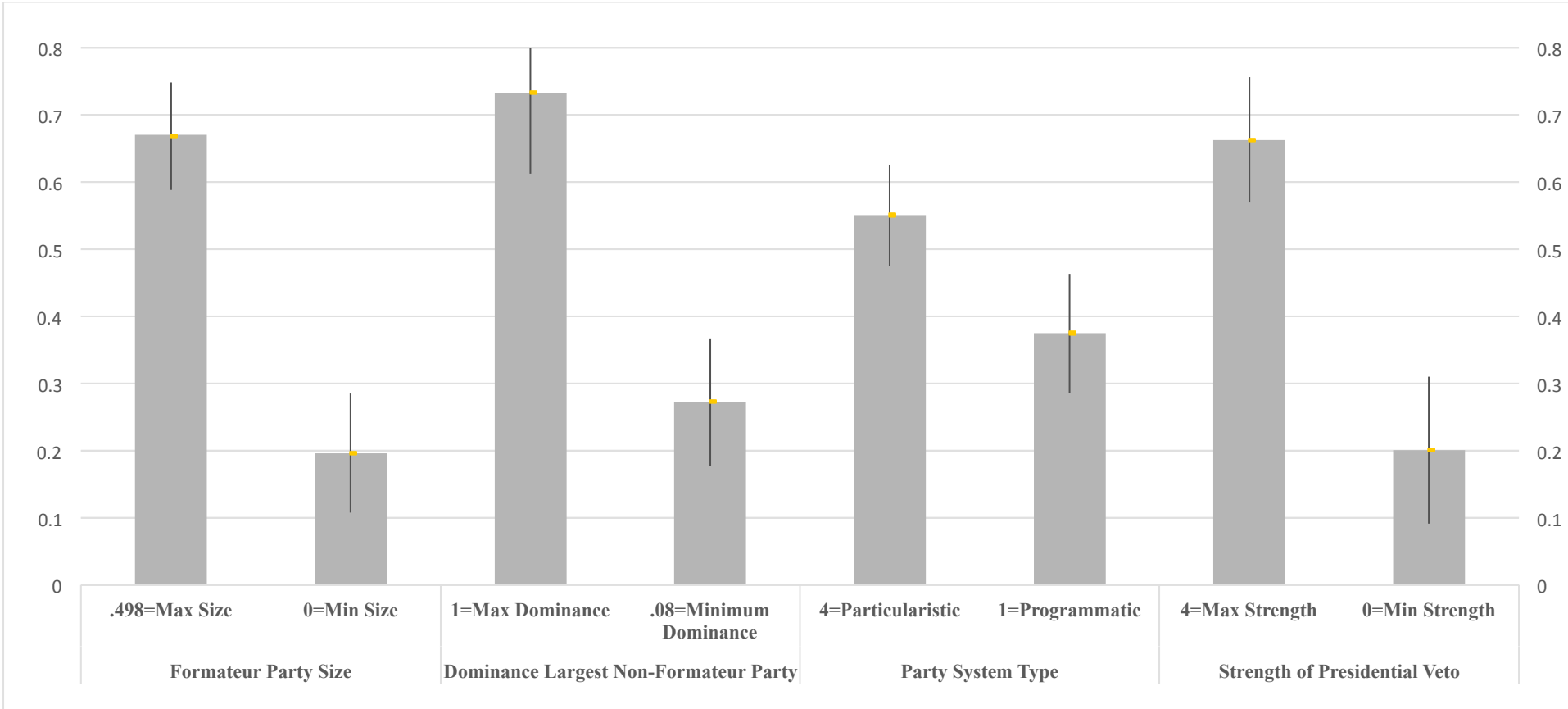
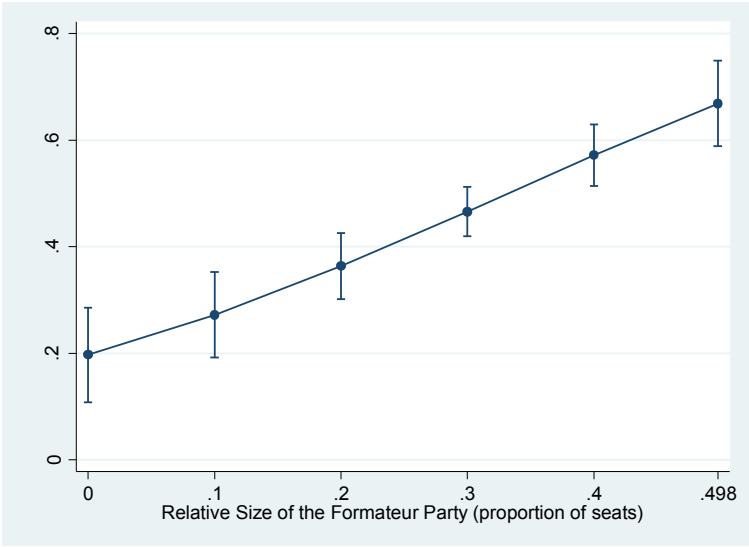


Figure 3

Striking Distance: Marginal Effect of the Size of the Presidential Party on the Probability of Unipartisan Cabinet Outcomes



Notes: estimates drawn from the model in Table 3. *Y*-axis is the predicted probability of single-party cabinet formation by minority presidents. *X*-axis represents the marginal effect of the size of the formateur party as the proportion of seats moves from zero to 49.8 percent.

Endnotes

[1] See Cheibub & Limongi (2010) for an insightful review of the factors that can make government formation under presidentialism and parliamentarism look very similar (especially when presidents are institutionally weak) and of the factors that can also make these processes look very different (especially when presidents are legislatively strong).

[2] Parliamentary democracies with investiture requirements have lower rates of minority government than parliamentary systems lacking such rules; in the latter, 'the ultimate power of the parliament rests in its power to unseat the government, not with the (formal) power to elect it' (Bergman 1993: 57). The fixed mandate of presidentialism obviates investiture.

[3] In saying 'many more incentives,' we adopt a probabilistic and not a deterministic position about how parliamentary regimes work. Cheibub (2002: 292-4) shows that two commonly held stereotypes about parliamentarism—'that governments always have to hold a majority of seats in parliament and that the consequence of government dissolution is invariably an early election'—are both incorrect.

[4] Saiegh demonstrates that on average, a president turning a minority coalition into a majority one raises his/her batting average by four percentage points—a non-trivial gain when one considers that the batting averages of prime ministers, regardless of their cabinet configurations, are consistently 10-15 points higher than they are for presidents (Saiegh 2011).

[5] Chaisty, Cheeseman & Power (2018) examined coalitional presidentialism in Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union, and found that a portfolio (cabinet) definition of coalitions systematically underestimated the existence of de facto (floor) coalitions by more than 20 percent. Based on the month-by-month data that were available for nine countries, a floor-based definition of stable legislative coalitions yielded 1224 monthly observations of coalitional presidentialism, while the portfolio definition for the same cases over the same time period identified only 957 country-months. In total, 139 different parties joined floor coalitions over the cases and time periods analysed compared to only 91 parties that gained cabinet portfolios. Calculated as an unweighted monthly average, the floor definition yielded 5.4 raw parties per coalition, while the portfolio definition produced an unweighted average of 4.3 parties. The portfolio definition is far easier to implement in large-*N* research designs.

[6] We note that these annualised data cannot take account of dynamic factors such as multiple governments within a single year (e.g. Figueiredo et al. 2012) or the entry or exit of

individual ministers or parties (e.g. Martínez-Gallardo 2012)—variables that frequently feature in the literature on cabinet duration.

[7] Some other plausible predictors of our DV—e.g. the precise ideological location of the hundreds of political parties across our 38 country cases, the pre-electoral alignments between and among these parties, their internal discipline, or their capacity to field alternative presidential candidates themselves—were not obtainable on a large-*N* scale.

[8] We thank José Antonio Cheibub and Sebastián Saiegh for supplying these data up to 1999. We used their coding schema to extend the dataset through the end of 2013; coding details can be found in their original publication. We are grateful to Malu A.C. Gatto for assistance in extending the data coverage.

[9] Cheibub et al. (2004) coded as presidential some systems that formally speaking have dual executives and would otherwise be classified as president-parliamentary (Shugart and Carey 1992). The president-parliamentary cases include Comoros (1992-93), Guinea-Bissau (1999-2002, 2005-2007), Kyrgyzstan (2010-2013), Russia (1993-2003) and Ukraine (1996-2005, 2010-2013). Our findings reported here are not affected by the inclusion of these cases.

[10] This is item B10 on the survey of the Coalitional Presidentialism Project (Chaisty, Cheeseman & Power 2018). The question read as follows: 'In this country presidents have formed coalitions to secure a legislative majority. Please rank the following tools presidents may use to form a legislative coalition in terms of their effectiveness.' Respondents were shown a card set and were asked to order the five cards from top to bottom and rank the tools in order of importance, from top to bottom. The cards were labeled as follows: (A) direct legislative powers of the president (such as decree or veto powers), (B) budgetary control, (C) power to appoint to the cabinet, (D) control over their own party, (E) exchange of favours.

[11] The exceptions were Ecuador and Russia. In these two countries, MPs ranked partisan powers first, perhaps reflecting the influence of Rafael Correa and Vladimir Putin, respectively, over their dominant parties. For the Russia survey, we included MPs who had served in the Third Duma (2000-03). This was the last Russian legislature to experience coalitional presidentialism, and we asked MPs to focus on the Third Duma in their answers. About half of the Ecuadorean sample had served in the pre-Correa era.

[12] This is item C6 on the CPP survey questionnaire. After cabinet posts, the most frequently cited responses were access to the national budget (34.1%), other (non-cabinet) government

appointments (29.6%), and policy influence (21.1%). We thank Svitlana Chernykh for assistance in coding responses.

[13] Although we test several similar hypotheses to Figueiredo et al., their dataset, research question, and units of analysis differ in substantial ways from our own. Their research design covers 14 Latin American countries between 1979-2011, analyzing 79 different presidential terms and 130 distinct cabinets of all majority and minority types (of which only 21, or 17%, correspond to the single-party cabinets we discuss here). Their unit of analysis is cabinets, not country-years as in the present article; and more importantly they collapse minority unipartisan and minority coalition cabinets into a single category for purposes of analysis. Their regional focus allows them to introduce several variables (e.g. position of the median legislator in the formateur party, ideological dispersion of the parliament) for which we could not obtain analogous data at the global level.

[14] In the next section, we follow Figueiredo et al. closely on two hypotheses: veto powers and the electoral cycle (a control variable for us). We approach a third variable, ideological location of the president, in a broadly similar way, but with a less discriminating measure at the global level. We approach political parties differently. Figueiredo et al. measure party fractionalization at the level of the entire assembly (using a Herfindahl index), whereas we disregard the presidential party and measure the dominance of one non-formateur party within the bloc of other such parties.

[15] We avoid using the term 'opposition' to refer to the non-presidential parties in the assembly. While some of these parties may be predisposed toward opposition (especially those containing defeated or future presidential candidates) and some may be more sympathetic to the president (including some that may have formed pre-electoral coalitions with the formateur), in theory all could be available for recruitment to the cabinet.

[16] Colomer & Negretto (2005: 81) make the intriguing suggestion that provisions allowing legislators to present censure motions on cabinet members may encourage executive-legislative cooperation. We know of no empirical test of this proposition and data limitations prevented us from incorporating it here.

[17] Although highlighted separately in Table 1 for informational purposes, the United States does not constitute a region in its own right, and moreover does not exhibit variation on the dependent variable for any of its 26 country-years of minority presidentialism. Therefore we aggregate the U.S. and Latin America in the statistical analysis.

[18] This spans from 'open anocracies' to established democracies. Anocracies are 'countries whose governments are neither fully democratic nor fully autocratic but, rather, combine an often incoherent mix of democratic and autocratic traits and practices' (Marshall & Cole 2014: 21). Here we include only 'open anocracies': cases that are closer to democracies in terms of their combined score on all components of the scale used by Polity.

[19] Our approach stands in contrast to that of Figueiredo et al. (2012) whose analysis of 'minority governments' include cabinets that may feature more than one party, but whose corresponding legislative contingent still not does reach 50% of legislative seats.

[20] In the United States, the dominance score of the largest non-formateur party (LNFP) is usually the maximum value of 1.0, since there is typically only one non-presidential party in the House of Representatives. The mean dominance score for all LNFPs in the sample is .48, meaning that on average almost half of the non-presidential seats are occupied by a single party. If we express the size of LNFPs as a percentage of seats in the *entire assembly*, across all country-years of minority presidentialism the average LNFP controls 31.7 percent of the total seats, almost identical to the average formateur party which holds 31 percent of the seats.

[21] Expert assessments of party linkages are taken from the Varieties of Democracy project (Coppedge et al. 2016). The specific question asked was 'Among the major parties, what is the main or most common form of linkage to their constituents?' For our analysis, the order of the V-Dem response categories was reversed: 0 = policy/programmatic ('constituents respond to a party's position on national policies, general party programs, and visions for society'); 1 = mixed local collective and policy/programmatic; 2 = local collective ('constituents are rewarded with local collective goods, e.g. wells, toilets, markets, roads, bridges, and local development'); 3 = mixed clientelistic/local collective and clientelistic ('constituents are rewarded with goods, cash, and/or jobs'). The original source V-Dem has a separate pure 'clientelistic' category with few cases, so we combined these with cases scored as 3.

[22] These data are available for each country-year from the Database of Political Institutions (Cruz, Keefer & Scartascini 2015). Leading parties are classified trichotomously as left (3), center (2), and right (1). We have recoded their category of 0 (no clear position on the economic policy dimension) as 2.

[23] The specific question used asked 'If the head of state took actions to veto a piece of legislation, would he/she be likely to succeed?' The response categories are 0 = No; 1 = Yes,

but the legislature can override the veto by a simple majority vote; 2 = Yes, but the legislature can override the veto by an absolute majority vote; 3 = Yes, but the legislature can override the veto by a qualified/extraordinary majority vote; 4 = Yes, with no possibility of override (Coppedge et al. 2016).

[24] In runoff systems, we record temporal proximity to the first round of voting. In some ballotage systems, the two rounds of the presidential election can straddle two calendar years, as in the case of Chile (1999-2000, 2005-06, 2009-10); in these cases, annualised independent variables correspond to the year of the first ballot.

[25] Our case selection already provides a partial control on the level of democracy, given that we include only country-years with a Polity score of 1 or above. However, we also estimated the models including alternative democracy indicators; results are available upon request.

[26] The extreme value of zero here is observable in the real world, normally when independents assume the presidency. Examples in the dataset include Boris Yeltsin in Russia, Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine, and Gustavo Noboa in Ecuador.

[27] Similarly to Cheibub et al. (2004), we find that American-style 'divided government' (where there is a majority party in the legislature and it is not the party of the president) is rare indeed. Of 610 country-year observations, only 42 (or 6.9%) displayed this configuration of legislative seats. There was one year of pure divided government in El Salvador, 2 in the Dominican Republic, 5 in Comoros, 8 in Colombia, and 26 years in the United States.

[28] The pseudo *r*-squared falls from 0.1901 to 0.1711. These results are available on request.

[29] The constitutional data are taken from the Comparative Constitutions Project (CCP) (available at http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/ccp-data-downloads/). The CCP variable measures 'What proportion of the vote is needed to override a veto?' The original response categories were 1 = plurality; 2 = majority; 3 = three-fifths majority; 4 = two-thirds majority; 5 = three-fourths majority; 6 = unspecified majority. We recoded the categories to conform to the V-Dem veto scale.

[30] The limited data coverage in the CCP dataset recommended the use of the V-Dem variable.

[31] The coefficient for the 'size of the formateur party' variable increases slightly from 4.693875 to 4.976114. Results are available on request.

[32] Muluzi formed a coalition only in his final year in office, when he sought to introduce constitutional reform.

[33] Extant research on presidentialism has relied on abstract indicators of executive-legislative relations (such as ENP) at the expense of investigating concrete correlations of forces.

Exceptions are Negretto (2006) and especially Cheibub (2002), who argues that in democratic regimes, the division of seats into three factions of approximately equal strength is problematic, given that two-party coalition agreements are vulnerable to counteroffers from the third force (Cheibub 2002: 299-300). Our argument is that the dominance of a single party over the non-formateur bloc is likely to narrow the political space for coalition formation.

[34] In separate conditional analysis (results available on request), we examined the marginal effect of ideological distance between the formateur and the LNFP on the probability of single-party cabinets at varying levels of LNFP dominance, while excluding the covariates presented in Table 3. We found that when the presidential party and the LNFP display sharp ideological polarization (as measured in left-right terms on economic policy), the relative dominance of the LNFP has a much greater (positive) overall effect on the probability of unipartisan cabinets. We divided the LNFPs into three tiers of size (small, medium, large) based on the observed terciles in our distribution. The effect of maximum ideological distance on the probability of single-party cabinets was 36 percentage points higher when the dominance of the LNFP was high than when it was low. Although this relationship does not survive the fully estimated model shown in Table 3, it recommends further exploration.