

Routledge Research in Comparative Politics

COALITION POLITICS IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE

GOVERNING IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Edited by Torbjörn Bergman,
Gabriella Ilonszki, and Johan Hellström



Coalition Politics in Central Eastern Europe

This insightful book brings the study of coalitions and coalition governance in Central and Eastern European democracies up to date, with an analytical focus framed by difficult economic and social periods, such as the end of the economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic.

The volume posits insights from a plethora of experts on party politics and coalition studies from their respective countries, with chapters on Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Focusing on the period from 2008, and embellished with illustrative tables and extensive datasets throughout, each chapter maps the developments of party system change, covering the coalition life cycle until the end of 2021, and explores whether there has been transformation of the coalition, governance, and dissolutions patterns due to heightened pressures.

This book will be of key interest to scholars and students of coalition politics, representative democracy, governance, political parties, European Union politics, East and Central European politics, and comparative politics.

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This book complements a research project that began already in 2011 and, by 2019, resulted in the completion of a first volume on coalition politics in Central and Eastern Europe. The findings of the project were published in *Coalition Governance in Central Eastern Europe*, edited by Torbjörn Bergman, Gabriella Ilonszki, and Wolfgang C. Müller (Oxford University Press). However, the observation period for that volume ended in 2014. This book brings the study of coalition politics in the region up to the end of 2021, but it is also broader in scope.

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1 Coalitions in Times of Crisis

*Torbjörn Bergman, Gabriella Ilonszki,
and Johan Hellström*

Introduction

In the representative democracies of Europe, elections only rarely result in a single, majority party. Coalitions are therefore central to understanding how national governments work. Almost nine out of ten governments are coalitions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (see also [Chapter 13](#)). The frequency is higher than in Western Europe (WE), where coalitions have formed about two-thirds of all governments in the post-war period (Bergman et al 2021: 694–695). Even globally, coalitions are the most frequent form of government (Cheibub et al 2004). Given the centrality of coalitions in modern politics, the study of government coalitions has received much scholarly attention, and it should continue to do so.

Central to this volume are the challenges that affected coalitions and coalition governance in the CEE region with the three crises between 2008 and 2021 – the financial crisis, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic – as well as the democratic backlash in several of the countries (and most profoundly in Hungary and Poland). The recent developments are in sharp contrast to the ‘success story’ of the transition to representative democracy from the early 1990s and up to the mid-2010s (Bergman et al 2019). After the transition from communism, political parties formed and competed in free and fair elections. Having been heavily influenced by the pro- and anti-communist divide, the party systems, messy as they were, began to institutionalize and party politics came to have some resemblance to the left-right party competition that has been prevalent in WE (Lewis and Markowski 2011). Peaceful transitions of government power became standard practice. And after two decades of democratic politics, the region became more stable and apparently more similar to its West European counterpart (Backlund et al 2019).

Over the last decade, the CEE region has seen the birth of new parties, and the rise of anti-corruption parties, which often try to win votes by a business-like approach, and not seldom end up being accused of exhibiting the societal disease they ran against (Hanley and Sikk 2016). Party systems have seen the rise of populist parties, primarily on the right but also on the left. Although

institutional innovations have become less frequent, informal changes like some of the presidents' having more say in government formation and termination have impacted government formation. The extended financial crisis in some countries, then the discord over the migration crisis of 2015, and the Corona pandemic of early 2020 further challenged the path towards stable parliamentary democracy. In some countries, there have been illiberal and authoritarian tendencies. All this means that the stabilizing patterns from the 1990s and the early 2000s often dissipated.

In this book, we cover the recent changes in the region and bring the study of coalition politics in CEE up to 2021. Our analytical focus is explicitly framed by difficult years – the year of the economic crisis (2008) to the Corona pandemic crisis up to the end of 2021, events that triggered economic and social difficulties. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 is formally outside our observation period, but our contributors briefly discuss the possible impact of that invasion on coalition politics.

Our aim is to contribute to the study of coalition politics and ten EU member states in the CEE region: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.¹ We complement data gathered in a volume on governments and coalition governance in CEE (Bergman et al 2019). The Bergman et al's (2019) book covered the period from the establishment of parliamentary democracy in the early 1990s to the summer of 2014, and as mentioned, its main interest was how relatively stable patterns of coalition formation and coalition governance had evolved.

As it turned out, what in the early 2000s seemed to be a region where democratic systems were stabilizing, and where the 'heat' of the transformation had diminished, was a region hit hard by the financial crisis of 2008. The discord over the migration crisis of 2015 and the Corona pandemic from early 2020 has further challenged the stable path towards parliamentary democracy. Thus, it is an open question of how many and how much the patterns from the 1990s and from early 2000 have continued, and how much have been disrupted. Thus, this volume is meant to capture the life cycle and governance in relation to the three challenges (or crises) noted above.

We study what Strøm et al (2008) label as the 'life cycle' of cabinets in parliamentary democracies. The three phases of the coalition life cycle applied to cabinets – formation (birth), governance (life), and termination (death) – are relevant to all parliamentary systems in democratic Europe. However, special attention is paid to the practice of governing together – often called 'coalition governance' or the 'governance phase' in coalition government 'life cycle'. This is the period between the formation of the cabinet (i.e., government) and the termination of the same cabinet, i.e., the phase during which the cabinet governs the country.²

In the following section, we first introduce the analytical framework of the book, that is how the broad understanding of coalition politics known as the *coalition life cycle approach* creates a dynamic picture for coalition

studies. We then discuss coalition governance, and in order to move beyond the analysis beyond the earlier framework, we summarize the main findings of the Bergman et al (2019) volume. In the next step, we highlight the challenges that affected this region in the past long decade (2008–2021). In the final sections, we present the plan for the book. Our data collection efforts and the structure of the coming country chapters are detailed in the following chapter, [Chapter 2](#).

The coalition life cycle approach

Our particular focus is the study of the coalition life cycle. The coalition life cycle begins at the *government formation* stage. Focusing on this stage, scholars have asked why specific types of governments form (e.g., Mitchell and Nyblade 2008; Thürk et al 2021); which parties get into government (e.g., Döring and Hellström 2013); and why negotiations over government formation take longer in some countries than in others (e.g., De Winter and Dumont 2008; Ecker and Meyer 2020). Other questions relate to the payoffs that political parties negotiate over. That is, why some parties receive more portfolios than others (e.g., Warwick and Druckman 2001; Cutler et al 2016) and ‘who gets what’ in terms of portfolios (e.g., Ecker et al 2015). In this phase, as in later phases, a dynamic perspective is useful. Specifically, the idea that what happens at the formation stage shapes what happens during the government’s tenure, which in turn influences its durability. Thus, when party elites are looking for potential coalition partners, they will think retroactively about previous successful and unsuccessful cooperation but also act upon anticipation, about what might happen in the next step of the coalition governance. Theoretically, this is in line with research that incorporates actor expectations about the future stages already at the formation stage (Laver and Shepsle 1996; Lupia and Strøm 2008).

The second phase of the coalition life cycle is the period when parties govern and make policy, that we call the *coalition governance* stage. This phase has received considerably less attention than other phases of the coalition life cycle, but previous volumes in related projects (i.e., Strøm et al 2008; Bergman et al 2019, 2021) and this volume are exceptions. The main question that is asked is ‘how do coalitions govern?’ Again, a dynamic perspective is necessary. That is, to understand the inner working of coalition cabinets, what happened in the formation stage is important, as coalition agreements (or contracts), and the portfolio distribution among parties, to a large extent shape how coalition partners govern together. In this context, and related, there is an emerging governance literature that is useful for describing and understanding government decision-making. In this literature, three different types of stylized coalition governance models exist. The *ministerial government model* suggests that ministers have complete autonomy to direct policy in their departments (Laver and Shepsle 1990, 1996). The second model places government authority largely in the hands of the Prime Minister (PM), the so-called *Prime Minister*

model (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990; Müller 1994). A third model emphasizes that coalition governance should primarily be characterized as individual political parties negotiating and monitoring each other (Müller and Strøm 2000; Martin and Vanberg 2014). In this so-called *coalition compromise model*, coalition partners try to constrain ministers from other parties by using various coalition governance mechanisms.

The final, and third, phase of the coalition life cycle is the ‘death’ or termination of governments, and scholars have focused on explaining the duration of cabinets, asking why some cabinets last longer than others (e.g., Saalfeld 2008; Walther and Hellström 2022). In this field, contemporary studies mainly focus on how different political institutions (e.g., Bergmann et al 2022; Schleiter and Evans 2022), pre-electoral coalitions (e.g., Chiru 2015), support party arrangements (e.g., Krauss and Thürk 2021) affect the longevity of cabinet (their duration). There is also literature that focuses on the strategic timing of early elections (e.g., Schleiter and Tavits 2016; Hellström and Walther 2019). This literature shows that the timing of extra elections is not only the result of when the cabinet faces parliamentary defeat, but at times it can also be a matter of strategic choice by the cabinet or the PM. The PM can try to meet the voters when polls indicate that this can be particularly advantageous.

The evolving governance models in CEE

The formation and termination phases of the coalition life cycle are ‘classical’ themes in the literature on political coalitions. What makes our analysis stand out relative to most other analyses of coalition politics is our focus on coalition governance and coalition decision-making. As mentioned above, the coalition *governance* phase covers the period between formation and termination.

The extent to which the three governance models – ministerial, coalition compromise, and PM dominated – apply to a particular country or cabinet remains one of the novel aspects of our research enterprise. To capture this, we cover coalition governance by analysing a series of indicators on coalition politics. The use of written and publicly available coalition agreements is one important indicator. We also consider if these written coalition contracts have been comprehensive or at least included a wide variety of policy issues. The governance mechanisms include also other conflict management mechanisms, such as an inner cabinet and a coalition committee, or ‘watchdog’ junior ministers. The function of different agents, PMs, ministers and junior ministers, and party organs, will be decisive in which governance model evolves.

Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1994, 1996) in identifying the ministerial government model (also known as the ministerial ‘policy dictator’ model) emphasize ‘that the cabinet is not simply a collection of coalition partners, but instead a distribution of specific powers over policy formulation and implementation among those partners’ (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 282).

Specifically, Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996) theorized each cabinet minister has (close to) full power over the government policies in his or her policy jurisdiction. Like all parsimonious theories or models, it does not always correspond well with what has been observed empirically. Rather, empirically, ‘ministers do indeed appear to be functioning as agents of their party rather than as independent actors in their own right’ (Laver and Shepsle 1994: 302). It turns out that at least in WE, coalition partners usually keep ‘tabs’ on each other through mechanisms such as coalition agreements and policy monitoring (e.g., via junior ministers or shadowing by other ministers). However, in CEE, Bergman et al (2019) observed proximity to the ministerial government model, for example, in Latvia and Lithuania. In contrast to the Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996) original model, however, policy concerns did not seem to be the primary motive. Rather there were high levels of rent-seeking by public officials, in government office, on behalf of both them and their core constituencies. While the original ministerial government model is based on political parties as policy seekers, the empirical manifestation in the CEE region seems more based on office-seeking. Perks of office and the control of state resources that a ministerial position brings with it appear often to be of primary concern.

While office-seeking is a prevalent characteristic in the region, the governance patterns do also vary. The second model, the coalition compromise model (Martin and Vanberg 2014), sometimes also referred to as the ‘collegial’ model (Barbieri and Vercesi 2013), holds that coalition partners credibly commit to policies which in each policy domain are somewhere between the individual cabinet parties’ ideal policies. In the end, credible commitment is possible because most government policies necessitate legislation, the passing of which requires cabinet consent and a parliamentary majority and hence the votes of the coalition parties. Although ministers through their office have considerable advantages to shape the policy process, these can be mitigated if coalitions resort to mechanisms of *ex-ante* coordination, such as coalition contracts and policy agreements, various means of mutual control to reduce the ministers’ informational advantage, and coalition bodies to manage and resolve the conflicts that may arise in the process (Müller and Strøm 2000; Thies 2001; Strøm et al 2008). As the building and use of all these coalition governance mechanisms are costly to the government parties, their presence is generally seen as indicating that the coalition compromise model works. Among the ten CEE countries, Bergman et al (2019) found Slovenia to have the most elaborate governance system of coalition mechanisms. Here there are procedures that ensured checks and balances among the coalition parties. More than in the other political systems, coalition partners tended to discuss issues and proposals in collective processes although this has changed over time.

Overall, Bergman et al (2019) found that the ministerial government model characteristics apply better to this region than in WE.³ Mechanisms that ensure collaboration and coordination are often less elaborate and less

enforced. Still, coalition compromise does of course exist. In addition, a third model, one that highlights dominance by the PM, does sometimes provide a more accurate picture of the main cabinet governance pattern. In some of the parliamentary systems, such as Hungary and Poland, the largest party and/or the PM have dominated coalition politics to the extent that puts the practice in line with the notion of ‘Prime Ministerial government’, or the *Dominant Prime Minister model* (Rhodes and Dunleavy 1990; Müller 1994).

We asked our contributors to account for transformations of the domestic governance model during the post-2008 period. From the outset, we must stress that the models only summarize general patterns related to how the cabinet is organized and its relationship to other actors, not least the parliament. Another thesis that is prevalent in our analysis is the sometimes-large gap between the general models and individual cases in the same country. When it comes to basic institutions, general patterns are important, but they do not completely determine individual behaviour. For example, the strength of the PM model in Poland probably has more to do with the size and influence of the PM party, and other strong actors within that party, than it is a direct consequence of power concentration in the office of the PM. In this respect, we also make a distinction between the formal rule and the informal rules that shape party behaviour and politics. We return to these themes when we discuss modes, institutions, and country patterns. We also discuss change and transformation. As the country chapters highlight, in several of the countries under investigation, the political constellation has changed: new parties have arrived, old ones have collapsed, and party systems have transformed. Are the governance patterns from the 1990s and 2000s stable despite the challenges? What impact have any new governance patterns had on the ability of the cabinet to govern the country during the three crises?

New challenges and their potential impact

The section identifies five challenges. These are (1) the party system changes, (2) the three crises that wrap up the long decade (2008–2021) – more particularly the financial crisis, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic – and the (3) democratic backlash in several of the countries under observation.

Party system change

As argued by Bergman et al (2019), during the 1990s, the transition to new party systems led to fluid forms of coalition politics in CEE. This was associated with high electoral and ideological volatility, party splits and party mergers, including a high level of party switching between elections among individual Members of Parliament. At the same time, some stabilization could be

observed. In the early 2000s, the party systems and coalition patterns seemed stable in most countries. Later, party system changes increased bargaining complexity and formed a basis for more varied coalition politics (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015). These developments, which we set out to briefly capture, are mentioned below. Thus, this short introduction provides a summary of party system transformation with an eye on the possible implication of these changes on governments and governance. The partisan changes are important from several perspectives: how they impact the composition, stability, inner working, and decision-making of the coalitions.

In general, the party systems in the regions have been characterized primarily as ‘open’ rather than ‘closed’ (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2016). Latvia is an example of the former, while Hungary has been more ‘closed’ with a party system that has seen very few successful newcomer parties. The degree of parliamentary fragmentation has been shown to affect cabinet bargaining duration (e.g., Ecker and Meyer 2020), coalition formation (e.g., Döring and Hellström 2013), and duration of cabinets (e.g., Walther and Hellström 2022). The logic is simple. The more and evenly sized parliamentary parties, the more difficult it becomes to create parliamentary majorities and govern. As seen in the country chapters, in the period since 2008, several countries have seen an increase in the effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), or party system fragmentation, over time (i.e., Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, and Slovenia).

Obviously related to party system fragmentation is the appearance of new parties. The formation of new parties – and their occasional rocketing success – often have implications for coalition formation, especially as many newly established parties can be characterized as anti-establishment or populist radical right (PRR). Populist parties were not uncommon in CEE countries after the democratic transition, and they continue to emerge. However, the group of anti-establishment parties is even broader and overarches wide ideological spectrum as ‘anti-establishment rhetoric can be found across the ideological spectrum (including the centre) and constitutes a predominant discursive building block of these actors’ (Engler et al 2019: 1313). More importantly, even some formerly mainstream parties took a populist turn, and many ideologically mainstream parties show populist traits (Pytlas 2018). Indeed, we can observe two developments at the same time. While some PRR parties become mainstream (professionalized, stabilized, and government actors), there was a radicalization effect on the mainstream (Minkenberg 2017). On this ground not only has the coalition composition changed, as these parties are needed to form majority governments, but also a transformation of governance can be expected. Pytlas (2018) and Minkenberg (2017) both argue that this ‘dual development’ is different from that in more established democracies. In WE, even where PRR parties became coalition partners, there is still a *cordon sanitaire* between them and the mainstream parties on the left – while in CEE this *cordon sanitaire* does not exist. Moreover, in policy terms, their impact is concrete in the West, while more difficult to determine

in CEE, where their policies are absorbed by other parties as well. Even if we in this volume cannot focus in more detail on the nature of populism and populist parties in these countries, it might be a highly applicable and useful approach to distinguish them on the grounds whether they apply populism as an ideology, as a strategy or as a style, and to which extent there is a mix of these in their governance practice (Olivas Osuna 2021). We might also expect that these potential differences between types of PRR would have implications, not only for these parties' coalition entry but also for their coalition governance.

Although much attention has been devoted to populists, particularly PRR party developments, populists on the left are often neglected. The left in most of these countries have been seriously weakened as they lost their brand in the process of introducing market reforms or later in doing crisis management (Bagashka et al 2022). Thus, in several countries, they are not important coalition players anymore (Bakke and Sitter 2021). The changing power relations between the left and right as well as the looming populism without 'colours' raises two questions that need renewed attention. One is about relevant conflict dimensions, and the other is about 'coalitionability'. While Bergman et al (2019) confirmed the prominence of the left-right cleavage, the question is as follows: is it still as important in terms of coalition formation and governance? As for concerns about 'coalitionability', the function and role of the post-communist or successor parties should be reviewed, as when they become candidates for open and public cooperation, how does this affect coalition politics? We can observe that in response to the electoral success of these successor parties, other political parties had frequently formed politically heterogeneous and diverse alliances, a potential challenge for both decision-making and stability of such governments.

Times of crisis

As discussed above, we highlight three crises: the economic (financial), migration, and Covid-19 pandemic. Starting with the economic crisis, as Backlund et al (2019) explain, the countries in CEE had quite different starting conditions in terms of their economic positions. They also chose different ways and rates of transformation on their way from communism to democracy. Since the countries differed substantially on factors such as level of industrialization, indebtedness, and economic growth, they opted for different strategies in the transition from a central planned to a free market economy. Still, most of the countries had reached comparatively high levels of market orientation within a few years of democratization. Considerable differences remained when the countries joined the European Union in 2004 or 2007, but all ten countries have witnessed an increase in wealth since then. However, the economic (or financial) crisis of 2007–2008 hit most European economies hard. To illustrate how the crisis affected the CEE region, [Figure 1.1](#) shows the economic growth rate for the ten countries covered in this study. As seen in the figure,

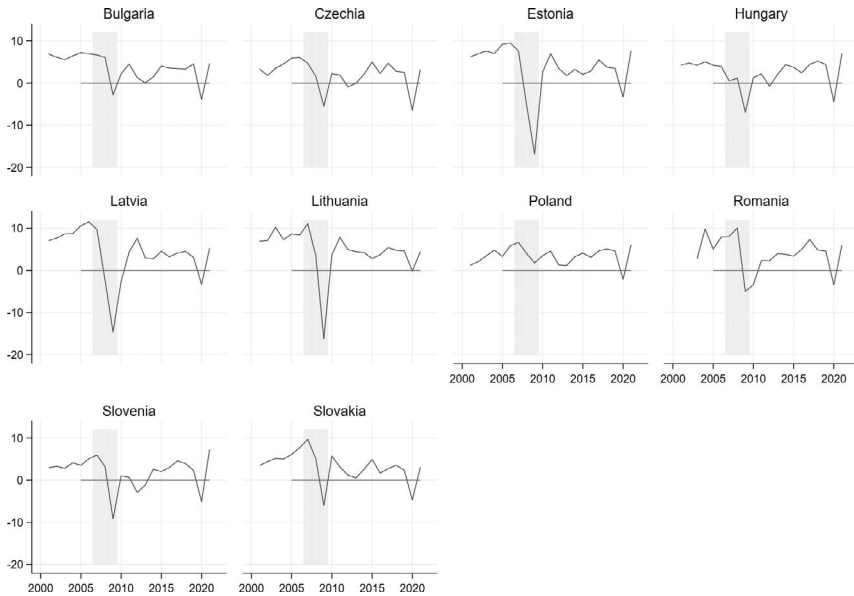


Figure 1.1 Economic growth rate, 2005–2021

Source: Eurostat (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/NAMA_10_PC)

Note: The figure shows the economic growth rate (as indicated by GDP) for the respective countries. The time period of the economic and financial crisis around the year 2008 is shaded grey.

the economic crisis had a varied impact, where some countries were affected more than others. For example, in Poland, the economic crisis in 2008 was hardly felt. In fact, Poland was the only country that did not experience negative economic growth during the economic crisis. In contrast, the recession hit the Baltic states the most and seemed disastrous when annual economic growth of about 10 per cent quickly turned to an annual economic decline (or a negative growth) of about 15 per cent. In addition, there were substantial differences in ‘recovery’. Although most countries have managed to get back to their pre-crisis economic levels, there are substantial differences between them. The economic crisis clearly impacted the stability of governments and occasionally it triggered entirely new coalition trends. Hungary is a prime example where coalitions built on the left versus right blocks were replaced by right-wing dominance.

In a similar way to the economic crisis, the migration crisis in 2015 initially had a varied impact. Although the northern countries in CEE were not directly affected, conflicts about the relevant EU policies eventually forced each country to take a stand and develop national policy answers. Political considerations and populist power games often had a greater role in the formation of these answers than the problem of immigration itself. The handling of the migration crisis became *aqua fortis* between the countries: from

minority rights to attitudes towards the EU differences between them became obvious (Nyzio 2017). The migration crisis also gave rise to increased public attention to immigration issues, and [Figure 1.2](#) gives an indication of this. The figure shows the percentage of citizens who considered immigration as one of the most important issues in 2014, before the migration crisis started, and during the peak of the crisis in autumn 2015. As seen in [Figure 1.2](#), before the crisis in 2014, few citizens considered immigration to be one of the most important issues, but this changed dramatically to quickly become the most important issue in most countries.⁴ As with the economic crisis, however, one can rightly argue that these crises momentums do not die out and remain consequential in the medium or even in the long run and have implications on the internal political context, including governance issues (Kazharski 2017). In fact, immigration continued to be the most important issue for voters in most countries until the next crisis came in 2020, the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic became both a challenge and an opportunity for governments. In the spring of 2020, much of Europe was on lockdown to slow the spread of COVID-19. Although the CEE region was more spared

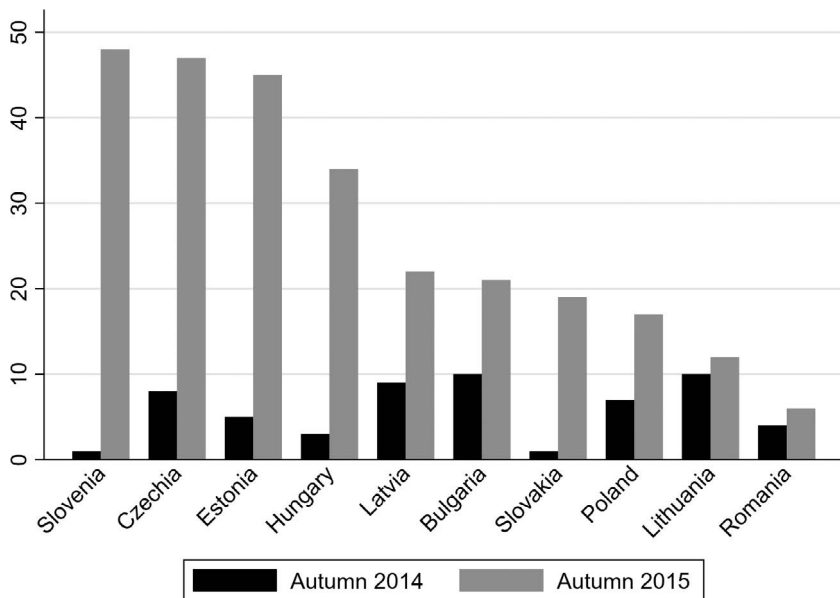


Figure 1.2 The percentage of citizens who stated that immigration is one of the most important issues the year before (autumn 2014) and during the migrant crisis (autumn 2015)

Source: Standard Eurobarometer 82 and 84

Note: In the Eurobarometer surveys, citizens are asked to choose the ‘two most important issues facing [your country] at the moment’, in no particular order. Thus, the figure shows the percentage of respondents who think immigration is one of these two most important issues.

during the first wave of COVID-19 infections than most West European countries, CEE governments were less able or willing to handle the following waves of infections, which had dramatic consequences and the infection and death rates climbed to the highest levels in the world (Bohle and Eihmanis 2022). However, some countries were hit harder than others by the pandemic. One indication of this can be seen in Figure 1.3 which shows estimates of excess mortality due to COVID-19-related deaths by country. Most affected was Bulgaria where over six times more people died than normally, and the least affected was Slovenia where less than twice as many died. Not surprisingly, governments' different strategies and ability to cope with the pandemic became important for the public. In fact, the pandemic and health issues were the most prioritized issues among voters in 2020 and, at least temporarily, replaced immigration as the most important political concern in all countries (Standard Eurobarometer 94).⁵

The pandemic is a large-scale governance issue, and it is interesting what governance procedures and mechanisms have formed as a result. At the same time, it is a challenge how to handle fundamental social and political values

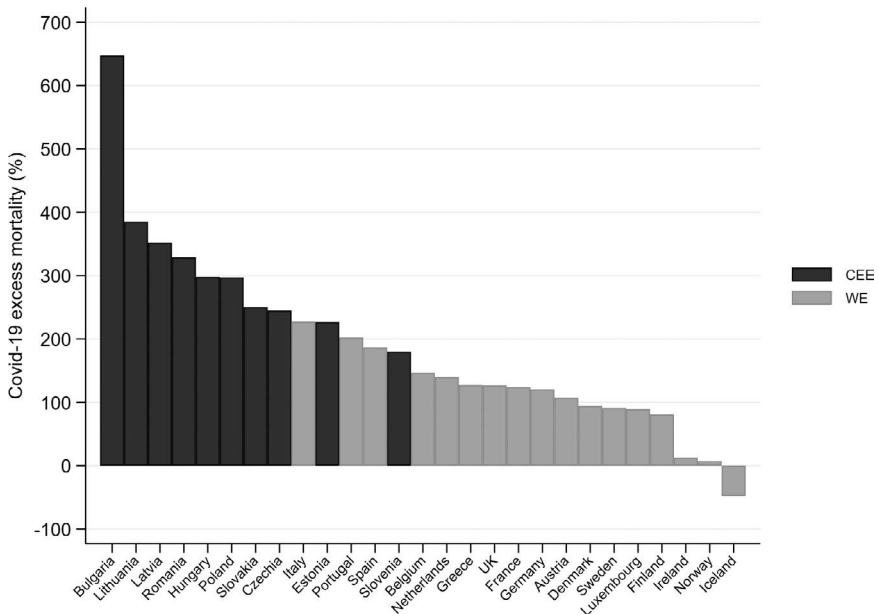


Figure 1.3 The estimated excess mortality due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021

Data source: COVID-19 Excess Mortality Collaborators (2022) 'Estimating excess mortality due to the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic analysis of COVID-19-related mortality, 2020–21', *The Lancet*. doi: [10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)02796-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)02796-3).

Note: Excess mortality is defined as the net difference between the number of deaths during the pandemic and the number of deaths that would be expected based on past trends in mortality regardless of the cause.

like freedoms and liberties and how the leading elite and the society interact in this regard (Buřtková and Baboš 2020). For example, Guasti (2020) suggests that in Hungary and Poland, the political (populist) leaders used the state of emergency to increase and extend executive prerogatives. Also, at the level of the European Union, the piecemeal response to the financial, migration, and pandemic challenges has led to responses in some countries that have been characterized as ‘failing forward’, that is, further integration of the member states in spite of the threat of disintegration and through less than comprehensive reforms (see, for example, Dimitrakopoulos and Lalis 2021). Overall, one can rightly say that all the above-mentioned three crises have been a major challenge for coalition crisis management. The country chapters detail how this has varied between countries.

Democratic backlash

The transformation of the party systems and the three crises are intimately connected to what we label a democratic backlash. Since 2008, democratic backlash commenced in many Central and Eastern European countries. This has been demonstrated by comparative data, broad descriptions of regime transformations, and types of defunct democracies – but more importantly from our perspective, by analytical studies that bring these theories to the ground (Pakulski 2016).

What can be the sources and the signs of democratic backlash? Returning to the previous section on party system transformation, one obvious feature is the prevalence of populist parties in prominent governing positions. Several information and analytic sources are available that demonstrate the backlash phenomenon and the status of representative electoral democracy continues to be problematic. For instance, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) Democracy Index, only two countries, Estonia and Latvia, show an improvement between 2008 and 2021. There, the rest of the countries show lower democracy scores. In particular, the democracy index has dropped the most in Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.⁶ According to V-Dem electoral democracy index (Coppedge et al 2022), based on expert surveys, the drop in the level of democracy in Hungary between 2008 and 2021 was particularly drastic.⁷ The electoral democracy index dropped from a score of 86 to 46 on a scale that hypothetically could reach 100 (if all democratic institutional conditions are met). This is the most dramatic drop in the entire region. The democratic development in Poland is also often criticized, and the country dropped from 89 to 58 during the same period.

At the same time, beyond the reference to new party system patterns and crises impact, there can be broader causes underlying the backlash phenomenon. According to Hlouchek and Fiala (2021), the liberal-democracy nature of the EU polity and its policies has triggered nationalist and illiberal opposition. EU accession has brought about changes and expectations that have not been

fully discussed and even less absorbed by the public – including sections of the political class. In this line of thought, EU accession appears as a new critical juncture that negatively impacted the consolidation of these countries and destabilized their democratic transition.

Data collection and plan of the book

For this volume, we have assembled a team of experts on party politics and coalition studies, one or two from each country in the region. In addition to adhering to the data structure and joint definitions, our experts are asked to identify country-specific trends and bring up the issues and changes that have raised the most attention during the recent coalition cycles. In each country chapter, we ask if there has been any transformation of the coalition formation, governance, and dissolutions patterns due to the heightened pressures. For instance, do the same or very similar patterns prevail in terms of the different aspects of the coalition cycle (from elections and type of government through coalition documentation, and governance patterns to the end of the cabinets)? Or, in contrast, are new (entirely or partially new) coalition cycle patterns developing?

For each country, we rely on the best information available in the native language and in international scholarship. Whenever and wherever possible, we supplement that information by conducting interviews with strategically placed actors about how politics works inside governments, out of sight of most political observers. The Coronavirus pandemic and perhaps a general distrust in some of our countries of ‘academics’ have constrained our effort in this respect, but all our contributors have done their utmost to secure at least a number of such elite interviews. We know from previous experience (Bergman et al 2019, 2021), that such interviews can provide a highly valuable addition to the numbers and descriptive details that we otherwise rely on. Only respondents who have agreed in writing to be cited or quoted are mentioned as direct sources. For others, we have relied on our best judgement on when to include the information or not.

The main part of this book consists of country chapters, which are based on a uniform structure. Each country chapter has eight tables that we present in each chapter. Each country chapter introduces the institutional context of coalition politics in the respective country, summarizing the most important institutions that shape coalition politics, in particular, important changes since around 2008. The chapter authors also provide information on the party system and the most important political parties, as well as discuss the most important dimensions of competition and such matters as the phenomena of populist parties, and if there are significant newcomer parties.

The draconian event of our time, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in February 2022, is still relatively recent and the consequences are unsettled. We do not present tables and figures on that, but our contributors are among

the first scholars to analyse in print the impact for individual countries and for the CEE region.

In each chapter, the authors map the developments in common tables that cover the coalition life cycle. The next chapter, [Chapter 2](#), explain our data collection efforts and the structure of the individual country chapters. In the concluding section of each of the ten country chapters, we discuss major changes in the various steps of the coalition life cycle and how these connect to party system changes and the different crises. In the final and concluding chapter, we bring together the main findings and discuss if and how the different crises have affected coalition politics in the region.

Notes

- 1 Croatia, another EU member state in the region, was covered in Bergman et al's (2021) book and is therefore not included in this volume.
- 2 We define a 'cabinet', or government, in line with existing research. According to our definition, we count a new government every time there is a general election, any change of parties holding cabinet membership, or change in Prime Minister (Müller and Strøm 2000). A new government may occur after a parliamentary election, or between elections as a so-called replacement government. Thus, a replacement government forms when there is a change in the governing parties or of the Prime Minister, without a prior general election.
- 3 In an analysis of the OECD countries, Jahn (2016) agrees that too little attention has been given to how political parties in coalitions influence government politics. In his analysis, in Western Europe, countries in which Prime Ministers typically dominate coalition decision-making are the UK and Denmark, and decision-making is a more collective enterprise in countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, and Norway. For these particular cases, the ranking is similar to the one recently done by Bergman et al (2021). As for the other countries in Western Europe, to determine the precise model is a more complex task, which to some extent depends on which particular cabinet is in focus.
- 4 In fact, it was the most important issue in all countries, except in Lithuania, Romania, and Poland, where health and social security were considered somewhat more important issues. In the Eurobarometer surveys, respondents were also asked to choose 'the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment', and according to this survey question, immigration is the most mentioned issue in all countries. More specifically, between 47 and 79 percent mention immigration as the most important issue for the EU.
- 5 The Eurobarometer does not provide respondents with a specific option for the Coronavirus/Covid-19 but has 'health' as an option. At the lower end, in Lithuania, about 40 percent of citizens mention 'health' as the 'most important issue', and at the other end, in Estonia, as much as 62 percent of citizens mention 'health' as the 'most important issue'. In the Eurobarometer surveys, citizens are asked to choose the 'two most important issues facing [your country] at the moment', in no particular order. Before 2020, health was not an issue that voters considered one of the most important in any of the countries.
- 6 The Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) Democracy Index consists of 60 indicators in five categories – electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.
- 7 The V-Dem index for electoral democracy consists of three components: electoral rights and procedures, alternative sources of information, and freedom of expression.

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2 Concepts and Measurements

Andrea Fumarola and Jonas Lindahl

The country chapters analyse the coalition life cycle of all the cabinets in office in ten Central and Eastern European countries between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2021.¹ According to researchers, the coalition life cycle is composed of three interconnected phases – cabinet formation, governance, and termination – before new general elections are held (Müller et al 2008). We define a cabinet as newly formed every time there is a variation in one of three specific indicators: (a) the party composition of the cabinet, (b) the Prime Minister, and (c) the occurrence of a general election. To establish the first day of office, we rely on official criteria such as the date on which the Prime Minister or the cabinet was appointed by the head of state, or the date of a passed confidence vote in parliament, or if that is not applicable, the date of the general election (Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b).

On the other hand, to establish the ‘end date’ of a cabinet, we rely on three alternative indicators: (a) the date on which the cabinet resigns; (b) the date on which the resignation is accepted by the head of state or there is a vote of no confidence in parliament if one or both of these are explicitly stated in the Constitution; (c) the date of a general election, whichever comes first.² Since the final aim is to construct a cross-national, comparative dataset of coalition governance, we follow a stricter, yet generalizable, definition of the date of resignation instead of specific national counting rules based on different criteria.³

For the sake of comparability, the ten country chapters follow the same structure. After a brief introduction, they provide a presentation of the institutional setting of each country, followed by a discussion about the major changes that occurred in the party system between 2008 and 2021 – also considering the well-known financial, migration, and pandemic crises which invested those countries. The chapters then focus on three stages of the coalition life cycle. First, they look at the formation of coalition governments, with an empirical emphasis on the bargaining process. Then, another section deals with the main features of coalition governance in each country, illustrating how the formal rules of cabinet decision-making work in practice. Finally, before the concluding remarks, each chapter contains a section about cabinet termination, highlighting possible distinctions between technical and behavioural reasons for termination.⁴

Institutional setting and party systems

Institutional setting

As the ten CEE countries analysed show a rather interesting degree of variation in their institutional setting, each chapter devotes space to a presentation of the context in which coalition politics takes place. This section briefly presents not only an overview of the core government institutions in a country such as the Prime Minister, the cabinet, the parliament, and the electoral system as well as the cabinet structure but also other relevant institutions like the head of state, describing the relationships and any major development entailed in the coalition formation process in each country in the period under investigation.

First, the *type of legislature* – unicameral or bicameral – is discussed for each country, as the ten countries analysed are perfectly split (five each) between these two categories.⁵ With respect to the five bicameral parliamentary democracies, it is interesting to investigate the potential role of the second chamber as a ‘veto player’ (Tsebelis 1995), i.e., its power to influence the cabinet’s action by blocking or delaying the approval of governmental bills.

Second, the *cabinet formation rules* have dramatic consequences for the length of government creation and the dynamics subtended to coalition politics. A central feature of any parliamentary democracy is the principle that the government emerges from and can be removed by the legislature (Cheibub et al 2015: 969) and the ten CEE countries analysed in the book show an interesting degree of variation when it comes to procedures for the vote of investiture.

Moreover, different legislatures exert different formal roles in the government formation process. Some parliaments proactively select the government (for instance, the Estonian *Riigikogu*), others vote, reactively, to confirm in office an already appointed Prime Minister (as the Polish *Sejm*). Sometimes parliaments may be involved in multiple votes even if only one chamber votes to invest in a government. For example, Lithuanian *Seimas* selects a Prime Minister proposed from within parliament itself and only subsequently votes on the cabinet.⁶ Related to the government formation process, some countries refer to the constitutional roles of *formateurs* and *informateurs* (Strøm 1990: 25–27). For instance, constitutional rules in Estonia formally state that the party with the largest share of seats in parliament should be asked to form a new government with the support of the parliament. Other systems – like Latvia – seem to rely more on what is defined as ‘free-style bargaining’ (Bergman 2000).

Third, researchers have recently identified an institutional evolution of parliamentary democracies towards procedurally costlier parliamentary procedures of government termination (Cheibub and Rasch 2021; Lento and Hazan 2022). This is evident, for instance, not only in the higher threshold required to initiate the proposal, in the timing and frequency of proposals, in the larger majorities necessary to approve a *vote of no confidence*, but also in the

adoption of the constructive vote of no confidence. In the book, three types of parliamentary votes are discussed, each depending on the institution in charge of initiating the procedure: (a) ‘no confidence’ vote, when a parliamentary initiative to vote on the cabinet; (b) ‘confidence’ vote, when the procedural initiative lies with the government institutions (Prime Minister or cabinet); (c) ‘constructive’ vote of no confidence, as in the case of Poland and Slovenia where the constitutions provide for this specific type of vote.

Fourth, given that the (mostly) Presidential power to *dissolve the parliament* and call early elections is considered part of coalition politics (Strøm and Swindle 2002) and that there exist different constitutional rules that enable the use of this power, it is important to discuss dissolution rules and constraints in each country chapter. While countries like Czechia, Poland, or Estonia articulate several conditions that enable the President to dissolve the Parliament, the Romanian President has a very limited scope, while Latvia distinguishes itself for a ‘popular confirmation’ of parliamentary dissolution through the instrument of a referendum.

Fifth, the governance section of each country chapter provides an analysis of the legal and constitutional provisions regarding the powers of the Prime Minister and his/her authority over the members of the cabinet, to investigate how they vary not only across countries but also within different cabinets. The institutional *powers conferred to the PMs* and the *rules and procedures within the cabinet* may affect different stages of the coalition life cycle, such as the governance stage, or the cabinet duration and termination stage when, for instance, a Prime Minister has the power to unilaterally dissolve parliament. This feature clearly varies across, and to some extent within, countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as the PM powers and cabinet rules are also dependent upon the characteristics of the party system and the political actors involved (Strøm et al 2003; Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b).

Finally, although almost all the countries analysed in the book are parliamentary democracies, and their constitutions assign to the presidents mostly symbolic functions which are frequently shared with governments, it has been observed a divergence between the formal and actual *powers of Presidents* in CEE countries. While governments are typically perceived as dominant executive institutions, the influence of presidents in the selected political systems is given not only by the letter of the constitution but also by historically rooted constitutional traditions or personal power of the single presidents, as the Czech case shows, for instance. Therefore, in each chapter, our contributors discuss the role of presidents in government formation and government termination. We make clear whether the respective country has a ‘pure’ parliamentary system or if it is a parliamentary democracy with semi-presidential features. Although our CEE countries feature a number of directly elected presidents, only Romania can be classified as a semi-presidential system, as its constitution formally stipulates an elected president and provides the president with influence on coalition formation and termination (Elgie 1999; Strøm et al 2003). As the country chapter explains, Lithuania also has

semi-presidential characteristics, but the Lithuanian constitutional court has ruled that the country is a ‘parliamentary republic’ with ‘certain features of the semi-presidential system’, thereby hinting that the president cannot dominate coalition formation and governance.

The party system and the actors

In the second section, each country chapter analyses coalition politics looking at the main actors involved, i.e., political parties and their patterns of competition. A brief presentation of the national party system as structured since the fall of the Communist rule in the early 1990s is provided, while a specific focus is devoted to the transformation of this traditional party landscape, in particular after the two big crises that hit European countries in the 2010s, namely the economic and the so-called migrant crises. In the wake of these big exogenous shocks, in fact, new actors – for instance, new populist, radical right parties – appeared on the scene, while some mainstream parties have declined.

Three factors are considered here fundamental to analyse coalition politics: (a) the number of political parties in the system; (b) their relative strength; (c) the dimensions of competition among them (Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b). In this section, country experts rely, first of all, on a table like [Table 2.1a](#)⁷ to discuss the relationship between cabinets and party systems as it contains the basic data on cabinets formed. Unlike all the tables used in the country chapters which focus only on the period 2008–2021, this first one covers the entire democratic life of the selected CEE country, roughly from 1990 onwards.

It is important to stress that political parties are here discussed as parliamentary party groups (PPGs). In order to establish some criteria to include and code a specific party into our dataset, we record a party as ‘new’ when it gains at least three seats in the elections, otherwise, it is coded as ‘other’.⁸ All the parties that fulfil these criteria are listed in the ninth column, indicating the ‘number of parties in parliament’, while parties recorded in the ‘other’ category are excluded from this count.

Each country chapter provides an appendix with a detailed list of all the PPGs included in the study. In the list, we provide (a) the national acronym, (b) the party name in English followed by (c) the party name in the native language in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use. The party appendix includes only PPGs at the national level. Although parties with no seats in parliament are mentioned because of their impact on electoral alliances, they are not included in these party lists.

This table provides other essential information. First, it reports the acronyms of all parties that are included in each cabinet (‘Party composition of cabinet’). Then, our experts also note the ‘type’ of cabinet, including the presence of any ‘non-political’ caretaker executive (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014) with,

Table 2.1a Latvian cabinets 1993–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Birkavs | 1993-08-03 | 1993-06-06 | LC, LZS | min | 48 (48) | 100 | 8 | 5.05 | |
| 2 | Gailis | 1994-09-19 | | LC, TPA | min | 44 (44) | 100 | 9 | 5.26 | |
| 3 | Šķēle I ^a | 1995-12-21 | 1995-10-01 | TB, DPS, LC, LNNK+LZP, LaDP, LVP | sur | 73 (73) | 100 | 9 | 7.59 | |
| 4 | Šķēle II ^a | 1997-02-13 | | TB, DPS, LC, LNNK+LZP, LaDP, TT | sur | 71 (71) | 100 | 10 | 8.53 | |
| 5 | Krasts I | 1997-08-07 | | TB-LNNK, DPS, LC, LaDP | sur | 67 (67) | 100 | 8 | 7.06 | |
| 6 | Krasts II | 1998-04-08 | | TB-LNNK, LC, LaDP | min | 45 (45) | 100 | 8 | 7.14 | LZP |
| 7 | Krištopans I | 1998-11-26 | 1998-10-03 | LC, TB-LNNK, JP | min | 46 (46) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | LSDSP |
| 8 | Krištopans II | 1999-02-05 | | LC, TB-LNNK, JP, LSDSP | sur | 60 (60) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | |
| 9 | Šķēle III | 1999-07-16 | | TP, LC, TB-LNNK | mwc | 62 (62) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | |
| 10 | Bērziņš | 2000-05-05 | | LC, TP, TB-LNNK, JP | sur | 70 (70) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | |
| 11 | Repše | 2002-11-07 | 2002-10-05 | JL, LPP, ZZS, TB-LNNK | mwc | 55 (55) | 100 | 6 | 5.02 | |
| 12 | Emsis | 2004-03-09 | | ZZS, LPP, TP | min | 46 (46) | 100 | 8 | 6.02 | TSP |
| 13 | Kalvītis I | 2004-12-02 | | TP, JL, LPP, ZZS | sur | 71 (71) | 100 | 8 | 6.41 | |
| 14 | Kalvītis II | 2006-04-08 | | TP, ZZS, LPP | min | 46 (46) | 100 | 8 | 6.41 | SC |
| 15 | Kalvītis III | 2006-11-07 | 2006-10-07 | TP, ZZS, LPP-LC, TB-LNNK | sur | 59 (59) | 100 | 7 | 6 | |

(Continued)

Table 2.1a (Continued)

| Cabinet number | Cabinet | Date in | Election date | Party composition of cabinet | Type of cabinet | Cabinet strength in seats (%) | Number of seats in parliament | Number of parties in parliament | ENP, parliament | Formal support parties |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 16 | Godmanis | 2007-12-20 | | LPP-LC, TP, ZZS, TB-LNNK | mwc | 56 (56) | 100 | 7 | 6.44 | |
| 17 | Dombrovskis I | 2009-03-12 | | JL, TP, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | sur | 64 (64) | 100 | 8 | 6.98 | |
| 18 | Dombrovskis II | 2010-03-23 | | JL, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | min | 44 (44) | 100 | 8 | 7.29 | |
| 19 | Dombrovskis III | 2010-11-03 | 2010-10-02 | JV, ZZS | mwc | 55 (55) | 100 | 5 | 3.93 | |
| 20 | Dombrovskis IV | 2011-10-25 | 2011-09-17 | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK | min | 50 (50) | 100 | 5 | 4.96 | |
| 21 | Straujuma I | 2014-01-22 | | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | mwc | 60 (60) | 100 | 5 | 5.17 | |
| 22 | Straujuma II | 2014-11-05 | 2014-10-04 | JV, ZZS, VL+TB-LNNK | mwc | 61 (61) | 100 | 6 | 5.13 | |
| 23 | Kučinskis | 2016-02-11 | | JV, ZZS, VL+TB-LNNK | mwc | 61 (61) | 100 | 6 | 5.17 | |
| 24 | Kariņš I | 2019-01-23 | 2018-10-06 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, A/P, JKP, KP V | sur | 66 (66) | 100 | 7 | 6.39 | |
| 25 | Kariņš II | 2021-06-03 | | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, A/P, JKP | min | 49 (49) | 100 | 7 | 7.44 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition; non = non-partisan. Minority cabinets are also indicated by *italics*.

^a Technocrat Prime Minister.

for instance, Bulgaria reporting several examples in the last decade. Then, to describe the relative strength of the cabinet *vis-à-vis* to the parliament, columns seven and eight report the absolute and relative number of seats held by the cabinet parties after each general election,⁹ and the total number of seats in each parliamentary assembly when the cabinet forms, respectively. Both are based on the snapshot principle, and we only resort to post-electoral seat data when it is difficult/impossible to find up-to-date seat data on the PPGs during the inter-electoral period. This information is dramatically important as it identifies the parties with bargaining weight in coalition negotiations (Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b). Moreover, [Table 2.1a](#) also contains the ‘effective number’ of parties (ENP) in parliament, derived using the well-established measure of party system fragmentation (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). This number does not just indicate the number of legislative parties but also their relative size, so higher values of the index indicate that the legislative assembly is more fragmented and complex.¹⁰

To account further for political bargaining, [Table 2.1a](#) reports the election date (column four) and the date in which the cabinet took office (column three). This data allows us to distinguish between cabinets that form almost immediately after an election and those which form during the constitutional inter-election period (CIEP). The Latvian example, shown in the table, clearly shows this important distinction. Moreover, there is often a considerable amount of time between election day and the official assignment of the cabinet. The duration of the cabinet formation processes in CEE can be rather long due to bargaining complexity and uncertainty about their competitors’ policy preferences, related to systemic factors like a high number of parties and ideological polarization in the parliament (De Winter and Dumont 2008; Ecker and Meyer 2015). This may lead to considerable delays in government formation.

Conflict dimensions and the median party

Each country chapter provides an extensive discussion about the change in the party system and the party conflict structure between 2008 and 2021 based on data presented in tables like [Table 2.1b](#). The focus here is to investigate to what extent parties in each country differ in their policy preferences. Scholars, in fact, underline the importance of policy proximity not only for the formation but also for the stability of coalition governments (Bassi 2017).

There is an ongoing scholarly debate about the use of either expert knowledge or party manifestos to measure political parties’ policy preferences (Lindstädt et al 2020). In this book, we rely on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) data to place the parties along the dimensions of conflict identified by our country experts. In the CHES survey, experts are asked to locate parties on various policy dimensions and to assess their issue salience in several countries, including our ten CEE democracies (see, e.g., Polk et al 2017; Jolly et al 2022). Compared to manifesto-based approaches (Klingemann et al 2006), experts can use their knowledge about parties and issue positions, thus counterbalancing

Table 2.1b Latvian system conflict structure 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 16 | Godmanis | TP | Ethnic minorities | JL | Econ. left-right |
| 17 | Dombrovskis I | TP | Ethnic minorities | JL | Econ. left-right |
| 18 | Dombrovskis II | TP | Ethnic minorities | JL | Econ. left-right |
| 19 | Dombrovskis III | V | Ethnic minorities | ZZS | Econ. left-right |
| 20 | Dombrovskis IV | ZRP, V | Ethnic minorities | VL+TB-LNNK | Econ. left-right |
| 21 | Straujuma I | V | Ethnic minorities | VL+TB-LNNK | Econ. left-right |
| 22 | Straujuma II | ZZS, V | Ethnic minorities | ZZS | Econ. left-right |
| 23 | Kučinskis | ZZS, V | Ethnic minorities | ZZS | Econ. left-right |
| 24 | Kariņš I | KPV | Ethnic minorities | A/P | Econ. left-right |
| 25 | Kariņš II | KPV | Ethnic minorities | A/P | Econ. left-right |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2007–2014 (cabinets 16–21) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

parties' strategic behaviour in drafting manifestos. Recent research shows that experts sometimes disagree regarding parties' positions on specific policies and issues, or that expert surveys may have an endogeneity problem because experts' assessment of party position might be influenced by their own beliefs (see Lindstädt et al 2020). Nevertheless, CHES data performs quite well when compared to alternative data sources on parties' positions.

As our dataset also includes smaller PPGs that are not covered by CHES although they have got seats. In these cases, we relied on the judgement of our ten contributors who have placed the missing parties according to the CHES scale using data from the best possible sources. In Table 2.1b for each government in office between 2008 and 2021, our experts report the first and second dimensions of conflict together with the corresponding 'median party'. The concept of 'median (legislator) party' – the party in the centre of the policy space – is of dramatic importance in the study of the coalition life cycle because a median party in one (or both) of the main conflict dimensions can essentially control both coalition formation and decision-making in parliament (Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b). This can be the case of the Latvian *People's Party* (TP) reported in Table 2.1b. According to our expert, TP has been for a while the median party on the first dimension of conflict, i.e., ethnic minorities, in particular Russian. This situation made it a pivotal coalition partner in three consecutive governments from 2007 to 2010, giving it the power to block any alternative government. However, in a multidimensional policy space, there can be more than one policy dimension of conflict and, therefore, more than one median legislator party. For these reasons, our country experts – see again Table 2.1b as an illustration – reported the presence and content of such dimensions.

Finally, we have opted to exclude from the calculation small parties that have never gained more than two seats but also large numbers of independent parliamentarians that do not belong to any PPG. Although there are several potential approaches to fixing this issue (Bergman et al 2019), the difficulty to position small PPGs or large numbers of independent parliamentarians in the ideological policy space would make the identification of the median party too problematic.

Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions

Finally, Table 2.1c reports the occurrence of what we define as electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions, which may be expressed formally or informally. Unlike most of the variables used in the book, these two are measured at the election campaign level rather than at the level of the resulting cabinet. It is therefore important to distinguish the two concepts as they subtend different inter-party dynamics. On the one hand, *electoral alliances* (EAs) concern essentially the election campaign phase, as it consists of the strategy adopted by two (or more) parties to form a joint list with the purpose to maximize their vote share and, consequently, seat share.¹¹ On the other hand, *pre-electoral coalitions* (PECs) are conceptualized as pre-election

Table 2.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Latvia, 2006–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|---|-------------|--|
| 2006-10-07 | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TSP, 'New Centre', Daugavpils City Party | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2010-10-02 | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | SD, 'Concord', LSP, Daugavpils City Party | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TB-LNNK, VL | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TP, LPP-LC | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2011-09-17 | JL, PS, SCP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | SD, 'Concord', LSP, Daugavpils City Party | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2014-10-04 | TB-LNNK, VL | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | Alliance of Regions, Party of Vidzeme, For Ogre Parish | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2018-10-06 | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | JV, Party of Latgale, Jēkabpils Regional Party, For Valmiera and Vidzeme, For City and Parish of Tukums, For Kuldīga Parish | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |

Notes:

Type: Electoral alliance (EA) and/or Pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: Written contract, Joint press conference, Separate declarations, and/or Other.

(official) agreements between two or more parties to form a coalition government after the election.

Table 2.1c reports data about electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions collected on an election-by-election basis, as indicated by the election date reported in the first column. Moreover, we report for each electoral agreement the constituent parties, the type of commitment, and which form this commitment has assumed (written agreement, separate declarations, or joint press conferences).

In order to include the two instances in the dataset, it must be clear the mutual commitment of the two (or multiple) parties. For informal (i.e., non-written) commitments, both parties must release a statement in which they express their will to establish a pre-electoral coalition pact. Moreover, coalition statements should be official and made *on* behalf of the party (for instance, based on a party executive or party congress decision).

Government formation

Coalition bargaining

Turning now our attention to the formation of governments, we present the empirical record on coalition bargaining in our ten countries, including central information on how simple or complex the bargaining environment was, how many bargaining attempts were needed before a government could be formed, and so forth. In Table 2.2, we record the key data on the formation process for every cabinet formed during the period of observation, regardless of if they are coalition cabinets, single-party cabinets, or non-partisan cabinets.

In the individual chapter texts, we make a distinction between two main types of bargaining processes, those led by a *formateur* and *free-style bargaining*. During the former, the *formateur* is intended to form a government themselves after successful negotiations, while in the latter, an *informateur* is tasked with identifying viable potential governments among possibly multiple concurrent negotiations between the parties. Each such bout of negotiation, regardless of the type, counts as a *bargaining round*.

We define a ‘bargaining round’ as any change in either the composition of the involved parties or in the change of the *formateur* or *informateur*.¹² One restriction that we impose on our data is that we only count publicly known bargaining attempts, that is, bargaining rounds that are generally known to be ongoing or that have occurred, and have been subject to, for example, media reports. While this does not necessarily include *all* bargaining attempts, given that parties may hold more covert negotiations, it is a systematic approach to identifying bargaining rounds. We also consider simultaneous bargaining attempts over different potential governments involving different sets of parties as separate bargaining rounds.

For both inconclusive and ultimately successful bargaining rounds, we include the full list of involved parties, beginning with the party that has *formateur* status and is expected to nominate the PM. If there is no clear *formateur*, for example in free-style bargaining systems, we instead try to identify the

Table 2.2 Government formation period in Latvia, 2007–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses) | | |
|-----------------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Birkavs | 1993 | 0 | LC, LZS | 26 | 58 | 28 | 48 | 32 | 11 |
| Godmanis | 2007 | 0 | LPP-LC, TP, ZZS, TB-LNNK | 7 | 15 | 14 | 54 | 0 | 43 |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | 0 | JL, TP, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | 15 | 20 | 19 | 67 | 0 | 21 |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | 0 | JL, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | 0 | JV, ZZS | 2 | 32 | 31 | 63 | 0 | 35 |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | 0 | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK | 7 | 38 | 37 | 57 | 0 | 38 |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | 0 | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 22 | 56 | 55 | 64 | 2 | 27 |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | 0 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 3 | 209 | 32 | 61 | 0 | 39 |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | 0 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 30 | 67 | 68 | 60 | 0 | 32 |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | 2 | JV, JKP, KP, A/P, VL+TB-LNNK | 17 | 109 | 109 | 61 | 0 | 39 |
| | | | JV, JKP, KP, A/P, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 8 | | | | | |
| | | | JV, JKP, KP, A/P, VL+TB-LNNK | 15 | | | | | |
| Kariņš I | 2021 | 0 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, A/P, JKP | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |

party that is in the metaphorical driver's seat, what we may consider an *informal formateur*. We also record information on the duration of each individual bargaining round, beginning from the first known day of negotiations to the last.¹³ In addition, we also include data on the duration of the entire bargaining process, the *total bargaining duration*, beginning with the first day of the first bargaining attempt, and ending when the last, conclusive, bargaining round has concluded. Finally, we include information on how long the spell between each cabinet was, and the *number of days required for cabinet formation*, calculated as the duration from the termination of the previous cabinet and the installation of the new cabinet. All these duration variables are coded as the number of days for each sequence. Finally, we also include voting figures on the *investiture vote* that allowed the government to take office (or to remain in office, in some cases), which presents important information on the relative tolerance of the government within parliament.

A possible discrepancy that can occur owing to our coding rules is when a cabinet remains in office while simultaneously negotiating over the constituting of a 'new' cabinet, for example, negotiations on if an additional party should be included in the government coalition. As the number of days required for cabinet formation can be zero days in these cases, such as when there is no requirement to invest the new expanded cabinet into office, we make special note when negotiations have occurred while there is still a cabinet with full powers in office.

Ministerial structure

After negotiations have concluded, coalition governments distributed various government offices among themselves, which are the subject of [Table 2.3](#). In this table, we include the number of ministerial posts held by each party in a given coalition government, as well as any independent ministers. Note that we count *persons* and not necessarily portfolios. A single minister may hold several portfolios simultaneously, and in those cases, we only record a single minister. The distribution of portfolios (or ministerships) is the subject of one of the most well-supported empirical regularities in the social sciences, the 'parity rule' often referred to as 'Gamson's Law', owing to the early statement of the rule by Gamson (1961). Parties tend to receive a number of ministerial portfolios that are in proportion to the number of parliamentary seats held by the parties. While there is an observed small party bonus (Mershon 2002), the parity rule holds empirically in general terms. We also include the number of ministers in total (including any independent ministers), along with the number of ministries, reflecting that parties do not only negotiate the distribution of offices between them but also the number of ministers and ministries (Mershon 2002; Verzichelli 2008; Bergman et al 2015). We also note that the party holding some particularly important ministerial offices, such as the office of Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Finance and/or economics, and Defence. Based on our interpretation of cross-national patterns in portfolio importance (Budge and Keman 1990; Druckman and Warwick 2005; Druckman

Table 2.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Latvian coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Welfare and Healthcare</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|-----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Godmanis | 2007 | 7 TP, 4 LPP-LC, 5 ZZS, 3 TB-LNNK | 19 | | 19 | LPP-LC | TP | TP | ZZS, TP | TP |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | 5 TP, 4 JL, 4 ZZS, 1 PS, 1 TB-LNNK | 15 | | 15 | JL | JL | TP | ZZS, TP | JL |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | 6 JL, 6 ZZS, 1 PS, 1 TB-LNNK | 14 | | 15 | JL | JL | TP | ZZS, JL | JL |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | 9 JV, 6 ZZS | 15 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | ZZS, ZZS | JV |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | 7 JV, 5 ZRP, 2 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | ZRP | JV, JV | ZRP |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | 5 JV, 3 VL+TB-LNNK, 3 ZRP, 3 ZZS | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | ZRP | ZZS, JV | ZRP |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | 6 JV, 5 ZZS, 3 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | ZZS, ZZS | JV |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | 6 ZZS, 5 JV, 3 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | ZZS | ZZS | JV | JV, ZZS | JV |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | 3 JV, 3 A/P, 3 JKP, 3 KPV, 2 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | KPV, A/P | KPV |
| Kariņš II | 2021 | 4 A/P, 4 JKP, 3 JV, 3 VI+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | JKP, A/P | A/P |

and Roberts 2008; Bäck et al 2011), we have included five ministries – or their national equivalent – for every country in their equivalent [Table 2.3](#): the Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of the Interior or Justice (whichever holds competence over the national police).¹⁴ In the odd case that there are two or more persons sharing the same ministerial portfolio, we list the party affiliations of all of them. In the chapter texts, we also discuss the patterns of portfolio preferences that have been observed previously in the literature on Western Europe (Blondel and Thiébault 1991, Mair 2007; Bäck et al 2011) and Central Eastern Europe (Ecker et al 2015), for example, Green parties bargain for the Ministry of the Environment and Social Democrats bargain for the Ministry of Labour Affairs. Beyond such ideological patterns of distributions, we also discuss other regularities that may be more national in character, such as if some portfolios are always/never held by the same party if there are some parties that have been effectively barred from particular ministries, which – if any – ministries hold a particular provenance in negotiations, and also if there are any particular ministerial preferences among the parties beyond previously observed cross-national patterns.

In addition to ministerial offices, we also record information on so-called watchdog junior ministers when applicable. While we define a junior minister as a political appointee with executive power within the minister’s chain of command, typically and ideally just below the minister in the hierarchy, watchdog junior ministers must come from a different party than the minister they serve under. Watchdog junior ministers serve as an important monitoring function in a coalition government, acting as one mechanism to constrain ministerial drift.

Coalition agreements

In [Table 2.4](#), we present information on the use of and content of coalition agreements. Here, we include any and all documents that specify the terms of the coalition government. Coalition agreements serve to bind the parties to whatever agreements they have reached during negotiations and often serve

Table 2.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Latvia, 2007–2021

| <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1284 | 80 | 1 | 12 | 7 | 0 |
| 1296 | 82 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 0 |
| 1296 | 82 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 0 |
| 1270 | 81 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 2 |
| 1414 | 75 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| 1715 | 74 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| 1579 | 88 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| 1449 | 87 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| 1638 | 87 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| 1638 | 87 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 |

as the most authoritative document on constraining party behaviour in the coalition. In some cases, parties produce documents formally referred to as a coalition agreement or some analogue, while in other coalitions, we find functional equivalents that serve the same purpose. Agreements or their analogues may also only apply to certain parties within the coalition, possibly with multiple overlapping agreements between different constellations of parties. We are interested in all such documents, to the extent that they are sufficiently authoritative regarding the coalition's functioning. If a country expert determines that there are multiple authoritative documents, we include all of them, with one row per document.

We record two types of data on each coalition agreement or equivalent document: its *size* in words and the relative proportions of different types of content, such as the general rules governing the coalition, the distribution of competencies and positions, and policy. Based on these proportions, the agreements can be positioned between two different primary types of structuring the coalition's ensuing work. The first type is *procedural agreements*, where the parties agree on how decisions will be made in the cabinet, but with less or less detailed content on its policy programme. The other type is *policy agreements*, which proceed from the opposite direction, mainly including agreements on the government's policy programme rather than how decisions will be reached. Some coalitions opt to divide the content across multiple documents, having some documents that only concern procedure and others that only concern policy, while some coalitions include a mix of the two in a single document.

In the individual chapter texts, we discuss the more qualitative aspects of the broader content categories recounted above. This includes the particular rules used by various coalitions in maintaining and enforcing the terms stipulated in the coalition agreement, and what means of sanction are available in case of intransigence. We also continue the discussion on the distribution, number, and competencies of ministries, and if and how this has changed as a result of coalition negotiations.

Coalition agreements serve multiple purposes within the coalition, beyond what has already been recounted above. Perhaps most importantly, they reduce uncertainty and potential conflicts within the coalition *ex-ante* (Timmermans 2006; Walgrave et al 2006; Moury 2011). In the individual chapter texts, the authors discuss how and when parties construct their coalition agreements for such purposes.

Coalition governance

As coalition governments are defined for this volume, they invariably include multiple parties, which generally compete against each other in elections and have different policy preferences. As has been discussed in the previous sections, they must also choose to distribute ministries and competencies between each other in some manner. The jurisdictional delegation process used by cabinets gives individual ministers considerable advantages in resources and information

relative to their cabinet peers, which, combined with diverging policy preferences between coalition partners, gives rise to a multitude of delegation problems (Laver and Shepsle 1996; Martin and Vanberg 2004). In systems where Prime Ministers have considerable powers, junior coalition partners may seek additional mechanisms to constrain the PM. How coalitions manage the potential problems arising from their diverging preferences is a central discussion in the individual chapter texts, which are summarized in [Table 2.5](#).

One such mechanism is the coalition agreements covered in [Table 2.4](#). We include additional information on coalition agreements in [Table 2.5](#), noting if there are any such agreements when the agreement was reached relative to the previous election if they are public or not, and how comprehensive they are regarding policy. Although coalition agreements are designed to pre-empt and constrain conflicts between coalition partners with varying preferences, they cannot pre-empt all possible conflicts that may arise, for example, due to exogenous shocks. To unforeseen conflicts, coalition parties employ various oversight and conflict resolution mechanisms to nip potential problems in the bud before they are given time to bloom and bring down the coalition. A first line of defence consists of so-called watchdog junior ministers, where a junior minister from one party ‘shadows’ a full minister from another party, whereby they can report any pertinent information to their party (Müller and Strøm 2000; Thies 2001).

Parties in parliamentary systems are however not merely consigned to using whatever means for monitoring and scrutiny within the executive arena. They can also turn to parliamentary functions and procedures to keep tabs on their partners (Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2011, 2005). This can entail restricting parties from both holding a ministerial portfolio and the chair in the corresponding legislative committee (Kim and Loewenberg 2005; Carroll and Cox 2012) or fielding parliamentary questions towards ministers from other coalition parties (Höhmänn and Sieberer 2020; Martin and Whitaker 2019). How effective such means of control are is however subject to the relative strength of each parliamentary instrument of scrutiny (Martin and Vanberg 2020; Bäck et al 2022).

If less intrusive means of scrutiny fail, coalition partners can finally turn to more direct conflict resolution mechanisms to hopefully resolve the conflicts. These vary in terms of their personnel composition, or arenas, primarily in terms of if the involved members are drawn from within the coalition, from outside the coalition (but still within the parties), or a mix between the two. As conflicts escalate in severity, coalition partners often use different conflict resolution mechanisms, situated in various arenas, in attempts to resolve the inter-party conflicts before they result in the termination of the coalition (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008; Müller and Meyer 2010a, 2010b). Particular national or party preferences for different types of mechanisms are discussed in greater detail in the individual chapter texts, and also if there are particular national subtypes of the broader cross-national categories.

Other mechanisms included in [Table 2.5](#) cover further indicators of coalition governance, including behavioural regularities. We note if all party leaders

Table 2.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Latvia, 2007–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|-----------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Godmanis | 2007 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | CoC | No (ZZS) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | Yes | No |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa, O | CoC, CaC | O | No (ZZS) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | Yes | No |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa, O | CoC | O | No (ZZS) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | Yes | No |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZZS) | No | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZRP) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZRP, ZZS, NA) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZZS, NA, V) | No | All/Most | No | Varied | No | Yes |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZZS, NA) | No | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |

(Continued)

Table 2.5 (Continued)

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|-----------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa, O | CoC | O | No (V, A/P, KP, VL+TB/LNKK) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Kariņš II | 2021 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, Pca, O | CoC | O | No (V, A/P, VL+TB/LNKK) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |

Notes:

During periods where the values for the variables remain identical, the first and last applicable cabinets are listed. The last applicable cabinet is right-justified in the Coalition column.

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; POST = post-election.

Conflict management mechanisms: CaC = cabinet committee; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; O = other.

Coalition discipline: All = discipline always expected; Most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters.

Policy agreement: Varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; Comp. = comprehensive policy agreement.

are cabinet members (and if not, for which parties this does not apply), if the coalition has agreed to leave any policy issues outside of the coalition's purview, how disciplined coalition-affiliated MPs are in legislative and non-legislative matters in parliament, and if government appointments, non-cabinet positions within the government, and the selection of junior ministers are subject to coalition negotiation. These, along with the variables mentioned previously, provide a brief summary of which of the three governance models is most applicable in each individual country, and, if there is a transition between models over time, during which periods. Moreover, the table serves to structure the discussion on the applicability of the governance models to the particular country case, and how a given country has remained close to given model or transitioned towards another.

Cabinet termination

The third and last phase of the coalition life cycle analysed in the book is cabinet termination. Party governments in the CEE region have been relatively unstable since the establishment of democracy in the early 1990s. According to Tzelgov (2011: 552), the mean duration of governments in the region 'is not becoming longer than [...] the average duration of Western governments'. Cabinets, and in particular coalition governments, can terminate due to an array of reasons. In this book, we make a basic, yet important, distinction between two mutually exclusive, categories of government termination, according to the circumstances which triggered the event. We distinguish, in fact, between *technical* – or 'non-political' – and *discretionary* – or 'behavioural' – terminations (Damgaard 2008; Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b).

On the one hand, technical terminations are those considered beyond the control of political actors. In this book, we consider three specific types of technical termination: (a) parliamentary elections held at the end of the regular legislature term; (b) constitutional reasons that require the cabinet to terminate its office; (c) the death or permanent impediment of the Prime Minister during her/his office. In case there are several technical reasons occurring at the same time, only one of them is used for coding. On the other hand, discretionary terminations are those promoted by political actors and can be triggered for a variety of reasons. Among them, we include (a) (strategic) call for early elections; (b) a reshuffle in the governing coalition; (c) a defeat caused by a vote of no confidence – or a loss in a vote of confidence – in parliament; (d) Inter- or intra-coalition party conflicts regarding policy or personnel issues. All those cases that do not fall into any of these categories are coded as 'other voluntary reason'. Thus, in general, while discretionary terminations are initiated by political actors with different goals – strategic or conflictual, technical terminations are beyond their control. For this reason, technical terminations cannot be generally considered an indicator of government instability.

To illustrate the data employed in this section, we refer, once again, to the case of Latvia (see [Table 2.6](#)). The table collects a variety of data about cabinet

Table 2.6 Cabinet termination in Latvia, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Godmanis | 42.1 | 9 | 11, 12 | | | Economic crisis of 2008 |
| Dombrovskis I | 65.9 | 7a | 10 | TP | Economics | TP left coalition on eve of elections citing economic policy differences |
| Dombrovskis II | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Dombrovskis III | 22.2 | 4 | | | | Early parliamentary elections |
| Dombrovskis IV | 71.1 | 9 | | | | Collapse of a supermarket building in Rīga |
| Straujuma I | 30.6 | 1 | | | | |
| Straujuma II | 27.7 | 8 | | JV | | Political infighting between PM Straujuma and Party Chair Solvita Āboltiņa |
| Kučinskis | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Kariņš I | 63.9 | 7a | 11 | | | KPV LV lost popular support and was pushed out of the coalition |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: Other constitutional reason; 3: Death of Prime Minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: Voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: Cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: Conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: Intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: Other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: Popular opinion shocks; 12: International or national security event; 13: Economic event; 14: Personal event.

termination, which is not limited to its mechanisms discussed above. In each chapter, our country experts use this table to present data about the duration in office of each cabinet. In order to make these data comparable across countries and cabinets, in fact, the relative time in power is calculated on the number of days the cabinet was in office and the number of days constitutionally established for the term of office.¹⁵ Thus, the calculation is based on the last day the cabinet could stay in office provided the parliamentary term would expire (Bergman et al 2021a, 2021b). When possible, our country experts have reported in the table any ‘terminal event’ which impacted the duration of the respective cabinet.¹⁶ This table in each country chapter also contains – where applicable – information on the specific policy area that triggered the termination of the cabinet – in our example, ‘economics’ has been recorded as the policy area which caused the termination of Dombrovskis I cabinet. Besides that, the country experts also provide a brief description of the political events that led to the government termination as well as the actors involved, because the identification of defecting partners is twofold relevant, for the formation of the next government coalition, and for the parties’ support in the next election (Tavits 2008; Warwick 2012).

Appendix: *List of parties*

| <i>Parties</i> | |
|----------------|--|
| LSP | Socialist Party of Latvia (Latvijas Sociālistiskā partija) |
| PCTVL | For Human Rights in United Latvia (Apvienība Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā) |
| L | Equal Rights (Līdztiesība) |
| LVP | Unity Party of Latvia (Latvijas Vienības partija) |
| TSP | National Harmony Party (Tautas saskaņas partijas) |
| LSDSP | Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Latvia (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija) |
| SC | Harmony Centre (Saskaņas centrs) |
| TKL-ZP | Popular Movement For Latvia (Siegerist Party) (Tautas kustība Latvijai) |
| SLAT | Concord for Latvia, Rebirth for Economy (Saskaņa Latvijai, atdzimšana tautsaimniecībai) |
| TT | For people and justice (Tautai un taisnībai) |
| TPA | Political Union of Economists (Tautsaimnieku politiskā apvienība) |
| DPS | Democratic Party ‘Saimnieks’ (Demokrātiskā partija Saimnieks) |
| DCP | Democratic Centre Party (Demokrātiskā centra partija) |
| ZZS | Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un zemnieku savienība) |
| LKDS | Christian Democratic Union of Latvia (Latvijas Kristīgo demokrātu savienība) |
| LaDP | Democratic Party of Latgale (Latgales Demokrātiskā partija) |
| VL+TB-LNNK | National Alliance of ‘All for Latvia’ and ‘For Fatherland and Freedom’/LNNK (Nacionālā apvienība Visu Latvijai un Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK) |
| TB-LNNK | For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK) |
| V | Unity (Vienotība) |
| ZRP | Zatlers’ Reform Party (Zatlera Reformu partija) |
| LZP | Green Party of Latvia (Latvijas Zaļā partija) |
| TB | For Fatherland and Freedom (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai) |

| | |
|----------|--|
| LZS | Farmers' Union of Latvia (Latvijas zemnieku savienība) |
| JL | New Era (Jaunais laiks) |
| PS | Civic Union (Pilsoniskā savienība) |
| LNNK+LZP | Latvian National Independence Movement + Green Party of Latvia (Latvijas Nacionāli Konservatīvā Partija/Latvijas Zaļā Partija, LNNK/LZP) |
| LC | Latvia's Way (Latvijas ceļš) |
| LNNK | Latvian National Independence Movement (Latvijas Nacionālās neatkarības kustība) |
| LPP | First Party of Latvia (Latvijas Pirmā partija) |
| JP | New Party (Jaunā partija) |
| LPP-LC | First Party of Latvia/Latvia's Way (Latvijas Pirmās partijas un savienības Latvijas ceļš apvienība LPP/LC) |
| TP | People's Party (Tautas partija) |
| PLL | For a good Latvia (Par labu Latviju) |
| JKP | New Conservative Party (Jaunā konservatīvā partija) |
| A/P | Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!) |
| KPV | Who Owns the State? (Kam pieder valsts?) |
| JV | New Unity (Jaunā Vienotība) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Latvian in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Notes

- 1 For the last cabinets, i.e., that were in office on December 31, 2021, we generally do not have data about their termination.
- 2 In case of elections with Two-Round Systems (TRS), the termination date corresponds to the day of the runoff.
- 3 The official records of individual countries are often not very good for exact comparative purposes as they are based on different criteria.
- 4 To access the full dataset and codebook, see <https://www.erdda.org>.
- 5 The sample includes, in fact, five unicameral parliamentary systems (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia) and five bicameral parliamentary systems (Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia).
- 6 In case of multiple parliamentary votes, in order to establish the date in which the cabinet has received the formally investiture, we rely on the vote after which the government effectively takes office (Bergman et al 2021).
- 7 In this chapter, we refer to the tables and the data compiled for the case of Latvia (cf. Chapter 7) as an example of the way in which the analysis in the different chapters is structured in terms of time periods and variables.
- 8 According to Bergman et al (2019, 2021), once a PPG has gained three seats, it is included in the table. After that, this party will be always coded as a distinct party – also retroactively – regardless of the number of seats gained. There are another few exceptions to the rule: a party is recoded if it gets cabinet posts or if – according to our country experts – it has a considerable impact on the party competition or on coalition formation.
- 9 To count a political party and the seats it occupies in parliament, we follow the approach of Müller and Strøm (2000). Given the several party switches occurred one or more year after the cabinet formation – which would make impossible to present

- the tables in a brief chapter format – we consider seat distribution at the formation of the cabinet only.
- 10 The category of ‘Other’ parties is counted as a single party for these calculations.
 - 11 Regarding our counting strategy, we count electoral alliances as one PPG. Nevertheless, if, after the election, these parties split up and form different groups, we count the members of the alliance as individual parties (Bergman et al 2021).
 - 12 We do not count a change from an *informateur* to a *formateur* as a new bargaining round when the latter succeeds in forming the government suggested by the *informateur*.
 - 13 The minimum duration for any individual bargaining attempt is therefore one day.
 - 14 A full account of ministerial distributions between the parties is included in the full dataset.
 - 15 In the case of two-round elections, we considered the date of the runoff.
 - 16 As ‘terminal event’, we considered any extraordinary event like non-parliamentary elections, national or international shocks, with particular attention to economic or security issues, and personal events.

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3 Fragility of Coalition Governance in Bulgaria

Dobrinka Kostova

Introduction

The chapter aims to provide data and analyses on the way coalition making process takes place in Bulgaria since 2008, to define the main actors, arrangements, and mechanisms of negotiation and compromise in coalition governments and to divulge to what extent they are a result of established principles and mechanisms or of non-written behind the scene relations and personal influences. There were 7 parliamentary elections and 11 governments in power since 2008, including 5 caretaker governments, appointed by the President of the Republic. The coalition governments are five and present a varied pattern of government coalitions. Observing the typical as well as the specific characteristics of coalition politics in this context and analysing the behaviour of parties and politicians, it allows understand how national governments work. The stability of the studied coalition governments is dependent on their ability to achieve their objectives, to compromise, and to respond to emerging crises and challenges. Only two coalition governments finished their full term of service and this is a signal of the instability of Bulgarian coalition governance.

The coalition governments in Bulgaria in the studied period turned vital for governance as it became difficult for one party to achieve electoral support and form a government alone. This is due to a number of reasons, among these the fragmentation of party system, a non-consensual political culture, and the discontinuity in governments' policies. Coalition governments are formed by partners, which are frequently alliances of small parties that either split from previous unions or are newly emerging. As a result, coalition governments are often ideologically heterogeneous. Coalition partners have to a definite extent conflicting issue preferences and this results in achieving compromises in policies rather than consensus and brings fragility and tensions in governments.

The studied period is characterized by the political dominance of party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), moderate conservative, populist, and centrist, a catchall party. Although it is the party, which got the best election results, these results were not enough to allow

GERB to govern alone. The fact that GERB received highest number of seats in five consecutive parliamentary elections reveals a high degree of institutionalization of the party in Bulgarian political system. At the same time, public protests in the second half of 2020 and in 2021 divulge dissatisfaction with the relatively long period of GERB governance that has led to the creation of patron-client relations that undermine democratic principles. The political unrest has developed into the creation of new political parties such as There Is Such a People (ITN), We Continue the Change (PP), Revival (Vazrazhdane), Bulgaria Stand up – We Come (IBG-NI). This could be a sign that if there are elements of democratic backsliding, there is public potential for opposing it. At the same time, the new parties, with regard to coalition governance, could constitute some risk as they may lack the ability to negotiate and realize effective agreements, as the Bulgarian case suggests for the period 2021–2022. These considerations bring relevance to the complexity of party system fragmentation and the weak institutionalization of the newly established parties that challenge democratization of the country.

The coalition relations, the process of bargaining, the decision-making process between partners, the formation, duration, and termination of the cabinets do not follow a pre-determined scheme. This is why empirical study is needed. In this chapter, we rely on interviews with members of parliamentary parties and of coalition governments, as well as on the available documents as party programmes and coalition agreements to analyse policy outputs of coalition governments.

The institutional setting

According to the 1991 Constitution (Constitution 1991), the main features of the Bulgarian political system are represented by (a) a directly elected president; (b) a unicameral parliament, the *National Assembly*; (c) a proportional electoral system.

Bulgaria is, according to its Constitution, a parliamentary republic. The President of the Republic is directly elected for a five-year term. The Constitution provides the President with a rather limited role in the formation process of the government, as he/she is formally limited to invite the largest party parliamentary group (PPG) to attempt to form a government. Only if two attempts to form a government fail, the Constitution gives the president stronger prerogatives. He/she can then choose by discretion the party, which will then present a prime minister (PM) before the parliament and, if this third investiture attempt fails, he/she can dissolve the parliament, appoint a caretaker cabinet, and call for new elections. During the pre-election period, the president can appoint and dismiss the PM and the entire cabinet at his/her discretion.

With regard to the legislature, the Bulgarian parliamentary system can be classified as ‘positive parliamentarism’ as both the PM and the cabinet are

proactively (s)elected and removed by the National Assembly. Three investiture votes – with simple majority – are required: a first one for the PM, then two votes for the portfolio structure and the ministerial composition of the cabinet.

The electoral law has been regularly changed in the last 30 years. A mixed-member system has been used in the first three decades of democratic life, although several reforms in 2001 and 2009 gradually reduced the share of seats allocated to the single-member districts (SMD), while making the electoral system increasingly proportional (PR). With the 2011 reform, the 240 members of the National Assembly are elected for a four-year term under a PR system with a single-preference option in 31 multi-member constituencies. The nation-wide threshold to enter the parliament for parties and coalitions is 4% of the valid votes, while independent candidates have to pass the constituency electoral quota.

The party system and the actors

The parties have been the most significant factor for the consolidation of the political system in Bulgaria (Karasimeonov 2002) and their role is vital in the competition for power. In the studied period, there are political parties that are stable and institutionalized and others that split, emerge, increase, or diminish their political significance. Party documents reveal that these changes do not support significant ideological differences among parties and trigger anti-establishment tendencies (Kitschelt et al 1999; Kostova 2014a: 9ff.; Oktaj 2016; Mitev 2017). These dynamics have been particularly evident in the last two years.

The data show the fragmentation of the Bulgarian party system (Table 3.1a). The main political parties after 2008 are GERB, Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and Movement for Freedom and Rights (DPS). Ideologically these parties share the ideas of the EU party families to whom they belong – GERB shares the right-wing values of EPP, BSP – socialist ideology of PES and DPS – of ALDE. The strength of local party organizations of these three parties significantly contributes to their stability. There are less influential parties that infrequently get seats in the parliament as democratic parties (Reform Block, Democratic Bulgaria [DB], Da Bulgaria [Yes Bulgaria]) and nationalistic ones (VMRO, Ataka, NFSB).

Party system change

Due to public dissatisfaction with political parties' policies and achievements, all parties face ups and downs in support, their committed electorates are small in number and this provides an opportunity for new parties to gain recognition. For example, the socialist President Georgi Parvanov (2002–2012) has formed Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (ABV), splitting it from the BSP. In comparison with BSP, ABV is ideologically more centre-oriented and represents the interests of city dwellers. The nationalistic party Revival, established

Table 3.1a Bulgaria cabinets 1990–2021

| <i>Bulgaria cabinets 1990–2021</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
| 1 | Lukanov | 1990-09-22 | 1990-06-17 | BSP | Maj | 211 (52.8) | 400 | 4 | 2.42 | |
| 2 | Popov | 1990-12-20 | | BSP, SDS, BZNS | Sur | 371 (92.8) | 400 | 4 | 2.42 | |
| 3 | Dimitrov | 1991-11-08 | 1991-10-13 | SDS | Min | 110 (45.8) | 240 | 3 | 2.41 | DPS |
| 4 | Berov | 1992-12-30 | | NI, BSP, DPS | Sur | 142 (59.2) | 240 | 4 | 2.67 | |
| 5 | Indzhova | 1994-10-17 | | | Non | * | 240 | 4 | | |
| 6 | Videnov | 1995-01-25 | 1994-12-18 | BSP | Maj | 125 (52.1) | 240 | 6 | 2.73 | |
| 7 | Sofiyanski | 1997-02-12 | | | Non | * | 240 | 6 | | |
| 8 | Kostov | 1997-05-21 | 1997-04-19 | SDS, NS | Sur | 137 (57.1) | 240 | 6 | 2.97 | DPS, EL |
| 9 | Sakskoburggotski | 2001-07-24 | 2001-06-17 | NDSV, DPS, NV | Mwc | 141 (58.8) | 240 | 6 | 2.92 | |
| 10 | Stanishev | 2005-08-17 | 2005-06-25 | BSP, NDSV, DPS | Sur | 169 (70.4) | 240 | 9 | 4.8 | |
| 11 | Borissov I | 2009-07-27 | 2009-07-05 | GERB | Min | 116 (48.3) | 240 | 8 | 3.34 | SK, PA |
| 12 | Raykov | 2013-03-13 | | | Non | * | 240 | 8 | | |
| 13 | Oresharski | 2013-05-29 | 2013-05-12 | BSP, DPS | Min | 120 (50) | 240 | 6 | 3.15 | PA |
| 14 | Bliznashki | 2014-08-06 | | | Non | * | 240 | 6 | | |
| 15 | Borissov II | 2014-11-07 | 2014-10-05 | GERB, RB, ABV | Min | 118 (49.2) | 240 | 8 | 5.06 | PF |
| 16 | Gerdzhikov | 2017-01-27 | | | Non | 97 (40.4) | 240 | 8 | | |
| 17 | Borissov III | 2017-05-04 | 2017-03-26 | GERB, OP | Min | 117 (48.8) | 240 | 5 | 3.68 | Volya |
| 18 | Yanev I | 2021-05-12 | | | Non | * | 240 | 6 | 4.84 | |
| 19 | Yanev II | 2021-09-15 | | | Non | * | 240 | 6 | 4.94 | |
| 20 | Petkov | 2021-12-13 | 2021-11-14 | PP, BSP, ITN, DB | Mwc | 134 (55.8) | 240 | 7 | 5.31 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has been formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); maj = single-party majority cabinet; mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition; non = non-partisan.

* When there is a caretaker cabinet appointed by the president (in the table noted as 'non' in party composition), parliament is dissolved so there are formally no party groups in parliament, nor can the cabinet be said to have a certain cabinet strength.

in 2014 as a split from VMRO, has ultra nationalist ideology. In 2020, a showman Slavi Trifonov has registered a populist conservative party, ITN. In 2021, the electoral alliance PP is established as a social liberal formation, situated at the centre. The main political objectives of PP are the creation of favourable environment for economic development, with an emphasis on small and medium firms, on the rule of law, the fight against corruption, and broad access to high-quality education and health system.

The new parties attract people who are unsatisfied with the previous governments (Kostova 2014c: 280ff.). About a fifth of Bulgarian voters display high interest in newcomers. In this regard, the mass media are fundamental in providing information and transparency (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Kriesi 2014). Yet, progress in terms of real policy results of parties and governments is uneven. Additionally, policies are challenged by significant hardships (Boix 2011), such as the economic crisis in 2008–2009, the pandemic since 2020, and the current high inflation bringing difficulties to many people who then prefer to transfer their trust to charismatic leaders promising them a change. The newly emerging parties, for instance, GERB in 2009, Revival in 2014, and ITN in 2020, appear as anti-establishment parties. Their influential leaders make unrealistic and overambitious promises. Often, the decision-making process of the party depends on a small circle of people. Additionally, although the anti-establishment slogans of the parties are similar – attain the rule of law, fight against corruption and oligarchical circles – the proposed programmes could hardly unite the parties around a strong political agenda or policies. Moreover, the war in Ukraine has brought in a strong geopolitical context for Bulgarian political parties. While GERB, PP, DB, and DPS confirm their support for European policies, Revival party is strongly against and BSP accepts some decisions and vetoes others. The conflict lines of parties over time are presented in [Table 3.1b](#).

Table 3.1b Bulgaria system conflict structure, 2005–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 10 | Stanishev | DPS | Econ. left-right | BSP | GAL-TAN |
| 11 | Borissov I | GERB | Econ. left-right | BSP | GAL-TAN |
| 12 | Raykov | | | | |
| 13 | Oresharski | DPS | Econ. left-right | GERB | GAL-TAN |
| 14 | Bliznashki | | | | |
| 15 | Borissov II | GERB | Econ. left-right | RB | GAL-TAN |
| 16 | Gerdzhikov | | | | |
| 17 | Borissov III | GERB | Econ. left-right | OP | GAL-TAN |
| 18 | Yanev I | | | | |
| 19 | Yanev II | | | | |
| 20 | Petkov | PP | Econ. left-right | ITN | Nationalism |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2005–2013 (cabinets 10–13) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

Although the parliamentary parties present in their manifestos their priorities as conservative, liberal, social, or nationalist, their policies are not straightforward. In the analysed period, fiscal discipline and shortcomings in social policies have been in the focus. For example, the public spending on education is relatively low (Dragoeva 2022: 65). Bulgarians are hardly hit by the Covid pandemic (Markova 2021: 57ff). About 10% of the population has got the disease and the number of deceased is the highest in Europe. Only 20% of the population is vaccinated due to the public mistrust to vaccines. The governments choose moderate policies and slightly narrow the rights of citizens. In parallel, they raise government spending to secure political stability increasing the minimum wage and some pensions. Before the pandemic, the governments instead imposed austerity measures and sustained fiscal stability in the context of economic stagnation and corruption. The economic growth slowed down under the impact of economic and financial crises. Although the Currency Board, established in 1997, is a crucial factor of financial stability, the economy is affected and the crises even led to bigger corruption (Kostova 2016; Bechev 2017: 337ff.; Marc 2009: 11; Martinez and Kukutschka 2021). As a result, the public trust in state institutions is very low and people's fears in the periods of crises enhance the chances of populist policies.

Bulgarian parties make no significant mention of migrants and refugees in their programmes, nor do they view migration as a priority issue at national level. They see it as a priority at EU level emphasizing EU responsibility for border control and re-admission coordination. The data on refugee-asylum seekers indicate that refugees and immigrants are actually fleeing the country instead of staying (Krasteva 2019: 49). The Bulgarian migration experience reveals negative pattern. Bulgaria has experienced high levels of emigration (1.3 million), coupled with negative birth rates and very low level of immigration (150,000), which have deprived the country of the labour force needed to sustain economic development. Major challenges include the absence of informed, coherent, and strategic government response while the governments transfer the responsibility for migrants to local level. The xenophobic political rhetoric of extremist parties contributes to hostile public opinion. The lack of positive media narrative, both nationally and locally, could not counter the toxic and fake news in public discourses.

Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions

GERB party is dominant in the last decade but its support steadily decreased since 2010. In 2017, it attracted SDS (Sayuz na Demokratichnite Sili, United Democratic Forces) as a coalition partner to strengthen the centre-right political space (both are members of the EPP). There are other pre-election coalitions if parties expect in this way to increase their electoral chances (Table 3.1c). This is the case of the Patriotic Front (PF), formed in 2014 and consisting of the National Front for Saving Bulgaria (NFSB) and VMRO-Bulgarian National

Table 3.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Bulgaria, 2005–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|--|-------------|--|
| 2005-06-25 | BSP, PDSB, Movement for Social Humanism, Party Roma, BZNS 'A. Stambolijski', BKP | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | SDS, DP, BZNS, NU BZNS, DROM | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | VMRO-BND, BZNS-PU, Bulgarian People Union | EA | Joint press conference |
| 2009-07-05 | BSP, PDSB, Movement for Social Humanism, party Roma, BZNS 'A. Stambolijski', CPB | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | SDS, DSB | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| 2013-05-12 | BSP, PDSB, Movement for Social Humanism, party Roma, BZNS 'A. Stambolijski', BKP | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| 2014-10-05 | BZNS, DBG, DSB, SDS, NPSD | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | BSP and small left parties | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| 2017-05-04 | BSP and small left parties | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | VMRO-BND, Ataka, NFSB | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| 2021-04-04 | GERB, SDS | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | Da Bulgaria, DSB, Green Movement | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | BSP and small left parties | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| 2021-07-11 | GERB, SDS | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | BSP and small left parties | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | Da Bulgaria, DSB, Green Movement | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | IBG, DBG, D21, VOLT | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| 2021-11-14 | GERB, SDS | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | BSP and small left parties | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | Da Bulgaria, DSB, Green Movement | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |
| | VOLT, SEK, PDSB | PEC, EA | Joint press conference |

Notes:

Type: electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

Movement (VMRO-BND). The democratic Reformist Block (RB), established in 2014, included Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB), SDS, Movement 'Bulgaria for Citizens' (DBG). United Patriots (OP) from 2017 involved VMRO-BND, NFSB, and Party Attack (PA). The coalition Democratic Bulgaria since 2018 consists of Yes Bulgaria, DSB, and the Green Movement. These coalitions are ideologically homogenous. These small parties – right or nationalist ones – could not win parliamentary vote if they remain dis-united (Kostova 2014c: 281–282). The nationalist parties, participating individually, for example, PA, NFSB, and VMRO-BND, got about 13% support in 2013 elections but only PA reached 4% threshold to enter the parliament. This result reveals the need for cooperation between these parties. When united in 2014 as PF and in 2017 as OP, they received significant support in the elections and increased their role.

The governing coalitions formed after the parliamentary elections in 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2021 are ideologically heterogeneous. There are economic left-right and social-cultural dimensions that make cooperation difficult. This leads to political instability, becoming significant from 2020 onwards as three early parliamentary elections were held in 2021 (April, July, and November) and one on October 2, 2022. In April 2021, GERB – in coalition with SDS – got the highest result, 25.80%. In July 2021, ITN achieved the best result, 24.1%. The results in November 2021 revealed the first place for PP with 25.7%. The elections indicate the increasing volatility of the Bulgarian political party system. This enforces the difficulty to form coalitions and achieve stability of governance as a result.

Government formation

The president invites after elections the nominated person by the suggestion of the largest parliamentary group to form a cabinet within seven days. If the attempt is not successful, there is second and third attempt. If the last attempt fails, the president appoints a caretaker government and the next parliamentary elections are scheduled. Although caretaker governments have constitutional constraints on their powers, in the studied period five caretakers governed the country for a substantial period (Raykov, Bliznashki, Gerdzhikov, Yanev I, Yanev II).

The bargaining process and composition of cabinets

The studied coalition governments are headed by: Stanishev, Oresharski, Borissov II and III, and Petkov (Table 3.2). They were formed after parliamentary elections on the basis of coalition agreements. The formation periods lasted about 30–40 days. Four governments received the confidence vote at first attempt. The government of Stanishev received it at third attempt.

The fragmented parliaments are an obstacle to the creation of stable coalition governments. With reference to the introductory chapter of this volume, the case of Bulgaria reveals that party parliamentary strength and party newness are likely to have major influence on the participation of coalition formation. The coalition bargaining is centralized as it is in the hands of the leadership of the parties (Kolarova and Spirova 2019: 98). The negotiations involve compromises on the basic policies as partners in the studied coalitions represent ideologically diverse parties. Expectedly, the parties have to make compromises that conform their ideological basis and at the same successfully respond to overarching general aims contributing to government formation (Karasimeonov 2002). The studied coalitions were heterogeneous and did hardly overcome their conflicting interests and in some case their inexperience. The difficult balance between cooperation and compromises caused fragile coalition governance.

Table 3.2 Government formation period in Bulgaria, 2005–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days)</i> | <i>Number of days required in government formation</i> | <i>Total bargaining duration</i> | <i>Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses)</i> | | |
|----------------|----------------|---|---|--|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------|
| | | | | | | | <i>Pro</i> | <i>Abstention</i> | <i>Contra</i> |
| Stanishev | 2005 | 3 | DPS, BSP, NDSV BSP, DPS NDSV, BSP | 10 50 10 | 50 | 50 | 169 | | 67 |
| Borissov I | 2009 | 0 | GERB | 20 | 22 | | 162 | 1 | 77 |
| Raykov | 2013 | 0 | | | 0 | | | | |
| Oresharski | 2013 | 1 | BSP, DPS | 17 | 17 | 17 | 120 | | 97 |
| Bliznashki | 2014 | 0 | | | 0 | | | | |
| Borissov II | 2014 | 1 | GERB, RB | 30 | 30 | 30 | 149 | | 85 |
| Gerdzhikov | 2017 | 0 | | | 0 | | | | |
| Borissov III | 2017 | 1 | GERB, OP | 40 | 40 | 40 | 134 | | 101 |
| Yanev I | 2021 | 0 | | | 0 | | | | |
| Yanev II | 2021 | 0 | | | 0 | | | | |
| Petkov | 2021 | 1 | PP, BSP, ITN, DB | 30 | 35 | 35 | 134 | | 104 |

Over time, there have been different models of governance: a model of significant party participation in decision-making process in Stanishev and Oresharski governments, a dominant PM model in Borissov II and III cabinets, and a ministerial model in Petkov's administration (Table 3.3).

Coalition agreements

The coalition agreements in all studied cases were public and included a general policy programme for governance (Table 3.4). Stanishev government had a well-structured coalition agreement and written mechanism for conflict resolution between its three partners – BSP, DPS, and NDSV. Its functioning is considered a negative example of coalition governance as the objective of the partners was rather an access to state resources ensuing corruption (Kolarova and Spirova 2019: 125). Despite the protests in 2008 and 2009, this government did not resign, but BSP got low results in 2009 elections and NDSV could not overcome the 4% required vote.

In 2013, Oresharski cabinet was formed by BSP in a coalition with DPS and supported by PA. The government had five non-party members (at the time of appointment), but the leadership of BSP and of DPS selected them for their loyalty to parties' aims. PM Oresharski was not a party member either. There were tensions between the aspiration of the government to be considered an expert one due to the negative image of a coalition as a result of Stanishev government ruling, and its subordination to influential political actors from the coalition parties that tried to establish control over juridical, economic, and secret services institutions (Interview of Vasilev Ts. on June 21, 2014). The non-transparent negotiations for ruling positions between BSP and DPS further increased the mistrust in government. PA supported the government, but this created uncertainty for its stability, as it was not a part of the governing coalition. The appointment of Delyan Peevski from DPS as a president of the State Agency for National Security marked the beginning of a 405-day protest and undermined the legitimacy of the government. The protests persuaded the parliament to block the appointment of Peevski, but the public mistrust as well as the conflicts between the coalition parties led to the termination of the cabinet and the call of new elections.

After the 2014 elections, the parliament counted eight parties. GERB as the largest political party faced a challenging task to negotiate with various political players to form a government. GERB had 84 seats, falling short of the absolute majority of 121 seats. After negotiations, GERB made two separate coalition agreements – one with RB and another with ABV. The coalition agreements approved four deputy PMs: two from GERB and one from RB and ABV each.

The coalition agreement between GERB and RB defined basic issue priorities for the government and the mechanisms of the decision-making process. A declaration of parliamentary support without direct participation in government was signed between GERB and PF. PF signed it as a requirement of RB to secure parliamentary support for the coalition government and to exclude

Table 3.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Bulgaria coalitions, 2005–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Employment and Services</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Stanishev | 2005 | 9 BSP, 5 NDSV, 3 DPS, 1 Ind. | 18 | 14 DPS, 11 NDSV, 9 BSP | BSP | Ind. | BSP | BSP | BSP |
| Oresharski | 2013 | 9 BSP, 4 DPS, 5 Ind. | 18 | 6 DPS, 4 BSP | Ind. | DPS | BSP | DPS | Ind. |
| Borissov II | 2014 | 13 GERB, 4 RB, 2 ABV, 2 Ind. | 21 | 2 Ind., 1 RB | GERB | GERB | RB | ABV | GERB |
| Borissov III | 2017 | 17 GERB, 4 OP | 21 | 1 GERB | GERB | GERB | GERB | GERB | GERB |
| Petkov | 2021 | 10 PP, 4 BSP, 4 ITN, 3 DB | 21 | 1 PP, 1 DB, 1BSP, 1ITN | PP | PP | ITN | BSP | PP |

Table 3.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Bulgaria, 2005–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Stanishev | 2005 | 147 | 84 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 0 |
| Oresharski | 2013 | 1,369 | 57.9 | 0 | 26.51 | 0 | 15.55 |
| Borissov II | 2014 | 27,250 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 77 |
| Borissov III | 2017 | 32,000 | 7 | 5 | 4.06 | 7 | 72 |
| Petkov | 2021 | 33,000 | 12 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 74 |

any possible parliamentary dependency on DPS. The declaration was signed after some priority issues of PF were included in the programme declaration of GERB and RB.

At the next parliamentary elections in 2017, GERB was the first party again and this time it signed a coalition agreement with the nationalist alliance OP. This brought PM Borissov back to power for his third term since 2009. GERB and OP formed the government with the initial parliamentary support of the newcomer Volya party. Institutionally, the most important decisions, according to the GERB – OP agreement, were to be taken by a Coalition council of six members – the three leaders of the parties of the OP and three leaders from GERB. The government consisted of ministers from the ruling GERB, the two leaders of the junior coalition partner OP and a few ministers considered close to the media mogul Delyan Peevski, parliamentarian from DPS (Interview of Ts. Ts. 1.02.2021). The relationship between GERB and DPS was important as DPS was formally in opposition although it supported prominent decisions of the government and justified this support with the argument that the development of the country required political stability and adoption of EU policies. The critics of the relationship revealed that the support of DPS for the government was honoured by powerful positions for people close to DPS as the minister of finances till 2020 (Interview of Ts. Ts. 1.02.2021 and Interview of Vasilev Ts. on June 21, 2014).

During this period, the political situation in Bulgaria was marked by an ever-growing dissatisfaction of citizens with governments' performance. The key problems were corruption and ineffective anti-corruption measures (Kaufmann et al 2010; Bechev D. 2017; Report 2019: 5ff). The main affected areas were EU funds and public procurement (Kostova 2014b: 103ff.). Borissov concentrated his power over political and economic life, on communication through financially supporting pro-government mass media and on impacting the juridical institutions through influence on state prosecution (Report 2019: 5ff.). This resulted in deep mistrust in politics, parties, and their leaders (Kostova 2016: 336ff.) and led to public protests. After series of inconclusive elections in April and July 2021 and two caretaker governments in 2021, PP won the November 2021 elections. In December 2021, the most diverse coalition, led by PP, was formed uniting left, right, and populist parties. The coalition was stitched together from four parties

across the political spectrum – PP, ITN, BSP, and DB, united by the objective to prevent Borissov to form a government. That goal was not enough to keep partners together. With a razor-thin parliamentary majority and divisions on major policy issues such as the veto to negotiations between North Macedonia and EU, distribution of budget, and leadership of the central bank, the alliance began to fracture. The public opinion polls (<https://www.gallup-international.bg/45839/people-do-not-want-new-elections/>) reveal that people are tired of elections and the prospect of preliminary one may lead to political apathy. The data reveal that electoral turnout has gradually collapsed: 60.2% in 2009, 51.33% in 2013, 48.66% in 2014, 54.07% in 2017, and 40.23% in November 2021.

The results from the latest polls in 2022 show that GERB got the highest result although it is far from getting enough seats to form a government. It remains unclear if GERB leader would be able to obtain the required support of MPs to form a government. He is a divisive figure in Bulgarian politics and it is doubtful if he will convince enough politicians to back him. Similar is the situation of DPS. After Oresharski government, DPS lost its privileged position of potential coalition partner that it enjoyed in the previous decades. Till now neither PP nor BSP and DB consider coalition governance with DPS. As the Bulgarian political scene is fragile, the requirements towards DPS and GERB are rather for exclusion of Peevski and Borissov from powerful positions and then to be considered potential coalition partners. The last three parliamentary elections reveal that a stable coalition government and parliamentary majority are difficult to form without the support of GERB and DPS.

Coalition governance

The role of parties and ministers

Coalition governance is characterized by decision-making process based on institutional principles and signed coalition agreements. The governments consist of PM and ministers with or without portfolio, who are approved by the parliament. The powers of the PM are significant as he/she defines the agenda setting, the procedures for decision-making, has discretion in appointing deputy ministers and exercises control over policies. Also, informal mechanisms were used to negotiate decisions, although the need for transparency is recently recognized and adopted. The Act of Administration (1998) and the Organizational regulations of the Council of Ministers (2009) set the procedural arrangements for the functioning of the Bulgarian cabinets. The Act of Administration introduces the system of political cabinets thus distinguishing between the political and the administrative function in governance. Nevertheless, the political cabinets play a controversial role because, on the one hand, they are supposed to provide cabinet members with analytical and expert information; on the other, they appear to serve as catalyst for informal

political influence. Often, ministers prioritize the interests of political parties as they are appointed by the direct patronage of these parties. The data below (Table 3.5) show that the conflict resolution mechanisms depend on the composition of coalition – from main role in the hands of the PM to defence of parties' interests through compromises between partners.

The negotiations concerning the ministerial positions generally were based on proportional strength of the participating government parties. Leaders of the coalition parties were regularly members of the cabinets. Exceptions were rare as in Oresharski government none of the party leaders joined the cabinet and Stanishev's government involved only BSP leader as PM, while DPS and NDSV leaders participated only in coalition council. Coalition governments of Petkov and Borissov had deputy PMs from each coalition partner party. Stanishev, Oresharski, and Petkov governments had significant influences from the parties' leaderships, while the governments of Borissov were characterized by a decisive role of the PM in achieving compromises with the leaders of coalition partners and opposition parliamentary parties.

Our analyses reveal that the number of parties in coalitions is a significant indicator for successful decision-making process. The proportion of cases of substantial disagreements recorded by the interviewed ministers increased regularly as the number of parties in the coalition increased. The second government of Borissov at the beginning of its formation had significant parliamentary backing. The conflicts between ABV and GERB steadily increased and in 2016 their collaboration ceased, ABV minister left the government, and ABV joined the opposition in the parliament. Frustration developed among the ministers and their parties within the RB as well, as they felt that, despite their broad representative character, their government was less effective and they could not fulfil their political promises. After the first year in government, a minister of the coalition RB resigned as a result of conflicts on judicial reform. In the interview, he revealed that reforms failed to get off the ground, in particular, changes to the justice system and anti-corruption legislation. The comparison between second and third government of Borissov reveals that the conflicts within the coalitions' partners were stronger between 2014 and 2016, because of the split and conflicts in the coalition partner – the RB. As a consequence, Borissov resigned as a tactical move expecting better results in the following elections.

The interviews allow to underline that internal coalition conflicts contribute to but are not a major reason for government termination. An important aspect is the presence of insecure government majorities in parliament. As our data reveal, Borissov II terminated because of the fragility of the coalition, facing conflicts with ABV and divisions within RF that ended in the lack of parliamentary support. Petkov government went through a similar process. The strength of the opposition parties and their voting behaviour towards coalition government policies is worth studying. DPS's role as opposition was substantial for supporting legislation and securing quorum in the parliament during the coalition governments of Borissov. This role

Table 3.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Bulgaria, 2005–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Coalition agreement</i> | <i>Agreement public</i> | <i>Election rule</i> | <i>Conflict management mechanisms</i> | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | | | | <i>All used</i> | <i>Most common</i> | <i>For most serious conflicts</i> |
| Stanishev | 2005 | PRE, POST | Yes | No | CoC, IC, PS | IC, CoC | CoC |
| Oresharski | 2013 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PS | CoC | CoC, PS |
| Borissov II | 2014 | PRE, POST | Yes | No | CoC, IC, PS | CoC, IC | CoC, PS |
| Borissov III | 2017 | PRE, POST | Yes | No | CoC, IC, PS | CoC, IC | CoC |
| Petkov | 2021 | PRE, POST | Yes | No | CoC, IC, PS | CoC, IC, PS | PS |
| <i>Personal union</i> | <i>Issues excluded from agenda</i> | <i>Coalition discipline in legislation/other parl. behaviour</i> | <i>Freedom of appointment</i> | <i>Policy agreement</i> | <i>Junior ministers</i> | <i>Non-cabinet position</i> | |
| No (NDSV, DPS, BSP) | Yes | Most/spec. | Yes | Varied | Yes | Yes | |
| No (BSP, DPS) | Yes | Most/Most | Yes | Varied | No | Yes | |
| No (GERB, RB) | Yes | Most/most | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes | |
| No (GERB, OP) | Yes | Most/most | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes | |
| No (PP, ITN, BSP, DB) | Yes | Most/most | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes | |

Notes:

During periods where the values for the variables remain identical, the first and last applicable cabinets are listed. The last applicable cabinet is right-justified in the coalition column.

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; PRE = pre-election; N = no coalition agreement, PRE, POST = pre- and post-election.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; CaC = cabinet committee; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; Parl = parliamentary leaders; PS = party summit.

Coalition discipline: all = discipline always expected; most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters, spec. = discipline only expected on a few explicitly specified matters, no = no discipline expected.

Policy agreement: few = policy agreement on a few selected policies; varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; comp. = comprehensive policy agreement; no = no explicit agreement.

changed towards the coalition government of Petkov due to Petkov critics of Delyan Peevski who continued to be an MP, regardless of the accusations of corruption practices.

Coalition government in the executive arena

The analysis of Bulgarian coalition governments from 2008 to 2021 suggests that the smooth and professional functioning of the government depends substantially on the experience and leadership style of the PM. While the role of Stanishev, Oresharski, and Petkov was subordinated to the decision of coalition parties' councils, the interviews revealed that PM Borissov was more independent, preparing the decisions with his team in advance to avoid conflicts with the coalition partners and in a case that there was a conflict it could be solved with a compromise. The support of governmental party leaders for the coalition council decision-making process was a contributing factor as well. To have that backing, a balance between parties' priorities and proposed decisions was achieved. Related to the latter was the stable parliamentary support by the governmental parties for the cabinet as an important factor for its functioning. In line with coalition politics, PM Borissov often emphasized the role of the coalition party leaders for the smooth functioning of his third government. These leaders had a long political career, and for all of them, it was clear that compromises are needed in order for the coalition to function smoothly. Governing the country was the most important motive for these leaders to keep the coalition together. And even when PA decided to leave the coalition and the government, the other two parties of the OP continued their collaboration with GERB. This could explain why there were relatively few disagreements in this government compared to the second coalition government of PM Borissov. An additional argument is that there was closer cooperation between ministers and their parties in the third government of Borissov than in the second one.

Governance mechanisms in the parliamentary arena

The data also imply that if there is party discipline, then the support for the government is stable. If the parliamentary support decreases, then the probability that the government will continue its term is low. That is why the role of the political parties that take part in the coalition government is vital as the smooth functioning and stability of the government depends on their support. The interviews also revealed that the backing of non-governmental parties that support the government in parliament has direct implications on government stability. These parties' support guaranteed in this way their parliamentary significance. These were, for instance, PA in Oresharski, PF in Borissov II, and Volya in Borissov III governments. Once they obtained the parliamentary support, Bulgarian coalition governments traditionally centralized the power in their hands. As a result, the policies, budget decisions, and the coordination of the governing process were in the hands of the PM and his close circle. The

dominant role of Borissov in conflict solving tended to show that he had full control of the governance. The interviews revealed that the ministers felt the ‘influence’ of the PM on their decision-making process, backed by the leadership of the governing parties, determined by their needs to be cherished in order the coalition to survive. Being supported by the small Volya party and often by DPS, the government was able to achieve adequate majority support in the parliament. As compensation, allies of the opposition party DPS were getting state-funded projects and GERB gained parliamentary support. Some of the interviewed respondents confirmed this but everyone explained that this would be very hard to prove as all the auctions formally kept to the required rules. The parliamentary backing guaranteed the government its smooth functioning. The Bulgarian case supports the hypothesis that the more effective the government is in sharing state resources the less opposition it has. When the access to state benefits was limited to chosen political, economic, mass media, and judicial allies, as was the case of Bulgaria in the period 2009–2021, the opposition parties’ dissatisfaction and public mistrust grew. This factor united opposition parties against GERB. They claimed that Borissov governments violated the principles of democracy, by corruption and by undermining the rule of law.

Governance mechanisms with different types of actors

Criticizing authoritarian style of Borissov, PP tried to transform coalition governance into transparent scene where each party openly negotiated its priorities. The consequences were somewhat controversial as the mechanisms to implement this idea in this ministerial government proved difficult to apply. The coalition was ideologically heterogeneous, tied together to impede GERB to form a government. Each party had broad autonomy in its ministerial area where it could implement its ideas and although the most important policies were negotiated, numerous outcomes were incoherent with the government’s policy position. In an interview, a minister of Petkov government said that the division of portfolios among the coalition parties granted each minister a dictatorial power over his/her ministry, which ensured party responsibility, but lacked mutual control and the policy output was in some cases inconsistent with broad political goals (Interview D.L. July 1, 2022). This dispersed decision-making process contributed to the low prospect of government survival. Coalition loyalty was respected by partners from PP, BSP, and DB but was neglected by ITN party leadership.

In comparison, the loyalty and coalition partners’ discipline in Borissov governments was strong, especially in his third government, even if ideologically the coalition was incoherent. According to the data in our interviews, this was due to the transfer of coalition policy making from parties to cabinet. It turned in strong governing parties’ discipline, subordinated to government decisions, and signified a transition to less democratic model of governance. Gradually this model was transferred and led to deterioration in juridical and media environment and institutions.

The public protests that started in summer 2020 had strong threat to the smooth functioning of Borissov III government. The President of the Republic supported the protests and Borissov spent much of his third term locked in an institutional war with the President. The two politicians accused each other of leading the country into political crisis. The governing parties rejected the recommendations made by the President to the proposed legislative bills. President Radev for four years made 28 vetoes and only 2 were accepted by the parliament. He backed the protesting groups in 2020 and 2021, accusing the government of corruption practices. The protests were shaking Borissov government but did not achieve the objective of early parliamentary elections. The weak position of Borissov – due to the long protests – made it easier for the coalition partner to achieve some of their political promises thus being compensated for the firm support of the government.

The new parties in Petkov government were inexperienced but innovative enough to take the lead. The coalition of the four parties formed in 2021 was heterogeneous. Moreover, three of the parties – PP, ITN, and DB – were for the first time in government. The parliamentary support of coalition partners was unstable, the parliamentary disagreements burdened the smooth functioning of the government and often the various parties' interests allowed to block the decision-making. Strategic visions from the government could hardly be accepted in the parliament due to the firm objection of opposition parties GERB, DPS, and Revival. For GERB and DPS as experienced parties it was easy to manipulate parliamentary procedures and decisions. Petkov government had to manage and adapt to the everyday political environment and conflicts and global crises. There were also the difficult coalition relations and the accusations to the prime minister of not taking consideration of coalition partners' proposals and undertaking decisions without their consultation and approval that had the most important effect on the coalition relations and termination of the government. Conflicts between coalition partners could not be resolved informally as PP had promised transparency. Methods to improve transparency reached a level that brought all the conflicts in front of the public. This negatively impacted the trust between coalition partners and contributed to the termination of the cabinet.

Cabinet duration and termination

Parliamentary parties' discipline

Our interviews suggest that the studied coalition governments broke down because parties' individual ambitions and interests mattered more than achieving consensual state policies. There were only two full-term governments in the studied period – Stanishev and Boris III, which illustrates the fragility of coalitions (Table 3.6). This instability is due also to the weak institutional capacity and limited coping mechanisms that has narrowed the adoption of policies of improvements or, when accepted, they have been poorly implemented, amplifying the problem of a common devoid of governance (Fukuyama, Political Order).

Table 3.6 Cabinet termination in Bulgaria, 2005–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Stanishev | 96.7 | 1 | 10 | | | |
| Borissov I | 87.2 | 4, 9 | 11 | | | Public protests erupted in early 2013 throughout the country mostly focused on high energy prices, the monopoly over energy provision, and other social concerns. Following some violent clashes with the police, Borissov submitted the resignation of the Cabinet in February 2013. |
| Raykov | 100 | 2 | | | | |
| Oresharski | 29.2 | 4, 7a | 11, 13 | | | Public protests against Oresharski cabinet continued for a year. European Parliament elections on May 12, 2014, showed a dramatic decrease in the support of the leading coalition party (BSP) and the supporting party (ATAKA). The small coalition partner (DPS), which almost doubled its results, demanded early elections obviously intending to play a swing-party role in the next parliament. BSP had no means to oppose DPS as a banking crisis erupted, allegedly caused by a disreputable DPS politician. The PM regardless of being a BSP nominee took the DPS side and early elections became inevitable. |
| Bliznashki | 100 | 2 | | | | |
| Borissov II | 55.6 | 4 | 10 | | | Public protests |
| Gerdzhikov | 100 | 2 | | | | |
| Borissov III | 98 | 4 | 10 | | | Public protests |
| Yanev I | 100 | 2 | | | | |
| Yanev II | 100 | 2 | | | | |
| Petkov | 15 | 6 | 10 | | | No-confidence vote |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of prime minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event.

The governments of Oresharski, Boris II, and Petkov were prematurely terminated. Oresharski tried to present the cabinet as technocratic, not as a coalition one. In reality the coalition partners' decisions about the cabinet actually mattered. After the EP elections in 2014, DPS expected success in parliamentary elections and voted for the termination of Oresharski government. Borissov II ended due to the instability of the coalition itself. A dismissal of the Speaker of the parliament was the first sign of the erosion of the parliamentary majority in Petkov government and resulted in a vote of no confidence for the government. Besides these political considerations, the public unrests contributed to the termination of Oresharski and Borissov II governments.

Stanishev government relied on party discipline, the governing parties' parliamentary support for the decisions made by the leaders of the coalition parties. Oresharski had been hampered by the nature of coalition government with narrow majorities and constant public protests since the elections in May 2013. In comparison, the two coalition governments led by Borissov were more stable and Borissov III (2017–2021) completed its mandate. The opposition parties periodically ensued reports of high levels of corruption during Borissov II and III but they could not force government termination. Borissov applied not only different approaches as compromises with coalition partners, negotiations with some of the opposition parties, management of support for the government by the small parliamentary parties that felt threatened if new elections were to be held, changes in ministers of the government, but also challenges to the democratic patterns through mass media and state prosecution arrangements as delay of investigations on corruption cases and media, financially supported by the state, to present PM as a problem solver, who could successfully negotiate the requests of protesting groups.

Parliamentary parties' interests

In the case of his second government, PM Borissov took a tactical decision to resign as a consequence of the decreased and unstable parliamentary parties' support and their failure to cooperate. His coalition partner, RB, was an ally of parties and within the process of governing they had conflicting opinions about the reforms and their pace. The contradictions were between Movement Bulgaria for Citizens (MBC) and DSB, whose expectations from GERB were not met. In 2015, DSB went into opposition, while MBC and SDS remained in governing coalition. Similarly, the relations with other parties, supporting the government, without being part of it – PF – consisting of two nationalistic parties, VMRO-BND and NFSB, did not develop smoothly expressing concerns for the needed reforms by the government. The political influence of Party Ataka decreased and this was obvious during the 2015 local elections when it lost almost a third of its supporters. This fact defined its willingness to approve the resignation of the government, expecting to ally with nationalistic parties in the coming elections for better results.

In the case of Petkov government, the four parties aimed to change the political model in Bulgaria and oust GERB and its leader Borissov from governing positions. In an interview, an influential member of PP revealed his expectations for a positive result with continuous efforts over a substantial time period (Interview D.L. July 1, 2022). Instead, the duration of PP first government attempt was very short and could not master the coalition governance challenges. From one side, the coalition, from which PP was for the first time in parliament and ITN and DB for the first time in government, faced incapacity to negotiate their objectives within their own coalition. From another side, Petkov government got destructive response from influential economic actors, supporting the decisive political role of GERB and DPS (Interview with A.V., August 15, 2022). Petkov government dealt with demanding challenges not only at international level – the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, and the growing inflation – but also at national level, where its coalition partners have different, often partially conflicting, policy preferences and where the parliamentary opposition does not seem to be prone to cooperation to respond to the international crises. The inability of the government to cope with these problems and its inter-coalition conflicts made the governing controversial and fragile and played the decisive role for its termination on June 22, 2022. It was the first government in Bulgarian history to lose a vote of confidence.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at how coalition governance is shaped by political parties, the PMs, and the partners' ability to compromise. The data and analyses indicated that even if the provision of political compromise is self-evidently necessary for encouraging coalition governance, it might not by itself be sufficient. Coalition governance is likely to be influenced by the nature of the parties' composition, the degree of their responsiveness to parties and state priorities, their strength to negotiate and to balance between keeping to their ideologies and the compromises they make to remain in power. Even when parties' support is available, obtaining it in a competitive environment involves costs of its own, specifically in the periods of crisis. In insecure times, the role of political experience becomes critical especially if there is a constant process of newly emerging political parties that need time to get political knowledge and practice. Besides GERB, BSP, and DPS, the other parties are relatively new and this aspect contributes to the lack of sufficient political experience and professional development in their cadres. The newly formed parties come to power due to the dissatisfaction of people from GERB governance as corrupted. Since 2020, there is a trend of generational change with young people participating actively in party formation and governance. To overcome the institutional mistrust of people, the emerging parties try to incorporate people in the dialogue between parties making it transparent and public.

Since 2008, there is a tendency of increased centralization of the power around the prime minister and the leaders of the governmental parties who

are in the core of defining political priorities and the decision-making process. More, the administration is rearranged with each political change of power and that makes its members loyal to the people in power rather than to the administrative rules. The uncertain times of pandemic, war in Ukraine, inflation and energy crises, and the need for adequate decision-making further increase the importance of the PM, as he is the one responsible for governing the crises and negotiating them through permanent contacts with his colleagues in the EU. This further strengthens the role of the PM.

The art of political negotiations is a significant element of coalition culture. Bulgarian coalition governance is an illustration of how to make compromises rather than how to achieve consensus. When there is an excessive fluctuation of governing parties, the decision-making process is often ineffective due to the lack of experience and non-professional reaction to significant state matters. This leads to incompetent decisions that further burden the coalition relations. Studied coalition governments try to fulfil a few of their parties' promises to succeed in the next election. They struggle to solve day-to-day issues and rarely propose solutions that go on beyond their time on power. This contributes to fragile coalition governance in Bulgaria. The ideal high levels of political stability and democracy are still an ambition as the establishment of democracy is a slow process and the political institutions are weak.

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|------|---|
| BSP | Bulgarian Socialist Party/Coalition for Bulgaria (Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya/Koalitsiya za Bulgaria) |
| PA | Party Attack (Partiya Ataka) |
| EL | Euroleft Coalition (Koaliciya Bulgarska Evrolevica) |
| BBB | Bulgarian Business Bloc (Balgarski Biznes Blok) |
| DPS | Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi) |
| NI | New Choice (Nov Izbor) |
| RZS | Order, Lawfulness, Justice (Red Zakonnost Spravedlivost) |
| BZNS | Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (Balgarski Zemedelski Naroden Sayuz) |
| BNS | Bulgarian National Union (Balgarski Naroden Sayuz) |
| NS | People's Union (Naroden Sayuz) |
| NDSV | National Movement Simeon II (Natsionalno Dvizhenie Simeon Vtori) |
| NV | New Time (Novoto Vreme) |
| GERB | Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Bulgaria) |
| SDS | Union of Democratic Forces (Sayuz na demokratichnite sili) |
| SK | Blue Coalition (Sinyata koalitsia) |
| DSB | Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (Demokrati za Silna Balmariya) |
| ABV | Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (Alternativa za balgarsko vazrazhdane) |
| RB | Reformist Bloc (Reformatorski blok) |
| PF | Patriotic Front (Patriotichen Front) |
| BBC | Bulgaria without Censorship (Balgaria bez cenzura) |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Volya | Volya (Volya) |
| OP | United Patriots (Obedineni patrioti) |
| VMRO-BND | VMRO-Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO-Balgarsko Nazionalno Dvizhenie) |
| NFSB | National Front for Saving Bulgaria (Natsionalen front za spasenie na Balgariya) |
| DB | Democratic Bulgaria (Demokratichna Balgariya) |
| DA Bulgaria | Yes Bulgaria (Da Balgariya) |
| IBG-NI | Stand Up.BG! We are coming! (Izpravi se.BG! Nie idvame!) |
| ITN | There is Such a People (Ima takav narod) |
| Revival | Revival (Vazrazhdane) |
| PP | We Continue the Change (Prodalzhavame Promyanata) |
| ABV | Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (Alternativa za Balgarsko Vazrazhdane) |
| ZD | The Green Movement (Zeleno Dvizhenie), 2019– The Greens (Zelenite), 2008–2019 |
| DBG | Movement Bulgaria to Citizens (Dvizhenie Balgaria na Grazhdanite) |
| NPSD | People Party Freedom and Dignity (Narodna Partiq Svoboda I Dostojnstvo) |
| D21 | Movement 21 (Dvizhenie 21) |
| VOLT | Volt (Volt) |
| SEK | Middle European Class (Sredna Evropejska Klasa) |
| PDSB | Political Movement ‘Social Democrats’ (Politicheskoto Dvizhenie ‘Socialni Demokrati’) |
| DROM | Roma Party DROM |
| SSD | Union of Free Democrats (Sayuz na Svobodnite Demokrati) |
| BKP | Communist Party of Bulgaria (Bulgarska Komunisticheska Partia) |

Note:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Bulgarian in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

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4 Regularity and Instability

Coalition Governments in Czechia 2008–2022

Petra Guasti and Zdenka Mansfeldova

Introduction

Between 2008 and 2022, coalition formation in Czechia was marked by both regularity and instability – four parliamentary elections were held, but altogether nine governments emerged. Only two governments remained in office for a full term (Sobotka and Babiš II). The instability is perhaps best exemplified by the re-emergence of caretaker governments (Fischer in 2009 and Rusnok in 2013) and frequent no-confidence votes. As a result, the Czech coalition governments remain weak and unstable.

The main cause of instability seems to lie in the party system's fragmentation and the presence of permanent opposition. Three new anti-establishment party families emerged in the period under study – radical right (ÚSVIT/SPD), populists (ANO), and the new centre-left Czech Pirate Party (Pirates). After the 2017 elections, 64 per cent of MPs in the Chamber of Deputies belonged to the new anti-establishment parties (Guasti 2020a). The electorally most successful ANO experienced a meteoric rise – from a junior partner in the Sobotka government to a senior partner in the Babiš II cabinet (Bustikova and Guasti 2019) before being replaced in 2021 by a coalition dominated by the established parties.

Until 2021, permanent opposition parties were located on two extremes of the party spectrum – the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) on the left, and the radical right Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚSVIT)/Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)¹ on the right. The presence of permanent opposition impeded the formation of stable and ideologically coherent cabinets. As of early 2022, only the radical right SPD remains in parliament; KSCM did not cross the 5 per cent threshold in the 2021 elections. On the left, populist Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) has eliminated its ideologically proximate competitors. KSCM and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) have suffered demise as ANO's coalition partner (ČSSD) and informal supporter (KSCM).

Coalition negotiations and coalition agreements are key in determining the policy agenda of governments, assigning ministerial portfolios, and establishing coalition conflict management bodies. Party system fragmentation shapes

cabinet formation by increasing the bargaining power of junior partners. As a result, junior partners mostly receive a proportionally higher number of government seats than their share of parliamentary seats and successfully bargain for key ministerial portfolios. Failure to coordinate and resolve internal cabinet tensions leads to government termination. As for the overall governance pattern, between 2008 and 2022, Czechia went a full circle – shifting from a *Coalition Compromise Model* based on inter-party compromise and negotiation to a close to (albeit not full) *Dominant Prime Minister Model* under Babiš II and back to Coalition Compromise Model under the current Prime Minister Fiala (cf. Bergman et al 2019). Nevertheless, coalition governments remain unstable due to the prevailing short-term calculus of political actors.

The institutional setting

Czechia is a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral parliament (Chamber of Deputies and Senat), a multiparty system, and a directly elected President.² Constitutionally, the prime minister is the country's leading political figure, and the President is a ceremonial head of state.³ However, the current President Zeman transformed his formal power of appointing ministers into a *de facto* veto power. As a result, successive prime ministers – Sobotka, Babiš, and Fiala – had to informally negotiate ministerial appointments with the President. Several standoffs ensued between 2013 and 2021. Upon President's critique, Sobotka and Babiš withdrew candidates. On the other hand, Fiala succeeded by deploying a mixture of diplomacy and the threat of jurisdictional action.

The institutional power struggle has impacted many cabinet formations (see Table 4.1a).

During Sobotka's government (2014–2017), the President exercised the most significant influence over ministerial appointments, even refusing to appoint ministers. Most importantly, in May 2017, the President refused to dismiss his ally Babiš, Minister of Finance and leader of the junior government party, upon Sobotka's request.

The President-Prime Minister alliance gave Babiš two attempts at forming the government after the 2017 elections. When the first attempt at forming a government of ANO and non-partisan experts failed to win the investiture vote, Zeman reappointed Babiš while exercising strong pressure on ČSSD to join the government as a junior partner (Guasti 2020b). In 2018, the President was instrumental in negotiating KSCM support for the Babiš II minority government. President appointed all ANO ministers (Babiš sought President's approval in advance) but rejected the ČSSD candidate for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Instead, the new ČSSD leader Jan Hamáček asked for approval of his ministerial proposals.

Parliamentary oversight is cumbersome, and its dynamics are tenuous – depending on the strength of the government and internal tensions between the coalition partners. A Conflict of Interest Law case during Sobotka's tenure

Table 4.1a Czech cabinets 1992–2021

| Cabinet number | Cabinet | Date in | Election date | Party composition of the cabinet | Type of cabinet | Cabinet strength in seats (%) | Number of seats in parliament | Number of parties in parliament | ENP, parliament | Formal support parties |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Klaus I | 1992-07-02 | 1992-06-06 | ODS, KDU-ČSL, ODA, KDS | mwc | 105 (52.5) | 200 | 9 | 5.71 | |
| 2 | Klaus II | 1996-07-04 | 1996-06-01 | ODS, KDU-ČSL, ODA | min | 99 (49.5) | 200 | 6 | 4.15 | ČSSD |
| 3 | Tošovský ^{b,c} | 1998-01-02 | | KDU-ČSL, ODS/US (US-DEU)*, ODA | min | 62 (31) | 200 | 7 | 5.71 | |
| 4 | Zeman | 1998-07-22 | 1998-06-20 | ČSSD | min | 74 (37) | 200 | 5 | 3.71 | ODS |
| 5 | Špidla | 2002-07-15 | 2002-06-15 | ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US (US-DEU) | mwc | 101 (50.5) | 200 | 5 | 3.81 | |
| 6 | Gross I | 2004-08-04 | | ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US (US-DEU) | mwc | 101 (50.5) | 200 | 5 | 3.81 | |
| 7 | Gross II | 2005-03-30 | | ČSSD, US (US-DEU) | min | 80 (40) | 200 | 5 | 3.81 | |
| 8 | Paroubek | 2005-04-25 | | ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US (US-DEU) | mwc | 101 (50.5) | 200 | 5 | 3.81 | |
| 9 | Topolánek I | 2006-09-04 | 2006-06-03 | ODS | min | 81 (40.5) | 200 | 5 | 3.1 | |
| 10 | Topolánek II | 2007-01-09 | | ODS, KDU-ČSL, SZ | min | 100 (50) | 200 | 5 | 3.1 | |
| 11 | Fischer ^{a,b,c} | 2009-05-08 | | ČSSD, ODS, SZ | sur | 153 (76.5) | 200 | 5 | 3.32 | ODS, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, SZ |
| 12 | Nečas I | 2010-07-13 | 2010-05-29 | ODS, TOP 09, VV | mwc | 118 (59) | 200 | 5 | 4.51 | |
| 13 | Nečas II | 2012-04-27 | | ODS, TOP 09, LIDEM | min | 100 (50) | 200 | 6 | 4.91 | |
| 14 | Rusnok ^{a,b,c} | 2013-07-10 | | non-partisan, KDU-ČSL | non | | 200 | 6 | 4.91 | |
| 15 | Sobotka | 2014-01-29 | 2013-10-26 | ČSSD, ANO 2011, KDU-ČSL | mwc | 111 (55.5) | 200 | 7 | 5.62 | |
| 16 | Babiš I | 2017-12-13 | 2017-10-21 | ANO 2011 | min | 78 (39) | 200 | 9 | 4.81 | |
| 17 | Babiš II | 2018-06-27 | | ANO 2011, ČSSD | min | 93 (46.5) | 200 | 9 | 4.81 | KSČM |
| 18 | Fiala | 2021-12-17 | 2021-10-09 | ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, Pirates, STAN | Sur | 108 (54) | 200 | 7 | 4.67 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has been formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition; non = non-partisan.

^a Technocrat minister majority.

^b Technocrat prime minister.

^c Limited policy remit.

* Since 1998-01-22.

(2014–2017) exemplifies this. The law sought to prevent ownership of media by ministers, and companies owned by ministers from receiving state funding. The bill put a significant wedge between the governing coalition partners, and no ANO MP supported the bill – perceived as targeting ANO Chairman Babiš. Nevertheless, in January 2017, the bill received a constitutional majority – parties from both the government coalition and the opposition all supported the bill and later overruled the presidential veto. The Constitutional Court upheld the law (Guasti 2020a).

Babiš perceived parliamentary oversight and deliberation as impeding effective governance. However, it was perhaps not effective parliamentary oversight that constrained the Babiš's II government, but rather its lack of parliamentary majority and internal divisions. Babiš's minority government often relied on KSCM to support its legislation and shape agenda setting in the parliament (Guasti 2020b). Based on the 'tolerance agreement' between ANO and KSCM, the support for each bill was negotiated individually between the prime minister and KSCM leadership – outside the regular channels (parliamentary committees). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Babiš II cabinet attempted to pass some laws that would benefit the PM, but the unified opposition, including the KSCM, prevented this (Guasti 2020a).

The party system and the actors

Party system change

After the transition from communism in the early 1990s, the Czech party system stabilized quickly, and the structures of political parties consolidated (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Kostecky 2002). Over time, fragmentation ensued, but the traditional left-right lines of conflict remained dominant for most of the period under review. However, in the 2017 and 2021 elections, we can observe the growing importance of the GAL/TAN dimension (see [Table 4.1b](#)).

After every subsequent election in 2010, 2013, and 2017, the political situation was marked by a continuous struggle between a weak coalition government and a divided opposition. In addition, governments faced growing internal divisions among and within the coalition parties (Guasti and Mansfeldova 2018).

In terms of absolute number of parties, fragmentation doubled between 2010 and 2019. In 2013, seven parties entered parliament; in 2017, it was nine (see [Table 4.1a](#)). In the 2021 elections, the fragmentation decreased somewhat – only seven parties are now represented in the Chamber of Deputies.

As of 2021, the Czech party landscape has only one dominant party – ANO, with relatively stable support at about 25–30 per cent. On the left, ČSSD and KSCM are no longer present in the parliament. Their voters shifted to ANO (seniors) and the Pirates (younger and urban voters). On the right, fragmented liberal and conservative parties formed a five-party coalition government around two pre-electoral coalitions – conservative and liberal (see also below).

Table 4.1b Czechia system conflict structure 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 10 | Topolánek II | SZ, ČSSD | Econ. left-right | ODS | |
| 11 | Fischer | ČSSD | Econ. left-right | ODS | |
| 12 | Nečas I | VV | Econ. left-right | ODS | |
| 13 | Nečas II | LIDEM | Econ. left-right | ODS | |
| 14 | Rusnok | LIDEM | Econ. left-right | ODS | |
| 15 | Sobotka | ANO 2011 | Econ. left-right | KSCM | |
| 16 | Babiš I | ANO 2011 | Econ. left-right | ANO 2011 | GAL-TAN |
| 17 | Babiš II | ANO 2011 | Econ. left-right | ANO 2011 | GAL-TAN |
| 18 | Fiala | KDU-ČSL | Econ. left-right | ANO 2011 | GAL-TAN |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2007–2014 (cabinets 10–15) retrieved from Bergman et al. (2019).

Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions

The political parties have occasionally tried to increase their electoral prospects by forming pre-electoral coalitions. In the period under analysis, there have been four pre-electoral coalitions (see Table 4.1c): one in the 2010 and one in the 2013 elections, and both Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP09) with Mayors and Independents (STAN). In the last election in 2021, there were two pre-electoral coalitions; Together (SPOLU), which consisted of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), TOP09, and Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak Peoples’ Party (KDU-ČSL) and PirSTAN (Pirates and STAN). Pre-election coalitions usually focus on elections and parliamentary cooperation but do not automatically translate into a coalition government.

The higher threshold for alliances in the electoral system was an important explanatory factor for the rare occurrence of pre-electoral coalitions. Until May 2021, the electoral threshold was cumulative – 5 per cent for

Table 4.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Czechia, 2006–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|---|
| 2010-05-29 | TOP09, STAN | EA, PEC | Written contract, Joint press conference |
| 2013-10-26 | TOP09, STAN | EA, PEC | Written contract, Joint press conference |
| 2021-10-09 | ODS, TOP09, KDU-ČSL | EA, PEC | Written contract, Joint press conference |
| | Pirates, STAN | EA, PEC | Written contract, Joint press conference, separate declarations |

Notes:

Type: electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

single parties, 10 per cent for a two-party alliance, 15 per cent for a three-party alliance, and 20 per cent for a coalition of four or more parties. In May 2021, Constitutional Court eliminated the cumulative threshold for coalitions. The new electoral law adopted in the summer of 2021 reduced the threshold for two-member coalitions to 8 per cent and multi-member coalitions to 11 per cent. The new electoral law was in place for the 2021 parliamentary elections.

Government formation

The bargaining process

Between 2008 and 2022, Czechia had nine cabinets (see [Tables 4.1a](#) and [4.2](#)). One cabinet was formed as a single-party minority government (Babiš I.), six were coalition governments (Topolánek II, Nečas I and II, Sobotka, Babiš II, Fiala), one caretaker government (Fischer), and one interim non-partisan cabinet (Rusnok).

The bargaining process depends on the election outcomes – the strength of the dominant party, the number, and the strengths of the (potential) coalition partners. Nevertheless, [Table 4.2](#) illustrates that the bargaining process is mostly brief, except for the Topolánek II, Sobotka, and Babiš II cabinets.

Between 2008 and 2022, two dominant parties, ODS and ČSSD, which had long determined the formation of the governing coalition weakened significantly. After the 2010 elections, two of the five parties represented in the Czech parliament were new, and the position of the two previously dominant parties (ODS and ČSSD) weakened significantly.⁴ Despite this, after a relatively short bargaining round (six weeks), the appointed Prime Minister Nečas succeeded in forming a coalition government. The Nečas cabinet had the largest legislative majority in the history of Czechia (118 of the 200 seats; 59 per cent). As a senior partner, ODS formed the coalition with two junior partners – programmatically close TOP09 and ideologically fluid populist Public Affairs (VV). PM Nečas cabinet sought to manage the financial crisis by focusing on fiscal austerity and anti-corruption (Linek 2012). However, the unprecedented situation of a comfortable parliamentary majority was soon overshadowed by many problems leading to the coalition's disintegration and the Nečas II cabinet's formation, which ended prematurely due to personal scandals. In 2021 PM Fiala successfully formed a five-party coalition of ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, Pirates and STAN with a comfortable 108 votes majority.

Historically, the KSČM and, since 2013, the populist radical right SPD were considered 'permanent opposition'. Due to their radical positions, they were not perceived as a potential coalition partner. The permanent exclusion from coalition negotiations resulted in narrow and unstable parliamentary majorities (Guasti and Mansfeldova 2018; Mansfeldova and Lacina 2019).

Table 4.2 Government formation period in Czechia, 2007–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses) | | |
|--------------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Topolánek II | 2007 | 1 | ODS, KDU-ČSL, SZ | 21 | 98 | 214 | 100 | 1 | 97 |
| | | | ODS, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, SZ | 43 | | | | | |
| Fischer | 2009 | 0 | ČSSD, ODS, SZ | 29 | 45 | 29 | 156 | 0 | 38 |
| Nečas I | 2010 | 0 | ODS, TOP 09, VV | 39 | 45 | 39 | 118 | 0 | 82 |
| Nečas II | 2012 | 0 | ODS, TOP 09, LIDEM | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Rusnok | 2013 | 0 | | | 23 | | 93 | 7 | 100 |
| Sobotka | 2014 | 0 | ČSSD, ANO 2011, KDU-ČSL | 57 | 169 | 57 | 110 | 33 | 38 |
| Babiš I | 2017 | 0 | ANO 2011 | 42 | 53 | 42 | 78 | 0 | 117 |
| Babiš II | 2018 | 0 | ANO 2011, ČSSD | 174 | 154 | 174 | 105 | 0 | 91 |
| Fiala | 2021 | 0 | ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, Pirates, STAN | 93 | 69 | 93 | 106 | 0 | 87 |

Under these conditions, coalition formation tended to focus less on the ideological distance between possible coalition partners – resulting in ideologically heterogeneous coalitions negotiating policy consensus.

A party's willingness to join a coalition depends on its prospective coalition partners and the alternative coalition it could form (Indridason 2011). In Czechia, over time, the party competition model has shifted from an initial focus on the traditional left-right cleavage to a less ideologically defined model (Linek and Petrušek 2020).

Coalition bargaining has been typically brief, with one exception. After the 2017 elections, Babiš attempted to form a minority single-party government but failed to win the investiture vote. However, because of the presidential appointment, Babiš I constitutionally was in power. The President also tasked Babiš with forming the next government. Babiš II consisted of a minority coalition government with the support of the KSČM.

The formation of three subsequent cabinets (Sobotka, Babiš I, and Babiš II) was marked by the participation of a new populist party, ANO. Simultaneously, the ČSSD went through internal conflicts⁵ as well as conflicts with the former party Chairman and later President Zeman. Furthermore, the 2013 election did not produce a clear political majority. After seven weeks of negotiations, the ČSSD formed a majority coalition government with ANO and KDU-ČSL. The time between elections and the PM Sobotka cabinet appointment reached 95 days, while 57 days passed between the initiation of coalition bargaining and the signing of the coalition agreement. This was due to ČSSD-internal problems, tough negotiations concerning seat ratio and portfolio allocation, and President Zeman's interventions in ministerial nominations.

As was the case in 2013, the outcome of the 2017 elections made cabinet formation even more difficult. ANO won 78 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, while ČSSD won only 15 seats. Simultaneously, two new parties entered the parliament – Pirates (Piráti) and a new iteration of the radical right – Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). The President appointed Babiš to form a government. However, the coalition bargaining process was tenuous not because of programmatic and ideological differences but because almost no party was willing to bargain with Babiš due to an EU subsidy fraud investigation by the European Anti-Fraud Office and the Czech authorities (Bustikova and Guasti 2019).

All mainstream parties refused to enter the bargaining process with ANO as long as Babiš led it. This situation might have represented a window of opportunity for the 'permanent opposition', except that they could not provide separately enough votes for the investiture (KSČM had 15 MPs, SPD 19). Moreover, the ideological differences between the radical right SPD and the radical left KSČM prevented agreement on policies among ANO, SPD, and KSČM if the coalition included both. Subsequently, Babiš formed a single-party minority cabinet led by ANO and non-partisan experts, but as mentioned, it failed to win an investiture vote.

The President reappointed Babiš for a second attempt, and second coalition negotiations ensued. ČSSD hesitated for a long time to join the Babiš II cabinet. However, the sustained pressure from the President, a leadership change, hard bargaining, and an internal party referendum led to a coalition formation of Babiš II cabinet. ČSSD successfully bargained for an increased number of cabinet seats (from four to five) and a key portfolio (Interior Ministry for the new ČSSD chairman). However, ANO and ČSSD coalition had only 93 votes (46.5 per cent) and needed further support. The KSČM provided it with its further 15 votes (7.5 per cent). The Babiš II depended on KSČM for external support in the investiture vote, controlling a small majority of 108 of the 200 seats (54 per cent). Interestingly, the support for the government was only negotiated between ANO and KSČM because the ČSSD was still prohibited from forming a coalition with the KSČM at the national level. In April 2021, the KSČM terminated its support due to the government's non-compliance with parts of the coalition agreement.

The 2021 parliamentary elections and the government formation took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and the President's hospitalization. ANO won the most seats – 72 (36 per cent). The two electoral coalitions, SPOLU and PirSTAN, won 108 (54%) seats and signed a memorandum to form a majority government on the night of the election. At first, the President tried to appoint Babiš as the leader of the strongest party to form a government. However, after it became clear that coalition bargaining would be futile, ANO's leader withdrew from consideration. Subsequently, the President appointed ODS Chairman Petr Fiala (from the SPOLU alliance) to form a government.

The five-party cabinet was formed relatively swiftly, with ODS gaining the PM position and the leaders of the remaining four parties becoming deputy PMs. Internal divisions somewhat hampered coalition negotiations within PirSTAN, stemming from the electoral outcome that saw STAN gaining a high number of parliamentary seats through preferential voting at the expense of Pirates. After initial hesitation, and after via intra-party online voting, the Pirates also joined the government.

The composition and size of the cabinets

During the formation phase, the President appoints the prime minister and then, on his proposal, appoints other members of the government and entrusts them with the management of ministries or other offices. The appointed government must then ask the Chamber of Deputies for a vote of confidence within 30 days. Finally, the minister is appointed and dismissed from office by the head of state on the proposal of the prime minister. In a parliamentary system, it is more of a ceremonial right; however, over time, presidential interventions in cabinet formation and portfolio allocation became an important feature of the Czech coalition formation process. While also previous

Presidents (Havel, Klaus) intervened in government formation and portfolio allocation, none of them was a veto player like President Zeman.

From 2008 to 2022, the cabinet size ranged from 15 to 18 members. The higher number of government members compared to the number of portfolios is due to deputy PMs who do not manage any portfolio or so-called ministers without portfolios. Ministers without a portfolio are responsible for a specific agenda, such as the chairman of the Government's Legislative Council or the Head of a Government office. Assigning a unique portfolio to one of the ministers or deputy PMs can signal the importance of a particular issue to a given cabinet but is often the result of coalition bargaining (Mansfeldova and Lacina 2019).

In addition to the size of the cabinet, the ministerial turnover is also important. The Nečas II cabinets had the highest number of changes, but the Babiš II had some of the shortest serving ministers. During the three years of the Nečas cabinets, 28 persons served in the 17 ministerial posts. In the Babiš II cabinet, 24 persons served in 14 ministerial posts.

The allocation of the ministerial portfolios

The allocation of ministerial portfolios was and still is an important part of the coalition bargaining process. The cabinet posts are rarely proportional to the size of electoral gains. The lengthier the coalition bargaining process, the more junior partners benefit – in terms of acquired portfolios. For example, in the Topolánek II cabinet, the Green Party (SZ) received 4 out of 18 cabinet seats, even if it got only six mandates in the Chamber of Deputies. In Nečas I cabinet, VV received the same ministerial positions as the second strongest party, TOP09 (Mansfeldova and Lacina 2019). In the Fiala cabinet, the smallest member of the five-party coalition, Pirates, won only four mandates in the Chamber of Deputies but gained three ministerial posts. Table 4.3 shows the outcome of bargaining over five portfolios, often cross-nationally seen as the most important.

In Czechia, the senior partner was usually interested in controlling the following key ministries: Finance, Interior, Defence, Foreign Affairs, and in the last two cabinets, also Justice. However, junior partners often make specific demands for portfolio allocation, making some portfolios the critical condition for entering the coalition. For example, in the Nečas I cabinet, VV demanded the Ministry of Interior, historically held by the senior government partner.

The importance of small parties in coalition formation and their disproportional bargaining power was also demonstrated after the 2013 election when ČSSD, ANO, and KDU-ČSL formed a coalition (parliamentary seat ratio 50:47:14). Both ČSSD and ANO aspired for two positions: prime minister and Minister of Finance (MF). The bargaining process resulted in the prime minister position going to the ČSSD and the MF to ANO. Subsequently, negotiations with the smallest coalition partner KDU-ČSL took place. KDU-ČSL rejected

Table 4.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Czech coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Labour and Social Affairs</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Topolánek II | 2007 | 9 ODS, 5 KDU-ČSL, 4 SZ | 18 | | 16 | ODS | KDU-ČSL | SZ | ODS | ODS |
| Fischer | 2009 | 8 ČSSD, 6 ODS, 2 SZ, 1 Ind. | 15 | | 14 | Ind. | ODS | ČSSD | ČSSD | ČSSD |
| Nečas I | 2010 | 7 ODS, 5 TOP 09, 5 VV | 17 | | 15 | ODS | TOP 09 | TOP 09 | TOP 09 | VV |
| Nečas II | 2012 | 6 ODS, 5 TOP 09, 4 LIDEM, 2 Ind. | 17 | | 15 | ODS | TOP 09 | TOP 09 | TOP 09 | Ind. |
| Sobotka | 2014 | 8 ČSSD, 6 ANO 2011, 3 KDU-ČSL | 17 | | 15 | ČSSD | ANO 2011 | ČSSD | ČSSD | ČSSD |
| Babiš II | 2018 | 10 ANO 2011, 5 ČSSD | 15 | | 15 | ANO 2011 | ANO 2011 | ČSSD | ČSSD | ČSSD |
| Fiala | 2021 | 6 ODS, 4 STAN, 3 KDU-ČSL, 3 Pirates, 2 TOP 09 | 18 | | 14 | ODS | ODS | Pirates | KDU-ČSL | STAN |

the initial distribution of cabinet seats among the coalition partners (8:7:2), drew a hard bargain, and received three cabinet seats (Mansfeldova and Lacina 2019). Similarly, in Babiš II cabinet, ČSSD significantly out-bargained its parliamentary mandate reaching a portfolio allocation of 9:5, whilst holding only 15 parliamentary mandates. In the current Fiala cabinet, portfolio allocation between the five coalition partners was even more complicated. ODS won 31 per cent of the 108 parliamentary seats, STAN 31 per cent, KDU-ČSL 21 per cent, TOP09 13 per cent, and Pirates 4 per cent. The negotiation resulted in a ratio of 4:4:3:3:3, with the ODS additionally holding the PM in the 17-member cabinet.

The Minister of Finance – a portfolio second only to the prime minister – is usually the primary interest of the senior coalition partner. However, the junior partner obtained this portfolio in four of the nine governments analysed. For example, in the Topolánek II, the Minister of Finance went to the KDU-ČSL; the Nečas I and II cabinets went to the TOP09.⁶ In the Sobotka cabinet, ANO held this portfolio. In Babiš II and Fiala cabinets, the senior partner kept the portfolio (ANO and ODS, respectively). In exchange, the junior partners in both cabinets were awarded two other key portfolios – the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Portfolio allocation is generally stable throughout the cabinet tenure. The ministers can be removed or replaced only with the approval of their party. This applies, in particular, to key portfolios. Coalition partners usually respect other parties' appointment suggestions under the coalition agreement. The PM has formal freedom of appointment; however, coalition partners are expected to nominate acceptable candidates.

The distribution of non-cabinet positions is another significant element of the cabinet bargaining process (albeit not necessarily part of the coalition agreement). This includes the distribution of the positions in public and semi-public institutions and supervisory boards of state-owned companies used by coalition parties to reward party loyalty.⁷ Allocation of parliamentary leadership positions is also relevant in the coalition bargaining process. For example, the positions of President and vice-presidents in the Chamber of Deputies and the leadership of parliamentary committees are all chips in the cabinet bargaining processes.⁸

Coalition agreements

The formation of a government coalition in Czechia is usually completed by signing a coalition agreement. Only the interim non-partisan Rusnok cabinet had no coalition agreement.⁹ A new coalition agreement was not produced for the Nečas II cabinet due to only a slightly changed composition and overall continuations of the previous one. [Table 4.4](#) presents the length and content of the Czech coalition agreements.

All coalition agreements were post-electoral agreements resulting from a coalition bargaining process in the period under study. Consequently, the length of coalition agreements varies significantly – between 17,000 words

Table 4.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Czech coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Topolánek II | 2007 | 7676 | 12.7 | 0 | 0.7 | 0 | 78.3 |
| Fischer | 2009 | 338 | 47.9 | 0 | 38.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Nečas I | 2010 | 14477 | 7.9 | 0 | 4.2 | 0 | 84.9 |
| | | 2749 ^a | 10.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 77.6 |
| Nečas II | 2012 | 14444 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 98.5 |
| Sobotka | 2014 | 11249 | 9 | 0 | 0.8 | 0 | 83.7 |
| Babiš II | 2018 | 1219 | 82.7 | 4.5 | ^b | 4.8 | 0 |
| Fiala | 2021 | 2789 | 50.9 | 0 | 7.2 | 0 | 30.7 |

Notes:^a Amendment to Coalition Agreement from 30.6.2011.^b Relevant figures are contained in the unavailable annexes to the coalition agreements.

in the Nečas II coalition agreement (including amendment) and 1219 words in the Babiš II cabinet.¹⁰ The coalition agreement of the current Fiala cabinet with 2,789 words is one of the more concise ones.

Length alone does not indicate the significance of the coalition agreement's content (Indridason and Kristinsson 2013: 830). The Czech coalition agreements tend to be policy-oriented, with the policy goals comprising around two-thirds of the text. The remaining part is usually reserved for general rules of coalition cooperation, conflict resolution, and portfolio allocation. An exception was the Babiš II cabinet, where more than 80 per cent of the coalition agreement was devoted to procedural rules. Only marginal space was devoted to the government policy agenda concerning the government's programme statement.

Coalition governance

The role of individual ministers in policy-making

Czech governments make decisions as a body – by an absolute majority of cabinet members.¹¹ Governments have tried to ensure ministerial compliance largely through the use of well-defined government programmes and coalition agreements. However, differences between ministers and the government lead to disagreements between the parties, manifesting as threats of resignation. Sometime reshuffles are also common. For example, five health ministers in the Babiš II cabinet quit or were dismissed during the pandemic.

The prime minister is responsible for organizing the government's activities, running the government meetings, appearing in its name, and carrying out other activities entrusted to him by the constitution or other laws. However, in government decision-making, the prime minister has one vote, the same as other ministers. Therefore, understanding the prime minister's role and functions depends on his personality and authority. For example, Babiš

was particularly forceful in shaping the ministerial agenda of line ministries, especially during the pandemic.¹²

Coalition governance in turmoil

Several periods of government instability ensued between 2008 and 2021. Similarly to other European countries, these included the financial and economic crisis, the migration crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to crises triggered by external impulses, serious internal problems also hindered the functioning of Czech coalition cabinets. In March 2009, in the middle of the first EU Presidency, Topolánek II did not survive a no-confidence vote, and an interim Fischer cabinet was established. It was the first time since the restoration of Czech democracy that the government was dismissed by a no-confidence vote. The no-confidence vote resulted from the continuous struggle between the centre-right government and the opposition, and from growing policy disagreements in the weak government coalition, especially between the party in government and parliamentary party groups (PPGs) (Guasti and Mansfeldova 2018).

Topolánek cabinet reacted belatedly to the financial and economic crisis, adopting unpopular austerity measures and triggering criticism from the opposition, trade unions, and civil society. As a result, large-scale demonstrations ensued. The public discontent undermined the Topolánek II cabinet but did not directly cause its failure. The prime minister and the cabinet faced many political scandals and lost support within its PPGs ranks. The prime minister was unresponsive to the voices of his PPG, listening instead to his advisers. In order to pass the no-confidence vote, 101 votes were needed against the government. The opposition had only 97 votes, but two ODS rebels and two rogue ex-Green Party MPs joined the opposition – yielding the necessary votes. One of the rogue ODS MPs commented on communication failure among coalition partners: ‘I was not interested in the government falling, I wanted to vote for it, but the PM did not accept any of the proposals I submitted’.¹³

The fall of Topolánek’s government is an example of the fragility of small coalitions in the absence of a ‘constructive no-confidence vote’ (Guasti and Mansfeldova 2018). Unlike the constructive no-confidence vote, which significantly increases the transactional costs of triggering government failure, the Czech no-confidence vote is a tool of opposition pressure. When internal party/coalition disagreements weaken the ruling coalition, institutional rules enable the opposition to use a no-confidence vote in policy bargaining without subsequent responsibility. A no-confidence vote can be held even with no alternative candidate suggested, and it does not automatically trigger elections.

The economic turmoil during the Topolánek II and subsequent Fischer caretaker government persisted, and the Nečas I cabinet adopted further austerity measures. The public pressure resumed, and negotiating support for austerity legislation became increasingly difficult within the governing coalition.

Policy disagreements increased, with the junior partners (TOP09 and VV) threatening to leave the government if the policy agreement was not reached. The combination of tensions in the fragile coalition and the consequences of the financial and economic crisis was addressed by the June 2011 Amendment to the Coalition Agreement. However, even in the face of declining public support and increasing dissatisfaction, the Nečas II cabinet fell due to scandals involving the prime minister.

Furthermore, the balance of power becomes significantly skewed when a key political player owns a major media group. This was the case with Babiš (Guasti 2020a). For example, before the arrival of Babiš to the Czech political arena (2013), media access was relatively balanced, influenced by political skill. However, Babiš purchased media to facilitate his political rise and instrumentalized them to weaken its senior government partner ČSSD (Guasti 2020a). Coalition partners began to communicate more through the media than through the mechanisms and platforms stipulated in the coalition agreement, which weakened the coalition mechanisms.

The ‘migration crisis’ in 2015 and 2016 further disrupted the coalition government by strengthening Eurosceptic voices and anti-immigration sentiment. Sobotka was caught between a rock and a hard place – expected to act responsibly vis-à-vis the EU while maintaining political support and fending off the rising junior government partner (ANO). Babiš instrumentalized the popular Eurosceptic sentiments to delegitimize his EU subsidy issues (Bustikova and Guasti 2009).

The tensions within the government culminated in May 2017, when Sobotka asked President Zeman to recall Babiš from the government over the investment (Stork’s Nest) scandal. The President, an ally of Babiš, first halted the process, then another ANO minister replaced Babiš as deputy prime minister, and another ANO member, Ivan Pilný, became Minister of Finance. Sobotka won a battle, but in the 2017 parliamentary elections, Babiš and ANO won the war. ANO won the 2017 elections, ČSSD lost 70 per cent of their support, and its Chairman Sobotka left politics. In 2018, Sobotka joined the civic protests against the Babiš government.

With the President’s help securing the support of KČM and attractive portfolio allocation for the electorally decimated ČSSD, Babiš formed a minority government in 2018. However, over time, his governance style and temper undermined policy negotiations in the cabinet and support for governing bills in the parliament. Formally first among equals, Babiš acted from a position of power and informally promoted governance of the Prime Minister Model type (Bergman et al 2019). As a successful entrepreneur before entering politics, he was unwilling to deliberate or compromise, trying to bend the cabinet to his will. This style works in ANO party and PPG, but treating opponents as enemies is uncondusive to legislative successes. Moreover, Babiš’s unwillingness to follow formal and informal rules of executive-legislative relations strained his cabinet’s agenda.

The tensions within the governing coalition became evident during the pandemic. Major conflict ensued within the government about triggering the standard emergency response, which would see the Minister of Interior

(junior partner in the government) lead the emergency response body (Guasti 2020a). While the prime minister initially hesitated to trigger the establishment of the emergency body to prevent the empowerment of the leader of his junior coalition partner, he backtracked after public pressure, allowing the standard emergency response to ensue.

The backlash against the government's mishandling of the pandemic grew. However, ANO support remained relatively stable due to measures such as an increase in the minimum wage, increased pensions, and decreased taxes. In the summer of 2020, the prime minister prioritized the regional elections over adopting tough measures during the onset of the second wave. The pandemic gambit weakened both coalition partners and unified the opposition except for KSCM. ANO is populist, and populists in power respond to popular demand, but amidst a pandemic, unpopular steps might be necessary (Bustikova and Baboš 2020). As a result, the Babiš's and government's popularity eroded, and the internal tensions within the cabinet grew. At the end of Babiš II's tenure, the ruling coalition became impossible. The PM (ANO) and the Interior Minister (ČSSD), both members of the Chamber of Deputies, used their mandates to submit conflicting amendments concerning a significant change in income tax to the 2021 budget bill.

Coalition governance in the executive arena

Conflict management mechanisms between coalitions are among the most important elements of coalition agreements.

Conflict management mechanisms (see [Table 4.5](#)) include coalition committee¹⁴ (consisting of party chairpersons, vice-chairpersons, and chairpersons of PPGs), a combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians, or meetings among parliamentary leaders (heads of the coalition parties' parliamentary groups). For the most frequent conflicts, Coalition Committees became the most common conflict management mechanism used in most cabinets. The Coalition Committee manages conflicts over budget allocations, spending cuts, and health reform. However, some crucial issues remain in the purview of the 'inner cabinet' consisting of the party leaders. An 'inner cabinet' as a conflict management mechanism was rarely used; we can find it in Sobotka and partly Babiš II cabinets. In Topolánek II and Babiš II cabinets, negotiations with the PPG chairpersons were more frequent.

The most important body is the Coalition Committee which addresses fundamental issues of coalition cooperation. Meetings are convened by the PM as required. The delegation of the coalition party consists of the chairman and a maximum of three other representatives of the coalition party. It solves current and medium-term tasks and fundamental personnel issues. Any chairman of the coalition party may request that a meeting be convened. The prime minister must then convene a meeting immediately upon receiving such a request. Most coalition cabinets have used coalition committees or Coalition Committee as a conflict resolution mechanism.

There are not only regular meetings of chairmen of coalition parties, but they can also convene upon the request of the chairman of any coalition party. Meetings between the heads of the coalition PPGs, cabinet members, and parliamentarians have been another way to manage coalition politics. For the most serious conflicts, the Coalition Committee was the most commonly used conflict management mechanism except for the Sobotka cabinet.

Additionally, Babiš used media he owns skilfully – using critical (ČSSD) and positive (ANO) coverage of line ministers and providing PR advisors to assist ANO ministers. For a populist party like ANO, the election campaign does not stop. Over time, the coalition no longer sought to present itself as a coherent entity but as competitors constantly competing for political power.

The meeting of the PPGs chairpersons is according to a regular schedule, solving current tasks related to the agenda of the Chamber of Deputies meeting and dealing with the elections of individual parliamentary and non-parliamentary bodies. Its participants are responsible for maintaining the widest possible participation of coalition MPs in all-important votes. During the meetings of the Chamber of Deputies, meetings of PPGs chairs take place at any time upon request. All coalition deputies meet at the request of any coalition party, usually before an important vote in the Chamber of Deputies. As Czechia has a bicameral system, cooperation in the Senate is similar to that in the Chamber of Deputies.

The compatibility of a parliamentary mandate and a cabinet post eases executive-legislative relations. The prime minister is usually also the leader of his or her party. Except for caretaker governments, party leaders of government parties were cabinet members. Czech Constitution allows ministers to remain members of the Chamber of Deputies or senators; however, they cannot serve as committee members or participate in investigation committees. These rules strengthen the government's position in the parliament¹⁵ (Mansfeldova and Lacina 2019).

During the Babiš II cabinet, the link between party chairpersons and PPG chairpersons was strengthened. Except for ANO, where the PPG chairperson managed the party on behalf of the prime minister, the PPG chairpersons became important veto players, and an additional power centre emerged in the parliamentary arena. This applies not only to the governing coalition's PPGs but also to the PPG of KSCM, which tolerated the government. An additional form of coalition management has been an informal structure between ANO and KSCM chairpersons, whose aim was to pre-negotiate support on complicated government proposals. For example, before submitting the budget bill to the parliament, Babiš often visited the KSCM headquarter for final pre-approval.

Cabinet duration and termination

Between 2008 and 2022, Czechia had nine cabinets, including two interim cabinets and the current majority coalition cabinet, in the first year of his term. As a result, only Sobotka and Babiš II cabinets remained in office for the full four-year electoral term.

There were five types of cabinet termination between 2008 and 2021 (see [Table 4.6](#)): three cabinets terminated at regular or early parliamentary

Table 4.6 Cabinet termination in Czechia, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---|
| Topolánek II | 72.9 | 6 | | | | On March 24, 2009, vote of confidence was held in the Chamber of Deputies, initiated by the opposition parties, ČSSD and KSCM, and the Chamber expressed no-confidence. It was the first government in the history of the Czech Republic, which was overthrown by a vote of non-confidence. There were 101 MPs for the non-confidence expression, and 96 MPs against it. In addition to all deputies from opposition ČSSD (71) and KSCM (26), two rebels from ODS (Vlastimil Tlustý and Jan Schwippel) and two former deputies for SZ (Vera Jakubková and Olga Zubová) voted against the government. |
| Fischer Nečas I | 100 46.1 | 1 7a | | VV | | On April 3, 2012, the leaders of VV announced that their ministers would leave the government by the 1st May. However, one day later, all three ministers of VV (two of them were not MPs) led by Deputy PM Karolina Peake announced that they refused to resign. On the 17th April, Peake stated that she was leaving VV and was establishing a new fraction called LIDEM, which is meant to support the Nečas cabinet. In the following days, she succeeded in gaining support from seven other VV MPs, who consequently left the PPG of VV. The LIDEM fraction officially turned to become a party on May 29, 2012, when it was registered by the Ministry of Interior as a political party. |

(Continued)

Table 4.6 (Continued)

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Nečas II | 54.7 | 7b | 14 | ODS | | PM Petr Nečas resigned on June 17, 2013, after his closest co-worker, the Managing Director of the Section of the PM Jana Nagyova was put under arrest and accused of misuse of the Military Intelligence Agency which should be following up Nečas' wife. The police also suspect Nagyova of corrupt behaviour consisting in organizing high-profile posts in state-owned enterprises for three former ODS factioning MPs who opposed the state budget bill and later voluntarily resigned on their MP mandate and so enabled that the Nečas cabinet bill on state budget was passed. The arrest of Nagyova was a part of a larger anti-corruption police operation and included the prosecution of former MPs, Military Intelligence officials, and influential businessmen suspect of manipulating state tenders. |
| Rusnok | 10.6 | 4, 6 | | | | An investiture vote not passed. However, the cabinet stayed in office until the appointment of a new cabinet formed after early elections. |
| Sobotka | 99.6 | 1 | | | | Full term. The coalition was undergoing a crisis due to unclear property relations of the Deputy PM, Minister of Finance, and President of the ANO Movement, Andrej Babiš. This weakened the positions of the PM and Chairman of ČSSD S. Sobotka. In June 2017, he resigned as chairman of the party but remained PM. |
| Babiš I | 100 | 6 | | | | |
| Babiš II | 92.7 | 1 | | | | Full term. |

Notes:

Technical terminations

1: Regular parliamentary election.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event.

elections (Sobotka, Babiš II, and interim Fischer cabinet). One cabinet resigned because of conflicts between the coalition partners (Nečas I), and one resigned because of personal scandals (Nečas II). Finally, one cabinet resigned after a successful no-confidence vote (Topolánek II). In this occasion, the no-confidence vote was initiated by the opposition parties (ČSSD and KSČM), who did not use the opportunity to form a new government. Babiš I cabinet did not gain confidence in the Chamber of Deputies and acted for over half a year as a government in resignation (caretaker). Rusnok's interim non-partisan cabinet ruled without confidence for 169 days. There are no constitutional specifications, but an informal norm is that these governments do not have the legitimacy to propose any major reforms or bills and should bring the country to the election (Rusnok) or form a new government that would win the investiture vote (Babiš).

Conclusion

Between 2008 and 2022, Czechia held four parliamentary elections but had nine governments. Only two governments served a full four-year term. The period under study was plagued by external and internal crises – economic, migration, and pandemic, but the weak and unstable governments struggled to manage these crises. The current Fiala cabinet addresses the consequences of the receding Covid-19 pandemic, the energy crisis and the consequences of the war in Ukraine, including more than 450.000 Ukrainian refugees.¹⁶

With one exception (Babiš I), all governments were coalitions. Three distinct types of unstable governments can be identified: minimum winning coalition, minority, and caretaker. Minimum winning coalitions revealed vulnerable to internal tension between coalition partners; minority governments relied on external party support, making its calculus regarding legislative support difficult (fulfilment of policy agenda versus retention of voter support). Caretaker governments have been an outcome of political compromise, thus liminal and constrained by nature.

The lack of stability results from a fragmented party system, the existence of parties that nobody wants to form a coalition with (so-called permanent opposition) and the shift of left-leaning voters from mainstream parties to populists. The presence of two permanent opposition parties narrowed the options for forming ideologically coherent and stable governments.

The public trust in parties, parliament, and government is low. The party system is unstable, fluid, and represents a key determinant in the relative weakness of the government coalitions as it constrains dominant parties from entering into negotiations with junior partners. Coalition bargaining also strengthens the bargaining power of small parties. As a result, a system of mutual constraints emerges, and no party can dominate.

Two new stable party types emerged throughout the period of study – radical right, excluded from the government by a cordon sanitaire (in permanent

opposition), and populists. Since its emergence in 2013, populist ANO became the dominant force on the centre-left, attracting the voter support of its twice coalition partner, ČSSD and KSCM. Neither ČSSD nor KSCM entered the Chamber of Deputies in the 2021 elections.

Over the period under study, Czechia shifted from a ‘Coalition Compromise Model’ based on inter-party compromise and negotiation to a rather ‘Dominant Prime Minister Model’ under Babiš and back to ‘Coalition Compromise Model’ under Fiala cabinet (Bergman et al 2019). New and small parties seek to maximize their electoral support in attaining maximum government seats. The focus on office-seeking reflects unstable internal power struggles within parties – party leaders allocate ministerial portfolios to stabilize internal party support. Changes in internal party dynamics are reflected in changes in ministerial appointments. Changes in ministerial appointments occur relatively frequently but are limited to the internal deliberation of the party holding the portfolio. The policy agenda of governments is outlined in detail in the coalition agreements. Procedural issues such as conflict resolution among coalition partners dominate coalition agreements.

Although the constitutionally defined role of the President has not changed, the current President Zeman transformed his formal power of appointing ministers into a *de facto* ‘veto power’. In a show of force, the President created several standoffs with PMs over refusing to appoint proposed ministers. The message was clear – seek President’s advice and approval informally. Babiš negotiated ministerial appointments with the President before formally proposing a new minister and was willing to appoint figures from the President’s orbit to maintain President’s support. However, the current Prime Minister, Fiala, who chose confrontation in his ministerial appointment standoff, won.

Politics, not policy, are key defining features of Czech coalition governments. Tensions between the coalition partners undermine governance. For example, in 2020, Babiš impeded the establishment of the emergency response body to prevent strengthening his coalition partner, who held the relevant portfolio. The populist party in government prioritizes popularity over responsibility. A pandemic leads to a chaotic response, high death toll, and skyrocketing public debt.

The case of Czechia highlights three recent changes shaping coalition governance: interaction between party system and coalition governance, populist style of governance, and the increasing role of experts.

First, European party systems are increasingly fluid; in particular, the emergence and success of populist parties shifted the focus of governance on responsiveness. Populist governments follow the demands of (their) voters. The presence of radical right (and radical left) impedes the coalition formation of ideologically coherent majorities. Lastly, increasing fragmentation of the party landscape further impedes the formation of stable governments and policy-driven governance. Junior partners play an outsized role in the bargaining process.

Second, the populist style of governance presents a key contemporary challenge. Populist runs on anti-establishment populist appeal, highlighting existing grievances, and prioritizing responsiveness over responsibility. In power, populists seek to aggrandize power and undermine accountability (Bustikova and Baboš 2020; Guasti 2020a). A pandemic shift to executive dominance further amplifies this tendency (Guasti 2020b). The parliament can thwart the attempts at executive dominance. Opposition can unify in demanding accountability, constraining populists in power.

Third, technocratic populists, such as ANO in Czechia, attempt to increase their legitimacy by harnessing trust in knowledge and expertise (cf. Bickerton and Accetti 2021). They bring important expertise and legitimacy but are politically inexperienced and not skilled in political communication and negotiation. Furthermore, experts rely fully on their popularity with the public and the PM. This changes the dynamic within the governing coalition towards the Dominant Prime Minister Model (Bergman et al 2019). The appointment of highly specialized experts leads to tensions between two interrelated issues – public health and the economy – resulting in ad hoc policies further undermining public trust.

Future research on coalition governments ought to focus on how populism changes coalition governance's balance towards responsiveness, undermines the systems of checks and balances, and how attempts at executive aggrandizement can be contained.

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|----------|--|
| KSČM | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy) |
| ČSSD | Czech Social Democratic Party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická) |
| LSU | Liberal Social Union (Liberálně sociální unie) |
| HSD-SMS | Self-Governing Democracy Movement-Association for Moravia and Silesia (Hnutí za samosprávnou demokracii-Sdružení pro Moravu a Slezsko) |
| SPR-RSČ | Association for Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (Sdružení pro republiku-Republikánská strana Československa) |
| ÚSVIT | Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit přímé demokracie) ^a |
| SPD | Freedom and Direct Democracy (Strana přímé demokracie) |
| SZ | Green Party (Strana zelených) |
| VV | Public Affairs (Věci veřejné) |
| LIDEM | LIDEM-Liberal Democrats (LIDEM-liberální demokraté) ^b |
| ANO 2011 | Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (Akce nespokojených občanů) |
| KDU-ČSL | Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak Peoples' Party (Křesťansko demokratická unie-Československá strana lidová) |
| KDS | Christian Democratic Party (Křesťansko demokratická strana) |
| ODS | Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana) |
| ODA | Civic Democratic Alliance (Občanská demokratická aliance) |
| US | Freedom Union/Freedom Union-Democratic Union (Unie svobody/ |
| (US-DEU) | Unie svobody-Demokratická unie) ^c |

| | |
|---------|--|
| TOP 09 | Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (Tradice, Odpovědnost, Prosperita 09) |
| Pirates | Czech Pirate Party (Česká pirátská strana) |
| STAN | Mayors and Independents (Starostové a nezávislí) |
| DL | Democratic Left (Demokratická levice) |

Notes: Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Czech in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

- ^a In January 2015, the DAWN party split. DAWN PPG members (14) and some party members decided to establish a new party without T. Okamura in February 2015. Several DAWN members created in July 2015 a new party – Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) led by T. Okamura. SPD participated successfully in 2017 elections.
- ^b Party emerged in spring 2012 from the fraction in VV around the Deputy Prime Minister Karolina Peake: the split was declared on April 17, 2012, the party was officially registered on May 29, 2012.
- ^c Originally Freedom Union. In December 2001, it merged with small party Democratic Union and changed its name to US-DEU.

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Notes

- 1 Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit přímé demokracie) split in 2015, and the successor SPD remained a parliamentary party.
- 2 Between 1993 and 2012, the President was indirectly elected by the parliament.
- 3 Presidential powers include pardons, appointing ministers at the PM’s recommendation, a legislative veto power (which can be overruled by an absolute majority of MPs), and appointments of judges and personnel for high offices.
- 4 In the 2006 elections, they obtained 77.5% seats, but in the 2010 elections, only 54.5% of the seats.
- 5 An attempt at an internal party coup led by the President (Guasti 2020b).
- 6 The same person (Miroslav Kalousek) held positions in both Topolánek II and Necas II cabinets, albeit for a different political party.
- 7 In the Czech cultural milieu, ‘trafika’ means a good job or position provided as reciprocity for services rendered, like ‘jobs for the boys’. The term is used to designate positions on boards of state companies for loyal political allies (Kopecký 2012).
- 8 The agreement between ANO and the KSČM for support of the Babiš II cabinet included key parliamentary leadership position allocation to the KSČM (leadership of the budget committee). This is the first time that the permanent opposition reached such office.
- 9 Fischer cabinet signed the ‘Contract on establishing a caretaker cabinet composed of non-partisans’, and the Rusnok cabinet had a government programme. Interim governments are based on a broad consensus of political parties, which agree not to hold early elections, and cabinet programme results from a broader compromise.
- 10 However, the length of the coalition agreement cannot be directly determined because the annex with the seat allocation is not publicly available.
- 11 Constitutional Act No. 1/1993 Coll. of the Czech National Council of December 16, 1992, Chapter three, Article 76.
- 12 The government’s powers increase considerably during crises. For example, during states of emergency, the government can adopt broad emergency measures.

- Exceptional situations may arise where a specific ministry acquires greater powers for a limited time. Examples are the Ministry of Health and the pandemic in 2020. Three types of crises can be declared at the national level: a state of emergency, a state of threat to the state, and a state of war. Under these conditions, state authorities are entitled to take extraordinary measures to resolve crises. These measures are adopted for a necessary period and to the necessary extent.
- 13 https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/vlada-padla-pohrbili-ji-tlusty-schwippel-jakubkova-a-zubova.A090324_171609_domaci_klu
 - 14 While the English version of the Czech coalition agreements uses the term ‘coalition council’, we use the term coalition committee, which is used throughout the book and adopted here.
 - 15 The possibility of combining offices can help ministers to negotiate support in the Chamber of Deputies. However, it depends on how cohesive the coalition is and defends the interests of the entire government and the party discipline of the governing parties.
 - 16 While the Fiala government is facing simultaneous crises, it remains unified, especially about its support for Ukraine, which the prime minister and other government members visited multiple times. Fiala’s visit to Kyiv in March 2022 with a group of CEE leaders was the first of its kind.

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5 Estonia

The Breakdown of the Exclusionary Logic in Coalition Formation

Tõnis Saarts and Georg Sootla

Introduction

Estonia is a parliamentary democracy, with the PR electoral system and a fragmented but relatively stable multi-party system. The coalitions formed since 2008 have been mainly minimal-winning coalitions (MWC). The patterns of coalition formation and governance have become fairly institutionalized in terms of major rules and practices during the recent 30 years. The duration of the coalitions has been slightly above the CEE average.

The formal legal pattern of the coalition government (the status of the cabinet, the powers of the PM, etc.) is loosely regulated in Estonian laws. However, those informal institutions and conventions have stayed surprisingly consistent and sustainable despite a high level of party system fragmentation and volatility.

Whereas the period of the Global Financial Crisis (2008–2011) highlighted the stability of the coalition patterns and brought further stabilization in the party system, major changes happened thereafter. We can identify three major shifts:

First, in 2014, a significant generational change in Estonian politics started.

Many prominent politicians, whose political careers started at the beginning of the transition to democracy and even in the late Soviet time, left or stepped back.

Second, in the autumn of 2016, the right-wing Reform Party (ER), which had been in the government for 17 years in a row, was forced into opposition and the Centre Party (EK) formed the first centre-left-leaning government in the country's history since 1992. It also meant some changes in the styles of coalition governance, particularly in the logic of coalition formation.

The third big shift occurred after the elections in 2019 when the populist radical right party Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) was invited to the coalition. This did not produce any institutional changes or a democratic backlash, but it affected the intra-coalition dynamics of the Jüri Ratas (EK) II government. However, that coalition did not last long and was replaced by the Kaja Kallas (ER) government formed by the ER and EK in January 2021.

The rise of the EKRE has also affected the party system, making the former preeminent cleavages (the ethnic and class divisions) somewhat less relevant while increasing the prominence of the GAL/TAN (green-alternative-liberal/traditional-authoritarian-nationalism) divide. In addition, the Covid-19 crisis strengthened the populist radical right (PRR) position in Estonia even further.

The institutional setting

According to the Constitution,¹ Estonia is a parliamentary republic with the power vested in the unicameral parliament. The executive branch is headed by the PM and the cabinet.² The cabinet government is the major locus of political authority in Estonia. The indirectly elected President mostly has ceremonial power and fairly limited veto powers. Nevertheless, the President wields considerable informal power and has occasionally interfered in everyday politics when there have been more serious political crises.

At the national elections, a relatively complex PR party-list system is used in which the mandate allocation is based on the distribution in three separate tiers: individual, district, and compensation mandates (see Pettai 2019). The electoral system provides a small advantage for the larger electorally successful parties, who usually obtain slightly more seats than the strict proportionality rule would allow them to get.

Even if the Estonian political system is characterized by a weak presidency, the President can play an important role in government formation. Within 14 days after the elections (or resignation of a previous government), the President shall nominate a *formateur*, whose task is to form a new coalition that a majority of the parliament will support. Customarily, the leader of a party who has won the largest number of seats in a newly elected parliament is appointed as a *formateur* (Pettai 2019). If the parliament fails to approve the *formateur*, the President may put forward a new candidate. If the second candidate gets also rejected, the process is handed over to the parliament, and it has to nominate a new *formateur*. The failure of the parliament to approve the new government within 14 days leads to early elections. The *formateur* should present the government programme to the parliament, and an open and simple majority investiture vote is needed to appoint the new PM. Thereafter the PM presents the cabinet ministers to the President, who formally appoints the cabinet ministers. The Presidents formally have the power to reject the candidates but have never dared to use it.

The Estonian institutional framework is relatively vague in terms of formal regulations, and the importance of informal institutions and conventions is considerable in the everyday operation of coalition governments.³ For example, the government as a collegial decision-making body is understood in Estonian laws⁴ as the top of the executive administration in very traditional-legalistic terms. PMs are regarded as formal chairpersons simply steering the governments. While drafting the new constitution in 1992, the Constitutional Assembly envisaged that policy-making happened mostly in the parliament,

and thus, the government was regarded as merely an institution for policy implementation. There was also a strong desire to avoid a strong PM institution. However, in practice, almost all Estonian PMs have asserted themselves in a strong leadership role.

Governments in Estonia consist of government ministers, including the PM and the ministers without a portfolio. There are no junior ministers or other low-rank cabinet officials. Almost all the cabinets have had at least one minister without a portfolio (Pettai 2019). The formal rules for portfolio allocation are also absent – it is based on the compromise made between the governing parties. Perhaps the biggest change happened in 2015 when the Taavi Rõivas (ER) II government decided to increase the number of cabinet ministers from 13 to 15 – the change had a lasting effect on the composition of the subsequent cabinets.

The formal cabinet meetings with all the ministers are known as the *Sessions of Government* (SoG). These are chaired by the PM, who also approves the agenda. Although the voting at the government sessions should formally follow the majority principle, the issues are almost always decided in consensus.

The government and PM are administratively supported by the State Chancellery. The State Chancellery was instituted primarily as government services with the autonomous Prime Minister's (PM) Bureau and Government Communication Bureau. However, after EU accession, it increasingly extended its roles of coordination of government strategy development, EU issues, security and defence issues and strategic communication (Government Office 2022).

The party system and the actors

The multi-party system in Estonia is fragmented but still relatively stable compared with many other CEE countries (Auers 2018). On the centre-right, there have traditionally been two major parties: Reform Party (ER) and Pro Patria (IE). The ER is the most influential party in Estonia because it managed to stay in the government for 17 years without any interruption (1999–2016, from which, 2005–2016, it served as a party of the PM). Considering its ideological profile, ER could be regarded as a market-liberal party, although since the mid-2000s, it has incorporated some national conservative elements into its programme (Saarts and Lumi 2012). ER has won the position as the largest party in all the national elections since 2007, usually gaining 28–29 per cent of the votes (Elections in Estonia 2022).

The IE has experienced many splits, mergers, and name changes during its history: after the merger with the flash party Res Publica in 2006, the party was known as Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL). However, in 2018, the original name from the 1990s, Pro Patria (IE), was readopted. Since 2015, IE/IRL has been in a slight electoral decline and won 11–14 per cent of votes; in the 2011 elections, 21 per cent of votes (Elections in Estonia 2022). By its ideological profile, IE is a moderate national conservative party, making it distinct from EKRE, which could be seen as an ultra-conservative party.

The EKRE's (founded in 2012) ideological profile is very close to the other populist right-wing parties in Europe. Nativism, anti-immigration, anti-gay, traditional values, anti-pluralism, Euro-scepticism, and populist rhetoric – are the keywords here (Petsinis 2019).

Two major parties could be found on the centre-left: the Centre Party (EK) and Social Democratic Party (SDE). EK is the only party in Estonia with a strong electoral appeal among the Russian-speaking minority (Saarts and Lumi 2012). Furthermore, for a long time, the EK was a very leader-centred party, chaired by one of Estonia's most controversial and charismatic politicians – Edgar Savisaar (Pettai 2019). In its ideological profile, EK could be classified as left-liberal (Saarts and Lumi 2012). Its electoral performance has remained pretty stable for the period 2008–2020 (23–25 per cent of votes) (Elections in Estonia 2022).

However, the same could not be said about the SDE, whose electoral support has steeply declined in the last years (15 per cent of votes in 2015, 10 per cent in 2019). It is the only party in Estonia that has tried to follow the classical social democratic ideology (Saarts and Lumi 2012).

In sum, the Estonian party system has been fragmented, and no major dominant parties have emerged: even if two larger parties, the ER and EK, have traditionally obtained more votes than their competitors, but the gap between them and a party occupying the third position has never been substantial (Saarts 2011). Also, even if party system fragmentation has been quite pronounced in Estonia, it has not led to excessive party system instability compared, for instance, to neighbouring Latvia (Auers 2018).

In government formation, almost all the coalitions in 2008 – 2021 have been the MWCs (see [Table 5.1a](#)), except the ER and IRL minority government (2009–2011).⁵

Curiously, the party system became most consolidated during the financial crisis (2008–2011) and thereafter. The successful crisis management and pronounced confrontation with the major competitor, EK (which was consistently excluded from all the coalitions), strengthened the position of ER and made it possible for the party to form viable minority cabinets. The elections in 2011 brought only four parties into the parliament, which was quite exceptional for Estonia ([Table 5.1a](#)).

However, an “unfreezing” of the party system happened later, in 2015, when two new parties entered the parliament: EKRE (7 per cent of seats) and the moderate conservative Free Party (EVA, 8 per cent of seats) (Elections in Estonia 2022). The entry of EKRE marks an important turning point in Estonian party politics because, until 2015, Estonia had been among the very few European countries in which the radical right parties had not yet won any seats in the national legislatures. While EVA experienced a rapid decline and dropped out of the legislature by the 2019 elections, EKRE saw a meteoric rise and managed to increase its electoral support almost by three times (from 7 per cent of votes in the 2015 elections to 18 per cent in 2019), which culminated in its inclusion in the Ratas II government (2019–2021) with EK and IE.

Table 5.1a Estonian cabinets 1992–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Laar I | 1992-10-21 | 1992-09-20 | IL, SDE, ERSP | mwc | 53 (52.5) | 101 | 10 | 6.29 | |
| 2 | Tarand | 1994-11-08 | | SDE, IL, ERSP, VKR-P, ER | min | 47 (46.5) | 101 | 12 | 11.53 | Sõlt |
| 3 | Vähi I | 1995-04-17 | 1995-03-05 | EKo, EK, EML, EME, EPPE | sur | 57 (56.4) | 101 | 10 | 7.95 | |
| 4 | Vähi II | 1995-11-06 | | EKo, ER, EME, EML, EPPE | sur | 60 (59.4) | 101 | 10 | 8 | |
| 5 | Vähi III | 1996-12-02 | | EKo, EME, EML, AP, EPPE | min | 46 (45.5) | 101 | 11 | 8.85 | AP |
| 6 | Siimann | 1997-03-17 | | EKo, EME, EML, AP, EPPE | min | 45 (44.6) | 101 | 10 | 8.61 | AP |
| 7 | Laar II | 1999-03-25 | 1999-03-07 | IL, ER, SDE | mwc | 53 (52.5) | 101 | 7 | 5.5 | |
| 8 | Kallas | 2002-01-28 | | ER, EK | min | 46 (45.5) | 101 | 7 | 5.53 | |
| 9 | Parts | 2003-04-10 | 2003-03-02 | ResP, ER, ERL | mwc | 60 (59.4) | 101 | 6 | 4.67 | |
| 10 | Ansip I | 2005-04-13 | | ER, EK, ERL | mwc | 52 (51.5) | 101 | 6 | 5.48 | |
| 11 | Ansip II | 2007-04-04 | 2007-03-04 | ER, IRL, SDE | mwc | 60 (59.4) | 101 | 6 | 4.37 | |
| 12 | Ansip III | 2009-06-04 | | ER, IRL | min | 50 (49.5) | 101 | 6 | 4.48 | |
| 13 | Ansip IV | 2011-04-06 | 2011-03-06 | ER, IRL | mwc | 56 (55.4) | 101 | 4 | 3.84 | |
| 14 | Rõivas I | 2014-03-26 | | ER, SDE | mwc | 52 (51.5) | 101 | 4 | 4.28 | |
| 15 | Rõivas II | 2015-04-09 | 2015-03-01 | ER, SDE, IRL | mwc | 59 (58.4) | 101 | 6 | 4.72 | |
| 16 | Ratas I | 2016-11-23 | | EK, SDE, IRL | mwc | 56 (55.4) | 101 | 6 | 4.72 | |
| 17 | Ratas II | 2019-04-29 | 2019-03-03 | EK, EKRE, IE | mwc | 56 (55.4) | 101 | 5 | 4.27 | |
| 18 | Kallas K | 2021-01-26 | | EK, ER | mwc | 59 (58.4) | 101 | 5 | 4.27 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition; non = non-partisan. Minority cabinets are also indicated by italics.

Nevertheless, the rise of EKRE and its inclusion in the government did not bring any visible democratic backlash in Estonia.

There could be many explanations for the rise of EKRE (see Petsinis 2019). However, one cannot underestimate the impact of the two crises: the migration crisis in 2015 opened up the opportunity structures for EKRE to promote new issues (anti-immigration and anti-EU agenda), and the Covid-19 pandemics (2020–2021) allowed them to further mobilize the new constituencies because they adopted the strong anti-vaccination and anti-restrictions stance. However, curiously EKRE adopted that stance only after dropping out of the government (2021), while being in the cabinet, they demanded even stricter restrictions and never torpedoed the vaccination efforts. Overall, the Ratas II government had to cope with recurrent conflicts and regular public scandals caused by EKRE's populist leadership. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis management became even a solidifying factor for the coalition while providing a common goal.

The rise of EKRE has also transformed the underlying cleavage constellations in Estonian party politics while making the GAL-TAN division much more prominent than before (see Table 5.1b). Previously, according to the Chapel Hill Survey, the socio-economic cleavage has traditionally been the preeminent cleavage in Estonia, followed by the ethnic cleavage (see Pettai 2019 and Table 5.1b).

Regarding the party system, one should consider two peculiar features that help explain the underlying coalition formation patterns in Estonia. First, since the 1990s, a relatively strong centre-right ideological leaning has been evident in party politics, significantly impacting the coalition formation patterns (Pettai 2019). The ideological imbalances in the party system have made it possible that the country has mostly seen centre-right coalitions, and Ratas I government, formed in 2016, has actually been the first centre-left coalition in power since the early 1990s.

Second, although the Estonian parties seem to be relatively unrestrained in choosing the coalition partners, and there is difficult to see any institutionalized and predictable patterns in coalition formation in such an 'open'

Table 5.1b Estonian system conflict structure 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 11 | Ansip II | ERoh | Econ. left-right | ER | Ethnic |
| 12 | Ansip III | IRL, ERoh | Econ. left-right | ER | Ethnic |
| 13 | Ansip IV | IRL | Econ. left-right | ER | Ethnic |
| 14 | Rõivas I | IRL | Econ. left-right | ER | Ethnic |
| 15 | Rõivas II | EVA | Econ. left-right | ER | Ethnic |
| 16 | Ratas I | EVA | Econ. left-right | ER | Ethnic |
| 17 | Ratas II | EKRE | Econ. left-right | EK | GAL-TAN |
| 18 | Kallas K | EKRE | Econ. left-right | EK | GAL-TAN |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2007–2014 (cabinets 1–14) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

party system, there has traditionally been at least one party almost consistently excluded from the governments. EK had been deliberately excluded from all the coalitions formed from 2007 to 2016. It mostly happened because, for a long time, EK (and particularly its former chairman Edgar Savisaar) had been regarded as a pro-Russian party. After the open ethnic conflict erupted in Estonia over the relocation of the Soviet time war memorial in 2007 and the EK sided with the Russian speakers, all other parties decided not to coalesce with EK anymore (Saarts and Lumi 2012). In the situation where the second largest party was persistently excluded from the governments, it allowed the first biggest party, ER, to become an undisputed kingmaker. Thus, ER formed all the coalitions until 2016, and the playing field became more open only thereafter. There are no signs so far that such an effective *cordon sanitaire* could be instituted against the radical right EKRE.

Government formation

The bargaining process

The average total bargaining duration has been approximately 20 days since 2007 (see Table 5.2). For almost half of the cases, there has been one inconclusive round of negotiations, which has usually involved an attempt to include a new party into the coalition (in 2007, The Greens of Estonia and in 2015, Free Party). Those parties were excluded later on because they were not required to form an MWC. However, as our qualitative interviews with the former cabinet members and prominent party politicians indicate, the periodic return to this instrument in formation talks has provided some possible benefits – fresh blood and new ideas.

The length of negotiations heavily depends on whether the coalition is formed after the consequent elections or in-between the elections. In the former case, the coalition candidates draw largely on their electoral programs (which tend to be long and systematic in Estonia). Those lists of proposals are negotiated step by step, which is often quite a time-consuming process, not least because coalition agreements usually contain more substantial reform initiatives and policy changes.

In the case of coalitions formed in-between elections, the formal negotiations are often preceded by a much longer period of informal bargains. For example, before forming the Ratas I government (2016), the informal secret negotiations lasted about three months between KE, IRL, and SDE before the appointment of a *formateur*, but then the government assumed office only 11 days later. Moreover, for in-between elections coalitions, it is common for the members of the old coalition to draw on the former coalition agreement in which they want to finalize some previous policies, whereas the newcomers, as our qualitative interviews have indicated, tend to focus on issues with short-term effects on the voters. Thus, the coalition agreements made in-between the elections are usually more biased on vote trading and image building and

Table 5.2 Government formation period in Estonia, 2007–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses) | | |
|-----------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Ansip II | 2007 | 1 | ER, IRL, SDE | 2 | 31 | 17 | 62 | 1 | 0 |
| Ansip III | 2009 | 1 | ER, IRL, SDE, ERoh | 15 | 14 | 9 | | | |
| | | | ER, IRL | 3 | | | | | |
| Ansip IV | 2011 | 0 | ER, IRL, ERL | 6 | 31 | 26 | 56 | 0 | 44 |
| | | | ER, IRL | 26 | | | | | |
| Rõivas I | 2014 | 1 | ER, SDE | 7 | 22 | 12 | 55 | 0 | 36 |
| Rõivas II | 2015 | 0 | ER, SDE, IRL | 35 | 39 | 35 | 58 | 0 | 40 |
| | | | ER, SDE, IRL, EVA | 14 | | | | | |
| Ratas I | 2016 | 0 | EK, SDE, IE | 11 | 14 | 11 | 53 | 7 | 33 |
| Ratas II | 2019 | 1 | EK, EKRE, IE | 28 | 56 | 36 | 55 | 0 | 44 |
| Kallas K | 2021 | 0 | EK, ER | 10 | 12 | 10 | 70 | 1 | 30 |

rarely contain comprehensive policy strategies. Consequently, while the negotiations right after the elections often take 20–30 days, government formation in-between elections usually take less than two weeks.

The composition and size of cabinets

The size of cabinets in Estonia has slightly varied from one cabinet to another (13–16 ministers) (see [Table 5.3](#)). While Andrus Ansip (ER) was a PM (2005–2014), small cabinets with a fixed number of ministers were favoured, and portfolios were distributed proportionally regarding the parties' strength in the parliament. A substantial shift happened in the Rõivas II cabinet, in which the number of ministers was increased to 15, and in some policy spheres (e.g. social and economic policies), the new ministers were forced to share a ministry with one of their colleagues. Since the Ratas I government, the portfolios have been distributed evenly between the coalition partners, notwithstanding their electoral strength (5+5+5 formula if three partners in a government and 7+8 formula if two). The shift largely happened because Ratas initially felt insecure as a PM and wanted to demonstrate that he would not discriminate against smaller partners, as the ER has often done in previous coalitions.

The allocation of ministerial portfolios

Portfolio distribution issues are intentionally left to the end of the negotiations after the policy agreement has already been achieved (Pettai 2019). This is aimed at avoiding veto behaviour and conflicts between the potential ministers and/or their parties. Portfolios are distributed between the partners, and the parties have full discretion in nominating their own candidates.

Besides the portfolios of ministers, other important positions in the parliament are also agreed upon. Usually, the position of the Speaker of the Parliament is offered to the next largest coalition partner. The balances in a specific policy domain are ensured by the principle that the head of the parliamentary committee comes from another coalition party than the party which already controls the corresponding ministry.

The Coalitions with consistent and capable leaders have had a pretty clear and predictable pattern of portfolio distribution. For example, when Ansip (ER) was a PM, he almost always reserved most of the strategic ministries for his party (the ministers of Foreign affairs, Finance and Social affairs). For the subsequent governments (Rõivas, Ratas, and Kallas), it was more difficult to grasp the underlying logic behind the portfolio's allocation: Ratas distributed portfolios mostly according to the principle of whether the capable candidates were readily available in a particular party, Rõivas invited several his own personal advisers as ministers, etc.

There are no firmly rooted traditions in which portfolios go to which parties in Estonia. Conservative parties often prefer the Minister of Defence or Education, while the left-wing parties prefer Social Affairs and Culture – however,

Table 5.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Estonian coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Social Affairs</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Ansip II | 2007 | 6 ER, 5 IRL, 3 SDE | 14 | | 12 | ER | SDE | ER | ER | SDE |
| Ansip III | 2009 | 7 ER, 6 IRL | 13 | | 12 | ER | ER | ER | ER | IRL |
| Ansip IV | 2011 | 7 ER, 6 IRL | 13 | | 12 | ER | ER | ER | ER | IRL |
| Rõivas I | 2014 | 8 ER, 6 SDE | 14 | | 12 | ER | ER | ER | | SDE |
| Rõivas II | 2015 | 7 ER, 4 IRL, 4 SDE | 15 | | 12 | ER | IRL | ER | | ER |
| Ratas I | 2016 | 5 EK, 5 IE, 5 SDE | 15 | | 12 | EK | IE | SDE | | SDE |
| Ratas II | 2019 | 5 EK, 5 IE, 5 EKRE | 15 | | 12 | EK | EKRE | IE | EK | EKRE |
| Kallas K | 2021 | 8 ER, 7 EK | 15 | | 12 | ER | ER | EK | ER | EK |

this is not always a rule. Traditionally, the ministers are selected among the prominent party politicians – members of the parliament. However, as parties increasingly lack experienced candidates due to the generational change that has occurred since 2014, even non-partisan experts have been invited as ministers (for instance, in the Rõivas I, Ratas II, and Kallas I cabinets).

Most cabinets have had at least one minister without a portfolio. Typically, those ministers are responsible for quite topical policy areas such as administrative reform and demographic issues.

Coalition agreements

The coalition agreements (see [Table 5.4](#)) have become relatively lengthy documents, particularly from the Ansip II government (2007–2009) and onwards. However, the length of the document also varies: they tend to be much more programmatic and detailed for the coalitions formed right after the elections, while the in-between elections coalitions usually draft considerably shorter agreements.

Coalition agreements also serve as an example of strong informal institutions in Estonia because neither the Constitution nor Government of the Republic Act mentions coalition agreements. However, coalition agreements have become a real basis of the coalition’s political integrity, which is followed and interpreted as highly legitimate text during the coalition life cycle. It forms the core for a more standardized Government Action Plan prepared by the higher civil service and is followed strictly as a planning and policy-making instrument. The document could bear different names: for instance, for the Rõivas coalitions, it was referred to as the “*Government’s Action Plan*”, but Ratas presented it as the “*Basic Principles of Government Formation*”.

From 2007 onwards, we find an increase in the programmatic role of coalition agreements and/or increasing complexity of the negotiations. The coalition agreements tend to be almost exclusively focused on policy issues in

Table 5.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Estonian coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year</i> <i>in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General</i> <i>rules</i> <i>(in %)</i> | <i>Policy-</i> <i>specific</i> <i>procedural</i> <i>rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution</i> <i>of offices</i> <i>(in %)</i> | <i>Distribution</i> <i>of</i> <i>competences</i> <i>(in %)</i> | <i>Policies</i> <i>(in %)</i> |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Ansip II | 2007 | 7738 | 0.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 99.5 |
| Ansip III | 2009 | 7738 | 0.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 99.5 |
| Ansip IV | 2011 | 11,232 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Rõivas I | 2014 | 3590 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 98 |
| Rõivas II | 2015 | 12,472 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.5 | 97.5 |
| Ratas I | 2016 | 2565 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Ratas II | 2019 | 5632 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Kallas K | 2021 | 3689 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 99 |

Estonia. Thus, procedures, rules, and distribution of offices are rarely mentioned in the document or comprise a minuscule part. Instead, policy issues are negotiated in working groups with the involvement of experts and higher officials. Nevertheless, in the core issues in which clear political deals were needed or where conflicts became too intense and could not be solved at the working group level, the party leaders closed meetings are convened.

Nonetheless, under Ratas, the coalition agreements have become less of detailed technocratic planning documents but rather the instrument of broader goal setting, leaving room for post-formation bargaining. It was particularly evident for the Ratas II cabinet, in which EKRE, in the initial phase of the negotiations, was making radical proposals to overhaul the whole liberal democratic institutional architecture in Estonia. Because those principles were unnegotiable and EKRE was relatively inexperienced in governance, a less bureaucratic and detailed coalition agreement became a solution.

In addition, coalition agreements have also become the pre-emptive tools for further conflict prevention in coalitions. Although there have been attempts to revise the agreement during the coalition life cycle (e.g. in 2015 by SDE and 2017 by IRL), those attempts have either failed or brought quite limited adjustments, our qualitative elite interviews indicated.

Coalition governance

The role of individual ministers vis-a-vis cabinet and the prime minister

The formal-legal space for government in Estonia was primarily designed to assign politico-administrative responsibility for governing the ministerial domain to an individual minister. The minister has full discretion to issue ministerial *legislative acts* or regulations, which should also be countersigned by the non-political secretary-general of the corresponding ministry. At the same time, PM has the discretion to issue *personal orders* as single and temporary non-regulative acts, but a minister formally has much of the politico-administrative power compared to the PM. However, the ministerial autonomy is usually narrow in issuing substantial legislative acts; thus, many issues in the ministerial domain are left to the cabinet to decide. On the one hand, this overburdens the Session of Government (SoG) agenda with miscellaneous technical issues that usually do not attract other ministers' attention. On the other hand, as all government decisions should pass prior coordination mechanisms between the ministries (done mainly by the civil service), it decreases the possibility of tensions arising from policy formation in a coalition (Sootla 2005).

In Ansip's cabinets, there was an increasing trend to establish politico-administrative coordination via the State Chancellery. Even a special Strategic Unit was founded and staffed with high-level professionals from the PM's Office. Ratas' coalitions, however, established the permanent ministerial commission on economic development, which was supplemented by de facto the issue-specific sub-cabinet (CaC).

The ministers' policy initiatives are screened via a long chain of network-type politico-administrative coordination mechanisms up to the SoG. There are two aspects worth mentioning. First, in a case where the minister acts according to the Government Action Plan (based strictly on the coalition agreement), the minister is free to shape his/her policy initiatives. On the other hand, there are the frequent role and value conflicts between ministerial domains and those disagreements are settled by the higher civil service coordination or the cabinet-level conflict resolution mechanisms. The study by Sootla (2005) indicated that fewer frictions with the other ministers had happened in the domains of defence, foreign affairs, and culture.

The second main variable of the minister's autonomy is his/her dependence on the civil service. As our interviews reveal, this depends highly on the personal style of a minister because the civil service is policy responsive and fairly professional. However, the ministers' experience in cooperation (and hidden appointments) with civil service has ensured that the latter has become quite capable of assisting the political leaders if needed. The experience of the Ratas II coalition illustrates the point: the less experienced EKRE ministers had several conflicts or mounting tensions with the higher civil servants, which resulted in their weak support for EKRE's ministers' political initiatives, even if the legal context favoured the cooperation.

The third set of variables comes from the political context. In Estonia, the coalition and party discipline are rather strict – thus, ministers can hardly demonstrate dissent with the coalition's policy will (or the party's policy line). Hence, in the realm of political agreements, the PM and coalition party leaders dominate overwhelmingly over the ministers and act as the key figures in smoothing emerging conflicts between the individual actors in a coalition. Therefore, as soon as the minister's appointment depends on the political will of the party leaders and PM, there are few examples of meaningful conflicts between the ministers and PM. However, in the case of the less experienced parties (EKRE) or under weaker PMs (e.g. Kallas cabinet 2021–2022), single dissenter ministers may emerge, and this has become more frequent since 2014 (our qualitative interviews revealed).

Coalition governance and conflict management mechanisms

A sophisticated pattern of *network-type* politico-administrative coordination has evolved over the years at the executive level in Estonia. It has been evident throughout the process in which the ministerial draft proposals finally reach the SoGs. The network has a reasonable amount of veto points and strategic planning filters but has been able to avoid the concentration of coordinating administrative authority vis-a-vis political coordination. Briefly, at the level of politico-administrative coordination, a policy proposal must fit not only into the official legislative plan, which the Ministry of Justice steers, but also the proposal should get consent from all the ministries and central governing bodies, which consider the proposal's juridical side, the overall conception,

and assess the possible policy impact, etc. If the parties involved have been able to settle the disagreements, the final approval is given by the *board of secretaries-general* of ministries on Monday morning meeting before the SoG on Thursday. Thus, much of the policy coordination is done by a well-oiled politico-administrative coordination machine before the draft proposals reach the table of the cabinet meetings.

After the consent of the board of secretaries, or even in case of minor disagreements, the PM has full political control over the decision-making. The issue is included in the draft agenda of the SoG on Tuesday, which the PM approves on Wednesday. Before the session's agenda is approved, if necessary, the PM holds supplementary ad hoc consultations with the involved members of the government. Sometimes conflicts or frictions remain, and then the leaders of the coalition parties and the PM make ad hoc arrangements: very rarely excluding the issue from the agenda altogether, but most often forging a supplementary consensus.

The official SoGs on Thursday morning are almost entirely formal meetings in which the agendas, ca. half a hundred items, are ratified, usually within one hour and a half. It indicates effective political selection and coordination mechanisms before that meeting.

However, if the full consent of ministries/agencies is not achieved and the *secretaries-general* do not accept the proposal on Monday, the proposal is forwarded to the *cabinet consultation meeting (CCM)*. It is an informal and confidential arena of political coordination at the coalition and is held as a rule after the SoG on Thursday afternoon.

Until recently, there have not been issue-specific government (ministries') commissions, such as sub-cabinets (CaC) for regular policy coordination and conflict solution, in Estonia, although they are fairly widespread in other European democracies. In the Estonian case, the generalist and pragmatically oriented CCM has worked as a more efficient conflict resolution mechanism over the policy issues before the official SoG takes place. At the CCM, the timetable is completely reversed to the SoG: every issue is debated for a long, up to several hours. This meeting is designed to create an informal and trustworthy atmosphere for consensual decision-making. However, our interviews reveal that the CCMs have become more technical and formal in the Kallas cabinet due to the weaker PM leadership.

If consensus has not been found even at the CCM, the issue will either drop out, return to the CCM after the ad hoc meetings in which consensus between the conflicting parties is achieved, or, if the issue is very important and requires even a broader agreement – it is assigned to *coalition committee (CoC)* for a solution (see [Table 5.5](#)). If it happens, it indicates either internal cleavages or weak leadership of the current coalition.

Ansip's coalitions usually had no problems achieving consensus at the cabinet-level CCM, so those meetings were more formal, shorter, and *open* to expert advice on concrete issues, which increased the PM's leverage. Rõivas continued this practice while having a weaker authority, which resulted in

Table 5.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Estonian coalitions, 2007–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|-----------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Ansip II | 2007 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PCa, CCM | CoC, CCM | CoC | No | Yes | All/All | No | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Ansip III | 2009 | POST | Yes | No | IC, CoC, CaC, CCM, Parl, PCa | CoC, CCM | IC, CoC | No | Yes | All/Most | No | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Ansip IV | 2011 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PCa, CCM | CoC, CCM | CoC | Yes | Yes | All/All | No | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Rõivas I | 2014 | IE | Yes | No | CoC, CCM, PCa, Parl, PS | CoC, CCM | CoC | Yes | Yes | All/All | No | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Rõivas II | 2015 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PCa, CCM, Parl | CoC, CCM | CoC | Yes | Yes | All/Most | Yes | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Ratas I | 2016 | IE | yes | no | CoC, CCM, PCa, CaC, IC, Parl | CoC, CCM | IC | No (IE) | Yes | All/Most | Yes | Varied | No | Yes |
| Ratas II | 2019 | POST | yes | no | CoC, CCM, PCa, CaC, IC, Parl | CoC, CCM | IC | No (IE) | Yes | All/Most | Yes | Varied | No | Yes |
| Kallas K | 2021 | IE | Yes | No | CoC, CCM, PCa, Parl | CoC, Parl | CoC | No (EK) | Yes | All/All | Yes | Varied | No | Yes |

Notes:

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; PRE = pre-election; N = no coalition agreement.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; CaC = cabinet committee; CCM = cabinet consultation meeting; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; Parl = parliamentary leaders PS = party summit.

Coalition discipline: all = discipline always expected; most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters, spec. = discipline only expected on a few explicitly specified matters; no = discipline not expected.

Policy agreement: few = policy agreement on a few selected policies; varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; comp. = comprehensive policy agreement; no = no explicit agreement.

longer meetings. He sometimes tried to achieve faster outputs at the expense of firm consensus, which damaged the cooperative climate in the coalition and made the partners wary.

At the Ratas I coalition, especially at the beginning, CCM was a rather closed meeting of the cabinet members but politically highly deliberative, whereas the involvement of invited experts was considerably smaller. As a result, those meetings were much less effective, and the resolutions to the conflicting issues were often postponed, or sometimes too ambiguous decisions were made. However, Ratas was learning the art of consensus-seeking and holding the coalition together. In the Ratas II coalition, the ad hoc (but regular) *inner cabinet (IC)* or meeting of party leaders gained considerably more importance as a conflict solution mechanism than previously. In a case of deadlock at the executive level, the issues were usually referred to the *coalition committee (CoC)*. Earlier, the inner cabinet indicated the strength of PM leadership, but in the case of Ratas' cabinets, a need to switch on an informal summit of the party leaders indicated high tensions in the coalitions.

The coalition committee (CoC) includes not only the coalition parties' leadership (or delegations) but also the chairpersons of parliamentary groups or parliament-based party leaders not currently involved in the cabinet. The powerful PM-s initially created it to control the 'large' and less disciplined coalitions. In the Laar II cabinet (1999–2002), one of Estonia's most collegial coalitions, the role of the CoC was to smoothen the political coordination between the government and parliament (Pettai 2019: 187).

Ansip restored the initial role of the CoC primarily to strengthen his leadership. The role of the CoC got even more formalized for his later coalition (2011–2014).

However, the coalitions with a weaker leadership (Rõivas) or too conflict-ridden (Ratas) have already been heavily involved in conflict resolution at the cabinet level, which has further increased the role of CCM. Since 2017 the new leader of the IRL/IE (Helir-Valdor Seeder) has not been a member of the cabinet but has continued as a leader of the parliament fraction. So, it became difficult to avoid divisive conflicts purely at the cabinet level because the members of the parliament were formally not included in the CCM. More precisely, the conflict was transferred to the party leaders' regular meetings (inner cabinet – IC) and also resulted in the increased *role* of the coalition committee in ensuring the coalition's integrity. The pattern of the inner cabinet has become particularly pronounced in the Ratas II government, where a very unpredictable coalition partner (EKRE) emerged.

Kallas, as a PM, also not only resorted predominately to the CoC as the main conflict resolution arena but also gave more weight to the prominent politicians based on the parliament (Parl), such as the chairpersons of the parliamentary groups. However, because the personal relationship between the two party leaders (Ratas, EK and Kallas, ER) was rather a thorny one, the inner cabinet was not very functional (Ratas was not even a cabinet member but based in the parliament). Thus, it became increasingly difficult to manage intra-coalition conflicts.

Coalition politics and the parliament

The CoC's second role is to ensure policy planning at the parliamentary level. It mostly concerns not only the cabinet decisions voted at the parliament, but also, the policy proposals originated from the parliament need a supplementary legitimisation or denial (in the case of the proposals made by the opposition) by the cabinet. There is also a need to ensure voting discipline at the parliamentary committees and the *plenary meetings*. Due to the increasing need for consensus-seeking mechanisms, those tasks have become even more essential for the Ratas' and Kallas' coalitions.

The role in ensuring the voting discipline has been rather formal and assigned regularly to party group leaders at the parliament. Overall, the Estonian parties have not struggled much in keeping the party discipline in the parliament – it has been pretty firm since the 2000s. However, the parliamentary party group leaders should occasionally manage situations where a small number of MP-s are not affiliated with any party groups, or internal party dissenters are emerging (which was relatively common during the Rõivas II and Ratas I governments). Nevertheless, those tasks are not difficult because, in Estonia, the role of the opposition is rather limited and is restrained mainly by the questioning time in the plenary sessions. Moreover, the role of the committee heads is not visible in Estonia because of strict party discipline and because committees' meetings are closed to the general public.

Overall, as one can see, instruments favouring both considerable ministerial autonomy and the emergence of strong PMs are simultaneously built in the Estonian system. Moreover, those instruments are supplemented with advanced intra-coalition consensus mechanisms (CCM, CoC, IC). Thus, the specific coalition governance model adopted very much depends on the particular PM's leadership style. The governments led by Ansip were clearly following a strong PM model, but its successors from the same party, Rõivas and Kallas, lacked comparable authority and leadership skills and were forced to incline more towards the coalition compromise model (Rõivas) or were unable to prevent the re-emergence of the ministerial government (Kallas). Ratas developed the coalition compromise model almost from the beginning. However, in his second government (with EKRE – Ratas II), he was forced to give more autonomy to the constituent parties, and the ministers, mostly because the leading personalities of EKRE, proved to be very self-willed and hard to be tamed (as our interviews with various cabinet members indicated). While the PM still held a grip on the strategic decision-making and successfully disciplined the cabinet ministers, the slight shift to the ministerial government model started even earlier than in the Kallas cabinet.

Cabinet duration and termination

Since the 2000s, the duration of the governments in Estonia has steadily increased, and especially the cabinets formed by Ansip and the ER (2005–2014) proved to be relatively long-lasting (Pettai 2019). Nevertheless, the more

recent governments formed since 2014 (Rõivas I II, Ratas I, II and Kallas) have had a shorter timespan (the average coalition duration for 2008–2014 was 824 days, and since 2014 597 days). The reasons for cabinet termination are summarized in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Cabinet termination in Estonia, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Ansip II | 54.3 | 7a | 13 | SDE, ER | 6 | Ansip threw out the SDE ministers over disputes concerning unemployment benefits and budgetary constraints. Ansip wanted to reduce benefits and raise payroll taxes, which the SDE objected to, until Ansip had President Ilves remove them from his cabinet |
| Ansip III | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Ansip IV | 74.5 | 9 | 14 | | | Ansip resigned to stand for the European Parliament and become EU Commissioner |
| Rõivas I | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Rõivas II | 40.7 | 7b | | ER, IRL | | Loss of trust between members: breaking promises and resenting each other, criticizing persons disrespectfully in public |
| Ratas I | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Ratas II | 45.4 | 7a, 9 | 14 | EK, EKRE | | EK faced a corruption scandal related to financing the party, and the Prime Minister decided to resign as a pre-emptive move. There had also been prolonged intra-coalition conflict on the public referendum (on the constitutional status of marriage) planned by EKRE |

Notes:

Technical terminations

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of Prime Minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event.

As mentioned earlier, the big shift in Estonian politics, when Edgar Savisaar was finally replaced by younger and Europe-orientated Jüri Ratas in 2016, opened up the political arena for different combinations. Because there were suddenly more opportunities to form alternative coalitions and no *cordon sanitaire*, the subsequent governments have become somewhat more fragile and short-lived.

Regardless of recent years' turbulence, several factors have still contributed to the relative stability of the coalition governments in Estonia. First, the growing stability of the governments has come hand-in-hand with the ongoing party system consolidation since 2008. Second, the leading parties in the coalitions have preferred to cooperate with other experienced and familiar partners, not with the populist newcomers. Ratas II government, which invited EKRE, has been a remarkable exception here. Nonetheless, the rise of the PRR (EKRE) has not made coalition politics inherently less stable in Estonia.

According to the Estonian constitution, the parliament can call for a no-confidence vote against the cabinet as a whole, individual ministers, or the PM personally. The motions like that are allowed to be put to the vote if at least a fifth of the MPs have previously supported them. A majority of the parliament has to vote for the motion of no-confidence to get it passed. In a case of coalition termination, the President has two options: (1) if a single party leaves the coalition and the PM is convinced that the government has enough strength to continue as a minority government, the President has not usually designated the new *formateur* (as happened for Ansip III cabinet); (2) if the composition of a coalition changes substantially and the new coalition agreement is made, a new *formateur* is appointed by the President, and an investiture vote takes place accordingly.

No coalition government in Estonia since 2008 has lasted for a full term – from one election to another. There have been different reasons for coalition termination (besides regular parliamentary elections), but various types of highly contingent personal events or other voluntary reasons have been prevalent: the prominent ministers or the PM has been involved in a political/corruption scandal (Ratas II), there have been the conflicts over policy issues (Ansip II) or the shifts in the party leadership which have opened up the new avenues for the alternative configurations (Ansip IV, Rõivas II) (see also Pettai 2019).

Conclusion

Two major earthquake-like events shaped Estonian politics and coalition politics in the period 2008–2021. First, in the autumn of 2016, in which ER, which had been in the government almost for two decades (1999–2016), dropped out from the government, and the subsequent coalitions, until 2021, were formed by its major rival, EK. This broke a long-lasting coalition dominance of ER and opened up the political arena for different coalition

options. Second, after the elections in 2019, the populist radical right party, EKRE, was invited to the government, which has somewhat affected the familiar patterns and styles of coalition governance but has not led to democratic backlash.

The Estonian party system has remained considerably fragmented but fairly stable for the whole period analysed here, although the elections in 2015 brought two new parties into the parliament (EVA and EKRE). However, the rise of the EKRE has produced some shift in the underlying cleavage constellations in Estonian politics, in which the GAL/TAN divide has gained more importance along with the traditional socio-economic and ethnic cleavage.

The dramatic changes described earlier (including the EKRE's involvement in a government) have not brought any substantial changes in the formal institutional settings. Nevertheless, in the previous sections, it was emphasized that the informal rules and conventions had played an even more important role in the coalition politics in Estonia than the formal ones. Those informal patterns have become relatively well institutionalized over time and repeatedly used by different coalitions. However, a situation like that can not only open the door for a calculative-pragmatic political style, which provides some flexibility, but can also make the real practices of coalition governance less predictable and too dependent on the peculiar domestic political context and the leadership styles.

Consequently, one can witness how Estonia has shifted from the strong PM government model under Ansip (2007–2014) to the coalition compromise model under Rõivas (2014–2016) and Ratas (2016–2021) and has further developed into a ministerial government pattern during the Kaja Kallas cabinet (2021–2022).

Regarding government formation, the Estonian case exhibits two peculiar features. At first glance, Estonian parties seem to be quite promiscuous in choosing their coalition partners, but at least until 2016, a strong exclusionary logic was built into the system, in which one of the major parties (EK) was almost permanently excluded. The playing field has become more open only recently, making the post-2016 coalitions somewhat less stable. Second, the Estonian parties have rather preferred to form coalitions with professional and familiar partners – the brand-new populist parties have not usually been invited to the coalition. The inclusion of the EKRE in 2019 could be seen as a violation of that well-established pattern.

However, if we look at the overall composition of the coalitions, it has not changed so dramatically since the 'big shift' in 2016: either the IE or SDE or both have been the members of all coalitions since 2014 (the familiar pattern, EK or RE + IE or/and SDE, has endured). Only the entry of the EKRE in 2019 has somewhat reshuffled the cards.

Yet, there have been some changes in the size of the cabinet, which has expanded from 13 to 15 ministers since the Rõivas II government (2015–2016). Since Ratas I cabinet, the allocation of portfolios has followed the

parity principle in which the portfolios have been distributed equally among the coalition partners. It has been a significant shift away from the style followed by the governments chaired by Ansip (2005–2014), in which the portfolios were allocated according to the electoral strength, and thus, the ER was constantly in a more favourable position than its partners.

The second issue which has transformed under the EK's governments has been the status of the coalition agreement. When the ER was in charge, the coalition agreements were often very lengthy, detailed, and technocratic documents, which were often followed in a very orthodox and rigid manner. The coalition agreements under Ratas' governments have become shorter, less technocratic, and rather programmatic political documents.

The PMs (Rõivas, Ratas, and Kallas) who have assumed office since 2014, after the long reign of Ansip, have been more troubled in holding the coalitions together and solving the intra-coalition conflicts. It has happened chiefly due to a lack of experience (Ratas), authority, or both (Rõivas, Kallas). It also indicates that the generational shift which took place in the mid-2010s had produced politicians with somewhat meagre leadership skills than the previous generation, which was socialized in the Soviet time or early 1990s.

Traditionally the major conflict management arena has been the informal *cabinet consultation meeting* (CCM), happening after the formal government sessions. Nonetheless, due to the frequent conflicts (e.g. in the Kallas government) and/or undisciplined behaviour of one of the coalition partners (EKRE in the Ratas II cabinet), the role of the *coalition committee* (CoC) has also increased. PM Kallas has unintentionally further increased the weight of the parliamentary actors in intra-coalition conflict management.

The cabinet duration in Estonia has been slightly above the CEE average. However, the coalitions formed after 2014 have been more short-lived than those formed by Ansip 2007–2014. None of the coalitions studied here has endured for a whole electoral cycle. The events which have led to the coalition's resignation have been highly contingent and personal (corruption scandals or the shifts in the party leadership, which have opened up new avenues for alternative combinations).

To conclude this chapter, one can ask three critical questions: (1) how the major crises (financial, migration, and Covid-19 crises) have affected coalition politics in Estonia; (2) in what way the rise of the PRR parties (namely EKRE) has impacted the coalition governance and democracy; (3) how the war in Ukraine might influence the Estonian politics?

Regarding the above-mentioned crises, we have seen that the financial crisis (2008–2011), even strengthened the position of the government parties (notably RE), helped to consolidate the party system and made the cabinets even more long-lasting. The migration crisis opened up the opportunity structures for the rise of PRR parties (EKRE), and the Covid-19 crisis further cemented their electoral position.

So far, the emergence of EKRE has brought neither democratic backlash nor any noteworthy institutional changes in Estonia. Although they have been very provocative and visible in parliamentary politics, the influence of the opposition parties is usually very limited in Estonia; thus, the EKRE's actions have not contributed to the increasing government instability. However, while in the government (Ratas II), they still forced the coalition partners to alter many former conventional practices. For example, causing recurring scandals because of their inflammable rhetoric, they made the Ratas II cabinet more conflict-ridden than many previous coalitions. They thus forced the PM to resort concomitantly to the coalition committee and inner cabinet as the conflict managing mechanisms. EKRE has also influenced the format of the coalition agreement, which became shorter and less technocratic. Nonetheless, none of those changes in the informal institutions has brought any lasting impact. Curiously, the presence of EKRE has not yet triggered the re-emergence of the *cordon sanitaire* phenomenon in coalition formation – at least so far.

Why has there been no democratic backsliding in Estonia due to the rise of the PRR? One can point out two principal reasons: (1) coalition governments themselves have proven to be very efficient tools in disciplining the radical parties, especially if the other coalition partners (in Ratas II government EK and IE) are devoted to the principles of liberal democracy; (2) because of the fragmentation of the Estonian party system, it is improbable that any populist party in the near future can control a legislative majority.

The war in Ukraine has somewhat weakened the positions of EK and EKRE because those parties have formerly demonstrated quite ambiguous attitudes towards Putinist Russia. Yet, quite remarkably, the war has strengthened the position and authority of PM Kallas, who has become one of the major spokespersons in the international arena when adopting a very uncompromising attitude towards Russia's behaviour. The improved international standing has helped Kallas compensate for her relatively weak leadership skills in domestic politics and intra-coalition conflict management.

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|------|---|
| EÜRP | United People's Party of Estonia (Eestimaa Ühendatud Rahvapartei) |
| EPPE | Estonian Pensioners and Families Party (Eesti Pensionäride ja Perede Erakond) |
| EME | Estonian Country People's Party (Eesti Maarahva Erakond) |
| AP | Development Party (Arengupartei) |
| EK | Estonian Centre Party (Eesti Keskerakond) |
| VD | Free Democrats (Vabad demokraadid) |
| SDE | Social Democratic Party (Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond) |
| ERL | People's Union of Estonia (Eestimaa Rahvaliid) |
| ERo | Estonian Greens (Eesti Rohelised) |
| EML | Estonian Rural Union (Eesti Maaliit) |

| | |
|-------|---|
| ERoh | Greens of Estonia (Eestimaa Rohelised) |
| EKod | Estonian Citizen (Eesti Kodanik) |
| Sõlt | Independents (Sõltumatud) |
| ERP | Estonian Royalist Party (Eesti Rojalistlik Partei) |
| IL | Pro Patria Union (Isamaaliit) |
| ERSP | Estonian National Independence Party (Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatus Partei) |
| ResP | Res Publica (Res Publica) |
| EKO | Estonian Coalition Party (Eesti Koonderakond) |
| IRL | Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit) |
| EEE | Estonian Entrepreneurs' Party (Eesti Ettevõtjate Erakond) |
| VKR-P | Right-Wingers' Party (Vabariiklaste ja Konservatiivide Rahvaerakond, Parempoolsed) |
| ER | Estonian Reform Party (Eesti Reformierakond) |
| EVA | Estonian Free Party (Eesti Vabaerakond) |
| EKRE | Conservative People's Party of Estonia (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond) |
| IE | Pro Patria (Isamaa) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Estonian in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Notes

- 1 *The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia*, accessible on the web: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/530102013003/consolide>
- 2 In Estonia the term 'cabinet' is mainly used for informal coordination meetings of the government. This stands in some contrast to our formal project definition and our main unit of analysis, the formal cabinet. In the text, we use the terms cabinet and government interchangeably.
- 3 A special Regulations of the Government Act was adopted only in 2011: it finally codified many rules and practices that had become habitually institutionalised over many years.
- 4 Government of the Republic Act, accessible on the web: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521012014008/consolide>
- 5 There is no tradition of forming pre-electoral alliances in Estonia – it has happened only once, before the elections in 1999 (Pettai 2019).

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6 Hungary

Party Alliances and Personal Coalitions

Éva Ványi and Gabriella Ilonszki

Introduction

Former findings on coalition governments pointed towards prime ministerial government and political governance as the most important trends in Hungary (Ilonszki, 2019). Prime ministers have had an elevated role and have enjoyed a safe position since the beginning of systemic change. A constructive no-confidence vote stabilized their position by making the PM's removal possible only if the parliament could propose a new replacement PM with a clear majority. The PM had discretionary power in nominating and dismissing ministers and working out the structure of the government. The PMs' positions further increased in the new millennium with moves toward political governance (Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008; Meyer-Sahling and Veen 2012): at the expense of bureaucracy political nominees gathered strength and the politicization and centralization of governance became entrenched, a tendency that has become accentuated with time (Kopecký et al. 2022). Against this background, stable governments and coalition governments prevailed in the two decades after systemic change except for the 2008–2010 year (Ványi 2015) (see [Table 6.1a](#)).

[Table 6.1a](#) provides an overview of some fundamental aspects of Hungarian governments since systemic change demonstrating the dominance of coalitions, a clear left-right coalition divide, and government stability. Although the left-right coalition shift changed government stability remained after 2010 as well. Hungary had economic problems before the depression, in fact, the Gyurcsány II coalition government collapsed before the crisis mainly due to economic reasons when the junior coalition partner left the government in 2008. This was followed by a one-party government (Gyurcsány III), and then by the Bajnai government, which was claimed to be an expert government although it did not correspond to the expectation that expert governments should be supported by all major parties. In fact, the Bajnai government was supported from outside only by the leftist coalition partners in the Gyurcsány II government, while Fidesz and KDNP were against. Although the Bajnai government achieved good results in the management of the economic crisis, the crisis and the left coalition's failure contributed to the overwhelming victory of the Fidesz-KDNP party alliance in 2010.

Table 6.1a Hungarian cabinets 1990–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Antall I | 1990-05-23 | 1990-04-08 | MDF, FKGP, KDNP | sur | 230 (59.6) | 386 | 6 | 3.72 | |
| 2 | Antall II | 1992-02-24 | | MDF, Kiszgazdák, KDNP | sur | 214 (55.7) | 384 | 7 | 4.01 | |
| 3 | Boross | 1993-12-21 | | MDF, EKGP, KDNP | mwc | 196 (51.3) | 382 | 8 | 4.86 | |
| 4 | Horn | 1994-07-15 | 1994-05-29 | MSzP, SzDSz | sur | 279 (72.3) | 386 | 6 | 2.89 | |
| 5 | Orbán I | 1998-07-06 | 1998-05-24 | Fidesz, MDF, FKGP | sur | 213 (55.2) | 386 | 6 | 3.45 | MIÉP |
| 6 | Medgyessy | 2002-05-27 | 2002-04-21 | MSzP, SzDSz | mwc | 198 (51.3) | 386 | 4 | 2.5 | |
| 7 | Gyurcsány I | 2004-09-29 | | MSzP, SzDSz | mwc | 198 (51.6) | 384 | 4 | 2.54 | |
| 8 | Gyurcsány II | 2006-06-09 | 2006-04-23 | MSzP, SzDSz | mwc | 210 (54.4) | 386 | 6 | 2.61 | |
| 9 | Gyurcsány III | 2008-05-01 | | MSzP, Somogyért | min | 191 (49.5) | 386 | 6 | 2.64 | SzDSz |
| 10 | Bajnai | 2009-04-14 | | MSzP | min | 189 (49.2) | 384 | 6 | 2.63 | SzDSz |
| 11 | Orbán II | 2010-05-29 | 2010-04-25 | Fidesz, KDNP | sur | 263 (68.1) | 386 | 5 | 2.54 | |
| 12 | Orbán III | 2014-06-06 | 2014-04-06 | Fidesz, KDNP | sur | 133 (66.8) | 199 | 7 | 2.58 | |
| 13 | Orbán IV | 2018-05-18 | 2018-04-08 | Fidesz, KDNP | sur | 133 (66.8) | 199 | 7 | 2.63 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition.

Since 2010, two significant changes have occurred. First, Hungary can increasingly be described as a declining or as a defunct democracy (Lührmann and Staffan 2019), thus, it is important to examine how coalition governance is affected by this development, particularly so because scholarly attention on de-democratization rarely touches upon the governance aspect (Bartha et al 2020). Is the model of responsible party government, the foundation of modern democracies and coalitions maintained?

Second, and related, the role of the two governing parties requires attention. Two parties form the three more recent governments in Hungary (2010–2014, 2014–2018, 2018–2022): Fidesz Hungarian Civic Alliance and Christian Democrats (KDNP). The two parties have separate Parliamentary Party Groups (PPGs) in parliament and the KDNP party leader is represented in the government as a deputy PM – in addition to several KDNP top politicians in varied government positions. On structural grounds, Fidesz-KDNP governments seem to be coalitions. At the same time electorally and organizationally, the two parties function as an alliance since the early 2000s: in the mixed-member electoral system, they run a common party list as well as joint candidates in SMDs, and both parties allow double membership between them. The two parties can hardly be more different: an electorally strong Fidesz with well-established clientele in the countryside, in contrast to an electorally invisible KDNP without much local basis. A strong and powerful party leader and prime minister in Fidesz, in contrast to a weak and hardly visible KDNP party leader (and deputy prime minister). It is Fidesz (indeed the prime minister) that spells out the political and policy agenda, while KDNP only follows through. KDNP makes its voice heard only in matters that they regard as part of religious moral: for example, aiming to prohibit opening stores on Sundays or curtailing abortion: the party represents the Christian values as it is also stated in the party alliance document.¹ The features of the two parties' alliance had received scholarly attention before (Ondré 2012)² but remained inconclusive concerning their government cooperation. As the two parties are in their fourth governing cycle after their success at the April 2022 parliamentary elections, we can establish a more conclusive analysis of the particularities of their governing cooperation. We expect that the party alliance framework and the de-democratization process qualify these governments in important aspects and make them different from the coalitions as regularly analysed by scholarly literature.

Based on former coalition literature, there are particularly three aspects that require attention and might be instructive to unfold the nature of the party alliance governance (Müller et al 2019: 11 and ff.). In coalitions, *while parties are hardly ever equal still aim to establish their connections so that they ensure responsibility towards their voters both in electoral and policy terms*. To this end, first of all, the parties should have similar *access to information* so that they can make decisions on the same grounds. Second, there should be clear patterns in implementing personnel moves like *nominations and removals in the government through careful adjustment between the parties*. Finally, there should

be a clear policy agenda and *mechanisms for working out policy moves together between the governing partners*. The presence or absence of these aspects will highlight whether the traditionally expected coalition rationale prevails in the party alliance context. Furthermore, as authoritarianisation tendencies run in parallel with power concentration in the form of centralized and personalized decision-making, party responsibility and party-based coalition rationale might also be harmed (Mccoy and Somer 2019). Thus, on both the party alliance and the authoritarianisation grounds, we expect a modified government form and governance practice in the post-2010 governments as compared to the pre-2010 ones.

Although the starting point of the analysis of this book is 2008, this chapter will particularly focus on the Orbán governments after 2010. The immediate impact of the financial crisis was the break-down of the left-wing majority coalition in 2008 between the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) and Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz). The policy mismanagement of the Gyurcsány II (2006–2008) coalition government and Gyurcsány III (2008–2009) minority government before and during the crisis appeared as a prelude to the fundamental transformation that started in 2010 with the landslide victory of Fidesz.

The institutional setting

The period of interest for this chapter began with the “more than a government change less than a regime change” slogan of Fidesz at the 2010 elections. As the “old” party system has become increasingly feeble, Fidesz, as an important actor, started a new strategy, it would not only change the party’s responses and behaviour in light of the changed circumstances but change the “rules of the game” as well (Shepsle 2008).

As the 2010 elections brought about a qualified surplus two-thirds majority for the Fidesz-KDNP electoral alliance, changes of constitutional significance were implemented. Although a former government coalition between 1994 and 1998 also had surplus majority, they did not seize the opportunity to change the rules of the game that had been worked out at systemic change. By contrast, the post-2010 transformation spread over all policy fields and reached the levels of politics and polity.

First, the new constitution (Fundamental Law) of 2011 increased the power of the already powerful prime minister (Goetz and Margetts 1999; Ilonszki, 2019). The strengthening of the prime minister occurred through various developments: while formerly the investiture votes on prime minister and the government programme were voted on at the same time, due to the constitutional change, the prime minister is now invested without a programme. As a result, a key component of responsibility, that is the requirement of a clear government programme or policy document has been removed. Constitutionally the cabinet is formed when the ministers are nominated. The new constitution also increased the power of the prime minister within the government.

According to the Fundamental Law ‘*The Prime Minister defines the government’s general policy,*’ and ‘*a minister leads the ministry within the framework of the government’s general policy*’³. These aspects hint at substantive features of “political governance” and strengthen the dominant prime ministerial model (Bergman et al 2019: 557). Furthermore, the Fundamental Law curtailed the potential input of the public by eliminating popular initiative and introducing stricter referendum requirements in terms of validity and effectiveness. Even though it was advocated that the Constitution is “etched in stone”, it has been amended 11 times.

The electoral system change that came into effect at the 2014 parliamentary elections had two eminent consequences on the governance framework (Várnagy and Ilonszki 2017). Although the electoral system remained mixed (a party list tier and single-member districts being combined), its majoritarian component strengthened. Although there had been safe governing majorities in Hungary before 2010 (except for the 2008–2010 crisis years), the new regulation offers a large advantage to the winner. Furthermore, the opposition parties’ opportunity to agree on a common candidate in single-member districts was weakened as the two-round formula was replaced with one round in the single-member districts, which appeared as a blow in the fragmented and polarized opposition party system (Ilonszki and Dudzinska 2021). Finally, the last change that strengthened the incumbent parties at the expense of the opposition was the reduction of the parliamentary seats from 386 to 199: the small size of opposition PPGs further constrains their possibilities to influence policy.

These above changes affecting fundamental political institutions were complemented by several other transformatory steps with implications on the working of the government. These steps can be grouped into three types: in some instances, the institution has been preserved in form, but due to *personal changes, its role in the political system has been transformed; in other instances, the same institution has gone through functional changes* and thus its role has changed; and finally *new institutions* have been created to serve the changing governance rationale. The case of the Constitutional Court with new nomination rules and newly nominated members is an example of the “personal” dimension: as a result, the Constitutional Court has lost its former control function on government action; the case of the Budget Council (BC) also illustrates function loss by the new nomination rules: the BC had been entitled to give opinion on finance-related legislation, but after 2010, with the nomination of government-related persons as a member of BC, its original control functions decreased and only its name remained; finally, the creation of a brand new National Media and Communication Council ensured control of the media in the interest of the government. These changes increased the power of the executive by eliminating the scrutiny opportunities and autonomy of other institutional actors. They did not serve efficiency aims but power aims (Grosser 1993), more particularly partisan interests (Ágh 2016), and due to their excessive nature, made the bed for the authoritarianisation tendencies.

The party system and the main actors

As mentioned above, the financial crisis only indirectly explained the 2010 changes as the more immediate and direct impact occurred in 2008 by ending the Gyurcsány II majority coalition. The mismanagement of the financial and economic crises and the coalition conflicts discredited the leftist forces, first of all, the Gyurcsány-led MSzP and the junior coalition partner SzDSz. The party system underwent major changes as a result. Before 2010, the party system was characterized by a bipolarity with the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) on the left, and Fidesz on the conservative side, both supported by smaller coalition partners in government. The 2008 economic crisis hit the country hard and the leftist government coalition: half-hearted reforms, coalition conflicts, and prime-ministerial leadership failure⁴ offered the opportunity to the opposition Fidesz to advance.

During this period, Fidesz turned completely from conservatism to right-wing populism (Enyedi 2015; Norris 2020, Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index). The party's organizational and leadership traits also transformed: after Fidesz's 2002 electoral and government failure, the party-rebuild started outside the party through the so-called civic circle movement (Greskovits 2020) with a powerful input from Viktor Orbán, the party leader. This broader movement increased the party's organizational outreach and began to overwrite the party organization *per se*. The "three faces" of party organization have fundamentally transformed (Katz and Mair 1993). Although Fidesz sits in *public office*, i.e. in government, party goals are exclusively represented by the party leader and PM unconstrained; the party *on the ground* is built on excessive personal interests and the acquisition of local resources by the party clientele; the party *in central office* that is the party hierarchy is a selected entourage loyal to and dependent on the PM without any opportunity to supervise or advise. On the road from conservatism to populism, Fidesz became hostage of its party leader (Körösényi, 2007, 2019). This image of party organization confirms former scholarly analysis that party democracy is missing in leader-centred populist parties (Böhmelt et al 2022). This organizational transformation was going in parallel with Fidesz's changed political and policy attention in a populist frame and changed the conflict structure towards the GAL/TAN divide (see Table 6.1b).

The landslide victory of Fidesz and the failure of the Socialists did not come as a surprise at the 2010 parliamentary elections. Fidesz together with its ally KDNP was able to acquire a two-thirds constitutional majority in parliament, while the Socialists' positions substantially weakened, and the other parties from the early 1990s disappeared from the political scene. At the same time, two new parties emerged: the extreme right, Jobbik, and the green party, Politics Can be Different (LMP). A new party system pattern formed: one-party dominance and a fragmented and polarized opposition. Opposition fragmentation has even increased: in 2010, three parties occupied the opposition benches (Socialists, Jobbik, and LMP) and since then four more

Table 6.1b Hungarian system conflict structure 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 8 | Gyurcsány II | MSzP | Econ. left-right | | |
| 9 | Gyurcsány III | MSzP | Econ. left-right | | |
| 10 | Bajnai | MSzP | Econ. left-right | | |
| 11 | Orbán II | Fidesz | GAL-TAN | MSzP | Econ. left-right |
| 12 | Orbán III | Fidesz | GAL-TAN | MSzP | Econ. left-right |
| 13 | Orbán IV | Fidesz | GAL-TAN | DK | Econ. left-right |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2006–2014 (cabinets 1–12) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

opposition parties have emerged: Democratic Coalition (DK), a split away left-liberal party from the failing Socialists, Dialogue for Hungary (PM), a split away party from the green LMP, Our Home, (MH), a split away party from Jobbik, and Momentum Movement (Momentum), a new liberal party, which became a parliamentary party at the 2022 elections. Starting in 2020, some cooperation among the opposition parties began in response to the populist government dominance. Although their cooperation brought about some success for opposition parties at the local elections, it never threatened Fidesz's political dominance. Not at least due to the party's excessive media dominance and disposition of huge state resources to well-targeted societal groups, the party was able to maintain its two-thirds parliamentary majority at the 2022 parliamentary election under the shadow of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Government formation

The bargaining processes

Before 2010, the bargaining over government was neither complex nor complicated: the choices were set between left-wing versus right-wing partisan actors. Also, the government formation negotiations always resulted in coalition agreements, which – despite their sometimes rather extensive length – were not policy oriented.

This trend ended in 2010. Still, the post-2010 cabinet formations in one respect followed former practice of right-wing parties forming governments based on electoral alliances (EA) and pre-electoral coalitions (PEC) (which was the case in 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022). In 2010, there was a pre-electoral party alliance⁵ between Fidesz and KDNP who had a joint party list and ran common single-district candidates⁶(see Table 6.1c). This cooperation was

Table 6.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Hungary, 1990–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--|
| 1998-05-24 | Fidesz, MDF | EA | |
| 2002-04-21 | Fidesz, MDF | EA | |
| 2006-04-23 | Fidesz, KDNP | EA, PEC | |
| | MDF, MDNP | EA, PEC | |
| 2010-04-25 | Fidesz, KDNP | EA, PEC | |
| 2014-04-06 | Fidesz, KDNP | EA, PEC | |
| | MSZP, Együtt, DK, PM, MLP | EA, PEC | Joint press conference |
| 2018-04-08 | Fidesz, KDNP | EA, PEC | |
| | MSZP, PM | EA, PEC | |

Notes:

Type: Electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

maintained in the following elections, even when Fidesz enjoyed dominance facing a fragmented opposition and had enough votes and seats to form a government alone. The formalized independence of KDNP is kept for political-ideological and resource acquisition reasons. Ideologically, KDNP might give the allure of Christian values to the government attracting voters who would not necessarily support Fidesz's radical agenda. On the other hand, the party's formal independence ensures more parliamentary resources, more party financing resources, and decision resources. As KDNP has a separate PPG, it is entitled to parliamentary funding and party funding, it can install nominations to parliamentary positions, and due to the allocation of parliamentary time and standing rule procedures, it can contribute to the parliamentary debates in its own right.

Nonetheless, the Orbán II cabinet formation in 2010 followed a familiar coalition formation procedure as a government programme, based on the detailed alliance document, was presented to the Parliament to vote on together with the investiture vote on the prime minister. The government formation process changed in 2014 due to several institutional and political reasons. Most importantly, as already mentioned above, the new Fundamental Law did not require a vote about the government programme. Also, Fidesz and KDNP did not prepare either joint electoral programmes or government programmes, before the 2014, 2018, or 2022 elections. 'We will continue' was the main message of the Fidesz-KDNP alliance in 2014. As a result, there was no bargaining (or any "bargaining rounds") taking place (see Table 6.2) and the parties did not make any formal coalition agreements after these elections either.

In fact, as one of the interviewees explained this condition in the following way: "a government programme is not needed at all; there are goals and guidelines at the beginning of the term, and the ministries work accordingly." At the

Table 6.2 Government formation period in Hungary, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days)</i> | <i>Number of days required in government formation</i> | <i>Total bargaining duration</i> | <i>Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses)</i> | | |
|----------------|----------------|---|---|--|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------|
| | | | | | | | <i>Pro</i> | <i>Abstention</i> | <i>Contra</i> |
| Gyurcsány II | 2006 | 0 | MSzP, SzDSz | 32 | 47 | 32 | 206 | 0 | 159 |
| Gyurcsány III | 2008 | 0 | MSzP, Somogyért | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Bajnai | 2009 | 0 | MSzP | 23 | 24 | 23 | 204 | 8 | 0 |
| Orbán II | 2010 | 0 | Fidesz, KDNP | 23 | 34 | 23 | 261 | 0 | 107 |
| Orbán III | 2014 | 0 | Fidesz, KDNP | 25 | 61 | 27 | 130 | 0 | 57 |
| Orbán IV | 2018 | 0 | Fidesz, KDNP | 8 | 40 | 8 | 134 | 0 | 28 |

same time, a new phenomenon appeared in Hungarian politics. As against the prime minister's speech in the Parliament after his investiture vote the annual extra-parliamentary speech of the prime minister has become more prominent during the Orbán II, III, and IV governments.⁷ This annual speech makes the publication and evaluation of policy issues a partisan event organized by the party foundation of Fidesz, while the parliament has become increasingly neglected as a forum for policy discussion and policy-making (Ilonszki and Vajda 2021). The executive has been using decree laws, which do not require any parliamentary debate or decision, especially since the COVID-19 emergency and outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

This condition partially explains why coalition agreements that would reflect intra-party and inter-party interests have not been created since 2010. As executive decisions tend to evade partisan and parliamentary influence, the policy bargaining and coalition agreements have become futile.

The composition and size of cabinets

The main actor in government formation since 2010 has been the party leader, and prime minister, Viktor Orbán from Fidesz. The first deputy prime minister is the leader of the KDNP (Zsolt Semjén) since 2003 and represents the KDNP in the cabinet.

From the beginning of the Orbán II cabinet (2010), ministries with multiple policy fields appear as a new form of government structure. This is not a new phenomenon in Hungary: in some former cabinets, some ministries with similar policy fields became united (social and youth affairs or economic and transport affairs). The novelty of the post-2010 cabinet structure was that the newly emerging large ministries did not simply unite two or three policy fields in one ministry but established large ministries with several policy fields. For example, the Ministry of Human Capacities included education, health, social, family, and youth affairs under the authority of one minister. Therefore, the number of ministries and cabinet members in the Orbán governments is the lowest compared to other cabinets before (*see Table 6.3*). The Orbán III government partially returned to a more traditional structure with ministries focusing on one policy area each, but the Ministry of Human Capacity remained an “integrated ministry” as before. In addition, with reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, and based on the introduced emergency laws, the Ministry of Interior Affairs incorporated health affairs to ensure more efficient measures in managing the pandemic. It should be noted here that after the 2022 elections – and the formation of the Orbán V government – the education portfolio also became incorporated in the Ministry of Interior Affairs to ensure stricter surveillance above a failing policy area.

Another politically interesting aspect of post-2010 cabinet formation is the changeable status of the finance affairs. First, between 2010 and 2018 finance policy area was integrated into the Ministry for National Economy.

Table 6.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Hungarian coalitions, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Labour Affairs/ Human Resources</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Gyurcsány II | 2006 | 10 MSzP, 3 SzDSz | 13 | 1 MSzP, 1 SzDSz | 12 | MSzP | MSzP | MSzP | MSzP | |
| Gyurcsány III | 2008 | 15 MSzP, 1 Somogyért | 16 | 1 MSzP | 13 | MSzP | MSzP | MSzP | MSzP | |
| Orbán II | 2010 | 9 Fidesz, 1 KDNP | 10 | 2 KDNP | 8 | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz |
| Orbán III | 2014 | 10 Fidesz, 2 KDNP | 12 | 2 KDNP | 9 | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz |
| Orbán IV | 2018 | 13 Fidesz, 1 KDNP | 14 | 2 KDNP | 10 | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz | Fidesz |

This followed from the beginning of the Orbán II cabinet when economic crisis management was a major task. However, in 2018, domestic economic development became part of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology to ensure the development of a stronger economy with innovation-based industries. Consequently, a separate Ministry of Finance had to be created in 2018, although in fact the National Bank has a fundamental role in finance affairs. The National Bank is not an extra-government or independent actor, it works in close alliance with the prime minister. Although the Orbán cabinets are politically focused, a small number of non-partisan technocratic ministers have been involved in the cabinets, ministers that tend to be more dependent on the prime ministerial agenda than more party-based ministries (Ilonszki and Ványi, 2011).

Structural-institutional changes at the top of the government since 2010 illustrate centralization trends as well as the ever-increasing power of the prime minister. At the beginning of the Orbán II government in 2010, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was established, under a junior minister from Fidesz. Its main task was to coordinate the work of government and parliament, especially between the two parties' PPGs, and to assist the prime minister to prepare proposals, control the work of the government and the implementation of decisions. This organization transformed into a ministry in 2014 in the face of the increasing number of tasks. While the strong competencies of the PMO remained, in 2015, the already existing Cabinet Office of the prime minister also transformed into a separate new ministry. The reason behind this was that the prime minister wanted to speed up decision-making processes, achieve quicker government decisions, and fasten bureaucratic implementation. Thus, the political coordination and control of the government work have been acquired by the Cabinet Office of the prime minister while the general, bureaucratic coordination remains in the PMO.

After the election in 2018, the political control of the prime minister over the government became even more pronounced. An organization called Government Office of the Prime Minister was founded to act as the PM's administrative support unit, directly under his control. This is not a ministry by law, but rather the central office of the Hungarian government. As Viktor Orbán said this change of governance structure was necessary because he does not only want to "lead the third government, but also direct and control it".⁸ Thus, altogether there are three government units under the exclusive authority of the prime minister: two ministries (i.e., the Prime Minister Office⁹ and the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office) and the separate Government Office from 2018 on. The Government Office prepares the cabinet meetings and coordinates and controls the implementation of the decisions. The prime minister controls the most important administrative decision-making processes through this organization, while the head of the Cabinet Office is responsible for political coordination. These changes again show the increasing role of the prime minister in government decision-making in parallel with the decreasing role of the parties in government.

The allocation of ministerial portfolios

More than 90 per cent of ministers were nominated by Fidesz in the three Orbán governments, and the most important portfolios belong to Fidesz (see [Table 6.3](#)). Consequently, only a few ministers have been nominated by the Christian Democrats. The main actor of the portfolio allocation process is the prime minister. According to our interviews, the prime minister has the unquestionable right to choose and nominate ministers to the cabinets. It should be noted that this right of the prime minister has been embedded in the constitutional regulation from 1990 on – but before 2010 the prime minister expectedly had to consult with his own party and the coalition partners and work out an agreement on that basis. At that time, in several instances, the conflicts, the unresolved portfolio, or personal problems used to have consequences – even if not government termination but some freezing in the coalition atmosphere. This happened in a number of occasions in all coalitions with the participation of MSzP and SzDSz.

The prime minister has the authority in government nominations and the leader of KDNP is informed about the candidates in advance but not necessarily in all instances.¹⁰ The interviews were informative about the concrete practice. First, the prime minister receives and accepts – informal – suggestions regarding personal nominations (from the KDNP party leader as well) but eventually alone proceeds with the nomination process. It is also clear that the names come first and the positions afterwards. Finally, when all details are put together, party affiliation does not count. One interview explicitly said: “we regard most state secretaries (i.e., junior ministers) as individual actors”, with the implication that party considerations do not (or very rarely) appear in the background of nominations. Politically, this implies that the individual ministers are responsible to, and are accountable to, the prime minister and not to the party.

However, when it comes to the portfolio allocation, KDNP politicians tend to get the religious and social affairs fields in the cabinets. The first deputy prime minister has been responsible for the religious affairs without a portfolio and some junior ministers have been responsible for social affairs. Nevertheless, only a small number of ministerial portfolios can be counted as belonging to the KDNP, such as the head of the Ministry of National Development and the (second) minister of Defence in the Orbán III government, or the minister without portfolio responsible for building a new nuclear power plant. The last example illustrates the complexity of the alliance framework: in 2018, the prospective minister won a mandate in a single-member district as a common candidate of Fidesz-KDNP and at the same time was allocated on the Fidesz party list – but eventually he joined the KDNP PPG in parliament.¹¹ Party affiliation does not count as much as normally in coalitions, but it might have symbolic significance. For example, the minister responsible for territorial development and EU resources in the Orbán V government changed his parliamentary seat from Fidesz to KDNP so that he could be in a better position in negotiating

with EU authorities – as Fidesz does not belong to any EU party group as opposed to the KDNP.¹² Membership in government is claimed to be based on personal and political achievements and not on party belonging. As one of our interviewees said ‘if someone wants to prevail without any performance, he/she will fall out in a short time’.¹³

Governance

From the perspective of governance, it is fundamental that in 2010, after their electoral victory, the Fidesz and KDNP declared their governance intention in a party alliance agreement.¹⁴ However, this merely focused on the two parties’ shared values like human rights, love, justice, family, social solidarity – without any concrete policy implications (see Table 6.4). In fact, a “normal” coalition agreement was not agreed upon at any post-2010 government formations. The populist framing of all issues, the PM’s leadership style, and the failure of party government explain this condition.

The role of individual ministers in policy-making

Although ministers have responsibility for their own portfolio, they must adjust to the general government policy and to the fact that the prime minister dominates all aspects of government policy-making. In more concrete terms, the “integrated ministries” represent special conditions for ministerial work as they must manage many different policy areas. As a result, two types of junior ministers collaborate with the ministers: the ‘traditional’ ones as deputy ministers, while the others engage with special policy areas. This latter group serves like a ‘portfolio minister’. They do not take part in cabinet meetings and are supposed to be the experts in a special policy field (Ványi 2016). The number of the junior ministers is much higher in the three post-2010 Orbán cabinets as compared to the previous ones. The average number of the junior ministers per government was below 30 before 2010, while it was 65 between 2010 and 2022. Our interviews confirmed that the junior ministers have their own inter-ministerial meetings where all politically relevant issues are discussed before the cabinet meeting. This divided ministerial autonomy confirms and further strengthens the prime minister’s position in the cabinet’s decision-making.

Table 6.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Hungary, 2006–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Gyurcsány II | 2006 | 20,972 | 0 | 2.8 | 0.4 | 0 | 87.8 |
| | | 7755 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 99.2 |
| Orbán II | 2010 | 1167 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Governance in the executive arena

The post-2010 cabinets represent not only a new type of government structure but also a new style of governance featuring prime minister-centred ‘political governance’: decision-making is based on the political agenda and less on the ministry-level bureaucratic processes and the aim is to implement political goals as quickly as possible. This attitude to governance has several implications: less consensus-building with external actors, insufficient preparation of decisions that consequently must be frequently modified¹⁵ or “sold” to the public by propaganda measures which all strengthen authoritarian tendencies.

The conciliation mechanisms also comply with the new governance style (see [Table 6.5](#)). Besides vertical decision-making which starts at the top with the prime minister being in dominant position, inter-ministerial horizontal coordination is complex. Based on interviews, three types of inter-ministerial meetings are applied: (1) meetings of deputy state secretaries who are responsible for bureaucratic coordination between ministries; (2) meetings of junior ministers (‘portfolio ministers’) who are responsible for political coordination in the inter-ministerial topics; and (3) cabinet meetings where final decisions are made by cabinet members. Nevertheless, the coordination mechanisms do not connect to party goals and interests as the allied parties apparently have the same political agenda. This does not imply that there is an all-encompassing agreement on all issues, but conflicts are policy-related and not party-formed or party-identity relevant.¹⁶ Thus, as conflicts are issue-based throughout the decision preparation process, party-political coordination is not necessary.

As party organizations cannot send messages to those on the top and the views of external actors – such as civic organizations or trade unions or expert groups – are disregarded, how could the government demonstrate that it listens to the people and serves their interests? So-called national consultations were established to serve this aim. As a new method of dialogue with the voters, the consultations have two purposes: to test (and propagate) the policy visions of those on the top¹⁷ and to streamline voters’ views. The populist party in government initiated so-called national consultations to justify certain policies (e.g. policies related to immigration and terrorism [2015], the COVID-19 pandemic [2021], and sanctions of the European Union against Russia during the war in Ukraine [2022]). Until the April 2022 elections, ten national consultations had been held¹⁸ some around dubious issues and all with ‘questionable’ wordings of questions, without transparent results (officially, the response rates varied from 5 to 30 per cent). For example, the national consultation on immigration and terrorism was sent out to the voters in May 2015, the response rate was reported to the public at the end of July, being just above 10 per cent, and two bills in this regard were submitted to the parliament at the end of August and enacted in the first part of September, the same year. Unmediated linkage with “the people” serves the populist agenda, as elsewhere (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012: 219).

Table 6.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Hungary, 2006–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|---------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Gyurcsány II | 2006 | POST | Yes | No | PCa, PS, CoC | PS | PS | No (SzDSz) | No | All/All | Yes | Varied | yes | Yes |
| Gyurcsány III | 2008 | N | | No | | | | Yes | No | All/All | No | No | no | No |
| Orbán II | 2010 | PRE | Yes | No | CoC, O | O | O | Yes | No | All/All | No | No | no | Yes |
| Orbán III | 2014 | N | | No | O | O | O | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | No | no | Yes |
| Orbán IV | 2018 | N | | No | O | O | O | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | No | no | Yes |

Notes:

During periods where the values for the variables remain identical, the first and last applicable cabinets are listed. The last applicable cabinet is right-justified in the coalition column.

Coalition agreement: PRE = pre-election; POST = post-election; N = no coalition agreement.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; CaC = cabinet committee; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; Parl = parliamentary leaders
PS = party summit; O = other.

Coalition discipline: all = discipline always expected; no = no discipline expected.

Policy agreement: varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; no = no explicit agreement.

Two referendums, one about immigration in 2016 and the other in 2022 about sexual education in schools, were also part of this practice, although neither of them proved valid as the incoming Fidesz increased validity requirements as the chapter clarified above. The two referendums pinpoint how the government aims to collect public support and legitimize its own political agenda. Although the question on immigration itself was misleading and the 43.9 per cent turnout was insufficient for validity, the government wanted to change the constitution regarding refugee policy on this basis. At that time, however, Fidesz temporarily lost its two-thirds majority in parliament in a by-election; thus, the amendment did not get through in parliament and was accepted only in 2018 when the governing parties again acquired a two-thirds majority.

The immigration issue as a tool of fearmongering has been on the government agenda ever since and it connects to the government's anti-EU slogans. The European Commission triggered the new conditionality mechanism against Hungary on April 27, 2021, for the first time ever due to the corrupted use of EU resources. As the EU funding became uncertain, the government turned the issue of corruption around with a twist: as the EU also criticized a law that targeted and was discriminatory against sexual minorities, the government propaganda placed the sexual identity issues in the focus, blaming the EU to stress the issue of non-compliance due to its homophobic attitudes, as opposed to corruption concerns. In face of economic hardship, the government – with a new twist – dropped the identity issue and began discussions with the EU authorities promising measures to curtail corruption.¹⁹ Both the national consultations and the referendums demonstrate how populist instruments mix with and support the authoritarianisation of the regime.

Governance mechanisms in the parliamentary arena

Fidesz and KDNP have separate PPGs in parliament. In fact, the still unchanged party alliance document from 2010²⁰ declared that Fidesz and KDNP work in the alliance in the legislative arena as well. As confirmed by our interviews, the two PPGs regularly organize joint meetings where the most important legislative proposals are discussed, and the KDNP party group members are invited to the weekly Fidesz PPG meetings, although the KDNP has separate meetings as well.

The main actor in the parliamentary arena is the Fidesz party group leader. His task is to mediate between the two party groups and the government and thus support the preparation of the legislative process. He keeps contact primarily with the deputy ministers while he also has the right to directly contact the ministers if it seems necessary. In addition, there exists a regular informal forum of the PPG leaders and deputy ministers where the submitted bills and their schedules are discussed by party group leaders, deputy ministers, and policy experts from PPGs. Nevertheless, the KDNP PPG can hardly be regarded

as a fully independent party group. Interviews confirm that the head (whip) of Fidesz PPG is the main actor in the process of conciliation between the parties and the government actors.

We are not aware of many examples where PPG input was decisive. An exception however was at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020 when mainly the Fidesz PPG mediated the voters' opinion to the government actors – and to the prime minister who was reluctant to notice the imminent threat – to make substantial defence steps against the pandemic. While the government ever since claims highly successful management of the health crisis, in fact, Hungarian death toll figures are the second worst in the EU.²¹

The government used the pandemic to introduce emergency powers which still prevail. In fact, since March 2020, with some short intermittent periods when the emergency powers were suspended until the time of writing this analysis, Hungary is governed mainly by decree laws and non-transparent government decisions. The most recent emergency law (Law VI/2022) at the beginning of June 2022 strengthened the former emergency measures, now with a reference to Russia's war aggression in Ukraine. This is an illustration that the government and the ruling parties abuse the crisis momentums to strengthen their power – similar to what we could observe above in relation to the immigration crisis.

None of these developments influenced the stability of the governments since 2010 (see [Table 6.6](#)). Each cabinet worked out the full parliamentary cycle, unsurprisingly given their two-thirds majority position. The popularity and public support of Fidesz has not decreased, and neither corruption scandals nor the deterioration of democracy, or the management of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis had a negative impact in this regard. The lasting stability of the government is the result of complex issues: institutional changes, powerful populist propaganda, and favourable economic conditions at the international scene – at least until 2020 – contributed to the success.

Conclusion

Two questions have been raised in the introductory chapter of this book: how do the more recent governance patterns compare to the pre-2010 ones; and what was the function of the economic, immigration, and health crises in the possible changes of the former trend? The analysis of the Hungarian case focused on two complementary problems: how responsible party government and governance prevail among conditions of de-democratization and authoritarianisation; and does the party alliance framework function as a coalition?

As to the former aspects, the conclusion in the former volume was that coalition governments in Hungary featured political governance and prime ministerial government. This pattern has been excessively strengthened in the

Table 6.6 Cabinet termination in Hungary, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration of cabinet (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|---|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---|
| Gyurcsány I | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Gyurcsány II | 48.8 | 7a | 11 | SzDSz, MSzP | | Removal of a minister from the area of the coalition partner plus loss of confidence in PM after his leaked speech on false campaign promises |
| Gyurcsány III | 44.8 | 9 | 11, 13 | | | The aim was to hand over the prime ministership to someone who is accepted by MSzP and SzDSz alike. Also the PM was unpopular and the economic crisis hit the country |
| Bajnai | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Orbán II | 98.7 | 1 | | | | |
| Orbán III | 98.2 | 1 | | | | |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of prime minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event.

post-2010 period. The elevated role of the PM prevailed from the beginning of systemic change due to institutional reasons and then was complemented and strengthened by party transformation and democratic decline. The turn towards political governance began in 2006 (Ványi 2015, 2018) and has been reinforced and channelled towards all actors of governance (Kopecký et al 2022). Furthermore, the stability of the cabinets also continued – unsurprisingly amongst the supermajority condition when competitors are under serious constraints.

Somewhat in contrast to these continuities the Hungarian cabinets after 2010 represent a new pattern of government and governance. These governments are different both in their structure and in their decision-making processes as compared to coalitions formed during the first two decades after systemic change. Party-based responsibility has been replaced by personalized connections that are built on informality. Although at the elections the parties get the mandate to govern, they are not the main actors on the scene anymore. As Fidesz has become hostage of its party leader, the chapter highlights that

the power has been further concentrated on the prime minister. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, we have found a complex – even overpopulated – governance framework, which is mainly due to the centralization of decision-making. So that those few on the top can make informed decisions – in the absence of a functioning party base – a performance oriented and highly loyal “political bureaucracy” is indispensable.

Overall, the specificity of the post-2010 governments lies in the parties. This is not an unexpected conclusion as parties are the main actors in every aspect of the coalition life cycle. The defunct quality of the Fidesz party and the lack of ambition in KDNP to establish its own identity are feeble foundations for a working coalition format. Party political coordination in governance and party responsibility patterns have been replaced by personal attachments – first of all to the prime minister, while the entire system resides on a clientelist structure. Expectedly, coalitions are established and maintained by parties and the political games are played out in the parties and in parliament. In contrast, the personalization of government and governance is based on the de-parliamentarization and de-participation of substantive decision-making processes in Hungary (Ilonszki and Vajda 2021). The connections between the two parties are informal and person-based, and cooperation between them does not follow from party identities. As discussed above, KDNP is hardly involved in information acquisition, in personal nominations, or in policy adjustment processes – or if so, it happens in an *a-party mode*. Altogether, governance resides not in party entitlements but in the central authority. On these grounds, we can conclude that the party alliance framework lacks several substantive coalition attributes.

The populist turn of Fidesz is crucial in these developments. Since 2010, the party organization has been replaced by a clientele with personal dependence on the party leader. The government excessively applies instruments of populism from fake national consultations to abused referendums as support mechanisms of governance. Institutional transformation and media dominance provide the foundations and support the maintenance of the regime. Paradoxically the three crises’ momentums served the populist and authoritarian turn: measures to get out of the economic crisis, fearmongering built around the problem of immigration, and emergency rules put in place since early 2020 onwards with reference to the COVID pandemic created a comfortable environment for the government.

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|-----------|---|
| KDNP | Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Christian Democratic People’s Party) |
| JOBBIK | Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Right Hungary) |
| FKGP | Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt (Independent Smallholders Party) |
| Kisgazdák | Kisgazdák (Smallholders) |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| EKGP | Egyesült Kisgazdapárt (United Smallholders Party) |
| DK | Demokratikus Koalíció (Democratic Coalition) |
| LMP | Lehet Más a Politika (Politics Can Be Different) |
| Fidesz | Fiatalkorú Demokraták Szövetsége-Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Alliance of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Alliance, Hungarian Civic Party) |
| MIÉP | Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (Hungarian Justice and Life Party) |
| MSzP | Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party) |
| MDF | Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum) |
| Somogyért | Somogyért Egyesület (Union for Somogy) |
| SzDSz | Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats) |
| PM | Párbeszéd Magyarorszáért (Dialogue for Hungary) |
| MH | Mi Hazánk (Our Home) |
| Momentum | Momentum Mozgalom (Momentum Movement) |

Notes:

Party names are given in Hungarian, followed by the party name in English in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Notes

- 1 A Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség és a Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt szövetségi szerződése, 2010. (Alliance agreement of Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance and Christian Democratic People's Party)
- 2 In fact, after his fourth electoral victory in a speech in Tusványos on July 23, 2022, the prime minister boasted that they can govern with ease and efficiency as they do not have to bother with coalition problems, as his government is not a coalition.
- 3 Translated by the authors.
- 4 The governing authority and integrity of the MSzP party leader and prime minister suffered a blow due to a leaked speech in which he self-critically revealed serious governing mismanagement and failure.
- 5 Szövetségi szerződés a nemzet újjáépítéséért. (Alliance Agreement for National Reconstruction), 2010.
- 6 162 Fidesz candidates and 14 KDNP candidates were nominated in the joint country-wide party list in 2010.
- 7 These are the "Evaluation of the Year" speeches, always held in February and accessible on the government portal <https://kormany.hu/beszedek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede>
- 8 <http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20180502-kancellaria-orban-balazs-miniszterhelyettes-a-szazadvegtol-erkezik-csepreghy-tavozik>. Translated by authors.
- 9 This cannot be properly translated: in Hungarian, it is *Miniszterelnökség*, sg. like prime ministership.
- 10 In this regard, our interviews contained contradictory information: one of our interviewees mentioned informal negotiations between the two party leaders, while the other said that there is not any bargaining about ministers.
- 11 This minister without portfolio is counted as Fidesz nominated minister in Table 6. based on his place on Fidesz's party list.
- 12 Fidesz's membership in the European People's Party was first suspended, and after an extended period, the party left the European group – in face of its lingering expulsion.
- 13 Interview with a former deputy state secretary.

- 14 A Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség és a Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt szövetségi szerződése, 2010 (Alliance agreement of Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance and Christian Democratic People's Party).
- 15 In the 2010–2014 Orbán II government period, one-third of approved bills were modified shortly after approval, i.e. during the same legislative period. This trend can be attributed predominantly to the speed of the legislative process and avoidance of public or expert consultations. The share somewhat decreased but even in the Orbán III government period was one-fifth (Ilonszki and Vajda, 2021).
- 16 The interviewees mentioned the issue of re-regulating abortion. This was only an internal debate between the parties and it was not publicized. Nevertheless, in the autumn of 2022, which is outside the focus of this chapter, abortion regulations were modified enforcing women to get through a further step of confirmation before abortion.
- 17 "...We need a government that pays attention to the people, listens to them, [...] understands their problems..." – electoral manifesto in 2010. Translated by the authors.
- 18 These were 2010: Pensioners about pension conditions; 2011: About the Fundamental Law; 2011: Social Consultation; 2012: Economic Consultation; 2015: Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism; 2017: Stop Brussels Consultation; 2017: Consultation about the Soros Plan; 2018: Consultation about the Defence of the Families; 2020 Consultation about the crown virus measures; and 2021 Consultation about the post-COVID period. 2022 Consultation about Brussels sanctions (connected to the war in Ukraine).
- 19 At the time of writing the analysis, the negotiations are still inconclusive.
- 20 A Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség és a Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt szövetségi szerződése, 2010 (Alliance agreement of Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance and Christian Democratic People's Party).
- 21 <https://www.portfolio.hu/krtk/20220520/koronavirus-jarvany-magyarorszagon-keves-teszt-sok-halalozas-545321>

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7 Latvia

Populist Wind of Change

Jānis Ikstens

Introduction

Latvia's society is rich in ethnic, social, religious, regional differences, some of which have translated into politically relevant cleavages producing a multitude of political parties. A fractured legislature elected under a proportional representation system has been conducive to the emergence of various political combinations which affect the formation, governance, and termination of coalitions.

Nevertheless, the rules of coalition governance that are laid out in written and publicly available coalition agreements and cabinet declarations outlining major policy priorities have been remarkably stable and have not seen fundamental changes despite profound challenges posed by the 2009 economic meltdown or the COVID-19 crisis.

The institutional setting

Latvia reverted to its 1922 constitution as the struggle to regain the country's independence was largely based on the principle of legal continuity of the Republic of Latvia. This led to the emergence of a large body of non-citizens, i.e. former Soviet citizens who did not have any legal ties to the Republic of Latvia. While East Slavic minorities (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians) accounted for 42 per cent of Latvia's population in 1989 on the eve of the Soviet breakup, as a result of the process of naturalization, the share of non-citizens decreased to 9.7 per cent of Latvia's population in 2022 (Official Statistics Portal 2022).

The 1922 constitution was modelled after the Weimar constitution of Germany (Šilde 1976), providing for a parliamentary republic. While the president performs primarily representational functions, s/he holds the key right to nominate a person who would become a prime minister if the cabinet is approved by the legislature. The president is not expected to set any policy priorities or suggest/nominate cabinet members.

The Latvian constitution provides that the parliament is to be elected under a proportional system in five electoral districts. Further, the *Saeima* Elections

Act specifies a party list system with the possibility of preferential voting for each candidate on a chosen list.

In an effort to reduce the number of parties in the parliament, an electoral threshold was introduced already in the early 1990s and subsequently raised to 5 per cent from 1995 onwards for both parties and electoral alliances (Ikstens and Runcis 2011).

The institutional arrangement, the multi-party setting, and societal diversity provide a favourable background for a long list of cabinets since the reestablishment of Latvia's independence. As summarized in [Table 7.1a](#), the country has experienced 25 cabinets supported by a notable variety of coalitions, of which 7 were minimum-winning coalitions, 9 were minority coalitions, and another 9 were surplus coalitions. However, several coalitions can only be technically regarded as minority coalitions as they could rely on a rather stable support of other parliamentary players.

One of the possible explanations for the rather high number (and short lifespan) of the cabinets lies with a notable number of parties in the parliament. This figure has oscillated between five and ten, providing building blocks for new coalitions. As government is sworn in by a majority of Members of Parliament (MPs) registered to vote for the particular motion (and not of all MPs), minority governments can be installed.

Further, the effective number of parties (ENP) in the *Saeima* has ranged from 3.93 to 8.53, with the number tending to increase towards the end of parliament's term due to splits or individual deputies choosing to leave their factions. This fluidity led to changes in the *Saeima* Rules of Conduct effectively prohibiting the creation of a new faction by break-away parliamentarians.

Nearly all coalitions were clearly dominated by right-of-the-centre parties, particularly after 2008, as leftist forces were mainly represented by parties of ethnic minorities that lacked coalition potential in Sartori's terms, that is, being seen as viable coalition partners (Sartori 1976). Thus, little 'alternation in government' occurred (Bértoa and Mair 2012), as can be seen in [Table 7.1a](#).

The party system and the actors

The abundance of national parties can be structured along two main dimensions of political conflict in Latvia's party system (Whitefield 2002) as shown in [Table 7.1b](#). The main axis of competition was a fully developed ethnic cleavage (Auers 2013) with cultural interests of ethnic Latvians populating one end of the axis, while identity interests of ethnic (mainly, Russian) minorities were found on the other end. The socio-economic cleavage gradually gained importance as social and economic issues surrounding the transition to market economy entered the political agenda around 1995. That cleavage structure remained relevant well into the 21st century when political representations of GAL/TAN dimension gained salience around 2020 but fell short of parliamentary presence.

Table 7.1a Latvian cabinets, 1993–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|--|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Birkavs | 1993-08-03 | 1993-06-06 | LC, LZS | min | 48 (48) | 100 | 8 | 5.05 | |
| 2 | Gailis | 1994-09-19 | | LC, TPA | min | 44 (44) | 100 | 9 | 5.26 | |
| 3 | Šķēle I ^a | 1995-12-21 | 1995-10-01 | TB, DPS, LC, LNNK+LZP, LaDP, LVP | sur | 73 (73) | 100 | 9 | 7.59 | |
| 4 | Šķēle II ^a | 1997-02-13 | | TB, DPS, LC, LNNK+LZP, LaDP, TT | sur | 71 (71) | 100 | 10 | 8.53 | |
| 5 | Krasts I | 1997-08-07 | | TB-LNNK, DPS, LC, LaDP | sur | 67 (67) | 100 | 8 | 7.06 | |
| 6 | Krasts II | 1998-04-08 | | TB-LNNK, LC, LaDP | min | 45 (45) | 100 | 8 | 7.14 | LZP |
| 7 | Krištopans I | 1998-11-26 | 1998-10-03 | LC, TB-LNNK, JP | min | 46 (46) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | LSDSP |
| 8 | Krištopans II | 1999-02-05 | | LC, TB-LNNK, JP, LSDSP | sur | 60 (60) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | |
| 9 | Šķēle III | 1999-07-16 | | TP, LC, TB-LNNK | mwc | 62 (62) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | |
| 10 | Bērziņš | 2000-05-05 | | LC, TP, TB-LNNK, JP | sur | 70 (70) | 100 | 6 | 5.49 | |
| 11 | Repše | 2002-11-07 | 2002-10-05 | JL, LPP, ZZS, TB-LNNK | mwc | 55 (55) | 100 | 6 | 5.02 | |
| 12 | Emsis | 2004-03-09 | | ZZS, LPP, TP | min | 46 (46) | 100 | 8 | 6.02 | TSP |
| 13 | Kalvītis I | 2004-12-02 | | TP, JL, LPP, ZZS | sur | 71 (71) | 100 | 8 | 6.41 | |
| 14 | Kalvītis II | 2006-04-08 | | TP, ZZS, LPP | min | 46 (46) | 100 | 8 | 6.41 | SC |
| 15 | Kalvītis III | 2006-11-07 | 2006-10-07 | TP, ZZS, LPP-LC, TB-LNNK | sur | 59 (59) | 100 | 7 | 6 | |

(Continued)

Table 7.1a (Continued)

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 16 | Godmanis | 2007-12-20 | | LPP-LC, TP, ZZS, TB-LNNK | mwc | 56 (56) | 100 | 7 | 6.44 | |
| 17 | Dombrovskis I | 2009-03-12 | | JL, TP, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | sur | 64 (64) | 100 | 8 | 6.98 | |
| 18 | Dombrovskis II | 2010-03-23 | | JL, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | min | 44 (44) | 100 | 8 | 7.29 | |
| 19 | Dombrovskis III | 2010-11-03 | 2010-10-02 | JV, ZZS | mwc | 55 (55) | 100 | 5 | 3.93 | |
| 20 | Dombrovskis IV | 2011-10-25 | 2011-09-17 | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK | min | 50 (50) | 100 | 5 | 4.96 | |
| 21 | Straujuma I | 2014-01-22 | | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | mwc | 60 (60) | 100 | 5 | 5.17 | |
| 22 | Straujuma II | 2014-11-05 | 2014-10-04 | JV, ZZS, VL+TB-LNNK | mwc | 61 (61) | 100 | 6 | 5.13 | |
| 23 | Kučinskis | 2016-02-11 | | JV, ZZS, VL+TB-LNNK | mwc | 61 (61) | 100 | 6 | 5.17 | |
| 24 | Kariņš I | 2019-01-23 | 2018-10-06 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, A/P, JKP, KPVP | sur | 66 (66) | 100 | 7 | 6.39 | |
| 25 | Kariņš II | 2021-06-03 | | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, A/P, JKP | min | 49 (49) | 100 | 7 | 7.44 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = Minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = Minimal-winning coalition; sur = Surplus majority coalition; non = Non-partisan. Minority cabinets are also indicated by italics.

^a Technocrat prime minister.

Table 7.1b Latvian system conflict structure, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 16 | Godmanis | TP | Ethnic minorities | JL | Econ. left-right |
| 17 | Dombrovskis I | TP | Ethnic minorities | JL | Econ. left-right |
| 18 | Dombrovskis II | TP | Ethnic minorities | JL | Econ. left-right |
| 19 | Dombrovskis III | V | Ethnic minorities | ZZS | Econ. left-right |
| 20 | Dombrovskis IV | ZRP, V | Ethnic minorities | VL+TB-LNNK | Econ. left-right |
| 21 | Straujuma I | V | Ethnic minorities | VL+TB-LNNK | Econ. left-right |
| 22 | Straujuma II | ZZS, V | Ethnic minorities | ZZS | Econ. left-right |
| 23 | Kučinskis | ZZS, V | Ethnic minorities | ZZS | Econ. left-right |
| 24 | Kariņš I | KPV | Ethnic minorities | A/P | Econ. left-right |
| 25 | Kariņš II | KPV | Ethnic minorities | A/P | Econ. left-right |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2007–2014 (cabinets 16–21) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

The salience of ethnic identity issues has been enhanced by the interventionist foreign policy of Russia aimed at gaining excessive political influence in countries of the former Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. One of the means to achieve this influence was Russia's multifaceted support to the Russian minority in the respective countries, which endangered nation-building and state-building processes in Latvia and, by extension, increased the significance of identity issues. Russia's support has been a key explanation for the reluctance of most Latvian voters to accept deeper cooperation between parties advocating ethnic Latvian interests and those representing the ethnic minorities. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 only reduced the coalitionability of the Harmony Party, the most popular among minority parties with a long record of parliamentary representation.

Regardless of the high turnover of parties at the parliamentary level (for details, see Ikstens 2011, 2012, 2015, 2019), the basic pattern of political competition remained remarkably stable – right-of-the-centre Latvian parties vs. left-of-the-centre minority parties. The largest Latvian parties with a relatively stable core supporter base (Unity, National Alliance [NA], Union of Greens and Farmers) largely supported market-based mechanisms to address various social and economic challenges. Moreover, they broadly shared their views

on the strengthening of Latvian ethnic identity but did not always agree on particular methods to achieve that. Political newcomers that did not profess strong views on the ethnic identity policy, yet still drew major support from ethnic Latvians and somewhat gravitated towards social liberalism on GAL/TAN issues (Zatlers Reform Party; Development/For), found common ground with the former parties on various issues linked to pro-market economic policy and pro-Western foreign policy. However, the massive drop in public support for Zatlers Reform Party in the wake of the 2011 extraordinary elections after it kept insisting on the involvement of the Harmony Party (representing the Slavic minorities) in the ruling coalition attested once again to the importance of the ethnic cleavage and served other Latvian parties a lesson.

Populists emerging after the 2009 economic meltdown (i.e. From Heart to Latvia, KPV LV, New Conservative Party) presented a rather broad mix of ideas coupled with a strong anti-establishment rhetoric, which prompted right-of-the-centre parties to avoid closer cooperation for as long as possible. Eventually, populists with a heavier emphasis on Latvian identity policies (i.e. New Conservative Party, KPV LV) were invited to join coalitions. Both populists and social liberals made use of issues such as anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability to help mobilize their support. However, in contrast to many other countries, immigration issues played virtually no role in the ascent of populists.

Meanwhile, the centre-left remained dominated by a single minority party (Social Democratic Party Harmony) that frequently referenced the platform of the Party of European Socialists (PES) in the realms of social and economic policies but remained lukewarm towards the PES agenda on the GAL/TAN dimension. It also emphasized identity needs of the Slavic minorities but fell short of the cultural radicalism of Latvia's Russian Union that remained outside the parliamentary realm. Harmony's moderation can be explained not only by the evolution of the party since 1994 but also by deliberate attempts to make deeper inroads into the Latvian electorate in order to boost its parliamentary representation, which saw limited success in 2010–2011.

Latvia's party system after 2008 remained rather fluid under the circumstances of notable voter volatility. The ENP saw a brief dip to below four parties in 2010 but recovered to the more usual level of five to six parties in subsequent elections. The 2010 elections, thus, constituted an exception stemming from efforts of various political parties to set up joint candidate lists under the uncertain circumstances of the economic meltdown.

Ideological distance on some dimensions increased among parties with parliamentary representation, creating additional factors to take into account when creating a coalition. This applied to GAL-TAN dimension and to issues clustered around political corruption, transparency, and accountability. The latter set of issues has long been part of Latvia's electoral politics owing to modest success in fighting high-level corruption, reducing income inequality, and achieving higher living standards for the population. The ideological distance played a more visible role in creation and management of coalitions after the 2018 elections.

Table 7.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Latvia, 2006–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|---|-------------|--|
| 2006-10-07 | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TSP, ‘New Centre’, Daugavpils City Party | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2010-10-02 | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | SD, ‘Concord’, LSP, Daugavpils City Party | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TB-LNNK, VL | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TP, LPP-LC | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2011-09-17 | JL, PS, SCP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | SD, ‘Concord’, LSP, Daugavpils City Party | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | TB-LNNK, VL | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2014-10-04 | Alliance of Regions, Party of Vidzeme, for Ogre Parish | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| 2018-10-06 | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | JV, Party of Latgale, Jēkabpils Regional Party, for Valmiera and Vidzeme, for City and Parish of Tukums, for Kuldīga Parish | EA, PEC | Written contract |
| | LZS, LZP | EA, PEC | Written contract |

Notes:

Type: electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

While many parties fought for *Saeima* seats individually, Table 7.1c demonstrates that joint lists of several organizations have been represented in each of post-independence parliaments. Joint lists culminated in the 2010 elections when five of them gained parliamentary representation. Most of the joint lists are to be regarded as pre-electoral coalitions that coordinate their activities after elections as well. All joint lists have demonstrated remarkable internal cohesion throughout the tenure of the respective parliament. Moreover, some of the pre-electoral coalitions evolved into single parties (i.e. ‘For Fatherland and Freedom’, ‘Unity’, ‘Harmony’).

Government formation

The bargaining process

The formal procedure of forming a government has not changed substantially since 2008. The creation of coalitions formally begins with the nomination by the state president of a prospective prime minister who would subsequently present a cabinet and a cabinet declaration to the *Saeima* for approval. The prospective prime minister does not have to be a member of the *Saeima*, and

the president may nominate any person that would be eligible to run in the *Saeima* elections. Moreover, failed attempts do not trigger any special measures (resignation of the president, extraordinary elections, etc.).

The actual coalition formation process can be seen as free-style bargaining among parties in the *Saeima*, particularly in the aftermath of elections. As opinion polls provide reasonable insights into how votes and mandates could be distributed among major contestants, parties have increasingly begun to play out post-election scenarios in advance of election day to shape the most appropriate bargaining strategies. These strategic exercises are conducted among a narrow circle of party leadership (party chair, board chair, head of party parliamentary group, senior board members, etc.) and, perhaps, political consultants hired by respective political organizations for campaign purposes.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 reinforced public concerns about Russia's policies towards its neighbouring countries, and the collapse of the Zatlers Reform Party after it sought to involve the main Slavic party in the coalition in 2011 served as yet another warning to Latvian parties to refrain from closer cooperation with minority parties at the national level of governance. As a result, the number of available coalition options was reduced.

According to interviewees, one of the goals of inter-party bargaining has been to create a solid majority of at least 55 MPs in the 100-strong parliament. This is also reflected in the actual size of coalitions captured in [Table 7.2](#). Also, parties strived for cooperation with ideologically proximal partners as it reduced the costs of decision-making in coalition, reducing the need for far-reaching compromises.

The average length of the bargaining process for post-2008 cabinets somewhat contracted (see [Table 7.2](#)) up to Straujuma II but two recent cabinets constituted a reversal of the trend. The Kučinskis cabinet and the Kariņš I cabinet took longer to build for idiosyncratic reasons. In 2016, President Vējonis refused to nominate Solvita Āboltiņa from the ruling Unity party on indications that potential coalition partners would reject to work under Āboltiņa's leadership. The Kariņš I cabinet emerged after two inconclusive bargaining rounds immediately after parliamentary elections due to a large role political newcomers played in the negotiations and the resistance of mainstream parties to work under the premiership of a populist.

The success of the third attempt led by Krišjānis Kariņš of New Unity that had the smallest party parliamentary group at the time of cabinet formation was facilitated by growing public pressure, reversion from the proportional distribution of portfolios, and cosmetic changes of coalition governance to please political newcomers. Thus, involvement of populists and political newcomers in coalition building not only substantially prolonged the process but also affected its outcome as the principle of proportionality was ignored to the disadvantage of the populists. It is important to note that mainstream parties preferred populists to the pro-Russian Harmony Party in the process of coalition formation out of concern for a loss of public support if a pro-Russian party would become part of coalition.

Table 7.2 Government formation period in Latvia, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days)</i> | <i>Number of days required in government formation</i> | <i>Total bargaining duration</i> | <i>Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses)</i> | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---|---|--|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------|
| | | | | | | | <i>Pro</i> | <i>Abstention</i> | <i>Contra</i> |
| Birkavs | 1993 | 0 | LC, LZS | 26 | 58 | 28 | 48 | 32 | 11 |
| Godmanis | 2007 | 0 | LPP-LC, TP, ZZS, TB-LNNK | 7 | 15 | 14 | 54 | 0 | 43 |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | 0 | JL, TP, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | 15 | 20 | 19 | 67 | 0 | 21 |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | 0 | JL, ZZS, PS, TB-LNNK | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | 0 | JV, ZZS | 2 | 32 | 31 | 63 | 0 | 35 |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | 0 | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK | 7 | 38 | 37 | 57 | 0 | 38 |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | 0 | JV, ZRP, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 22 | 56 | 55 | 64 | 2 | 27 |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | 0 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 3 | 209 | 32 | 61 | 0 | 39 |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | 0 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 30 | 67 | 68 | 60 | 0 | 32 |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | 2 | JV, JKP, KPVP, A/P, VL+TB-LNNK | 17 | 109 | 109 | 61 | 0 | 39 |
| | | | JV, JKP, KPVP, A/P, VL+TB-LNNK, ZZS | 8 | | | | | |
| | | | JV, JKP, KPVP, A/P, VL+TB-LNNK | 15 | | | | | |
| Kariņš I | 2021 | 0 | JV, VL+TB-LNNK, A/P, JKP | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |

The above cases highlight the dual nature of the state president's involvement in coalition building. In line with the constitution and political tradition, presidents tended to keep a rather low public profile during coalition formation. Politicians involved in coalition negotiations admitted to the author that presidents might reveal some preferences for personalities or policies in bilateral talks with party representatives or carefully communicate those preferences to parties. Yet, Raimonds Vējonis went further formulating several policy priorities after Straujuma's resignation in a public statement and reiterating them after the 2018 elections.

Overall, the second decade of the 21st century saw a more active position of presidents in choosing the prospective prime minister. Andris Bērziņš (Union of Greens and Farmers) for allegedly personal reasons ignored the Unity's choice of Artis Pabriks after Valdis Dombrovskis resigned in late 2013 and nominated Laimdota Straujuma of Unity instead. Then Raimonds Vējonis chose Māris Kučinskis (ZZS) over Kārlis Šadurskis (Unity) in 2016 dealing a major political blow to Unity. Also, Vējonis made strategic choices of nominees after the 2018 elections in order to weaken political newcomers. It emerges that presidents who have closer ties to a political party and experience with elected political positions have been more active in selecting the prospective prime minister.

The composition and size of cabinets

As noted above, the dominant pattern of political competition set leftist advocates of Slavic minorities against right-of-the-centre Latvian parties. The ethnic cleavage was reinforced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the mass level, and by the collapse of the Zatlers Reform Party at the elite level. That largely explains the right-of-the-centre ideological composition of coalitions after 2008. Moreover, neither the economic meltdown of 2009 nor subsequent events changed this trend. If any divergence can be observed, it is related to Kariņš I and Kariņš II coalitions that included the left-liberal Development/For electoral alliance.

The number of party parliamentary groups (PPG) being part of a particular coalition has ranged from two to five after 2008, with three groups being the most frequent number. Only two PPGs were necessary to swear in the Dombrovskis III cabinet in 2010 that was created after Unity took electoral advantage of its courageous tackling of the 2009 meltdown. Politically difficult times saw broader coalitions (see [Table 7.1a](#) for details).

However, it is useful to note that the number of PPGs is smaller than the number of actual political parties as several represent pre-electoral coalitions (see [Table 7.1c](#)). Yet, these pre-electoral alliances have been remarkably consolidated and most frequently spoke with one voice.

Out of nine cabinets since 2008, two are surplus coalitions – Dombrovskis I and Kariņš I. They emerged in response to challenging political circumstances. The former came into power at the beginning of the global economic

meltdown, while the latter emerged after two failed attempts to form a functioning majority immediately after the 2018 parliamentary elections. Kariņš II was technically a minority coalition. But it had institutionalized support of several independent MPs who had signed an agreement with the prime minister pledging support to and effectively providing a comfortable majority for that cabinet. The remaining four are clear-cut instances of minimum-winning coalition. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that minimum-winning coalitions have been the dominant model since 2008.

The allocation of ministerial portfolios

The distribution of portfolios is another important aspect of the inter-party bargaining process. Following numerous changes in the number and types of ministerial portfolios during the first 15 years after the Soviet collapse, the cabinet structure has become notably more stable. The position of Minister of Children and Family Affairs was streamlined in 2009 but the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Regional Development were merged in 2011, launching a period of stability of cabinet structure, with the number of cabinet members oscillating between 14 and 15.

In line with theoretical expectations and earlier empirical findings in Western Europe (Browne and Franklin 1973), the principle of proportionality was frequently applied to allocate ministerial portfolios, i.e. the number of ministerial positions should roughly correspond to the number of parliamentarians each coalition partner had (see [Table 7.3](#)). While perfect proportionality is difficult to achieve due to a relatively small number of ministerial portfolios, gross violations of this principle have led to difficulties in decision-making and the management of coalition. This was best exemplified by the Dombrovskis IV cabinet that faced resistance of the NA to various policy initiatives and found it increasingly complicated to negotiate decisions within the coalition after the NA was given a disproportionately small number of ministerial positions.

The mathematical proportionality is just one side of the coin. Parties watch closely to obtain ministries from various ‘categories’. According to the informants for this project, politicians divide all ministerial portfolios into three groups: (1) heavyweight ministries (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development), (2) power ministries (Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and (3) other ministries. The heavyweight ministries are of particular importance for office-seeking parties as these ministries have greater discretion over flows of substantial amounts of public money.

Some parties have constantly striven for particular portfolios as they, according to interviewees for this project, regarded those portfolios to be beneficial for the party’s public image. For example, the Union of Greens and Farmers was particularly insistent on the Ministry of Agriculture, while the NA has lately favoured the Ministry of Culture as an instrument of the party’s

Table 7.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Latvian coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Welfare and healthcare</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|-----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Godmanis | 2007 | 7 TP, 4 LPP-LC, 5 ZZS, 3 TB-LNNK | 19 | | 19 | LPP-LC | TP | TP | ZZS, TP | TP |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | 5 TP, 4 JL, 4 ZZS, 1 PS, 1 TB-LNNK | 15 | | 15 | JL | JL | TP | ZZS, TP | JL |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | 6 JL, 6 ZZS, 1 PS, 1 TB-LNNK | 14 | | 15 | JL | JL | TP | ZZS, JL | JL |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | 9 JV, 6 ZZS | 15 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | ZZS, ZZS | JV |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | 7 JV, 5 ZRP, 2 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | ZRP | JV, JV | ZRP |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | 5 JV, 3 VL+TB-LNNK, 3 ZRP, 3 ZZS | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | ZRP | ZZS, JV | ZRP |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | 6 JV, 5 ZZS, 3 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | ZZS, ZZS | JV |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | 6 ZZS, 5 JV, 3 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | ZZS | ZZS | JV | JV, ZZS | JV |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | 3 JV, 3 A/P, 3 JKP, 3 KP, 2 L+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | KPV, A/P | KPV |
| Kariņš II | 2021 | 4 A/P, 4 JKP, 3 JV, 3 VL+TB-LNNK | 14 | | 14 | JV | JV | JV | JKP, A/P | A/P |

policies aimed at strengthening the ethnic Latvian identity. A similar motivation can be seen in the pro-European Unity's attempts to control the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Parties have maintained a long-standing tradition of allocating the Finance Minister to the party of the prime minister. Parties recognize the importance of close working relationship between the two positions and have not violated this tradition since 2008 (see [Table 7.3](#)), which partly explains why the proportionality principle was not introduced for portfolio distribution under Kariņš I.

Moreover, the distribution of portfolios can be affected by other political considerations. For example, the NA was not given the Ministry of Education and Science under Straujuma I and Straujuma II to avoid hasty reforms of minority schools which would risk deteriorating relations with Russia at the time of its invasion of Ukraine. The Union of Greens and Farmers was not offered the Ministry of Justice to avoid attempts from the party to influence an ongoing court case (i.e. the Lembergs court case). In addition, great efforts were made to minimize the access of New Conservative Party to some important ministries to resist the party's intention to merge all secret services and investigation institutions under one ministry.

Distribution of ministerial portfolios is only distantly affected by the allocation of parliamentary positions. Most parliamentary positions are said to be allocated in correspondence to the size of the party parliamentary group of each coalition partner although chairs of parliamentary committees can be used to compensate for some disproportionality at the cabinet level. This approach had long excluded opposition parties from taking senior parliamentary positions but it was somewhat revised after the 2018 elections.

Once a general agreement on portfolio distribution is reached, parties propose to the prospective prime minister candidates for particular ministerial positions.

Coalition agreements

Latvia's political parties have come to appreciate coalition agreements that have been an inextricable part of all coalitions since December 1995 except the one behind the Repše cabinet (2002–2004). The exception likely resulted from the desire of 'New Era' to present itself as a break with the previous political tradition.

As captured in [Table 7.4](#), the lion's share of the text of all coalition agreements are devoted to rules of cooperation: rights and obligations of the prime minister, rights and obligations of PPG of coalition partners and supporting independent MPs, main mechanisms of policy coordination and dispute resolution. Written articulation of these rules is appreciated by a wide range of partners in various coalitions. However, the degree to which these rules are binding should not be exaggerated – if political benefits of violating them

Table 7.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Latvia, 2007–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Godmanis | 2007 | 1284 | 80 | 1 | 12 | 7 | 0 |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | 1296 | 82 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 0 |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | 1296 | 82 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 0 |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | 1270 | 81 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 2 |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | 1414 | 75 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | 1715 | 74 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | 1579 | 88 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | 1449 | 87 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | 1638 | 87 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Kariņš II | 2021 | 1638 | 87 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 |

outweigh potential damages stemming from observing them, the rules will likely be ignored.

Specific policies are rarely mentioned in coalition agreements as they are captured in separate documents – cabinet declarations that are mandatory for any cabinet to be sworn in by the parliament. However, specific procedural rules requiring unanimity of coalition partners are often provided in the agreements should a coalition take a decision on a sensitive issue (see Table 7.5). The rules were initially included in the agreement at the request of the Latvian nationalist NA as they covered decisions on changes in the country's constitution, citizenship policy, and language policy. From 2011 onwards, however, the unanimity principle was extended to decisions on taxes and the state budget, which is arguably an effect of the economic meltdown on coalition governance. Although coalition agreements have become more extensive and their length has increased by some 25 per cent compared to the early 2000s (see Table 7.4), this appears to be related to the accumulation of political experience rather than the spread of populism. Moreover, no substantial additions related to coalition governance can be discerned except for development committees in the Kariņš I coalition agreement to address emergent issues for which swift and mutually acceptable solutions cannot be identified.

According to interviews with former prime ministers or cabinet members, all coalition agreements were indeed based on the understanding that there will be a coalition discipline in the parliamentary votes on legislative proposals. This is further symbolized by the fact that coalition agreements are signed not only by the prospective prime minister and chairs of constituent political parties but also by chairs of PPG. However, partners could agree upon and

Table 7.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Latvia, 2007–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|-----------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Godmanis | 2007 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | CoC | No (ZZS) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | Yes | No |
| Dombrovskis I | 2009 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa, O | CoC, CaC | O | No (ZZS) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | Yes | No |
| Dombrovskis II | 2010 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa, O | CoC | O | No (ZZS) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | Yes | No |
| Dombrovskis III | 2010 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZZS) | No | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Dombrovskis IV | 2011 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZRP) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Straujuma I | 2014 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZRP, ZZS, NA) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Straujuma II | 2014 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZZS, NA, V) | No | All/Most | No | Varied | No | Yes |
| Kučinskis | 2016 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa | CoC | PCa | No (ZZS, NA) | No | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Kariņš I | 2019 | POST | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, PCa, O | CoC | O | No (V, A/P, KPV, VL+TB/LNNK) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |
| Kariņš II | 2021 | IE | Yes | No | CaC, CoC, Pca, O | CoC | O | No (V, A/P, VL+TB/LNNK) | Yes | All/Most | No | Varied | No | No |

Notes:

During periods where the values for the variables remain identical, the first and last applicable cabinets are listed. The last applicable cabinet is right-justified in the coalition column.

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; POST = post-election; N = no coalition agreement

Conflict management mechanisms: CaC = Cabinet Committee; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; O = other

Coalition discipline: all = discipline always expected; most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters

Policy agreement: varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; comp. = comprehensive policy agreement

include in the coalition agreement issues that are exempt from coalition discipline. For example, the Straujuma I coalition agreement in 2014 allowed NA to take a divergent stance on the language of instruction in the schools of ethnic minorities; the Straujuma II coalition agreement in the same year enabled ZZS to publicly support changes in the constitution aimed at introducing the institution of popularly elected state president. Similarly, the Kariņš I coalition agreement in 2019 pledged to respect activities aimed at *inter alia* the expansion of rights of unmarried partners, Jewish property restitution, and granting Latvia's citizenship to under-age children of non-citizens. (Table 7.4 summarizes the content of coalition agreements.)

Unlike the equivalent documents of the 20th century, coalition agreements starting with the Bērziņš cabinet (2000–2002) were made public and even published on the government's website after 2010 to foster transparency of the political process. The contents of the agreements are notably similar, particularly after 2010, with the most sizeable changes found in policy-related procedural rules.

Coalition governance

The role of individual ministers in policy-making

The Cabinet Structure Law emphasizes the collective character of cabinet decision-making. The law stipulates that cabinet decisions are taken by consensus. If a member of the cabinet objects to a particular decision, voting is held and the decision is taken by the absolute majority of participating cabinet members.

Moreover, the procedure for a cabinet decision is geared towards transparency and wide participation. Draft decisions prepared by line ministries are announced at meetings of the Council of State Secretaries; they are published on the government's website and are freely available for review and comments of non-governmental organizations and individual citizens; other ministries are invited to comment on the draft within 14 days of publication. Further, comments are reviewed by the responsible ministry and (amended) draft decision is forwarded for discussions at the Cabinet Committee where all ministers participate. After the Committee endorses the draft, the prime minister submits it to the cabinet for a final decision.

Although this procedure is geared towards collective decision-making and horizontal policy coordination, it obscures the notably compartmentalized nature of ministerial policy-making that was highlighted during interviews with informants of this project. While many goals are listed in cabinet declarations and concrete tasks are developed in government action plans, little policy coordination takes place among ministers and ministries. The procedure for decision-making in the Cabinet of Ministers stipulates that the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Justice issue a written comment on each draft decision submitted to the Council of State Secretaries, these comments are said

to focus rather narrowly on the financial impact or legal quality of a particular draft. There is also an Inter-institutional Coordination Centre subordinated to the prime minister that is tasked with horizontal policy coordination among ministries, but its actual ability to perform this task has been questioned by informants.

Prime ministers emerged as main policy coordinators. They not only set formal agenda for each meeting of the government but can also put on the cabinet's agenda issues that have not been discussed with ministries or non-governmental organizations. The formal status of these powers of prime minister has not changed but their use has diminished over time. Each ministry is required to approve its action plan to reach the goals outlined in the cabinet declaration. Prime ministers are in a position to oversee and control the implementation of these plans. The actual use of this instrument depended on the particular prime minister. Based on interviews for this project, Māris Kučinskis emerged as one of the most active prime ministers in the realm of policy coordination, making use of both cabinet declaration and ministerial action plans.

Ministers are somewhat reluctant at cabinet meetings to question drafts submitted by other ministries – drafts may have been agreed upon at the Coalition Council or ministers do not want to provoke future scrutiny of drafts from their ministries. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that individual ministers have notable discretion in ministerial decision-making. This also lends support to the existence of the ministerial government model in Latvia.

Coalition governance in the executive arena

Although cabinet decisions by consensus are by no means the only formula, a range of interviewees indicated it was the preferred formula of many prime ministers. It is believed to be the task of the prime minister to reach a consensus.

Prime ministers have sought broadly acceptable solutions by various means, including but not limited to logrolling, pressure, information leaks, and appointments. The office of the prime minister and his closest aides have played an important role in elaborating policy alternatives, communicating them to coalition partners, persuading PPG, etc. If a consensus emerged as a result of these activities, it would likely be endorsed by the Cabinet Committee where all members of the cabinet participate. Cabinet Committee meetings also served the purpose of finding common ground among top civil servants of different ministries. If disagreements could not be ironed out, the prime minister may use individual discussions with PPG, heads of PPG, chairs of parties, and other senior officials of partners involved in the discussion.

Regardless of the existence of a consensus, all items on the cabinet's agenda are discussed at the Coalition Council. This institution has a dubious reputation. The general public distrusts it because the council is believed to take decisions by narrow circle of political elite. Moreover, those decisions would be *de facto* binding for cabinet members and parliamentarians alike. The council was often seen as an unwarranted restriction on the ability of popularly elected

officials to represent interests of their constituents. This feeling is further enhanced by suboptimal results of government performance. Public pressure not only encouraged the New Era party to dismantle the council during the Repše cabinet but also prompted KPV and the New Conservative Party to return to this idea in 2018–2019. As a consequence, the Coalition Council (called Cooperation Council since 2011) was substituted with ‘cooperation meetings’ during the Kariņš I and Kariņš II cabinets and their decisions were termed political recommendations.

Politicians, however, appreciate the opportunity to voice their concerns or objections and to engage in political discussions behind closed doors. This seems to have gained importance under the circumstances of open cabinet meetings that were introduced in 2003 and have been broadcast on the internet since June 2013. Nevertheless, a number of top-ranking politicians revealed their negative attitude towards open cabinet meetings because they tend to preclude meaningful political discussions, obstruct reaching a compromise, and even foster communication that better suits public rallies.

Politicians interviewed for this project described the proceedings of the Coalition Council. The council meets at least once a week and considers a full range of issues pertaining to coalition decision-making. It scrutinizes all items on the cabinet agenda and the parliament’s agenda; it discusses new political initiatives drafted by members of the coalition. Any coalition partner is entitled to suggest an issue for discussions if the relevant information was made available to the heads of the PPG at least 24 hours before the meeting. Yet, the final agenda of a particular Coalition Council meeting is set by the prime minister or a cabinet member authorized by the prime minister. As reflected in [Table 7.4](#), the Coalition Council was the preferred method of conflict resolution throughout the time period under scrutiny.

Interviews with politicians revealed that the circle of participants in Coalition Council meetings has somewhat changed since 2008. During the four cabinets led by Valdis Dombrovskis, an increasing number of civil servants were invited to participate in those meetings in order to provide technical information and advice to politicians, particularly when issues from the realm of Ministry of Finance were discussed. It was felt that the wish for technically more accurate decisions led to ‘bureaucratization’ of the council’s decisions although civil servants did not have voting rights on the Coalition Council. This trend was reversed under Kučinskis and Kariņš who minimized the participation of civil servants in order to promote political rather than technocratic debates.

The roster of participating representatives of coalition partners has also slightly changed. Under Dombrovskis, any minister could take part in meetings and decision-making of the Coalition Council. The participation policy was tightened during the Kučinskis and the Kariņš cabinets. Particularly in the latter case of five-party coalition, it was felt that a large number of participants would render the Coalition Council dysfunctional. Therefore, only two representatives of each coalition partner would participate in the Council

meetings. These typically include the elected leader of party, the head of party parliamentary group, or a senior minister. Other party representatives (*Saeima* deputies, parliamentary secretaries of ministries etc.) could be invited to discuss a specific issue. In view of these restrictions, ministers of the same party often gathered before a Coalition Council meeting to identify controversial issues and agree on a stance to be communicated at the Council meeting.

Expecting that the Council's decisions may not be unanimous, various formulae were installed in coalition agreements (like the requirement of no less than 4/5 of coalition votes or the support of the majority of coalition partners for a decision to be taken). In more problematic cases, a task force, including representatives of all coalition partners would search for a mutually acceptable solution. If coalition partners could not agree on a particularly controversial issue, the prime minister would unilaterally make a decision. However, a range of issues have been exempt from these rules and required unanimity, for example, changes in citizenship policy and official language legislation. Kariņš I and Kariņš II cabinets went even further requiring unanimity for all 'political recommendations of cooperation meetings' (that is, decisions of Coalition Council). If it could not be achieved, a separate task force would be established under the leadership of a minister who oversees the realm in which the disputed issue falls.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced technological innovations in view of the imposed limits of face-to-face meetings of persons. Not only did the *Saeima* move all its committee and plenary meetings online, but the Coalition Council also set up a WhatsApp group to discuss issues. The latter complemented online meetings of the Coalition Council.

The decisions taken by the Coalition Council are 'politically binding' on all parties in the government and in the parliament. A refusal to comply with council decisions could serve as an indication of an end to the cabinet in question.

Governance mechanisms in the parliamentary arena

Decisions of Coalition Council are politically binding for all coalition partners both at the executive and the parliamentary levels. According to interviews with politicians, the heads of PPG are responsible for the implementation of these decisions at the parliamentary level. They serve as primary points of contact for the prime minister on a wide range of issues.

All Latvian coalitions are built on the assumption of coalition discipline (see Table 7.5) and on measures to maintain this discipline. Moreover, coalition agreements explicitly provide that certain parliamentary motions (e.g. vote of confidence, initiation of new legislation without prior discussion at the Coalition Council) should not be supported by coalition partners. Heads of PPG engage in discussions with and persuasion of members of their group using rational, emotional, and political arguments. Although there seems to be a general understanding among parliamentarians that the Coalition Council is

an important mechanism for policy coordination and its decisions are binding on them as well, implementation of those decisions is by no means automatic. If a *Saeima* deputy of a coalition partner felt strongly about an issue and the Coalition Council had taken a decision that did not correspond to the position of that deputy, s/he may be given an opportunity to refrain from supporting the respective bill. Clearly, preferential voting in the *Saeima* elections serves as an institutional stimulus for such behaviour but a high incidence of divergent stances may indicate the existence of broader underlying disagreements between the party and the deputy that occasionally result in the respective MP leaving the party parliamentary group and becoming an independent.

The coalition behind the Kariņš I cabinet introduced a new format for policy coordination at the parliamentary level in view of the coalition's diversity in terms of ideology and political experience. Heads of PPG of coalition partners meet once a week with the Speaker of the *Saeima* to discuss upcoming items on the parliament's agenda and coordinate political activities of the coalition. These meetings are held in addition to the Council of Factions where each party parliamentary group is represented and to discuss and decide on issues that are not covered by the *Saeima* Rules of Procedure. The Council of Factions meets on an irregular schedule in response to a need. This, however, does not preclude bilateral consultations among leaders of parliamentary groups.

Party discipline in the *Saeima* is regarded as high both among coalition parties and opposition groups but a majority of MPs considered it appropriate. This has not warranted against reopening discussions in the *Saeima* on bills submitted by the government.

Reasons behind the reopening varied. Some served as an expression of dissatisfaction with earlier decisions taken by the Coalition Council. Some others stemmed from lobbying activities that effected attitudinal change of individual members of the *Saeima* or entire parliamentary groups. Still others could be seen as attempts to impose checks on behaviour of coalition partners. Regardless of the reasons, rarely would the reopening result in substantial changes to a government bill.

Given a key role of chairs of *Saeima* standing committees in the process of parliamentary decision-making, the allocation of these positions can be strategic as they can provide additional checks on the cabinet particularly if the chair's party is different from the party of the corresponding ministry. Nevertheless, informants confirmed that allocation of positions of committee chairs rarely followed this strategic thinking and focused more on ensuring the proportionality among coalition partners.

Cabinet duration and termination

One of the characteristics of Latvian cabinets is their rather short lifespan. If calculated since 1993, a cabinet lasted for 332 days on average. However, cabinets have become more durable after 2008 reaching an average lifespan of 380 days.

Table 7.6 Cabinet termination in Latvia, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---|
| Godmanis | 42.1 | 9 | 11, 12 | | | |
| Dombrovskis I | 65.9 | 7a | 10 | TP | Economics | Economic crisis of 2008 TP left coalition on eve of elections citing economic policy differences |
| Dombrovskis II | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Dombrovskis III | 22.2 | 4 | | | | Early parliamentary elections |
| Dombrovskis IV | 71.1 | 9 | | | | Collapse of a supermarket building in Rīga |
| Straujuma I | 30.6 | 1 | | | | |
| Straujuma II | 27.7 | 8 | | JV | | Political infighting between PM Straujuma and Party Chair Solvita Āboltiņa |
| Kučinskis | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Kariņš I | 63.9 | 7a | 11 | | | KPV LV lost popular support and was pushed out of the coalition |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of prime minister

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event

Still, this expansion is modest and modes of cabinet termination (see Table 7.6) do not seem relevant for cabinet durability and there are no particular patterns of terminal events. The tackling of the 2009 economic meltdown did create political turbulence that affected the duration of Dombrovskis I. However, the proximal Dombrovskis III was terminated due to the external reason of extraordinary elections convoked by State President Valdis Zatlers on political grounds (Ikstens 2012). Similarly, Dombrovskis IV fell after the prime minister resigned just months before the regular *Saeima* elections, unexpectedly taking political accountability for the collapse of a shopping centre that took lives of 54 persons. Yet another discretionary mechanism of cabinet termination was at play when Straujuma II ended with the resignation of the prime minister in response to intra-party conflicts. Therefore, the economic and social hardships of the 2009 meltdown affected only modestly the lifespan of several cabinets. However, the political elite mobilized and put aside disagreements at times of major challenges (economic meltdown, EU Presidency, COVID-19 pandemic), which arguably extended cabinet duration.

Other reasons can be attributed to political learning and a lack of better alternatives. Kučinskis cabinet was supported by the same coalition that was behind the relatively short-lived Straujuma II. However, it turned out to be one of the most durable cabinets in Latvia's history. Ideologically adjacent parties of that coalition likely had no preference for other combinations that would involve either the only Slavic party or political newcomers, some of which were direct competitors of coalition parties. Moreover, the Unity party was internally weakened and could not initiate an overhaul of a coalition that was disadvantageous for it. Similarly, the coalition behind the Kariņš cabinet was ideologically diverse and required additional efforts to manage and maintain it. Yet, changes of coalition partners were severely limited for political reasons – Harmony lacked coalition potential; New Conservative Party flatly rejected coalition cooperation with the Union of Greens and Farmers claiming the latter to be a corrupt political alliance; the KPV LV party was gradually disintegrating making it a notably unpredictable coalition partner.

It is worth noting that surplus coalitions tended to have higher longevity prior to 2008 and this trend continued after 2008. The coalitions behind the Kučinskis cabinet and Dombrovskis IV indicate that minimum-winning coalitions can also produce durable governments in Latvia.

Conclusions

As the global financial crisis of 2008 sparked the Great Recession around the world, many governments faced unprecedented challenges that needed to be addressed within particular constraints. Recovery from the crisis was further complicated by the 2015 migrant crisis when large numbers of people from the Middle East and North Africa flocked to Europe, ultimately putting additional strain on welfare and security systems of many EU countries. Finally, the global COVID-19 pandemic represented yet another test of resilience and efficiency of government systems.

These developments had political consequences. Economic hardship sparked political unrest and electoral volatility. Populist forces gained not only strength but also wider representation in democratic institutions and, eventually, political recognition as equal partners of ruling coalitions. Further, left-of-the-centre parties failed to capitalize on the critical economic situation in many countries.

Although Latvia's economy was among the hardest hit during the 2009 meltdown, this had only a modest effect on the country's party system. The ENP contracted for a brief period of time and recovered in the next elections. Harmony, the largest leftist party with palpable pro-Russian inclinations, increased its support and parliamentary representation but failed to become part of the governing coalition at last as other parties were wary of cooperation with it. This was not least against the background of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and that a close relationship had developed between Harmony and Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. Newcomer parties attracted segments

of the disgruntled voters from 2014 onwards, and some of them managed to become part of the governing coalition after the 2018 elections.

Other major crises (migration, COVID-19) did not have immediate effect on the shape of Latvia's party system. Latvia saw little inflow as part of the European migration crisis and it took place several years ahead of the next parliamentary elections. Even the populists who waged a successful campaign in 2018 did not turn immigration into a major campaign issue. The global pandemic unfolded a year after the 2018 elections but its political effect remains to be seen as the popular dissatisfaction took a sharp dip in the latter part of 2020.

Although new parties entered the parliamentary arena, none even approximated an absolute majority and coalitions continued to be the model of political decision-making. However, the sizeable presence of populists in the parliamentary arena did complicate the bargaining process, contributed to an unprecedented length of cabinet formations, and led to certain changes in the governance of coalition.

However, basic principles and process of coalition formation and portfolio allocation remained intact. Proportional distribution of ministerial portfolios and proportional access to 'heavyweight' ministries continued to represent cornerstones of coalition building. The Kariņš I cabinet (2019–2021) constituted a major exception as each coalition partner obtained an equal number of portfolios. This resulted from a complicated and protracted process of coalition building that involved populists and political newcomers.

The number of ministries was slightly reduced during the Great Recession as the Ministry of Environment was merged with the Ministry of Regional Development but the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs was abolished altogether. Coalition agreements, however, were not revised fundamentally but the rule of decision-making within the Coalition Council (unanimity, a certain percentage of MPs or coalition partners) fluctuated rather widely. Yet, special procedural rules for particularly sensitive issues were retained regardless.

Coalition governance also saw changes when populists became part of the coalition in 2019. As part of cosmetic activities aimed at fulfilling populist pre-election pledges, the term Coalition Council (or Cooperation Council – after 2011) was replaced with 'cooperation meetings'. Similarly, decisions of cooperation meetings became 'political recommendations'. Likely owing to a larger number of coalition partners, more substantial changes were introduced. Development committees were instituted to forge new political initiatives or to resolve conflicts among coalition partners. Weekly meetings of the *Saeima* Speaker with heads of PPG of coalition partners were established in an effort to coordinate decision-making at the parliamentary level. Also, more emphasis was laid on achieving unanimity at cooperation meetings.

Changes in some aspects of coalition governance did not affect the notably compartmentalized nature of the government. Ministers enjoyed autonomy within their policy realm within limits set by the cabinet declaration and ministerial action plans. The prime minister remained the key for horizontal policy

coordination among ministries and the actual coordination notably depended on preferences of each prime minister. Thus, Latvia bore a close resemblance to the ministerial model of governing.

The above analysis shows that the Great Recession had lesser effect on coalition formation and, particularly, coalition governance than the accession of populist parties to the government. However, the durability of the recent innovations past the complicated coalition behind the two Kariņš cabinets remains to be seen.

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|------------|---|
| LSP | Socialist Party of Latvia (Latvijas Sociālistiskā partija) |
| PCTVL | For Human Rights in United Latvia (Apvienība “Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā”) |
| L | Equal Rights (Līdztiesība) |
| LVP | Unity Party of Latvia (Latvijas Vienības partija) |
| TSP | National Harmony Party (Tautas saskaņas partijas) |
| LSDSP | Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Latvia (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija) |
| SC | Harmony Centre (Saskaņas centrs) |
| TKL-ZP | Popular Movement For Latvia (Siegerist Party) (Tautas kustība Latvijai) |
| SLAT | Concord for Latvia, Rebirth for Economy (Saskaņa Latvijai, atdzimšana tautsaimniecībai) |
| TT | For People and Justice (Tautai un taisnībai) |
| TPA | Political Union of Economists (Tautsaimnieku politiskā apvienība) |
| DPS | Democratic Party ‘Saimnieks’ (Demokrātiskā partija “Saimnieks”) |
| DCP | Democratic Centre Party (Demokrātiskā centra partija) |
| ZZS | Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un zemnieku savienība) |
| LKDS | Christian Democratic Union of Latvia (Latvijas Kristīgo demokrātu savienība) |
| LaDP | Democratic Party of Latgale (Latgales Demokrātiskā partija) |
| VL+TB-LNNK | National Alliance of ‘All for Latvia’ and ‘For Fatherland and Freedom’/LNNK (Nacionālā apvienība “Visu Latvijai!” un “Tēvzemei un Brīvībai”/LNNK) |
| TB-LNNK | For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (“Tēvzemei un Brīvībai”/LNNK) |
| V | Unity (Vienotība) |
| ZRP | Zatlers’ Reform Party (Zatlera Reformu partija) |
| LZP | Green Party of Latvia (Latvijas Zaļā partija) |
| TB | For Fatherland and Freedom (“Tēvzemei un Brīvībai”) |
| LZS | Farmers’ Union of Latvia (Latvijas zemnieku savienība) |
| JL | New Era (Jaunais laiks) |
| PS | Civic Union (Pilsoniskā savienība) |
| LNNK+LZP | Latvian National Independence Movement + Green Party of Latvia (Latvijas Nacionāli Konservatīvā Partija/Latvijas Zaļā Partija, LNNK/LZP) |
| LC | Latvia’s Way (Latvijas ceļš) |
| LNNK | Latvian National Independence Movement (Latvijas Nacionālās neatkarības kustība) |

| | |
|--------|--|
| LPP | First Party of Latvia (Latvijas Pirmā partija) |
| JP | New Party (Jaunā partija) |
| LPP-LC | First Party of Latvia/Latvia's Way (Latvijas Pirmās partijas un savienības Latvijas ceļš apvienība LPP/LC) |
| TP | People's Party (Tautas partija) |
| PLL | For a Good Latvia (Par labu Latviju) |
| JKP | New Conservative Party (Jaunā konservatīvā partija) |
| A/P | Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!) |
| KPV | Who Owns the State? (Kam pieder valsts?) |
| JV | New Unity (Jaunā Vienotība) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Latvian in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

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8 Lithuania

Ministerial Government and the EU Factor

Irmina Matonyte and Ieva Gajauskaite

Introduction

This chapter focuses on coalition governance in Lithuania during the post-2008 period. It highlights new developments in terms of coalition governance and interprets persistent patterns of coalition governance. Lithuania had to deal with the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Since early 2020, the country has also had to develop policies aimed at managing the Coronavirus pandemic. Even though Lithuania was spared from the migration crisis of 2015, the country did not escape geopolitical challenges such as the influx of thousands of migrants caused by authoritarian Belarus pushing them to cross the border in late spring 2021, and the Russian full-scale war launched against Ukraine in 2022, resulting in numerous war-refugees.

Alongside this, developments in the party system and changes in the style of the political elite's behaviour led to shifts in patterns of coalition formation, bargaining, and governance. In earlier research, covering data from the early 1990s to early 2010, it became apparent that Lithuania's governmental style is akin to that of the 'ministerial government'. In ministerial governments, the division of portfolios between the various coalition parties serves to function as the basic mechanism in terms of managing those coalitions, while the various expected perks of office and the opportunity to take control of state resources appear to be of primary concern for politicians who are seeking office (Bergman et al 2019). Here we will explore whether and how these developments played out in terms of the formation and governance of coalition cabinets between 2008 and 2021. Except for Table 1a, which captures the full democratic period, our tables start with the Rikilas cabinet that formed in 2006. Our focus is on the period that begins with the Andrius Kubilius government, which was formed in late 2008, and concludes with the Ingrida Šimonytė cabinet, which formed in December 2020, after the regular parliamentary elections in October 2020.

We find that two aspects stand out as being particularly important when it comes to coalition governance in Lithuania. Firstly, coalition bargaining and governance become liable to innovations that are introduced by the new parties and instances of populism, widely practiced even by the mainstream parties. As for new parties and instances of populism (Valentinavičius 2017; Auers

2018; Ramonaitė 2020; Jastramskis 2020), the personalization of politics and the ailing partisan content of policies have produced implications for political competition and for the very premises of coalition formation and generally for democratic accountability.

Secondly, the ‘EU factor’ becomes an important variable in the formation and functioning of any government. In the post-2008 period, several facets of the EU factor became perceptible in the formation and functioning of coalitions. Lithuania’s political elites and population remain amongst the most fervent Europhile among the EU member-states (Matonytė et al 2016). Although the European parliamentary elections remain second-order elections, the appeal and prestige of becoming a Member of European Parliament (MEP) are considerable amongst the Lithuanian political class. The tasks of the Lithuanian presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2013 for a few years mobilized the entire political class (Vilpišauskas 2014). Another important European aspect is to be found in all seven coalition governments that were formed between 2012 and 2020: at least one coalition party has had its leader not with a national mandate but with a European Parliament one, which weakened their engagement when it comes to national coalition governance. The ‘EU factor’ created an additional layer in coalition governance: along with the national legislative and executive arenas, the European arena is also represented. Under the ‘ministerial government’, for office-seeking politicians, the especially luring were the ministries, which administer EU Structural Funds. On very practical grounds, portfolio distribution has been structured by the considerations related to distribution of EU Structural Funds through such ministries as Economy and Innovations, Transport and Communications, Environment, and Agriculture (Matonytė 2019).

The institutional setting

In Lithuania, its institutional rules that shape coalition politics are established in the Constitution (which was drawn up in 1992), electoral law, and the ‘Law on Government’ (1994), as well as by the governing statutes of the Seimas and other relevant documents, and they have not undergone any significant change in the post-2008 period.

In 1998, the Constitutional court ruled that the country is a ‘parliamentary republic’ with ‘certain features of the semi-presidential system’, thereby hinting that the president could not dominate any coalition governance. The principle of parliamentary control of the government means that a president can be very active in the process of cabinet formation. However, with a certain grain of Solomonic wisdom, the court did not establish overriding powers for the prime minister and (or) the parliamentary majority.

The period which forms the subject of our study practically coincides with the two terms of office for President Dalia Grybauskaitė, who took a very active role. Her behaviour was in sharp contrast to the rather passive stance which had been held by President Valdas Adamkus who, in the final period of

his second term, behaved permissively in the form of a rubber stamp for decisions which were being adopted by the then-current cabinet. Grybauskaitė imposed herself as an independent political player.

The president notoriously used to repeat that any coalition agreement was not constitutionally binding. In particular, Grybauskaitė used this argument in the case of the Algirdas Butkevičius II cabinet to enforce the perception that the president was not bound by any partisan agreements. The president managed to maintain her influence on the formation and functioning of cabinets throughout both her terms of office. The president acted a little differently in the case of the three Saulius Skvernelis cabinets (2016–2019). This time she used a less confrontational style and was more accommodating. As Malinauskas asserts, *‘the entire composition of the government in the Skvernelis I cabinet was tacitly coordinated with the president, and only then did Skvernelis publicly announce that candidacy’*.

President Gitanas Nausėda, elected in 2019, is vocal and takes active role vis-à-vis the cabinets. However, if President Grybauskaitė in her debates with the stakeholders of the coalitions over ‘who gets what’ referred to the arguments regarding good reputation, professionalism of the candidates and their policy visions, her successor, Nausėda, publicly expresses his personal views on events and criticizes candidatures (and later, ministers).

Regarding the president’s powers in relation to the government’s formation, there is an important caveat which has been left open by the constitution: what should be done if the opinion of the president and the PM diverge concerning the selection of ministers? In autumn 2012, PM Butkevičius submitted a list of ministers for only 12 positions, not all 14 of them. Accordingly, President Grybauskaitė appointed the government without two ministers. In 2019, the newly elected President Nausėda kept vacant the position of Minister of the Economy and Innovations for almost an entire year.

The Lithuanian parliament (the one-chamber, 141-member Seimas) is elected every four years. The president is elected by popular vote every five years. After every parliamentary and presidential election, formally, a new cabinet is formed. In practice, after the inauguration of new president, the same PM then continues, and a few ministers might be replaced (upon the initiative of the president or the PM himself). The Seimas is elected by parallel voting using a mixed electoral formula: 71 MPs are elected in single-seat districts and 70 MPs are elected in a multi-seat district (via party lists). In the single-member districts, a majority of the vote is required to get elected in the first round; if there is a second-round vote then the two candidates with the most votes in the first round compete against one another in a run-off.

The government in Lithuania is invested by the Seimas in a two-step investiture vote. Firstly, the Seimas votes on the proposed candidate for PM. In the second vote, the Seimas approves the cabinet, with a maximum of 15 days between the first and second investiture vote. The second investiture vote completes the process of government formation. In this chapter, we use the day of the second investiture vote as the starting point of the new government (see [Table 8.1a](#)).

Table 8.1a Lithuanian cabinets 1992–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Lubys | 1992-12-17 | 1992-11-15 | LDDP | maj | 74 (52.5) | 141 | 7 | 2.82 | |
| 2 | Šleževičius | 1993-03-16 | | LDDP | maj | 73 (51.8) | 141 | 7 | 2.88 | |
| 3 | Stankevičius | 1996-02-15 | | LDDP | min | 60 (45.1) | 133 | 8 | 4.31 | |
| 4 | Vagnorius | 1996-12-10 | 1996-11-10 | TS-LKD, LKDP, LCS | sur | 100 (73) | 137 | 6 | 3.44 | |
| 5 | Pakas I | 1999-06-10 | | TS-LKD, LKDP | mwc | 74 (53.2) | 139 | 6 | 3.95 | |
| 6 | Kubilius I | 1999-11-11 | | TS-LKD, LKDP | mwc | 74 (53.6) | 138 | 6 | 3.97 | |
| 7 | Pakas II | 2000-11-09 | 2000-10-08 | LiCS, NS-SL | min | 66 (46.8) | 141 | 7 | 4.21 | LCS |
| 8 | Brazauskas I | 2001-07-12 | | LSDP, NS-SL | mwc | 74 (52.5) | 141 | 7 | 4.74 | |
| 9 | Brazauskas II | 2004-12-14 | 2004-10-24 | LSDP, DP, NS-SL, VNDS | mwc | 80 (56.7) | 141 | 8 | 6.15 | |
| 10 | Brazauskas III | 2006-05-25 | | LSDP, DP, VNDS | mwc | 71 (50.4) | 141 | 9 | 6.47 | |
| 11 | Kirkilas | 2006-07-18 | | LSDP, VNDS, PDP, LiCS | min | 59 (41.8) | 141 | 10 | 7.4 | TS-LKD |
| 12 | Kubilius II | 2008-12-09 | 2008-10-26 | TS-LKD, LRLS, LiCS, TPP | sur | 80 (56.7) | 141 | 10 | 5.76 | |
| 13 | Butkevičius I | 2012-12-13 | 2012-10-28 | LSDP, DP, TT, LLRA | sur | 85 (61.6) | 138 | 7 | 5.38 | |
| 14 | Butkevičius II | 2014-09-25 | | LSDP, DP, TT | mwc | 79 (56.4) | 140 | 7 | 5.42 | |
| 15 | Skvernelis I | 2016-12-13 | 2016-10-23 | LVŽS, LSDP | mwc | 73 (51.8) | 141 | 6 | 4.2 | |
| 16 | Skvernelis II | 2018-04-24 | | LVŽS, LSDDP | min | 68 (48.2) | 141 | 7 | 4.23 | TT |
| 17 | Skvernelis III | 2019-08-07 | | LVŽS, LSDDP, LLRA, TT | mwc | 76 (53.9) | 141 | 7 | 4.79 | |
| 18 | Šimonytė | 2020-12-11 | | TS-LKD, LRLS, LP | mwc | 74 (52.5) | 141 | 10 | 4.67 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix ([Appendix I](#)).

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition.

The cabinet in Lithuania consists of the PM and about 15 ministers. The PM has steering rights vis-à-vis cabinet ministers but cannot intervene directly in ministerial jurisdictions. Ministers can make decisions which are beneficial to their own party, or themselves, even if such decisions contradict the principles that are espoused by the PM. Lithuanian ministers are extremely autonomous in the sense that they largely control their ministries without interference from their coalition partners. In contrast, Indridason and Kristinsson (2018: 149) observed in Iceland where, after the economic crash of 2008, the development of more collective cabinet mechanisms has weakened ministerial control, with notable improvements in more extensive coalition agreements and greater attention to hierarchy in government.

The party system and the players

Lithuania's party system has evolved from a high degree of polarization between the left and right to more centrist politics. This initial polarization was induced by the origins of two of the major parties rather than through any ideological differences. The social democrats on the left (the LSDP, formerly the LDDP) originated from the Communist party, while the other on the right (the TS-LKD) evolved from the pro-independence, anti-communism movement, *Sąjūdis*. Consequently, the communist/anti-communist divide led to a clear division between the economic left and right wings in the political spectrum (Saarts 2011: 94) (see [Table 8.1b](#)).

As the electorate was becoming tired of tensions between left and right, new parties found their way into the Seimas by introducing alternative, more centred liberal politics (Duvold and Jurkynas 2013: 128; Matonytė 2019: 305). The decreasing degree of polarization was influenced by several factors. First, the electorate was getting tired of never-ending political conflict between left and right. Moreover, the TS-LKD and LSDP started to cooperate in their gate-keeper attempts aimed to prevent new political parties from governing, while labelling them as populist (Ramonaitė 2008: 97). In the attempt to minimize the influence of the newcomer parties, the LSDP and TS-LKD even engineered a minority government (July 2006 to October 2008, Social-Democrat Gediminas Kirkilas' minority cabinet was supported by the conservatives, who formally were in opposition).

During the post-2008 period, non-partisan politicians have become pervasive at all political levels in Lithuania. In the 2009 and 2014 elections, the non-partisan Grybauskaitė (the former EU Commissioner for Budget and Finance) was elected as President. Grybauskaitė promoted an anti-partisan rhetoric in the public sphere and contributed to a less ideological approach to public policies. In 2019, the non-partisan Nausėda (chief economist of the Scandinavian SEB commercial bank in Vilnius) got elected as a president based on vague welfare society-centred proposals.

Also, as the electoral success of the populist Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) shows, in a parliamentary campaign, it is also possible to strike a good

Table 8.1b Lithuanian system conflict structure 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 11 | Kirkilas | DP, TT | Econ. left-right | DP | |
| 12 | Kubilius II | TPP | Econ. left-right | DP | |
| 13 | Butkevičius I | DP | Econ. left-right | DP | |
| 14 | Butkevičius II | TT | Econ. left-right | TS-LKD | GAL-TAN |
| 15 | Skvernelis I | LVŽS | Econ. left-right | LVŽS | GAL-TAN |
| 16 | Skvernelis II | LVŽS | Econ. left-right | LVŽS | GAL-TAN |
| 17 | Skvernelis III | LVŽS | Econ. left-right | LVŽS | GAL-TAN |
| 18 | Šimonytė | TS-LKD | GAL-TAN | TS-LKD | Econ. left-right |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2006–2013 (cabinets 11–14) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

balance: to look as non-partisan as possible and at the same time to remain a political party that is legally allowed to run in national elections (Valentinavičius 2017). Despite the populist rhetoric, the LVŽS is not a new populist party, as the nutshell of the party was founded in 1994. This party (until 2012 it was known as the Union of Peasants and New Democracy Party, VNDS) was a partner of the coalition governments from 2004 until 2008. In the 2019 elected European Parliament, the LVŽS belongs to the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), while previously (in 2004) the representatives of VNDS associated themselves with the Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN). In 2012, the new emblem of the party was adopted and the massive efforts to build more local chapters of LVŽS were launched. Representatives of the LVŽS (previously, under various names of the party) always had strong positions at the several of the municipal councils in the province of Lithuania.

Regarding the political dimensions of conflict, three dimensions define the Lithuania party system in the post-2008 period. The first dimension concerns the historical legacies of the Soviet Union and relates to the marginal but vocal group of Russian (Kremlin) apologists versus the spectrum of milder and stronger proponents of an anti-Russian (anti-Putin), pro-democratic, and Europhile attitudes (Matonytė et al 2016).¹ The second divide is defined by the social and economic politics of redistribution (i.e. economic left-right issues). The third dimension of liberalism-conservatism (or GAL-TAN) taps into the nexus of liberal values (and human rights) versus

traditional, or conservative values (Ramonaitė 2012: 134). According to Ramonaitė (2021), in the 2020 Seimas elections, the GAL-TAN dimension became even more significant than the socio-economic one. In 2020 elections, taking place amidst coronavirus pandemic, and in the increasingly insecure geopolitical environment, the extremist appeals have not attracted much popular support. For instance, the Polish minority party, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA) – because of the pro-Kremlin stances of its leadership – for the first time since post-communist transition could not secure its parliamentary representation. In contrast, the newcomer libertarian Freedom Party (LP), which separated from the LRLS in 2019, consolidated votes of Lithuanian citizens, who support progressive liberal values, won 11 seats (Ramonaitė 2021).

In the post-2008 period, Lithuania's party system became more fragmented and characterized by extreme voter volatility (Saarts 2011: 112). The overlapping centrist electoral appeals of the mainstream and populist parties contributed to the high voter volatility (reaching 30 and more per cent in 2008–2016). However, in the election of 2020, volatility was less than 20 per cent (Jurkynas 2021: 6).

Also, the parliamentary elections in 2008 marked the highest point of party fragmentation in Lithuania, with 5.8 effective parliamentary parties (see Table 8.1a). Since then, this number has dropped. In 2012, it stood at 5.2, in 2016, the parliamentary party system consisted of 4.2 effective parties, and in 2020 – 4.7.

Table 8.1c shows that in 2012, the coalition was founded following a pre-electoral agreement, which was signed by the mainstream social democrat party with two populist forces, the Labour Party (DP) and the Party 'Order and Justice' (TT). Even though the three-party electoral alliance received a total of 57 per cent of the seats, the decision was made to build a surplus coalition by introducing the LLRA (a Polish minority party).

Summing up, the coalition governments in post-2008 Lithuania emerged and functioned within a party system, which was itself characterized by low polarization, high (but decreasing) fragmentation, and high electoral volatility.

Table 8.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Lithuania, 2004–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|---|
| 2004-10-24 | LSDP, NS-SL | EA, PEC | |
| 2012-10-28 | DP, LSDP, TT | EA, PEC | Written contract, Joint press conference, Separate declarations |

Notes:

Type: electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

Government formation

The government formation process was characterized by several trends in post-2008 period. Firstly, Lithuania's EU membership perceptibly influenced coalition bargaining, especially in terms of areas of coalition partner responsibilities, and regarding candidates for ministers. Secondly, populist parties became coalitionable partners for the mainstream parties. Thirdly, the choice of coalition partners and eventual ministers became highly contingent upon the personal calculations of the leaders of partner parties, as did the taking of decisions which concerned the content of coalition agreements.

Forming coalitions in Lithuania immediately after parliamentary elections is a relatively straightforward process (see [Table 8.2](#)). During the post-2008 period in Lithuania, three types of cabinets have been formed. Two surplus coalitions were formed after the parliamentary elections in 2008 and 2012 (see [Table 8.1a](#)). The reason for these surplus coalitions was to secure broad parliamentary support, while also reducing the cabinet's vulnerability to interpellations, presidential vetoes, or scandals involving coalition politicians. Also, these surplus coalitions also provide some assurance against 'betrayals', whether by coalition partners or a lack of voting discipline.

Four minimal winning coalitions saw the light of day at three different stages of the electoral cycle. In terms of longevity, minimal winning coalitions have dominated in Lithuania, since the ministerial government tends to dwell on well-calculated transactions regarding coalition partners.

Amidst the unfolding financial crisis, the TS-LKD won the 2008 parliamentary elections. TS-LKD chose two liberal parties with which to form a cabinet. Since the three-party coalition still did not guarantee a ruling majority, the populist Nation's Resurrection party (TPP) was also invited to join. Creating an oversized coalition justified itself, as the populists turned out to be an unpredictable partner. Negotiations began with a proportionate division of ministerial positions. The proportional rule included not only the members of the Parliamentary Party Group (PPG), but also, based on verbal agreement during the negotiations, and creatively 'weighted', the relative importance of ministries and other power positions, which had to be distributed. The position of PM was equal to three points. The position of the speaker of the Seimas was equal to two points, while the position of a minister was equal to one point. Ministries were rated at three points, two points, or one point (Valinskas 2020). Five ministries, which together control the biggest financial appropriations and distribute EU Structural Funds (ministries covering environment, interior, finance, economy, and healthcare), were considered 'strategic' ministries, and at least one of these five ministries was sought by each partner.

The European considerations were particularly important in the formation of the coalition in 2012. Firstly, to ensure a smooth presidency for the European Union council, President Grybauskaitė was actively (albeit informally and not overstepping her mandate) involved in the formation of the cabinet.

Table 8.2 Government formation period in Lithuania, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds</i> | <i>Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days)</i> | <i>Number of days required in government formation</i> | <i>Total bargaining duration</i> | <i>Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses)</i> | | |
|----------------|----------------|---|---|--|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------|
| | | | | | | | <i>Pro</i> | <i>Abstention</i> | <i>Contra</i> |
| Kirkilas | 2006 | 1 | LSDP, PDP, LiCS, VNDS | 20 | 47 | 34 | 58 | 2 | 49 |
| Kubilius II | 2008 | 0 | LSDP, PDP, LiCS, VNDS TS-LKD, LiCS, TPP, LRLS | 5 17 | 44 | 17 | 83 | 5 | 40 |
| Butkevičius I | 2012 | 1 | LSDP, DP, TT, LLRA | 30 | 46 | 40 | 83 | 9 | 39 |
| Butkevičius II | 2014 | 0 | LSDP, DP, TT | 1 | 30 | 1 | | | |
| Skvernelis I | 2016 | 0 | LVŽS, LSDP | 11 | 51 | 11 | 86 | 40 | 3 |
| Skvernelis II | 2018 | 0 | LVŽS, LSDDP | 7 | 213 | 7 | | | |
| Skvernelis III | 2019 | 0 | LVŽS, LSDDP, LLRA, TT | 35 | 70 | 35 | 75 | 9 | 27 |
| Šimonytė | 2020 | 0 | TS-LKD, LRLS, LP | 16 | 47 | 16 | 78 | 20 | 30 |

The president made clear the qualification requirements for nominees (such as a certain level of familiarity with the European agenda in the intended policy field, fluency in English or another working European language, and an impeccable reputation). Secondly, for the four coalition partner parties but, in particular, for the leadership of the populist DP, access to the ‘European money’ which was to be distributed via strategic ministries was a major motivating and driving force. Thirdly, the very initiative behind the coalition involving four parties was launched by the leaders of the DP, TT, and LLRA (all three men were members of the European Parliament), and at first, they had discussed the initiative amongst themselves in Brussels and only then presented it to the *formateur* (interview with former PM, Butkevičius). By introducing a fourth partner, the TT and DP strengthened their positions in the coalition and counterweighted the largest coalition member, the LSDP.

As emphasized by our interviewee, who was close to the DP, negotiations regarding the composition of the government were initiated after the drafting of the joint programme (on our interviews, see also [Appendix II](#)). The negotiations on ‘who gets what’ considered the number of parliamentary members in the four PPGs. As in previous coalitions, the ministries were ‘weighted’. The ministries of Finance, Economy, Transport and Communications, Energy, and Environment were labelled ‘strategic’ (given a coefficient of 1.5 when compared to the remaining ministries).

After sharing the ministries (see [Table 8.3](#)), the four parties had informal negotiations on nominations. The party nominations had to be coordinated with President Grybauskaitė who took a particularly demanding and moralistic position towards the DP, which was subject to a criminal investigation regarding fraudulent financial accounting and for suspected cases of vote buying during the 2012 parliamentary elections. As our interviewee observed, the president’s underlying position was that ‘*the president is not a notary, someone who approves everything that the PM brings to her*’. The president paid special attention to the appointment of the ministers of the Interior, Defence, and Foreign Affairs.

After the 2016 elections, the LVŽS emerged as the winner and got the first opportunity to form a new government. Even though formally, the LVŽS was not a new party, in the elections, it capitalized on the image of being a newcomer.

After initial talks with the Homeland Union (TS-LKD), the LVŽS opted to form a minimal winning coalition with the social democrats. Bargaining between LVŽS and LSDP took 11 days. During the negotiations, the experienced negotiators from the LSDP managed to gain the portfolio for the Ministry of the Economy, prominent in distribution of the EU Structural funds even though LSDP was not the largest party.

The LVŽS and the LSDP had quite a clear distinction in how they perceived the most appropriate format of the new government. While the LSDP negotiators insisted that the cabinet should consist of ‘politicians’ who would be able to implement the cabinet’s political agenda, the populist LVŽS aimed

Table 8.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Lithuanian coalitions, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Social Security and Labour</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Kirkilas | 2006 | 7 LSDP, 3 VNDS, 2 LiCS, 2 PDP | 14 | 2 LSDP | 14 | LSDP | LSDP | VNDS | LSDP | LiCS |
| Kubilius II | 2008 | 7 TS-LKD, 3 LRLS, 2 LiCS, 2 TPP | 14 | | 14 | TS-LKD | TS-LKD | TS-LKD | TS-LKD | LiCS |
| Butkevičius I | 2012 | 8 LSDP, 4 DP, 2 TT, 1 LLRA | 15 | 5 DP, 4 LLRA, 4 LSDP, 2 TT | 15 | LSDP | LSDP | LSDP | DP | TT |
| Butkevičius II | 2014 | 8 LSDP, 5 DP, 2 TT | 15 | | 15 | LSDP | LSDP | LSDP | DP | TT |
| Skvernelis I | 2016 | 12 LVŽS, 3 LSDP | 15 | | 15 | LVŽS | LVŽS | LSDP | LVŽS | LVŽS |
| Skvernelis II | 2018 | 13 LVŽS, 2 LSDDP | 15 | | 15 | LVŽS | LVŽS | LSDDP | LVŽS | LVŽS |
| Skvernelis III | 2019 | 11 LVŽS, 2 LLRA, 2 LSDDP | 15 | | 15 | LVŽS | LVŽS | LSDDP | LVŽS | LLRA |
| Šimonytė | 2020 | 10 TS-LKD, 3 LP, 2 LRLS | 15 | | 15 | TS-LKD | TS-LKD | TS-LKD | TS-LKD | TS-LKD |

to form a cabinet of ‘non-partisan experts’ who would excel in their own policy fields.

During the cabinet formation phase, President Grybauskaitė seized the opportunity to play even more active role than in the case of previous cabinets. The *formateur*, Skvernelis (affiliated with LVŽS, but formally not its member), discussed many potential candidates with the president before her approval was obtained (according to an interview with a high-ranking civil servant).

Very soon the LSDP’s PPG split into two ‘factions’. Twelve former LSDP parliamentarians founded a new PPG called ‘Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour’ (LSDDP), while eight parliamentarians decided to remain with the ‘original’ LSDP PPG and joined the parliamentary opposition. The newly founded LSDDP PPG immediately entered into a ‘PPG agreement’ with the LVŽS. In March 2018, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party was formally established to be able to formally sign a new three-party coalition agreement.

However, the leaders of the newly formed LSDDP had one genuine goal: *‘The goal was to participate in elections for the European Parliament, and this was agreed’* (via an interview with Butkevičius). The promise of cooperation between the LVŽS and the LSDDP in all forthcoming elections was included in the coalition agreement as a separate clause. However, later the LVŽS did not keep its promise and did not include any LSDDP member in its electoral list for the European Parliament. Despite such a betrayal, the LSDDP did not withdraw from the cabinet.

Shortly after signing the coalition agreement with the LSDDP in March 2018, the LVŽS signed an agreement on joint work with the TT and invited the LLRA (the Polish minority party) to join its coalition. The negotiations started after the 2019 presidential election. Since in Lithuania an MP can join another PPG immediately after leaving one PPG, without having to be independent for some time, migration of members from one of the PPGs to another made the Skvernelis III cabinet particularly frail. To avoid early elections and to stabilize the situation, the leadership of the LVŽS fell back on various means. Amongst such creative means was the decision by the LVŽS to delegate one of its most vocal parliamentarians to the PPG of the support party, TT, which was effectively pulling itself apart (according to the statutes, a viable PPG must have a minimum of seven parliamentarians).

The formation of Šimonytė cabinet in late 2020 was rather smooth as the three coalition partner parties had secured a parliamentary majority (74 out of 141 seats) and the leaders of the three parties were quick to sign a coalition agreement, where most of the attention was devoted to value orientations and policy priorities. All three party leaders took key positions in the coalition government. PM Šimonytė commented that formation of the government does not take place in a pharmacy, i.e. it should not focus on carefully weighing all possible ingredients instead of paying attention to the public policy issues. During the cabinet formation, tensions were generated by President Nausėda, who – willing to assert his authority – initially rejected two

ministerial candidates for the government. However, the cabinet is unprecedentedly stable and during more than 12 months of being in power did not undergo any changes.

It is not surprising that all five coalition agreements which were signed between 2008 and 2019 refer to the size of coalition partner PPGs, tying this to a commitment to form a government. All agreements, except the one, signed in 2020, are dominated by general rules (see Table 8.4). In two coalition agreements (2012 and 2020), the PM's name is specified. Other agreements only indicate to which party the position of PM and speaker is to be allocated.

Coalition agreements tend to provide a degree of liberty for a coalition not to have to rewrite a coalition agreement even if one of the partners withdraws, and none of the partners stipulates that, if the coalition collapses, then parliamentary elections would be held. The politicians avoid voter control and attempt to postpone as much as possible the 'moment of truth', when the voters could throw out these rascals. Areas of responsibility are discussed only in the annexes to the agreements (2008 and 2019) or are not specified at all. Agreements leave as many windows of opportunity as possible when it comes to flexibility to be able to reallocate positions or change the share of positions without re-negotiating the coalition agreement.

None of the coalition agreements stipulates that partners must support each other during a parliamentary vote. Voting in the Seimas is frequently subject to *ad hoc* bargaining, especially as strict party discipline and voting commitments cannot be implemented due to the instability of the PPGs (especially those PPGs which consist of numerous non-partisan members).

The issue of non-partisan MP and problems that are related to the existence of different 'wings' of the same PPG served to incentivize (in 2016, the LVŽS and LSDP and in 2020, the TS-LKD, LRLS, and LP) the inclusion of a provision that partners would be able to independently decide upon some value-related issues into their coalition agreement.

Table 8.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Lithuania, 2006–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Kubilius II | 2008 | 4056 | 5 | 0 | 33 | 12 | 50 |
| Butkevičius I | 2012 | 336 | 80 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| Skvernelis I | 2016 | 267 | 71 | 12 | 19 | 0 | 0 |
| Skvernelis II | 2018 | 517 | 90 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| Skvernelis III | 2019 | 503 | 85 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 911 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| | | 387 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Šimonytė | 2020 | 1822 | 35 | 9 | 9 | 0 | 47 |

The decision to publicly announce issues on which the coalition partners would ‘agree to disagree’ was a result of the conflicting positions of the coalition partners, between the traditionalist-authoritarian-nationalist LVŽS and the more liberal-cosmopolitan LSDP in 2016; and between the traditionalist TS-LKD, the liberal LRLS and the overtly libertarian LP in 2020. In addition, there were internal conflicts regarding these sensitive questions within the dominant coalition parties, respectively, in 2016 the LVŽS and 2020 – the TS-LKD. In 2016, these specific issues tapped exclusively into the GAL-TAN dimension (involving the spelling of foreign surnames in their original form, and enshrining the definition of a family in the constitution, along with guaranteeing the protection of human life from the moment of conception). In 2020, the list of issues on which the coalition partner parties agreed to disagree was longer and more varied (it included the legislative initiatives ranging from the decommunization of public spaces to the issues of ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the law on reproductive health, etc.).

Governance

According to the constitution, the Lithuanian government consists of the PM and an unspecified number of ministries. During the period 2008–2021, the ‘Law on the Government’ (1994), which stipulates details regarding the functioning of the government, has not been revised in any significant way. The number of ministries went up from 13 to 14 when, in January 2009, a new Ministry of Energy was created (with a separated jurisdiction from the Ministry of the Economy).

The full cabinet meets at least once a week. The PM controls the cabinet agenda, while also initiating and leading debates. Formal cabinet decision rulings are achieved via a majority vote. However, in practice, decisions are regularly taken on a kind of unanimity basis and consensus.

The PM can exercise the right to appoint and dismiss ministers only through a formal act, which is carried out by the president. PM Skvernelis used and, according to media commentators, abused the occasion of the inauguration of the newly elected President Nausėda in July 2019 to change several ministers with whom he was dissatisfied.

The constitution clearly establishes a ‘ministerial government’ model: ministers lead ministries and resolve issues which fall under the jurisdiction of their individual ministries and avoid interfering in matters that fall outside the ministry’s policy area. Also, and quite specifically, the law provides that a minister may be temporarily substituted only by another government minister and the PM himself cannot assume the responsibilities of any of the ministers.

Until 2006, watchdog junior ministers used to be delegated (Matonytė 2019). In practical terms, this arrangement was dysfunctional, serving only to create tensions between coalition partners. In the post-2008 period, junior-ministers are delegated by the same coalition partner party, which appoints the minister. The junior-ministers may represent the minister in cabinet meetings and for parliamentary standing committees; they participate in the preparation

of legal acts, coordinate projects with the other shareholders, etc. In July 2009, it was established that there could not be more than three junior-ministerial positions in any ministry.

The revision to the governmental structure was necessitated by preparations before the Lithuanian assumption of the presidency of the European Union council in 2013. The number of junior-ministers in each ministry did not go down straight after 2013.

As for the personalities of the PMs, the four cases which are under consideration were rather different. PM Kubilius (2008–2012) was a respected and experienced politician. Essentially, the Kubilius II cabinet had one predominant task: to unravel the negative effects of the financial crisis, and the crisis circumstances served to consolidate the cabinet as a team. Even though, as frequently highlighted by the media, Kubilius lacked public communication and persuasion skills, he knew how to explain political initiatives to his cabinet members and opponents.

The Butkevičius' cabinets functioned quite differently. Our interviewees acknowledged the fact that a particular weakness stemmed from Butkevičius' personality which, sometimes, served to provoke resistance and an unwillingness to obey or cooperate between members of his own team. Frequently, Butkevičius fell back on a recourse to use working groups, which were created specifically to study problematic situations and prepare solutions. His political opponents (including the president) further added to the inefficiency of these working groups by often ridiculing them as a means to 'muddle through'. In contrast, our interviewees underlined the importance of consensus-building practices, especially those which were skilfully conducted by PM Skvernelis in preparation for plenary sessions and cabinet meetings. Gediminas Kirkilas (a political heavyweight in various cabinets that were led by Butkevičius and Skvernelis) commented: *'Skvernelis is quite business-like and flexible. He is considerate: if you suggest something, he will be inclined to accept it'*. Therefore, even though the formal rules of the game have not been revised in the post-2008 period, due to the president's attitudes towards PMs and the specific features of the PM's personality, coalitions which were led by Butkevičius or by Šimonytė experienced greater difficulties and were weaker than those which were led by Kubilius or by Skvernelis.

Governments in Lithuania always include several non-partisan ministers whose authority is based on their professional expertise and personal networks, rather than on their affiliation with a particular political party. Observed prior to 2008, the tendency that centre-right governments relied more on partisan ministers while centre-left coalitions were quite well-disposed to appointing non-partisan ministers (Matonytė 2019) persisted in the post-2008 period. The centre-right Kubilius II and Šimonytė cabinets each had two non-partisan ministers. More numerous incidences of non-partisan ministers occurred during the series of centre-left coalitions which were formed during 2012–2020. Typically, non-partisan members are placed in ministerial positions which are allocated to new parties, ones which may well be lacking in well-reputed and committed politicians. In different cabinets, the same persons could be nominated for ministerial positions, and not necessarily by the same political party.

In 2016–2020, it was not only a shortage of politicians who were experienced, trustworthy, and willing to become ministers which contributed to the strengthening of the presence of non-partisan ministers in the cabinet, but it was also due to the populist message used in the electoral campaigns. The LVŽS pushed the principle of non-partisan ministers to its absolute maximum. PM Skvernelis himself was not a member of the LVŽS and, as the media aptly pointed out, the LVŽS ‘was leasing’ the Skvernelis’ brand name. In contrast, even though PM Šimonytė is not a member of the TS-LKD, her allegiance to the party is not questioned. Šimonytė’s non-partisan status plays out as a rather successful personal-political branding strategy in a society with very low trust in political parties.

The principle of political parties as an essential constitutive element of government is not legally enshrined in Lithuania. This omission legitimizes a relatively important share of the ministerial appointments of non-partisan members. However, it would be far-fetched to refer to the composition of any of Lithuania’s cabinets as technocrats. Rather, non-partisan ministers have certain policy ‘missions’ to carry out without generating political repercussions for any of the coalition partner parties.

Coalition parties usually agree on joint decision-making formulas. As a rule, coalition partners promise to reach mutual agreement on their projects prior to their placement on official cabinet agendas or before they are delivered to the Seimas. All agreements emphasize the respect, trust, or good-will of the coalition partners and invite the prevention of conflict.

Even though all coalition agreements contain provisions for resolving serious conflicts, in practice these fatality-avoiding clauses have never been activated. [Table 8.5](#) provides further details regarding coalition governance.

In all of the cabinets that have been formed during the period 2008–2021, except the Šimonytė’s cabinet, the highest decision-making instance of a coalition was in terms of a ‘coalition committee’. The coalition committee is institutionalized and permanent. Each coalition partner is represented on it by three or four ‘personalities’. As a rule, the coalition committee includes the PM, the speaker, the elders from the coalition partner PPGs, and all of the chairpersons from the coalition partner parties. More than a year after its formation and despite publicly announced intentions, the coalition committee of Šimonytė’s cabinet was not formed and its management mostly relies on personal meetings of the PM with the two leaders of partner parties.

Both arenas, executive and legislative, are represented in the coalition committees. Interviews with coalition insiders indicate that on any relevant political controversy and project the decision is first proposed and discussed in the political committee, which sets out the general lines for the cabinet’s and parliamentary majority’s interpretation of sensitive issues. As a rule, the coalition committees are pretty stable and include the PM along with one or two ministers (leaders of the coalition partner parties) and the Speaker of the *Seimas* along with several parliamentarians (elders of the PPGs). PMs Kubilius and Butkevičius convoked the meetings of the coalition committee on a regular basis, usually, once a week, in the building of the Seimas, on Tuesdays or Thursdays, before the plenary sessions.

Table 8.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Lithuania, 2006–2021

| Coalition | Year in agreement | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Kirkilas | 2006 | IE | No | No | CoC, PCa | CoC | CoC | No (LiCS, PDP) | No | All/All | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Kubilius II | 2008 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, CaC, Parl | CoC | CoC | No (TPP) | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Butkevičius I | 2012 | POST | Yes | No | CoC | CoC | CoC | No (LLRA, DP, TT) | No | All/All | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Butkevičius II | 2014 | N | | No | CoC | CoC | CoC | No (DP, TT) | No | All/All | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Skvernelis I | 2016 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PCa | CoC | CoC | No (LVŽS, LSDP) | No | Most/All | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Skvernelis II | 2018 | IE | Yes | No | CoC, PCa | CoC | CoC | No (LVŽS, LSDDP) | No | All/All | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Skvernelis III | 2019 | IE | Yes | No | CoC, PCa | CoC | CoC | No (LVŽS, LSDDP, LLRA, TT) | No | All/All | No | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Šimonytė | 2020 | POST | Yes | No | PCa | PCa | PCa | No (LRLS) | Yes | Most/All | No | Varied | Yes | Yes |

Notes:

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; PRE = pre-election; N = no coalition agreement.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; CaC = cabinet committee; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; Parl = parliamentary leaders.

Coalition discipline: All = discipline always expected; Most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters.

Policy agreement: Comp. = comprehensive policy agreement; No = no explicit agreement.

The membership of the coalition committee was relatively unstable in the case of the three consecutive Skvernelis cabinets, all of which were dominated by the LVŽS, as this party did not possess a great many experienced politicians in the Seimas.

A critically important factor is that, during the seven coalition governments, which were formed during 2008–2021, three of those coalitions saw at least one coalition party have its leader not with a national mandate but with a European Parliament one. To have these Brussels-based political leaders on board in the weekly coalition committees increased tensions and demanded additional organizational effort.

Typically, coalition governments in Lithuania are not fostered by personal union, i.e. not all the coalition party leaders are members of the cabinet. The leader of one of the coalition parties usually holds the position of speaker. A very peculiar situation arose in 2018 when the speaker, Viktoras Pranckietis, resigned from the LVŽS but remained in the position of speaker. He was eliminated from the coalition committee, and the vice-speaker (member of the LVŽS) replaced him.

In Lithuania, coalitions often make the distribution of non-cabinet positions part of their agreement: along with the common practice of assigning the speaker's position to the leader of a coalition party, while the formula for the distribution of vice-speakers and chairs in the parliamentary standing committees is also spelled out. Those provisions which concern the coalition governance reaching out to non-cabinet positions tend to bring the cabinet and the leadership of the Seimas closer together.

Termination

Table 8.6 shows the reasons behind the termination of coalitions. The Kubilius II cabinet operated for the entire parliamentary term (2008–2012) until normal parliamentary elections intervened.

The Butkevičius I cabinet formally collapsed in 2014, when the LLRA withdrew from the coalition due to personal disagreements between the LLRA chairman, Valdemar Tomaševski (a member of the European Parliament), and PM Butkevičius. The decision by the PM to dismiss the LLRA from the coalition was supported by the presidium of the LSDP and by the DP's PPG but was objected to by the TTP chairman, Rolandas Paksas, who used every opportunity to antagonize the PM (interview with a high-ranking civil servant). Ultimately, the LSDP, the DP, and the TTP continued to cooperate without a new coalition agreement, simply by transferring control of the LLRA-controlled Ministry of Energy to the DP. The Butkevičius II cabinet was terminated by the regular parliamentary elections.

During the 2016–2020 parliamentary term, the ruling coalition had three 'reincarnations'. The Skvernelis I cabinet collapsed when the LSDP withdrew from the ruling majority. Two of the LSDP-delegated ministers continued their work in the Skvernelis II cabinet as members of the LSDDP's newly

Table 8.6 Cabinet termination in Lithuania, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Kirkilas | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Kubilius II | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Butkevičius I | 43.8 | 7b | | LSDP, LLRA | | |
| Butkevičius II | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Skvernelis I | 20.1 | 8 | | LSDP | | |
| Skvernelis II | 43.1 | 2 | 10 | | | |
| Skvernelis III | 100 | 1 | | | | |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: Other constitutional reason; 3: Death of Prime Minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: Voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: Cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: Conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: Intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: Other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: Popular opinion shocks; 12: International or national security event; 13: Economic event; 14: Personal event.

founded PPG. In autumn 2020, the Skvernelis III cabinet was terminated by the regular parliamentary elections.

Since 2008, three cabinets have been ended by regular parliamentary elections. The Skvernelis II cabinet ended due to its formal resignation following the presidential elections. This technical form of formal resignation was used for a voluntary enlargement of the coalition. Two cabinets (Butkevičius I and Skvernelis I) were ended due to political reasons.

The collapse of the Butkevičius I government could have been foreseen thanks to the choice of forming a post-electoral, oversized surplus coalition. The party which was not necessarily required to form a majority government was the LLRA. The collapse of this coalition can also be attributed to negative public opinion regarding the use of the issue of discrimination against national minorities as a political instrument, something that was frequently enacted by the LLRA.

The intra-party conflict and discussions over matters of social policies brought the Skvernelis I cabinet to an end. After less than a year in power, an insufficient socially orientated policy led to conflict between members of the LSDP who were in government, those who were in the Seimas, and those who were in the regional party branches. The LVŽS decided to take advantage of the formal resignation of the cabinet after the presidential election and to expand the ruling majority by inviting the TT and the LLRA to it. In October 2019, the TT formally left the coalition, because it lost its party group in the Seimas. Nevertheless, this did not affect the work of the cabinet, as the TT was only a support party and had not delegated any ministers.

Conclusions

The analytical focus of this chapter is framed by difficult years: the year of the economic crisis (2008) and the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic from 2020 onwards. The situation in Lithuania in late 2020 was further aggravated by the mounting inflation and the hybrid war, launched by the neighbouring authoritarian Belarus. However, the Lithuanian evidence shows that it is not possible to interpret any transformation of coalition governance patterns as the effects of the multiple crises. Neither national lockdowns during the pandemic, neither state of emergency declared in 2021 because of the massive influx of illegal migrants, instigated by authoritarian Belarus and then, in 2022, re-introduced because of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, did not significantly alter governmental mechanisms or procedures.

In Lithuania, the perpetuation of short and formalistic coalition agreements and the shallowness of coalition bargaining which has been devoted to the particularities and the 'content' of public policies should be underscored. The absence of elaborate coalition agreements and the lack of political debates about policy reforms contribute to a continuation of the tradition of the 'ministerial government', one in which ministers with strong personalities act as dictators in their policy arenas. With the division of spheres of influence being the 'name of the game', the coalition partners and the president devote most of their energy to portfolio allocation.

Newly formed and/or populist parties have been involved in the post-2008 cabinets. Following the elections of 2008 and 2012, coalitions were formed by one of the two mainstream parties, the TS-LKD or the LSDP, who reluctantly invited several other parties to join. In 2016 and afterwards, those coalitions which were formed tended to stand out because the dominant coalition party itself – LVŽS – was populist. If, during the first few decades of democratic governance in Lithuania, the major issue regarding the question which political parties are being able to form a coalition was largely related to the juxtaposition of the parties of the left and of the right, in the post-2008 context, the 'centrist' positions, party newness, and party size have all become major aspects of this ability.

In the post-2008 period, several facets of the EU factor became very prominent in the formation and functioning of coalitions. The Lithuanian presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2013 mobilized the entire political class. During the period of 2008–2020, at least one coalition party has had its leader not with a national mandate but with a European Parliament one, and Brussels-based leaders of Lithuanian political parties played an influential role in national coalition governance. EU funding has also remained an important factor in the formation of coalition governments and in particular in the allocation of portfolios, as the ministries that administer the EU's Structural and Investment Funds have remained especially appealing.

Another trend, which strengthened in the post-2008 period, relates to the reinforcement of populist and non-partisan trends in public discourse and political life. The new parties, led by political entrepreneurs, keep on emerging and vanishing from the Lithuanian political scene.

Due to the spread of new parties – be they fully new or only re-arranged older parties – in the post-2008 period, the instability and disintegration of the PPGs during the parliamentary term have intensified, adding to complexities in terms of coalition formation. The results of incremental adaptations, as one of our interviewees put it, are a ‘flexible matter’, and they depend mainly upon the shrewdness of individuals who negotiate on behalf of the coalition partners, while the principles of proportionality and structural equality, which are mentioned in the public coalition agreement, are not meticulously observed.

Since the coalitions are formed and managed almost exclusively by the party leaders, the dissenting members of the populist PPGs often choose to leave their PPG as a sign that they are disassociating themselves from their party leader’s decisions. However, it would be unfair to generalize by stating that the ‘political’ content of the party programmes and coalition agreements has been side-lined due only to the arrival of numerous populists. In Lithuania, the mainstream parties are also far from doing their best in terms of instilling ‘political’ content into their programmes and coalition agreements. Promising trend regarding exposed ‘political’ content in party programmes was observed in the 2020 parliamentary elections and the formation and functioning of Šimonytė cabinet.

In Lithuania, the politicians – across the board, be in the cabinet or in the opposition – avoid voters’ control and hesitate to engage in populist electoral campaign. None of Lithuania’s governments failed for reasons such as an early parliamentary election or defeat by the opposition in parliament. In general, even though during elections the parties and individual candidates put forward strong anti-corruption stances, once in parliament the political party leaders revise their claims and those parties which had been blacklisted during the elections are suddenly offered the opportunity to join a coalition. This style of business-minded coalition formation and governance adds to public distrust in political parties, in the Seimas and in the government.

In summing up, in the post-2008 period, the Lithuanian political elite refrain from major institutional transformation which would exert a radical ground-breaking impact upon the patterns of coalition governance. One can figuratively state that the tectonic plates beneath Lithuanian coalition governance are stable even though, in the post-2008 period, changes may have occurred in the outer layers – especially the party system.

Appendix I: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|-------|--|
| LVŽS | Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (Lietuvos Valstiečių ir Žaliųjų Sąjunga) |
| LDDP | Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (Lietuvos Demokratinė Darbo Partija) |
| LLRA | Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (Lietuvos Lenkų Rinkimų Akcija) |
| DK | Political party ‘The Way of Courage’ (Politinė partija ‘Drąsos kelias’) |
| NS-SL | New Union-Social Liberals (Naujoji Sąjunga-Socialliberalai) |
| PDP | Party of Civic Democracy (Pilietinės Demokratijos Partija) |

| | |
|--------|--|
| LKDP | Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (Lietuvos Krikščionių Demokratų Partija) |
| LSDP | Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (Lietuvos Socialdemokratų Partija) |
| TT | Party 'Order and Justice' (Partija 'Tvarka ir Teisingumas') |
| DP | Labour Party (Darbo Partija) |
| LTS | Lithuanians' Nationalists Union (Lietuvių Tautininkų Sąjunga) |
| TPP | Nation's Resurrection Party (Tautos Prisikėlimo Partija) |
| LCS | Lithuanian Centre Union (Lietuvos Centro Sąjunga) |
| TS-LKD | Homeland Union-Lithuanian Conservatives (Tėvynės Sąjunga-Lietuvos Konservatoriai) |
| LiCS | Liberal and Centre Union (Lietuvos Respublikos Liberalų Sąjūdis) |
| LRLS | Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (Liberalų ir Centro Sąjunga) |
| LPS | Sajudis-Lithuanian Restructuring Movement (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis) |
| LSDDP | Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (Lietuvos Socialdemokratų Darbo Partija) |
| LP | Freedom Party (Laisvės partija) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Lithuanian in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Appendix II: Interviews

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Function</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Algirdas Butkevicius | PM 2012–2016; Member of Seimas 2016–2020 | August 10, 2020 |
| Gediminas Kirkilas | Vice Speaker of Seimas 2012–2016; Vice Speaker of Seimas 2016–2020 | August 10, 2020 |
| R1 | High ranking public official | August 11, 2020 |
| R2 | High ranking public official | August 12, 2020 |
| Skirmantas Malinauskas | Advisor to PM S. Skvernelis 2016–2020.03.05 | September 2, 2020 |
| R3 | Leading politician from the DP | August 28, 2020 |

Note

- 1 The chapter covers the period until 2021-12-31, i.e. does not extend to February 2022, when the Russian troops massively invaded Ukraine. Since then the positions of Kremlin apologists became untenable in Lithuania.

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9 Poland

Resilience to the External Crisis, Permanent Coalition Patterns, and Weakening of the Position of the Prime Minister

Marzena Cichosz and Joanna Koziarska

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to recognize the patterns of cabinet formation, strategies and tactics used by Polish political actors during the time of crisis. Our analysis covered the years 2007–2021, from Tusk I to Morawiecki III cabinet. This period was interesting for several reasons. At that time, seven cabinets were functioning, and as many as six were working as minimally winning coalitions. Only Morawiecki III's (2021–) cabinet had the status of a minority cabinet. All cabinets had coalition character; however, the nature of four of them was ambiguous. From the perspective of the party system, a significant decrease in the effective number of parties (ENP) on the parliamentary scene could be also observed. Additionally, Polish coalition practice was dominated by two large coalitions: Civic Platform – Polish People's Party, PO-PSL and Law and Justice – United Poland – Agreement/Republicans, PiS-SP-P/R (see Table 9.1a).

Furthermore, the years 2007–2021 were marked by three significant crises: the economic (financial) crisis, the migration crisis in 2015 (in Poland, it occurred on the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021), and the one caused by COVID-19. At the same time, starting in 2015, a significant decline in the level of democracy has also become apparent in Poland. According to Freedom House reports, Poland has moved from a group of countries of consolidated democracy to a group of semi-consolidated democracies (Freedom House 2022; see also: Tilles 2021). The reasons can be found, among others, in significant changes in the judiciary system, restrictions on civil liberties (introduced by the government primarily during the COVID-19 pandemic), attempts to restrict media freedom, changes in financing local governments and limiting their powers, or attacks on the LGBT+ community (Chapman 2017; Jaskiernia 2019; Słomka 2020).

In our analysis, we refer to previously conducted research in this field (see Jednaka 2004; Antoszewski and Koziarska 2019; Zuba 2020; Bill and Stanley 2020) and sources such as media reports and informal interviews with politicians.

Table 9.1a Polish cabinets 1991–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Olszewski | 1991-12-23 | 1991-10-27 | PC, ZChN, PL, PChD | min | 125 (27.2) | 460 | 16 | 10.71 | PSL, S, MNSO |
| 2 | Suchocka | 1992-07-11 | | UD, PL, ZChN, KLD, PChD, PPPP | min | 196 (42.6) | 460 | 16 | 10.71 | S, ChD, MNSO |
| 3 | Pawlak | 1993-11-10 | 1993-09-19 | PSL, SLD | mwc | 303 (65.9) | 460 | 7 | 3.88 | MNSO |
| 4 | Oleksy | 1995-03-07 | | SLD, PSL | mwc | 295 (64.1) | 460 | 7 | 4.04 | MNSO |
| 5 | Cimoszewicz | 1996-02-15 | | SLD, PSL | mwc | 295 (64.1) | 460 | 7 | 4.04 | MNSO |
| 6 | Buzek I | 1997-11-11 | 1997-09-21 | AWS, UW-PD | mwc | 261 (56.7) | 460 | 6 | 2.95 | MNSO |
| 7 | Buzek II | 2000-06-08 | | AWS | min | 186 (40.4) | 460 | 6 | 3.25 | |
| 8 | Miller I | 2001-10-26 | 2001-09-23 | SLD, PSL, UP | sur | 258 (56.1) | 460 | 8 | 4.04 | SRP, MNSO |
| 9 | Miller II | 2003-03-03 | | SLD, UP | min | 213 (46.3) | 460 | 8 | 4.27 | |
| 10 | Belka | 2004-06-24 | | SLD, UP | min | 172 (37.4) | 460 | 9 | 5.63 | SDPL, MNSO |
| 11 | Marcinkiewicz I | 2005-11-10 | 2005-09-25 | PiS | min | 155 (33.7) | 460 | 7 | 4.26 | SRP, LPR, PSL, MNSO |
| 12 | Marcinkiewicz II | 2006-05-05 | | PiS, SRP, LPR | mwc | 238 (51.7) | 460 | 7 | 4.32 | |
| 13 | Kaczyński I | 2006-07-19 | | PiS, SRP, LPR | mwc | 239 (52) | 460 | 7 | 4.34 | MNSO |
| 14 | Kaczyński II | 2007-08-13 | | PiS | min | 150 (32.6) | 460 | 7 | 4.53 | |
| 15 | Tusk I | 2007-11-24 | 2007-10-21 | PO, PSL | mwc | 240 (52.2) | 460 | 7 | 2.86 | MNSO |
| 16 | Tusk II | 2011-11-19 | 2011-10-09 | PO, PSL | mwc | 235 (51.1) | 460 | 6 | 3 | MNSO |
| 17 | Kopacz | 2014-09-22 | | PO, PSL | mwc | 234 (50.9) | 460 | 6 | 3.4 | MNSO |
| 18 | Szydło | 2015-11-16 | 2015-10-25 | PiS, SP, P | mwc | 235 (51.1) | 460 | 5 | 2.75 | |
| 19 | Morawiecki I | 2017-12-12 | | PiS, SP, P | mwc | 237 (51.5) | 460 | 5 | 2.76 | |
| 20 | Morawiecki II | 2019-11-15 | 2019-10-13 | PiS, SP, P | mwc | 235 (51.1) | 460 | 5 | 2.76 | |
| 21 | Morawiecki III | 2021-10-26 | | PiS, SP, R | min | 228 (49.6) | 460 | 5 | 2.98 | |

Notes.

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition.

Institutional setting

After the 1991 first fully democratic parliamentary election, the institutional framework that drove coalition politics frequently changed until the adoption of a new constitution in 1997 but henceforth that framework has remained by and large intact (see Antoszewski and Kozierska 2019). Legislative power is vested in the bicameral parliament (Sejm and Senat), while executive power is entrusted to the directly elected president and the council of ministers headed by the prime minister (PM). The cabinet in Poland not only consists of PM, and ministers but it may also include deputy PM and chairmen of committees specified in legal acts. However, the latter two are not necessary to form a cabinet. The Polish constitution introduced one standard cabinet formation procedure and two reserve ones. Since 2007, only the standard mechanism has been used. In this procedure, the president plays an important role in the appointment of the government. The president nominates the PM and appoints him/her together with other members of the government. At the request of the PM, the president changes the composition of the government. Therefore, cooperation between the president and PM is essential. In the period covered by the analysis, only in the years 2007–2010, there was a cohabitation between a president coming from a right-wing party and a centrist-agrarian government majority. After 2010, the president and the government represented the same political camp, which made their cooperation smoother, not the least in terms of government formation. When a new government is appointed, with the new PM at the helm, the standard procedure also requires an absolute majority investiture vote in the Sejm, which since 2007, each new government could obtain.

The party system and the actors

The years 1991–2005 in the Polish political system were a period of constant flux when both the party offer addressed to the electorate was broad and changeable and the voters themselves showed a high propensity to change their preferences (Antoszewski 2012; Glajcar et al 2017; Antoszewski and Kozierska 2019). The structure of rivalry in this period was defined by the post-communist cleavage (Grabowska 2004) with parties originating in either the post-communist or the post-Solidarity camps. This division also followed the socio-economic conflict as the left wing was represented primarily by the biggest post-communist formation, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). From 2005 onwards, the party system was dominated by a fierce rivalry between two right-wing formations of similar (post-Solidarity) descent: the conservative-liberal pro-European Civic Platform (PO) and the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS). This shift, coupled with a significant weakening of virtually all left-wing parties (particularly after 2015), meant that Polish politics is being shaped predominantly by the cultural GAL/TAN divide (greens-alternatives-libertarians vs.

Table 9.1b Polish system conflict structure 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 15 | Tusk I | PO | GAL-TAN | SLD | Econ. left-right |
| 16 | Tusk II | PO | GAL-TAN | RP | Econ. left-right |
| 17 | Kopacz | PO | GAL-TAN | RP | Econ. left-right |
| 18 | Szydło | PiS | GAL-TAN | PiS | Econ. left-right |
| 19 | Morawiecki I | PiS | GAL-TAN | PiS | Econ. left-right |
| 20 | Morawiecki II | PiS | GAL-TAN | PiS | Econ. left-right |
| 21 | Morawiecki III | PiS | GAL-TAN | SLD | Econ. left-right |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2007–2011 (cabinets 15–16) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

traditionalists-authoritarians-nationalists, see Table 9.1b). However, after 2015 and the takeover of power by PiS, the main political conflict concerned the shape of the political system. Institutional changes initiated by the ruling coalition, related, e.g., to the limitation of judiciary independence and the freedom of the mass media, caused the rivalry to be concentrated around the axis of authoritarianism (PiS, ruling parties) versus democracy (PO, opposition parties).

Over the five consecutive parliamentary elections, the two main formations, PiS and PO, had split victories: PiS triumphed in 2005, 2015, and 2019, while PO won in 2007, and 2011. In addition – three of their representatives (Lech Kaczyński and Andrzej Duda for PiS, Bronisław Komorowski for PO) also occupied the president’s office. In 2005, PiS and PO together won over 50 per cent of the electoral votes. In subsequent elections, support for them ranged from 60 per cent (2015) to over 70 per cent (2019).

The system that solidified after 2005, whereby two parties dominated the political scene, significantly curtailed access to the parliament (and, therefore, government) for any new entrants. However, it did not close the arena entirely – in fact, almost every election since 2005 has seen a newcomer gaining representation, usually with a support of 6–10 per cent. It is worth noting, however, that the life of new political actors is quite short and they usually disappear from the parliamentary scene after one term.

The time period encompassed in our research has seen a rising significance of various electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in different forms and degrees of permanence. Some parties formed formal coalitions and established coalition committees for the purpose of elections and post-election cooperation. Others made tactical decisions to put their candidates on the lists registered by larger, more popular formations, thus passing the 8 per cent threshold. Alliances and coalitions have been employed as means of electoral competition by both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum. Their genesis and exact forms have had a profound impact on the functioning of the Polish political and therefore cabinet scene. The most important ones were initiated by the key actors: PO, PiS, and SLD (see Table 9.1c).

Table 9.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Poland, 2007–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--|
| 2007–10–21 | SLD, SDPL, UW-PD, UP | EA | Written contract, Joint press conference |
| 2011–10–09 | PO, PSL | PEC | |
| 2015–10–25 | PiS/Zjednoczona Prawica | EA, PEC | Joint press conference |
| 2019–10–13 | PiS/Zjednoczona Prawica | EA, PEC | Joint press conference |
| | KO – Koalicja Obywatelska | EA, PEC | Joint press conference, Other |
| | SLD/Lewica | EA, PEC | Joint press conference, Other |
| | PSL/Koalicja Polska | EA, PEC | Joint press conference, Other |

Notes:

Type: Electoral alliance (EA) and/or Pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: Written contract, Joint press conference, Separate declarations, and/or Other.

PO initiated two forms of cooperation with other political entities. The first form was a formal, pre-election test of loyalty, while the second was an electoral alliance combined with a decision on a post-election coalition. In 2006, before the local elections, PO, then in opposition, started cooperation with the agrarian party: Polish People's Party (PSL). The decision to cooperate was provoked by a change in the electoral law introduced by the then-ruling coalition of PiS, Self-Defence (SRP), and League of Polish Families (LPR). The amendment to the electoral law aimed to increase the influence of the government parties in local governments. The means to achieve this goal was to give privileges to the electoral coalition in the election competition. One may conclude that the cooperation between PO and PSL was initially of a defensive character. The two entities did not create a joint electoral list, they ran in the elections separately (as a 'group of lists'¹), and they agreed on the rules for conducting the election campaign and establishing a post-election coalition in local governments. Positive experiences from the local government rivalry were applied in the following years (2007–2011) also before the parliamentary elections. The second cooperation model was used by PO in 2018 and 2019. Being aware of PiS' very strong position, the major opposition parties created the Koalicja Europejska (KE), which launched formally on February 1, 2019. Their purpose was to beat PiS at the European Parliament election and, possibly, at the parliamentary election in that same year. The KE included several notable players, among others, PO, SLD, and PSL. It came second in the European Parliament election, garnering 38.47 per cent of the votes. However, it could not survive until the parliamentary election as SLD and PSL opted to register their own candidate lists. In light of the split, PO decided to maintain an electoral alliance only with smaller parties from the centre and the left side of the political scene under the name Koalicja Obywatelska (KO). Eventually in

2019 the parliamentary election, KO received 27.4 per cent of the votes and, again, came second.

PiS used models of coalition cooperation differently from those implemented by PO. In July 2014, two small parliamentary parties²: the Eurosceptic, nationalist-conservative United Poland (SP) and the liberal-conservative Poland Together (PR, renamed in 2017 to Agreement, P) formed a joint deputies' club named the United Right and a few days later signed an agreement with PiS. The document stipulated that the United Right candidates in the 2014 local election and the 2015 parliamentary election would be placed on PiS' lists. Furthermore, all signatories were obliged to support a common candidate in the 2015 presidential election.³ As the United Right insisted that the agreement was valid until November 11, 2019 (i.e. the end of the parliament term), it was renegotiated following the next parliamentary election. Thus, on November 22, 2019, the representatives of PiS, SP, and PR signed a new coalition agreement under the banner of the United Right.⁴ The fact that the politicians of the three parties in question referred to these documents as 'coalition contracts' suggested the character of the cabinets formed since 2015. Both in 2015 and 2019, the candidates running on PiS' lists won an absolute majority⁵ (235/460) of seats in the Sejm. It established a single deputies' club for all MPs elected on PiS' lists. Therefore (until the summer of 2021), PiS was able to form what technically was a single-party government – it did not need to enter into coalition talks with any other independent formation. However, while formally the cabinet has been described as single-party (Markowski 2016: 1331; Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier 2016: 224), in practice, it is often referred to as the United Right coalition (Cichosz 2022). Indeed, given the context, it remains a question whether the 2014 agreement amounted to a potential coalition contract. The matter cannot be decided beyond dispute however as the PiS-SP-PR agreements have not been made public. Nonetheless, they were the basis of the practical functioning of Beata Szydło's and Mateusz Morawiecki's cabinets, which we discuss later in this chapter.

The United Right coalition, although torn by internal conflicts, survived. In 2021, it lost its parliamentary majority. At the beginning of this year, the Agreement was plagued by massive internal divisions inspired by PiS. Some of the party activists left to form the new Republican Party but at the same time stayed in the PiS parliamentary club. In August, Agreement eventually left the government, and in October 2021, the Republicans took its place.

SLD also opted for a cooperation strategy that largely spurred SLD's declining support rates. First, in 2007, SLD convinced several smaller parties to form a coalition under the name of The Leftists and Democrats (LiD) garnered 13.15 per cent of the votes which translated into 53 seats in the Sejm. Second, in 2015, on the initiative of the SLD, a new coalition of the United Left was established. This coalition did not exceed the election threshold, and as a result, for the first time since 1991, the left-wing parties did not have any representation in the Polish parliament. The fear of repeating such a scenario dissuaded the leftists from making another similar cooperation attempt.

Instead, in 2019, they decided to mirror PiS' tactics: representatives of several left-wing formations were placed on the candidate lists registered by SLD. The SLD received 12.56 per cent of the votes which made them the third strongest group in the parliament.

Government formation

Before 2005 government coalitions were formed primarily along the lines dictated by the conflict that up until then defined the Polish political scene (Antoszewski and Kozierska 2019: 372): parties emanating from the Solidarity movement stood against post-communist formations. Coalition partners were often chosen by elimination – each party first determined whom they would definitely not cooperate with. Declarations made by parties prior to the election period seemed to have little effect on the conduct of campaigns and the ultimate shape of cabinet coalitions. The post-election negotiations were organized ad hoc, usually at the initiative of the winning party.

From 2007 on, and even more clearly from 2015, the above-mentioned patterns were complemented with other practices that some parties have since employed. These amounted to a kind of loyalty test, whereby several parties would join forces in campaigning and upon winning the election form a governing coalition based on their campaign cooperation. For example, the positive experiences from the cooperation between the PO and PSL during the local elections in 2006 became the basis for the formation of a government coalition in 2007 (Tusk I; see [Table 9.2](#)). Right-wing parties followed a similar pattern in 2014–2015. Their parliamentary and government cooperation was based on positive experiences from local government and presidential election campaigns.

Some of the crises faced by individual cabinets can be considered another factor that perpetuates patterns of inter-party cooperation. The success of the Polish government during the economic crisis in 2008 served as an argument for the PO-PSL coalition in the 2011 election campaign. In turn, the migration crisis in Europe in 2015 allowed the right-wing parties to unite under the wings of PiS. However, the systemic changes introduced after taking power in 2015 and resulting in a crisis of the rule of law and, consequently, democracy seem to be of key importance for the maintenance of the United Right coalition. Taking responsibility for the drift of the Polish political system towards authoritarianism meant strengthening intra-coalition loyalty.

The role of the head negotiators of the government composition usually falls upon party leaders. The initiative was in the hands of the party that emerges victorious from a given election (i.e. wins the largest number of seats in the lower house of parliament). After 2007, the previously established pattern was strengthened. The position of PM was held by the candidate of the dominant entity, while the coalition partners received the position of deputy PMs. This principle applied to PO-PSL cabinets (Tusk I–II and Kopacz), but after PiS took power it was slightly corrected. In governments led by PiS, there were leaders of three smaller coalition partners (SP, PR – later P – and R), and only one of them

Table 9.2 Government formation period in Poland, 2007–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses) | | |
|----------------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Tusk I | 2007 | 0 | PO, PSL | 27 | 34 | 27 | 238 | 2 | 204 |
| Tusk II | 2011 | 0 | PO, PSL | 0 | 41 | 0 | 234 | 2 | 211 |
| Kopacz | 2014 | 0 | PO, PSL | 0 | 13 | 0 | 259 | 7 | 183 |
| Szydło | 2015 | 0 | PiS ^a | 0 | 4 | 0 | 236 | 18 | 202 |
| Morawiecki I | 2017 | 0 | PiS ^a | 0 | 4 | 0 | 243 | 0 | 192 |
| Morawiecki II | 2019 | 0 | PiS ^a | 0 | 3 | 0 | 237 | 3 | 214 |
| Morawiecki III | 2021 | 0 | PiS, R | 76 ^b | 76 | 76 | | | |

Notes:

^a One electoral list (PiS), one parliamentary club in parliament, however, in this case, it should be considered coalitions Zjednoczona Prawica (PiS, SR, P).

^b Approximate number of days, as no official information exists on when the bargaining process began or ended.

(Jarosław Gowin, head of PR, later P) was deputy PM (Szydło, Morawiecki I, and II) until his dismissal in August 2021. The official reason for dismissal was the Gowin's disagreement with some of the tax changes under the so-called Polish Tax Order as well as to the Broadcasting Act.⁶

While the distribution of cabinet posts was decided jointly by all coalition partners, each party was left to choose specific candidates for the ministerial posts it was given. This rule was almost universally followed after 1991. The final decision as to the composition of the cabinet was made together by all involved parties and endorsed by the person designated as the PM. The cabinet's structure and the number of ministries were also determined jointly. Since 2007, the number of ministries remained fairly constant, ranging from 17 to 19 (see [Table 9.3](#)). At the same time, there is a typical tendency for relatively frequent changes in the structure of offices and personnel changes in ministerial positions.

One recurring pattern was also that the number of ministerial positions allocated for coalition members was proportional to the scale of their presence in the parliament and, therefore, the ability to support the cabinet (see [Table 9.3](#)). This explains why PiS' smaller partners barely featured in the line-up of the 2015–2019 government led first by Beata Szydło and later by Mateusz Morawiecki. The number of mandates held (and the blackmail potential) also dictated a party's position in the bargaining for the 'prestigious' ministries. Nevertheless, there is no clear consensus in Polish politics as to which exact ministries belong to that category. Some entries on the list are not disputed (e.g. defence and internal affairs), but others are included or excluded (in various configurations) depending on a given actor's standpoint. For instance, the centrists and the left side of the political spectrum consider economy-related ministries as vital, while PiS does not attribute them much importance. Parties' ideological profiles, electoral bases, and cadres are among other factors that may affect the distribution of cabinet seats. Since some of the coalition members (typically the smaller ones) are nichers (Butler and Collins 1996: 39–40) with a clearly defined electorate (e.g. PSL with its agrarian electorate), their preferences are obvious. The personal aspect comes into play if a given party's leadership includes individuals associated specifically with a certain public policy – as a case in point, one could refer to SP's founder, Zbigniew Ziobro, who rose to prominence by advocating for far-reaching changes to the judicial system and, consequently, served as the minister of justice.

According to coalition agreements, in governments formed by PO-PSL, the smaller partner took control of three ministries: economy, labour and social policy, and agriculture. PiS partners, in turn, had three (Szydło I and Morawiecki I) or four (Morawiecki II) ministerial portfolios. SP was given positions as head of the Ministry of Justice and PR the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In Morawiecki's first cabinet, a member of Agreement also led the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Technology. After the 2019 election, SP and P were granted two positions, with P members heading the Ministry of Science, the newly established Ministry of Development and SP politicians

Table 9.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Polish coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Labour and Social Policy</i> | <i>5. Internal Affairs</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Tusk I | 2007 | 14 PO, 3 PSL, 2 Ind. | 19 | | 17 | PO | PO | PO | PSL | PO |
| Tusk II | 2011 | 17 PO, 3 PSL | 20 | 2 PO, 2 PSL | 19 | PO | PO | PO | PSL | PO |
| Kopacz | 2014 | 16 PO, 3 PSL | 19 | | 18 | PO | PO | PO | PSL | PO |
| Szydło | 2015 | 21 PiS, 2 SP, 1 P | 24 | | 19 | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS |
| Morawiecki I | 2017 | 19 PiS, 2 SP, 1 P | 22 | | 18 | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS |
| Morawiecki II | 2019 | 19 PiS, 2 SP, 2 P | 23 | | 19 | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS |
| Morawiecki III | 2021 | 19 PiS, 2 SP, 2 R | 23 | | 17 | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS | PiS |

at the helm of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Environment. After Jarosław Gowin was dismissed, the representatives of the Republicans joined the government (Morawiecki III) and took over the position of the minister of sport and tourism and the function of a minister without portfolio.

Since 1991, coalition agreements signed by political parties varied widely in scope and level of detail on some occasions, the public was treated to a complex, voluminous document that described the minutiae of relations between partners or fairly laconic documents, limited to listing key rules of cooperation and overall directions of policies to be proposed (e.g. the 2007 PO-PSL and the 2014 PiS-SP-PR agreements; see Table 9.4). One commonly adopted practice was that once crucial tenets were agreed on, coalitions continued to apply them even if they were forced to reshuffle the cabinet (either in between elections or after another electoral victory). There were, however, exceptions to that rule – for instance when the United Right members renegotiated the terms of their cooperation after the 2019 election. The negotiations finished more than a month after the election. Part of the reason for such a lengthy process lied in certain legal complications related to the rules governing the allocation of state subsidies for political parties. Since all United Right candidates ran on PiS' lists, PiS was formally the only entity entitled to the subsidy based on the election result. The politicians of the two smaller partners publicly spoke of the need to address the distribution of those funds in the coalition agreements.

Until 2014, another standard pattern (with few exceptions) was that the contents of coalition agreements were openly available to the public. This changed when PiS decided not to reveal the contracts formalizing cooperation within the United Right. In fact, the stipulations of those documents are known only to the leadership of each coalition party. One reason for that, as the politicians in question admitted themselves, is the character of the agreements (particularly the 2014 PiS-SP-PR agreement): they contain details regarding the allocation of placements on candidate lists and personnel decisions. The

Table 9.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Poland, 2007–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Tusk I | 2007 | 839 | 56.4 | 11.9 | 0 | 0 | 31.7 |
| Tusk II | 2011 | 839 | 56.4 | 11.9 | 0 | 0 | 31.7 |
| Kopacz | 2014 | 839 | 56.4 | 11.9 | 0 | 0 | 31.7 |
| Szydło | 2015 | 527 ^a | 93.93 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6.07 |
| Morawiecki I | 2017 | 527 ^a | 93.93 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6.07 |
| Morawiecki II ^b | | | | | | | |
| Morawiecki III ^c | | | | | | | |

Notes:

^a 1,106 words long annex was also agreed on, with the entire text devoted to principles of cooperation in elections to local government bodies in 2014, to the Sejm and the Senate in 2015, and the European Parliament in 2019.

^b An undisclosed agreement among PiS, SP, and PR was signed on November 22, 2019.

^c An undisclosed agreement between PiS and R was signed on an unknown date in October 2021.

former matter, in particular, for PiS' partners – being relatively small organizations, they could hardly hope to reach the electoral threshold should they choose to register their own lists separately from Law and Justice. Although the rules of cooperation were agreed on in detail after the 2015 election, there is no information as to whether they were put in written form. This remark also applies to the coalition agreements signed by the United Right in 2019, in September 2020, and – with Republicans – in 2021.

Coalition governance

Although the basic institutional framework has not changed since the adoption of a new constitution in 1997 significant shifts occurred in governing practice. A shift in the position of the PM is an important aspect. Naturally, a PM's situation depends on the extent of the parliamentary support for the government as well as the degree of control they hold over the parliamentary majority. The choice of the person to be designated as the PM is left to the party that initiates coalition negotiations. However, this does not mean that the position is always taken by that party's leader. In fact, out of 21 cabinets since 1991, only 7 were headed by party leaders. The most recent examples came from 2007 and 2011, when PO's head Donald Tusk was nominated as the PM. When Tusk resigned both from the post of the PM and party leader upon being elected the President of the European Council, his decision generated a situation that threatened the cohesion of the governing coalition and PO itself. To stave off a crisis, the party turned to its prominent member Ewa Kopacz who became the PM and, simultaneously, PO leader. As was mentioned above, PO-PSL cabinets always included the head of the smaller coalition partner, who took on the post of deputy PM in addition to certain ministries. This distribution of power, originally established in 2007, provided a fair amount of stability and was maintained throughout the coalition's two terms of office in power.

PiS and its coalition partners adopted a different pattern for selecting the PM when they came to power in 2015. None of the four cabinets formed by PiS was headed by its party leader. Moreover, one of the PMs (Mateusz Morawiecki) was not even a PiS member at the time of his nomination. This choice aimed to limit the PMs' decision-making leeway by making them dependent on the parliamentary majority and, particularly, on PiS' leadership. This enabled the ruling party to maintain full control over the cabinet (see [Table 9.5](#)).

The autonomy of ministers, expected by smaller coalition partners, is relatively broad. This pattern of cooperation reflected in coalition agreements also resulted from parliamentary arithmetic. The coalitions were mostly of minimal winning character, so the loyalty of each single entity was crucial for their functioning. However, in the case of some cabinets, solutions aiming to increase the degree of control over individual ministries by coalition partners were implemented. For instance, the PO-PSL agreement in 2007 provided a partial

Table 9.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Poland, 2007–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Coalition agreement</i> | <i>Agreement public</i> | <i>Election rule</i> | <i>Conflict management mechanisms</i> | | | <i>Personal union</i> | <i>Issues excluded from agenda</i> | <i>Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour</i> | <i>Freedom of appointment</i> | <i>Policy agreement</i> | <i>Junior ministers</i> | <i>Non-cabinet positions</i> |
|------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| | | | | | <i>All used</i> | <i>Most common</i> | <i>For most serious conflicts</i> | | | | | | | |
| Tusk I | 2007 | POST | Yes | No | PS, Parl | PS, Parl | PS, Parl | Yes | No | No/Spec. | Yes | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Tusk II | 2011 | POST | Yes | No | Parl | Parl | Parl | Yes | No | No/Spec. | Yes | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Kopacz | 2014 | POST | Yes | No | Parl, PS | Parl, PS | Parl | Yes | No | No/Spec. | Yes | Comp. | No | Yes |
| Szydło | 2015 | PRE | No | No | PS | PS | PS | No | No | All/All | Yes | Few | No | Yes |
| Morawicki I | 2017 | PRE | No | No | PS | PS | PS | No | No | All/All | Yes | Few | No | Yes |
| Morawicki II | 2019 | PRE, POST | No | No | PS | PS | PS | No | No | All/All | Yes | Few | No | Yes |
| Morawiecki III | 2021 | PRE, IE, POST | No | No | PS | PS | PS | No | No | All/All | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

Notes:

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; PRE = pre-election; N = no coalition agreement.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; Parl = parliamentary leaders PS = party summit; O = other.

Coalition discipline: All = discipline always expected; Most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters, Spec. = discipline only expected on a few explicitly specified matters; No = discipline not expected.

Policy agreement: Few = policy agreement on a few selected policies; Varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; Comp. = comprehensive policy agreement; No = no explicit agreement.

regulation by introducing one watchdog minister in each ministry. The candidates, nominated by coalition partners, had to be accepted by the minister in question. On other occasions, watchdog posts were not envisioned during original coalition negotiations but were later introduced mid-term as a result of additional bargaining between the given ministry and party leaderships (e.g. the 2015–2019 PiS-led cabinet).

Intra-coalition tenders also concerned the distribution of other positions such as voivods (representatives of the Council of Ministers in the voivodeship), CEOs of state-owned companies, or heads of various government agencies. Apart from the positions of voivods, these were typically not discussed in official coalition documents. However, the smaller partners were keen to ‘get their share of the spoils’. After the PiS’ candidate won the 2015 presidential election, the parties gained another batch of jobs to be distributed – in the Chancellery and the Cabinet of the President – with the minor partners within the United Right also getting access.

Before the focus of our observation period, coalitions did not establish a fixed set of rules for conflict resolution although at times some mechanisms were envisioned in coalition agreements, but typically solutions developed ad hoc when the need arose (Antoszewski and Kozierska 2019). During their 2007–2015 alliance, PO and PSL resorted to regular coalition meetings chaired by the PM (and the leader of the formateur party) and these sessions served as the highest level for conflict resolution. They were the forums to settle matters such as jurisdiction disputes among ministers or even personal disagreements. They were attended by ministers representing both coalition partners (in the case of PSL, all cabinet members from that party). It seems that this method of coalition management was quite effective – internal conflicts (if any) did not upset the stability of the agreement between the PO and PSL.

In cases where the formateur parties’ leaders did not serve as PMs, they nonetheless played a significant role in resolving conflicts within the coalition. One example is the PiS-led United Right alliance. When PiS triumphed in 2015, its chairman, Jarosław Kaczyński, did not take on any parliamentary or cabinet roles apart from a regular MP seat. However, he was a key player in every instance of negotiations among coalition members, while the PM was only one of several stakeholders present at the table. His voice was decisive in delineating the influence of each coalition member, establishing policy directions, and making political decisions. The different solutions for the management of inter-coalition conflicts were implemented in October 2020 when Jarosław Kaczyński joined the cabinet as deputy PM without a portfolio responsible for public security (Pytlas 2021: 348). This so-called stabilization mission of Kaczyński in the government aimed to prevent revealing intra-coalition conflicts to public opinion (especially the conflict between PM M. Morawiecki and the head of the SP, the Minister of Justice Z. Ziobro). Kaczyński’s voice remained decisive but he failed to achieve his goal because information about the conflicts was leaking.

Most conflicts were resolved through internal discussions, without informing the public. In some cases, the differences in opinion among partners did become public knowledge. Upon encountering the ‘insubordination’ of its coalition partners, PiS usually employs towards them political blackmail accompanied by a negative campaign in the public media which act effectively as the ruling party’s propaganda tool.

In the 2019 election, the two smaller partners had a larger share of the seats than in 2015 (35, compared to only 15). Their improved performance at the polls gave them bigger blackmail potential, which they promptly started to use.

Their emancipation within the United Right ranks was reflected, for instance, in more frequent vetoes of reforms put forward by PiS. For example, in 2019, P expressed its objection to the proposal to raise social insurance fees for high earners. Another example of the emancipation of minor partners was presenting their own legislative proposals, to mention a bill submitted by SP in 2021, regarding the amendment to the Act on the Protection of Pregnant Women titled ‘For Life’, which aimed to increase the supervision of pregnant women. Its legislative process was frozen at the first stage of work in the parliamentary committee.

With each mini-crisis in the coalition, SP and P gained opportunities for broadening their influence. The pattern of dispute resolution, however, remained unchanged – negotiations were held with PiS leadership rather than the PM.

A source of intra-coalition tensions was also the management of the state during the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. In numerous cases, the minor partners could exert effective pressure on the dominant PiS. To show the example, Agreement officially objected to mail voting in presidential elections in May 2020, which ultimately did not take place at that time (see also: Sula et al 2021: 29–31). One more example was when SP effectively blocked the government’s proposition to introduce mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations in the fall/winter of 2021. Others (the amendment to the Broadcasting Act; the adoption of a government program to rebuild the Polish economy after the COVID-19 pandemic) resulted in the application of a different conflict management pattern. Namely – the split of the former coalition partner (Agreement) by PiS (August 2021) and the creation on its ruins of a new entity (Republicans) that ‘joined’ the coalition in October 2021.

Within the parliament, coalitions are governed either by heads of deputies’ groups (e.g. PO-PSL, 2007–2015) or by party leaders, in case they are not included in the cabinet (as has been the case with PiS leader from 2015 to October 2020). Heads of deputies’ groups are to ensure vote discipline regarding issues that are vital to the preservation of the cabinet. The extent of vote enforcement varied by the coalition. Minimally, it applied to votes of confidence and the approval of the annual state budgets. Coalitions that exhibited noticeable axiological diversity (e.g. PO-PSL) allowed MPs to follow their consciences in value-related matters. For the PiS-led majority from

2015 to 2019, vote discipline was crucial for coalition governance due to major reforms proposed in the campaign agenda (e.g. changes in the judiciary system) and on other occasions when the issue in question ‘became important for PiS’ image’ (e.g. creation of the Territorial Defence Force in 2016). From 2019, when internal conflicts within the United Right became more visible, maintaining discipline seemed even more important, especially since mid-2021, when the government of Morawiecki III remained in a minority situation and had to seek support beyond the coalition (e.g. independent MPs or/and deputies from small parties).

Coalitions have a crucial tool for governing the workings of the parliament: they control the Presidium of the Sejm (the lower chamber). It means they can supervise the course of the legislative process. The Presidium comprises the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, with the latter posts mostly held by representatives of all parliamentary parties (including the opposition). From 1993 onwards, an unwritten but universally respected rule is that the coalition as a whole would hold the majority of seats on the Presidium. Since 2015, the majority of the Presidium has been reserved only for PiS deputies, even though the smaller partners did express their aspirations to sit on the Presidium.

Cabinet termination

Out of 20 cabinets that were terminated between 1991 and December 2021, only 1 – Donald Tusk’s 2007–2011 cabinet – survived an entire term of office. The average duration was approximately 18 months. The most frequent changes occurred between 2005 and 2007 when as many as four different cabinets (Marcinkiewicz I and II, Kaczyński I and II) were sworn in. Since 2007, the average duration has increased noticeably, to 30 months. Out of the five longest serving cabinets between 1991 and 2021, four were formed in this recent period.

After 2007, coalitions seem to have been fairly stable – a fact that partly reflects their relative cohesion and strength but partly stems from the lack of viable alternative coalition options. Cabinets were terminated mostly for technical reasons: either a scheduled parliamentary election or more or less expected PM changes dictated by internal partisan considerations. Only once (Morawiecki II in 2021) was the government dissolved for another reason (see [Table 9.6](#)). From the first cabinet of Donald Tusk, successive governments were *de facto* or *de jure* based on coalitions that remained coherent. Even when the coalition of Morawiecki II collapsed, the Republicans who replaced the Agreement in the coalition was the party that emerged as a result of the split in P.

The most recent case of an early parliamentary election in Poland happened in 2007. It was triggered by first of all, the collapse of the PiS-SRP-LPR coalition. All elections after 2007 have been held on the standard schedule. Three cabinets (Tusk I in 2011, Kopacz in 2015, Morawiecki I in 2019) were terminated through the regular election. On two of those occasions (2011

Table 9.6 Cabinet termination in Poland, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---|
| Tusk I | 97.1 | 1 | | | | |
| Tusk II | 70.3 | 2 | | | | Tusk's resignation after being elected President of the European Council. |
| Kopacz | 96.1 | 1 | | | | |
| Szydło | 52.9 | 2 | | | | On December 7, 2017, the Sejm rejected a vote of no confidence in the government of Beata Szydło, on December 8, 2017 Beata Szydło resigned. |
| Morawiecki I | 100 | 1 | | | | |
| Morawiecki II | 51.1 | 7a | | PiS, SP, P | | Conflict over amendments to the media law. Leader of Porozumienie dismissed from the post of deputy prime minister August 10, 2021. The following day, Porozumienie announced their withdrawal from the United Right coalition. |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: Other constitutional reason; 3: Death of Prime Minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: Voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: Cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: Conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: Intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: Other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: Popular opinion shocks; 12: International or national security event; 13: Economic event; 14: Personal event.

and 2019), the coalitions remained in power, with the same person (Tusk and Morawiecki, respectively) designated to take the post of the PM. It is important to note that prior to 2011 no party managed to win two elections in a row.

In the analysed period, two cabinets (Tusk II and Szydło) were terminated as a result of the PM's resignation. In September 2014, Donald Tusk submitted his resignation to President Bronisław Komorowski upon being elected the President of the European Council. The task of forming a new cabinet was assigned to Ewa Kopacz, Tusk's close ally in PO who at that time served as the Speaker of the Sejm. The change was approved by Civic Platform's coalition partner, PSL. Both parties supported the new cabinet in the vote of confidence. Beata Szydło's cabinet was also dissolved as a result of her resignation. In this case, while the resignation itself was far from unexpected, the manner in which the cabinet change was implemented was somewhat unusual. The constructive vote of no confidence is a relatively frequent occurrence in Polish politics, often favoured by the parliamentary opposition. In November 2017, PO and PSL motioned for a vote of no confidence against Beata Szydło's cabinet, and although the motion was defeated thanks to the votes of the United Right, the following day Szydło submitted her resignation to PiS' Political Committee (which was duly accepted).

Conclusions

Since 1991, only 3 out of 21 Polish cabinets were not formed by coalitions. The last one to hold this distinction was led by Jarosław Kaczyński in the years 2006–2007. Coalition forming as a basis for governing has been a common practice, although the most recent cabinets (led by Beata Szydło and Mateusz Morawiecki), formed after PiS returned to power in 2015, cannot be unequivocally identified as being coalitions because the cabinet was formed by – formally – a parliamentary group of one party. This was the first case of using such patterns in Polish politics.

From 2005 onwards, political competition has been centred around a fierce rivalry between two post-Solidarity, right-wing parties: PiS and PO. Cabinets, typically built by two or three parties for tactical considerations rather than based on their shared origins, have exhibited relative stability. As post-Solidarity parties grew in strength, the role of the largest left-wing actor, SLD, diminished. The emergence of new parties onto the parliamentary arena has not altered the coalition forming patterns in any significant way. Their coalition and blackmail potential have not been sufficient to threaten the stability of cooperation patterns built and led by PiS and PO (Kosowska-Gąstoł and Sobolewska-Myślik 2019: 89, 107). At the same time, the focus of political conflict shifted from economy to the attitude towards liberal democracy and the rule of law, as the discourse has moved much more towards the green-alternative-libertarian/traditional-authoritarian-nationalist (GAL/TAN) axis. By dominating the narrative, PiS forced to the forefront issues such as immigration, the rights of the LGBT+ community, abortion, reform of the judiciary, and recentralization. If one assumes that a key goal of liberal democracy is to protect individual rights against abuses on the part of the government (Jackson 2011: 104), then PiS' willingness to neglect certain principles (the

separation of powers, the rule of law, protection for minorities) should be considered particularly consequential for the functioning of the state. PiS' actions may lead to the crossing of boundaries that need to be respected if those in power want to avoid consequences going beyond just losing an election (Antoszewski 2018: 56) or a temporary limitation of leeway in constructing political alliances. The practices employed by Law and Justice, particularly after 2015, have significantly deepened political divisions and stoked the conflict between PiS and all other major parties. Given the low number of relevant parliamentary parties, this has greatly curtailed the range of viable cooperation patterns for cabinet formation and governance.

In a recently developed pattern, the two key players on the Polish political scene – i.e. PiS and PO – initiated cooperation with their eventual coalition partners before the election. In the case of the PO-PSL coalition, that cooperation began before the 2006 local election and was primarily a defensive move – a response to how the then-governing PiS-LPR-SRP coalition attempted to scoop up a bigger share of the electoral market by amending election law. By working together, PO and PSL were able to develop mutual trust which then facilitated talks on coalition and cabinet formation after PO won the 2007 parliamentary contest. Before the 2011 election, the leaders of both parties stated their intention to extend their cooperation into the next term. Meanwhile, the coalition formed by PiS before the 2014 local election reflected their strategy as a political market challenger, as the party strove to monopolize the right side of the spectrum. PiS effectively co-opted smaller parties which, on their own, could only count on approximately 1 per cent of votes (each). Candidates put forward by all partners ran from a single slate registered by Law and Justice. Still, the cooperation, extended to the 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections, also facilitated cabinet formation. The same approach was adopted before the 2019 parliamentary contest: partners declared the need to continue their cooperation and all candidates were officially registered by PiS. It is worth noting that creating such strong links within a coalition for the purpose of joint campaigning and governance alike means that partners effectively become each other's hostages. At the same time, depending on the exact shape of a particular arena, they wield a certain blackmail potential. As a dominant party with a solid voter base, PiS controls its partners' ability to exist in the electoral market. In turn, they can pressure PiS in the parliament and the cabinet, since their exit from the coalition would deprive Kaczyński's party of their parliamentary majority. Replacing them would, under the current circumstances, be virtually impossible, since a strong polarization of the political scene (particularly from 2015 onwards) based on parties' attitudes towards the rule of law significantly limited viable coalition options.

In the period from 2007 to 2021, the practice of cabinet formation reflected a certain stabilization and specialization of roles, particularly among the smaller coalition partners. One example of that was PSL who, when partnering PO, was given the same ministries in two consecutive cabinets (Tusk II

and Kopacz). There were also instances of the smaller parties attempting to broaden their cabinet presence, especially in moments of reshufflings (P and SP in Morawiecki I and II cabinets).

Coalition governance in the period from 2007 to 2021 puts Poland closer to the Ministerial Government Model (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 282). The PM's position is stronger if he/she is the leader of the dominant party. In this case, conflicts are resolved internally, and a collegial body (not necessarily a formal one) within the cabinet can manage disputes (e.g. Tusk II). In other instances, the support for the PM by the leader of the dominant party is important. It is especially visible since 2015, when B. Szydło and M. Morawicki, with their positions as a 'weak' PM, were additionally strengthened by the powerful position of the PiS leader (J. Kaczyński). In this case, the coalition's decision-making centre (including conflict management) resides outside the cabinet: either in parliament or with the formateur's leadership (Szydło, Morawiecki I, II, and III) and the government could be an example of 'a surrogate government' (Zuba 2020).

External crises, the ones mentioned earlier, as well as the crisis related to Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 or internal conflicts, did not threaten the stability of the governments or the coalitions – after 2007, only one government ended as a result of the coalition collapsing.

However, the method of managing crises (especially the economic crises in 2008, the migration crises in 2015, and – since 2015 – the crisis of democracy in Poland) was 'freezing' the main political divisions, and thus the patterns of coalition cooperation. The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought more or less successful attempts to limit democracy in Poland, also resulted in the expansion of the arsenal of methods used to resolve intra-coalition conflicts (weakening the coalition partner by causing a split in its ranks and changing the leader).

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|------|---|
| SRP | Self-Defence (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) |
| LPR | League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin) |
| UP | Union of Labour (Unia Pracy) |
| KPN | Confederation Independent Poland (Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej) |
| PiS | Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) |
| SP | United Poland (Solidarna Polska) |
| P | Agreement (Porozumienie) |
| R | The Republicans (Republikanie) |
| PSL | Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe) |
| ROP | Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (Ruch Odrodzenia Polski) |
| SDPL | Social Democracy of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Polska) |
| SLD | Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej) |
| AWS | Solidarity Electoral Action (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność) |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| S | Solidarity (Solidarność) |
| PL | Peasant Alliance (Porozumienie Ludowe) |
| MNSO | German Minority (Mniejszość Niemiecka Śląska Opolskiego) |
| ZChN | Christian National Union (Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe) |
| PC | Centre Alliance (Porozumienie Centrum) |
| BBWR | Non-Party Reform Bloc (Bezpartyjny Blok Wspierania Reform) |
| UD | Democratic Union (Unia Demokratyczna) |
| RP | Palikot's Movement (Ruch Palikota) |
| UW-PD | Freedom Union-Democratic Party (Unia Wolności-Partia Demokratyczna) |
| PChD | Christian Democratic Party (Partia Chrześcijańskich Demokratów) |
| ChD | Christian Democracy (Chrześcijańska Demokracja) |
| KLD | Liberal-Democratic Congress (Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny) |
| PPPP | Polish Beer-Lovers' Party (Polska Partia Przyjaciół Piwa) |
| PO | Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) |
| UPR | Realpolitik Union (Unia Polityki Realnej) |
| Partia X | Party X (Partia X) |
| .N | Modern (Nowoczesna) |
| Kukiz 15 | Kukiz'15 |
| Konfederacja WiN | Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Polish in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Notes

- 1 The institution of the 'group of lists' consisted of the possibility of individual parties to run in the elections separately (each entity registered its own electoral list), but the 'group of lists' participated jointly in the distribution of seats.
- 2 Both parties were created after the 2011 elections, and their representatives in the Sejm obtained their seats from lists of other parties (primarily PiS and PO).
- 3 The contracts have not been made public, but both the members of the signatory parties and the journalists stated that it contained detailed stipulations as to the distribution of placements on the slates.
- 4 The 'United Right Coalition' moniker was used by the head of PiS' Executive Committee, Krzysztof Sobolewski. A subsequent agreement reached in September 2020 was also referred to as a coalition agreement by PiS's spokesperson, Anita Czerwińska.
- 5 It should be noted that at the 2015 election, the Gallagher index was recorded at as high as 12.56, and there were 16.62 per cent wasted votes. This meant PiS achieved a parliamentary majority despite garnering only 37.58 per cent of votes. Better popular vote results had previously been recorded by SLD (in 2001) and PO (in 2011), but neither party had won a majority of seats. In 2019, PiS recorded a significantly better result – 43.59 per cent – yet retained the same number of MPs as in the previous term (Markowski 2016: 1315).
- 6 The amendment proposed by PiS concerned the ban on broadcasting programmes by TV stations in which the share of foreign capital exceeds 49 per cent. In real life, the ban applied only to TVN, the largest private broadcaster in Poland.

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10 Live Fast, Die Young

Romanian Coalitions in Time of Crisis

Veronica Anghel

Introduction

Romanian political elites strategically used moments of crisis to solve unrelated political problems. These moments included the formation and termination of cabinets. The mechanisms politicians employed to force cabinet changes increased the country's risk of democratic backsliding. In their reactions to the 2008 financial crisis and to the COVID-19 pandemic, politicians forced cabinet change by challenging procedures or by modifying how institutions function, as well as encouraged the use of non-transparent individual payoffs to secure party switching within the parliament.

Exogenous crises were not in themselves a cause for authoritarian innovations. As in other European countries, moments of crisis worked as a magnifying glass to expose vulnerabilities and illiberal agendas which had been building up for years (Bohle and Eihmanis 2022). Crises were also not the most immediate cause for coalition instability but were used to confirm entrenched patterns of coalition politics that make those coalitions even more unstable. Among these, this chapter highlights the role of the president in coalition formation, political parties' fluid ideologies and flexibility in adjusting their issue positions, and party switching in parliament.

Between 1990 and 2022, Romania had 36 cabinets chaired by 21 prime ministers (Table 10.1a). The country stands out as the most unstable in the region. Three out of four of these cabinets were coalitions. Political elites often chose to use moments of disruption opportunistically to reshape alliances and achieve office or policy goals unrelated to solving the crisis itself. These strategies have been motivated by presidents' agendas to increase their own power through the formation of loyal cabinets, by party leaders' agendas to eliminate political opponents and deliver self-serving, often corrupt policy objectives, and by parliament members' (MPs) individual goals that lead to party switching. The prominence of such opportunistic agendas is facilitated by ideologically flexible parties and the absence of transparent coalition governing programs. Informal institutions such as extreme party switching and corruption add to the set of challenges that subvert Romania's democratic consolidation (Anghel 2022).

Table 10.1a Romanian cabinets 1990–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Roman | 1990-06-28 | 1990-05-20 | FSN | maj | 263 (66.4) | 396 | 10 | 2.19 | |
| 2 | Stolojan | 1991-10-17 | | FSN, PNL, MER, PDAR | sur | 312 (78.8) | 396 | 10 | 2.22 | |
| 3 | Văcăroiu I | 1992-11-20 | 1992-09-27 | PSD | min | 117 (34.3) | 341 | 12 | 5.86 | PUNR |
| 4 | Văcăroiu II | 1994-08-18 | | PSD, PUNR | min | 145 (42.5) | 341 | 12 | 5.96 | PRM, PSM |
| 5 | Văcăroiu III | 1996-09-03 | | PSD | min | 105 (30.9) | 340 | 12 | 6.31 | |
| 6 | Ciorbea I | 1996-12-12 | 1996-11-03 | PNTCD, PDL, PNL, UDMR, PSDR, PNLCD | sur | 191 (55.7) | 343 | 11 | 6.10 | PER, FER |
| 7 | Ciorbea II | 1997-12-05 | | PNTCD, PDL, PNL, UDMR, PSDR | sur | 187 (54.7) | 342 | 10 | 6.60 | PER, FER |
| 8 | Ciorbea III | 1998-02-11 | | PNTCD, PNL, UDMR, PSDR, UFD | min | 148 (43.4) | 341 | 10 | 6.58 | PER, FER, PDL |
| 9 | Vasile I | 1998-04-17 | | PNTCD, PDL, PNL, UDMR, PSDR, UFD | sur | 189 (55.1) | 343 | 10 | 6.58 | PER, FER |
| 10 | Vasile II | 1998-10-27 | | PNTCD, PDL, PNL, UDMR, PSDR | sur | 188 (54.8) | 343 | 10 | 6.52 | PER, FER |
| 11 | Isărescu I | 1999-12-22 | | PNTCD, PDL, PNL, UDMR, PSDR | mwc | 178 (51.9) | 343 | 10 | 6.55 | PER, FER |
| 12 | Isărescu II | 2000-09-14 | | PNTCD, PDL, PNL, UDMR | min | 161 (46.9) | 343 | 10 | 6.68 | PER, FER |
| 13 | Năstase I | 2000-12-28 | 2000-11-26 | PSD, PSDR, PC | min | 155 (44.9) | 345 | 7 | 4.08 | UDMR, PNL |
| 14 | Năstase II | 2003-06-19 | | PSD | min | 160 (46.6) | 343 | 6 | 3.54 | UDMR |
| 15 | Popescu-Tăriceanu I | 2004-12-29 | 2004-11-28 | PNL, PDL, UDMR, PC | min | 153 (46.1) | 332 | 6 | 4.87 | |
| 16 | Popescu-Tăriceanu II | 2006-12-04 | | PNL, PDL, UDMR | min | 140 (42.4) | 330 | 6 | 5.07 | |
| 17 | Popescu-Tăriceanu III | 2007-04-05 | | PNL, UDMR | min | 73 (22.2) | 329 | 6 | 5.21 | PSD |
| 18 | Boc I | 2008-12-22 | 2008-11-30 | PDL, PSD | mwc | 225 (67.4) | 334 | 5 | 3.67 | |
| 19 | Boc II | 2009-10-01 | | PDL | min | 115 (34.4) | 334 | 5 | 3.72 | |
| 20 | Boc III | 2009-12-23 | | PDL, UDMR, UNPR | min | 145 (43.5) | 333 | 6 | 3.93 | |
| 21 | Ungureanu | 2012-02-09 | | PDL, UDMR, UNPR | min | 158 (48.2) | 328 | 6 | 4.00 | UDMR |

(Continued)

Table 10.1a (Continued)

| Cabinet number | Cabinet | Date in | Election date | Party composition of cabinet | Type of cabinet | Cabinet strength in seats (%) | Number of seats in parliament | Number of parties in parliament | ENP, parliament | Formal support parties |
|----------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 22 | Ponta I | 2012-05-07 | | PSD, PNL, PC | min | 151 (46.5) | 325 | 6 | 4.07 | UNPR |
| 23 | Ponta II | 2012-12-21 | 2012-12-09 | PSD, PNL, PC, UNPR | sur | 273 (66.3) | 412 | 8 | 4.41 | |
| 24 | Ponta III | 2014-02-26 | | PSD, PC, UNPR | min | 192 (49.7) | 386 | 8 | 4.10 | |
| 25 | Ponta IV | 2014-03-05 | | PSD, PC, UNPR, UDMR | mwc | 210 (54.4) | 386 | 8 | 4.47 | |
| 26 | Ponta V | 2014-12-17 | | PSD, UNPR, PC, PLR | sur | 222 (55.4) | 401 | 8 | 4.09 | |
| 27 | Ciolos | 2015-11-17 | | non-partisan | non | | 370 | 7 | 3.32 | |
| 28 | Grindeanu | 2017-01-04 | 2016-12-11 | PSD, ALDE | mwc | 174 (52.9) | 329 | 6 | 3.51 | UDMR |
| 29 | Tudose | 2017-06-29 | | PSD, ALDE | mwc | 168 (51.1) | 329 | 6 | 3.51 | UDMR |
| 30 | Dăncilă I | 2018-01-29 | | PSD, ALDE | mwc | 159 (48.5) | 328 | 7 | 3.56 | UDMR |
| 31 | Dăncilă II | 2019-08-27 | | PSD | min | 124 (37.7) | 329 | 7 | 4.06 | |
| 32 | Orban I | 2019-11-04 | | PNL | min | 69 (21) | 329 | 7 | 4.17 | USR, UDMR, PMP, ALDE |
| 33 | Orban II | 2020-03-14 | | PNL | min | 78 (23.7) | 329 | 7 | 4.04 | USR, UDMR, PMP, ALDE |
| 34 | Çițu I | 2020-12-23 | 2020-12-06 | PNL, USR PLUS, UDMR | mwc | 169 (51.2) | 330 | 6 | 4.25 | |
| 35 | Çițu II | 2021-09-06 | | PNL, UDMR | min | 114 (34.5) | 330 | 6 | 4.25 | |
| 36 | Ciucă | 2021-11-25 | | PSD, PNL, UDMR | sur | 205 (62.1) | 330 | 7 | 4.71 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); maj = single-party majority cabinet; mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition; non = non-partisan.

This chapter focuses on the role of the financial crisis that started in 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic in coalition politics. It claims that by using exogenous crises, Romanian elites also increased the risk for a crisis of democracy from within. The 2015 refugee crisis and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war also contributed to the amplification of illiberal agendas. Such moments of external disruption were opportunities for politicians to attempt coalition, institutional and party system changes, and accelerated the country's internal crisis with democratic consolidation.

The institutional setting

The formal institutional setting that influences coalition formation did not undergo many changes in the last two decades. The most notable fluctuations are in the formal and informal powers of the president in shaping coalitions. The president's role in coalition formation can be connected to heightened coalition instability, particularly during periods of cohabitation. A 2020 Constitutional Court decision that curbs the powers of the president could change that in the future. This section takes stock of the principle changes in the institutional setting that structure Romanian coalition politics.

The main institutions that shape coalition politics in Romania are the parliament, the president and, on occasion, the Constitutional Court through some of its rulings. According to the 1991 Constitution, Romania is a semi-presidential regime, combining a popularly elected president with a prime minister and government accountable to the parliament. This includes Romania in the category of premier-president democracies (Samuels and Shugart 2010). This architecture of power has led to conflict as a result of the dual legitimacy it allows (Gherghina and Mişcoiu 2013), but the dual executive has not in itself been a danger for the democratization of Romania (Elgie 2010). On the contrary, having a dual executive with independent sources of legitimacy has tempered presidential tendencies to centralize power, as was the case of the Popescu-Tăriceanu II and III cabinets (Anghel 2018), or curbed the prime minister's self-aggrandizing agenda, as it was the case during the Ponta I and Ponta II cabinets. Electoral outcomes that led to cohabitation also increased the likelihood of more frequent cabinet changes as a result of conflicts between the prime minister and the president.

Conflicts between the prime minister and the president appeared because the Constitution leaves some room for interpretation on how much leeway the president has in choosing the premier. The Constitutional Court was called upon several times to mediate such conflicts (Ştefan 2019). If a single party wins an absolute majority, the Constitution compels the president to nominate that party's premier proposal. The prime minister designate thus becomes the *formateur*. If no party has an absolute majority, the president could, in principle, select whichever candidate they desired for the position. The level of discretion the president can exercise in choosing the prime minister has been formally limited by a 2020 ruling of

the Constitutional Court (Romanian Constitutional Court 2020). At that time, the president triggered a constitutional conflict by insisting on re-nominating the leader of his own party, Ludovic Orban, as prime minister, although he had lost a vote of no confidence. The Constitutional Court weighed in on this 2020 conflict stressing that the president should only nominate a candidate who has a reasonable chance of acquiring an absolute majority in parliament. Orban was not eligible, despite the president's determination to nominate him.

This 2020 Constitutional Court decision sets new formal limits on the role of the president in shaping cabinets. Limiting the president's discretion in nominating the premier could reduce coalition instability. However, it also reduces the chances of triggering early elections and thus reinforces a different source of coalition instability: party switching within parliament. According to the Constitution, the president can dissolve parliament and call for early elections only if the parliament rejects the president's premier nomination twice, and after consulting the speakers of the two chambers and the leaders of the parliamentary groups (Art. 89). With the new court ruling, the president cannot nominate premier candidates without them having a real chance at also winning the confidence of an absolute majority of parliamentarians. This makes it unlikely that the president will have the opportunity to trigger early elections.

The informal powers of the president have also been limited by the Constitutional Court decision discussed above. Before this decision, potential junior coalition parties had some incentives to select the party of the president to support in government, as in the case of Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu I or Boc II. The president's strength in informal cabinet formation negotiations will now diminish.

The party system and the actors

Party system change

The party system has largely stabilized in the past two decades and so became more predictable. New parties entered the parliament or split from existing parliamentary parties in every electoral cycle but usually had a short life. In terms of ideological positioning, the 2008 financial crisis, the pandemic and the refugee crisis of 2015 revealed more authoritarian characteristics in the rhetoric and ideology of the mainstream Romanian political parties. The advent of the pandemic also contributed to the emergence of a new extreme right nativist party: the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR). The entry of AUR in parliament in 2020 pushed the mainstream parties even closer as they sought to fend off the rise of this extreme party, further blurring their ideological identities.

Romania has had a proportional electoral system since 1990. A 5 per cent threshold was introduced in 2000 to limit party system fractionalization. This

threshold contributed to the institutionalization of the party system (Casal-Bértoa and Mair 2012; Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2018). Parties themselves separated between those that institutionalized and became a fixed presence in Romanian politics and those who became vehicles for different influential politicians or businessmen (Coman 2012; Gherghina and Soare 2017; Thürk 2019). Those parties, such as the Dan Diaconescu People's Party (PP-DD), Pro-Romania (PRO), or the Popular Movement Party (PMP) had a short life as parliamentary parties. Political parties have shown great ideological fluidity from one election to another (Borbáth 2019). This fluidity partially enables parties' inclination for fast paced and frequent coalition reshuffles. When choosing allies, parties often prioritized office-seeking goals which created ideologically disconnected pre-electoral and post-electoral alliances (Chiru 2015; Anghel 2017).

In 2008, an electoral reform shifted the electoral system from a closed-list proportional representation arrangement to one in which all candidates ran in single-member districts (Marian and King 2010). That system was only used for the 2012 elections after which Romania returned to the previously used closed-list proportional representation system. Six to seven parties on average win representation in the Chamber of Deputies. Government formation has been confined to a narrow circle of parties; new parties have usually only become members of the legislature from the position of a junior partner in an electoral alliance. Only three parties had a continuous presence in the legislature from 1990 to 2022: the Social-Democratic Party (PSD), the National Liberal Party (PNL), and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). The Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) was another major player in politics. After running under different names since the early 1990s, it eventually merged with PNL in 2014. The 2016 elections saw three new parties enter parliament, deeming observations of a spike in programmatic and extra-system volatility (Borbáth 2021). These new parties were the 'Save Romania' Union (USR), Pro-Romania (PRO), and the Popular Movement Party (PMP). Among these, USR was the only party to pass the 5 per cent threshold in the 2020 elections.

The 2014 merger of PDL into PNL was an important occasion for party system re-alignment. But the political system did not polarize on a left-right scale as the PNL and PSD emerged as the main competitors. Historically, the PNL and PSD represent different electorates on the left-right economic scale. PNL represents centre-right and urban voters, while the PSD represents the centre-left, rural, and small-town constituencies. Both parties also share socially conservative views; they are inclined to support nationalist, traditionalist views on the GAL-TAN dimensions, and neither is Eurosceptic. Most differences persist in terms of economic policies (Table 10.1b). The frequent alliances between these two parties have also blurred some of these distinctions and revealed more similarities than differences in their policy agendas.

Table 10.1b Romanian party system conflict structure 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 17 | Popescu-Tăriceanu III | PC | Econ. left-right | PC | GAL-TAN |
| 18 | Boc I | PDL | Econ. left-right | PDL | GAL-TAN |
| 19 | Boc II | PDL | Econ. left-right | PDL | GAL-TAN |
| 20 | Boc III | PDL | Econ. left-right | PDL | GAL-TAN |
| 21 | Ungureanu | PDL | Econ. left-right | PDL | GAL-TAN |
| 22 | Ponta I | PDL | Econ. left-right | PDL | GAL-TAN |
| 23 | Ponta II | PSD | Econ. left-right | PSD | GAL-TAN |
| 24 | Ponta III | UNPR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 25 | Ponta IV | UNPR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 26 | Ponta V | UNPR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 27 | Ciolos | UNPR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 28 | Grindeanu | PMP | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 29 | Tudose | PMP | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 30 | Dăncilă I | PMP | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 31 | Dăncilă II | PMP | Econ. left-right | ALDE | GAL-TAN |
| 32 | Orban I | PMP | Econ. left-right | ALDE | GAL-TAN |
| 33 | Orban II | PMP | Econ. left-right | ALDE | GAL-TAN |
| 34 | Cițu I | USR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 35 | Cițu II | USR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |
| 36 | Ciucă | USR | Econ. left-right | UDMR | GAL-TAN |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2007–2012 (cabinets 1–23) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

Ideological fluidity also brought the main political parties – PNL and PSD – closer in times of crisis. PNL and PSD coalesced at the start of the 2012–2016 electoral cycle to form the Ponta I and Ponta II cabinets. At that time, they jointly campaigned against the austerity programs developed by the PDL-led cabinets of Boc II, III and Ungureanu in response to the financial crisis. During the 2015 refugee crisis, PNL and PSD revealed the same hostility toward welcoming and integrating refugees. Under the leadership of PNL President Klaus Iohannis, Romania voted against EU plans for refugee burden sharing and did not invest in refugee integration. The PSD-led cabinets at the time agreed with this policy. The Russia-Ukraine war also reveals similar pro-EU, Atlanticist and pro-NATO policies in both mainstream parties, which makes the collaboration between PSD and PNL under PNL premier Ciucă very functional. The intensification of the Russia-Ukraine war on Romania's borders created some more incentives for this grand coalition to remain united under the leadership of PM Ciucă, a former army general and former Chief of the Romanian General Staff.

Some parties were consequential for cabinet formation and termination despite their short life span. Most notably, former PM Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu

split with the PNL in 2014 and negotiated to bring his Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) into the Ponta V cabinet. During the 2016–2020 cycle, Popescu-Tăriceanu’s ALDE was also a key ally in supporting the PSD-led Grindeanu, Tudose and Dăncilă I cabinets, and contributed to the successful motion of no confidence against Dăncilă II by withdrawing his parliamentarians’ support. This move was a gamble; Popescu-Tăriceanu tried to disassociate himself from an unpopular government close to elections. Even so, ALDE failed to enter the 2020 legislature.

The anti-establishment Save Romania Union (USR) grew on an anti-corruption platform and out of a grass roots movement but officially became a party only in 2016 when it also entered parliament. The vote for USR represented citizens’ response to Romania’s crisis with the quality of democracy rather than a response to exogenous shocks. USR employed populist rhetoric distinguishing between the honest people and the corrupt elite. During its tenure in parliament, however, USR increasingly expanded its policy concerns to become a more mainstream centre-left party. In 2021, it briefly entered a coalition with PNL and UDMR but finally found its reformist agenda incompatible with that of the other ‘status-quo’ parties. With the loss of some of its populist appeal, the USL has constantly dropped in voters’ preferences and is not likely to become a contender to either PNL or PSD for the upcoming electoral cycle.

Eighteen national minorities (not including the Hungarians) are represented in Parliament where they form the National Minority Caucus (NMC). This united group of deputies is not unlike that of a united, disciplined, and institutionalized party and has made the difference on multiple occasions in creating cabinet majorities (Anghel and Thürk 2019). Their role remained unchanged throughout the years and it always offers support to the incumbent cabinet.

Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions

Issue-based bloc alignment defined Romanian electoral strategies and the creation of electoral alliances. As I discuss elsewhere, for each electoral cycle, the opposition challenged the incumbent parties based on (a) their communist legacy (1990–1996), (b) poor economic performance (1996–2000), (c) corruption (2000–2008/2009), (d) presidential allegiance and austerity measures (2009–2012/2014), and (e) undermining the rule of law (2014–2020) (Anghel 2023). Such ‘anti-’ campaigns produced temporary polarising voting patterns that delivered cabinets either around the centre-left PSD or the centre-right PDL or PNL. However, as discussed above, ideological fluidity allowed for frequent collaborations among seemingly opposing parties and the reconsidering of alliances after elections. The PSD and PNL even established a pre-electoral alliance (together with PC, and then formed the Ponta I and Ponta II cabinets) and post-electoral coalitions (Boc I and Ciucă cabinets). In

Table 10.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Romania, 2004–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| 2004-11-28 | PNL, PDL PSD, PC | EA, PEC EA | |
| 2008-11-30 | PSC, PC | EA, PEC | |
| 2012-12-09 | PSD, UNPR, PNL, PC PDL, PNTCD, FC | EA, PEC EA | |
| 2020-12-06 | USR, PLUS | EA, PEC | Separate declarations |

Notes:

Type: electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC)

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other

interviews with the author, PNL leaders also confirmed the informal agreement that guaranteed the support of PSD for the Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu III minority cabinet.

The 2012 elections were the last ones to see pre-electoral coalitions openly compete (see Table 10.1c). In 2012, the USL alliance defeated a three-party alliance formed around the PDL. Pre-electoral coalitions are largely advantageous to small parties who cannot make it beyond the 5 per cent threshold. However, once in an alliance, parties need to meet the 10 per cent threshold. Since the merger between PNL and PDL in 2014, all major parties have manifested an interest to run alone, leaving their satellites to fight for themselves or absorbed individual parliamentarians from smaller parties on their party's lists.

Government formation

The bargaining process

Romanian politics recorded a relatively low number of inconclusive bargaining rounds (see Table 10.2). Post-election cabinet formation is uncomplicated when pre-electoral coalitions win elections (Ponta II, Grindeanu). The role of the president in designating their preferred prime minister becomes most relevant when the winner of elections is less straightforward (Boc III, Cîțu I), confirming previous expectations related to coalition outcomes in semi-presidential systems.

The fragility of Romanian cabinets is the result of bargaining for the re-shaping of majorities between elections. The bargaining that takes place for individual payoffs leads to frequent party switches, which changes majorities in parliament. According to Klein (2016), every fifth legislator defected from their party between 1996 and 2012. Tables 10.1a and 10.1b show that on occasion, the strength of the incoming cabinet differs from the strength of the

Table 10.2 Government formation period in Romania, 2007–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (Senate result in parentheses) | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Popescu-Tăriceanu III | 2007 | 0 | PNL, UDMR | 0 | 0 | 0 | 303 | 0 | 27 |
| Boc I | 2008 | 4 | PDL, PSD | 7 | 22 | 15 | 324 | 0 | 115 |
| | | | PSD, PC, PNL, UDMR | 1 | | | | | |
| | | | PDL, UDMR | 4 | | | | | |
| | | | PDL, PNL, UDMR | 1 | | | | | |
| | | | PDL, UDMR, PSD | 8 | | | | | |
| Boc II | 2009 | 0 | PDL | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Boc III | 2009 | 1 | PDL, UDMR, UNPR | 7 | 71 | 7 | 276 | 0 | 135 |
| | | | PDL, UDMR, PNL | 1 | | | | | |
| Ungureanu | 2012 | 0 | PDL, UDMR, UNPR | 1 | 3 | 1 | 237 | 0 | 2 |
| Ponta I | 2012 | 0 | PSD, PNL, PC | 1 | 10 | 1 | 284 | 0 | 92 |
| Ponta II | 2012 | 1 | PSD, PNL, PC, UNPR | 1 | 12 | 1 | 402 | 0 | 120 |
| | | | PSD, PNL, PC, UNPR, UDMR | 1 | | | | | |
| Ponta III | 2014 | 0 | PSD, PC, UNPR | 1 | 0 | | | | |
| Ponta IV | 2014 | 0 | PSD, PC, UNPR, UDMR | 3 | 0 | 3 | 346 | 0 | 191 |
| Ponta V | 2014 | 0 | PSD, UNPR, PC, PLR | 6 | 0 | 6 | 377 | 0 | 134 |
| Cioloș | 2015 | 0 | no party bargaining | 1 | 13 | 1 | 389 | 0 | 115 |
| Grindeanu | 2017 | 0 | PSD, ALDE | 7 | 24 | 7 | 295 | 0 | 133 |
| Tudose | 2017 | 0 | PSD, ALDE | 1 | 8 | 1 | 275 | 0 | 103 |
| Dăncilă I | 2018 | 0 | PSD, ALDE | 1 | 13 | 1 | 282 | 1 | 136 |
| Dăncilă II | 2019 | 0 | PSD | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Orban I | 2019 | 0 | PNL | 1 | 24 | 1 | 261 | 0 | 139 |
| Orban II | 2020 | 0 | PNL | 1 | 38 | 1 | 286 | 1 | 23 |
| Chișu I | 2020 | 0 | PNL, USR PLUS, UDMR | 1 | 17 | 1 | 260 | 0 | 186 |
| Chișu II | 2021 | 0 | PNL, UDMR | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Ciucă | 2021 | 0 | PSD, PNL, UDMR | 1 | 0 | 1 | 318 | 0 | 126 |

outgoing cabinet. That reflects party switching, although these numbers do not account for how MPs' movements across parties offset each other in the final count.

The informal institution of party switching ensures the continuation of some individual payoffs – electoral, office, or policy – and the perpetuation of parties but undermines cabinet stability and blurs parties' ideological content and accountability. The practice of party switching is closely related to high coalition turnover and weak trust in political parties. Moments of crisis matter in these calculations as they also create the incentives for parties and individual MPs to reconsider their allegiances and preserve or recuperate some electoral capital. This happened most obviously in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Party switching can both undermine and shore up governments. Personal ambitions led party leaders and individual members of parliament to switch parties at key moments. The Boc II and Boc III cabinets famously formed as a result of individual defections from different parties followed by the creation of another parliamentary group, the Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR). In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and of the government's unpopular austerity measures, individual MPs from the governing parties sheltered from the electoral cost of their government's policies and switched to the opposition. As the 2012 elections neared, PDL parliamentarians switched sides to the PSD or PNL. They later voted to bring down the Ungureanu cabinet and supported the formation of the minority cabinet Ponta I.

Party switching is closely entwined with high levels of corruption and clientelism. In an interview with the author, Prime Minister Ungureanu confirmed he witnessed the bribing of MPs to vote against his cabinet, but he was not in the position to prove it. During the time prime minister Ponta chaired his first cabinet, his party, the PSD, and his coalition partner, the PNL, received tens of parliamentarians fleeing parties dropping in popularity. Dăncilă II formed with the official withdrawal of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), but her party's (PSD) parliamentarians were also running to join more popular parties as elections approached. Finally, these parliamentarians participated in bringing down the Dăncilă II cabinet. According to local media, ALDE chairman Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu made similar accusations of vote buying and transactional party switching during the motion of no confidence against the Dăncilă II minority cabinet (Popescu-Tăriceanu 2019). This way to negotiate cabinet formation is rarely discussed in the literature.

The conversation around party switching shows once more how Romania's internal crisis with the quality of democracy is important in coalition formation outcomes. The exchange of material benefits for votes is difficult to trace, but corruption among public officials has been proven to be widespread. According to the annual reports from the National Anti-Corruption Agency, the number of ministers, parliamentarians, local representatives, and directors of

national companies who are sent to trial yearly under corruption charges is in the high tens (National Anti-Corruption Directorate 2019).

The composition and size of cabinets

Just over half of the cabinets formed between 1990 and 2022 were minority cabinets (see [Table 10.1a](#)). Among the post-communist states, Romania stands out with more than double the amount of minority cabinets compared to runner-up Latvia (Bergman et al 2019: 6; Anghel 2023). Parties' preferences to run alone in elections favour a hinge party strategy of keeping options open to both left and right (Arter 2016). Smaller parties, such as the PC, UDMR, UNPR, PMP, ALDE and the national minority caucus, transferred their support according to strategies of political survival or other office or policy goals. With the exception of Ponta II, minimum winning coalitions – such as Boc I, Grindeanu, and Cîțu I – usually form immediately after elections. The frequent cabinet reshuffles within electoral cycles often lead to the formation of minority cabinets. That is the outcome of widespread and normalized coalition volatility, under the conditions of which smaller parties often calculate that the cost incurred for only offering legislative support or for easily shifting alliances and withdrawing government support can be easily offset in little to no time.

Once the Social Democrat Party (PSD) and the main right-wing party, the National Liberal Party (PNL), overcame their reluctance to govern together, the political scene also opened up to the idea of *grand coalitions*. The PSD first gave support for a PNL-led minority cabinet in 2008 (Popescu-Tăriceanu III) then governed together with PNL in 2012 (Ponta I and Ponta II). The appearance of the anti-establishment party Save Romania Union (USR) created some space for new coalition alignment strategies in 2016. USR entered parliament as a natural ally for PNL. However, PNL and USR only briefly governed together in 2021 (Cîțu I), before PNL and PSD rejoined forces in late 2021 in the Ciucă government.

The allocation of ministerial portfolios

Romanian cabinets are usually composed of the prime minister, one or more deputy prime ministers (or 'ministers of state' up to 2004), regular ministers, and, quite often, ministers without portfolios or 'delegate ministers'. Ministers usually come and go with the premier. The premier has full powers to dismiss cabinet members, who very rarely refuse to quit when asked to do so. Prime ministers face limited constraints in appointing new cabinet members. As the procedure also involves the president, in situations of cohabitation, this can lead to conflict. That conflict usually plays out exclusively for the public, as the prime minister has the final say. According to a 2008 Constitutional Court Decision, the president can only refuse the nomination of a minister once.

Ministers are an expandable resource with short life spans. For example, over 70 ministers had passed through the PSD cabinets in two years (2017 and 2018) (see [Table 10.3](#)). According to Romanian law, a major political reshuffle or the change to the structure of the government can only be done with parliamentary approval. However, there is no limit to the number of times a prime minister can change the ministers in their cabinet. Prime Minister Dăncilă's proposal to change several ministers at once at the end of 2018 and in 2019 resembled a cabinet reshuffle, which the president refused. That conflict died out before the Constitutional Court would have inevitably been asked to mediate.

The structure and size of cabinets change with most new cabinets. [Table 10.3](#) shows at least 53 different types of portfolios that have been created in 30 years. During government formation, portfolio allocation is roughly proportionate to the size of a coalition member in parliament. The largest party usually takes the prime minister position, and then coalition parties take turns in choosing their preferred portfolio. Portfolios with more resources are usually thrashed out between equal sized coalition partners. Negotiations for all other public offices are carried away from public scrutiny. Apart from party size, other informal aspects such as specific portfolio requests from a strong party leader can also become part of negotiations.

Junior coalition partners usually have an interest to bargain for a portfolio that matches prominent aspects of their campaign platform. For example, USR bargained for the Ministry of Justice to pursue its anti-corruption platform (Cîțu I). UDMR always bargains for the Environment portfolio due to an interest to administer the country's foresting industry that is prominent in the counties with ethnic-Hungarian population (Popescu-Tăriceanu III, Boc III, Ungureanu, Ponta IV, Cîțu I and II, Ciucă).

Each minister is usually shadowed by three-to-five junior ministers who are political appointees. One of those junior ministers can come from the minister's party, but the rest represent other coalition partners.

Coalition agreements

Following in the footsteps of previous scholars studying the content of coalition agreements in Romania, this chapter only records for analysis those documents that qualify as the treaty of the coalition: the public contract between the political parties that agreed to govern together. Applying this definition, on 22 January 1994, PSD and PUNR signed the first coalition agreement we have on record, ceding four portfolios to PUNR. PSD then delayed its implementation for seven months. PSD ignored the threats made by PUNR to bring down the cabinet for as long as possible. This was the start of a weak relationship that Romanian parties have with written commitments. Parties often challenge the promises made to each other, while the dominant party in the coalition consistently tries to maximize the utility of cabinet membership at the expense of coalition stability. When parties of equal sizes enter coalitions, each one looks for possibilities to govern alone in minority cabinets

Table 10.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Romanian coalitions, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime Minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Labour and Social Protection</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Popescu-Tăriceanu III | 2007 | 14 PNL, 4 UDMR | 18 | | 16 | PNL | PNL | PNL | PNL | PNL |
| Boc I | 2008 | 10 PDL, 9 PSD, 1 Ind. | 20 | | 20 | PDL | PDL | PSD | PSD | PSD |
| Boc III | 2009 | 11 PDL, 3 UDMR, 1 UNPR, 2 Ind. | 17 | | 17 | PDL | PDL | PDL | PDL | PDL |
| Ungureanu | 2012 | 10 PDL, 3 UDMR, 2 UNPR, 2 Ind. | 17 | | 17 | PDL | PDL | UNPR | PDL | PDL |
| Ponta I | 2012 | 10 PSD, 9 PNL, 2 PC | 21 | | 17 | PSD | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| Ponta II | 2012 | 14 PSD, 11 PNL, 2 PC | 27 | | 21 | PSD | PNL | PSD | PNL | PNL |
| Ponta III | 2014 | 25 PSD, 2 PC, 1 UNPR | 28 | | 22 | PSD | PSD | PSD | PSD | UNPR |
| Ponta IV | 2014 | 20 PSD, 3 PC, 2 UNPR, 2 UDMR | 27 | | 22 | PSD | PSD | PSD | PSD | UNPR |
| Ponta V | 2014 | 16 PSD, 2 UNPR, 3 PC, 2 Ind. | 22 | | 20 | PSD | PSD | IND. | PSD | UNPR |
| Grindeanu | 2017 | 23 PSD, 4 ALDE | 27 | | 22 | PSD | PSD | ALDE | PSD | PSD |
| Tudose | 2017 | 22 PSD, 4 ALDE, 1 Ind. | 27 | | 22 | PSD | PSD | ALDE | PSD | PSD |
| Dăncilă I | 2018 | 20 PSD, 4 ALDE, 2 Ind. | 28 | | 22 | PSD | PSD | ALDE | PSD | PSD |
| Cișu I | 2020 | 9 PNL, 5 USR, 3 UDMR, 1 Ind. | 20 | | 19 | PNL | PNL | IND. | PNL | PNL |
| Cișu II | 2021 | 13 PNL, 6 UDMR, 1 Ind. | 20 | | 19 | PNL | PNL | IND. | PNL | PNL |
| Ciucă | 2021 | 10 PSD, 8 PNL, 4 UDMR, 1 Ind. | 23 | | 21 | PNL | PSD | IND. | PSD | PNL |

Table 10.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Romania, 2007–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Popescu-Tăriceanu III | 2007 | | | | | | |
| Boc I | 2008 | 3150 | 61 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 16 |
| Boc III | 2009 | 713 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 80 |
| Ungureanu | 2012 | 713 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 80 |
| Ponta I | 2012 | 5961 | 66 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 24 |
| Ponta II | 2012 | 5961 | 66 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 24 |
| Ponta III | 2014 | | | | | | |
| Ponta IV | 2014 | 687 | 6 | 18 | 15 | 0 | 61 |
| Ponta V | 2014 | 540 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grindeanu | 2017 | 271 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 0 | 45 |
| Tudose | 2017 | 271 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 0 | 45 |
| Dăncilă I | 2018 | 271 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 0 | 45 |
| Cițu I | 2020 | 520 | 70 | 20 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Cițu II | 2021 | | | | | | |
| Ciucă | 2021 | 846 | 33 | 43 | 0 | 24 | 0 |

or with less demanding junior partners. In other words, parties often sign contracts without a clear intention to keep promises for a long time and constantly seek to maximize office payoffs. This lowers trust among politicians and diminishes the importance of written commitments. As a result, most coalition agreements in Romania remain simply ceremonial and lack a strong policy focus (see Table 10.4).

There are two other reasons for this pattern. First, the Constitution requires that every new cabinet that asks for an investiture vote submit a government platform. The government platform is usually a long meandering list of major policy objectives and priorities for the full four-year term. This document is almost never discussed in public and is not binding for the cabinet. Previous scholarship on Romania did not include them as part of the coalition agreements (see Ștefan 2019; Klüver and Bäck 2019; Anghel 2023). The existence of these mandatory policy documents eliminated some of the responsibility for parties to discuss policy more in detail and seal it with a contract of a more private and binding nature. These documents are usually collective efforts of party policy advisors and staffers and are not the object of tense negotiations given their non-binding nature and high degree of generalizability. Coalition partners have usually agreed to this government policy platform with ease.

Second, Romanian politicians are (usually) more concerned with office distribution during negotiations than with policy negotiations. However, they do not want to share the dominance of these concerns with the public. As a result, the public does not get to follow closely the debates over office distribution or see these procedures coded in writing. Consequently, with few exceptions, politicians understand the coalition agreement they present to the public as

a sign off on who gets to enter the cabinet. This preference for insubstantive coalition agreements became manifest in the 2012–2020 electoral cycles. While Ponta II started off with a detailed pre-electoral USL agreement among PSD, PNL, and PC, this would be the last substantive coalition agreement recorded for Romania.

Coalition governance

The role of individual ministers in policy-making

According to the Romanian Constitution, the president is the head of state. This endows the president with ceremonial capital and informal powers in internal politics. Formally, the president's powers are quite limited in coalition governance. Informally, presidents are well connected to governments led by their own parties. In situations of cohabitation, the president can be a strong reactive or oppositional force, thus becoming an agent for the opposition. In this case, they can veto parliament legislation and ministerial appointments once.

De facto, the prime minister is the single most powerful politician in the Romanian political system. The prime minister has the right to appoint and dismiss ministers, has steering or coordination rights vis-à-vis cabinet ministers, has full control over the agenda for cabinet meetings, and has the ability to monitor ministers. Prime ministers and the parliament can override presidential vetoes.

The role of individual ministers in policy-making cannot be formally restricted by the prime minister. However, when ministers hail from the same party as the premier, it naturally follows that ministers are more responsive to informal interference from the premier in their respective jurisdictions. Junior ministers are appointed according to a pattern of divided portfolios. The role of the junior ministers is to oversee the minister.

Ministers rarely manage to associate themselves with policy achievements. A high frequency of ministerial turnover also leads to slow reform and weak policy implementation. Unwritten rules largely stipulate that most ongoing business or negotiations carried out by third parties with a government official tend to start over or suffer important delays every time a minister is replaced.

Coalition governance in the executive arena

The cabinet meets on a weekly basis. During these meetings, cabinets make decisions via consensus. Should conflict emerge, the prime minister is expected to act as an arbiter. Usually, leaders of coalition parties other than the premier's assume roles as deputy prime ministers. This allows for easy configurations in party summits (PS) or coalition committees (CoC) before the weekly meeting of the coalition cabinets. CoCs thus become the main conflict-solving mechanism as coalition party leaders are all present and can hammer out party concerns and negotiate agendas (see [Table 10.5](#)). Ad-hoc PS are also convened outside the government building on occasion.

Table 10.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Romania, 2007–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|-----------------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Popescu-Tăriceanu III | 2007 | N | N/A | No | CoC, PS | CoC | CoC | Yes | No | All/All | No | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Boc I | 2008 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | PS | No (PSD) | Yes | All/All | No | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Boc III | 2009 | IE | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | PS | Yes | No | All/All | No | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Ungureanu | 2012 | IE | Yes | No | PS | PS | PS | No (PDL) | No | All/All | No | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Ponta I | 2012 | IE | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | PS | No (PNL) | No | All/All | No | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Ponta II | 2012 | PRE | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | PS | No (PNL) | No | All/All | No | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Ponta III | 2014 | IE | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | PS | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Ponta IV | 2014 | IE | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | PS | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Ponta V | 2014 | IE | Yes | No | PS | PS | PS | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |
| Grindeanu | 2017 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | PS | PS | No (PSD) | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |
| Tudose | 2017 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | PS | PS | No (PSD) | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |
| Dăncilă I | 2018 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | PS | PS | No (PSD) | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |
| Çițu I | 2020 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | CoC | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |
| Çițu II | 2021 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | CoC | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |
| Ciucă | 2021 | POST | Yes | No | PS, CoC | CoC | CoC | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Few | Yes | Yes |

Notes:

During periods where the values for the variables remain identical, the first and last applicable cabinets are listed. The last applicable cabinet is right-justified in the Coalition column.

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; PRE = pre-election; N = no coalition agreement, PRE, POST = pre- and post-election.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; CaC = cabinet committee; CoC = coalition committee; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; Parl = parliamentary leaders PS = party summit.

Coalition discipline: all = discipline always expected; most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters, Spec. = discipline only expected on a few explicitly specified matters, no = no discipline expected.

Policy agreement: few = policy agreement on a few selected policies; varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; Comp. = comprehensive policy agreement; no = no explicit agreement

President Klaus Iohannis used the COVID-19 pandemic to aggrandize his own powers (Anghel and Jones 2022). Together with Prime Minister Ludovic Orban, he institutionally and rhetorically targeted the parliament, the Constitutional Court and the ombudsman with the intention to weaken their position in the system. As a result, future Romanian executives will find it easier to resist judicial oversight and to interpret the law and the constitution entrepreneurially. This is likely to amplify Romania's democratic deficit with uncertain effects on coalition outcomes. The combination between increased executive powers and the context of the crises – first the pandemic and then the Russia-Ukraine war – led to the creation of a grand coalition between mainstream parties that makes governance more opaque. The 2021 unprecedented nomination as prime minister of a retired general and former Chief of the Romanian General Staff, Nicolae Ciucă, led to the staffing of the government with military types, halted the access of reformists, and showed plans to increase the power and oversight of intelligence services.

Governance mechanisms in the parliamentary arena

Parliamentary coordination is important in key moments related to cabinet investment and during motions of no confidence. Parliament discipline is also important for major votes related to the budget and a number of other laws. Few independent-member initiatives are adopted, while most laws passed by the Romanian parliament originate in bills proposed by the government (Anghel 2023). Passing government-sponsored laws needs coordination among coalition members. The success rate of government-sponsored bills lies at over 90 per cent. This is a similar figure to what previous scholarship observed in West European countries (Kreppel 2020: 126; Field and Martin 2023).

The role of the leaders of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies is crucial for coalition coordination. While some party leaders preferred cabinet positions, others preferred to take over the leadership of the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies. In times of crisis, their role becomes even more important. They are also the ones who have oversight of negotiations for party switching, which this chapter previously identified as a major input to coalition formation and termination.

Given the important role of the two speakers, the failure to coordinate with them can lead to dramatic outcomes. According to the constitution, should something happen to the president, the Senate spokesperson takes over as head of state. This position became very important during one of Romania's most difficult rule of law crisis. In 2012, as USL took over the executive following a successful motion of no confidence, the PSD chairman Victor Ponta occupied the prime minister position, while Crin Antonescu, the PNL chairman, was elected Senate spokesperson. After controlling these positions, the USL impeached President Traian Băsescu, and Antonescu became interim president through the virtue of his position as Senate spokesperson. During this time,

PNL and PSD showed their most overt inclinations toward an authoritarian interpretation of the constitution and other legal procedures.

President Băseșcu's impeachment was ultimately not confirmed by popular vote due to the absence of a quorum. The quorum was confirmed as a requirement for impeachment by the Constitutional Court. According to insiders interviewed by the author, the PSD leaders had wanted the interim PNL president not to accept the ruling of the Constitutional Court, but Antonescu refused. Because the two coalition leaders, Ponta and Antonescu, did not coordinate on this matter, the plan to forcefully remove president Băseșcu failed.

The role of party group leaders is also very important in maintaining party unity and ensure coalition coordination on the parliamentary floor. As discussed above, parties can lose or recruit parliamentarians with ease. Keeping in contact with individual MPs is fundamental for cabinet stability. PPG leaders are the first to deal with defections. They are also the ones who organize the vote on legislation, follow the voting agenda, and coordinate with the government.

Cabinet duration and termination

The duration of cabinets

On average, Romanian cabinets survive less than a year. The predominance of minority cabinets does not correlate with a shorter cabinet duration. Minority cabinets, such as Năstase I, Văcăroiu II, Popescu-Tăriceanu I, Boc IV, Văcăroiu I, and Popescu-Tăriceanu III, are notable for lasting double or triple that amount of time in office. This is particularly true of minority governments that have the support of the main ethno-regional party (UDMR) and the national minority caucus. Comparing minority governments to one another, cabinet performance – measured by the success in passing legislation record and cabinet duration – correlates with detailed support agreements. Nevertheless, the four least durable cabinets were also minority cabinets. Surplus and minimum winning coalitions fall somewhere in-between in terms of duration. Such extreme variation in terms of stability warrants further investigation of minority cabinet performance beyond duration and passing legislation.

The termination of cabinets

Terminal issues are often connected to parties' opportunistic strategies. Political parties easily switch from a cooperative to a competitive strategy to improve electoral prospects. This is the reason why some parties leave unpopular cabinets close to elections (see ALDE withdrawing from Dăncilă I; UDMR withdrawing from Ponta IV; PSD withdrawing from Boc I). Terminal issues are rarely related to the parties' position in the policy space.

Only eight governments have been terminated by technical reasons, more specifically by parliamentary elections (see [Table 10.6](#)). Increasingly, cabinets

Table 10.6 Cabinet termination in Romania, 2007–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| Roman | 55.4 | 8 | 13 | FSN | | Miners' rampage on Bucharest combined with conflict over policies between PM and President (both from the same party) |
| Stolojan | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Văcăroiu I | 44 | 5 | | | | Minority cabinet searching for a more stable parliamentary majority |
| Văcăroiu II | 92.5 | 7a | | PSD, PUNR | 3 | Conflict over policies (bilateral treaty with Hungary) plus proximity of legislative elections (parties need to distance themselves from the government) |
| Văcăroiu III | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Ciorbea I | 24.8 | 9 | | | | Major cabinet reshuffle (cabinet asks for renewed confidence; as a side effect, one minor party loses its cabinet seat) |
| Ciorbea II | 5.4 | 7a, 7b | | PNTCD, PDL | 8 | 'Either him or me' – part 1: conflict between PM and one cabinet member triggered by/combined with conflict over policies |
| Ciorbea III | 4.6 | 5, 7b | | PNTCD, coalition parties (PM vs coalition) | | 'Either him or the coalition' – part 2: PM undesired by almost all coalition parties, was forced to resign; PDL to come back in cabinet |
| Vasile I | 20.2 | 7a | | CDR, UFD | 8 | One party leaves the cabinet and the coalition – unhappy with the policies of the cabinet |
| Vasile II | 54.1 | 7b | | PNTCD, coalition parties (PM vs coalition) | | PM 'revoked' by the president; PM forced to resign as he lost the trust of the coalition parties |
| Isărescu I | 78.5 | 7a | | | | One party (PSDR) forms a new coalition with main opposition party and is therefore excluded from cabinet |
| Isărescu II | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Năstase I | 63.1 | 7a | | PSD, PC | | Coalition between PSD and PC breaks, PC excluded from cabinet |
| Năstase II | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Popescu-Tăriceanu I | 49.2 | 7a | | PC | 2 | One party leaves the cabinet and the coalition – unhappy with the policies of the cabinet |
| Popescu-Tăriceanu II | 16.8 | 7a | | PNL, PDL | | Major tensions between coalition parties has led to exclusion of one party from the cabinet (minority cabinet gets the confidence of the parliament with the help of the major opposition party) |

(Continued)

Table 10.6 (Continued)

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Popescu-Tăriceanu III | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Boc I | 19.5 | 7b | | PDL, PSD | | Conflict over personnel (revocation by PDL of the PSD Minister of Interior) |
| Boc II | 1 | 6 | | | | Successful motion of no confidence |
| Boc III | 71.6 | 9 | | | | PM decided to resign: his government has become increasingly unpopular |
| Ungureanu | 25.7 | 6 | | | | Successful motion of no confidence |
| Ponta I | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Ponta II | 29.8 | 7b | | PSD, PNL | | Break-up of the governing coalition (PNL leaves the cabinet) |
| Ponta III | 0.7 | 5 | | | | Coalition enlargement with UDMR |
| Ponta IV | 28.4 | 9 | 10 | | | Presidential elections have forced UDMR to leave the cabinet (Hungarians voted overwhelmingly against the PM who also a runner-up in the presidential elections) |
| Ponta V | 44.4 | 9 | | | | Major fire in capital highlights corruption, protesters ask for PM resignation; PM resigns |
| Ciolos | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Grindeanu | 11.4 | 6, 8 | | PSD | | PM refuses to resign and is defeated by motion of no confidence lead by own party PSD |
| Tudose | 15.7 | 9 | | | | PM resigns |
| Dăncilă I | 53.6 | 7a | | ALDE | | ALDE withdraws from cabinet; cabinet becomes increasingly unpopular |
| Dăncilă II | 9.3 | 6 | | | | Successful motion of no confidence |
| Orban I | 21.2 | 6 | | | | Successful motion of no confidence |
| Orban II | 100 | 1 | | | | Terminated by elections |
| Cițu I | 17.6 | 7a | | USR, PNL | | USR PLUS withdraws from cabinet |
| Cițu II | 7.6 | 6 | | | | Successful motion of no confidence |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of Prime Minister

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event

have been brought down through successful motions of no confidence. Five out of 19 minority cabinets were terminated through motions of no confidence. Some of these cabinets were not coalition cabinets (Orban I, Dăncilă II, Boc II). Most notably, the Grindeanu cabinet was brought down through a motion of no confidence introduced by the prime minister's own party, the PSD. This was a rare situation in which the head of the main governing party PSD and the head of cabinet did not agree on how to carry justice system reform to benefit the corrupt purposes of the PSD party leader, Liviu Dragnea, but Prime Minister Grindeanu refused to resign.

Conflicts and tensions usually emerge when the premier is not also the leader of the governing party. In the 2016–2020 electoral cycle, the separation between who was the head of cabinet and who was the leader of the PSD led to many cabinet reforms. PSD chairman Liviu Dragnea could not assume public office and become the prime minister because of a previous suspended sentence for electoral fraud. This story ties back to Romania's democratic deficit crisis. Dragnea nevertheless kept a tight grip on the cabinet through the nomination of prime ministers personally loyal to him, less known nationally and mostly connected to local party branches. During his almost four-year mandate as president of the PSD, Dragnea chaired over the party's increased personalization, self-serving justice reforms, internal contestation, MP defections, and the change of three prime ministers. This self-centred and conflictual leadership also led to one of the most unusual termination of the Grindeanu cabinet discussed above.

Protest movements have also been a non-marginal actor in coalition cabinet termination. The increased number of protests is a sign of increased activism within civil society. The financial crisis of 2008/2009 and the austerity measures that followed finally led to the resignation of Prime Minister Boc and to the switch to prime minister Ungureanu. Since 2011, a series of citizen mobilizations have emerged in Romania, showing clear continuity of civil disobedience (Abăseacă and Pleyers 2019). Street protests led to the decision of prime minister Ponta to resign (Ponta V) and to the formation of the first full technocrat government under prime minister Cioloș. Street protests also made prime minister Grindeanu step back from his original decisions to uphold Dragnea's imposed reforms to the rule of law.

Conclusion

Romanian coalition politics is characterized by high instability. The role of the president in coalition formation, political parties' fluid ideologies and pliability in adjusting their issue positions, and extreme party switching can largely explain this outcome. Romania's democratic deficit contributes to the amplification of coalition instability. This chapter shows some of the ways in which coalition formation and termination can be used by entrepreneurial elites to this end, particularly in times of crisis.

Crises do not increase coalition instability, but elites use moments of crisis opportunistically to solve unrelated political problems (Guasti and Bustikova 2022). The fallout of the financial crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as a magnifying glass for underlying trends of elite-driven democratic erosion in Romania. Elites experimented with authoritarian interpretations of the law and other institutional procedures to reshape cabinets. During the financial crisis, this led to the downfall of the Ungureanu cabinet and to the formation of Ponta I. During the pandemic, such self-aggrandizing policies led to maintaining prime minister Ludovic Orban in power, despite his losing the support of the legislative majority (Anghel and Jones 2022).

The financial crisis and the pandemic created opportunities for political leaders to make institutional and informal changes as part of their crisis response. Elites used such disruptions to motivate strategic alliance reshuffling thus increasing coalition instability. During the 2008–2012 electoral cycle, Romania's cabinets enacted austerity measures that led to widespread popular dissatisfaction (Boc III). The leading coalition party at the time, PDL, suffered numerous defections to the opposition as individual MPs looked to find better political deals for the following electoral cycle.

The breakdown of the ruling coalition marked the start of a period in which opportunistic political parties manipulated anti-austerity public sentiment to justify challenges to the rule of law, including to the balance of powers and judicial independence. Frequent changes of cabinet composition became necessary to deliver that illiberal agenda because not all ministers supported autocratizing moves (see party composition shifts from Ponta II to Ponta V).

The three parties that started this illiberal agenda and pushed Romanian elites to experiment more actively with authoritarian innovations were the PSD, PNL, and PC. In 2012, the PNL withdrew from supporting some of the alliance's most severe illiberal actions that would have included challenging Constitutional Court decisions, while PM Ponta maintained that agenda with PSD, PC, and UNPR support (Ponta III–V). During the following electoral cycle (2016–2020), the PSD followed through on their intentions to alter the independence of the judiciary. Most notably, the yearly turnover of PSD prime ministers from 2017 to 2019 was the result of the then PSD Chairman Liviu Dragnea's attempt to maintain support for his agenda to alter the rules of the criminal code to favour his own ongoing law suits. Liviu Dragnea was, nevertheless, convicted for influence peddling in 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed patterns of opportunistic behaviour within the PNL leadership (Anghel and Jones 2022). The advent of the pandemic overlapped a constitutional conflict between president Klaus Iohannis and the legislative majority over the nomination of a prime minister. The president pushed the limits of the constitution to secure the executive for his party, the PNL. Although the presidential agenda was finally deemed unconstitutional, the health emergency was eventually used to justify the need for stability and the president still managed to install his PM choice and a PNL single-party cabinet, voted by a grand coalition (Orban II). This solved political issues only

temporarily. The procedural innovations the PNL and the president supported continued a long-standing process to concentrate power in the executive at the expense of the parliament and the judiciary. President Iohannis and prime minister Orban also enacted COVID-19 rules that bypassed parliament and continued to challenge the motivation of the Constitutional Court in striking down such arbitrary decision making.

In addition to how mainstream parties use moments of crisis to reshape cabinets and increase their power, the COVID-19 pandemic was also a springboard for the extreme right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR). AUR entered parliament propelled by an anti-vaccine conspiratorial rhetoric, a successful strategy in a vaccine-sceptic country. They are also the only officially Eurosceptic party in the parliament and have a nativist, racist rhetoric with antisemitic tones. Once elected with 9 per cent of the vote in 2020, AUR leaders remained equally extremist. Their extremism lowers the coalition potential of AUR and creates more structural incentives for the mainstream parties – PNL and PSD – to govern through grand coalitions. AUR will challenge the mainstream consensus to keep extremists out office once they increase their popular appeal.

The 2015 refugee waves bypassed Romania's territory and overlapped the rule of a technocratic government (Cioloş). But the issue of third-country migration led to a unified political expression across party lines against supporting non-white non-European migrants, which further blurred party identities. Similarly, the Russia-Ukraine war also shows a unified world view; with the exception of far-right party AUR, there is a cross-party loyalty to NATO commitments and widely shared security concerns over Russia's imperialism, which does not lead to conflicts within the incumbent Ciucă led PSD-PNL cabinet. More generally, both the issue of migration and that of the Russian invasion of Ukraine do not leave much space for political conflict – all Romanian mainstream politicians reflect the nation's hostility toward non-white non-European migrants and support NATO policies. In keeping with previous coalition termination patterns, it is more likely for the PNL-PSD coalition to break down as a result of disputes over office distribution or proximity to elections than in response to policy issues.

Overall, Romania managed to resist the far end of elite attempts to alter democratic institutions along the lines of Hungary or Poland. Although the country has struggled to improve its democratic track record in the last years, it is still a laggard in securing an independent judiciary, fighting corruption, and upholding human rights compared to other EU member states (Mungiu-Pippidi 2015; European Commission 2022). This is reflected in how elites manage governance in times of crisis. Disruptive events created the window of opportunity for incumbents to deploy discretionary leadership, including in the formation and termination of cabinets. Such interventions weakened constitutional checks and balances. As a result, Romanian democracy remains a work in progress, while politicians' preferred patterns of coalition governance are a source of stagnation.

Appendix: *List of parties*

| <i>Parties</i> | |
|----------------|--|
| PSM | Socialist Party of Labour (Partidul Socialist al Muncii) |
| PPDD | People's Party – Dan Diaconescu (Partidul Poporului – Dan Diaconescu) |
| PRM | Greater Romania Party (Partidul România Mare) |
| PStDR | Romanian Socialist Democratic Party (Partidul Socialist Democratic din România) |
| FSN | National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale) |
| PDAR | Agrarian Democratic Party of Romania (Partidul Democrației Agrare din România) |
| PSD | Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat) |
| UNPR | National Union for Romania's Progress (Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României) |
| PSDR | Romanian Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat Român) |
| PUNR | Romanian National Unity Party (Partidul Unității Naționale Române) |
| MER | Ecologist Movement of Romania (Mișcarea Ecologistă Română) |
| PER | Romanian Ecologist Party (Partidul Ecologist Român) |
| PC | Conservative Party (Partidul Conservator) |
| PNLCD | National Liberal Party – Democratic Convention (Partidul Național Liberal Convenția Democrată) |
| PDL | Democratic Liberal Party (Partidul Democrat Liberal) |
| PNTCD | Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat) |
| UDMR | Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania (Uniunea Democratică a Maghiarilor din România) |
| PAC | Civic Alliance Party (Partidul Alianței Civice) |
| PNL | National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal) |
| PL93 | Liberal Party 93 (Partidul Liberal 93) |
| UFD | Union of Right-Wing Forces (Uniunea Forțelor de Dreapta) |
| PLR | Liberal Reformist Party (Partidul Liberal Reformator) |
| ALDE | Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților) |
| AUR | Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor) |
| PMP | People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară) |
| USR | Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România) |
| PRO | PRO Romania (PRO România) |
| PUSL | Social Liberal Humanist Party (Partidul Umanist Social Liberal) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Romanian or a minority language in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

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11 Slovakia

Gradual Settlement of Rules in an Unstable Environment

Branislav Dolný

The institutional setting

During the observation period from 2008, the basic institutional framework and balance of power have been stable. Slovakia is a parliamentary democracy with a unicameral parliament elected by a proportional electoral system in a single district for a period of four years, with a directly elected president for a period of five years. The electoral system has a significant degree of proportionality. Apart from the 5 per cent threshold,¹ it does not favour large parties; therefore, it is conducive to a greater number of parties in parliament (which was never less than six). This usually results in multi-party government coalitions as shown in the [Table 11.1a](#).

Although directly elected, the president has limited competencies, he or she can still be an important player in government formation. After the election or dismissal of the government, he or she will appoint the formateur with the task of forming a government. The Constitution does not limit the president in any way in the choice. In practice, however, presidents follow the unwritten rule of appointing the leader (or representative) of the largest parliamentary party as a formateur after the election. If the formateur finds an agreement with majority support for his government in parliament, the president appoints him or her as prime minister and, on the PM proposal, appoints the members of the cabinet. The new government is then obliged to submit its programme statement to parliament within 30 days and win the support of majority of MPs.

According to Constitution, parliament has the opportunity to express a vote of no confidence in the government or its individual members at any time, and the president has to dismiss the cabinet or the individual minister. Likewise, the president dismisses a member of the government on the proposal of its prime minister. However, the Constitution does not make it clear whether the president is obliged to appoint and remove a member of the government on the proposal of the prime minister. Although a 1999 amendment to the Constitution was intended to oblige the president to respect the prime minister's proposals, the legal interpretation of this article is still ambiguous (Balog and Trellová 2010). The powers of the president towards the government were strengthened by a major amendment to the

Table 11.1a Slovakian cabinets 1992–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Mečiar I | 1992-06-24 | 1992-06-06 | ĽS-HZDS, SNS | mwc | 89 (59.3) | 150 | 5 | 3.19 | |
| 2 | Mečiar II | 1993-03-19 | | ĽS-HZDS | min | 74 (49.3) | 150 | 5 | 3.19 | SDL |
| 3 | Mečiar III | 1993-11-10 | | ĽS-HZDS, SNS | mwc | 89 (59.3) | 150 | 5 | 3.19 | |
| 4 | Moravčík | 1994-03-16 | | DUS, SDL, KDH | min | 74 (49.3) | 150 | 6 | 4.68 | |
| 5 | Mečiar IV | 1994-12-13 | 1994-10-01 | ĽS-HZDS, ZRS, SNS | mwc | 83 (55.3) | 150 | 7 | 4.41 | |
| 6 | Dzurinda I | 1998-10-30 | 1998-09-26 | SDK, SDL, SMK, SOP | sur | 93 (62) | 150 | 6 | 4.75 | |
| 7 | Dzurinda II | 2002-10-16 | 2002-09-22 | SDKU-DS, SMK, KDH, ANO | mwc | 78 (52) | 150 | 7 | 6.12 | |
| 8 | Dzurinda III | 2005-09-01 | | SDKU-DS, SMK, KDH | min | 63 (42) | 150 | 7 | 6.31 | Independent MPs who left ANO |
| 9 | Dzurinda IV | 2006-02-08 | | SDKU-DS, SMK | min | 48 (32) | 150 | 7 | 6.31 | Independent MPs who left ANO |
| 10 | Fico I | 2006-07-04 | 2006-06-17 | Smer-SD, SNS, ĽS-HZDS | mwc | 85 (56.7) | 150 | 6 | 4.81 | |
| 11 | Radičová | 2010-07-09 | 2010-06-12 | SDKU-DS, SaS, KDH, MH | mwc | 79 (52.7) | 150 | 6 | 4.01 | |
| 12 | Fico II | 2012-04-04 | 2012-03-10 | Smer-SD | maj | 83 (55.3) | 150 | 6 | 2.88 | |
| 13 | Fico III | 2016-03-23 | 2016-03-05 | Smer-SD, SNS, MH, Siet' | mwc | 81 (54) | 150 | 8 | 5.75 | |
| 14 | Fico IV | 2016-08-31 | | Smer-SD, SNS, MH | mwc | 81 (54) | 150 | 8 | 5.67 | |
| 15 | Pellegrini | 2018-03-22 | 2016-03-05 | Smer-SD, SNS, MH | mwc | 78 (52) | 150 | 7 | 5.71 | |
| 16 | Matovič | 2020-03-21 | 2020-02-29 | OĽaNO, SR, SaS, ZL | sur | 95 (63.3) | 150 | 6 | 4.37 | |
| 17 | Heger | 2021-04-01 | | OĽaNO, SR, SaS, ZL | sur | 93 (62) | 150 | 9 | 5.25 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has been formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); maj = single-party majority cabinet; mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition.

Constitution approved by the parliament in 2011. This amendment says that a caretaker government may exercise some of its powers only with the prior consent of the president.

So far, the presidents have always respected that the formation of the government is a matter for the negotiations among the parliamentary parties. Nevertheless, this is an informal rule. Since 2008, the president has used the opportunity to influence the composition of the government only once. In 2018, the president made the appointment of the prime minister and the government conditional on changing the nominee to the Minister of the Interior, which was accepted by the coalition. It cannot be completely ruled out that a more activist president could become an important player in the formation of the government and the governing coalition in the future.

The Constitution provides limited possibilities for the president to call early elections. It should be done only under exceptional circumstances such as the inaction of parliament or a failed referendum on the removal of the president. In previous practice, early elections were held by approval of the constitutional law by the parliament but a decision² of the Constitutional Court in 2021 declared this procedure unconstitutional.

The party system and the actors

After a period in the 1990s which was marked by the authoritarian style of Prime Minister Mečiar, which made national identity and democracy the basis of party competition, in the new millennium, as indicated in [Table 11.1b](#), the left-right divide increasingly became the dominant dimension with two blocs of parties alternating in government (Szomolányi and Karvai 2019). The first two terms after 2008 confirmed this division even though an imbalance was evident. Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-SD) was the dominant force of the left and it was able to integrate most of the left-wing parties (including

Table 11.1b Slovakian system conflict structure 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 10 | Fico I | ĽS-HZDS | Econ. left-right | Smer-SD | |
| 11 | Radičová | MH | Econ. left-right | Smer-SD | |
| 12 | Fico II | Smer-SD | Econ. left-right | Smer-SD | |
| 13 | Fico III | LSNS | Econ. left-right | Smer-SD | GAL-TAN |
| 14 | Fico IV | LSNS | Econ. left-right | Smer-SD | GAL-TAN |
| 15 | Pellegrini | LSNS | Econ. left-right | Smer-SD | GAL-TAN |
| 16 | Matovič | OĽaNO | Econ. left-right | OĽaNO | GAL-TAN |
| 17 | Heger | OĽaNO | Econ. left-right | OĽaNO | GAL-TAN |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2006–2012 (cabinets 10–12) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

the communist successor party, which lost relevance after 2002) as well as a large part of Vladimir Mečiar's former supporters. The right remained fragmented with frequent reconfigurations and mergers. The right-wing parties differed mainly in their attitudes to cultural issues – cultural conservatism was represented by Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), a more moderate approach by Slovak Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS), cultural liberalism by Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) and Bridge (MH) representing Hungarian minority.

The early termination of the right-wing coalition in 2012 resulted in sweeping victory for Smer-SD, which for the first time since the fall of communism was able to form a one-party majority government (Malová and Dolný 2016). Despite the right-wing parties weakening at the polls, they all returned to parliament and further confirmed the dominance of the L/R dimension and the consolidation of the party system. The only new party was Common People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO), led by an eccentric businessman Igor Matovič. His anti-corruption, anti-party, and anti-establishment appeal combined with an aggressive and confrontational but unconventional style of communication easily gained media attention. As it turned out, the success of OĽaNO was not just an episodic exception. It foreshadowed not only the emergence of new anti-establishment protest parties (Hanley and Sikk 2016) but also new issues structuring the party system, which proved important in the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections.

The party system and the election competition thus gained new dynamics in 2016 (Rybář and Spáč 2017). In 2016, the new political parties in parliament were all dominated by their leaders and this brought about new cultural issues and anti-establishment style of politics: the Slovak National Party (SNS) emphasized national populism and a strong state; Network (Sieť) new state management; We Are Family (SR) populism and cultural conservatism; and People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) represented the neo-fascist extreme right.

This shift was based on two key moments. The first was the migration crisis. Although Slovakia was not directly affected, migration evoked negative emotions and fears of most citizens. The Smer-SD tried to take advantage of the crisis before the elections and put this issue at the forefront of its campaign. This has only helped the new radical and extremist parties with the mobilization of anti-migration appeals (Baboš and Malová 2017). The second reason was the ever-growing popularity of non-mainstream alternatives, promising a new, different politics. This was clearly rooted in the dissatisfaction with the way established parties govern, plagued by allegations of corruption and against the power of oligarchs in political parties and state institutions. The continuation of the Smer-SD-led government after the 2016 elections reinforced this dissatisfaction and it fully erupted after the assassination of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak (and his partner) in February 2018. This provoked not only mass protests that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico. Subsequent investigation revealed links or even control of state institutions, including the police, by oligarchs, systematic corruption, and criminal

activity by people close to the governing parties. It is therefore not surprising that at the 2020 elections the role of Smer-SD, which was the only party of the former coalition to get into parliament, significantly weakened. As at all previous elections, voters punished the government parties (Roberts 2008). This however does not seem to affect the parties' ambition to participate in government. Igor Matovič and his OĽaNO movement became a clear, albeit surprising, winner of the election. With a clever campaign, he managed to grasp the key issue of corruption (Bútorová 2020) and multiply his support during the last few weeks before the elections. The new centrist party of former President Andrej Kiska, For People (ZL), also entered parliament but this party eventually and gradually split.

In addition to changes in the party system, the organizational features of the parties are also important for coalition governance. With a few exceptions (KDH, SNS), all parliamentary parties in Slovakia after 2008 emerged as projects founded by their leaders either by fragmentations and divisions of parliamentary parties or as projects of political entrepreneurs seeking to gain political influence. This development can be attributed to the proportional electoral system with a single national district, which contributes to the importance of leaders and the personalization of politics.

As a result, the influence of ordinary members on party decision-making is marginal. Key decisions such as joining a governing coalition are under the control of the leader himself, or the top leadership of the party (Dolný and Malová 2016). The rise of new parties, especially after 2016, shows that established organizational structures and stable membership base are not necessary for electoral success.

Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions

The formation of electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions is not common in Slovakia (see [Table 11.1c](#)), probably due to a higher parliamentary threshold for coalitions. The threshold increases for coalitions of parties – a coalition of two and three parties needs to get 7 per cent of the vote, a coalition of more than three parties 10 per cent. Actually, before our observation period, it happened that the overall election results for large pre-electoral alliances were lower than the sum of the electoral preferences for the individual parties (Szomolányi and Karvai 2019).

Table 11.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Slovakia, 2006–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--|
| 2020-02-29 | SaS, ZL, KDH, PS-Spolu | PEC | Written contract |

Notes:

Type: electoral alliance (EA) and/or pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

Before the 2020 elections, however, opposition parties in face of the still dominant Smer-SD tried to create pre-election cooperation called the ‘Non-Aggression Pact’ to show voters their ability to work and prospectively govern together. The process was not smooth: the first agreement was signed by only two non-parliamentary opposition parties. SaS and ZL joined later, after fulfilling the requirements, namely accepting mutual ‘non-aggression’ in the election campaign, excluding any post-election cooperation with the Smer-SD, SNS, and ĽSNS, and a commitment to negotiate after the elections. Overall, however, the signing of the agreement proved counterproductive. During the long process of its preparation, the disagreements between the parties became wide open, in addition the voters of the conservative KDH perceived this cooperation with the liberal parties as a betrayal of the party’s principles (Bútorová 2020: 45). This eventually led to the party’s (KDH) failure in the election. The agreement had no impact on the post-election coalition negotiations either, as two of the four parties did not gain any seats in parliament and SaS and ZL represent only a minority in the government after the 2020 elections. Instead the election brought about the success of the opposition parties that did not participate in preparatory agreement.

Government formation

The bargaining process

As Table 11.2 shows, coalition negotiations are short, never longer than one month. In the case of ideologically close right-wing parties in 2010, it was no surprise that the bargaining process took a bit of time. First, the president formally appointed the chairman of the strongest parliamentary party, Smer-SD, to form a government, none of the right-wing parties that won a majority in the election agreed to negotiate with Smer-SD party leader Fico. As their strong motivation was to replace Smer-SD, eventually the right-wing parties were then able to agree despite some controversies, mainly on cultural issues.

The situation after the 2016 elections was significantly different. Due to the success of the far-right ĽSNS, none of the blocs alternating in the previous few periods in the government could master a majority. Complicated coalition negotiations or even early elections were expected (Rybář and Spáč 2017) but in the end party rules proved decisive (Strøm et al 1994). All parliamentary parties had resolutely ruled out cooperation with ĽSNS. The right-wing SaS and OĽaNO parties based their successful election campaign on a commitment not to join a coalition with Smer-SD. A new party – SR – declared it would not join any government but did not rule out its backing of a government without Smer-SD (Baboš and Malová 2017). The situation was quickly resolved when SNS, which became pivotal party, accepted the invitation of Smer-SD to start coalition negotiations (Rybář and Spáč 2017). The day after, the leaders of MH and Sieť also joined in. Despite the ideological heterogeneity of these parties, the coalition in 2016 (Fico III) was a quickly agreed government.

Table 11.2 Government formation period in Slovakia, 2006–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses) | | |
|------------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Fico I | 2006 | 1 | Smer-SD, SNS, ĽS-HZDS SDKU-DS, SMK, KDH, ĽS-HZDS | 12 11 | 17 | 12 | 80 | 0 | 55 |
| Radičová | 2010 | 1 | SDKU-DS, SaS, KDH, MH | 20 | 27 | 22 | 79 | 0 | 66 |
| Fico II | 2012 | 0 | Smer-SD | 1 | 176 | 1 | 83 | 0 | 67 |
| Fico III | 2016 | 0 | Smer-SD, SNS, MH, Siet' | 10 | 17 | 13 | 79 | 2 | 61 |
| Fico IV | 2016 | 0 | Smer-SD, SNS, MH | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Pellegrini | 2018 | 0 | Smer-SD, SNS, MH | 6 | 7 | 6 | 81 | 2 | 61 |
| Matovič | 2020 | 0 | OĽaNO, SR, SaS, ZL | 18 | 21 | 18 | 93 | 0 | 48 |
| Heger | 2021 | 0 | OĽaNO, SR, SaS, ZL | 0 | 0 | 0 | 89 | 6 | 55 |

Apparently neither the deputies nor the members of the central bodies of MH and Siet were informed about this fundamental turnaround. As a result, some members and deputies left these parties in protest.³ According to one of the ministers who took part in the coalition negotiations, a welcoming approach prevailed by Smer-SD and accepting the programme and personnel demands of the partners led to a quick agreement.

As mentioned above, this government had a fast end in 2018. After the resignation of Prime Minister Fico, the same coalition aimed to proceed and the Vice-President of Smer-SD Peter Pellegrini delivered to the president the signatures of 79 deputies who guaranteed support for the new government. The president was able to use his powers and influenced the composition of the new cabinet however. He requested the nomination of ministers for the new government before the authorization to form a government was granted and made its granting conditional on the replacement of the proposed candidate of the Minister of the Interior (as a sensitive post responsible for investigating the murder of a journalist) which was achieved. The process of changing the government took only a few days.

After the 2020 elections, coalition negotiations were again fast. OĽaNO was the largest party with 53 seats, and Smer-SD was pushed to opposition with 38 seats. Although several combinations of minimal-winning coalitions were possible, eventually a surplus majority government formed, including SaS, SR, and ZL. In this way, they could ensure constitutional changes, limit the blackmail potential of small parties, and be safe against defections from parliamentary groups of government parties. Despite their heterogeneity both in economic and cultural issues, they were united by a markedly negative attitude towards Smer-SD and the will to cleanse the government of systematic corruption and connection with the oligarchs. Coalition negotiations in 2020 were swift, even though three of the four parties have no experience with participating in government. As in 2016, the parties focused primarily on office distribution and their programme priorities and did not agree on individual policy areas. The pressure for a quick agreement was intensified by the pandemic, which required government decision-making with clear parliamentary support.

The formation of Eduard Heger's government after the resignation of Prime Minister Matovič in 2021 was similar to the case of Peter Pellegrini's government in 2018. The party composition and distribution of posts did not change in any way. The only change was the swap of the posts of Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, which aimed to change the way of government management introduced by Prime Minister Matovič and at the same time still guarantee him as the leader of the winning party influence in the government by holding a key ministry.

The composition and size of cabinets

The number and structure of ministries stabilized after 2010 and did not change until 2020 (see [Table 11.3](#) for details). In addition to the prime minister and the ministers managing the ministries, the government during this

Table 11.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Slovakian coalitions, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Social Affairs</i> | <i>5. Interior</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Fico I | 2006 | 11 Smer-SD, 3 SNS, 2 ĽS-HZDS | 16 | 7 SNS, 5 Smer-SD, 3 ĽS-HZDS | 15 | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD |
| Radičová | 2010 | 5 SDKU-DS, 4 SaS, 3 KDH, 3 MH | 15 | 3 SaS, 3 SDKU-DS, 3 Ind., 2 MH, 1 KDH | 13 | SDKU-DS | SDKU-DS | SDKU-DS | SaS | KDH |
| Fico III | 2016 | 9 Smer-SD, 3 SNS, 2 MH, 1 Sieť | 15 | 13 Smer-SD, 5 MH, 5 SNS, 3 Sieť | 14 | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD |
| Fico IV | 2016 | 9 Smer-SD, 3 SNS, 3 MH | 15 | 14 Smer-SD, 5 MH, 5 SNS | 14 | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD |
| Pellegrini | 2018 | 9 Smer-SD, 3 SNS, 3 MH | 15 | 14 Smer-SD, 7 MH, 5 SNS | 14 | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD | Smer-SD |
| Matovič | 2020 | 8 OĽaNO, 3 SaS, 3 SR, 2 ZL | 16 | 1 OĽaNO, 1 KDH, 1 SaS, 1 ZL | 15 | OĽaNO | OĽaNO | SaS | SR | OĽaNO |
| Heger | 2021 | 8 OĽaNO, 3 SaS, 3 SR, 2 ZL | 16 | 1 KDH, 1 ZL | 15 | OĽaNO | OĽaNO | SaS | SR | OĽaNO |

period also included one Deputy Prime Minister without a permanent organizational structure. He managed a specially assigned agenda reflecting the importance of some policy for the government.

Although the parties try to avoid unpopular increases in the number of members of the government, the coalition agreed in 2020 to establish a new ministry by transforming the Deputy Prime Minister for Investments into a separate ministry that will address the long-standing problem of managing EU funds. This centralization of the management of EU funds may in the future also affect the attractiveness of some ministries in coalition bargaining. However, the number of cabinet members has increased as the post of Deputy Prime Minister without a permanent organizational structure was retained. The new agenda of legislative coordination was assigned to this post, which is important for fulfilling the priority of SR to start rapid and massive construction of rental housing.

The allocation of ministerial portfolios

The allocation of ministerial portfolios follows the share of parties' parliamentary mandates. The post of prime minister always belongs to the leader of the strongest coalition party. One of the few unwritten rules is that the Ministry of Finance – as the second most important position in the cabinet – would also belong to the largest coalition party. The importance of this post has not increased significantly during the economic crisis as the negative economic impact of the crisis was rather brief and moderated by high state budget deficits (Malová and Dolný 2016).

Other portfolios are allocated by the policy priorities of the parties, the professional orientation of the party's top members, and the intention to maintain 'balance' according to the perception of the ministries' importance. As confirmed by interviews, a certain hierarchy of ministries is acknowledged. The power ministries (defence, interior), the economic ministries (finance, economy, social affairs), and the ministries controlling large investments from EU funds (transport, agriculture) are regarded as the most important. Less preferred ministerial portfolios relate to education, health, justice, which tend to require politically sensitive reforms. The Ministries of Culture, Foreign Affairs, and the Environment are considered to be the least attractive. In the case of all coalition negotiations since 2010, the redistribution of posts was relatively smooth and the priorities of all parties were respected. It is interesting that since 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has always been a respected diplomat without party affiliation.

Coalition agreements

With the exception of the governments in the early 1990s, all Slovak coalition cabinets have been based on a written coalition agreement. These have described the decision-making procedures and mechanisms for conflict

Table 11.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Slovakia, 2006–2021

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Fico I | 2006 | 1475 | 20 | 0 | 35 | 0 | 45 |
| Radičová | 2010 | 7458 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 78 |
| Fico III | 2016 | 2908 | 42 | 1 | 16 | 1 | 27 |
| Fico IV | 2016 | 2908 | 42 | 1 | 16 | 1 | 27 |
| | | 3813 | 50 | 1 | 14 | 0 | 21 |
| Pellegrini | 2018 | 3813 | 50 | 1 | 14 | 0 | 21 |
| Matovič | 2020 | 2830 | 30 | 14 | 11 | 6 | 25 |
| Heger | 2021 | 2830 | 30 | 14 | 11 | 6 | 25 |

resolutions, the allocation of posts both in the cabinet and parliament, and an outline of policy priorities. These coalition agreements, signed by the leaders of the parties, are the only binding documents that regulate the coalition parties' relations. Differences in their size (see [Table 11.4](#)) are primarily due to the scope of the policy priorities. At one extreme, the coalition agreement of the Radičová government in 2010 largely consists of programme priorities. The coalition agreements after 2016 are shorter and very similar in scope, structure, and content. They largely focus on the general rules that regulate the way the coalition works, and far less space is devoted to policies. This indicated that the mechanisms of cooperation and distribution of offices are the most important for parties. The speed of coalition negotiation both in 2016 and 2020 might also explain the lack of detailed policy proposals. Moreover, in 2020, the coalition agreement contains programme objectives, separately for each party. Yet, the parties and the public do not seem to attribute high importance to policy components of the coalition agreements. Policies are instead prominent in the government's programme statement, which the government must submit to parliament before the first vote of confidence. Coalition agreements in Slovakia usually do not contain agreements on specific procedural rules and distribution of competencies – with the exception of the 2020 coalition agreement. This agreement devotes 14 per cent of its content to procedural rules and distribution, the reason being that the competencies of the newly established Ministry of Investment and Informatization are outlined here.

In 2020, the process of signing the coalition agreement also changed, namely that in a ceremonial act all government MPs (and not only the party leaders) signed the document. This was an expression of the concerns about the coherence and unity of the coalition parliamentary groups and an attempt to implement moral pressure on MPs to support the government even if they leave the party.

Interestingly, in the 2016–2020 election period, the coalition agreement was signed up to three times. The first agreement was signed after the

elections and re-signing was necessary after only a few months when Sief disintegrated but apart from the relocation of its posts the content of the agreement did not change. The third agreement occurred in 2017, when the chairman of the SNS unexpectedly terminated the coalition agreement and demanded new settings for relations in the coalition. The reason was that the prime minister pressed to replace the Minister of Education after the scandal concerning the distribution of EU funds in the ministry, which the SNS chairman considered an interference in the party's decision-making autonomy. The minister resigned and eventually new coalition cooperation bodies (regional coalition councils, meetings of parliamentary club presidents) were set up and the share of general rules increased. However, the new bodies did not have any influence on the coalition governance. The resignations of Robert Fico in 2018 and Igor Matovič in 2021 did not impact on or alter the coalition agreements.

Coalition governance

The role of individual ministers in policy-making

The key powers of the Prime Minister in Slovakia are determined by the Constitution, providing him control over the composition of the cabinet by proposing appointments and removals of its members to the president. As mentioned before, it is not univocal whether the president is always obliged to respect the prime minister's proposals, but throughout the period under review, the president did not reject the formal proposals of the prime minister to appoint or remove a member of the government. Still, the need to form coalition governments in fact limits the prime minister's ability to determine the composition of the cabinet. Generally, the prime ministers respected the nominations of the coalition partners for the positions that belonged to them under the coalition agreement – with some exceptions. On one occasion – as has already been mentioned – in 2017, Prime Minister Fico openly pushed the SNS to replace its nominee. Then in 2009 Fico openly violated the coalition agreement and 'withdrew' from the SNS the Ministry of the Environment and replaced their minister with a member of his own party due to multiple corruption scandal allegations. At other occasions, the rule on the exclusive decision of a party on its nominees significantly restricts the prime minister's ability to shape his cabinet. This was evident in the government of Igor Matovič, when after disputes with the Minister of Economy (who was also the chairman of SaS) over the pandemic in December 2020, he described him as an idiot in an emotional radio interview and called for his resignation. Nevertheless, he did not propose the removal of the Minister to the president and respected the rules set out in the coalition agreement.

The model of the autonomous position of ministers in their ministries prevailed in all election periods until 2020. As confirmed by interviews with

members of the government, the prime minister did not intervene in their decisions, did not initiate issues to solve, nor did he give them direct tasks. His main function apparently was to coordinate, ensure the smooth negotiation of the government, and address priority issues. Consensual decision-making was the rule and voting took place only exceptionally. Such a setting of the cabinet model did not change even during the single-party majority government of Smer. In 2018, Prime Minister Fico initiated so-called control days in all ministries with the intention to evaluate the implementation of the government manifesto with individual ministers and set priorities for the next period. However, as one of the members of the government revealed in the interview, this control of the ministers by the prime minister served only as a presentation to the public and did not influence decisions of the ministers.

In the period of Igor Matovič's cabinet, the government's agenda and its decision-making have been fundamentally affected by the pandemic. The need for crisis management required the coordination of decision-making, which strengthened the position of the prime minister. The prime minister has *de facto* taken the lead in resolving the crisis and has been heavily involved in the measures taken. As part of this, he bypassed established institutional decision-making processes, politicized expertise to gain legitimacy in response to public reactions (Buščíková and Baboš 2020). In a number of cases, the government did not decide on fundamental measures by consensus, but by a majority decision. The deteriorating situation during the second wave of the pandemic, chaotic decision-making processes together with frequent changes in measures led to growing controversies between the prime minister and other parties in the coalition eventually led to a government crisis and the prime minister's resignation. The situation calmed down for a while after the nomination of the new Prime Minister Heger, but his success is limited by his loyalty to the party chairman Matovič. Moreover, Matovič in his new position as Minister of Finance continues to promote his own controversial proposals, emotional communication, and harsh criticism of the coalition partners, especially the chairman of SaS to whom he attributes responsibility for failures in the fight against the pandemic.

In general, we can observe an inclination towards Ministerial Government Model based on the division of power between the individual parties and their ministers. The pandemic, together with the personality and populist decision-making style of Prime Minister Matovič, significantly affected the decision-making of the cabinet and highlighted the role of the prime minister in line with Dominant Prime Minister Model. The change of the prime minister in 2021 did not eliminate tensions and disputes in the coalition, which complicates coalition governance, especially in times of crisis.

Coalition governance in the executive arena

Junior ministers (called state secretaries) serve as deputy ministers and can also replace ministers at the cabinet meetings although with only an advisory vote.

Each ministry usually has two junior ministers proposed by a minister and appointed by the government. The Minister also determines the part of the ministry's agenda for which the junior minister is responsible. Before 2010, junior ministers were representatives of a coalition party other than that of the minister (see Table 11.3). This method of mutual control of cabinet members by coalition parties was abandoned in Radičová cabinet in 2010 (Szomolányi and Karvai 2019: 464). After the 2016 elections, the governing coalition apparently returned to the model of cross-control and the distribution was even agreed in the coalition agreement. Nevertheless, the abilities of junior ministers to control the ministers were limited in practice and largely dependent on the minister's assignment of any agenda to the junior minister. This caused controversies between coalition parties.⁴

Following the 2020 elections, the new coalition introduced the model of full control and responsibility of the party for its ministry, implying that the nominations of junior ministers are fully within the competence of the ministers and their parties. The obligation to respect the Minister's proposal for these positions is also stated in the coalition agreement.⁵ Nevertheless, two junior ministerial posts were also won by representatives of another party from which the minister came. They did not have the role of a watchdog, but the intention was to implement their professional expertise at the ministry. This model quickly proved to be dysfunctional when junior ministers found that they had no influence on decision-making in these departments and resigned from their posts. Developments in this area of coalition cooperation also point to the gradual implementation of the Ministerial Government Model, which recognizes the autonomy of ministers and political parties within their ministry.

At the executive level, no specific institutions have been established in Slovakia that would have an impact on coalition governance (such as the inner cabinet). If necessary, the issues are resolved by the relevant minister among themselves on an ad hoc basis, or the dispute is submitted to the coalition council.

Governance mechanisms in the parliamentary arena

The basic mechanisms of governance in parliament were explicitly regulated in the coalition agreement in all periods and in similar ways. The chairmen of the parliamentary groups play a key role in the process of coordination and securing the support of coalition MPs for government proposals. For amending government proposals by coalition members in parliament, coalition agreements require the approval of the chairmen of all coalition parliamentary party groups and the consent of the member of the government who submitted the proposal. If some coalition MPs raise objections on the proposed legislation which they are unable to reconcile with the minister, the chairmen of the parliamentary groups will exclude it from the parliamentary session and it is submitted to the coalition council.

Coalition agreements also contain provisions prohibiting joint action with the opposition parties. The 2020 coalition agreement stipulates that opposition proposals can only be supported after their approval by the coalition council. Both 2016 and 2020 coalition agreements oblige the coalition not to initiate a vote of no confidence or participate in such votes. These mechanisms have a clear goal to ensure smooth support for not only government proposals in parliament but also full control of the government and government parties over the final form of the adopted legislation. At the same time, it marginalizes the opposition in the legislative process. The procedures introduced by the coalition agreements were also confirmed by the interviews. The government proposals did not have automatic support in parliament and the concerns of the MPs were resolved through the chairmen of the parliamentary groups. If the minister could not find support even after these negotiations, the coalition council discussed the proposal although this was a rare occasion.

Governance mechanisms with different types of actors (mixed)

The most important decision-making body of each Slovak coalition remains the coalition council, as before (see Szomolányi and Karvai 2019: 455). The Coalition Council usually consists of leaders and top representatives of the coalition parties (usually three to four members per coalition party). Its members are the chairmen of the parties, vice-chairmen, and some ministers or other officials, depending on the agenda under discussion. It meets regularly and relatively often (once every one or two weeks), or it can be convened at any time by one of the coalition parties. As [Table 11.5](#) shows, the coalition council is the primary (and currently the only) mechanism for resolving coalition conflicts. The negotiations are not public. Coalition agreements presuppose a consensual decision-making by the coalition council, which is usually the case. In addition, the 2020 coalition agreement provides for an explicit right of veto for each party on any issue. If a party does not exercise the veto option, majority decision-making is also possible. Coalition council meetings are usually held a few days before government meetings, so they serve not only as a mechanism for conflict resolution between coalition parties but also as a platform for leaders to reach an agreement before the government's decisions. Interviews have confirmed that the coalition council is a key body where decisions are actually made, either in case of conflict between coalition parties or to coordinate cooperation in government and parliament.

The coalition agreement in 2016 also allowed for a meeting of the 'expanded' coalition council, where two additional representatives of each party can be invited aimed to include the chairmen of the parliamentary groups.⁶ In addition to the coalition council, informal ad hoc meetings of coalition party chairmen also appeared during this period, but the final decisions were always taken by the coalition council.

Table 11.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Slovakia, 1992–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | Most common | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Fico I | 2006 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PS | CoC | CoC | No (SNS, ĽS-HZDS) | No | No/No | No | Varied | No | Yes |
| Radičová | 2010 | POST | Yes | No | CoC | CoC | CoC | No (MH, SaS) | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Fico III | 2016 | POST | Yes | No | CoC, PS | CoC | CoC | No (SNS, MH, Siet) | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Fico IV | 2016 | IE | Yes | No | CoC, PS | CoC | CoC | No (SNS, MH) | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Pellegrini | 2018 | IE | Yes | No | CoC, PS | CoC | CoC | No (Smer-SD, SNS, MH) | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Matovič | 2020 | POST | Yes | No | CoC | CoC | CoC | No (SR, ZL) | No | Most/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Heger | 2021 | IE | Yes | No | CoC | CoC | CoC | No (SR) | No | Most/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |

Notes:

During periods where the values for the variables remain identical, the first and last applicable cabinets are listed. The last applicable cabinet is right-justified in the coalition column.

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; POST = post-election.

Conflict management mechanisms: CaC = cabinet committee; CoC = coalition committee; PS = party summit.

Coalition discipline: all = discipline always expected; most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters, no = discipline not expected.

Policy agreement: varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; comp. = comprehensive policy agreement; no = no explicit agreement.

Cabinet duration and termination

As Table 11.6 shows, with one exception, all the coalition cabinets ended prematurely after 2008 (Müller and Strøm 2008: 12; Strøm et al 2008: 139). The reasons for their termination were different and the change in the cabinet did not necessarily mean a change in the party composition or the patterns of coalition governance.

Table 11.6 Cabinet termination in Slovakia, 2006–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration of cabinet (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|-----------------------|---|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Fico I Radičová | 99.7 32 | 1 4, 6, 7a | SaS, SDKU-DS, MH, KDH | | The government did not succeed in vote of no confidence, since the vote was held together with the vote on EFSF, and SaS abstained on the vote, thus the government did not gain the confidence of the parliament |
| Fico II Fico III | 99.7 | 1 8 | Siet | | Disintegration of the ‘Siet’, change to a three-party coalition |
| Fico IV | | 7b | 11 | Smer-SD, MH | Mass protests and the political crisis after the murder of investigative journalist J. Kuciak with demands for resignation of PM Fico and Ministry of Interior. These demands are supported by MH. The coalition continued with a new prime minister and a reconstructed government |
| Pellegrini Matovič | | 1 7a | OĽaNO, SaS, ZL | | Resigned after his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Matovič bought Russia’s coronavirus vaccine without consulting his coalition partners in government |

Notes:

Technical terminations

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of prime minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event.

The termination of cabinets

The fall of the right-wing government of Iveta Radičová in 2012 was caused by a conflict between the coalition partners over the ratification of the European Financial Stability Facility extension (Szomolányi and Karvai 2019: 468). The conflict stemmed from the frustration of SaS, which as a new party was not able to enforce several priorities of its programme in the coalition. Although the proposal had the support of the opposition Smer-SD, it refused to help the government with its vote. Prime Minister Radičová decided to combine the vote on the proposal with the vote of confidence in the government, assuming that SaS will not risk the fall of the government. However, SaS decided to stick to a 'principled' position and did not support the pact. It was approved two days later after the three coalition parties agreed with Smer-SD on early elections. Even if the fall of the government was related to the financial crisis, this issue was instrumentally useful for the short-term domestic political goals of two parties (Szomolányi and Karvai 2019: 468) and it showed the political inexperience of the SaS, which sacrificed the government in favour of making its principles visible on an unimportant technical issue.

Robert Fico's cabinet formed after the elections in March 2016 (Fico III) lasted unchanged for only 160 days. The reason was a change in party composition, which was related to the disintegration of the smallest coalition party Siet'. The second change of cabinet in this term was much more dramatic and was caused by the popular opinion shock triggered by the assassination of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak in February 2018. Tensions and massive protests across the country were fuelled by revelations that the police did not act to protect the victim and that the prime minister's close associates were connected with a representative of the Italian mafia. Prime Minister Fico underestimated the seriousness of the situation, as his communication and reluctance to dismiss the Minister of the Interior only increased public anger and pressure for his own resignation. This development also became unacceptable for the MH, which decided to demand early elections also promoted by President Kiska. However, coalition crisis was finally resolved by Prime Minister Fico's decision to resign with the agreement of the coalition parties to create a cabinet under the leadership of Smer-SD Vice-President Peter Pellegrini. The parties thus opted for a pragmatic compromise that avoided the government crisis or early elections in a tense situation that would not be beneficial to either of them.

Igor Matovič's 2020 government lasted only about one year in office, when he resigned under pressure in March 2021 as a direct consequence of the pandemic crisis. The immediate reason for the government crisis was the prime minister's negotiated purchase of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, which was supposed to solve the slow vaccination caused by the lack of vaccines. The secret purchase of vaccines in Russia as well as widespread antigen testing was the prime minister's ideas and he implemented them secretly without consulting the coalition partners. The two smaller coalition parties, SaS and ZL, could no longer accept the prime minister's way of making decisions and demanded

his resignation together with the Minister of Health. Yet, it was only after the resignation of five members of the government and the realization that he could not maintain a majority in parliament that the Prime Minister reluctantly stepped down with an agreement on a new government where he exchanged posts with the Minister of Finance.

Conclusion

The study of coalition governance in Slovakia after 2008 shows important changes in the patterns of formation of government coalitions, but at the same time there was a certain settlement of rules of coalition governance corresponding to the Ministerial Government Model. New developments in the formation of coalition governments are largely due to changes in the party system. The growth of new parties emphasizing a new type of policy with anti-corruption and anti-establishment rhetoric after 2012 ended the pattern of alternating right and left governments based more on fairly coherent socioeconomic policies (Szomolányi and Karvai 2019: 471). The events of the assassination of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner and the subsequent political, public, and media pressure led not only to the first voluntary resignation of a prime minister since 1993 (Láštic 2019) but also to the dominance of corruption rule of law issues before the 2020 elections. Therefore, the question arises if and when the traditional L/R dimension again can still best capture the party competition in Slovakia, in a way that has been common in the CEE context, as argued by Bergman et al (2019). The emphasis on issues of corruption together with the entry of the extreme right into parliament without coalition potential implied the creation of less homogenous government coalitions. Still, the higher complexity of coalition negotiations has not impacted much on cabinet formation: government coalitions have always formed very quickly during this period. This indicates the priority of the office-seeking strategy of political parties in deciding to join the government, which is in line with the noted trend of neglecting policy programmes in coalition agreements. Complex policy programmes have with the new anti-establishment and populist parties been replaced by a small set of narrow programmatic preferences. This not only reduces the need for developed mutual control mechanisms (Falcó-Gimeno 2014) but also facilitates the parties' agreement in coalition negotiations. The smooth and fast coalition formations are also helped by the organizational character of the parties, namely leaders (founders) dominance without developed organizational structures. Thus, they are not constrained by the need to find compromises within their own party, as often is the case in negotiation processes in Western Europe (Diermeier and van Roozendaal 1998: 610).

The coalition governance was characterized by the stabilization of its rules and the strengthening of features Ministerial Government Model based on the division of power between individual parties and their ministers (Laver and Shepsle 1994, 1996). Ministers thus have control over government policies

in their areas, and coalition agreements also give them important opportunities to control legislation in parliament. During this period, ministerial power was further strengthened by the abandonment of the watchdog function of junior ministers by coalition partners. The autonomy of ministers is thus limited mainly by their own political party. As no permanent mechanisms for coalition control of cabinet members are established in coalition agreements, their control is limited to ad hoc objections to their proposals from coalition parties or members of parliament, which are resolved in the coalition council.

Since 2008, we have seen a trend of stabilization of patterns of coalition cooperation and governance in line with this model, and neither the economic crisis nor the migration crisis has practically affected them. However, we cannot say that these events have had no impact on Slovak politics. The government fell in 2012 related to the economic crisis, and the migration crisis was one of the topics of the election campaign in 2016 contributing to the importance of cultural issues and strengthening extremist and populist parties. In both cases, however, the impact of the two crises was relatively limited and did not have a fundamental influence on the patterns of coalition governance. In the case of the financial crisis, the economic downturn was only temporary, and thanks to the relatively low public debt, governments did not have to resort to significant cuts in government spending and absorbed the increased costs by increasing the deficit. The fall of the government in 2012 was rather a consequence of using this issue for short-term party goals. The migration crisis did not directly affect Slovakia at all, as it was not a destination or a transit corridor. The topic of migration did not even become a significant issue in the party competition, as we could not find any relevant party that would be open to accept migrants or refugees from the Middle East and Africa, or to change restrictive asylum policies.

In contrast, the Corona pandemic, which hit Slovakia just after the change of government, significantly disrupted the relatively stabilized patterns of coalition government and parliamentary democracy. Even though the crisis caught Slovakia organizationally and materially unprepared and it was not possible to use standard decision-making processes, the efforts of new Prime Minister Matovič to personally and innovatively manage the crisis disrupted some established rules of coalition governance. This approach, complemented by a new style of 'online' communication and a tendency to escalate conflicts with his opponents, caused rapidly deteriorating relations between coalition partners. This shows that populist leaders with unorthodox approaches, which do not fully respect established rules, do not only complicate coalition governance but in the extraordinary context even a shift towards the Dominant Prime Minister Model could also be observed.

Despite the disturbed relations and the complicated cooperation of the coalition parties, they were able to agree on a clear rejection of Russian aggression and aid to Ukraine (including military). So far, these events have not affected the coalition government in Slovakia. In contrast to the migration

crisis, Slovakia also adopted a welcoming approach to the wave of Ukrainian refugees who hit the country.

It is not easy to directly connect the way of coalition governance with the trends of quality of democracy in Slovakia, where we did not notice significant changes. In this period, Slovakia does not record significant illiberal tendencies, not even during the period of the majority one-party Smer-SD government in the period 2012–2016. There can be more explanations – negative authoritarian experiences from the period of Vladimír Mečiar’s rule, relatively developed civil society and independent media, lack of ideological motivations (see, e.g., Bakke and Sitter 2022). On the other hand, Slovakia has been struggling for a long time with insufficient functioning of the rule of law and systematic corruption. To some extent, the dominance of Smer-SD as a dominant force in governments for most of the period under review contributed to this. In addition to a popular programme combining social security with moderate conservatism, the party also brought an understanding of government and state institutions as resources and opportunities for systematic enrichment and influence for an interconnected network of top party officials and oligarchs.

Greater autonomy of ministers with little control from other parties in the coalition government since 2016 has enabled the continuation and further development of networks of ties between business and state officials. As the investigation after the murder of a journalist gradually showed, these structures were completely controlled by key state institutions (police, courts, prosecutor’s office, top representatives of state agencies), which can be described as state capture (Innes 2014). But it is hard to prove that the rules of coalition governance would be the cause of this situation or rather adapted to this approach.

Appendix: *List of parties*

Parties

| | |
|---------|--|
| KSS | Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická Strana Slovenska) |
| ZRS | Association of Workers in Slovakia (Združenie Robotníkov Slovenska) |
| SDL | Democratic Left (Strana Demokratickej L’avice) |
| SV | Common Choice (Spoločná Voľba) |
| Smer-SD | Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-Sociálna Demokracia) |
| SOP | Party of Civic Understanding (Strana Občianskeho Porozumenia) |
| ŠNS | Slovak National Party (Slovenská Národná Strana) |
| ĽS-HZDS | People’s Party-Movement for Democratic Slovakia (Ľudová Strana-Hnutie za Demokratické Slovensko) |
| SMK | Hungarian Coalition Party (Strana Maďarskej Koalície) |
| DUS | Democratic Union of Slovakia (Demokratická Únia Slovenska) |
| MH | Bridge (MOST-HÍD) |
| KDH | Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické Hnutie) |
| OĽaNO | Common People and Independent Personalities (Obyčajný ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti) |
| ANO | Alliance of the New Citizen (Aliancia Nového Občana) |
| SDK | Slovak Democratic Coalition (Slovenská Demokratická Koalícia) |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| SDKU-DS | Slovak Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (Slovenská Demokratická a Kresťanská Únia-Demokratická strana) |
| SaS | Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita) |
| ĽSNS | People's Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko) |
| Sieť | #Network (#Sieť) |
| SR | We Are Family (Sme rodina) |
| ZL | For People (Za ľudí) |
| HLAS-SD | Voice-Social Democracy (Hlas-sociálna demokracia) |
| Republika | Republic (Republika) |
| Z-NS | Life-National Party (Život-Národná strana) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Slovak in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Notes

- 1 The threshold increases for coalitions of parties – a coalition of two and three parties needs to get 7% of the vote, a coalition of more than three parties 10%.
- 2 Resolution of Constitutional Court 7/2021.
- 3 Sieť lost 3 members in parliament, MH 1, the government could rely on a majority of 83 MPs at the beginning of its term.
- 4 The chairman of the SNS, Andrej Danko, openly criticized the Ministry of Health, where, according to him, his junior minister ‘only made coffee’. A similar case was the junior minister by Smer-SD at the Ministry of Justice, to whom the Minister assigned a peripheral consumer protection agenda and completely cut her off from influence over the decision-making of the ministry.
- 5 With the exception of junior ministers in Ministry of Culture, which OLaNO leaves to the ZL party in a deal for the free voting of its members of parliament on ‘life protection’ (abortion) issues, not as a watchdogs.
- 6 In September 2017, after a sudden coalition crisis caused by the chairman of the SNS, the government parties signed an amendment to the coalition agreement, which introduced new bodies of regional and district coalition councils but there is no evidence that they have ever been convened.

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12 Slovenia

Newcomers as Prime Ministers. A New Mode of Coalition Governance?

Alenka Krašovec and Tomaž Krpič

Introduction

Since 2008, Slovenia has experienced turmoil, also caused by the global economic and financial crisis, the migration crisis in 2015, and the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. The Slovenian party system was already showing signs of destabilization at the turn of the century, with this becoming obvious at the 2011 early elections (Fink-Hafner 2020a). Accompanied by low legitimacy or even the collapse of trust in political institutions, strong criticism of corruption, and calls to re-establish the rule of law (Krašovec and Houghton 2014; Krašovec and Johannsen 2016; Fink-Hafner and Novak 2022), several new parties successfully entered the party system and three politically inexperienced prime ministers (PMs) from new parties emerged to lead cabinets. Including such parties in a cabinet can prove to be a special challenge for its formation, duration, and termination (Deschouwer 2008; Grotz and Weber 2016) due to their inexperience, frequent ideological vagueness, and the unpredictability of their behaviour. Such parties also frequently call for new politics, which might be manifested in coalition governance.

Despite the stable institutional settings in Slovenia, some re-arrangements of the patterns while forming and ending cabinets are visible when newcomer PMs were at the helm. They also introduced a stepping-down strategy instead of one, whereby coalition partners drop out as occurred under politically experienced PMs (Krašovec and Krpič 2019). Nevertheless, coalition governance has not changed significantly.

Institutional setting

The Slovenian institutional setting has remained in place since 1991. Only the electoral system saw minor alterations at the turn of the century. Slovenia has a bicameral parliament, where the National Assembly is the lower house, and the National Council is the upper house. The latter is often described as a corporatist body due to its composition: indirectly elected representatives of functional and local interests. The Council has no role in approving or dismissing cabinets, although it has some formal role in governance. The Council

holds the right to initiate legislation, albeit this power is rarely used – less than 10% of the draft legislation was initiated by the Council between 2008 and 2022 (National Assembly 2011, 2014, 2018, 2022). The Council may convey to the National Assembly its opinion on all matters, but the most important power it has concerning governance is its right to issue a veto on laws passed by the Assembly. This veto can, however, then be overridden in a separate vote by a majority of all MPs. In the 2008–2022 period, the Council issued vetoes on approximately 4% of all laws passed, yet most of these vetoes were overridden (Krašovec and Krpič 2019; National Assembly 2022). Until 2013, the National Council could demand a referendum on laws passed by the National Assembly. This happened only twice. Overall, the Council also does not act as a major institutional constraint on governance of the coalition.

The characteristics of the PR electoral system mean that the almost complete absence of pre-electoral coalitions or electoral alliances is unsurprising. The threshold at elections for the National Assembly has been relatively low at 4% since 2000. There are 8 constituencies, each with magnitude of 11. Despite several cycles of talks between parties about making changes to the electoral system, such as lifting the threshold, eliminating sub-districts, and simultaneously introducing a preferential vote, changes have not been introduced. However, among relevant parties, only the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) has argued in favour of a majoritarian electoral system (Fink-Hafner and Novak 2022).

The two-step process for forming a cabinet remains the same after having been first implemented in 1992, with the President of the Republic playing a role in it, albeit their role is chiefly representative and ceremonial in nature (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2019). After the parliamentary elections, the President nominates a candidate for the PM to the National Assembly. Cabinets are listed in [Table 12.1a](#).

If the President's candidate for PM does not receive the support of the majority of all National Assembly MPs (at least 46 votes), in the second round, the President can propose either the same candidate again or a fresh candidate. However, in a second round, any group of ten MPs and each of the parliamentary party groups can also propose a candidate. If no one is elected in the second round, a third one may follow within 48 hours. In the third round (where the President can also propose a candidate), a majority of present MPs is needed to elect a candidate. If no one is elected, the President dissolves the National Assembly and calls new elections.

If a PM is elected, they propose a list of ministerial candidates. Voting on candidates for ministers is made for an entire list of candidates. Only in the third round, if the first two rounds were inconclusive, are individual candidates voted for.

Several institutional mechanisms have provided the collective and individual accountability of ministers and entire cabinets to the National Assembly since 1991, also with a (potential) influence on coalition politics and cabinets in Slovenia.

Table 12.1a Slovenian cabinets 1990–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Date in</i> | <i>Election date</i> | <i>Party composition of cabinet</i> | <i>Type of cabinet</i> | <i>Cabinet strength in seats (%)</i> | <i>Number of seats in parliament</i> | <i>Number of parties in parliament</i> | <i>ENP, parliament</i> | <i>Formal support parties</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Peterle | 1990-05-16 | 1990-04-08 | SKD, SDZ, SLS, LS, ZS, SDS | sur | 47 (58.8) | 80 | 9 | 8.16 | |
| 2 | Drnovšek I | 1992-05-14 | | LDS, SDP, SDS, ZS, SDZ, SSS | sur | 53 (66.3) | 80 | 9 | 8.16 | |
| 3 | Drnovšek II | 1993-01-25 | 1992-12-06 | LDS, SKD, SD, SDS | sur | 55 (61.1) | 90 | 8 | 6.59 | |
| 4 | Drnovšek III | 1994-03-29 | | LDS, SKD, SD | mwc | 51 (56.7) | 90 | 8 | 6.59 | |
| 5 | Drnovšek IV | 1996-01-31 | | LDS, SKD | min | 45 (50) | 90 | 7 | 5.08 | |
| 6 | Drnovšek V | 1997-02-27 | 1996-11-10 | LDS, SLS, DeSUS | mwc | 49 (54.4) | 90 | 7 | 5.52 | |
| 7 | Bajuk | 2000-06-07 | | SLS, SDS, SKD | min | 45 (50) | 90 | 7 | 5.52 | |
| 8 | Drnovšek VI | 2000-11-30 | 2000-10-15 | LDS, SLS, SD | mwc | 54 (60) | 90 | 8 | 4.85 | SMS, DeSUS |
| 9 | Rop I | 2002-12-19 | | LDS, SD, SLS, DeSUS | sur | 58 (64.4) | 90 | 8 | 4.85 | |
| 10 | Rop II | 2004-04-04 | | LDS, SD, DeSUS | mwc | 49 (54.4) | 90 | 8 | 4.87 | |
| 11 | Janša I | 2004-12-03 | 2004-10-03 | SDS, NSi-KLS, SLS, DeSUS | mwc | 49 (54.4) | 90 | 7 | 4.89 | |
| 12 | Pahor I | 2008-11-21 | 2008-09-21 | SD, Zares, DeSUS, LDS | mwc | 50 (55.6) | 90 | 7 | 4.42 | |
| 13 | Pahor II | 2011-05-09 | | SD, Zares, LDS | min | 42 (46.7) | 90 | 7 | 4.57 | |
| 14 | Pahor III | 2011-06-27 | | SD, LDS | min | 33 (36.7) | 90 | 7 | 4.57 | |
| 15 | Janša II | 2012-02-10 | 2011-12-04 | SDS, NSi-KLS, SLS, DeSUS, DL | sur | 50 (55.6) | 90 | 7 | 4.72 | |
| 16 | Janša III | 2013-01-23 | | SDS, NSi-KLS, SLS, DeSUS | min | 41 (45.6) | 90 | 7 | 4.76 | |
| 17 | Bratušek | 2013-03-20 | | PS, SD, DL, DeSUS | mwc | 50 (55.6) | 90 | 7 | 4.76 | |
| 18 | Cerar | 2014-09-18 | 2014-07-13 | SMC, Desus, SD | sur | 52 (57.8) | 90 | 7 | 4.15 | |
| 19 | Šarec | 2018-09-13 | 2018-06-03 | LMŠ, SMC, DeSUS, SD, ZaAB | min | 43 (47.8) | 90 | 9 | 6.78 | Levica |
| 20 | Janša IV | 2020-03-13 | | SDS, NSi-KLS, SMC, DeSUS | mwc | 48 (53.3) | 90 | 9 | 6.54 | |
| 21 | Janša V | 2020-12-17 | | SDS, NSi-KLS, SMC | min | 43 (47.8) | 90 | 9 | 6.45 | |
| 22 | Janša VI | 2021-12-04 | | SDS, NSi-KLS, Konkretno | min | 38 (42.2) | 90 | 9 | 6.53 | |

Notes:

For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.

The number of parties in parliament does not include parties that have never held more than two seats when a cabinet has formed.

Cabinet types: min = minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = minimal-winning coalition; sur = surplus majority coalition.

One of these mechanisms is interpellation¹ against individual ministers or the entire cabinet. Even following several interpellations, ministers generally remain in their positions. In some cases, interpellations nevertheless triggered debates, even disagreements among coalition partners, which had to be settled using conflict resolution mechanisms (Krašovec and Krpič 2019), a matter to which we return below. An interpellation addressing an entire cabinet has rarely been used. It is interesting that as an opposition party SDS in its formal declaration against the cabinet of Cerar also mentioned ‘failing to fulfil the commitments arising from the Coalition Agreement between the government parties SMC, DeSUS and SD’ (National Assembly 2018: 38), thereby demonstrating that a coalition agreement can also be cited by the opposition.

The PM may require the National Assembly to vote on a motion of confidence in the cabinet and can connect the vote with the passing of a law or any other decision by the National Assembly. Yet, this mechanism has seen infrequent use: twice since 2008. In 2011, PM Borut Pahor (Social Democrats – SD) used the mechanism when faced with a dropping-out rebellion, i.e., the coalition partners left the cabinet. He lost the vote, opening the way to early elections. The coalition agreement from 2013 was signed in turbulent times due to the economic and financial crisis. The agreement was only to last one year, with a possible prolongation. At the time, an exceptional commitment was given, namely that PM Alenka Bratušek would issue a motion of confidence within the year. As Bratušek (2020) explains, she proposed it after feeling that there was not enough confidence among some coalition partners.

A final motion of confidence mechanism clearly bolsters cabinet stability – namely the constructive vote of no confidence – which also forms part of the institutional setting in Slovenia. Cabinets in the period investigated were subject to two constructive votes of no confidence: one in 2013 and 2021, both against cabinets formed by PM Janša.

Party system

A key characteristic of any party system is the structure of cleavages within it. Some changes are visible here in Slovenia even if the first and second dimensions of conflicts stayed the same, as evident in [Table 12.1b](#).

Several scholars (Vehovar 1996; Fink-Hafner 2001; Zajc and Boh 2004; Prunk 2012) believe that in Slovenia, one can detect the four main cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan. However, Vehovar (1996) also suggests that since these cleavages overlap, it is possible to talk about a single all-encompassing cleavage: the traditional–modern cleavage, in Slovenia also labelled a cultural cleavage (encompassing conflicts regarding the role of the Catholic Church in Slovenian society and politics, the rights of different minorities as well as conflicts over developments during the Second World War). In more general comparative terms, this is a GAL-TAN cleavage. Over the last decade, the SDS and New Slovenia (NSi) have been prominent on the traditional/authoritarian end of the spectrum, whereas the SD and the successful new parties that

Table 12.1b Slovenian system conflict structure 2004–2021

| <i>Cabinet number</i> | <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Median party in the first dimension</i> | <i>First dimension conflict</i> | <i>Median party in the second dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension conflict</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 11 | Janša I | SDS | GAL-TAN | LDS | Econ. left-right |
| 12 | Pahor I | DeSUS | GAL-TAN | Zares | Econ. left-right |
| 13 | Pahor II | DeSUS | GAL-TAN | SNS | Econ. left-right |
| 14 | Pahor III | DeSUS | GAL-TAN | SNS | Econ. left-right |
| 15 | Janša II | PS | GAL-TAN | PS | Econ. left-right |
| 16 | Janša III | PS | GAL-TAN | PS | Econ. left-right |
| 17 | Bratušek | PS | GAL-TAN | PS | Econ. left-right |
| 18 | Cerar | SMC | GAL-TAN | SMC | Econ. left-right |
| 19 | Šarec | LMŠ | GAL-TAN | SMC | Econ. left-right |
| 20 | Janša IV | LMŠ | GAL-TAN | SMC | Econ. left-right |
| 21 | Janša V | LMŠ | GAL-TAN | SMC | Econ. left-right |
| 22 | Janša VI | DeSUS | GAL-TAN | SMC, Konkretno | Econ. left-right |

Notes: Median parties for the period 2004–2013 (cabinets 11–17) retrieved from Bergman et al (2019).

emerged following the 2008 elections, including The Left (Levica), are mostly found at the modern/libertarian end.

Before the 2004 elections, any alternative socio-economic Left–Right dimension was almost invisible. Every parliamentary party largely advocated similar social-democratic socio-economic policies (Fink-Hafner 2001; Stanojević and Krašovec 2011; Kolarič 2012). The electoral winner of the 2004 elections, SDS, at the time decided to turn towards the more conservative thinking. Several years later, NSi also started to firmly commit itself to economic liberalism. In the contexts of the global economic and financial crisis as well as the external pressure of the international *Troika*, almost every party accepted more (neo)liberal-oriented socio-economic reforms. The only obvious exception was the United Left (ZL) coalition (after some splits and mergers, it is today called Levica), which has thereby managed to raise the profile of the economic cleavage. Nevertheless, the GAL-TAN cleavage dimension is still the most prominent one.

The 2015 migration crisis together with the generally growing importance of identity politics (mainly associated with ethnic nationalism, which is closely connected to religion and LGBT+ rights) has reinforced the GAL-TAN cleavage. Anti-migration rhetoric and the increased salience of identity politics served the far-right Slovenian National Party (SNS) well, seeing it return (on the 2018 elections) to the National Assembly following seven years of absence. SDS also employed anti-migration rhetoric to great effect. This was one reason that already in the electoral campaign of the 2018 elections, the centre-left parties ruled out the idea of forming a coalition with SDS.

Until the early 2010s, the Slovenian party system was regarded, alongside the Hungarian and Czech ones, as the most stable in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (Lewis 2000; Casal Bertoa 2014; Haughton and Deegan

Krause 2020). Although there were no early elections held in this period in Slovenia, one can detect the flow of votes among parties, the entry of some small new parties while certain parliamentary parties also ceased to exist or became irrelevant (Fink-Hafner 2020a: 5). In the last decade, the country's party system may be characterized as having become destabilized. Only three parties have survived since the early 1990s – SDS, SD, and the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia, DeSUS (Fink-Hafner 2020a). Some significant changes in the party system were observable after the 2004 elections. One example is the disintegration of the long-term, leading, centre-left Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS). By the 2011 early elections, the Slovenian party system had been hit by 'the hurricane season', as Haughton and Deegan Krause (2015) describe important changes occurring in party systems in the region (CEE). It is even possible to say that a new subsystem has emerged in Slovenia. Not only have established parties lost electoral support compared to new parties, but the 'old newcomers' have rapidly lost out to even newer parties (Haughton and Deegan Krause 2020). While at the 2008 elections, the newly established party Zares – New Politics (established one year prior to the elections), which included some politically experienced people from LDS, became the third-strongest party in the National Assembly and entered the cabinet, at the 2011 early elections two parties, formed just weeks before, attracted more than one-third of the votes. The List of Zoran Janković – Positive Slovenia (LZJ – PS) even received the largest share of the vote (28.5%), while List of Gregor Virant – Citizen List (a liberal/libertarian-oriented party) won more than 8%. At the 2014 elections, a party founded just over one month before the early elections, the Party of Miro Cerar (SMC), won 35% of the votes. The United Left coalition (ZL), an electoral alliance of three more radical left-oriented parties, received 6% of the votes. At the 2018 early elections, another brand new party, List of Marjan Šarec – LMSŠ, entered the National Assembly, having won the second-biggest share of votes (12.7%). This party was launched at the national level only several months prior to the elections.

Several circumstances, also considered in the introduction chapter, can help to understand the breakthroughs of the mentioned new parties. Before turning to them, it must be mentioned that especially electorally the most successful new parties – Zares, PS, SMC, and LMSŠ – clearly tried to occupy the position of the metric centre of the party system that LDS used to hold (Fink-Hafner 2020a). LDS tried to position itself as a centre-left party and voters saw it as such. Slovenian voters also predominantly self-position themselves in the centre-left part of the spectrum (Fink-Hafner and Novak 2022). As data show, new successful parties in Slovenia in the 2011–2018 period did not activate many non-voters. Voters who positioned themselves in the left and centre of the ideological spectrum supported the new parties (Krašovec and Broder 2020: 53). Voters in Slovenia who cast ballots for a new party at one election tended to develop the habit of voting in the same way at subsequent elections, a phenomenon observed across the CEE (Haughton and Deegan Krause 2015).

When it comes to the economic and financial crises, together with changes in the party system, even if some measures were warmly received, the Pahor cabinet (2008–2011) demonstrated it was hardly able to cope with the economic crisis (Krašovec and Krpič 2019). Moreover, not one parliamentary party proved to be immune from the taint of corruption, party patronage and corruption-risk scandals. The issue of systemic corruption in the country has been high on the political and public agenda ever since (Krašovec et al 2014). The failure of the Pahor I cabinet to deal with the crisis gave encouragement to Zoran Janković, the capital city's mayor, who had managed to portray himself as a successful manager, to upgrade his local list to the national level. However, the lack of national-level political experience restrained him from becoming PM, giving an opportunity to the more politically experienced Janez Janša to form his second cabinet, which this time proved to be short-lived. The coalition led by Alenka Bratušek (PS) in 2013 was formed in the very turbulent times of mass protests against the Janša II cabinet. Findings released by the Commission of Prevention of Corruption showing that PM Janša but also Zoran Janković had systematically and repeatedly violated the law, and that their behaviour was not in accordance with legal transparency and anticorruption standards, coincided with the *Trojka* knocking on Slovenia's door due to the country's financial problems (Krašovec and Krpič 2019).

This was evidently a period of huge disappointment with the political elite, including the newer one, accompanied by a continuation of poor governance (Fink-Hafner 2020a). Low levels of trust in the main political institutions continued, along with low satisfaction with democracy (Krašovec and Johannsen 2016), and corruption scandals. The already quite fragmented party system was becoming much more bipolar (Fink-Hafner 2020a). Data from the longitudinal Slovenian Public Opinion Poll revealed that conflict among politically left- and right-leaning people (thus polarisation) had intensified considerably in this period. In 2005, 15% of respondents saw the conflict as very sharp, while in 2013, this share had risen to 40%. In this environment, playing on the novelty card, the rule of law, and promoting a change in the country's political culture in particular calls for more co-operative and respectful conduct between political opponents lay at the heart of the appeal of Cerar and his Party of Miro Cerar (SMC). Despite electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions being very rare in Slovenia (see Table 12.1c), another newcomer was the ZL coalition.

Table 12.1c Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in Slovenia, 2004–2021

| <i>Election date</i> | <i>Constituent parties</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Types of pre-electoral commitment</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--|
| 2008-09-21 | SLS, SMS | EA | |
| 2014-07-13 | TRS, IDS, DSD | EA | |

Notes:

Type: Electoral alliance (EA) and/or Pre-electoral coalition (PEC).

Types of pre-electoral commitments: written contract, joint press conference, separate declarations, and/or other.

The most prominent party in this coalition, the Initiative for Democratic Socialism (IDS), was formally established in 2014. The mass protests during 2012 and 2013 against the Janša II cabinet and other political elites accelerated the process of its formation (Toplišek and Thomassen 2017: 1394). The economic policies advocated by the EU during the 2008 crisis and the opposition to these policies also gave a push to the IDS' formation (Fink-Hafner 2020a). IDS sees capitalism as a political economic system that must be challenged while democratic socialism must be established (Toplišek and Thomassen 2017). At the 2018 early elections (the third in a row), another newcomer, LMS, again with an appeal based on the need for 'new politics', attracted 12.7% of the votes. However, as many as nine parties entered the National Assembly, noting that only at the 1990 elections was the number of parties that high.

A good explanation for the high support for new parties includes the phenomenon of Janez Janša, the leader of the SDS since 1993. While the 'appeal of newness' was central to successful newcomers, a central plank of their appeal was that they would try to prevent Janša from taking power once again (Haughton and Krašovec 2018: 4). As Haughton et al (2018) pointed out, Janša is the most polarizing figure in Slovenian politics, a love-me-or-loath-me politician.

Government formation

One pattern related to the electoral system and institutional characteristics is that majority coalition cabinets have tended to be formed. Only one minority coalition cabinet was formed following an election. Another pattern deals with the ideological homogeneity of coalition governments – up until the 2004 elections, the government coalitions under LDS and PM Drnovšek were more ideologically mixed, later coalitions were more ideologically coherent, also in the face of the greater polarization as well as politically inexperienced PMs in Slovenia (Zajc 2020; Fink-Hafner 2020a).

While talking about bargaining processes (see [Table 12.2](#)), they were as different as the contexts were. While PM Pahor followed the pattern known in the pre-2008 period (Krašovec and Krpič 2019), a change was seen when the first inconclusive bargaining occurred after the 2011 elections. The leader of the largest party following the elections, Janković, was unable to form a cabinet, whereas Janša was. A coalition led by Janković's protégé Bratušek was formed in 2013, including two parties from the Janša II cabinet, in the distinct and turbulent circumstances of the economic, financial, and political crises, in just 26 days, following a successful constructive vote of no confidence against PM Janša.

The electoral result and clear dominance of SMC after the 2014 elections meant that the coalition formation was not expected to last long. Two circumstances led to an almost two-month-long bargaining process. First, the political inexperience of SMC, which did not know how to approach the process of forming a coalition and at the beginning mostly followed a strategy of economic bargaining, asking the potential partners what they wanted instead of preparing a draft proposal of a coalition agreement, as they were 'instructed'

Table 12.2 Government formation period in Slovenia, 2004–2021

| Cabinet | Year in | Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds | Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds | Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days) | Number of days required in government formation | Total bargaining duration | Result of investiture vote (senate result in parentheses) | | |
|-----------|---------|--|--|---|---|---------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| | | | | | | | Pro | Abstention | Contra |
| Janša I | 2004 | 0 | SDS, NSi-KLS, SLS, DeSUS | 61 | 61 | 61 | 51 | 2 | 37 |
| Pahor I | 2008 | 0 | SD, Zares, DeSUS, LDS | 61 | 61 | 61 | 56 | 4 | 30 |
| Pahor II | 2011 | 0 | SD, Zares, LDS | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Pahor III | 2011 | 0 | SD, LDS | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Janša II | 2012 | 1 | SDS, NSi-KLS, SLS, DeSUS, DL | 30 | 143 | 68 | 50 | 30 | 10 |
| Janša III | 2013 | 0 | PS, DeSUS, SD, DL, SDS, NSi-KLS, SLS, DeSUS | 38 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Bratušek | 2013 | 0 | PS, SD, DL, DeSUS | 26 | 26 | 26 | 52 | 3 | 35 |
| Cerar | 2014 | 0 | SMC, SD, DeSUS | 52 | 52 | 52 | 54 | 11 | 25 |
| Šarec | 2018 | 0 | LMŠ, SD, ZaAB, SMC, DeSUS | 87 | 87 | 87 | 55 | 4 | 31 |
| Janša IV | 2020 | 0 | SDS, NSi-KLS, SMC, DeSUS | 46 | 46 | 46 | 52 | 7 | 31 |
| Janša V | 2020 | 0 | SDS, NSi-KLS, SMC | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Janša VI | 2021 | 0 | SDS, NSi-KLS, Konkretno | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |

to do later (Cerar 2019). Second, although building a coalition with the party holding the greatest potential in Slovenia (DeSUS) would have been enough to form a majority coalition; Cerar (2019) also invited SD as well as centre-right NSi to the bargaining process, knowing that sometimes not all coalition MPs can be present in the National Assembly, and also due to the desire to have a comfortable majority to respond to the serious issues Slovenia was then facing. The bargaining with the latter contributed to the length of the process.

The bargaining process in the case of the cabinet led by Šarec (LMS) lasted 87 days. After the 2018 elections, SDS, which received the biggest share of votes (25%), and its leader Janša, was offered a candidacy for PM by the President. When it became clear that the centre-left parties had decided not to commence coalition talks with Janša, he did not accept the President's offer. The centre-left parties (SD, SMC, DeSUS, SAB – Party of Alenka Bratušek) and NSi were soon invited to talks by Šarec. After the centre-left parties made some important concessions to NSi at the moment when the coalition was already on the horizon, NSi nevertheless decided not to enter the coalition.

With a formal deadline for the second round of electing the PM approaching, Šarec and the four centre-left parties decided to invite Levica to talk. Although this party refused to join the coalition after several rounds of negotiations, it expressed its willingness to support a minority cabinet. Faced with the two unpleasant alternatives – either an SDS-led government or new elections – an agreement between the coalition partners and Levica as the supporting party was reached (Krašovec 2019).²

Šarec (2020) states that it was not easy to form a coalition since LMS was not a winner of the elections, having won considerably fewer seats than SDS, while other partners of LMS were (in two clusters) close to each other. Šarec was in a way 'forced' to form a coalition due to Janša's 'absence of success'.

Šarec's resignation at the end of January 2020 raised the question of early elections, with the parties being divided about this. Especially SMC and DeSUS, facing low public support, thought that it might be very hard for them to pass the parliamentary threshold and were convinced to join Janša's new cabinet together with NSi. This was also due to an alteration of their ideological course after changes in the party leadership. The Janša IV cabinet started to work 1 day after Šarec's acting government declared an epidemic due to COVID-19.

In all investigated coalitions, the ministries were quickly distributed. As seen in Table 12.3, all PMs wanted to have the Minister of Finance as the second-most important position after the PM (Blondel et al 2007) selected by them and as a part of their party's quota. The exception was the Janša II cabinet where a smaller party (Citizen List), pivotal to the coalition's formation, was in charge of this position; similar to Janša I situation. In Slovenia, one cannot clearly observe that the belonging of a party to a certain party family is a good predictor of ministry allocation, as otherwise suggested by Bäck et al (2011). The Ministry of the Interior was mostly reserved for the biggest coalition partner. It is interesting that in Šarec's cabinet, no party wanted to take responsibility for the Ministry of Health (Šarec 2020). Given that Slovenia has faced huge problems

Table 12.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Slovenian coalitions, 2004–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Number of ministers per party (in descending order)</i> | <i>Total number of ministers</i> | <i>Number of watchdog junior ministers per party</i> | <i>Number of ministries</i> | <i>1. Prime minister</i> | <i>2. Finance</i> | <i>3. Foreign Affairs</i> | <i>4. Labour, Family, and Social Affairs</i> | <i>5. Interior Affairs</i> |
|----------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Janša I | 2004 | 9 SDS, 4 NSi-KLS, 4 SLS, 1 DeSUS | 18 | | 16 | SDS | NSi-KLS | SDS | NSi-KLS | SDS |
| Pahor I | 2008 | 10 SD, 4 Zares, 3 DeSUS, 2 LDS | 19 | | 16 | SD | SD | SD | DeSUS | LDS |
| Pahor II | 2011 | 12 SD, 4 Zares, 2 LDS | 18 | | 16 | SD | SD | SD | SD | LDS |
| Pahor III | 2011 | 12 SD, 2 LDS | 14 | | 16 | SD | SD | SD | SD | LDS |
| Janša II | 2012 | 5 SDS, 2 NSi-KLS, 2 SLS, 2 DeSUS, 2 DL | 13 | | 12 | SDS | DL | DeSUS | SDS | SDS |
| Janša III | 2013 | 6 SDS, 2 NSi-KLS, 2 SLS, 2 DeSUS | 12 | | 12 | SDS | SDS | DeSUS | SDS | SDS |
| Bratušek | 2013 | 6 PS, 3 DL, 3 SD, 2 DeSUS | 14 | | 13 | PS | PS | DeSUS | SD | DL |
| Cerar | 2014 | 10 SMC, 4 Desus, 3 SD | 17 | | 15 | SMC | SMC | DeSUS | SD | SMC |
| Šarec | 2018 | 5 LMŠ, 4 SMC, 3 SD, 3 ZAaB, 2 DeSUS | 17 | | 15 | LMŠ | LMŠ | SMC | SMC | LMŠ |
| Janša IV | 2020 | 8 SDS, 4 SMC, 3 NSi-KLS, 2 DeSUS | 17 | | 15 | SDS | SDS | SDS | NSi-KLS | SDS |
| Janša V | 2020 | 8 SDS, 4 SMC, 3 NSi-KLS, 2 Ind. | 17 | | 15 | SDS | SDS | SDS | NSi-KLS | SDS |
| Janša VI | 2021 | 8 SDS, 4 NSi-KLS, 4 Konkretno, 2 Ind. | 18 | | 15 | SDS | SDS | SDS | NSi-KLS | SDS |

with its healthcare system in the last decade and unsettled differences over how to reform it among the coalition partners, this is not surprising.

The resulting distribution of ministries shows that PM Cerar indeed over-compensated his coalition partners with the aim of stabilising the parliamentary majority. This is a deviation from a pattern in Slovenia and from a general pattern in forming coalitions (Bäck et al 2011: 441). This pattern was repeated in 2021 when NSi in the Janša VI cabinet demanded to balance the distribution of ministries between the party and SMC – which lost half of its MPs during the term – and a new ministerial position was established for NSi one year before the regular elections. All the PMs during the period under investigation gave quite a free hand to their coalition partners to nominate their ministers, only having some kind of ‘veto’ on nominations. PM control of ministerial appointments was stricter under Janša II and III.

A form of junior minister – state secretary positions – exists in Slovenia. This position belongs to the minister’s party rather than being cross-party appointments. They accordingly do not really play a watchdog role in the manner way discussed by Thies (2001).

Talking about coalition agreements (see Table 12.4), PM Bratušek and two then high-ranking SD members explained that solving the financial situation was by far the most important matter for Bratušek’s cabinet. The written agreement was short as a result, in this respect similar to the agreements in the 1990s. When the economic situation stabilized at the end of 2013, at the beginning of 2014, the coalition partners signed a new agreement containing more policies. The then SD leader stated he does not believe in the written word and the agreement was prepared more because the coalition was expected to have such a document (Lukšič 2019). Still, another SD representative stated that due to the external circumstances, the agreements under

Table 12.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in Slovenia (2004–2021)

| <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Year in</i> | <i>Size</i> | <i>General rules (in %)</i> | <i>Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of offices (in %)</i> | <i>Distribution of competences (in %)</i> | <i>Policies (in %)</i> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Janša I | 2004 | 27,887 | 5 | 7.6 | 1 | 0 | 86.4 |
| Pahor I | 2008 | 31,000 | 6.2 | 3.9 | 1.2 | 0 | 88.7 |
| Pahor II | 2011 | 31,000 | 6.2 | 3.9 | 1.2 | 0 | 88.7 |
| Pahor III | 2011 | 31,000 | 6.2 | 3.9 | 1.2 | 0 | 88.7 |
| Janša II | 2012 | 29,357 | 8.7 | 4.5 | 2.1 | 0 | 84.7 |
| | | 1,805 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Janša III | 2013 | 29,357 | 8.7 | 4.5 | 2.1 | 0 | 84.7 |
| | | 1,805 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bratušek | 2013 | 8,016 | 34 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 63 |
| Bratušek | 2014 | 13,387 | 29 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 68 |
| Cerar | 2014 | 27,376 | 18.8 | 0 | 1.7 | 12.4 | 67.1 |
| Šarec | 2018 | 16,353 | 24.2 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 72.9 |
| Janša IV | 2020 | 2,636 | 29.8 | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 64.5 |
| Janša V | 2020 | 2,636 | 29.8 | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 64.5 |
| Janša VI | 2021 | 2,636 | 29.8 | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 64.5 |

PM Bratušek had less significance and political weight than the agreement for Šarec's coalition. Šarec (2020) himself understood the agreement only as a basis for the cabinet's work. On the other hand, the coalition agreement was evaluated as a very important document by three high-ranking representatives of SMC. However, Cerar (2019) admits that things were changing in the context, while Bratušek (2020) claims that too precisely prepared agreements can sometimes also be an obstacle to the work of the cabinet and coalition.

Policies dominated in all of the agreements. In the Bratušek, Šarec and Janša IV–VI cabinets (a similar situation to Drnovšek's II–IV), the general rules occupied between 24% and 30% of the text of the coalition agreement. Bratušek (2020) pointed out that the financial circumstances meant the document signed under her premiership was more an agreement on co-operation among the parties than a detailed policy document. In Šarec's case, the need for the co-operation of the five parties in the minority coalition, in addition to one supporting party, contributed to the coordination segment making up an important share of the agreement (high SD representative 2019).

During the bargaining processes, however, public policies were the most important debated topic either due to the external circumstances (Bratušek's cabinet), the idea about a new approach to politics (Cerar's cabinet), or obstacles in the formation of a minority government. For the Šarec cabinet, there was a wish to draft policies very precisely, which led to two rounds of talks. Bratušek (2020) estimated that in the latter case, the coalition partners maybe even talked too much about the policies. Talks were held with NSi, followed by Levica, and again NSi and 'these two parties had diametrically opposite views, and at the end it was a feeling we did not know in which direction we would like to go'. In the case of Šarec's cabinet, the PM had a clear wish to start the bargaining process with talk about personnel, not policies. As Šarec explained (2020), he wanted to talk about personnel to have a future minister being present when the policies of individual ministries were being negotiated among the future partners.

Coalition governance

In Slovenia, the PM is formally one among ministers. The PM leads and directs the work of the cabinet, ensures the unity of its political and administrative actions, coordinates the work of the ministers, represents the cabinet externally, and calls and presides over its sessions. It is interesting that the PM cannot dismiss a minister by her or himself but must send a proposal to the National Assembly, which follows the PM's proposal or does not. Cerar (2019) noted that the PM has very limited room for maintaining discipline, with only three measures available: criticism, stronger criticism, and a proposal to dismiss a minister. The PM formally does not have (full) control over the agenda of cabinet meetings since the PM is only one of the legally defined potential proposers. Still, the interviews revealed that PMs *de facto* have the biggest control over the agenda of cabinet meetings. Differences among the PMs'

execution of power indeed stem generally not only from their leadership style, but also from individual power resources (Nikić Čakar and Krašovec 2021).

Conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms are strategically important for cabinets to function and should be part of the toolbox of coalition governance (Bowler et al 2016). This is also the case in Slovenia as general rules in a coalition agreement are mostly composed of the procedures and ways of dealing with the relationship among the coalition partners, also involving conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. The biggest share of such rules in the agreement was detected in the 1990s and in the post-2013 period. As presented in [Table 12.5](#), all of the arenas discussed by Andeweg and Timmermans (2008) are used in conflict management in Slovenia.

Coalitions have resorted to two different conflict-management strategies. The first is the application of conflict prevention mechanisms with a meeting of the coalition parties' and PPGs' leaders being the most common of these mechanisms, followed by an annual gathering of coalition partners. Another frequently used mechanism has been regular meetings of the secretary-generals (who do not serve as ministers) of coalition parties as well as the PPG leaders. An intensive flow of information about the work and current political agenda between coalition MPs and cabinet members also helps to build trust among coalition partners and acts as a mechanism for preventing political conflicts among coalition partners. In coalitions led by Janša (II and III), Bratušek and Cerar, in the toolkit it was explicitly written that the partners would avoid certain political issues likely to cause political disharmony. This concerned a set of 'ideological' issues related to (a) interpretation of developments during the Second World War or about the events following that war (Janša's II and III cabinets); (b) in addition to these also developments in the processes of democratization and independence (Bratušek's cabinet); (c) topics that encourage/accelerate ideological battles and form new divides or are going on at the expense of minorities or vulnerable groups (Cerar's cabinet).

Second, coalition partners have attempted to set up mechanisms in advance to settle any conflicts that may emerge. A frequently used conflict resolution mechanism has been regular meetings of the party leaders. Other common mechanisms include ad hoc meetings of the PM and one or more ministers and meetings between the MPs of the coalition parties.

A comparison of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms among the different coalitions shows great similarities, even in the cabinets under the PMs coming from the new parties. As Bratušek (2020) and Cerar (2019) state, the coalitions they led relied on some good practices from previous agreements. For the high SD representative, this is indeed normal. An SMC PPG leader, Kustec (2019), said the agreement was indeed very detailed in that aspect and it allowed explicit reference to it when necessary.

The interviews reveal that informal meetings of the PM and the other party leaders also partly served as a conflict management mechanism. Kustec (2019) believes Cerar was using this informal mechanism of communication very frequently for he was personally inclined to intensive talks and frequent

Table 12.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Slovenia, 2004–2021

| Coalition | Year in | Coalition agreement | Agreement public | Election rule | Conflict management mechanisms | | | Personal union | Issues excluded from agenda | Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour | Freedom of appointment | Policy agreement | Junior ministers | Non-cabinet positions |
|-----------|---------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | All used | All used | For most serious conflicts | | | | | | | |
| Janša I | 2004 | POST | Yes | No | IC, PCa, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (SLS) | No | All/All | No | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Pahor I | 2008 | POST | Yes | No | IC, PCa, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (DeSUS) | No | Spec./Spec. | Yes | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Pahor II | 2011 | POST | Yes | No | IC, PCa, PS | IC | IC, Parl | Yes | No | Spec./Spec. | Yes | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Pahor III | 2011 | POST | Yes | No | IC, PCa, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (LDS) | No | Spec./Spec. | Yes | Varied | Yes | Yes |
| Janša II | 2012 | POST | Yes | No | IC, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (DL) | Yes | Most/Spec. | No | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Janša III | 2013 | POST | Yes | No | IC, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (DL) | Yes | Most/Spec. | No | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Bratušek | 2013 | IE | Yes | No | IC, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (SD) | Yes | Spec./Spec. | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Cerar | 2014 | POST | Yes | No | IC, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | Yes | Yes | Spec./Spec. | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Šarec | 2018 | POST | Yes | No | IC, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | No (SD) | No | Spec./Spec. | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Janša IV | 2020 | IE | Yes | No | IC, PCa, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Janša V | 2020 | IE | Yes | No | IC, PCa, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |
| Janša VI | 2021 | IE | Yes | No | IC, PCa, Parl, PS | IC | IC, Parl | Yes | No | All/All | Yes | Comp. | Yes | Yes |

Notes:

Coalition agreement: IE = inter-election; PRE = pre-election; N = no coalition agreement.

Conflict management mechanisms: IC = inner cabinet; PCa = combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians; Parl = parliamentary leaders; PS = party summit; O = other.

Coalition discipline: All = discipline always expected; Most = discipline expected except on explicitly exempted matters, Spec. = discipline only expected on a few explicitly specified matters.

Policy agreement: Varied = policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; Comp. = comprehensive policy agreement.

communication with people. He was giving thus to the partners a legitimacy of normality with such approach although the results of such talks were usually unpredictable.

In Bratušek and Šarec's cabinets, a meeting (or coffee sessions, as Bratušek [2020] called them) of coalition party leaders was held regularly. These meetings were considered a very important mechanism, even though in both cabinets SD party leaders were not cabinet members. On the other hand, Jankovič, a PS leader, was challenged in not being invited to these meetings as he had clearly expected this would be the case (Lukšič 2019). While Bratušek insisted on weekly 'coffee sessions' of party leaders, Šarec included a wider circle of people – PPG leaders and also his co-workers – at the end, roughly 15 people attended such weekly meetings. This changed the nature and dynamics of these meetings (Bratušek 2020).

Under the Slovenian Constitution, MPs are solely responsible to voters. However, since they run for the National Assembly under their wings – no independent MP has been elected since 1990 – MPs depend highly on the goodwill of a party, in particular its leadership (Krašovec 2016). In return, the political parties expect certain discipline and cohesion from MPs. Still, while it is not rare for individual MPs to defect to another party or become an independent MP, these transitions have usually had little effect on the cabinet.

Coalition discipline in Slovenia also depends on the PM's leadership style and the characteristics of the coalition parties. On one hand, in the Pahor coalitions discipline was loosened. On the other hand, in Janša's coalitions, the PM insisted on strict coalition discipline. In the case of coalitions under PMs coming from the new parties, coalition discipline was in-between the above poles. As Bratušek (2020) evaluated, during her premiership coalition discipline was assured in the National Assembly. She also helped to assure discipline by holding personal meetings with the PPGs. However, she faced greater problems assuring discipline within her own party. She is confident that Šarec, even as the PM of a minority coalition government, had to invest fewer efforts to ensure coalition discipline. Šarec (2020) himself evaluated the coalition's discipline in the National Assembly as strong during his premiership, for most of the time. Nonetheless, it began to break after the Levica decided not to support the cabinet anymore. Each partner started to search for an exit strategy. It seems discipline is also impacted by the point in the legislative cycle, as explained by Kustec (2019). Under the SMC-led cabinet, it was possible to speak about three distinct steps of coalition discipline in the National Assembly: at the beginning of the term, it was strong, in the mid-term became much more loosened among the coalition partners, while in the last part of the term, there was little discipline even within individual coalition parties.

Cabinet duration and termination

Generally, policy conflicts in Slovenia are the most important reasons for ending a cabinet (see [Table 12.6](#)), where also in the period investigated conflicts over policies dominated as the reason for ending a cabinet. However, two

Table 12.6 Cabinet termination in Slovenia, 2004–2021

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Janša I | 100 | 1 | | | | Government coalition mandate was ended by regular parliamentary election |
| Pahor I | 64.2 | 7a | | | Labour, Family, and Social Affairs | One of political parties (DeSUS) left the coalition. Disagreement over implementation of pension policy |
| Pahor II | 9.2 | 7a | | | | One of political parties (Zares) left the coalition. Zares demanded from PM to propose reconstruction of government. Since this did not take place, Zares left the coalition |
| Pahor III | 17.6 | 4, 6 | | | | PM and the coalition government was subject of vote of confidence which led to early parliamentary election. The cause was general belief that the PM and the parties which still persist in coalition are no longer capable of governing and facing the economic crisis. New candidates for ministers, proposed by PM in order to end the political crisis, were motions of vote of confidence |
| Janša II | 25 | 7b | | | | One political party (DL) left the coalition after the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption publically announced that Prime Minister Janez Janša systematically and repeatedly violated the law by failing to properly report his assets, yet the prime minister refused to step down to preserve the coalition government |
| Janša III | 2.9 | 6 | | | | PM and the coalition government were subjects of constructive vote of no confidence |

(Continued)

Table 12.6 (Continued)

| <i>Cabinet</i> | <i>Relative duration (%)</i> | <i>Mechanisms of cabinet termination</i> | <i>Terminal events</i> | <i>Parties</i> | <i>Policy area(s)</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Bratušek | 41.6 | 4, 8, 9 | | | | The cabinet was terminated due to resignation of the PM, which was caused by the split in the biggest governmental party over the leadership position (in the PS) |
| Cerar | | 4, 7a, 9 | | | | The government was terminated not long after regular parliamentary elections due to PM resignation. The reason for PM resignation was conflict among coalition parties over control over the main infrastructural project, so-called Drugi tir. Early election follows |
| Šarec | 34.3 | 7a, 9 | | | | The PM resigned after he accepted resignation of the minister of finance and the PM's recognition that minority government does not enable successful governance any more |
| Janša IV | 30.2 | 7a | | SDS, DeSUS | | DeSUS left the government due to policies and politics conducted by the PM and the government; democracy backsliding |
| Janša V | 55.5 | 5 | | | | SMC merged with GAS to form new party Konkretno |
| Janša VI | 50 | 1 | | | | Government coalition mandate was ended by regular parliamentary election |

*Notes:**Technical terminations*

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: other constitutional reason; 3: death of prime minister.

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament; 7a/b: conflict between coalition parties: (a) policy and/or (b) personnel; 8: intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties; 9: other voluntary reason.

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: popular opinion shocks; 12: international or national security event; 13: economic event; 14: personal event.

more patterns of cabinet termination emerged in the period under investigation. First, the politically experienced PMs Pahor (see Krašovec and Krpič 2019) and Janša were the subjects of coalition partners leaving, ‘dropping out’ of the coalition’s strategy. Yet, they either managed to stay in their position till the end of the legislative term or were forced to leave their position after a (constructive) vote of (no) confidence. Second, the PMs from new parties employed a resignation strategy rather than losing coalition partners. Still, they opted for resignation at different points within the four-year legislative term. PM Bratušek resigned in the last part of the legislative term, PM Cerar resigned almost literally at the end of his term, while PM Šarec took this step in the first part of the four-year legislative term. In no case was there a special prior protocol or agreement on dissolution of the governmental coalition and termination of the cabinet.

Although all PMs from the new parties resigned due to conflicts within the coalition, their origins and nature varied. Bratušek resigned due to problems/conflicts within the party she led as its acting leader and after she lost the elections for the party leadership (Krašovec and Krpič 2019). All coalition partners were clearly aware of the problem she was facing, and her resignation was indeed expected. Cerar offered several reasons for his resignation, ranging from the wave of strikes and protests by public sector workers to obstructions caused by the coalition partners in dealing with urgent reforms. Nevertheless, the straw that broke the camel’s back was a Supreme Court decision to annul the September 2017 referendum on the law governing the financing of a second track between the Port of Koper and the rail hub of Divača, ordering a new referendum on this question. Due to the huge disorder in the coalition, the public evaluated Cerar’s stepping down even as a wise move before the parliamentary elections. Policy conflicts among the coalition partners and a decision made by the supporting party were the main reasons for Šarec’s resignation. In autumn 2019, Levica announced that it would stop supporting the cabinet and move into full opposition status. The most explicit reason announced was the coalition’s failure to support the draft law Levica had proposed to eliminate supplementary health insurance. For a while and on certain topics – budget approval and the appointment of a new minister – the cabinet managed to secure the parliamentary support of the opposition SNS, yet disagreements continued among the coalition partners, and they also did not want to continue to work with the support of SNS. Šarec issued a public statement in which he said he was unable to fulfil the people’s expectations with the current coalition and only 13 representatives of his party in the National Assembly and called for early elections. Indeed, the political circumstances at the time seemed favourable to his party since LMS would have received the greatest support had elections been held (Krašovec 2021). His move was a complete surprise for the coalition partners and Bratušek (2020) was very critical of it, explaining that PM Šarec solely decided that he had enough, and the partners only heard about his move through the mass media. Šarec (2020) later confirmed that this was his personal decision, also due to some partners’

inability to realize that the cabinet does not have a majority and that it needed to adapt its functioning accordingly.

Despite Janša's IV–VI cabinets facing different challenges after the end of 2020 – the dropping out of DeSUS, some SMC MPs left this PPG (the cabinet was also formally transformed into a minority status cabinet), very low public support, protests against the government both also due to the mismanagement of the COVID-19 situation accompanied by the democratic backsliding, and active opposition in the National Assembly (four centre-left parties that had co-operated in Šarec's cabinet) united under the Constitutional Arch Coalition (KUL – Koalicija ustavnega loka) banner that employed different mechanisms to aim for early elections or the formation of a new government also because of Slovenia's democratic backsliding – the cabinet managed to stay in power even in the circumstances of a hung parliament, mostly because it could still rely on the remaining DeSUS MPs, but also SNS and two representatives of the Italian and Hungarian minorities; SNS and the minorities' representatives signed a special cooperation agreement in the summer of 2020 with the coalition parties on passing laws in the National Assembly (Krašovec 2022).

Generally speaking, already in the period before 2008, participation in the cabinet was not rewarded electorally (Krašovec and Krpič 2019), with this pattern intensifying after 2008. Successful new parties that participated in the cabinet often recorded much lower electoral support in the subsequent elections (e.g., SMC) and some even did not cross the parliamentary threshold again (e.g., PS, Citizen List). Still, the established parties also mostly faced losses.

Conclusion

Slovenia has encountered many changes in its party system since 2008, with the most visible being the electoral success of new parties led by leaders who were politically inexperienced on the national level, while the institutional settings stayed stable. Three crises may be seen as contributing to the changes in the party system and in coalition governance. However, it seems that especially the economic and financial crisis had the strongest consequences – its (mis)management contributed to the rise of some successful new parties, alongside some alternations in the political cleavage system. The migration crisis had a moderate impact – it mainly gave rise to the polarization/radicalization of the GAL-TAN dimension in the cleavage system, and to more radical right-leaning voices and policies also among some established parties, most notably in SDS, the winner of the 2018 elections. This to some extent led to the formation of the first minority coalition government after the 2018 elections. In the period investigated, the COVID-19 crisis during the time of Janša IV–VI had a limited direct impact on governance of the coalition. Yet, this crisis was connected with autocracy tendencies and democratic backsliding seen, among others, in empowerment of the executive in relation to other branches, in undermining media critical of the cabinet, but also the Slovenian Press Agency and the public broadcaster, the independent oversight bodies

(e.g., Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, Court of Audit) were under pressure, as were the judicial branch and state prosecutors (see Fink-Hafner 2020b; Bertelsmann Transformation Index [BTI] 2022; Freedom House 2022; Krašovec 2022). All of these processes contributed to DeSUS' decision to formally leave the Janša IV cabinet and some SMC MPs to leave the PPG of this party, transforming it into a minority cabinet. Russia's invasion of Ukraine had no direct impact on coalition governance since all relevant parties have condemned it and supported Ukraine, also during the electoral campaign for parliamentary elections held in the spring of 2022.

Under PMs from new parties, Slovenia faced a stepping-down pattern of PMs followed by two early elections to the National Assembly. Although different reasons explain such a move, the case of Bratušek clearly proved the importance of a PM being at the same time a party leader and being in (full) control of the party that nominates the PM. This is a decisive factor for the prolongation of a PM and for cabinet survival (Nikić Čakar and Krašovec 2021). Politically experienced PMs on the other hand suffered the dropping out of parties but nevertheless insisted on their position until the end of the legislative term or were forced to leave their position only after an (un)successful vote of (no)confidence.

Analysis of coalition management mechanisms revealed that the conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in the period under investigation mostly resembled the old patterns and practices. All three PMs coming from new parties said they were trying to identify and follow good practices in the previous coalitions and cabinets. They also exhibited a readiness and ability to learn some important political lessons quickly. In addition, new faces in politics were generally seen on the frontline, while already the second line in new parties and the ministries frequently saw old faces with different political experiences, as a high SD representative (2019) explained.

Deschouwer (2008) argues that the involvement of new parties in a coalition government is often perceived as a special challenge for the cabinet's duration also because of the lack of a routine in organizing relations with other parties in coalitions. This is typically associated with underdeveloped different party structures. Here it is interesting that Cerar (2019) revealed that he was willing to rely on the past experiences of some long-term politicians from SMC's coalition parties and admitted that several times it was beneficial for him and the cabinet that he followed their advice despite him having initially wanted to push for another solution or action.

At the end, it is worth adding that successful centre-left newcomers since 2008 have sought to occupy the position LDS used to enjoy, leading them to compete among themselves on one side but, on the other, they were 'forced' to co-operate in the coalition governments, mostly with the aim of preventing SDS led by Janša from forming a coalition government. It seems that this 'glue' was not always strong enough to prevent different policy conflicts among the centre-left partners, addressing a similar electoral base, also eventually leading to the ending of the cabinet.

Appendix: List of parties*Parties*

| | |
|---------|---|
| SSS | Socialist Party (Socialistična stranka Slovenije) |
| SDP | Party of Democratic Reform (Stranka demokratične prenove) |
| DeSUS | Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska stranka upokojencev Slovenije) |
| SD | Social Democrats (Socialni demokrati) |
| SMS | Party of Slovenian Youth (Stranka mladih Slovenije) |
| Zares | For Real (Zares) |
| SNS | Slovenian National Party (Slovenska nacionalna stranka) |
| DSS | Democratic Party of Slovenia (Demokratična stranka Slovenije) |
| SLS | Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka) |
| PS | Positive Slovenia (Pozitivna Slovenija) |
| ZaAB | Party of Alenka Bratušek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek), 2017– Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (Zavezništvo Alenke Bratušek), 2014–2016 |
| SMC | Modern Centre Party (Stranka modernega centra), 2015–2021 Party of Miro Cerar (Stranka Mira Cerarja), 2014–2015 Concrete (Konkretno), 2021– |
| LMSŠ | List of Marjan Šarec (Lista Marjana Šarca) |
| Levica | The Left (Levica), 2017– |
| ZL | United Left Coalition (Združena Levica), 2014–2017 |
| IDS | Party of Democratic Socialism (Stranka demokratičnega socializma), 2014–2017 |
| SDZ | Slovenian Democratic Alliance (Slovenska demokratična zveza) |
| SKD | Slovenian Christian Democrats (Slovenski krščanski demokrati) |
| LDS | Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (Liberalna demokracija Slovenije) |
| ZS | Greens of Slovenia (Zeleni Slovenije) |
| SDS | Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska demokratska stranka) |
| NSi-KLS | New Slovenia – Christian People's Party (Nova Slovenija – Krščanska ljudska stranka) |
| LS | Liberal Party (Liberalna stranka) |
| DL | Civic List (Državljska lista) |

Notes:

Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Slovenian in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed their names, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.

Notes

- 1 At least ten MPs may submit an interpellation with respect to the work of the cabinet or an individual minister. The PM or an individual minister has a chance to prepare a written response to the reproach and may explain it orally prior to the debate in the National Assembly. Once the debate on the interpellation has concluded, at least ten MP may require that a vote of no confidence in the cabinet or individual minister be held.
- 2 In this respect, the Portugal scenario was often mentioned as a possible model of governing. Still, as warned by Šarec (2020), with five parties in the coalition government this was not actually a Portugal scenario.

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13 New Patterns of Coalition Politics in Central and Eastern Europe?

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Introduction

We begin the concluding chapter with conceptual challenges in the study of cabinets and coalitions. In almost all the literature on coalitions and cabinets, coalitions are formed in stable party systems where the actors (political parties) are established, and their positions are well-known. They form coalitions that consist of two or more separate and readily identifiable parties, and on that basis, cabinets (governments) are formed. In Central Eastern Europe, all of this normality is sometimes challenged.

The turbulences of the past 15 years (2008–2021) left their mark on the coalition politics in the Central and Eastern European countries under study. The differential impact of the crisis' momentums in the ten countries and varied country responses in coalition politics are the Scylla and Charybdis context of our analysis. It turns out that even the concept of what a coalition cabinet is can be challenged. Let us begin with the impact of the political parties – either new or old – whose actions impact even the conceptualisation of coalition.

Coalition patterns are changing, also in Western Europe (Bergman et al 2021a) *and* due to party system changes more openness in coalition formation is generally gaining ground (Chiaromonte and Emanuele 2022). With widespread party and party system transformation in most of the CEE countries, we can witness coalitions among parties that are far from each other in political, ideological, and policy terms, as well as in their organisational features or even in their longevity. A few examples are illustrative. In Czechia, the ANO, a technocratic and populist party, coalesced with social democrats (ČSSD) and even enjoyed the support of the communists (KSČM), a party which used to be left out in the political cold. Nevertheless, this was not a success story as the latter two parties lost their parliamentary representation in 2021 – for the first time since the democratic breakthrough. This exemplifies that “strange” coalitions are often vulnerable and might result in unexpected outcomes, for example, with the failure of old and well-entrenched parties. Unexpected coalitions can also occur when entirely new parties enter parliament and rocket into coalition politics. For example, in Slovenia, in the 2014 elections, a new party (SMC), founded just a couple of weeks before

the elections, won the largest number of parliamentary seats. SMC became the senior member of the coalition, only to fall out of politics during the next parliamentary term.

Unusual coalitions prevail in many countries, but they do not necessarily challenge the traditional understanding of coalitions per se. Still, in a couple of countries, even the traditional understanding and the “fundamentals” of coalition politics can be discussed. Three examples show the challenges regarding the institutional, political, and governance aspects of the notion of coalitions. The first regards the Hungarian case. While formally two parties (Fidesz and KDNP) constitute the cabinet during most of our observation period (after 2010 onwards) and have separate rights both in parliament and government, the Hungarian chapter highlights that governance is built on personal alliances, and not on party-based cooperation. This example warns that while the institutional foundations (separate PPGs, distinct party rights in parliament, formalised positions in the government) suggest the existence of a coalition, in fact, the two-party coalition nature of the cabinet is highly questionable. A second example refers to Poland where some governments also constitute a challenge to the traditional understanding of a coalition government. As the Polish chapter shows, the three last governments are not only categorised as minimum winning coalitions – but it could also be argued that these cabinets consist of only one party. This is because the large governing party (PiS) informally incorporates minor political groups. Particularly, PiS offered SP (Solidarna Polska) politicians a place on its electoral lists, and the latter group does not have a distinct PPG. As the Polish chapter describes, this party constellation is informally often referred to as the United Right, a party-like construction based on a common political agenda. Still, it is not a clear-cut case. In the parliamentary debate about the NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) in 2021, the leader of the Eurosceptic SP, who was also a member of the government in the post of the minister of justice, was not allowed to speak despite several attempts (Dudzinska and Ilonszki 2023). Indeed, eventually, the members of SP voted against the government plan. Thus, the one-party status of the United Right has at times been under challenge. The third example, and a challenge for the understanding of usual coalition practice and how coalitions normally work, comes from Bulgaria. Bulgarian governments are often ideologically heterogeneous, and the constituting parties are alliances of several small parties. Exceeding this trend, several ministers come from non-coalition parties. This is not the same as the more well-known practice when party political outsiders, experts, or technocrats are invited to serve as ministers. In 2017, when the coalition included GERB and OP, formally a minority cabinet, influential MPs from DPS, a rival and opposition party also became members of the government. As the chapter on Bulgaria notes “the support of DPS for the government was honoured by powerful positions for people close to DPS”.

The three examples show that coalitions sometimes have vague party foundations and are also connected to the ailing democratic credentials of some

countries. We return to these themes below, but next, we will first briefly describe the party systems in Central and East Europe, and the institutional rules that guide government formation and termination in the countries covered in this volume. Here we also show and discuss the variation of PM and presidential powers. After that, we turn our attention to examining and presenting a comparative overview of the life cycle of coalition governments, before returning to crisis impact and our concluding discussion.

Party conflict and the institutional setting in Central and Eastern Europe

Coalition politics are to a large extent determined by the intra-party interactions and bargaining among political parties. The party system, institutions, rules, and conventions establish the setting for politics. In addition, role and power of the prime ministers and presidents are also important. Below we discuss variation in these aspects among the ten countries under study.

Party systems and party conflict

The party systems and their changes over time are of importance to understand formation, governance, and termination of governments. Most of all, the number of political parties in a political system, their relative size, and the main dimensions of competition among them are crucial to coalition politics. In coalition theory, as well as in comparative research, party conflicts are usually conceptualised in terms of the left-right policy dimension. Although important, other dimensions often also structure party competition, and [Table 13.1](#) illustrates the main line(s) of conflict in each country-based party system according to our country experts (i.e., [Table 13.1](#)). However vague and tentative, the economic left-right dimension is everywhere a crucial component of party competition. This was also the case before 2008 (Bergman et al 2019). More recently, competition on the GAL-TAN scale is pitting the liberal and secular against the more traditional and national in several countries. This conflict dimension has acquired a lasting or even a dominant position. During our observation period, much of the conflict lines in several countries gravitated from economic left-right to issues along the GAL-TAN conflict dimension.

The GAL-TAN conflict dimension has surpassed the economic left-right conflict in Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia. In these countries, the conflict between the liberal and secular camp and the more traditional and national is now the most salient political conflict. The country chapters also discuss elections and cases when also other dimensions have been very important, for example, the anti- and pro-Russian divide among the three Baltic countries. Nevertheless, the traditional (and West European) assumption of party systems based on an ordinal and simple left-right scale is now further from reality than even only two decades ago.

Table 13.1 Main dimensions of party competition

| <i>Country</i> | <i>First dimension</i> | <i>Second dimension</i> | <i>Effective number of parties</i> | |
|----------------|---|---|------------------------------------|------------------|
| | | | <i>1990–2007</i> | <i>2008–2021</i> |
| Bulgaria | Econ. left-right | GAL-TAN (2005–2021); Nationalism (2021–) | 3.05 | 4.33 |
| Czechia | Econ. left-right | GAL-TAN (2017–2021) | 4.07 | 4.69 |
| Estonia | Econ. left-right | Ethnic (1991–2019); GAL-TAN (2019–2021) | 6.77 | 4.28 |
| Hungary | Econ. left-right (–2009); GAL-TAN (2010–) | Econ. left-right (2010–) | 3.32 | 2.60 |
| Latvia | Econ. left-right | Ethnic | 6.18 | 5.63 |
| Lithuania | Econ. left-right (1991–2020); GAL-TAN (2020–) | GAL-TAN (2012–2020); Econ. left-right (2020–) | 4.49 | 4.88 |
| Poland | Post-communism (1991–2005); GAL-TAN (2005–2021) | Econ. left-right | 4.92 | 2.82 |
| Romania | Econ. left-right | GAL-TAN | 5.35 | 3.99 |
| Slovakia | Econ. left-right | GAL-TAN (2016–) | 4.69 | 4.81 |
| Slovenia | GAL-TAN | Econ. left-right | 5.92 | 5.29 |

Notes:

This summary table is based on Table 1b in the country chapters. Economic left-right and GAL-TAN are standard dimensions in the literature, their relevance is here estimated by the country expert. On occasion, for certain periods and cases, also other conflict dimensions are discussed in the country chapters.

In contrast, the increased party fragmentation that was a characteristic during the first decades of the democratic regime has been replaced by a situation of less party fragmentation. It is only Bulgaria and Czechia, where the (effective) number of parties is substantially higher than during the period before 2008. This indicates that new party formation does not necessarily increase the effective number of parties, as political parties come and go as older ones might go into oblivion.

Institutions and conventions

Not only institutions and conventions but also some more informal aspects are important for coalition politics. Due to the crises impact and to substantive turbulences, particularly on the party scene and because of democracy concerns in several countries – and in several government periods – the functions and working of institutions vary and the informal gathers ground. Nonetheless, institutions and conventions set the parameters for politics. Some of them

define the basic design of each political system. Rules do not always determine behaviour, but they often shape behaviour. [Table 13.2](#) shows some of the important institutional foundations of politics in our ten countries. In our analysis, the formal rules are one part of the context of coalition politics, but as discussed in many of the country chapters, the personalities of political actors and events are also very important. We will shortly return to how behaviour varies but let us first consider the basics of the institutional setup.

Among the ten countries, Poland and Romania have bicameral systems in which an upper house does have some influence over national politics. The country chapter ([Chapter 10](#)) explains that in Romania, both chambers vote on the incoming cabinet. In Poland, the lower house, the Sejm, has the dominant role both in legislation and in government formation. Also bicameral, there is thus an incongruence between the power of the two chambers. Another institutional variation is in the use of the (German type) constructive vote of no-confidence. In Hungary, Poland (from 1997), and Slovenia, a sitting PM/cabinet can only be removed by the parliament if the parliament at the same time votes with majority support for an alternative candidate.

All countries have rules for government formation that requires a potential government to pass a vote of investiture before it can take office and the ten CEE countries analysed in the book show an interesting degree of variation, with half of them – Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – relying

Table 13.2 Institutional rules and conventions concerning cabinet formation

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Year of first cabinet under rule</i> | <i>Constructive vote of no-confidence</i> | <i>Bi-cameral system</i> | <i>Semi-presidential system</i> | <i>Investiture vote decision rule</i> | <i>Cabinet responsible to upper chamber</i> |
|----------------|---|---|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Bulgaria | 1990 | No | No | No | 1 | No |
| Czechia | 1992 | No | No | No | 1 | No |
| Czechia | 1996 | No | Yes | No | 1 | No |
| Estonia | 1992 | No | No | No | 2 | No |
| Hungary | 1990 | No | No | No | 1 | No |
| Hungary | 1992 | Yes | No | No | 1 | No |
| Latvia | 1993 | No | No | No | 2 | No |
| Lithuania | 1992 | No | No | Yes | 2 | No |
| Poland | 1991 | No | Yes | Yes | 1,1,2 | No |
| Poland | 1997 | Yes | Yes | No | 1,1,2 | No |
| Romania | 1990 | No | Yes | Yes | 1 | Yes |
| Slovakia | 1992 | No | No | No | 2 | No |
| Slovenia | 1990 | Yes | Yes | No | 1,1,2 | No |

Note:

Investiture decision rules: 1: majority support, 50 per cent + 1 in support of government; 2: plurality support. When there are multiple decision rules reported, this reflects a change in the decision rule as the voting rounds progress. That is, e.g., 1,1,2 for Poland, indicates that in the first two rounds, a 50 per cent + 1 vote in support of the government is required, while in the third round, the decision rule is changed to one requiring plurality support.

on the vote of a single chamber and a simple majority as investiture procedure. Four countries – Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia – require the absolute majority of votes in one chamber, while only one – Romania – has the strongest requirements, demanding an absolute majority in both chambers of the parliament.

PM and Presidential powers

Variations in the role and power of the PM are sometimes acknowledged in the coalition literature. Interestingly, most comparative studies of coalitions in parliamentary democracies largely overlook the crucial role of presidents. Here we briefly highlight how both positions can be important for coalition politics. We again make an important distinction between the institutional formalities and how personality, informalities, and party politics shape relations.

Prime ministerial institutional power has in Western Europe been found to affect the number of bargaining rounds, the frequency of surplus coalitions, and the use of conflict management mechanisms (Strøm et al 2008; Bergman et al 2021c). To measure the power of the PM, Bergman et al (2019) and Bergman et al (2021c) combined governance variables into an index containing seven variables. Following Strøm and colleagues (2003), the indicators are based on the following questions: (1) does the PM appoint the cabinet ministers? (2) Can he or she dismiss these ministers? (3) Does the parliamentary accountability run through the PM, meaning that parliament can unseat ministers only by unseating the full cabinet (or the PM)? (4) Does the PM determine the jurisdiction of other ministers? (5) Is there a formal steering mechanism? (6) Does the PM have full control over the cabinet agenda? When the PM also has a (7) bureaucratic structure in his or her own office to monitor other ministers and ministries, the PM has a full set of PM powers (the PM index for our ten countries is presented in [Appendix A](#)). In the Bergman et al (2019: 533–536) volume, the Czech and Polish PMs were ranked as the ones with the highest PM powers. They were followed by the PMs in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, and Romania. At the opposite pole, the PMs in Slovakia and Slovenia had the fewest institutional powers vis-à-vis the cabinet and the parliament. With only a few changes, our ranking today is consistent with that earlier finding. During the observation period from 2008, only the Prime ministers in Czechia (2017) and Hungary (2014) have seen an increase in the institutional variables of their PM powers. In the rest of the countries, the PMs institutional prerogatives have been stable.

All the countries in the CEE region have elected Heads of State. In the literature on cabinets in parliamentary democracies, the institutional powers of the president are perhaps less well-known, relative to the role and power of the PMs. However, interestingly there is a lot of variation in the role and powers of the president (as showed in [Appendix A](#)). The Polish presidency is the one that has been allotted the most institutional powers. The Polish president's power to singlehandedly dismiss the PM/Cabinet was abandoned

in the early 1990s, still, the president is formally crucial at the government formation stage, can dissolve parliament, and has some decree and veto powers. The Polish president also has areas of legislative initiative and can call for a national referendum. Next in the power ranking among presidents is the president in Romania. In fact, in the Bergman et al (2019: 530) volume, based on the evidence at the time, Romania was the only full-fledged semi-presidential regime in the CEE region. However, as noted by Ştefan (2021: 482) “presidential power is dramatically reduced when the parliamentary majority is hostile to the president” so even in this case presidential power can be severely limited and depends on the party constellations. Similarly, in Poland under the PiS governments, political constellations overruled institutional rules and decreased presidential powers. According to our institutional measurements, also Lithuania and Slovakia can be discussed in terms of systems which allow above medium impact by presidential institutional design.

Above all the two indexes in the chapter appendix highlight a theme that is running through our chapter. This is the sometimes large discrepancy between the letter of the constitution and the practice of governance.

There are two aspects that might put flesh on the institutional bones, namely the *power of informality* and *the role of actors*. Several chapters in this book hint at the power of informality in the working of coalitions. This is an important finding particularly as one main result of the Bergman et al (2019) book was an ongoing institutional consolidation in which both the forms and rules of the coalition game were getting settled. Following this up we could observe that the institutional forms remain intact, but the behaviour keeps changing. The implication is that institutionalization per se has not continued in all aspects of coalition politics. While formal institutions only rarely transform, we find considerable fluctuation in how they are used. Variation in the informal is ongoing.

In relation to some countries, the power of informality is particularly emphasized. A prime example is Romania where politicians’ personal strategies often trump their party belonging: they often individually support governments for personal favours. Unsurprisingly, this is evidenced in parliament, in terms of weak voting discipline and Members of Parliament crossing party benches. The informal is not necessarily identical to the personal or the personalized but both pinpoint the sometimes feeble relevance of the institutional setting. The informal might follow from and complement institutions while personalization can well fit a more established hierarchical structure. An interesting example of how personalities might change the logic of coalition politics comes from Estonia: as the Estonia chapter reveals the leadership change in the Centre Party (EK) changed the coalition formation patterns – making the party an acceptable partner after a long period of exclusion – allowing a centre-left coalition formation pattern.

Among new actors, as we have stressed above, new parties and new party leaders are paramount. Most chapters mention that due to electoral volatility and party fluctuation new parties with new leaders have rocketed into top

positions including government positions. Possibly the most spectacular is the Slovenian case where three Prime ministers got into this position as the head of new parties without prior government or parliamentary experience. The chapter notes that this brings inexperience, frequent ideological vagueness, and unpredictability to the floor. Indeed, information uncertainty is a regular theme of coalition literature and new party success can make coalition formation and governance unpredictable. Still, some country chapters strengthen the former findings of the literature focusing on CEE (Grotz and Weber 2016). That is, the newcomer handicap as assumed in some of the traditional literature could transform into a newcomer advantage when the new party is large and strategically placed. A party that is needed for coalition formation, or at least might cause difficulties prospectively if it is left in the opposition benches, has a bargaining advantage. For an understanding of this mechanism, one should remember that many of the newcomer parties were born out of a critique of the existing parties, on an anti-corruption, anti-elite agenda (Hanley and Sikk 2016).

While several new “rocketing” parties soon leave government – again the Slovenian chapter is good guidance in this regard – there are others that remain in power. A prime example of the latter is the GERB party in Bulgaria, which was born in 2009 as a ‘crisis party’. Ever since it has survived all possible crises and the party leader PM Borisov has now become the country’s longest-serving prime minister. As the chapter on Bulgaria presents and other writings also argue (Spirova and Sharenkova-Toshkova 2021), GERB maintained the newcomer image by distancing the party from incumbency: the PM resigned twice although it was not really necessary. Both times, the subsequent elections brought him electoral success and renewed his governing position.

Other new actors have been political entrepreneurs who could basically finance their own party, such as PM Babiš in Czechia. New actors in politics occasionally also bring formerly unknown or at least rare practices. One example is the Slovakian PM Matovič, leader of the OĽaNO party, an “eccentric businessman”, according to the chapter’s wording. He aimed to manage the COVID crisis personally and tended to bypass regular decision-making processes, which created a conflictual atmosphere. Eventually, he agreed to step down as PM and occupied the position of the Minister of Finance. These examples emphasize how novelty or newness can alter coalition politics.

In other instances, and as another type of challenge, established actors might transform the workings of institutions. In Hungary and Poland long-serving politicians (Orbán and Kaczyński, respectively) had a powerful and polarising impact. We have also seen that without an institutional change *per se*, some political roles have been transformed – the Czech President Zeman serving as an example. Due to his conflict with his old party (ČSSD), he became a courier of PM Babiš and his subsequent governments.

During our observation period, we could also find the president’s role transformed in Lithuania. In this case, at least, evidence demonstrates that presidential activism can have a positive influence and ‘help to stave off the

worst effects of party system instability and electoral volatility’ (Pukelis and Jastramskis 2021: 475). The significance of the Bulgarian head of state has also increased – mainly because the number of caretaker governments in the observation period is at par with the number of coalitions. Thus, even with the institutional stability in the formal role of the Heads of State (as shown in [Appendix A](#)), the role of the elected head of state might have varied significantly.

Important aspects of the coalition life cycle

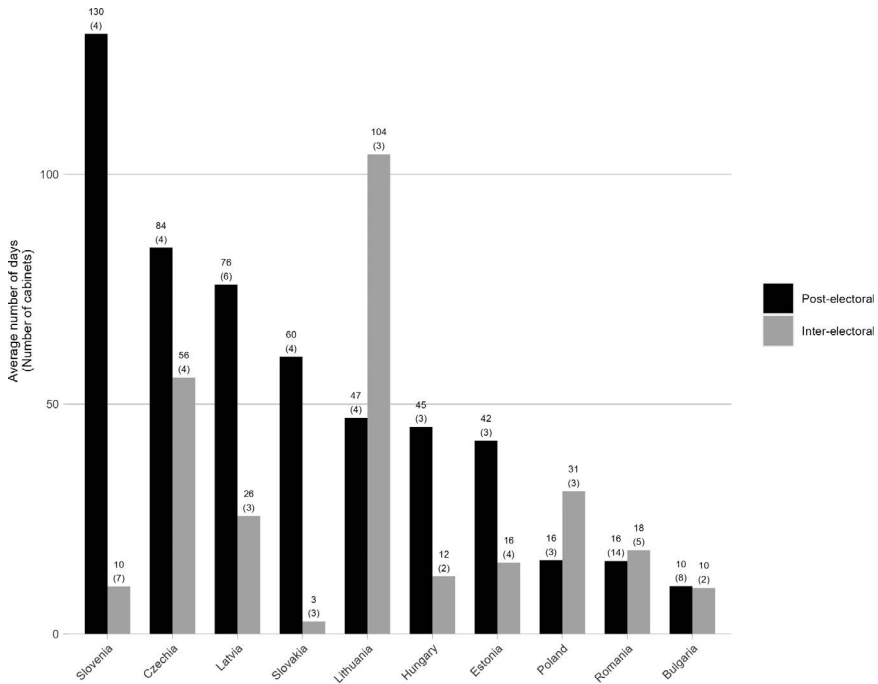
We now turn to a comparative overview of the life cycle of coalition governments and discuss whether we can observe any new patterns of coalition formation, coalition governance, and government terminations. In the three subsections, first, we address themes that are classical in the coalition literature, including the formation period, type of government, the median legislator party, as well as main dimensions of party competition. We then move on to examine the governance phase, with aspects common in that literature, such as portfolio allocation and how coalitions set up mechanisms to manage internal conflicts and dynamics. Finally, we also compare the length of coalition agreements, the content of policy commitments, and the record of cabinet termination.

Coalition bargaining and formation

As mentioned in the introduction, we count the beginning of a new government after elections when it was sworn in, passed the parliamentary inauguration vote, or the date of the general election. Also, the end of the cabinet is defined as when the cabinet resigned or the date of a general election, whichever comes first. These two events also define the total length of the government formation process after elections, which is the number of days from the election until a new government is appointed. Similarly, the length of government formation processes that occurs between elections is simply the elapsed time from when the previous government resigned (or was removed) until the next government took office.¹

Using this definition, on average, the time to form a government has increased when comparing the two time periods used in our analyses for this volume. It took about 30 days between 1990 and 2007 to form an average government after or between elections (or about 46 days after parliamentary elections). This has increased to an average of 38 days for the period between 2008 and 2021 (or to about 48 days after parliamentary elections). Thus, although there is no large increase over time, there are still some indications that the actual time it takes to form a new government is more protracted than before.

Investigating this in more detail, [Figure 13.1](#) shows how long it takes on average to form governments after and between parliamentary elections in the different countries. Although the figure only shows the average for 2008–2021, in seven of ten countries, there is an average increase in the time required for government formation. In Slovenia, Latvia, Czechia, and Slovakia,



Notes: The figure shows the average number of days required for cabinet formation after parliamentary elections (black bars) and between elections (grey bars). The number of days is shown above the bars, and below it in parentheses the number of government formations.

Figure 13.1 Formation duration

the average time for government formation after elections has increased significantly – more than a month on average. In Slovenia and Latvia, time to form a government has increased by almost two months, and the more protracted government formations go hand in hand with the electoral success of new political parties and more party fragmentation in parliament. In Czechia and Slovakia, either the entry of new parties or difficulties to work out government majorities explain the phenomenon. In Poland, in contrast, the time to form a government has been reduced with about a month, following decreased party system fragmentation. However, the causal pattern is not automatic and direct. For example, in Hungary, despite the supermajority position of the two currently governing parties, for their three governments, the formation periods were not particularly short.

Numerous studies have shown that government formation after elections takes longer if bargaining over government takes place between elections (Golder 2010; Ecker and Meyer 2015; Bäck et al 2023). This is because there is more uncertainty among party actors after elections, as prior to elections political parties often revise their platforms and new candidates are elected. However,

when a new formation occurs in an inter-election period, the actors, political parties have already revealed approximately which offers are acceptable, and how much they can compromise on various policy issues. [Figure 13.1](#) not only confirms that government formation takes less time between elections, i.e., they are inter-electoral, but it also indicates that government formation sometimes can take considerable time even between elections, as demonstrated by the Czech and Lithuanian cases. The main reason for these averages is, however, a couple of very protracted government formations. In Czechia, the formation of Babiš's second cabinet took over 150 days, and in Lithuania, Skvernelis' second cabinet took over 200 days to form (but only lasted about two months).

The time it takes to form governments is often related to the type of governments that form. In majoritarian electoral systems which normally produce a single-party majority winner, government formation is a simple and swift process. In contrast, proportional electoral systems often result in minority situations, where two or more parties are required for a parliamentary majority.

In Central Eastern Europe, less than 5 per cent of the parliamentary elections have resulted in a single-party majority winner. This is not surprising as all countries, except Hungary and Lithuania, use some form of proportional representation system for the legislature's lower chamber. Nonetheless, coalitions are common in all countries, including Hungary and Lithuania. [Table 13.3](#) provides an overview of party-based cabinets covered in this volume and shows the variation of the different types of cabinets between countries, divided into two columns for two periods (1990–2007 and 2008–2021). In the table, we separate between five cabinet types, depending on the number of parties, and whether the cabinet is backed by a legislative majority. In this regard, coalitions are the most common government type and constitute almost 90 per cent of the cabinets in Central Eastern Europe. In more detail, the most common form of government is minimal winning coalitions (MWCs), which in the latter period make up about 45 per cent of all cabinets, followed by minority coalitions (27 per cent), and oversized coalitions (20 per cent). More than one-third of all cabinets are minority cabinets (including minority coalitions), and they are more common in Romania and Czechia where about every second cabinet has been a minority cabinet.

Comparing the two time periods, a couple of changes over time are particularly apparent. One is the decreasing share of single-party cabinets in some countries. Single-party majority cabinets have virtually disappeared – with one exception in Slovakia. The large parties of systemic change – either the umbrella organisations or some of the successor parties – have often left the political scene and there seems to be only one party that has developed a size that could allow a single-party majority cabinet formation, that is, Fidesz in Hungary. However, as discussed above, even this party has opted for a formalised coalition format. Furthermore, we can observe a more frequent occurrence of MWCs (from about 35 to 45 per cent). The trend that coalitions, and in particular MWCs, have become more common is also a recent trend in Western Europe (Bergman et al 2021b). Note, however, that this trend has some notable

Table 13.3 Type of cabinets

| Country | Number of cabinets | | Single-party cabinets (%) | | | | Coalition cabinets (%) | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| | | | Minority | | Majority | | Minority | | Minimal winning coalitions | | Oversized coalitions | |
| | 1990–2007 | 2008–2021 | 1990–2007 | 2008–2021 | 1990–2007 | 2008–2021 | 1990–2007 | 2008–2021 | 1990–2007 | 2008–2021 | 1990–2007 | 2008–2021 |
| Bulgaria | 9 | 5 | 11.1 | 20 | 11.1 | 0 | 0 | 60 | 22.2 | 20 | 44.4 | 0 |
| Czechia | 10 | 7 | 20 | 14.3 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 28.6 | 40 | 28.6 | 0 | 28.6 |
| Estonia | 11 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 36.4 | 14.3 | 45.5 | 85.7 | 18.2 | 0 |
| Hungary | 8 | 5 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 50 | 0 | 50 | 60 |
| Latvia | 16 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37.5 | 33.3 | 18.8 | 44.4 | 43.8 | 22.2 |
| Lithuania | 11 | 7 | 9.1 | 0 | 18.2 | 0 | 18.2 | 14.3 | 45.5 | 57.1 | 9.1 | 28.6 |
| Poland | 15 | 6 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 26.7 | 0 | 46.7 | 100 | 6.7 | 0 |
| Romania | 17 | 18 | 17.6 | 16.7 | 5.9 | 0 | 41.2 | 27.8 | 5.9 | 38.9 | 29.4 | 16.7 |
| Slovakia | 10 | 7 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 14.3 | 30 | 0 | 50 | 57.1 | 10 | 28.6 |
| Slovenia | 11 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18.2 | 54.5 | 45.5 | 27.3 | 36.4 | 18.2 |
| Means | | | 9.3 | 7.3 | 3.4 | 1.2 | 27.1 | 26.8 | 34.7 | 45.1 | 24.6 | 19.5 |

Note:

The table is based on the cabinet formation date. The 1990–2007 period begins on January 1, 1990, and ends on December 31, 2007. The 2008–2021 period begins on January 1, 2008, and ends on December 31, 2021. Non-partisan cabinets are excluded.

exceptions. In a few countries, the number of MWCs has decreased, i.e., in Czechia and in Slovenia (as well as in Hungary, for the reason discussed above).

A robust prediction is that when political parties do not have their own parliamentary majority, they will try to form MWCs (Riker 1962). Another important prediction is that we could expect the median legislator party (De Swaan 1973; Döring and Hellström 2013) and the largest party (Mattila and Raunio 2004; Döring and Hellström 2013) to have a high likelihood of being a government member. Consequently, political parties that are located near the centre of the most important ideological dimension should be more likely to become government members than more ideologically extreme parties. To be able to make comparisons over time, Table 13.4 shows the median legislator party on a single policy dimension for all countries, namely the economic left-right dimension (although this is not always the most relevant policy dimension as was seen in Table 13.1). The table shows that the median legislator party was included in most governments during the first period (1990–2007), except for Estonian governments. However, when looking at the second period (2008–2021), the median party is less often in government than before (from 74 to 64 per cent), and in three countries (Estonia, Romania, and Slovenia), they occupy government positions in the minority of cases. The weakening importance of the economic left-right policy dimension in government formation in many party systems, related to the strengthening of populist parties, is the same trend that we can observe in Western Europe (Bergman et al 2021c). However, that political parties' positions on economic left-right policy issues are less important for government formations in Central and Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe is not a new phenomenon (e.g., Döring and Hellström 2013).

Table 13.4 Median party and largest party in government

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Number of party-based cabinets</i> | | <i>Median party on the economic left-right dimension in cabinet (%)</i> | | <i>Largest party in cabinet (%)</i> | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|---|------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| | <i>1990–2007</i> | <i>2008–2021</i> | <i>1990–2007</i> | <i>2008–2021</i> | <i>1990–2007</i> | <i>2008–2021</i> |
| Bulgaria | 9 | 5 | 80 | 50 | 90 | 30 |
| Czechia | 10 | 7 | 70 | 87.5 | 90 | 50 |
| Estonia | 11 | 7 | 27.3 | 42.9 | 63.6 | 71.4 |
| Hungary | 8 | 5 | 100 | 50 | 100 | 100 |
| Latvia | 16 | 9 | 81.2 | 77.8 | 68.8 | 22.2 |
| Lithuania | 11 | 7 | 72.7 | 100 | 90.9 | 57.1 |
| Poland | 15 | 6 | 100 | 100 | 93.3 | 100 |
| Romania | 17 | 18 | 64.7 | 47.4 | 70.6 | 68.4 |
| Slovakia | 10 | 7 | 60 | 57.1 | 40 | 85.7 |
| Slovenia | 11 | 11 | 81.8 | 36.4 | 81.8 | 72.7 |
| Total | 118 | 82 | | | | |
| Means | | | 73.9 | 64 | 78.2 | 62.9 |

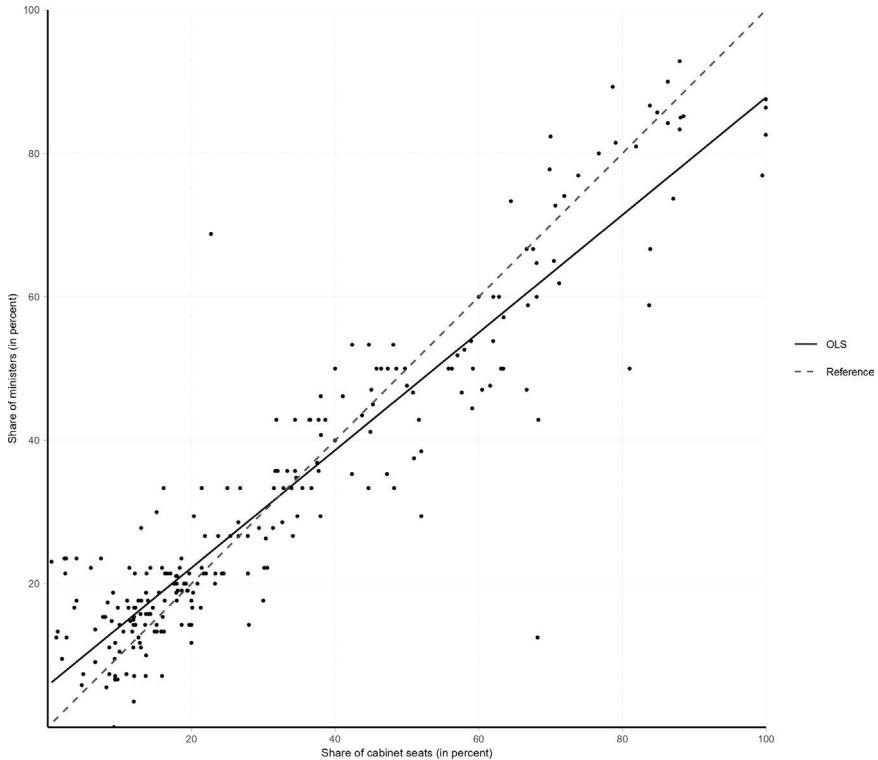
Notes:

The table is based on the cabinet formation date. The 1990–2007 period begins on January 1, 1990, and ends on December 31, 2007. The 2008–2021 period begins on January 1, 2008 and ends on December 31, 2021. Non-partisan cabinets are excluded.

As several studies indicate, the largest party is regularly also a government party (e.g., Döring and Hellström 2013; Bergman et al 2015; Bergman et al 2021a). This is expected, as in many countries, there is an established practice that the head of state appoints the party leader of the largest party to be the first to get a chance to form a government (e.g., Bäck and Dumont 2008; Döring and Hellström 2013). As [Table 13.4](#) shows, the largest parliamentary party is in government in more than seven of ten cabinets in Central and Eastern Europe. Although it differs a lot between countries since 2008, the largest parties have become somewhat less decisive in coalition formation in many countries (on average from 78 to 63 per cent of all cabinets formed included the largest party). In the cases, when the largest party is excluded from the government, it is usually either a newcomer that the other parties do not want to allow into coalition politics or a party that remains a major force in electoral terms despite its disastrous government credentials (Hanley and Sikk 2016). As to the former, we can note the party of Positive Slovenia (PS) and the latter the SMER in Slovakia. The story of PS illustrates the difficulties in the conceptualisation of new party formation (Sikk 2005; Kosowska-Gaśtoł and Sobolewska-Myślik 2022) as the newcomer PS had a pre-history in terms of its leadership. Although PS won the largest share of votes and enjoyed the largest share of seats in 2010, the other parties did not want to enter a coalition with it – thus, the largest party was left out. SMER, the leftist-nationalist and the largest party in Slovakia, was boycotted in government formation in 2010. Although SMER returned to power later, eventually it was forced out of government due to serious corruption allegations and crisis mismanagement.

Portfolio allocation

The allocation of ministerial portfolio allocation is central to the government formation process: which party gets what ministry and how many ministries does it get? The literature on portfolio allocation usually focuses on predicting how many portfolios each party gets, and one early finding from this research was that parties receive ministerial posts in relation to their parliamentary seat share. The proportionality prediction originates from Gamson's (1961: 376) argument that coalition partners will expect payoffs that are 'proportional to the amount of resources which they contribute to a coalition'. In the context of portfolio allocation, Browne and Franklin (1973: 457) argue that the 'percentage share of ministries received by a party participating in a governing coalition and the percentage share of that party's coalition seats will be proportional on a one-to-one basis.' The proportionality relationship has been strongly supported by empirical research ever since, but some minor deviations have been noted. For instance, as noted already by Browne and Franklin (1973), small parties tend to get more than their share if strict proportionality was used (also see Ecker and Meyer 2019). [Figure 13.2](#) illustrates the proportional relationship in our ten countries for the entire democratic period.



Notes: The figure shows the relationship between share of ministers (in percent) and share of cabinet seats (in percent). The solid line is the estimated linear regression line and the dashed line a 45-degree reference line (which indicates a perfect one-to-one relationship). The slope of the estimated line is 0.82 and the explained variance in terms of the R-square is equal to about 86 percent.

Figure 13.2 Portfolio allocation

The figure shows the expected and general pattern and confirms what earlier studies on Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Ecker et al. 2015, Bergman et al 2019: 551) and Western Europe (e.g., Bergman et al 2021c) have found. There is a strong, but not perfect, proportionality relationship. A small-party bonus is also confirmed, as the figure shows that political parties that contribute up to about a third of the share of the cabinet's parliamentary seats tend to get a somewhat larger share of the cabinet positions on average.

Coalition agreements and governance mechanisms

As we explained in the introductory chapter ([Chapter 1](#)), this book focuses much on the second phase in the coalition life cycle, the so-called coalition governance phase. One important aspect of coalition governance is the

written agreements, the coalition contracts, which are usually drafted between political parties when forming a coalition. Also, another important aspect when a coalition government forms is the mechanisms used to constrain and monitor other coalition partners' ministers (Strøm, Müller et al 2008). These mechanisms facilitate collective decisions in situations in which the incentives of each coalition party and the minister formally in charge of a policy area might differ from that of the majority in the cabinet. Thus, they are mechanisms for cabinets to avoid and manage conflicts to cooperate effectively and survive.

In Table 13.5, we present a summary of the frequency of coalition agreements and the most common coalition governance mechanisms used (compiled by our country experts). Coalition agreements are also discussed in more detail in the following section, but here we briefly present information on the occurrence of coalition agreements to give a more complete overview of various coalition governance mechanisms in Central and Eastern European coalition governments.

Table 13.5 Coalition agreements and conflict management mechanisms, 2008–2021

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Number of coalition cabinets</i> | <i>Coalition agreement</i> | <i>Agreement public</i> | <i>Coalition management mechanisms (three most common)</i> | <i>Cabinets with watchdog junior ministers</i> |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| Bulgaria | 5 | 4 | 4 | CoC, PS, IC | 5 |
| Czechia | 7 | 6 | 6 | CoC, O, IC | 0 |
| Estonia | 8 | 8 | 8 | CaC, Parl, CoC | 0 |
| Hungary | 5 | 2 | 2 | O, CoC, Parl | 3 |
| Latvia | 10 | 10 | 10 | CaC, CoC, Parl | 0 |
| Lithuania | 8 | 7 | 6 | CoC, Parl, CaC | 0 |
| Poland | 7 | 7 | 3 | PS, PCa | 7 |
| Romania | 16 | 14 | 14 | PS, CoC | 16 |
| Slovakia | 7 | 7 | 7 | CoC, PS | 7 |
| Slovenia | 12 | 12 | 12 | IC, PS, PCa | 0 |

Notes:

The table includes all coalition cabinets in office on or after January 1, 2008.

Conflict management mechanisms:

Internal:

IC Inner cabinet: a subset of cabinet ministers which is not issue-specific and which is stable over time.

CaC Cabinet committee(s): typically issue-specific; they may include cabinet ministers, junior ministers, and/or civil servants.

Mixed:

CoC Coalition committee: typically permanent with relatively stable membership, consisting of party leaders but not limited to cabinet members.

PCa Combination of cabinet members and parliamentarians.

External:

Parl Parliamentary leaders (heads of the coalition parties' parliamentary groups).

PS Party summit: typically ad hoc, consisting of one or several leaders for each coalition party, some but not all attendants may be cabinet members.

Other:

O Other. This coding option has only been used with extra caution and scarcity and only if no other mechanism is applied at all. See the comments to Table 13.4 of the country chapters for a more detailed description.

Written agreements are the norm when a coalition government forms. These are usually also made public. In fact, of the 85 coalition cabinets that formed between 2008–2021, 77 had such agreements and only a few agreements in Lithuania and Poland were not made available to the public. The reason why the latter is important is that making use of coalition agreements which are public makes it more likely that parties honour these deals, even when a policy domain is delegated to individual ministers, as they can be held accountable for them by the voters. Although coalition agreements may be the most important tool for conflict avoidance, coalitions also use several different so-called conflict management mechanisms. In [Table 13.5](#), we provide an overview of the most used mechanisms to handle conflicts (usually over policy) between coalition partners. These conflicts are managed not only within different arenas, but also by different participants, but normally consist of representatives from all coalition parties, i.e., party leaders, cabinet members, and parliamentary leaders (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008; Müller and Meyer 2010).

The most common conflict management mechanism used in eight out of ten countries is a *coalition committee* – a committee which is normally more or less permanent with relatively stable membership, consisting of leaders of the coalition, usually the parties’ leading ministers and party leaders outside the government. Coalition committees (CoC) are not issue-specific but rather largely institutionalized bodies which meet regularly to discuss day-to-day policies and the general guidelines of government policy. The second most common mechanisms used in coalition governments in five out of ten countries are the so-called *inner cabinets* (IC) and *cabinet committees* (CaC). In both bodies, conflicts are handled within the cabinet and do not involve members from other political arenas. The *inner cabinet* is a body, including the most senior cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister and the deputy prime minister(s). Like a coalition committee, the inner cabinet is also stable over time and is not issue-specific. A *cabinet committee* is typically issue-specific and may include cabinet ministers, junior ministers, and/or civil servants. They also differ from an inner cabinet by often including more ministers, and often the minister responsible for a particular policy area.

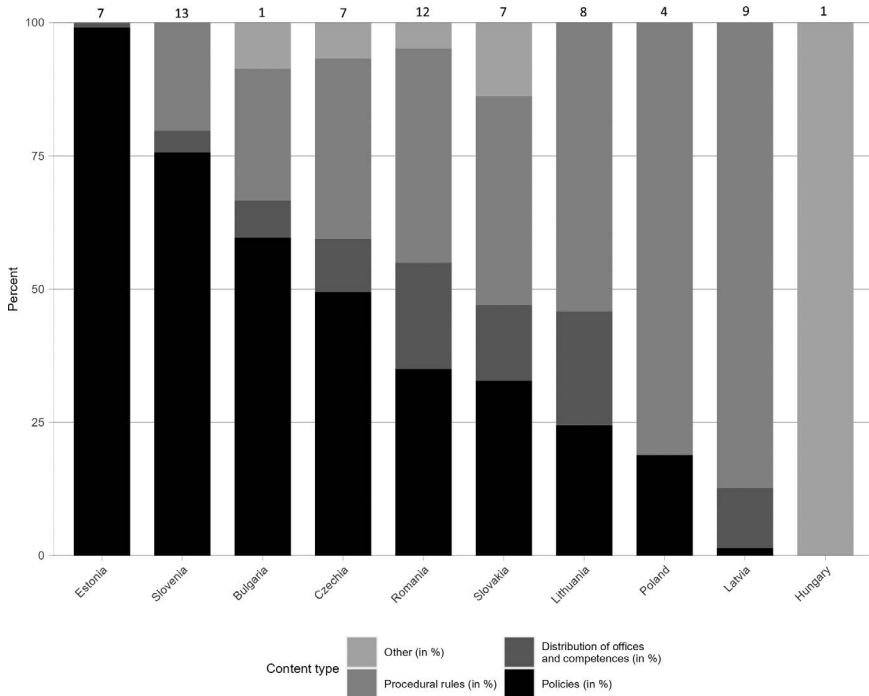
In [Table 13.5](#), so-called *watchdog junior ministers* are also listed, which are very common in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia where all, or almost all, coalition governments use this control mechanism. It is also used in most coalition cabinets in Bulgaria, Latvia, and Slovakia. Watchdog junior ministers are when parties in coalition governments appoint their own junior ministers to a ministry where the head of the department comes from another party. Thus, that minister can then act as a “watchdog” by monitoring the minister and screening the departmental affairs from a partisan point of view (Thies 2001). As described by Strøm et al (2010: 524–525), the presence of watchdog junior ministers not only “helps to reduce information asymmetries between the party holding the portfolio and its coalition partner(s)” but also if controversial issues cannot be resolved between the minister and

the junior minister, the information provided by the watchdog junior minister “can enable the parties not holding the portfolio to act in other arenas—the cabinet, a coalition committee, or the corresponding parliamentary committee.” Thus, as watchdog junior ministers can “shadow” ministers from other parties and observe the policymaking activities of their partners, thereby acting to make sure that the minister does not defect from any coalition agreement, or the jointly agreed coalition policy.

As mentioned, a common mechanism that coalition parties use to govern together, and to set up a joint policy agenda that everyone can accept, is to draft a coalition agreement. All coalitions are based on some either implicit or explicit agreement between their members, one that goes beyond the allocation of cabinet portfolios. If there are very small policy differences and trust prevails among coalition-forming parties, explicit and written contracts may not be necessary. In most cases, however, the coalition partners will make an explicit and written agreement. That is to write a contract describing the policies that should be implemented during the government’s time in office. In that way, these agreements can be used to control coalition partners when power is delegated to individual ministers and to avoid that ministers “drift” from the agreed government policy programme.

As described in the second chapter of this volume, these agreements are the most authoritative document on constraining party behaviour in the coalition, and to varying degrees cover three different topics: *policy agreements*, *portfolio allocation and the distribution of competencies*, and *procedural rules*. In [Figure 13.3](#), we present information on the content of coalition agreements as classified by our country experts. The figure shows the average share of agreement text focusing on policy, procedural rules, or portfolio allocation for the period 2008–2021.

Research on West European coalition governments has shown that political parties mainly use such documents to agree on the government’s policy programme, thereby constraining coalition partners from pursuing their own agenda when controlling a specific department (e.g., Müller et al 2008; Klüver and Bäck 2019). In the 1990s and 2000s, this was also the case for most countries covered in this volume, as most of the coalition agreements were devoted to policy issues. But this has changed, as the government programme has become less important in all countries except Estonia, Slovenia, and Bulgaria during the period 2008–2021.² In contrast to the developments in Western Europe, coalition governments in most CEE countries rather use the agreement for accounting of the distribution of ministerial portfolios, and even more importantly, for procedural rules. For instance, in Czechia, Romania, Slovakia, Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia, most of the written agreements are focused on such rules. In these procedural agreements, coalition partners not only agree on how decisions will be made and bargained in the cabinet but also on how to manage intra-coalitional conflict. As argued by Müller et al. (2008), and later Bowler et al (2016), strong procedural rules may compensate for a lack of explicit substantive policy agreement. Coalitions that devote little attention to



Notes: The number of coalition agreements is shown over each bar.

Figure 13.3 Coalition agreement content

joint policy agreements normally set up more rules and procedures that specify and detail the governance mechanisms. It is also likely connected to complex bargaining situations forcing ideologically dissimilar parties to form coalitions. Bowler et al (2016) indicate that when coalitions are ideologically heterogeneous and there is an increased risk for intra-coalition disagreement, parties tend to write shorter contracts at the coalition formation (i.e., before taking office) and are rather inclined to agree on more elaborate procedures for the governing together after taking office. Although it goes beyond the scope of this chapter to explain the abovementioned differences, our data provides a promising basis for further research.

Governing together – Three governance models compared

In the introduction, three models (or types) of coalition governance models were described. These models give a simplified, still informative overview of how coalition parties govern together. One model, the ministerial government model, is based on a division of power between coalition partners and their ministers, giving individual ministers a great deal of autonomy. A second model, the coalition compromise model, emphasizes inter-party compromise

among the government parties. A third model, the dominant Prime Minister model, captures when a cabinet is dominated by the leading party and the PM. Returning to our three models of coalition governance, Bergman et al (2019: 555–558) suggest that the ministerial government model was particularly strong in Latvia and Bulgaria. The PM model was dominant in Poland and Hungary. Slovakia followed a similar model but to a lesser extent. The coalition compromise model was particularly strong in Czechia and, above all, Slovenia.

The extent to which the three governance models – ministerial, coalition compromise, and prime minister dominated – apply to a particular country or cabinet remains one of the novel and challenging aspects of our research enterprise. To capture this, Bergman et al (2021c) study coalition governance from a comparative perspective by identifying seven indicators of coalition governance politics. One of these indicators is the PM powers that we discussed above. The length of coalition agreements is another, so is the average policy content of these agreements. We can also consider if these written coalition contracts have been comprehensive or at least included a wide variety of policy issues. The governance aspects include mechanisms such as the use of top-level party summits to adjudicate intra-coalition disagreements. The frequency of the use of ‘watchdog’ junior ministers is another important indicator. In cabinet-parliament relations, it matters whether parliament voting discipline is strict or not. The final indication that we use is if there is a high-level power concentration in the cabinet in the sense that the PM party holds the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance (Budget).

Applying the same logic to our ten cases, a comparison is illustrated in a chapter appendix ([Appendix B](#)). We operationalize the three models accordingly. The coalition compromise model is one where, for example, party summit is used to manage intra-coalition conflict, coalition agreements are central, and these devote much attention to policy matters. The PM model, instead, is one where (unsurprisingly) PM power has a high score, and the dominant party controls several of the most important ministries. The ministerial government model, finally, is one in which party summits are also common but parliamentary discipline can be less strict, allowing more leeway for the policy-specific ministry.

With the help of the seven indicators that helps us mirror the Bergman et al (2019) and Bergman et al (2021c) analysis, [Table 13.6](#) shows the country ranking of how well the three coalition governance models fit the empirical cases. The model matches are summarized and counted. The countries are ranked on how often they match the expectations of each of our three basic models. Based on the model characteristics suggested by Bergman et al (2021c), in the column furthest to the left, the compromise model, Slovenia also now stands out as the country in which politics most closely follows the model. Bulgaria and Estonia also have many of the traits of that model. The four countries the furthest away from the type are Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Table 13.6 Country ranking based on number of matches with a typical governance model

| <i>Compromise model</i> | <i>PM-dominated model</i> | <i>Ministerial government</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Slovenia (5) | Hungary (6) Poland (6) | Latvia (4) Lithuania (4) |
| Bulgaria (4) Estonia (4) | Lithuania (6) | Poland (4) Romania (4) |
| Romania (4) | Latvia (5) Slovakia (5) | Slovakia (3) |
| Poland (3) Slovakia (3) | Romania (4) Czechia (4) Estonia (4) | Bulgaria (2) Czechia (2) Estonia (2) |
| Czechia (2) Hungary (2) | | Hungary (2) Slovenia (2) |
| Latvia (2) Lithuania (2) | Bulgaria (2) Slovenia (2) | |

Note:

The number in parentheses indicates the number of matches with the respective governance model.

Conversely, in the middle column, the PM-dominated model, the ranking is reversed for Slovenia (a score of 2). It has the position as the political system in which the PM is the most circumscribed by other actors and procedures. Bulgaria is another governance system where the PM is less dominant (also a score of 2). Unsurprisingly, Hungary and Poland are the ones where the core executive dominates governmental and parliamentary politics. More surprising, or perhaps less well-known, is that in the Lithuanian systems the PM also has a privileged position in the country's governance (a score of 6).

Among the three basic governance models, the ministerial government model (column on the right) is the one that separates the ten countries the least. The typical cases of the model used to be Lithuania and Latvia. They are still in a top position. In the top category with Poland, and Romania, Latvia and Lithuania grant relatively much leeway to individual ministers over policy-making and appointments.

The clustering of the countries in [Table 13.6](#) suggests that there is considerable variation in how much the PM is dominant and how well the compromise model applies to our countries. The ministerial model applies more broadly, but not specifically to a certain country. No country has a full-scale such model, rather the general lesson is that having (or being) a minister is always important in a parliamentary democracy. The main differences between the countries do lie elsewhere. The main variation is in the role of the PM and how well the coalition is based on a search for joint positions and consensus.

Again, as is the case with basic institutions, coalition politics does also vary between individual cabinets and Prime Ministers, not least because of the party basis of cabinets. Informality and personalities are again important. For example, probably the most fluctuating governance type is noted in Bulgaria, where it in practice has gone through all three types – from party policy dictator through prime ministerial governance to coalition compromise model.

The country rankings in [Table 13.6](#) mask some of the variation between cabinets, but the models still capture between-country variation in important governance patterns. It is noteworthy that the models are not always exclusionary in the sense that scoring high on one model automatically means low scores on another. This is indeed the case in Hungary, which scores high on the PM model but low on the other two. A contradictory example is Latvia that scores high on two models, but low on a third (the compromise model). There are also countries that score on an intermediate position in all three models, Slovakia is an example of this. It combines traits from all three models but does not stand very close to any. The neighbouring Czechia is an even more striking example of a country in which none of the three governance models dominate. The standard note of more research needed applies.

Government terminations

At the end of the coalition life cycle, cabinets resign or are forced to resign. The unusually high number government turnover observed in Central and Eastern Europe has received much scholarly attention, and most studies have focused on which factors trigger government resignations, and the many replacements of government parties and Prime ministers (e.g., Bergman et al 2015; Walther and Hellström 2022). Although it is beyond this chapter to investigate all the causes of government terminations, below we show and discuss some important cross-country differences and discuss how the general trend has changed over time. As an overview, [Figure 13.4](#) shows the share of early terminations in Central and Eastern Europe. The figure excludes so-called technical terminations, that is, cabinet terminations due to non-political reasons such as regular parliamentary elections, the death of the head of government, or other constitutional reasons. In the figure, two types of discretionary terminations are shown, namely *early elections* or non-electoral *replacements cabinets*. The latter refers to the termination of a cabinet due to any changes of parties in government or if the prime minister is replaced.³

Between 2008 and 2021, in three out of ten countries, it was more common that a cabinet terminated early than served the full term. However, there are large differences between countries. In Slovenia and Romania, less than 20 per cent of the governments served the full term, but in Hungary and Poland, the opposite is true. As the figure shows, termination by early elections is (still) relatively uncommon in CEE, and most early terminations are due to parties leaving (or entering) the government or due to the prime minister being replaced. In Bulgaria, however, all terminations were early parliamentary elections, and all were initiated by the Bulgarian president after failures of forming new governments following government resignations. This is telling as our country experts do not identify any so-called opportunistic early elections or strategic election calling. That is, instances when governments try to seize the opportunity to call for early elections strategically, for instance, during times of relatively strong economic performance, or when they are faring well at the opinion polls (see, for example, Kayser 2005; Hellström and Walther 2019).

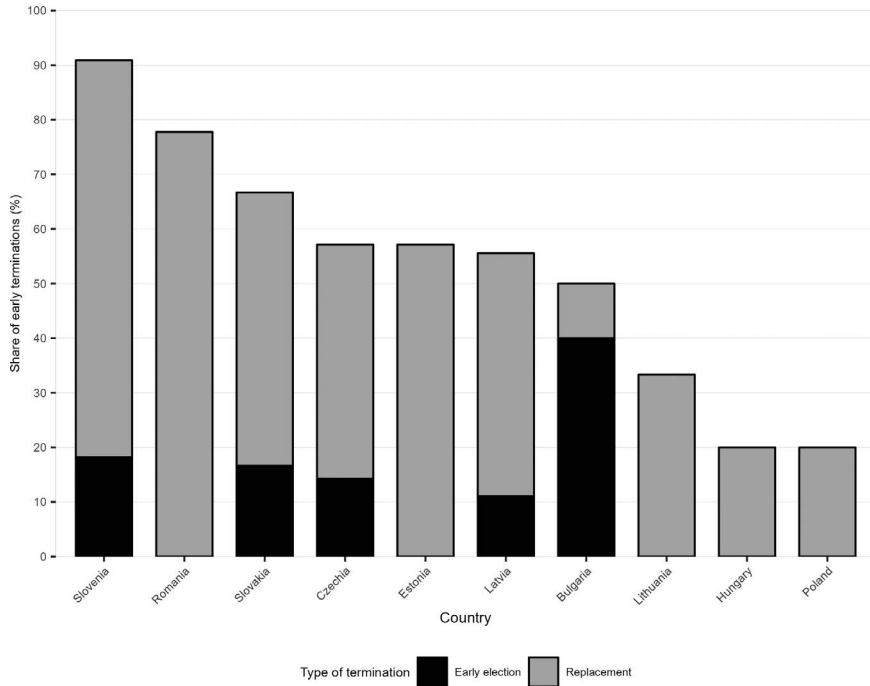


Figure 13.4 Early terminations, 2008–2021

Also, Bergman et al (2019: 559), covering all governments during the period 1990–2014, are reluctant to claim that any of the early elections observed was called strategically and argues that there is only “one cabinet each in Bulgaria (Berov) and Latvia (Dombrovskis III) that might have had such optimistic expectations while all other early terminations leading to elections were conflictual in some sense and certainly not desired by the cabinet parties”.

Examining the precise reasons for terminating more closely, [Table 13.7](#) shows the different mechanisms of cabinet terminations (again according to our country experts). The table includes all cabinets terminated after January 1, 2008 and shows that about three out of ten cabinets have terminated due to technical reasons, such as regular elections, while the majority have terminated for various discretionary terminations. Although there are considerable cross-country differences, in most countries cabinet termination frequently relates to conflicts between coalition partners and accounts for more than 30 per cent of all terminations. This includes policy conflicts, disputes over the appointment of officeholders, and personal conflicts. The pattern of termination reasons is like those found in Western Europe (Bergman et al 2019, 2021c), except for the low occurrence of early parliamentary elections (about 7 per cent compared to 25 per cent in Western Europe). Apart from this, about the same shares of cabinets terminate for reasons of voluntary enlargements, defeat by the opposition in parliament, conflicts between the coalition parties (policy or

Table 13.7 Mechanisms of cabinet terminations, 2008–2021

| Country | Number of party-based cabinets | Regular parliamentary election | Death of PM | Early parliamentary election | Voluntary enlargement of coalition | Cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament | Policy conflict | Personnel conflict | Intra-party conflict in coalition parties | Number of discretionary terminations | Share discretionary terminations |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|-----------------|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Bulgaria | 6 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 83.3 |
| Czechia | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 57.1 |
| Estonia | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 62.5 |
| Hungary | 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 33.3 |
| Latvia | 10 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 60 |
| Lithuania | 8 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 28.6 |
| Poland | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 16.7 |
| Romania | 19 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 14 | 77.8 |
| Slovakia | 8 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 57.1 |
| Slovenia | 12 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 83.3 |
| Totals | 92 | 30 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 12 | 16 | 7 | 5 | 53 | |
| Means/ % of all | | 34.5 | 0 | 9.2 | 1.1 | 13.8 | 18.4 | 8 | 5.7 | | 60.9 |

Notes: The table includes all cabinets terminated on or after January 1, 2008.

personal), and intra-party conflicts (i.e., when parts of the party leadership and/or the party organization oppose continued government participation).⁴

The crisis impact

The introduction asked whether different crises have had an impact on government formation and governance patterns. The country chapters demonstrate no unequivocal agreement in this regard. The chapter on Lithuania for example posits that it is “barely possible to interpret any transformation of coalition governance patterns as the effects of the crises and the extraordinary circumstances”, while the chapter on Hungary in all crisis instances finds a connection to different aspects of the coalition life cycle. The following sections will confirm this variation and the complexity of the problem.

The different crisis momentums impacted distinct aspects of the coalition life cycle. Government and coalition failure was the most spectacular in relation to the economic crisis, when the impact was often large and direct. New governments, or in several instances caretaker governments, had to take over. The immigration crisis – at least in the countries that had direct experience with it or where it was easy to capitalise on minority and related human rights issues – triggered the growth of extremist and/or populist parties, and increased polarisation. The Covid pandemic became mostly visible in cabinet governance and policy measures. At the same time, these impacts are not separated by cement walls – for example, extremist parties not only regularly form in relation to immigration, but they can also form because of the economic problems or even against Covid-related government policies – although the latter has been less frequent in CEE than in WE.

The economic crisis was widespread in the CEE region. As a result, government collapse was quite common, but occasionally with some delay. It is interesting how indirect impacts evolve. In Poland where the economy remained stable after the crisis, the acceptance of output-related measures and re-distributive policies substantially grew among the citizens, which ‘indirectly influence democratic backsliding and help to explain’ the relative ease with which there was a dismantling of the foundations of democratic rule of law after the 2015 elections (Markowski and Kwiatkowska 2018: 271). This re-distributive push is present in other countries as well and is often advocated – even if not fulfilled – by populist parties even on the right.

In some countries, as a kind of defence mechanism against crisis impact, policy focus has become more central in coalition agreements (Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia are prime examples), unanimity requirements in economic decisions between coalition partners have been introduced (Latvia), and the role of ministerial bureaucracy has been strengthened (Lithuania). These measures mainly concerned the economic sphere, although political consequences are also notable. In Estonia, successful crisis management consolidated the party system, and even a minority government could function (at least until the arrival of the populist right when the party system stability became uprooted). In other countries, this crisis has been used to spiral the conflict between the political rivals

who tried to use the crisis for their own party advantage following confrontative strategies (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania can be prime examples in this group). In addition to the policy and political triggers, we can identify constitutional and legal measures that aimed to inhibit economic turmoil by increasing national budgetary responsibility for example in Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary.

Regarding the immigration issues, the context is even more varied than the above picture, and the two migration periods had differential impact on the countries. First, around 2015, large migrant groups targeted Europe from their war-struck countries seeking better life also in economic terms. This movement provided the foundation for populism and nationalism and polarised the political scene, most prominently in Hungary and Poland. Even in a less pronounced migration context, political polarisation and populism increased at the government level in Slovenia, Slovakia, and Czechia (Stojarová 2018). Second, from 2020 onwards, the initial enforced migration from Belarus towards the Baltic countries and Poland was followed by Russia's war against Ukraine and a huge immigration flux from Ukraine. Still, at least initially this did not increase polarisation tendencies. Normally, in the analysis of coalition governance, international politics attracts limited attention. In these instances, however, it is paramount to include this aspect as government responses can be evaluated in this broader context, not at least as the EU immigration quota plans fuelled polarization and populist party support. Although radical right populist parties could rarely get into coalitions (but see Estonia between 2019 and 2021) or even rarely functioned as support parties (but see Slovenia during the Jansa IV-VI governments), in some countries the large and governing parties began to follow a populist agenda on immigration. Due to this complexity, the differences in government and governance practice have increased. Security concerns, economic concerns, or traditional sympathies towards Russia make country variation grow as the CEE countries ventilate towards different international entities. What we could already observe in relation to the economic crisis, namely the varied trajectories that the countries followed, has become even more explicit regarding the immigration crisis.

In relation to the Covid crisis, without exception all chapters note that ad hoc decisions became widespread. In these uncertain times and with underdeveloped healthcare systems, the responses were unsatisfactory, even if still diverse. In several countries, emergency procedures, decree laws replaced traditional political decision-making. Still, with rare exceptions, such as Slovenia and Slovakia, the impact on government and governance was not as direct as regarding the economic and immigration crises. In Slovenia, due to the country's democratic backlash, the Covid pandemic contributed to a government failure, and in Slovakia, the Prime Minister, heading a new populist party, wanted to personally manage the Covid crisis and eventually failed. Altogether without exception, these ten countries showed the weaknesses of the response as the death toll figures clearly indicate.

In sum, a crisis might strengthen cooperation between the relevant actors. Or just the other way around, it can offer the opportunity to weaken rivals. Furthermore, a crisis might favour extremism and bring forward extremist forces as extreme or/and simplified answers are welcome to complex problems. And a crisis

might bring forward more policy conscious developments as distinct and even new solutions are required, but equally it can bring about ad hoc decision-making processes. On these grounds, we can formulate a few political side effects. In a number of countries, political polarisation has grown due to the crises, which affected coalitions in terms of their composition, life-expectancy, and performance. At first glance, this might raise the wrong impression that crisis and instability are closely connected. This is not necessarily the case, and the stability concerns do not always connect to a country's democratic credentials either as the two contrasting country cases – Hungary versus Bulgaria – in this regard demonstrate.

Crisis do matter and they can bring forward positive as well as negative changes depending on the decisional choices of the relevant actors. Eventually, three main patterns, three groups of countries, can be identified concerning crisis impact. In a couple of countries, crises were played out for political purposes (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland) to delegitimize the political rivals. In still others, the policy implications and transformation of decision-making processes came to the forefront (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania), and despite the emergence of populist parties and internal divides, consolidation tendencies predominated. These emerging differences relate to the democratic credentials of the given countries. The third group (Slovenia, Czechia, Slovakia) occupies a place in-between: after some controversial developments embodied by both old and new partisan actors, a bouncing-back effect can be observed. Politicians are not only the victims of circumstances, but they also create new circumstances by working out responses and solutions.

Conclusion

On the above grounds, we can claim that the democratic backlash thesis, often encompassing all CEE post-communist countries, should be advocated with much care. A more varied picture evolves, evidenced by the differences in crisis management, and in the general working of coalitions. Although the weaknesses of democratic institutions still prevail, and as a result crises could often be misused and abused (Dawson and Hanley 2019), we found that crisis responses have been quite varied. Moreover, elevated levels of support for democracy prevail among the public in these countries, there is a public demand for democracy. Although the concrete relevance of this public demand and support of democracy is regularly challenged in face of severe democratic backlash in a number of countries, we should note that exactly in the crisis context crisis-triggered fears and the fear-mongering government agenda have not subdued citizens' democratic attitudes (Anghel and Schulte-Cloos 2022). Varied governance patterns and the differences in crisis management confirm that the trajectories are diverse and that to talk about a single track of democratic backlash is not justified (Cianetti et al 2018). Long-term tendencies will count and should be considered. Although the crises brought about and confirmed negative developments, corrective mechanisms stepped in, as demonstrated by a number of country cases. The so-called contagion effect remains limited, bad examples do not stick.

The introduction discussed the potentially growing unity or diversity of the CEE countries: whether the crises will bring them closer together or just to the contrary the crises will push them apart. Eventually, we have found that not only because the crises per se hit them differently, but mainly because the chosen solutions were different, diverse patterns have evolved. The function of cabinet-level politics can be regarded as substantial in this regard. As described above, the growing intra-regional variation also connects to differences in the international focus. The EU dimension – as several chapters note – has increased significantly and now has a considerable impact on government formation and governance.

In sum, during the period from 2008, the coalition life cycle in Central Eastern Europe met a series of challenges. We have discussed three such major crises (finance, migration, and the pandemic). We have also touched upon a fourth and even more recent traumatic event, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, a few of our countries, such as Poland and above all Hungary, have been criticized by other EU countries for infringing on the free media and on the independence of the courts. Nevertheless, all ten countries have responded by providing support for Ukraine and by staying within the framework of European cooperation, including EU sanctions.

As for the coalition life cycle itself, one major characteristic has been the *electoral success of new parties* that often ran on platforms criticizing the already established political parties for corruption and a lack of responsiveness. Another main trend has been the continued *replacement of the left-right* dimension by the liberal-conservative (or GAL-TAN) conflict dimension. The complexity that this has facilitated in terms of new party relations has led to somewhat *longer formation periods* for governments. At the same time, individual MPs have often continued to demonstrate a lack of fidelity to the party on which ballots they were elected so *party switching* remains frequent. The fluidity of the parliamentary party groups is another root of the continued complexity of the party systems. This result has not only been *a predominance of MWCs*, but also oversized cabinets and minority governments are quite frequent. In contrast, *single-party majority cabinets are very rare*. Another continuous trend is that rather than meeting the electorate in extra elections, *cabinet parties resign and try to find new partnership constellations* during the electoral period.

Still messy, with fluid party constellations and new parties bursting on the political scene and others disappearing, and with unstable party membership, the representative, and to varying degrees functioning democratic, systems still seem accepted by the voters. Elites seek the legitimacy that comes with having run for office and formed cabinets based on an elected parliament. The countries have also found their mode of coalition governance. *Compromises* and mutual adjustment among coalition partners are the most typical governance system for Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Estonia. In another set of countries, the relations within the cabinet and towards the parliament are more characterized by a *dominant PM* (and PM party). This includes Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia. In this regard, Czechia is the one country is the furthest away from having one model that is predominant in the governance phase of the cycle. The continued developments in this regard will be important to follow in Central and Eastern Europe.

Appendix

Appendix A. Prime Ministerial and Presidential Powers

| Country | Year of change | PM powers: summary | Popularly elected president | Presidential powers: summary | Presidential powers: Appoint PM | Presidential powers: Dismiss PM/ cabinet | Presidential powers: Select PM | Presidential powers: Dissolve parliament | Presidential powers: Veto powers | Presidential powers: Decree powers | Presidential powers: Right of legislative initiative | Presidential powers: Power of referenda |
|-----------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Bulgaria | 1990 | 7 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 1991 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Czechia | 1992 | 6 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 2012 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2017 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Estonia | 1992 | 3 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Hungary | 1990 | 4 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 1998 | 5 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 2014 | 6 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Latvia | 1993 | 3 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 1998 | 4 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Lithuania | 1992 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Poland | 1991 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Poland | 1992 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Romania | 1990 | 6 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 1992 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Slovakia | 1992 | 2 | 0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| | 1998 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2,3 |
| Slovenia | 1990 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Notes:

PM powers is an additive index based on seven indicators, explained in Bergman et al (2019: 534). Presidential powers are a new additive index based on the eight columns that are to the right of the summary index in the Presidential powers column. Included are the characteristics of the first cabinet in each country, followed by any additional changes to the characteristics in subsequent years. Most presidential powers categories are binary (yes/no) but a few coding include categorical information:

Appoint PM: [1: no; 2: free choice; 3: unclear; 4: constitution strict guidance.]

Dissolve parliament: [=: 0: no; 1: free choice; 2: in case of parliamentary (in)activity]

Veto powers: [0: no veto power; 1: veto can be overruled by supermajority; 2: veto can be overruled by majority of the new parliament after new elections; 3: veto can be overruled by absolute majority; 4: veto can be overruled by simple majority; 5: veto of president leads to a referendum].

Decree powers: [0: no decree; 1: decree power; 2: decrees need to be countersigned by PM] Power of referenda: [0: no right to initiate referenda; 1: right to initiate referenda; 2: right to initiate referenda in assent with parliament/government; 3: right to initiate referenda on initiative of the people; 4: right to initiate referenda on special issues].

Appendix B. Coalition governance models, empirical manifestations at the country level, 2008–2021

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Out of 7 PM powers: Score 5 or above?</i> | <i>PS is a common governance mechanism?</i> | <i>Watchdog junior ministers are used in more than 50% of cabinets</i> | <i>Parliamentary discipline often less strict</i> | <i>Above the average length of coalition agreements?</i> | <i>Average policy content at or above 50 (%) in coalition agreement?</i> | <i>Power concentration in the cabinet (PM, Finance, and Foreign), at or above country mean?</i> | <i>Summary points: No of compromise Model Matches</i> | <i>PM dominated model: No of matches</i> | <i>Ministerial government: No of matches</i> |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|--|--|
| Bulgaria | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Czechia | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Estonia | No | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| Hungary | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| Latvia | No | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Lithuania | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | 2 | 6 | 4 |
| Poland | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| Romania | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Slovakia | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Slovenia | No | No | No | Mixed | Yes | Yes | No | 5 (4) | 2 (3) | 1 (2) |
| Coalition compromise model | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | | | |
| PM dominance model | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | | | |
| Ministerial governance model | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | | | |

Notes

- 1 If the current government never resigns after a general election the “new” government has a government formation duration of zero days.
- 2 In Western Europe, there is (still) a heavy focus on policy in coalition agreements and on average more than 90% of the content in coalition agreements deals with policy (Bergman, Bäck and Hellström 2021c:707).
- 3 Our criteria for a new government, and thus the end of an incumbent government, are rather broad and especially as a change of PM is enough, even though the party composition remains unaltered. Thus, all recorded terminations are not necessarily a sign of instability or not even political.
- 4 Another similarity between West and East is the share of short-lived cabinets since the late 2000s. While many CEE countries have experienced more cabinet terminations (most evidently Slovenia and Slovakia) during this period, a few have more long-lived cabinets (i.e., Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland). However, many West European countries are experiencing more instability which likely stems from the fact that many countries in the West are becoming more like their neighbours in the East, with a higher degree of parliamentary fragmentation and several new party entries, electoral volatility, and larger vote losses for parties in government (e.g., Emanuele et al 2020).

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