Article

International Political Science Review
33(5) 505–519

DOI: 10.1177/0192512112462971
ips.sagepub.com
SAGE

The duration and durability of cabinet ministers

Jörn Fischer
University of Cologne, Germany

Keith Dowding
Australian National University, Australia

Patrick Dumont
University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Abstract

This article surveys the growing research programme on the duration of cabinet ministers. It examines some of the conceptual and methodological issues confronting research, including the nature and measurement of durability, ministerial terms and techniques. It considers some of the theories and hypotheses that have been generated by researchers. Using evidence from studies from around the world, it argues that institutional factors, including regime type, constitutional and parliamentary rules, and party systems, affect ministerial durability. Personal ministerial characteristics, such as gender, education and age, also affect durability. It examines future avenues of research in this field.

Keywords

Cabinet government, comparative politics, durability, ministers, political elites

Introduction

A long research tradition has told us a great deal about what contributes to government durability (Laver, 2003), but while governments come and go, the ministers who form them can last much longer (Von Beyme, 1971: 69). Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008) demonstrate that ministerial stability is largely independent of cabinet stability, while a new body of literature is examining ministerial durability in terms of institutional and personal characteristics. The topic is important because individual ministers can personally impact upon policy, whereas ministerial duration

Corresponding author:
Keith Dowding, Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia.
Email: keith.dowding@anu.edu.au

touches on a centrepiece of representative democracy: accountability. Cabinet ministers are not only collectively, but also individually, accountable for government policy.

Ministers leave government for all sorts of reasons, which can be thought of as the proximate causes of removal. The proximate reason is the story behind the exit. Most literature concentrates upon the ultimate reasons for exit: that is, the institutional and structural features that explain why certain types of ministers last longer than others. We theoretically and empirically consider the variables leading to ministerial selection and removal by exploring the extant research.

Cabinet and ministerial stability

Cabinet stability concerns the durability of the government as a collective; ministerial stability concerns that of individual ministers. Each focuses on the determinants of longevity. The events triggering the end of a government – 1) general elections; 2) death or incapacity of top cabinet members; 3) no-confidence votes; 4) one or more parties leaving cabinet; 5) voluntary resignation of the cabinet; and 6) conflict between the cabinet and the head of state (Grofman and van Roozendaal, 1997: 425) – need not necessarily lead to the end of any minister. A government might fall, but not all its ministers. When one party leaves government, the ministers of the other parties remain. While exit following a general election must be an important factor in length of ministerial tenure, other factors are significant too. Events triggering ministerial exit include: 1) end of government; 2) death, illness; 3) personal error; 4) departmental error; 5) sexual scandal; 6) financial scandal; 7) poor personal performance; 8) policy disagreement; 9) policy criticism from outside government; 10) other controversies; 11) other reasons for forced resignation; and 12) other reasons for unforced resignation.[1] The precise definition of when a government or a minister's tenure ends might be appropriately different depending on the research question. We might think a government terminates following a general election, even if the same prime minister (PM) returns with largely the same cabinet; for other questions, termination might be thought of as a change of PM. For ministers, too, the precise research question will determine whether a ministerial term is deemed to end at the end of a government or to continue through successive administrations.

Some ministerial resignations bring down governments. In coalitions, a party leader might reshuffle his ministerial delegation or he might decide to withdraw his full party team from office, thereby precipitating the end of the government. Here, the ministerial coding 'policy disagreement' might coincide with 'one or more parties leave the cabinet'. This example highlights the necessity of considering the institutions governing cabinet and ministerial termination. Across countries, formal rules of governmental termination differ from those ruling ministerial termination. Also, the institutions leading to government formation dramatically affect the nature of ministerial selection and termination. In cases where single-party government is the norm, the relationship between ministers and the PM is relatively straightforward: ministers can be considered agents of the PM. In coalition systems, ministers are often agents of the PM and of their party (Andeweg, 2000; Dowding and Dumont, 2009). In such systems, the PM can be considerably constrained in both appointing and dismissing ministers – indeed, the leader of the respective ministers' party might be more important than the PM.

These very cursory theoretical remarks on the relation between cabinet stability and ministerial stability meet with the empirical findings: Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008: 169) show that ministerial stability 'is only loosely related to the stability of cabinets'. Ministers remaining in portfolio with a changing government enables stability in an ostensibly unstable cabinet – a feature of interwar politics in Belgium (Höjer, 1969: 315) and the French Fourth Republic (Siegfried, 1956). Dogan (1989) provides an extensive historical comparison of 12 European regimes in terms

of the relationship between cabinet stability and ministerial turnover, arguing that groups of irremovable ministers often ensure the continuity of state leadership. But governmental stability can run alongside ministerial instability: Bäck et al. (2009: 175) argue that in post-war Sweden, apparently strong government stability belies high personnel turnover.

There are different approaches to measuring ministerial time in office. Frognier (1991: 119–120) simply compares the time in office of individual ministers and of governments. His sample of 14 West European states between 1945 and 1984 suggests that cabinets last for 2.9 years, while ministers remain in office, on average, for 4.5 years. In Italy, between 1948 and 1992, 'the average duration of ministerial experience was three years and eight months, that is no less than four times the average duration of the governments' (Verzichelli, 2009: 90). Alternatively, we can calculate the ratio of ministers who left the cabinet during a running term. In 16 Western European parliamentary democracies plus Australia, Canada and New Zealand, approximately one-third of all ministerial terminations, on average, occur during the course of a government – but with considerable cross-national variation (Austria: 62%; Ireland: 11%) (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008: 171). The overall figure for 10 Eastern European post-communist democracies is similar, with just over 30% of all ministers leaving office during a running term (based on Fettelschoss and Nikolenyi, 2009: 221). In short, there is only a weak relationship between ministerial and cabinet stability. Most of the work on ministerial stability is concerned with personal, institutional and structural factors that affect durability, such as age, gender, portfolio, scandal, size of parliament and so on. To that end, most of the work is empirical. However, principal–agent relations provide the broad theoretical framework.

Duration and durability

Duration is the length of time ministers are in office; it is an empirical fact about them. Durability is a theoretical term determined by the factors influencing ministerial duration. Those factors might be derived theoretically – the sorts of things we think should influence duration – but are also derived empirically by examining ministerial duration. Laver (2003: 24) pithily says: 'The healthiest person in the world can be hit by a bus tomorrow, while someone who is a total physical wreck can limp on to a ripe old age.' The durability of ministers is conditioned upon factors about them; to estimate the effects of those factors, we examine actual duration.

'Ministerial stability' is a generic term encompassing both ministerial duration and durability. Theoretically, we might want to compare the stability (actual duration) of ministers across countries, or within a country over time, and also be interested in the structural factors affecting durability. However, ministers might have had a longer duration in the past, or in one country rather than another, not because the structural factors differ, but because the hazards have changed. Some countries might have fewer crises than others because government is smaller or less powerful; while the threatening events leading to ministerial exit might vary over time within a country. Studies of durability often assume that events hit at the same rate, but this might not be true across nations or ministers. Gender, portfolios and unobservable factors, such as psychological disposition, might affect the event rate. Empirically examining durability apart from duration is theoretically complex.

Research focusing on duration largely concerns describing the length of ministerial tenure. It identifies general patterns in large-*N* studies (such as Blondel, 1985), but to explain these patterns, further theorized analysis is required. Durability studies try to find explanatory factors influencing ministerial duration and generally use event history analysis (survival or duration analysis) as their favoured method.

Different concepts of duration: The counting rules

As well as the duration–durability distinction, there are also different concepts of duration. Duration as the length of time ministers are in office seems clear-cut; however, when used to empirically determine durability, the concept is not so obvious. Since duration is used to derive durability, precisely how durability is going to be used determines our choice of definition of duration. There is no 'correct' definition.

Most duration studies consider uninterrupted ministerial tenure across various governments as one spell, whereas most studies on durability are more rigorous and operate with a definition of a 'ministerial spell as the length of time which a minister serves *in a given administration*' (Berlinski et al., 2007: 247, emphasis added; see also Berlinski et al., 2012). Both usages can be defended depending on the research question.

Of course, the minister's time in office technically ends with the government; if he returns, he is appointed to a new government. Politically or practically, this may make little difference. If, after the general election, the minister's party stays in power, the minister might not even have cleared his desk before taking up his post again. For instance, in Eastern Europe, more than one-third of all ministers who formally leave due to government termination return to their cabinet seat immediately after a new government is formed (Fettelschoss and Nikolenyi, 2009: 220). Consequently, most duration studies ignore the technical exit of an immediately reappointed minister, interpreting ministerial duration across administrations as one spell, with the end of tenure being reached with the last cabinet exit of the minister.[2] Thus, the tenure of a long-time minister is regarded as, for example, lasting 16 years and not four times four years. Note that not only are technical reasons for exits (e.g. elections, change of president, etc.) ignored, but also the types of government served in by a minister in successive cabinets, as this measure concentrates on the individual presence in office regardless of various aspects of the context.[3] This calculation makes sense since it enhances variance, allowing more meaningful results regarding the average duration as an indicator of ministerial stability across systems. It is the relevant calculation for the question: 'Which countries have the lowest ministerial turnover?'

Another concept of duration considers ministerial tenure as lasting at maximum the duration of one government. This might be a consequence of a methodological and conceptual spillover from the studies on cabinet stability, where the end of a cabinet is a point of discontinuity not only for the government as a whole, but also for its components – the ministers – irrespective of possible reappointment (the latter is seen as a new selection decision). To see how this relates to durability, let us consider coalition systems. Elections or change of coalition composition may have a tremendous effect on the number of portfolios a party is entitled to. A given minister who survived several successive cabinets in which his party was entitled to occupy, first, all cabinet seats, then half of them and then just a couple of portfolios appears much more valuable to his party than one who has continuously served in cabinets where the positions to be filled remained constant throughout the various administrations. This difference is expected to affect their respective chances of surviving scandals. The ideological complexion of successive coalitions may also affect the probability of the reappointment of a given minister with factional ties or specific policy views. Personal features, such as age, experience in cabinet or portfolio, may also affect such probabilities. Treating reappointments as new selection decisions whenever a new government takes office, therefore, allows for more variance in the explanatory factors expected to have an impact on ministerial durability.

So which concept is more appropriate? There is no objectively better way to define ministerial duration. When focusing on career aspects and the mere time ministers spend in office, ignoring

technical breaks is more suitable. When considering institutional factors, 'fall of government' and 'death/illness' censoring is appropriate; here, the durability of a minister depends on factors outside of government duration. (Although, of course, the factors that lead to lower ministerial durability might well lead to lower government durability – bad ministers are likely to make for bad government.) Broader questions concerning the durability of ministers given institutional factors about countries (e.g. length of parliamentary term) might justify no censoring. On the other hand, more fine-tuned measures could also be considered in comparative analyses, such as discounting parliamentary recesses, the time between parliamentary dissolution and the start of a new parliamentary term, or periods spent in a 'caretaker' cabinet before a new cabinet is formed, when ministers are not susceptible to parliamentary questioning or fully empowered, and so are not able to undertake new policy initiatives. Either way, the chosen 'counting rules' have implications for our conclusions when measuring ministerial duration and need to be taken into account when making cross-country comparisons. Although providing no guidance on definitional choice, data collection should allow for recomposition across definitions and provide detailed knowledge of institutional and contextual settings.

Event history analysis

An early attempt at measuring duration was Blondel's (1985: 79–90) 'attrition rate', which is the proportion of ministers leaving the cabinet during one year (e.g. 25 percent if five ministers out of 25 leave). The reciprocal is then a value indicating how many years it would take to replace the whole government at that attrition rate (four years in our example; Blondel, 1985: 84–85). The attrition rate is a useful indicator of ministerial turnover, allowing comparison regardless of cabinet size, and can be calculated for any time period or on the basis of administrations, allowing comparisons across different governments and PMs. One problem with his 'attrition rate' is that the rate is likely to increase over time, complicating comparisons of administrations of different lengths. It might also increase over the tenure of a government but tail off as an election approaches. It has been superseded by event history analysis.

Event history models have proved their usefulness in studies of cabinet stability (such as Diermeier and Stevenson, 1999; King et al., 1990; Warwick, 1992), providing better estimates when the subjects of investigation are duration and the transition from one state to another (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 1997). Event history analysis allows answers to the question of how the risk of exiting the cabinet at any time is influenced by a set of covariates (the event history term for independent variables) as well as estimates of how this risk depends on the time already spent in office. This is done by modelling the 'hazard rate', which can be interpreted as 'the instantaneous probability that an event occurs given that the event has not yet occurred' (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 1997: 1427). The semi-parametric Cox proportional hazards model is the most used model.[4] Yet it comes with the problematic ex ante assumption that there are no differences in the types of ministerial exits or, indeed, within types of ministers (unobserved personal characteristics). Since we have identified 12 types of terminal events, this assumption is difficult to maintain, but the Cox model is only capable of pooling multiple types of ministerial exits. Some of these exits might be endogenous to the individual or to the ministerial role. The Cox model does not specify the shape of the baseline hazard function, which is advantageous in some respects, but means that we have to assume that the minister's risk of exit cannot change over time. However, in the absence of alternatives, the advantages seem to outweigh the disadvantages (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008: 175). The problem can be mitigated by censoring cases where the occurrence of an event is not observed. This is especially true when the minister survives until the end of a government, but

it also makes sense to apply it in the case of death or illness. Thus, the nature of statistical estimation affects the definition of what we consider to be a ministerial spell given our research question.

Event history also provides a framework that turns the problem of different exits into a virtue. Competing risks models make it possible to explore separately the factors influencing the probability of ministerial exit for different terminal events (see Vermunt, 1997: 145–160). Their problem is that they require detailed data (e.g. information on different exit reasons for each ministerial spell) and their application is more complex than common event history models. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008) utilized this method, where it proved to be fruitful. Another useful feature of event history analysis, which contrasts with common regression models, is the option to include time-varying covariates. Those variables are able to depict features that change within observations over time.

The number of studies using an event history approach is growing, and expected to grow further (especially with a competing risks approach) as comparative data collection projects develop.[5]

Institutional characteristics of the environment

Regime type. We might expect ministers to stay in office longer in authoritarian regimes since they are not subject to elections. Yet dictators might be more shuffle-happy since they do not face the electoral costs associated with sacking ministers, and rapid ministerial turnover might reduce challenges.

There has been much less work on ministerial duration in authoritarian regimes, though extant evidence suggests no clear pattern of differences across regimes. Variation can be found in the subtypes of totalitarian systems. Under communism, long ministerial duration was the rule, while ministerial careers in military regimes tended to be short (Blondel, 1985: 135–136, 116–121). Regime change brings only a relatively small increase in ministerial turnover as a direct effect (Blondel, 1985: 112–115). After the demise of communism, and with more data available, things look different. Rapid ministerial turnover characteristic of post-authoritarian countries (Shevchenko, 2005: 409) might be true for post-communist states (Blondel et al., 2007: 50–52), but not for Latin American countries overcoming military dictatorship. For example, Chile, which was once the country with the second-shortest ministerial duration (Blondel, 1985: 89), had higher ministerial stability in post-Pinochet cabinets (1990–1998) (Siavelis, 1999: 239). Corrales (2002), in a study of Latin American education ministers, finds that democracy contributes to ministerial stability but not necessarily early in the transition.

Governmental system. Does the specific institutional configuration of parliamentary versus presidential systems impact on ministerial tenure? Two main effects are hypothesized in the literature. First, in presidential systems, the chief executive, equipped with a separate political legitimacy from the legislature, has more discretionary power to dismiss ministers than a PM in a parliamentary democracy, so ministerial duration should be shorter in presidential than in parliamentary systems. The second effect derives from the constitutive feature of parliamentary systems, where the cabinet as a whole is dependent on the parliament's confidence, suggesting a shorter duration of ministers in parliamentary than in presidential government types. Yet we have already shown that the connection between cabinet stability and ministerial stability is weak. In fact, there are few comparative studies on these questions since most focus on parliamentary systems. Blondel (1985: 123–126) suggests that constitutional presidentialism leads to low ministerial duration, whereas the duration in prime ministerial systems is 'not very high, but it is not low either'

(Blondel, 1985: 129–130). A comparative analysis of five presidential systems (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2010) tends to confirm this pattern: four Latin American countries had ministerial durations ranging from under two years to two-and-a-half years. The difference is explained by the fact that:

> constitutional presidencies are based on the election of a president, prime ministerial systems, which are issued from parliamentary systems, are based on the election of parties. Ministers are thus likely to continue in office even when the PM departs, provided the same party remains in office. (Blondel, 1985: 130)

Institutional framework of ministerial tenure

Many institutional factors affect hiring and firing. Some PMs are constitutionally more constrained than others because the pool of ministrables (qualified candidates) is limited (from the parliament only), or other formal or informal constraints exist depending upon the nature of coalition-formation or party rules (Bergman et al., 2003). Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009) use a constitution-based approach to explain cabinet stability, although the full effects of constitutions on individual ministerial tenure have not been empirically evaluated as most studies are country-specific.

Ministerial durability is higher the greater the number of people who must agree to a dismissal. As for triggering, the minister himself and the PM are the most powerful. Politically, the de facto power to trigger an exit often lies in the hands of the PM. Yet, de jure, the power of dismissal is usually held by the head of state. In semi-presidential systems, the decision needs to be negotiated between the PM and the head of state. Many parliaments possess the right to unilaterally vote an individual minister out of office against the wishes of the PM (outside of no-confidence votes against the government as a whole). Notably, the US Senate's de jure role of confirming the appointment of new cabinet secretaries gives it a de facto power to veto changes proposed by the president.

These features can make a big strategic difference for a threatened minister. He might prefer to step down voluntarily before being dishonourably removed by a parliamentary vote. Even where no-confidence votes cannot be directed at individual ministers, legislatures may force out ministers through criticism and pressure. In a broader sense, the general public is important and a clamorous public can force the issue. The public also ensures that highly popular ministers are practically untouchable (Verzichelli, 2009: 92).

Hiring and firing decisions are connected insofar as for every dismissal, there is almost always a replacement. Hence, appointment rules affect strategic considerations about whether to fire (Dowding and Dumont, 2009: 11). A PM wishing to sack a minister needs to find someone who will do better; the smaller the pool of potential replacements, the less likely a more competent candidate can be found. Thus, the size of parliament relative to the size of government affects durability. Additionally, practical and strategic issues reduce the ability of chief executives to sack or reshuffle ministers. In Ireland, minority or low-majority cabinets clearly inhibit dismissal for fear of parliamentary retaliation, reinforced by the small size of Ireland's parliament. A small pool of ministrables, therefore, allows ministers a higher degree of job security.

Where hiring rules specify group representation, such as in Belgium, firing a minister can involve a major reshuffle: a new minister from one language group needs to be accommodated and there may be no one from their parliamentary group fitting the vacated post. Sacking one minister can involve asking another minister to resign to enable a reshuffle that fits constitutional requirements. Where the PM wants to reduce the size of cabinet, the same number of ministers

from each linguistic group has to step down. Such severe constraints mean that Belgian ministers survive scandals that would sink them elsewhere.

Note that other selection constraints involve the number and the strength of actors necessary to approve ministerial appointments, such as confidence 'investiture' votes for individual ministers by legislatures or internal party rules (see later).

Political characteristics of the environment

Government types. Since there are more veto players in coalition governments, ministerial durability should be higher. However, we know that single-party governments last longer. In a sample of 14 West European countries, Bakema (1991) finds no clear pattern regarding single-party versus coalition governments. She finds that ministers, just as cabinets, last longer in minimum-winning coalitions than in surplus coalitions. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008: 176) find that 'the likelihood of leaving the cabinet is reduced by almost 40% for ministers in a coalition government when we compare them to ministers in single-party majority governments'. Budge (1985) and Budge and Keman (1990: 208–212) show that reshuffles occur more often in single-party than in coalition governments. They relate this observation to the weaker constraints on PM power in single-party cabinets.

Party systems. Party systems are important predictors of the coalition nature of cabinets, and their duration, therefore, should be at least indirectly linked to ministerial duration. The evidence is, however, mixed. Whereas Bakema (1991: 80) suggested a negative relationship between the number of effective parties in the legislature and the duration of ministers in office, Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008: 175) conclude that it is not a significant determinant of individual exit risk.

Party politics. Whether the minister belongs to the PM's party in a single-party government or to a junior partner's party in a coalition government makes a difference: the rules of party politics apply to all of them, though not in the same way. In most countries, parties do not have much formal control over a minister's exit. But in parliamentary systems, they are crucial actors, playing a vital role in selecting, sustaining and deselecting ministers. Parties are not unitary actors and chief executives need to keep the different party factions happy. It may be dangerous for a PM to alter cabinet composition as equilibriums negotiated within or across parties during cabinet formation might be at risk. PMs cannot simply fire powerful colleagues commanding party or parliamentary support. Large centre parties sometimes include prominent left-wing figures from their own ranks when coalescing with junior partners on the right of the political spectrum, and vice versa (see Germany and Belgium), making it problematic to remove these faction heavyweights selected in order to balance the policy preferences of the coalition personnel. Furthermore, unilateral changes may disrupt mutual trust among coalition partners.

In coalition systems, further party-strategic issues must be taken into account. The role of party leaders affects cabinet stability and ministerial turnover. Ministers might owe more to party leaders than to PMs, so conflict between coalition partners makes ministerial turnover less likely than cabinet breakdown. Leaders must also keep an eye on the party's popularity. As highly visible representatives of their party, ministers affect their party's image. Scandal reduces party popularity and that of the government as a whole; sacking ministers who are involved in scandal can (more than) correct for such falls (Dewan and Dowding, 2005) in single-party cabinets but both the decision to fire and its likely consequences are less straightforward for coalitions.

Portfolio and ministerial rank. One might think that portfolio should affect ministerial durability. Indridason and Kam (2008: 644) argue that reshuffles will be used to control ministers responsible for the politically important or complex portfolios. These ministers run a higher risk as monitoring is more difficult yet the failure to do so more costly. Hence, duration in significant portfolios should be shorter than in less important ones. Using data from the UK and Australia, Indridason and Kam (2008: 647) show that 'the more influential the portfolio, the more it was reshuffled'. Yet Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008: 172) argue that ministers holding important portfolios go through a more careful ex ante screening, and so should perform better and stay longer. In their empirical evidence from 19 parliamentary democracies, ministers ranking higher in portfolio importance run a lower risk of being terminated (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008: 176). These apparently contradictory findings are partly due to different views of terminations (including portfolio moves or not) and to differences between Westminster systems, where single-party government traditionally allows prime ministerial dominance, and coalition systems, where the leader of the junior party usually picks the most important portfolio for himself.

There is little evidence concerning different hazard rates across portfolios. Shevchenko (2005) distinguishes between ministers in consensual policy fields and those overseeing conflictive policies in Russia. She claims that 'bureaucrat ministers', who manage non-contentious portfolios, last longer than 'political ministers', who preside over divisive policy areas. Fischer and Kaiser (2011: 206–207) show that, in Germany, certain ministries, such as defence or home affairs, are more prone to resignation calls than those of, say, justice or postal affairs.

If greater screening leads to better ministers, then the higher the formal rank of minister, the more durable they would be. This is the case in the UK (Berlinski et al., 2007: 254, 259–260), despite the fact that higher-ranking ministers usually face greater levels of scrutiny in parliament and the press than their lower-ranking colleagues. We would also expect this in coalition systems, where junior-party leaders occupy deputy-PM positions.

Prime ministers. Notwithstanding the constraints on ministerial selection and deselection, the personality and characteristics of the PM should have some effect. PM effects are generally controlled for in duration analysis, but different ministerial styles exist (Berlinski et al., 2012: ch. 5). In more generalizable terms, Berlinski et al. (2009: 64–68) show, for the UK, that ministerial survivor functions by prime ministerial term do not differ greatly and that the differences detectable can be explained by the length of the term. In Spain, on the contrary, the ministerial survivor functions do differ considerably from PM to PM, suggesting that the PM's strategic calculations have more impact on the average ministerial duration (Real-Dato and Jerez-Mir, 2009: 110–120).

The strategic calculations of a PM may be revealed by the firing rule she employs when facing a minister's failures or scandals. Implementing a strict firing rule provides incentives for other ministers to raise their performance to avoid being sacked and reduces the likelihood of new scandals; however, at the same time, it withdraws talented ministers from the cabinet (Dewan and Myatt, 2010). Given that the talent pool is finite, the PM must therefore weaken her firing rule at some point. Hence, according to Dewan and Myatt (2010: 82), ministers entering cabinet late should be more durable than those selected at the start of a government, regardless of talent. This effect may be intensified where chief executives inherit ministers from their predecessors. Provided that the PM has an effective right to dismiss ministers, she will be more inclined to get rid of ministers that she would not have ideally chosen. For instance, Bäck et al. (2009b: 169) argue that Ingvar Carlsson's frequent reshuffles during his first cabinet were partly due to the fact that he took over as PM after Olof Palme's murder. Later cabinets comprised of ministers closer to the PM's ideal policy positions and more personally loyal.

Overall, there is thus a correlation between the length of tenure of the leader and 'her' ministers, as shown by Quiroz Flores's (2009a) study of foreign ministers. The opposite claim that the more time a leader is in office, the lower the probability of a minister being removed from office holds only for authoritarian systems.

Alternative career incentives in multi-level systems. Although being a national minister means that you cannot get much higher in politics, in multi-level systems, especially, there may be other attractive top jobs for which a cabinet minister might aim. So, the existence of multiple levels of government might induce different patterns of ministerial duration. In Spain, some national ministers resign to fight electoral campaigns in their region with the ambition of becoming minister-president; while, in Belgium, they sometimes resign following elections and their executive position in regional government is secured. Thus, the duration of federal ministers should be related to the attractiveness of sub-national and, indeed, supranational posts.

So far, there is no evidence of a systematic impact of alternative career options on ministerial durability. In Germany, a multi-level system where both the regional and the European level are considered important, the number of ministers who left their post because of an outside job is low: 18 out of 236 (8%; Fischer and Kaiser, 2009: 34). In Belgium, on the other hand, Dumont et al. (2009: 138) find that 38% of ministerial terminations during a cabinet term took place because a minister was moved to a sub-national government and, usually, these were actual 'promotions' (Dandoy and Dumont, 2010).

Performance and popularity. In an agency relationship, the PM constantly monitors and evaluates her ministers. Important criteria include the minister's political performance and his popularity among voters. PMs are far less likely to fire popular and well-performing cabinet members than underperformers. Public calls for resignation might be a viable performance indicator (Dewan and Myatt, 2010; Dowding and Kang, 1998; Fischer et al., 2006). In Canada, individual resignation calls (in the House of Commons) do, indeed, increase the hazard rate (Kerby, 2009).[6] Berlinski et al. (2010) demonstrate, for the UK, that the first and second resignation calls sharply increase that minister's hazard. Yet the hazard decreases in the cumulative number of resignation calls against the entire government, suggesting that ministerial performance is evaluated relative to that of fellow ministers (Berlinski et al., 2010). Kam and Indridason (2005: 349) show, for five Westminster systems, that ministerial reshuffles are not related to the governing party's popularity, but are more likely when the PM's personal popularity begins to lag behind that of her government; while Kristinsson (2009: 201–202) finds that, in Iceland, low public satisfaction with a given minister increases the risk of being removed.

Personal characteristics of the minister

Socio-demographics. Given the need for cabinet renewal, older ministers should be less durable than younger ones (Bäck et al., 2009: 173–174; Berlinski et al., 2007: 257–258). However, a non-linear relationship exists when ministers are criticized, with younger ministers and older ones more likely to resign than those in between: older ministers have reached the end of their career, younger ones can resign and return (and, indeed, might resign for tactical political reasons), while those in between fight to retain their jobs.

Educational background appears to affect duration (Bäck et al., 2009: 173–174; Berlinski et al., 2007: 257–258), but it is not clear that it is education per se, rather than social networks, that increases durability.

In both the UK and Sweden, female ministers have a higher duration (Bäck et al., 2009: 173–174; Berlinski et al., 2007: 257–258). One could hypothesize that women need to be more talented to reach the top or that women are more risk-averse than men, but one must note that this gender difference does not appear to materialize in presidential systems (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2010).

Career path. Ministers who ascend through the party or through other political offices might be more durable, having already proved themselves. Descriptive evidence from Sweden suggests that PMs are more reluctant to fire ministers who have party or parliamentary experience (Bäck et al., 2009: 173–174); while, in Germany, the average duration of a minister with parliamentary experience and as a regional minister is considerably longer (6.1 years) than that of someone who served in neither of those (4.2 years; Fischer and Kaiser, 2011: 209). However, Kerby (2010) finds that provincial cabinet experience has no impact on federal ministerial duration in Canada.

In most careers, the longer one has served, the more durable one is (until retirement age, censored in duration analysis). The opposite occurs in parliamentary governments. Operationalizing experience as service in a previous government, Berlinski et al. (2007: 257–259) show hazard increasing with experience. Similar evidence exists for Spain, but only for ministerial exits during a term (Jerez Mir and Real Dato, 2005: 158). Here, the cumulative effect of criticisms and problems probably causes increasing hazard.

Events

'Events, dear boy, events', Harold Macmillan remarked when asked what is most likely to blow governments off course. Events (and the responses to them) can also blow ministers out of office. We have considered the institutional or personal characteristics affecting ministerial durability, assuming that events occur at a uniform rate. However, that is unlikely. We begin by considering random shocks and then consider the interrelationship between events and ministerial characteristics.

Whether a minister survives in office after some exogenous shock depends on the formal and informal firing rules and his political weight and net benefit to the government. But shocks might not be random. Some portfolios might be more prone to problems than others. There is little systematic evidence, but, for example, ministries of defence often have a name as ministerial graveyards in Germany and Australia.

Events can also be affected endogenously through personal decisions and ministerial behaviour. This can be related to policy activism, assuming that the more new policy initiatives a minister pursues, the higher his risk of policy failures and, hence, unpleasant events (Dewan and Myatt, 2007).

Structural factors are also related to the probability of shocks. For instance, some governments might have fewer controversies to deal with. Major powers strut around the world stage. Other countries are bit players buffeted by world events, which ministers can blame. Blame-shifting towards supranational institutions is increasing among European Union members. The size of the country influences the (reported) number of scandals: in the atmosphere of a political village such as Ireland, 'one tries to avoid enemies unnecessarily' (O'Malley, 2009: 188). Size matters. Iceland has only 1.9 resignation issues per year (Kristinsson, 2009: 200); Germany 3.1 (Fischer et al., 2006); and the UK 3.9 (Dowding and Kang, 1998).

Following calls for resignation, a minister either resigns or not. However, even in the latter case, his durability is affected. PMs often defend ministers in trouble, but later quietly remove them

during a reshuffle or after an election. Whether or not a minister who is involved in a scandal resigns depends largely on the result of political cost–benefit analyses (Fischer et al., 2006). Part of this analysis is the perceived value of the minister for the PM or his party. Dewan and Dowding (2005) demonstrate that scandals are bad for government, but that resignations following a scandal restore popularity levels. This gives incentives for PMs to sack ministers, but only if they can replace the minister with someone less prone to scandal in the future.

Conclusion

The study of ministerial duration is a research programme separate from that of government duration. The comparative durability of ministers tells us at least as much about the government's accountability and stability as government durability. We have reviewed many of the factors leading to ministerial durability and discussed the problems involved in comparative inferences. Conceptual differences in treating duration and durability exist, and there are many different forms of exit that need to be taken into consideration in comparative analysis. We have viewed ministers as agents of the PM and governments as agents of the parliament and public, but the nature of the PM–minister relationship varies across countries due to institutional, parliamentary and party differences. Strategic considerations enter into a PM's calculation about when and whether she might want to fire a minister, if, indeed, she can.

For these reasons, a 'general theory' of ministerial durability is likely to be somewhat amorphous; rather, general principles can be invoked that will apply differentially to diverse institutional structures. Some generalizations are emerging from the empirical studies. Both the size of the country and the size of the pool of ministrables relative to government size are important, as are the numbers of veto players. Gender and educational background affect durability, while age has a non-linear relationship with it. Scandal affects durability in both obvious and more subtle ways, and is complicated by the specific institutional relationships within countries. These direct effects on durability mean that ministerial accountability is clearer and more effective in single-party governments. Political considerations are important in the hiring and firing of ministers, but, in democracies, these embrace public opinion. The research programme is still being developed and the exploitation of dedicated data will enable further systematic comparison by scholars who also have specialist country expertise.

Funding

This paper was drafted whilst Jorn Fischer was visiting the ANU under an IPP-Scholarship for Research Visit Abroad of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, University of Cologne; Keith Dowding was supported by the ARC grant 'The Accountability of Australian Cabinet Ministers' DP0985196.

Notes

1. This list is based on the Selection and De-Selection of Political Elites (SEDEPE) Codebook. Available at: http://sedepe.net/
2. Some studies examine portfolio change, calculating 'portfolio time' or 'portfolio experience' (e.g. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2004); others ignore intra-cabinet moves and focus on the exit from the cabinet, calculating 'cabinet time'.
3. In our example, a duration of 16 years for a centre party minister that could be subdivided by his continuous presence in, sequentially, a single-majority cabinet, a centre–right coalition, a single-party cabinet and a minority cabinet would, therefore, be equal to the continuous presence of another minister who remains in successive cabinets of the same type and composition.

4. Quiroz Flores (2009a) uses the parametric Weibull model; Wood and Marchbanks (2008) use the generalized gamma model.
5. For instance SEDEPE (http://sedepe.net/) is a network of scholars examining elite selection, of which durability studies form an important component.
6. Without referring to resignation calls, Quiroz Flores (2009b) suggests that presidents' decisions to dismiss cabinet secretaries are also partly explained by low performance. In Spain, potentially dangerous situations, such as scandals or major policy protests, have no significant effect on duration (Jerez Mir and Real Dato, 2005: 158).

References

Andeweg RB (2000) Ministers as double agents? The delegation process between cabinet and ministers. *European Journal of Political Research* 37: 377–395.

Bäck H, Persson T, Vernby K, et al. (2009b) In tranquil waters: Swedish cabinet ministers in the post war era. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 159–178.

Bakema WE (1991) The ministerial career. In: Blondel J and Thiébault J-L (eds) *The Profession of Government Minister in Western Europe*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 70–98.

Bergman T, Müller WC, Strom K, et al. (2003) Democratic delegation and accountability: Cross-national patterns. In: Strom K, Müller WC and Bergman T (eds) *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 109–220.

Berlinski S, Dewan T and Dowding K (2007) The length of ministerial tenure in the UK, 1945–1997. *British Journal of Political Science* 37: 245–262.

Berlinski S, Dewan T, Dowding K, et al. (2009) Choosing, moving and resigning at Westminster, UK. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 58–78.

Berlinski S, Dewan T and Dowding K (2010) The impact of individual and collective performance on ministerial tenure. *Journal of Politics* 72: 1–13.

Berlinski S, Dewan T and Dowding K (2012) *Accounting for Ministers: Scandal and Survival in British Government 1945–2007*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blondel J (1985) *Government and Ministers in the Contemporary World*. London: SAGE.

Blondel J, Müller-Rommel F and Malova D (2007) *Governing New European Democracies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Box-Steffensmeier JM and Jones BS (1997) Time is of the essence: Event history models in political science. *American Journal of Political Science* 41(4): 1414–1461.

Budge I (1985) Party factions and government reshuffles: A general hypothesis tested against data from 20 post-war democracies. *European Journal of Political Research* 13: 327–333.

Budge I and Keman H (1990) *Parties and Democracy: Coalition Formation and Government Functioning in Twenty States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Corrales J (2002) ¿Cuánto duran los ministros de Educación en América Latina? [How long do ministers of education last in Latin America?]. Series on Education Forms and Reforms, PREAL, 4, 12. Available at: https://www.amherst.edu/media/view/48039/original/Cuanto%252520duran_12.pdf (accessed 11 December 2009).

Dandoy R and Dumont P (2010) Multilevel demotion and promotion: Ministerial resignations in Belgium (1981–2009). Paper presented at the IPSA International Conference, Luxembourg.

Dewan T and Dowding K (2005) The corrective effect of ministerial resignations on government popularity. *American Journal of Political Science* 49: 46–56.

Dewan T and Myatt DP (2007) Scandal, protection, and recovery in political cabinets. *American Political Science Review* 101(1): 63–78.

Dewan T and Myatt DP (2010) The declining talent pool of government. *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 267–286.

Diermeier D and Stevenson RT (1999) Cabinet survival and competing risks. *American Journal of Political Science* 43: 1051–1068.

Dogan M (1989) Irremovable leaders and ministerial instability. In: Dogan M (ed.) *Pathways to Power: Selecting Rulers in Pluralist Democracies*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 239–275.

Dowding K and Dumont P (2009) Structural and strategic factors affecting the hiring and firing of ministers. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–20.

Dowding K and Kang W-T (1998) Ministerial resignations 1945–97. *Public Administration* 76: 411–429.

Dumont P, Fiers S and Dandoy R (2009) Belgium: Ups and downs of ministerial careers in a partitocratic federal state. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 125–146.

Escobar-Lemmon M and Taylor-Robinson (2010) Coming or going: How background affects duration in five presidential systems. Paper presented at the APSA Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Fettelschoss K and Nikolenyi C (2009) Learning to rule: Ministerial careers in post-communist democracies. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 204–227.

Fischer J and Kaiser A (2009) Hiring and firing ministers under informal constraints: Germany. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 21–40.

Fischer J and Kaiser A (2011) Wie gewonnen, so zerronnen? Selektions- und Deselektionsmechanismen in den Karrieren von deutschen Bundesministern. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift Sonderheft* 44: 192–212.

Fischer J, Kaiser A and Rohfling I (2006) The push and pull of ministerial resignations in Germany, 1969–2005. *West European Politics* 29: 709–735.

Frognier AP (1991) Elite circulation in cabinet government. In: Blondel J and Thiebault J-L (eds) *The Profession of Government Minister in Western Europe*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 119–135.

Grofman B and van Roozendaal P (1997) Modelling cabinet durability and termination. *British Journal of Political Science* 27: 419–451.

Höjer C-H (1969) *Le Régime Parlementaire en Belgique de 1918 à 1940*. Brussels: CRISP.

Huber JD and Martinez-Gallardo C (2004) Cabinet instability and the accumulation of experience: The French Fourth and Fifth Republics in comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political Science* 34(1): 27–48.

Huber JD and Martinez-Gallardo C (2008) Replacing cabinet ministers: Patterns of ministerial stability in parliamentary democracies. *American Political Science Review* 102: 169–180.

Indridason IH and Kam C (2008) Cabinet shuffles and ministerial drift. *British Journal of Political Science* 38: 621–656.

Jerez Mir M and Real Dato J (2005) Remodelaciones Ministeriales en los Gobiernos Españoles (1977–2004). VII Congreso de la Asociación Española de Ciencia Política y de la Administración (AECPA), Madrid. Available at: www.aecpa.es/uploads/files/congresos/congreso_07/area06/GT26/JEREZ-MIR-Miguel%28UGR%29yREAL-DATO-Jose%28UAL%29.pdf (accessed 1 March 2012).

Kam C and Indridason I (2005) The timing of cabinet reshuffles in five parliamentary systems. *Journal of Legislative Studies* 30: 327–363.

Kerby M (2009) Calls of the wild: Resignation requests in the Canadian House of Commons: 1957–2008. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Ottawa, Ontario, 27–29 May. Available at: http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2009/Kerby.pdf

Kerby M (2010) The patterns and effects of subnational political experience on federal level career paths in Canada: 1867–2008. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, 1–3 June, Montreal, Quebec.

King G, Alt JE, Burns NE, et al. (1990) A unified model of cabinet dissolution in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science* 34: 846–871.

Kristinsson GH (2009) More safe than sound? Cabinet ministers in Iceland. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 194–203.

Laver M (2003) Government termination. *Annual Review of Political Science* 6: 23–40.

O'Malley E (2009) Constructing and maintaining Irish governments. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 179–193.

Quiroz Flores A (2009a) The political survival of foreign ministers. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5: 117–133.

Quiroz Flores A (2009b) A theoretical and empirical analysis of cabinet turnover in the United States. Available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1450718 (last consulted 22 October 2012).

Real-Dato J and Jerez-Mir M (2009) Cabinet dynamics in democratic Spain (1977–2008). In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 101–124.

Schleiter P and Morgan-Jones E (2009) Constitutional power and competing risks: Monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, and the termination of east and west European cabinets. *American Political Science Review*103: 496–512.

Shevchenko I (2005) Easy come, easy go: Ministerial turnover in Russia, 1990 – 2004. *Europe–Asia Studies* 57(3): 399–428.

Siavelis PM (1999) Continuidad y Transformación del Sistema de Partidos en una Transición 'Modelo'. In: Drake P and Jaksic I (eds) *El Modelo Chileno: Democracia y Desarrollo en Los Noventa*. Santiago: LOM ediciones, Colección sin Norte, pp. 223–260.

Siegfried A (1956) Stable instability in France. *Foreign Affairs* 34: 394–404.

Vermunt JK (1997) *Log-Linear Models for Event Histories*. Advanced Quantitative Techniques in the Social Sciences Series, 8. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Verzichelli L (2009) Italy: The difficult road towards a more effective process of ministerial selection. In: Dowding K and Dumont P (eds) *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. London: Routledge, pp. 79–100.

Von Beyme K (1971) Party systems and cabinet stability in European parliamentary systems. In: Commager HS, Doeker G, Fraenkel E, et al. (eds) *Festschrift für Karl Loewenstein*. Tűbingen: Mohr (Siebeck), pp. 51–70.

Warwick PV (1992) Economic trends and government survival in Western European parliamentary democracies. *American Political Science Review* 86: 875–877.

Wood BD and Marchbanks MP (2008) What determines how long political appointees serve? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18: 375–96.

Biographical notes

Jörn Fischer is Senior Research Associate at the Chair of Comparative Politics at the University of Cologne, Germany. His research focuses on selection, durability and deselection of ministers in Germany. He has published in *West European Politics*, *Public Administration*, *German Politics*, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* and *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. He is editor of the book series 'Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Freiwilligendiensten' ('Interdisciplinary Studies on Volunteer Services').

Keith Dowding is a Professor of Political Science in the School of Politics and International Relations, Research School of Social Science, Australian National University, Australia. He has published 15 books, most recently, the co-authored *Accounting for Ministers: The Hiring and Firing of Ministers in British Government 1945–2007* (Cambridge University Press, 2012, with Samuel Berlinski and Torun Dewan) and *Exits, Voices and Social Investment: Citizens' Responses to Public Services* (Cambridge University Press, 2012, with Peter John), as well as over a hundred articles in journals and books on subjects in political theory, urban and krynoidal politics, public policy and administration, and comparative politics. He has been co-editor of the *Journal of Theoretical Politics* since 1996.

Patrick Dumont is a researcher at the European Governance Programme of the University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, research associate to the Chair in Parliamentary Studies of the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies and member associate of the Institut de science politique Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE). He has published extensively on coalition theory, political elites, parties and party systems, and europeanization processes in journals such as *The European Journal of Political Research* and *European Union Politics*. Recent and forthcoming books include *Puzzles of Government Formation: Coalition Theory and Deviant Cases* (Taylor & Francis 2011, edited with Rudy B. Andeweg and Lieven De Winter) and *The Selection of Ministers around the World: A Comparative Study* (Routledge 2013, edited with Keith Dowding).