Out of the Cabinet: What Drives Defections From the Government in Presidential Systems?

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Abstract

This article challenges a key part of the conventional view of coalitions in presidential systems that sees them as short-lived and ad hoc. The author shows instead that there is wide variation in the durability of governing coalitions across these regimes. She develops a theory of the incentives of parties to participate in the government and the circumstances under which scholars might expect to see the existing governing coalition break down. The author draws on data from 121 cabinets in 12 Latin American countries between the late 1980s and the mid-2000s to show that the dissolution of the cabinet is more likely when the president places less value on coalition building as a policy-making strategy and when parties find it costly to participate in the government. In particular, the author shows that strong unilateral institutional powers tend to diminish the incentives of presidents to compromise with other parties; in contrast, effective legislatures and high rates of approval for the executive contribute significantly to more stable governments.

Keywords

cabinet stability, coalition, presidential system, decree powers, Latin America

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In recent years, work by a number of scholars has established that coalitions are common in presidential systems and that they are a central piece in presidents' policy-making strategies. This work has challenged the traditional view that the lack of incentives for coalition building condemned minority presidents to deadlock and conflict and made presidential systems more prone to breakdown than parliamentary systems.[1] Instead, the literature on comparative institutions has moved away from broad comparisons across regime types to study the circumstances under which presidential coalitions form (Alemán & Tsebelis, 2011; Cheibub et al., Przeworski, & Saiegh, 2004) and their importance for governance. This work has shown that coalition building can give minority presidents a strategy for dealing with the risks of legislative deadlock (Alemán & Calvo, 2010; Amorim Neto, 2006; Cheibub et al., 2004; Martínez-Gallardo, 2010) and, importantly, with of the sort of interbranch conflict that leads to wider political instability (Negretto, 2006).

In this article I challenge a key remaining part of the conventional view of coalitions that sees them as short-lived and ad hoc. I show that in spite of the alleged instability of coalition governments, there is in fact wide variation in the durability of governing coalitions across presidential systems and, consequently, in the role of coalition building in policy making in these systems. In some countries, like Brazil, coalitions are indeed short-lived and presidents must frequently reconfigure their governing coalition to maintain enough support to enact their agenda. Under these circumstances, governing might become very costly indeed as presidents compromise on policy, sacrifice positions in the government, or use government funds to secure legislative support for their policies (Kellam, 2007; Zucco, 2007). Moreover, even where strong presidents can implement policy without the cooperation of the legislature, the rotation of positions that comes with cabinet dissolutions often has damaging effects on the continuity and effectiveness of policy making and even on the prospects for accountability.[2] By contrast, coalitions in other countries like Uruguay or Chile are relatively stable, and they provide presidents with reliable legislative support throughout their term and policy makers with longer time horizons. What explains this variation? When can we expect political parties to act as reliable coalition partners in presidentialism, and when should we expect endemic instability in coalition building?

To answer these questions, I draw on the literature on government formation and duration in parliamentarism, as well as previous work on coalition politics in presidential systems, to develop a theory about the incentives of parties to participate in the government. I argue that despite fixed terms, we observe a clear dynamic where parties bargain with the president over policy and positions. The terms of this bargain, and the changing conditions that might alter the initial agreement, systematically affect the incentives of political actors to maintain or end the governing coalition and thus explain the variability we observe in coalition stability among presidential systems. I draw on data from 12 Latin American countries between the late 1980s and the mid-2000s to show that the dissolution of the cabinet is more likely when the president places less value on coalition building as a policy-making strategy and when parties find it costly to participate in the government. In particular, I show that the stability of presidential coalitions relies crucially on the balance of institutional and political power between the president and the legislature. Strong unilateral institutional powers tend to diminish the incentives of presidents to compromise with other parties; in contrast, a more balanced relationship between the executive and the legislature contributes significantly to more stable governments.

I proceed as follows. The first section describes variation in coalition duration across Latin American countries. The second section presents theoretical arguments about how this variation is related to bargaining between the president and other parties and the circumstances under which we are likely to see this bargaining lead to defections. The third section introduces the data set on government formation in Latin America and describes the variables as well as the method used in the empirical analysis. The results are presented in the fourth section, and the fifth section concludes.

The Problem: Variation in Coalition Duration

Critics of presidentialism long held that coalitions should be rare in presidential systems where fixed terms allow presidents without majority support in the legislature to govern on their own. However, although presidents are free to reserve cabinet seats for members of their own party or for nonpartisan loyals, bargaining between parties is still central in government formation in presidentialism. Presidents do not need to form coalitions to survive, but they still have incentives to include other parties in the cabinet to ensure a smooth passage of their political agenda through congress (Amorim Neto, 2006; Martínez-Gallardo, 2010) as well as to move policy closer to their own preferences (Cheibub & Limongi, 2002). In fact, more than half of all governments formed in the presidential regimes of Latin America include more than one party (Chasquetti, 2001; Deheza, 1998), and most of these coalitions are formed when the president's party does not hold a majority of seats in the legislature and thus has to cross party lines to search support to implement the government's agenda.[3]

Table 1. Cabinet Duration in Latin America

Country	Term length[a]	All cabinets			Coalition			Single party		
		Duration	*SD*	*n*	Duration	*SD*	*n*	Duration	*SD*	*n*
Brazil	48	11.50	2.39	18	11.50	2.39	18	—	—	—
Peru	60	13.00	3.74	18	6.85	1.89	13	29.00	9.879271	5
Ecuador	60	16.00	2.92	13	12.20	2.27	10	28.67	6.33	3
Bolivia	48	19.83	4.90	14	17.36	4.64	13	47.00	0.00	1
Colombia	48	23.00	5.38	12	20.82	5.38	11	47.00	0.00	1
Uruguay	48	25.67	3.78	9	27.86	4.13	7	18.00	9.00	2
Venezuela	72	26.40	7.50	10	27.40	12.53	5	25.40	9.79	5
Argentina	60	32.14	11.23	8	11.67	1.76	3	47.50	16.01	5
Paraguay	60	33.80	10.94	5	25.50	15.50	2	39.33	16.76	3
Chile	60	37.40	9.56	5	37.40	9.56	5	—	—	—
Costa Rica	48	47.00	0.00	5	—	—	—	47.00	0.00	5
Mexico	72	71.00	0.00	4	—	—	—	71.00	0.00	4
All countries	57	29.73	5.20	121	19.86	6.01	87	39.99	6.78	34

Duration and length of term are in months. Some cabinets end because a scheduled election forces the incumbent president to step down.
a. Chile and Argentina changed the length of the presidential term during the time of the study: Argentina from 4 to 6 years and back to 4 years, and Chile from 4 to 6 years. Numbers in the table for these countries are averages.

Whenever executive coalitions did form, critics of presidentialism typically countered that they would tend to be unstable because fixed terms would give coalition partners incentives to defect as elections approached and lax party discipline meant that individual legislators were not bound to support the government, even if they were part of it (Mainwaring, 1993). However, in this section I present data on cabinet formation in Latin American presidential systems that show that presidential coalitions are not necessarily transient. What we see instead is evidence of very varied patterns of coalition building across countries. This variation is evident in Table 1, which shows the duration in months of Latin American presidential cabinets between the 1980s and the mid-2000s.[4] The first columns provide data on the duration of 121 cabinets, including single- as well as multiple-party governments. The duration of a cabinet is determined by a change in the partisan configuration of the cabinet or by the inauguration of a new president. On average, presidential cabinets last around 30 months, which is close to the 25 months on average that parliamentary systems last (Huber & Martínez-Gallardo, 2004). But the table shows wide variation across countries. At one extreme, in Peru and Brazil, where presidential terms are 4 years, cabinets last around a year on average as minority presidents struggle to muster the support they need to govern effectively. By contrast, at the other extreme, cabinets in Paraguay and Chile last on average more than 3 times as long as they do in Peru or Brazil, although the president's term is only slightly longer (5 and 6 years, respectively). In Mexico and Costa Rica, where single-party governments are the norm, cabinets tend to last the full length of the presidential term: 6 and 4 years, respectively.

To show the variation in the length of coalition governments in particular, the right-hand side of Table 1 separates single- and multiparty cabinets. The data show that coalition cabinets are in fact common in Latin America and that they do tend to last for less time on average than do single-party governments. This is not surprising and parallels patterns of cabinet duration in parliamentary governments where coalitions are also shorter lived than their single-party counterparts (Budge & Keman, 1990). However, the table also shows that there is great variation in the stability of coalition governments across the region. Again, Brazil and Peru, as well as Ecuador, conform closely to the view of executive coalitions in presidential regimes as unstable, but this is not the case in other countries like Venezuela, Uruguay, or Chile, where coalitions are often formed and have tended to provide stable support to presidents as they seek to implement their policy agenda.

In the rest of the article I explain this variation by relating it to the conditions under which the president and other political parties bargain over policies and government positions.

The Explanation: Interparty Bargaining and Cabinet Duration in Presidential Regimes

In this section, I develop a theory of the factors that shape the stability of the governing coalition in presidential systems. I begin by describing the basic model of coalition formation used in the literature on parliamentary cabinets. Next, I explain how differences between presidential and parliamentary politics shape coalition dynamics, focusing specifically on the powers of the president, the incentives of political parties, and the nature of the bargaining environment.

A large number of scholars of parliamentary regimes have explored the features that make governments more or less stable.[5] Much of this literature has concentrated on modeling the underlying process that leads to the collapse of parliamentary governments and on uncovering the structural factors that increase the likelihood that a cabinet will fall. The basic model that has been used to study cabinet duration treats government formation as an efficient bargaining process between political parties that culminates in the formation of an equilibrium government. Subsequent to the formation of the government, the original agreement is then put under stress by changes in the political environment that alter the distribution of power among political parties, disrupting the equilibrium and forcing a renegotiation of the terms of the bargain (see Diermeier, 2006). Whether this process will result in a cabinet failure depends, in turn, on the relative payoff to coalition partners of staying in the government or leaving, as well as the complexity of the environment in which coalition bargaining takes place.

This basic model is a useful starting off point for thinking about government defections in presidential systems, but a number of modifications are needed to take into account differences between parliamentary and presidential systems.[6] As in parliamentary systems, we can characterize the process of government formation as the outcome of bargaining between a *formateur* and other parties in the legislature. In presidential regimes, however, the president can decide with few restrictions whether she or he includes other parties in the cabinet or not, regardless of the legislative status of her or his party.[7] In practice, this means that the president is always the *formateur* or first mover in government formation and that any government will include the president's party.[8] An important implication of this is that the number of possible coalitions that can be formed is limited to those that include the president's party, potentially giving the president's party influence beyond its size and importance (Cheibub & Limongi, 2002).

Hence, we can think of the government formation process as starting with a decision by the president of whether or not to invite other parties to join the cabinet. As I have mentioned, although presidents are not required to maintain the support of a legislative majority, including other parties in the government gives them the opportunity to move the policy agenda closer to their own preferences and, potentially, to secure support for it. Governments, then, might include only the president's party—if, for example, the president has a large legislative majority or if opposition parties calculate that they stand to gain more electorally if they oppose the government. Presidents with only minority support might also decide to exclude other parties from the government if they expect that, given the configuration of political forces in congress and their institutional powers, they will be able to build ad hoc legislative coalitions on an issue-by-issue basis (Alemán & Calvo, 2010; Kellam, 2007; Negretto, 2006).[9]

But presidents may also include parties other than their own. In this case, the president will offer a combination of portfolios and policies to potential coalition partners, who in turn will consider whether to accept the president's offer and join the government or not. If the president's offers are not accepted, the process ends and the president's party governs alone. This reversion point is different from that in parliamentary governments, where a new attempt is made to form a government until there is no majority that can reject its investiture (Cheibub et al., 2004). If one or more parties agree to join the government, a coalition will be formed, sometimes adding enough legislative representation to form a majority government coalition but sometimes falling short of majority status (minority coalition).

As in parliamentary regimes, the resulting government can be thought of as a *bargaining equilibrium*: a combination of portfolio allocations and of legislative representation that results from the president's anticipation of the challenges she or he will face and of the configuration she or he anticipates will allow the most efficient bargaining with the legislature to achieve the government's goals (Amorim Neto, 2006; Martínez-Gallardo, 2010). As we will see, the equilibrium government that will form will depend too on the perceived benefits that potential coalition partners associate with joining the government and on their expectations regarding the president's bargaining position.

Once a government is formed, unexpected changes to the deal struck at the beginning of the presidential term change the president's calculations about the cost of exchanging cabinet positions for legislative support. Such changes also may affect the calculation of parties regarding the benefit of being in the government and might prompt them to adjust their expectations and devise new strategies. These events might include, among other things, a midterm election that changes the relative legislative weight of government parties, new information about (or changes in) government policy that coalition partners might find damaging to their electoral prospects (the departure of the NFR in Bolivia over the "Water Wars" in 2000 is one example), or a drop in the president's popularity (such as the one made evident by the protests against president Gonzalez Macchi in Paraguay in 2000 that led to the defection of the PLRA from the coalition).[10] Depending on the circumstances, there are two possible outcomes. Given the substantial benefits of being in office, party leaders will often find it beneficial to compromise and renegotiate the existing deal by changing the distribution of ministerial positions or compromising on policy (Laver, 2003). However, sometimes the political costs of staying in government will outweigh the benefits, and no acceptable compromise can be struck between the existing government partners. In these cases, bargaining will fail and one or more parties will defect from the government.

When Are We More Likely to See Bargaining Failures?

In the rest of the article I argue that the success or failure of bargaining within the governing coalition will depend crucially on the relative importance to the president of legislative support from outside her or his party. All else equal, strong presidents have fewer incentives to compromise with other parties in exchange for legislative support, and so we should observe coalition instability where political or institutional conditions enhance a president's authority vis-à-vis other political institutions. However, the relationship is not all one-way. Despite the centrality of presidents in government formation and change in presidential systems, patterns of coalition stability also depend on two other factors: coalition partners' perceived risk from being associated with a weak government and the bargaining environment, which determines the costs of reaching agreements. I deal with each one of these elements in turn.

The Incentives of Presidents

Confronted with a potential bargaining failure, presidents must decide whether to compromise to strike a new equilibrium or whether to dissolve the current coalition and build a new one. Presidents who place higher value in enlisting the support of other parties to build legislative majorities are more likely to seek a compromise by, for example, reshuffling the cabinet in a way that reflects the new balance of power or by offering changes in policy to coalition partners (Diermeier & Merlo, 2000). In turn, the value to presidents of coalition building will depend largely on their political and institutional leverage. Two factors, the legislative support for the president's party and the extent of the president's institutional authority, are likely to play a large role in determining the extent to which the president has to rely on the legislative process in the implementation of her or his policy agenda.

The first factor affecting the president's incentives is the status of the government. The association between the government's status and its durability has been long established in studies of parliamentary government, where majority governments are consistently found to last longer than minority governments (Diermeier & Stevenson, 1999; King, Alt, Burns, & Laver, 1990; Warwick, 1992). In presidential systems, however, the government cannot be defeated by a parliamentary vote, which means that cabinet terminations in single-party presidential cabinets happen only if the president resigns or is removed by extraordinary means, regardless of whether the government has majority status or not. Furthermore, under certain circumstances minority presidents might be backed by a legislative majority and might not seek support through coalition building (Negretto, 2006). Hence, single-party majority or minority cabinets should be substantially more stable than governments involving more than one party.

Among coalition governments, presidents should face the lowest potential costs of dissolution if the government they have formed is a *surplus* coalition, that is, if the government's majority in the legislature is large enough that any one of the government parties can defect without jeopardizing the government's majority. Thus, we should expect presidents leading surplus coalitions to be less willing to strike a new bargain with their coalition partners and the coalition governments that they form to be less durable. By contrast, the highest potential costs if the coalition splits should be faced by minority presidents who have formed *minimum winning coalitions* (MWC), that is, cabinets where the government controls a legislative majority but where the exclusion of any one party would leave the government without a parliamentary majority. Presidents leading MWC should be more willing to strike a new bargain with their coalition partners, and their governments should be more durable. In the case of minority coalitions, although the president might want to hold on to the support of coalition partners, no party is pivotal in maintaining a legislative majority, and so the cost of a defection is also relatively low.

A second factor that should affect presidents' incentives is related to their institutional leverage (Amorim Neto, 2006). Presidents with strong legislative powers, especially those who have the authority to act unilaterally to change policy, should also be less likely to compromise to preserve the coalition. For example, some presidential systems give the executive the authority to change policy unilaterally through the use of executive decrees. In these cases we should expect presidents to value coalition building less and to be less willing to pay the price of maintaining the coalition in the face of changing circumstances. In contrast, where the president's ability to change policy relies necessarily on the concurrence of a legislative majority, the president will be more likely to compromise with other parties and to pay a higher price to maintain the support of other political parties.

The institutional features of the presidency are counterbalanced by the legislature's capacity to effectively revise or modify the executive's proposals. Where strong legislative institutions allow political parties to scrutinize the executive's proposals, we should expect the president to place a higher value on building and maintaining legislative support, and thus we should observe more stable cabinets. Martin and Vanberg (2011) find, for example, that strong committee systems in parliament allow coalition partners to closely monitor the government's proposals and revise them when they stray too far from their preferences. By contrast, if the legislature is not an effective counterbalance to the president's authority—if it does not have the authority to revise, amend, or block the president's proposals—we should expect the president to value coalition building less and thus coalitions to be more unstable.

The Incentives of Parties

The potential costs and benefits to political parties of staying in the government also shape patterns of cabinet duration. In parliamentary systems a bargaining failure might lead to a government termination so parties must consider the possibility of an early election in calculating the cost of leaving the government. By contrast, in presidential regimes if a coalition party leaves the government it does not threaten the government's survival and the vacated portfolios revert to the president who can redistribute them at will among the remaining parties or offer them to a new party (Cheibub & Limongi, 2002). As a result, the reversion point for parties leaving the cabinet is not an early election (and with it the possibility of participating in a new government) but rather joining the ranks of the opposition until the next scheduled election.

In the face of shocks that change the conditions under which they joined the coalition, bargaining failures should prompt parties to weigh the benefits of being in office with the prospect of shoring up support for the party by distancing itself from the government. Government portfolios are valued by potential coalition partners as a privileged channel to policy making as well as a way to access the perks of office, including a source of patronage for their members and a vehicle through which to distribute pork to their supporters (Araujo, Pereira, & Raile, 2008; Cheibub & Limongi, 2000). The value of a portfolio is even higher in presidential systems where opportunities for pork and policy are concentrated in the executive and opportunities for career advancement outside the government are scarce.

But parties also care about their electoral fate, and so the potential electoral cost of being associated with the government will play a large role in their decision about whether to stay in the government or not (Strom, 1990). Most obviously, parties will take into account the electoral risk of being associated with an unpopular president. All else equal, parties are less likely to defect from the government when the president has widespread support from voters and they calculate that the executive's popularity might benefit them at the polls. In the case of Uruguay, for example, Altman (2000) finds that factions within the ruling party are more likely to defect from the government when the president's popularity falls. We should expect to find a similar pattern across presidential systems.

The Bargaining Environment

Interactions between the president and political parties do not happen in a vacuum; some features of the political environment in which parties bargain over policy and positions are bound to affect the stability of the government. In the parliamentary literature, the complexity of the bargaining environment—mainly, the number of parties involved in bargaining and the affinity of their interests—has been typically seen as an indicator of the likelihood that external shocks might change the prevailing balance of power and make parties more likely to seek an alternative coalition (e.g., King et al., 1990). Thus, indicators of a more involved bargaining context, such as a fractionalized legislature, have been systematically associated with shorter-lived governments. In presidential systems, however, no alternative coalition that excludes the president's party can replace the governing coalition. In this context the effect of a more complex bargaining environment on government stability is unclear; a more fractionalized legislature, for example, might make the cost of defections lower for the president who might have more alternative coalition partners, but it cannot lead to the replacement of the cabinet by an alternative government.

Warwick (1992) suggests a different possibility. He argues that in fractionalized party systems the need to include more parties in the government can also introduce a higher degree of ideological diversity and, thus, higher transaction costs into the government. In his account the effect of party system characteristics on the stability of the government is indirect: More fractionalized (or polarized) legislatures, for example, should be associated with coalition governments as well as with larger and more ideologically diverse coalitions. These ideological divisions lead to government terminations because "member parties cannot agree with one another on government policy" (Warwick, 1992, p. 347). In the case of Latin American presidential systems, evidence does indicate that higher fractionalization is indeed associated with the inclusion of more parties in the government.[11]

By the same logic, bargaining failures that lead to a dissolution should be more likely when the number of parties in the cabinet is higher and the affinity of their interests is lower (Axelrod, 1970), as disagreement among members of the governing coalition prompts them to reconsider the terms of the existing bargain. This has two implications. One, as noted above, single-party governments should be more stable than coalition governments. Two, the costs of agreement should also be lower in coalitions that are ideologically compact—that is, ones in which parties have higher agreement on policy—than in those where policy disagreement is higher.

Finally, agreement *within* political parties should also shape bargaining between parties. The extent to which party members have incentives to vote as a united block will determine to a large extent the cost to presidents of forming supportive legislative coalitions. In general, where party discipline is lax presidents will favor building ad hoc legislative coalitions by bargaining with individual legislators instead of creating executive coalitions that entail giving up cabinet positions (Kellam, 2007). By contrast, in the context of highly disciplined parties presidents will find it harder to build coalitions on a case-by-case basis and will likely place a higher value on the formation of formal executive coalitions. Although the cost of building ad hoc policy coalitions should determine the value of maintaining the coalition for all presidents, the effect should be even stronger for presidents with weak support or weak unilateral authority who have more to lose if the coalition breaks up. Consequently, we should expect high levels of party discipline to be associated with cabinet stability, especially for otherwise weak presidents.

The Evidence: Data and Method

To test the hypotheses outlined above I use an original data set that records the composition of 63 presidential administrations in 12 Latin American countries. The data cover the period between the early 1980s and the mid-2000s. The data set records the partisan configuration of the government for each country, month by month, and includes measures of the political and economic context and of the main institutional characteristics covered by the theory. In this section I describe the dependent and independent variables as well as the method of analysis.

Dependent Variable: Cabinet Dissolutions

The arguments I have outlined are about the conditions that make it more likely that interparty bargaining failures will lead to cabinet dissolutions and force the president to negotiate a new bargaining equilibrium. The dependent variable is the time that elapses between the formation of a *cabinet* and a change in the partisan composition of the government. A cabinet starts when one of two things happen: (a) a new president is inaugurated, through an election typically, regardless of whether the party in government changes, and/or (b) the partisan configuration of the government changes.[12] A defection happens when a party other than the president's loses its representation in the cabinet, typically through the resignation of one or more cabinet ministers.

The vacated position can be filled by a member of one of the governing parties, but it might be given instead to a member of a new party.

Defections are not the only way in which cabinets are dissolved, however. Some cabinets end when the president steps down after an election (or with the death or illness of an incumbent). Because elections in presidential systems are constitutionally mandated and fixed, these cabinet failures can be considered as exogenous to the process of interparty bargaining. In these cases, the duration of the cabinet does not tell us much since governments that could have potentially lasted longer end prematurely when their fixed term expires and an election ushers in a new president. In other cases no party leaves the government but, instead, the government is expanded to include a new party. Although some of the arguments that I have proposed here should apply to these terminations (especially the importance for government formation of having sufficient legislative support), these additions are not likely to result from the type of bargaining failure that I discuss in this article.

Figure 1 presents data on the 121 cabinets included in the data set and the proportion that ended in each of the ways outlined above: because a party left the government, through a scheduled election, or because a party joined it.[13] Bargaining failures were the reason for termination in 40% of all cabinets. In fact, in three countries—Brazil, Uruguay and Peru—cabinets were more likely to end because of a defection than an election, and in Bolivia and Ecuador they were equally likely to end in either of the two ways.[14] Elections account for 45% of terminations and expansions of the cabinet account for 24%. Of the 66 cabinets in the data set that did not end in an election, 73% ended with a party defection and the renegotiation of the governing bargain.

Method

To model the conditions under which interparty bargaining leads to cabinet failures, I use duration analysis. Duration analysis has been widely used in the literature on cabinet duration in parliamentary regimes because it is particularly well suited to explore the effect of a set of independent variables on the hazard rate, or the likelihood that a subject will fail given that it has not failed until that moment (Box-Steffensmeier & Jones, 1997). In this case, the subject of interest is a *cabinet*, and duration analysis allows us to estimate the effect of presidential strength, the calculations of opposition parties, and the bargaining environment on the likelihood that a cabinet will end with a defection (a cabinet *failure*) given that it has survived thus far.[15]

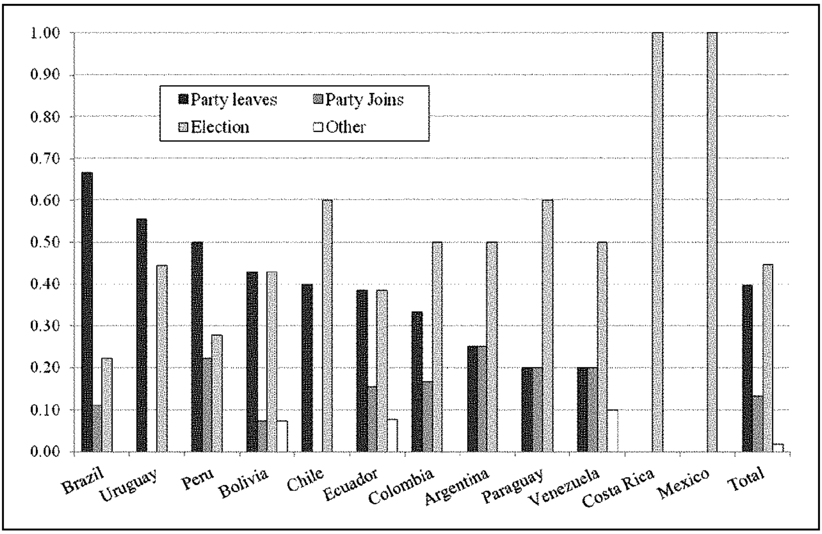

Figure 1. Distribution of cabinet failures as proportion of total failures

Furthermore, duration analysis is attractive for the study of cabinet failures in presidential systems because it accounts for *censoring*, or the possibility that certain observations (cabinets) leave the data set (or fail) because of factors that are theoretically irrelevant or exogenous to the process of interparty bargaining that I detail here. In what follows I concentrate on terminations caused by a party defection and consider cabinets that ended through a presidential election or cabinet expansion to be censored (King et al., 1990). I also account for the possibility that observations within a country are not independent by correcting for possible intragroup correlation in the standard errors.[16]

Duration analysis also allows the researcher to implicitly model how the risk of failure (or hazard rate) changes over time. Although it is likely that parties would face stronger incentives to defect as the next election approaches, and thus that we would see rising hazards, the theory suggests that the incentives of parties to position themselves before an election should be conditional on changing conditions, especially the president's political and institutional strength. Moreover, there is no reason to expect that challenges to the existing government that might prompt a re-evaluation of the terms of the government bargain will increase or decrease in time (Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1986). In the absence of a clear a priori reason to expect that the hazard will follow any specific distribution, the most appropriate model is a semiparametric Cox proportional hazard model that makes the least restrictive assumptions about time dependency.[17]

Independent Variables

The central hypothesis derived from the theory is that the potential costs to presidents of including other parties in their government significantly shape cabinet stability. These costs, I have argued, should vary with the extent of legislative support for the president's party and the president's institutional leverage.

Legislative support is measured using a set of dummies that code whether the president's party holds a majority of seats in the legislature, whether the government is a coalition, and, if so, whether the governing coalition holds a majority of legislative seats. The resulting variables are the following:

Single-Party Government: The government includes only the president's party; this variable includes majority and minority single-party governments

Surplus Coalitions: Together the governing parties hold a majority of seats in the legislature and at least one of the government parties can leave the coalition without jeopardizing the government's majority status

Minimum Winning Coalitions: The president's party does not hold a majority of seats but the governing coalition does; however, the exit of any coalition partner would leave the president without a legislative majority

Minority Coalitions: The president does not hold a majority of seats, and neither do all the parties in the governing coalition together

I measure institutional leverage with an indicator that gives a score of 1 to presidents who have the ability to issue decrees that immediately become law and a score of 0 to countries where this institutional power is not available to presidents (*Decree*). Although weaker forms of decree authority exist, this powerful unilateral authority should strongly shape the incentives of presidents to compromise with other parties. Countries where this institutional power exists are Argentina after 1994, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

To capture the extent to which the president's authority is balanced by a stronger legislature, I use a measure of legislative effectiveness based on a World Economic Forum survey that asks business executives, "How effective is your national parliament/congress as a lawmaking and oversight institution?"[18] Although the scale goes from 1 (*very ineffective*) to 7 (*very effective*), countries in the data set vary from only 1.4 (Chile and Costa Rica) to 3.7 (Venezuela), with an average of 2.34 (*Leg Effectiveness*).

To capture the costs and benefits to parties of forming part of the government, I use presidential approval. Parties should care about their electoral prospects, and these should be closely linked to the president's public support (*Approval*). Data on presidential approval across a wide cross-section of countries are hard to come by, however. Here I use new data on executive approval compiled by Carlin, Hartlyn, and Martínez-Gallardo (2009).[19] Unfortunately, approval rates are not available for all countries and years. Data are available for most years for executives in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Ecuador but are missing for 86% of observations for Bolivia and for two thirds of observations in Paraguay and Uruguay. Despite these limitations, the data give us a first approximation of the relationship between approval and cabinet stability. The mean approval rate is 44.2%, with a maximum of 87.15% (for Argentinean President Alfonsin in 1984) and a minimum of 5.93% (for Peruvian President Toledo in 2003).

The last set of variables measure the complexity of the bargaining environment. I follow Warwick (1992) in measuring the ideological compactness of the cabinet by coding the ideology of each party on a left (1) to right (5) scale and then using the share of legislative seats for each party as weighs. I then calculate the variance in these values using the standard deviation (*SD*).[20] This variable (*Ideo. Compact*) ranges from 0 for single-party governments or coalitions with no ideological diversity to 1.48 for the most ideological diverse coalitions, with a mean of 0.28.

The measure of party discipline is taken from Martínez-Gallardo and Schleiter (2010). Their index updates Carey and Shugart's (1995) work, which classifies countries according to four characteristics of the electoral system that should affect the extent to which electoral and party rules give legislators incentives to cultivate a personal or a party vote: ballot control, vote pooling, types of votes, and district magnitude. We should expect stronger party discipline where there are fewer incentives to cultivate a personal vote, so in the analysis below I reverse the scale so that higher values of the index indicate higher levels of party discipline. The reversed scale (*Discipline*) goes from .20 (low levels of party discipline) to .96 (high party discipline), with a mean value of .67. To measure the level of legislative fragmentation I use the Herfindahl index, which estimates the probability that two randomly selected legislators will belong to different parties. In the empirical analysis below I reverse the index so that higher values represent a higher level of fractionalization. The reversed index (*Fractionalization*) varies from .42 to .91, with a mean of .67.

Finally, I have argued that unexpected events throughout a president's term are likely to change the terms under which the cabinet was formed. These events are (by definition) hard to model *ex ante*, and they include events as diverse as an election, a scandal, and an economic crisis. In the empirical analysis I include controls that are meant to capture two important sources of shocks, elections and the economy. For the first I use a dummy for the 3 months before a legislative election (*Time to Election*). For economic shocks I use the quarterly change in the consumer price index (*Inflation*).

Results

To recap, the central expectation of the theory is that governments will last longer when the cost to presidents of losing the support of coalition partners is higher. In particular, I have argued that strong presidents will have weaker incentives to reach agreement with coalition partners and so the likelihood of a bargaining failure will be higher. The results provide strong evidence for this hypothesis. In addition, the data show that cabinets will be more stable when the president's authority is counterbalanced by an effective legislature and when the benefit to opposition parties of staying in the government outweighs the cost of being associated with the president.

The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2. Model 1 includes all the independent variables described above, except ideological diversity, which is highly collinear with indicators of government status.[21] The interpretation of the results that follows is based on this model unless otherwise noted. Model 2 tests the importance of presidential approval for the reduced sample for which the data are available. The last model in the table tests arguments about the bargaining environment. Parameter estimates in Table 2 are expressed as unstandardized coefficients and must be interpreted in relation to the baseline hazard rate. A positive (negative) coefficient indicates that an increase in the corresponding independent variable leads to an increase (decrease) in the likelihood that we will observe a cabinet failure. To make the interpretation of the results more intuitive, in the following paragraphs I convert unstandardized coefficients to odds ratios by exponentiating them.

The main conclusion to draw from Table 2 is that, as expected, stronger presidential authority is associated with higher cabinet instability. Presidents with strong decree powers have fewer incentives to compromise, and so the cabinets that they lead are more likely to end with a bargaining failure. However, this effect is offset by the capacity of a more effective legislature to revise and amend the president's proposals. Model 1 indicates that the direct effect of decree powers on the likelihood of a cabinet failure is very large; where the legislature scores zero on effectiveness, strong decree powers increase the odds of a failure more than 17 times. However, this effect becomes smaller as the legislature's effectiveness increases. For presidents *with* decree powers, an increase of one point in effectiveness—from the level of Ecuador

Table 2. Cox Proportional Hazards Models of Cabinet Duration

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Decree Power	2.845***	2.672***	
	(0.863)	(1.003)	
Single-Party Government	−3.246***	−2.932***	
	(0.653)	(0.750)	
Minimum Winning Coalition	−0.853	−0.961	
	(0.524)	(0.639)	
Minority Coalition	−1.002**	−1.109***	
	(0.460)	(0.267)	
Decree × Effectiveness	−1.012***	−0.956***	
	(0.331)	(0.327)	
Effectiveness of Legislature	−0.343	−0.079	−0.555***
	(0.209)	(0.351)	(0.186)
Presidential Approval		−0.037***	
		(0.007)	
Fractionalization	3.163***	1.493	3.886**
	(1.035)	(1.337)	(1.635)
Party Discipline	−1.300*	−1.271***	−1.800***
	(0.731)	(0.475)	(0.558)
Ideologically Compact			1.636***
			(0.309)
Majority Government			−0.778
			(0.535)
Minority Government			−0.275
			(0.310)
Quarterly Inflation	0.002	0.009***	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Legislative Election	1.000***	1.464***	1.054***
	(0.379)	(0.318)	(0.390)
Observations	2,735	1,954	2,735
No. of failures	44	35	44
No. of clusters	12	12	12
Log likelihood	−163.5	−115.0	−171.3

Entries are unstandardized coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.
*Significant at 10%. **Significant at 5%. ***Significant at 1%.

to that of Chile, for example—cuts the risk of dissolution by nearly 65%. In short, as the legislature becomes more important in policy making, coalition building becomes more valuable for the president and cabinet failures become more unlikely. A drawback of using perceptions of the legislature's effectiveness is that these perceptions might be shaped by the stability of the government.[22] The appendix shows the same effect using an alternative measure of the legislature's capabilities based on a combination of indicators including the professionalization, experience, and education of legislators developed by Saiegh (2010).

The models in Table 2 also show that, as expected, coalition governments are substantially more unstable than single-party governments.[23] However, results on government status are mixed. Among coalitions, surplus governments face significantly lower costs of defection and higher risk of dissolution than minority coalitions; the odds of dissolution are 63% lower for minority coalitions than for surplus coalitions. However, although the hazard rate is lower for MWC, also as expected, the difference between these governments and surplus coalitions does not reach standard levels of statistical significance in most model specifications.

Model 2 shows the effect of the president's approval on parties' incentives to defect from the government. Presidential approval is a strong determinant of cabinet dissolutions, with popular presidents being much less likely to see defections than less popular ones. The hazard rate indicates that an increase in approval rates of 16 points (1 *SD*) translates into a decrease in the risk of defection of 45%. A comparison of the two administrations of President Fernando H. Cardoso in Brazil helps illustrate this effect. President Cardoso led minority coalition governments in 1995 and 1999 and saw no significant changes in his institutional leverage—or in the effectiveness of the legislature—throughout his tenure. However, President Cardoso averaged approval rates of 49% during his first term and averaged only 34% during his second term. According to the model, holding all other variables constant, we would expect Cardoso to face a risk of dissolution about 46% lower in his first term than in his second term; indeed, all cabinet dissolutions during his tenure happened after 1995. Despite missing data on approval, this result provides strong initial evidence that parties are more likely to leave the government when they perceive that staying in it might hurt their electoral prospects.[24]

Arguments about the importance of the bargaining environment are also supported by the data, although to interpret the results we have to take into account the high correlation between the characteristics of the bargaining environment and measures of government status and presidential authority. Regarding the cost of agreement in the legislature, Model 3, which excludes indicators of government status, shows that fractionalization has a strong effect on coalition stability. The question of course is whether the effect of fractionalization on coalition stability is indirect, through its effect on the probability that a coalition will be formed.[25] Model 1 includes controls for government status and shows that even controlling for status, an increase of 1 *SD* in the level of fractionalization increases the likelihood of dissolution by 44%. This suggests that legislative fractionalization shapes coalition stability beyond its effect on government formation, also making party defections less costly for the president, who has access to more alternative coalition partners.

The cost of agreement *within* parties is also important for coalition stability. Model 1 shows that an increase of 1 *SD* in party discipline leads to a reduction of 32% in the risk of coalition dissolution. As others have noted before, however, decree powers and party discipline tend to move together (Cheibub & Limongi, 2000; Negretto, 2004), and so Model 3 excludes the indicator for decree powers and shows an even stronger effect of discipline on the likelihood of dissolution.[26] These results indicate that party discipline makes it harder for presidents to enlist the support of individual legislators and increases stability. The data, however, do not provide evidence that the cost of building coalitions on an issue-by-issue basis is different for presidents who are in the minority and those who are in the majority; the interaction between minority status and discipline is not significant (see Table A1 in the appendix). In the future, data on party discipline at the party level might make it possible to differentiate levels of discipline for government and opposition parties and to test this hypothesis more carefully.

Finally, I have suggested that the costs of reaching agreements should also depend on the number of actors in the cabinet and on their ideological proximity. Results show that coalition governments with more parties are in fact more unstable,[27] but it is hard to measure the impact of ideological compactness independent from government status because cabinets with more parties are also more likely to be ideologically diverse. Although ideological diversity is not significant if government status is taken into account (see Table A1 in appendix), it significantly increases the risk of dissolution if government status variables are excluded (Model 3). This indicates that, as Warwick (1992) suggests, the instability associated with coalition governments in presidential systems is related both to the number of parties in the cabinet and to their ideological diversity.

The control variables work largely in the expected direction. Although changes in inflation have no effect on the likelihood of a defection, the dummy for the 3 months before a legislative election indicates that bargaining failures are nearly 3 times more likely in these months, as presidents and parties adjust their expectations to changing political conditions.[28]

Conclusion

Coalitions are the most common form of government in the presidential countries of Latin America today. And yet our knowledge about coalition dynamics is still lacking. Work in the past decade has done much to dispel the notion that coalitions did not form in presidentialism, but there is still a sense that presidential coalitions are a somewhat ad hoc and transient—even corrupt—vehicle for the exchange of patronage and support. However, in the context of multipartyism, coalition building has also been a central way in which presidents have built majorities that allow them to pass legislation and, ultimately, to govern. Under what circumstances, then, should we expect coalitions in presidential systems to be a durable source of support for presidents? When should we expect successful compromise between presidents and parties, and when should we expect bargaining to fail?

In this article I have shown that the ability to issue decrees with force of law is systematically and significantly associated with shorter lived cabinets. The evidence presented here suggests that unilateral presidential authority reduces the incentives of presidents to engage in the type of consensus building and compromise that leads to stable governments. This instability can be damaging to governance, even where this strong authority might allow presidents to further their policy agenda unilaterally; rotation in positions can undermine trust in government institutions, policy continuity, and the ability of citizens to hold politicians accountable. However, the evidence also shows that strong, effective legislatures have the opposite effect, giving presidents incentives to compromise with parties to maintain their support and leading to more durable, stable coalitions. In the context of a trend in the region toward greater delegation of authority in the hands of executives, these results do not bode well for coalition maintenance and stability going forward.

Furthermore, this article also suggests that party discipline is important for cabinet stability. As Javier Corrales (2002, p. 32) has argued, parties are crucial "facilitators of governance" that help the executive build credibility and support for its policies. The results from this article suggest that they are also crucial in helping the president broker and maintain the types of political deals with other parties that lead to stable coalitions. Conversely, where we see presidents ruling "without parties" (Corrales, 2002), these results suggest that cabinet instability should likely follow. The question of whether these two trends are related and, if so, what that says about the prospects for coalition stability remains central for future research.

Finally, this article also contributes to the discussion about the similarities and differences between parliamentary and presidential democracies by showing that, despite lack of a survival relationship, coalition building in presidentialism reflects party system diversity and helps presidents deal with the challenges of policy making, much in the same way that it does in parliamentary countries.

Appendix

Table A1. Robustness Checks

	Cluster on president	Including ideo. diversity	Capabilities	Only coalitions	Bargaining/pres. powers	Discipline/govt. status	ENP in cabinet	First government
Decree Power	2.845***	3.127***	2.124***	2.699***			1.440**	2.724***
	(1.080)	(1.097)	(0.784)	(0.917)			(0.717)	(0.938)
Single-Party Government	−3.246***	−3.561***	−2.871***			−2.532***		−3.285***
	(0.780)	(0.943)	(0.636)			(0.545)		(0.636)
Minimum Winning Coalition	−0.853**	−0.942	−0.882*	−0.888*			0.020	−0.822
	(0.411)	(0.582)	(0.485)	(0.538)			(0.627)	(0.540)
Minority Coalition	−1.002**	−1.125**	−0.813*	−0.944*			−0.060	−1.009**
	(0.444)	(0.515)	(0.477)	(0.504)			(0.388)	(0.469)
Decree × Effectiveness	−1.012**	−1.129**		−0.958***			−0.748**	−0.965***
	(0.419)	(0.452)		(0.339)			(0.292)	(0.346)
Leg. Effectiveness	−0.343	−0.393		−0.361*	−0.704***	−0.816**	−0.637**	−0.432*
	(0.254)	(0.279)		(0.217)	(0.147)	(0.401)	(0.284)	(0.251)
Fractionalization	3.163**	2.920**	2.216*	3.354***	2.985*	2.438	0.308	3.400***
	(1.464)	(1.252)	(1.251)	(0.869)	(1.625)	(1.594)	(1.800)	(1.091)
Party Discipline	−1.300	−1.430	0.458	−1.306**	−1.986***	−1.966**	−2.335***	−1.414*
	(0.873)	(0.928)	(1.399)	(0.661)	(0.458)	(0.775)	(0.792)	(0.823)
Ideologically Connected		−0.337			1.683***			
		(0.714)			(0.328)			
Minority Pres/Gov					−0.291	−0.273		
					(0.316)	(0.446)		
Majority Pres/Gov					−0.829	−0.036		
					(0.536)	(0.635)		

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

	Cluster on president	Including ideo. diversity	Capabilities	Only coalitions	Bargaining/pres. powers	Discipline/govt. status	ENP in cabinet	First government
Legislative Election	1.000**	0.991***	0.885**	0.657	1.011**	1.023**	0.838**	1.029***
	(0.474)	(0.379)	(0.390)	(0.428)	(0.411)	(0.409)	(0.410)	(0.372)
Inflation Change	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Decree × Capabilities			−0.580*					
			(0.328)					
Capabilities of Legislature			0.298					
			(0.279)					
Pres Powers (UNDP)					1.423			
					(1.578)			
Minority × Discipline						0.271		
						(0.955)		
ENP in Cabinet							0.844***	
							(0.231)	
First Gov								0.416
								(0.340)
Observations	2,735	2,735	2,735	1,419	2,735	2,735	2,735	2,735
Log likelihood	−163.5	−163.3	−165.8	−149.6	−171.1	−167.8	−169.9	−163.2
No. of failures	44	44	44	42	44	44	44	44
No. of clusters	62	12	12	10	12	12	12	12

Entries are unstandardized coefficients from a Cox proportional hazards model, with robust standard errors in parentheses.
*Significant at 10%. **Significant at 5%. ***Significant at 1%.

Table A2. Missing on Presidential Approval

	Missing on approval
Decree Power	−0.898
	(0.729)
Single-Party Government	−0.669
	(1.116)
Minimum Winning Coalition	1.232
	(0.777)
Minority Coalition	−2.695***
	(0.722)
Effectiveness of Legislature	−0.769
	(0.801)
Fractionalization	−8.072*
	(4.199)
Discipline	−1.658
	(2.252)
Quarterly Inflation	0.009
	(0.008)
Legislative Election	−0.596***
	(0.160)
Constant	7.633**
	(3.859)
Observations	2,856

Entries in the table are coefficients from a logistic regression.

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Notes

1. The most often cited exposition of the argument is Linz (1994). For a summary, see Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh (2004).
2. For evidence of the effects of cabinet (in)stability on government performance, see, for example, Van Rozendaal (1997), Huber (1998), Leblang and Satyanath (2006), and Milio (2008).

3. Of minority presidents, 77% formed coalitions, whereas only 53% of majority presidents did so. Whether this practice improves the executive's legislative success, however, is disputed; see Cheibub et al. (2004), Alemán and Calvo (2010).
4. Countries included are Argentina (1983–2003), Bolivia (1982–2003), Brazil (1990–2006), Chile (1990–2006), Colombia (1982–2006), Costa Rica (1982–2002), Ecuador (1984–2002), Mexico (1982–2006), Paraguay (1989–2003), Peru (1985–2006), Uruguay (1985–2005), and Venezuela (1984–2006).
5. For some recent examples, see Diermeier and Merlo (2000), and Diermeier and Stevenson (1999).
6. See Linz (1994), Mainwaring (1993), Stepan and Skach (1993) and Cheibub and Limongi (2002).
7. In some presidential systems certain appointments require congressional approval.
8. This is not a formal requirement; however, the president typically includes some ministers from her or his own party.
9. Alemán and Calvo (2010) argue that strong institutional prerogatives might enhance the legislative success of minority presidents (see also Cheibub et al., 2004).
10. Diermeier and Merlo (2000) conceptualize these events as random shocks to the expectations of parties about the outcome of an early election that shape their decision to leave the coalition and, potentially, bring down the government.
11. A *t* test shows that, using the data for this article, the average legislative fractionalization for executive coalitions (.72) is significantly higher ($p < .001$) than for single-party governments (.61).
12. If the change involves a minister from the president's party or a nonpartisan minister, the cabinet is considered unchanged. Amorim Neto (2006), Kellam (2007), and Alemán and Tsebelis (2008) use a similar approach.
13. Five cabinets are excluded from the data analysis presented below because they lasted less than a month.
14. Some cabinet dissolutions happen when the president is replaced without an intervening election. These cases were considered defections and included in the statistical analysis with two exceptions; the resignations of President Mahuad in Ecuador and President Pérez in Venezuela were coded as "other" because the changes did not follow an election and the partisan makeup of the government did not change. Results hold if all of these cases are excluded.
15. The specific form of the models estimated is the following: $h(t) = \exp(\beta' x) h_0(t)$, where $h(t)$ is the hazard rate, $h_0(t)$ is the baseline hazard, and x is a matrix of independent variables with their estimated coefficients β.
16. Results are unchanged with clustering on presidential administration (see Table A1 in the appendix).
17. I ran several parametric specifications of the models presented below. Tests based on the log likelihood indicated that the most appropriate alternatives were the Weibull and exponential distributions, which indicate flat and increasing

hazards, respectively. In every case, results were unchanged, indicating that the specification of duration dependence is not driving the results. Results of these tests are available by request.

18. Taken from Saiegh (2010). I thank Eduardo Alemán for pointing out this measure to me.
19. To make the available surveys comparable across countries, Carlin, Hartlyn, and Martínez-Gallardo (2009) estimate a latent series of approval rates generated by the dyads-ratio algorithm (cf. Stimson, 1999).
20. Party ideology codings are based on Coppedge (1997) and other country-specific sources.
21. Substantive results are unchanged if ideological diversity is included. See Table A1 in the appendix.
22. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.
23. Results are unchanged if only coalition cabinets are included (see Table A1 in the appendix). However, I estimate the models on single-party governments too because there is nothing a priori that prevents presidents in these governments from including other parties in the government in response to external shocks or changes in the political context.
24. Substantive results for Model 2 are very similar to those for Model 1. The most notable exception is the result for fractionalization, which is not significant in Model 2. Table A2 in the appendix shows the relationship between the main variables of interest and the probability that approval data will be missing and shows that missingness is less likely in minority coalitions and in countries with high fractionalization (data are complete for the two countries with the highest fractionalization, Brazil and Ecuador, and they are missing in large part for the least fragmented country, Paraguay).
25. Indicators for single-party government and different types of coalitions are highly correlated with ideological diversity; instead, I include controls for whether the government is in the majority or the minority.
26. Table A1 substitutes the indicator for decree powers with a measure of presidential powers taken from the United Nations Development Programme (2007) report on Latin America (which is not highly correlated with discipline).
27. Table A1 substitutes indicators of coalition status with the effective number of parties in the cabinet; an additional effective party in the cabinet increases the odds of dissolution more than 2 times.
28. Although there might be reasons to believe that the first cabinet after a presidential election might be more stable than subsequent cabinets (see Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1986), I found no evidence of this trend (see Table A1 of the appendix).

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Bio

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