Pre-electoral coalitions in parliamentary democracies: a new dataset

Abstract

Keywords

# Introduction

# Defining and measuring pre-electoral coalitions

# Illustration of the data

## Comparison to existing datasets

Our data increase the coverage and granularity of extant data on pre-electoral coalitions. Sona Golder’s (2006, 15) seminal study covered 364 legislative elections in 23 parliamentary democracies. For the period from 1946 to 2002 Golder codes 240 pre-electoral coalitions. A related study on voter turnout in parliamentary elections between 1970 and 2011 modifies Golder’s data to include information on 223 legislative elections in 19 democracies (Tillman 2015). In extension of these efforts, our data cover 562 parliamentary elections across 35 EU and OECD democracies, including Central and Eastern Europe.[[1]](#footnote-1) For the period from 1945 to 2015, our data identify 493 pre-electoral coalitions. Information on participating parties, its type, the existence of a joint program, and incumbency status[[2]](#footnote-2) are reported for each of those PECs. With the help of these data scholars will be able to pose new questions such as: “When do incumbent government form pre-electoral coalitions?”; “Why do pre-electoral coalitions put forward joint programs and to what effect?”; or “Do all parties benefit equally from membership in pre-electoral coalitions?”.

-- Table 1 about here --

As Table 1 shows, countries differ markedly on their experience with pre-electoral coalitions. In some instances, e.g., Australia, Germany, and France, the number of PECs outranks the number of elections held since 1945. Pre-electoral coalitions competed in all post-1945 German and Australian parliamentary elections and on average they accounted for 48 to 64 percent of the vote. In contrast, pre-electoral coalitions never formed in Canada, Malta or Switzerland. Pre-electoral coalitions in Central and Eastern Europe rank anywhere in between these extremes. For example, PECs formed in 80 percent of all Bulgarian elections and accounted for 54 percent of the popular vote on average. These figures drop to 38 and 10 percent in the Czech Republic. Moreover, our data show considerable variation in both, the probability to which incumbent governments form pre-electoral coalitions and the likelihood of joint programs. On these accounts, the Romanian experience contrasts markedly with the Danish case. In both countries, pre-electoral coalitions competed in about 80 percent of all legislative elections. Remarkably, Romanian governments rarely formed PECs, but 92 percent of all Romanian PECs agreed on a shared platform. In contrast, about one-third of Danish governments formed a pre-electoral coalition, but PECs rarely compete on the same platform.

-- Figure 1 about here –

Moving on to more dynamic aspects of our data, Figure 1 plots the absolute frequencies of coalition type, incumbency, and joint program over time singling out CEE countries. Several patterns stand out from the graph. First, as can be seen from the left column, pre-electoral coalitions have become more frequent in parliamentary democracies outside the CEE region. Starting from 2 PECs in 1945 their number hits an all-time high at 15 coalitions in 2013. CEE countries, in contrast, exhibit the opposite development. When they were still young, pre-electoral coalitions frequently formed in these democracies meeting an all-time high at 13 PECs in 1992. As the CEE democracies, and their party systems, consolidated, however, PECs lost their attractiveness and largely disappeared until 2015. Second, incumbent governments rarely form pre-electoral coalitions regardless of geographical region. The numbers oscillate around 2 incumbent PECs each year. Third, PECs outside of Central and Eastern Europe tend to agree more frequently on joint programs in later observation years, but PECs inside this region demonstrate the opposite development. Finally, parties in CEE countries almost exclusively form joint lists whereas PECs outside of this region take every possible type at any given time.

This latter pattern hints to the influence of electoral systems as anticipated by Golder (2006, 17). Accordingly, political parties tailor pre-electoral coalitions to fit their institutional environment, among other things. Our data allow easy follow up of Golder’s intuition: Table 2 reports the marginal distributions of PEC type, incumbency status, and the existence of a joint program together with elementary information on the electoral system. More precisely, median district magnitude (DM), disproportionality (Disprop.), and effective number of electoral parties (Parties) are reported for each variant of pre-electoral coalition. As implied by the table, highly proportional electoral systems give political parties little incentive to increase their coordination efforts beyond public announcements. As the proportionality of the electoral system decreases, however, PECs take the form of either joint lists and dual-ballot instructions or nomination agreements and vote transfer instructions. Interestingly though, the more political aspects to electoral coordination within pre-electoral coalitions, incumbents and PECs with joint programs, do note visibly respond to the electoral system.

-- Table 2 about here --

# Conclusion and implications

Table 1: Descriptive data about pre-electoral coalitions (PECs) by country

| Country | First | Last | # Elections | # PECs | % Elections w/i PECs | PEC ave. vote share | Modal PEC typeb | # Incumbent PECs | # Joint programs | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Australia | 1946 | 2013 | 27 | 49 | 1.00 | 0.48 | 1 | 16 | 0 | |
| Germany | 1949 | 2013 | 18 | 36 | 1.00 | 0.64 | 1 | 13 | 19 | |
| Francea | 1945 | 2012 | 19 | 35 | 0.68 | 0.55 | - | 0 | 0 | |
| Denmark | 1945 | 2015 | 27 | 32 | 0.81 | 0.43 | 5 | 8 | 2 | |
| Bulgaria | 1991 | 2014 | 8 | 25 | 0.88 | 0.54 | 2 | 4 | 18 | |
| Israel | 1949 | 2015 | 20 | 21 | 0.65 | 0.21 | 2 | 0 | 9 | |
| Belgium | 1946 | 2014 | 22 | 20 | 0.59 | 0.09 | 6 | 1 | 5 | |
| Latvia | 1990 | 2014 | 9 | 20 | 0.78 | 0.30 | 2 | 3 | 18 | |
| Italy | 1946 | 2013 | 18 | 19 | 0.44 | 0.32 | 5 | 2 | 13 | |
| Portugal | 1975 | 2015 | 15 | 18 | 0.80 | 0.21 | 2 | 1 | 9 | |
| Estonia | 1992 | 2015 | 7 | 16 | 0.43 | 0.27 | 2 | 0 | 11 | |
| Norway | 1945 | 2013 | 18 | 16 | 0.67 | 0.32 | 5 | 5 | 5 | |
| Poland | 1989 | 2015 | 9 | 16 | 0.78 | 0.32 | 2 | 1 | 9 | |
| Sweden | 1948 | 2014 | 21 | 15 | 0.62 | 0.27 | 5 | 4 | 8 | |
| Romania | 1990 | 2012 | 7 | 13 | 0.86 | 0.41 | 2 | 3 | 12 | |
| Spain | 1977 | 2015 | 12 | 13 | 0.83 | 0.15 | 2 | 0 | 12 | |
| Croatia | 2000 | 2015 | 5 | 12 | 0.80 | 0.35 | 2 | 2 | 5 | |
| United Kingdom | 1945 | 2015 | 19 | 11 | 0.58 | 0.19 | 1 | 3 | 9 | |
| Hungary | 1990 | 2014 | 7 | 10 | 0.71 | 0.38 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Lithuania | 1990 | 2012 | 7 | 10 | 0.57 | 0.21 | 2 | 1 | 3 | |
| Austria | 1945 | 2013 | 21 | 9 | 0.43 | 0.31 | 5 | 7 | 1 | |
| Greecea | 1974 | 2015 | 17 | 9 | 0.41 | 0.12 | - | 0 | 0 | |
| Iceland | 1946 | 2013 | 21 | 9 | 0.33 | 0.10 | 2 | 1 | 7 | |
| Japan | 1946 | 2014 | 26 | 9 | 0.27 | 0.14 | 1 | 4 | 0 | |
| Netherlands | 1946 | 2012 | 21 | 9 | 0.33 | 0.16 | 5 | 3 | 6 | |
| Ireland | 1948 | 2011 | 19 | 8 | 0.37 | 0.18 | 5 | 5 | 3 | |
| New Zealand | 1946 | 2014 | 24 | 8 | 0.25 | 0.08 | 2 | 1 | 3 | |
| Slovenia | 1990 | 2014 | 8 | 7 | 0.63 | 0.28 | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| Slovakia | 1990 | 2012 | 8 | 6 | 0.38 | 0.09 | 2 | 1 | 3 | |
| Finland | 1945 | 2015 | 20 | 5 | 0.20 | 0.06 | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| Czech Republic | 1990 | 2013 | 8 | 4 | 0.38 | 0.10 | 2 | 0 | 1 | |
| Luxembourg | 1945 | 2013 | 16 | 3 | 0.19 | 0.05 | - | 1 | 0 | |
| Canada | 1945 | 2015 | 23 | 0 |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Malta | 1947 | 2013 | 17 | 0 |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Switzerland | 1947 | 2015 | 18 | 0 |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Notes: a Type information unavailable; b Codes: 1 Nomination agreement2, Joint list, 3 Dual-ballot instructions, 4 Vote transfer instructions, 5 Public commitment, 6 individual | | | | | | | | | |

Table 2: PEC Properties and Median Electoral System Features

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Frequency | |  |  |  |
|  |  | Abs. | Rel. | DM | Disprop.a | Partiesb |
|  | Public Commitment | 119 | 0.27 | 12.50 | 2.62 | 4.52 |
|  | Joint List | 204 | 0.47 | 9.76 | 5.29 | 4.54 |
|  | Dual-Ballot Instructionsc | 1 | 0.00 | 9.20 | 4.61 | 6.05 |
|  | Other | 16 | 0.04 | 7.07 | 2.79 | 7.48 |
|  | Nomination Agreement | 72 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 8.66 | 3.36 |
|  | Vote Transfer Instructions | 24 | 0.06 | 1.00 | 8.45 | 2.80 |
| Joint | No | 233 | 0.54 | 10.00 | 4.71 | 4.43 |
| program? | Yes | 197 | 0.46 | 8.90 | 4.32 | 3.63 |
| Incumbent | No | 337 | 0.77 | 9.65 | 4.51 | 4.03 |
| coalition? | Yes | 99 | 0.23 | 10.00 | 4.71 | 4.36 |
| Notes: a Gallagher Index; b Eff. number of electoral parties; c Romania 1996. | | | | | | |

Figure 1 Annual frequency of PECs

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

1. By CEE countries we refer to Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We code pre-electoral coalitions as incumbent if all members of the coalition enjoyed cabinet rank in the government immediately preceding the elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)