5

The confidence vote procedure and electoral politics

This chapter develops an Electoral Politics Model of the confidence vote procedure. Unlike agents in the models discussed previously, the agents in the Electoral Politics Model are not motivated exclusively by short-term policy preferences. Instead, they are also motivated by "office" considerations (related to control of the government) and electoral considerations (related to communication with voters). The analysis explores how these various motivations influence strategic behavior in policymaking after government formation is complete. The result is a theory that directs attention away from policy considerations in procedural choice and toward the role that the confidence vote procedure plays in shaping opportunities for political parties to communicate to voters information about political accountability and policy positions.

The chapter has three sections. The first section describes and defends the assumptions of the Electoral Politics Model. I then sketch the results, and the logic underlying these results, in the second section. The third section concludes with a discussion of the empirical implications from the model.

THE MODEL: PARTY MOTIVATIONS AND CONFIDENCE VOTES

The basic structure of the Electoral Politics Model is quite similar to that of the Policy Conflict Model described in Chapter 3. But the Electoral Politics Model contains assumptions about the identity of the agents, their motivations (or utility functions), and their possible strategies (or actions) that are quite different than those found in the Policy Conflict Model. I review these differences in this section.[1]

The identity of the agents

Recall that the Policy Conflict Model assumes that there are only two agents who take actions: the "Government" and the "Parliament." The

Electoral Politics Model differs in two ways. Analytically, the first difference is purely cosmetic. Rather than naming one player the "Government," the Electoral Politics Model names this player the "Prime Minister." This change in terminology reminds us of an important difference between the package vote and the confidence vote procedure. Whereas any minister in France can invoke the package vote on the floor of the parliament, only the prime minister (and not an individual minister) can decide to invoke a confidence vote procedure. Since prime ministers can invoke the confidence vote procedure at the end of the legislative process, if a renegade minister were to use a package vote (or any other procedure) to propose policies that were not agreed to by party leaders in government, then the prime minister could use a confidence vote procedure to reverse the undesirable policy changes obtained by the cabinet minister. A prime minister's prerogative vis-à-vis the confidence vote procedure therefore constrains the strategies that ministers can adopt using alternative procedural weapons. The precise identity of the player who actually invokes the confidence vote procedure therefore matters a great deal.

The second difference in the identity of the agents is substantive. Recall that the Policy Conflict Model, drawing on certain functionalist assumptions in the French politics literature, assumes the Government faces a unitary actor in parliament. In the Electoral Politics Model, rather than assuming away the interesting incentives that shape interactions among deputies and parties in the governing coalition, I assume there exists a finite number of members who together compose the Majority in the Parliament. The members of the Majority must agree before any policy change can occur, and any member of the Majority can ensure that the government will fall in a vote of confidence.

The Electoral Politics Model assumes that there exists an *ex ante* identifiable Majority to capture the constraints that coalition formation decisions impose on subsequent bargaining processes. In parliamentary systems, rarely is it the case that the prime minister can negotiate with different majorities on different bills because the prime minister is generally constrained to find backing from the parties that agree to support the prime minister at the time of government formation. If Conservatives and Liberals form a majority coalition with a Conservative prime minister, for example, then the prime minister will much more often than not trigger the fall of the government by attempting to pass a piece of legislation with the Socialists and against the will of the Liberals.

One should therefore think about the Majority in the Electoral Politics Model as the pivotal parties and party factions in the government. The Majority can manifest itself in many ways. During periods of coalition government, we might think of the Majority as including the various parties (and factions within parties) that are in the government. During

surplus majority government, passing a bill against the wishes of a surplus member can trigger the fall of the government, even if the government does not fall in a censure vote (because the surplus member may quit). In such cases, we can think of the Majority as including all members of the coalition. If the threat by certain members to quit the government is not credible, then during surplus majority coalitions, we can think of the Majority as a subset of pivotal parties forming a minimal majority. During minority government, the "Majority" will necessarily include deputies or parties that are outside the government. During single party government, if the party is very unified, there may be only one "member of the Majority." If the party is factionalized, the various factions might represent different members of the Majority.

Two points should be expressed regarding this assumption about the Majority. First, it is made in order to focus specifically on the problems that prime ministers face in attempting to achieve support among parties and party factions with diverse interests or preferences. Second, if one does not believe that coalition processes impose exogenous constraints on legislative bargaining, one should not dismiss the model. As will become clear below, the logic of all the results will obtain when the prime minister can form a majority with any set of deputies or parties in the legislature.[2]

The motivations of the agents

André Tardieu argued more than fifty years ago that the behavior of French deputies can be explained by focusing on only two goals that are shared by all elected representatives (Tardieu 1937). The first, the goal of "conservation," is to be reelected. The second, the goal of "development," is to gain power by becoming a minister. Consciously or unconsciously, contemporary research has often followed Tardieu, arguing that the goals of maximizing electoral success and controlling the government underlie strategic decision making by party leaders in parliamentary systems.

Comparative scholars have focused on other goals as well. Strom (1990a, 1990b), for example, contends that the members of political parties are motivated by office, electoral, and policy goals. Harmel and Janda (1994) add to these the goal of implementing party democracy (something that seems especially important among emerging green parties). Of course, the existence of multiple motivations would not be a problem if political strategies and actions led to simultaneously achieving different goals. If, for example, all parties had to do was promise particular policies to achieve electoral success, and if achieving electoral success ensured entrance into government coalitions, and if entry into coalitions ensured control over policy outcomes, then the distinction between the

office, policy and electoral motivations of parties and their members might not be very useful at all.

The problem facing elected members of political parties, however, is that pursuit of one goal is often possible only at the expense of achieving another. Strom (1985), for example, shows that the decision by parties to enter government coalitions often results in an electoral penalty unrelated to final policy outcomes (see also Powell and Whitten 1993). If parties are motivated significantly by the goal of vote maximization, in certain situations these parties will trade the policy influence that joining governments provides for the electoral benefits of staying in opposition (Strom 1990a, 1990b). Indeed, on several occasions parties have publicly committed to remaining in opposition in order to build electoral support (Strom, Budge, and Laver 1994). In a related vein, Tsebelis (1990) argues that parliamentary leaders are involved in two simultaneous strategic interactions – policy bargaining with other leaders and electoral politics with the voters. In many situations, these leaders will be constrained in one arena by incentives in the other (see also Laver 1989).

The challenge for scholars of parliamentary government is to craft theories of how, and under what circumstances, the multiple motivations of political agents will influence the actions that these agents take. One might expect, for example, the office-seeking motivations of politicians to affect the use of the confidence vote procedure (because it invites a majority in parliament to censure the government). But how and under what circumstances do office motivations influence strategies and outcomes? And how do office motivations interact with electoral motivations or policy objectives to shape political behavior? The Electoral Politics Model provides a methodology for answering such questions.

The utility functions of the agents include parameters reflecting the policy, office, and electoral motivations of the members of the Majority and the Prime Minister. First, as in standard spatial models (and as in the Policy Conflict Model), the Electoral Politics Model assumes all agents have ideal points in a policy space with one or more issue dimensions and that they prefer to obtain final policy outcomes that maximize their utility, given the weight they place on the different dimensions. The Policy Model therefore makes standard assumptions about policy motivations.

Second, the Electoral Politics Model takes into consideration the "office" motivations of the agents by examining preferences over "induced outcomes" from censure following the use of a confidence vote procedure. If a member of the Majority decides to censure the Prime Minister for invoking a confidence vote procedure, the member does not care simply about the immediate policy outcome from this decision. He also cares about what happens next, be it the formation of a new government or the call for new elections. Of course, the same is true for the Prime

Minister. If using a confidence vote procedure results in censure of the Prime Minister, then the utility to the Prime Minster will be a function of far more than the policy utility from the status quo.

To account for these "office" considerations, the Electoral Politics Model assumes that both the Prime Minister and the members of the Majority may pay a positive censure cost if the Prime Minister falls after invoking the confidence vote procedure. For the Prime Minister, these costs are obvious – a prime minister loses her job, her control over future policy outcomes, and her access to the perks and privileges of power. Thus, other things being equal, the prime minister should prefer that she not be fired and should be willing to make policy concessions in order to avoid this eventuality.

For the members of the Majority, the justification for assuming positive censure costs may seem less straightforward. Clearly, the costs or benefits to members of censuring the Prime Minister should be a key variable in explaining a prime minister's use of the confidence vote procedure, as well as the relative influence of the prime minister and the members of the majority on final policy outcomes. One Socialist deputy contended in an interview:

> Article 49.3 is only an instrument of dissuasion. When the Prime Minister is not supported by a majority in the Assembly, it is an effective instrument if the different political formations who are in competition with the government, or who are in opposition to it, think it is negative vis-à-vis public opinion – that is, vis-à-vis the voters – to hinder the government. On the other hand, if they think the Prime Minister is sufficiently weak, sufficiently discredited at that moment – vis-à-vis their own electorate and the voters who are undecided – then they have no more reason to be discrete with the Prime Minister, and 49.3 is no longer dissuasive. . . . That is to say, 49.3 can only work if the parties of the opposition are dissuaded from the idea of a dissolution. If they think they are going to win, then dissolution won't bother them at all.

At first blush, then, one might expect that the way to incorporate these considerations into the Electoral Politics Model is to assume that the members of the Majority might *either* pay a cost *or* receive a benefit from censuring the Prime Minister. But in fact it should never be the case that the members of the Majority receive an exogenous benefit from censuring the Prime Minister for using the confidence vote procedure on a specific policy. The reason is simple.

A majority in parliament can always remove the prime minister from office by voting a motion of censure or no-confidence. If a member of the majority does not like the government, or if a member would prefer the outcome from censuring the government to the outcome from keeping the government in place, then that member should simply submit and vote a motion of censure with the other opposition parties. Put differently,

since a majority in parliament can use a censure vote at any time to remove the government from office, the presence of any government in office indicates that there exists a majority (call it "the Majority") that places a nonnegative value on retaining the present government.

Of course, even if the members of the majority seek "professional development," to use Tardieu's terms, there are substantive reasons to believe that the members of the majority will generally pay a cost for bringing down the government. If the government is censured, a legislative election might ensue, the existing government might be replaced by one that is even worse, or there might be a political crisis of paralysis that leads the voters to punish the parties when elections are eventually held. We might therefore expect the members of the majority – who agreed to the investiture of the government in the first place – to make policy concessions to the prime minister in order to keep that government in place. Indeed, scholars often posit that the members of the majority in the legislature generally prefer making policy concessions to the prime minister rather than voting the government out of office. Goguel (1971: 85) claims, for example, that in France, the threat of dissolution during a debate on a motion of censure is often sufficient to induce a certain number of deputies to make policy sacrifices in order to avoid facing the voters. And King (1981: 88, see also Jennings 1957: 136) argues: "Above all, members of the governing party in parliamentary systems typically vote with the government because they fear that, if they do not, the government will fall and either the opposition will take power or an election will be called."

Next consider the electoral implications associated with legislative strategies. Scholars who use spatial models to study political processes often assume that a legislator's ideal point is influenced by electoral considerations – legislators will be rewarded at election time for *obtaining* the policy outcome that is as close as possible to the legislator's ideal point. Voters, then, are held to reward and sanction legislative agents based on the nature of the outcomes that emerge from the legislative process.

This argument about the connection between policy positions and electoral success, while certainly not unreasonable, imposes rather large informational requirements on voters. The assumption is particularly problematic in multiparty parliamentary systems, where there is a high incidence of coalition or minority government. In such situations, parties in parliament must cooperate in the legislature to pass bills and must then compete with their legislative partners at election time. This is a common problem in France, where the several parties on the left and on the right typically contest an election in the first round of voting. If the Gaullists and the UDF form a majority coalition, for example, the members of the

legislature must work together while keeping an eye on upcoming elections, at which time they become electoral foes.

Juggling legislative cooperation and electoral competition creates problems for voters and parties. Voters must be able to determine, not only which parties are responsible for which policy outcomes, but also what positions the various parties espouse on different issues. Political parties must be able to communicate this information to voters. Legislative processes in parliaments are therefore important, not simply because they influence policy outcomes, but also because they provide valuable information to voters about where parties stand on particular issues.[3]

To get at the strategic considerations raised by the need for parties to communicate with voters, I follow the interpretation of ideal points typical of pure policy models by assuming that these ideal points have electoral content. But I depart from the standard assumption of spatial models by assuming that the agents' utility from any final policy outcome may be influenced by the legislative strategies adopted to obtain the outcome.

For each member of the Majority, the electoral goal is to communicate information to supporters about the member's position on the policy issue under debate. Thus, I assume that for each member of the Majority, there may exist some electoral penalty for making policy proposals that diverge significantly from the member's most preferred policy. The magnitude of the electoral penalty can vary. On some issues, voters might be disinterested and communication thus unimportant. But on the many other issues which concern voters, we should expect the voters to use the positions parties advocate during the legislative process to influence voters' choices in future elections. In such cases, the members of the Majority must weigh the electoral costs of pursuing policies that are distant from their most preferred policies against the potential policy gains from such strategies.

The Electoral Politics Model therefore includes a "voter sensitivity" parameter that taps the degree to which members of the Majority believe they will pay an electoral penalty from proposals diverging from their ideal points. The total electoral penalty from proposals for any member of the Majority is a function of voter sensitivity (or attentiveness) and the distance of the proposal from the agent's ideal point. An agent pays no electoral penalty if he proposes his ideal point or if voter sensitivity is zero. But if voter sensitivity is positive, then the electoral penalty for making any proposal increases as the proposal diverges from an agent's ideal point. Put differently, the motivation for a member of the Majority to make a "position-taking" proposal that communicates information about the member's ideal point on an issue increases as the voters become more attentive to this issue.

The Prime Minister's electoral implications from making proposals

differ from those faced by members of the Majority. Like members of the Majority, the Prime Minister may be sanctioned by voters for using the confidence vote procedure to make policy proposals distant from the Prime Minister's ideal point. But since the confidence vote represents an extraordinary method for making policy proposals, the electoral implications of merely using the procedure may matter even if the Prime Minister uses the procedure to propose the policy her constituents most prefer.

Since a confidence vote procedure invites the most highly politicized event during the life of a government –the debate and vote on a motion of censure – its use is generally given front-page coverage by the media. The debate on the motion of censure guarantees the opposition a moment in the political spotlight, which it can use to criticize the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's policy, and the Prime Minister's willingness to use procedural force against the directly elected representatives of the people. The visibility of the confidence vote procedure, therefore, sharply distinguishes it from the package vote, the usage of which often passes unnoticed by the media, much less by the average citizen.

In my interviews, the deputies stressed the *electoral costs* associated with using the procedure. One Communist deputy asserted that "49.3 embarrasses the government because it gives the impression that there is not a majority in the country – that there is no direction and that the Prime Minister has become authoritarian. . . . For political reasons, the government wants to avoid 49.3." Similarly, a Center deputy stated that "the utilization of 49.3 repeatedly by the government is a sign of political weakness. There is a political cost." An assistant to the prime minister linked the political costs to the possibility that the use of a confidence vote procedure can be interpreted as a sign of executive weakness or incapacity:

> It's always possible to use 49.3, but to do so is brutal. The first idiot to pass by could do that. [Article] 49.3 is not a sign of force, but rather an admission of failure. If we're obligated to use 49.3, it's not a serious failure, but it still shows that our bill is not sufficiently good to pass on its own merits. It's important to show that you can do your job without it.

Use of the confidence vote procedure can send a negative signal of another type to voters. Scholars have often recognized the importance of maintaining an appearance of party unity in order to achieve electoral success. If parliamentary strategies give the appearance of disunity, the electoral implications are generally believed to be negative (Cox 1987; King 1976; King 1981; Jennings 1961: 496; and Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993).

Using the confidence vote procedure can affect the display of unity in two ways. On one hand, if the government uses the procedure against its own party, the procedure might exacerbate the appearance of divisions within the party. On the other hand, if a party is deeply divided on an

issue, then prime ministers may use the procedure to suppress debate on the issue or to enable the deputies to avoid casting votes on particular aspects of bills. This was the strategy used by the Socialist government during a controversial debate on state funding for private education in the early 1980s (Baumgartner 1989). And Duverger (1987: ch. 4) argues that during the 1986–8 period of cohabitation, Article 49.3 was frequently used to cover up differences between the various parties in the conservative government coalition.

It is therefore important to consider the possibility that there are exogenous political implications associated with simply invoking the confidence vote procedure. Because there are many factors (in addition to the precise nature of the Prime Minister's proposal) that may influence the electoral implications of making a proposal under the confidence vote procedure, rather than focusing exclusively on the electoral implications of proposals, I simply assume the Prime Minister may pay some exogenous "electoral cost" from invoking the procedure. These costs may be positive, implying that the Prime Minister would be willing to make policy concessions to avoid use of the confidence vote procedure. The "costs" might also be zero, or even negative, implying that the Prime Minister receives some benefit from using the confidence vote procedure (such as the suppression of divisive debate).

In sum, the Prime Minister and the members of the Majority all have ideal points and policy preferences in a policy space with one or more dimensions. In addition, the Prime Minister and the members of the Majority may pay a cost – and will never receive a benefit – if the Prime Minister falls in a censure vote. Finally, the need to impart information to voters about issue positions and political responsibility may create an electoral penalty for members of the Majority if they propose policies diverging from their ideal points. And the need to communicate information to voters about policy preferences, to avoid internal disunity, and to demonstrate political capacity may create for the Prime Minister electoral costs or benefits from using the confidence vote procedure.

The strategies of the agents

The Electoral Politics Model includes the same three stages as the Policy Conflict Model. In the Parliamentary Stage, it is necessary to specify, not only the strategies of the members of the Majority, but also how these individual strategies translate into a collective decision. To this end, I assume that each member of the Majority can go on record for any specific policy during the legislative process. "Going on record" might entail voting for the adoption of a bill to change the status quo. Or it might involve voting for a specific policy through, for example, the vote

on an amendment, and then voting to defeat the final version of the bill (assuming the amendment does not carry). I call this opportunity to go on record a "proposal" by a member of the Majority. A member can propose any policy he wishes, including his own most-preferred policy.

The collective decision by the Majority depends on the individual proposals. Since each member of the Majority is pivotal, all members must go on record for the same bill (i.e., propose the same bill) before any policy change can occur. The Electoral Politics Model therefore assumes that if all members make the same proposal, then this common proposal is the bill adopted in the Parliamentary Stage. If any two members of the Majority make different proposals, then because all members of the Majority must agree on any policy change, the Majority in parliament can be said to have defeated an effort to change the status quo. In this case, the bill emerging from the Parliamentary Stage is the status quo.

The Procedural Stage follows the Parliamentary Stage. In the Parliamentary Stage, the members of the Majority either will have adopted a bill changing the status quo or will have voted to retain the status quo. For either type of collective proposal, the Prime Minister can do one of two things. She can accept the Majority's bill, in which case interactions are complete and the final outcome is the policy adopted in the Parliamentary Stage. Or the Prime Minister can invoke the confidence vote procedure to propose any other policy, in which case the game proceeds to the Voting Stage.

In the Voting Stage, each member of the Majority must make a choice, either to accept the Prime Minister's proposal under the confidence vote procedure or to censure the Prime Minister. Since each member of the Majority is pivotal, the decision by any member to censure the Prime Minister results in the fall of the government. Thus, if any member censures the Prime Minister, the final policy outcome is the status quo (and all players pay any censure costs that exist). If no member votes to censure the Prime Minister, the final policy outcome is the Prime Minister's policy proposal.

ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL

There are many different factors that one might imagine will influence the behavior of the prime minister and the members of the majority in the legislative arena. These include policy preferences, the nature of the existing policy, the costs of censure, the electoral costs to the prime minister of using the confidence vote procedure, the position-taking incentives of the members of the majority, the composition of the majority, and the dimensionality of the policy space. The Electoral Politics Model provides a tool for understanding whether and how these various factors actually influ-

ence legislative strategies, and therefore for understanding the impact of the confidence vote procedure on French politics.

There are three important results from the analysis. First, the model generates an impressive list of *negative results*, that is, a list of factors that one might at first expect to influence the use of the confidence vote procedure but which in fact logically should not. Second, the model suggests that the prime minister's electoral costs of using a procedure – not her concern about being censured – explain the ability of members of the legislature to obtain policy concessions from the prime minister, as well as the infrequency with which we observe the confidence vote procedure. Third, the analysis indicates that the role of the confidence vote procedure in French politics is largely an electoral one. The confidence vote procedure provides an institutionalized means for government parties to communicate information about issue positions and political responsibility to voters, and to do so without destabilizing the government coalition. The opportunities the procedure creates for position taking are therefore central to understanding how the confidence vote procedure can stabilize the cabinet.

To understand the logic of these claims, it is necessary to examine the strategies of the agents in the various stages of the model.[4] As in the Policy Conflict Model, we do this by beginning at the end, with the strategies of the members of the Majority during the Voting Stage. Suppose the Prime Minister invokes the confidence vote procedure to propose some specific policy during the Procedural Stage. Under what conditions will a member of the Majority vote to censure the government? For the answer, consider Figure 5.1, which depicts a situation in which there are two members of the Majority (with ideal points at x_A and x_B). The status quo policy, x_0, will be the policy outcome if the Prime Minister falls in a censure vote. If a member of the Majority bears no costs of censuring the government, then the indifference curve of the member though x_0 defines the set of all policies that the member would accept rather than censuring the government. If on the other hand, a member pays a cost of censuring the Prime Minister, then the set of policies that the member would prefer to accept rather than censuring the government is a function of the location of the status quo and the costs of censure. For some arbitrary cost, the bold circle surrounding the indifference curves of A and B through x_0 depicts the set of polices that these members would prefer to accept rather than censure the government.

The intersection of each member's set of acceptable policies in the Voting Stage defines the best policy that a Prime Minister could propose using the confidence vote procedure. The Prime Minister can propose any policy in the set of policies that all members of the Majority prefer to the induced outcome from censure. In Figure 5.1, if the Prime Minister

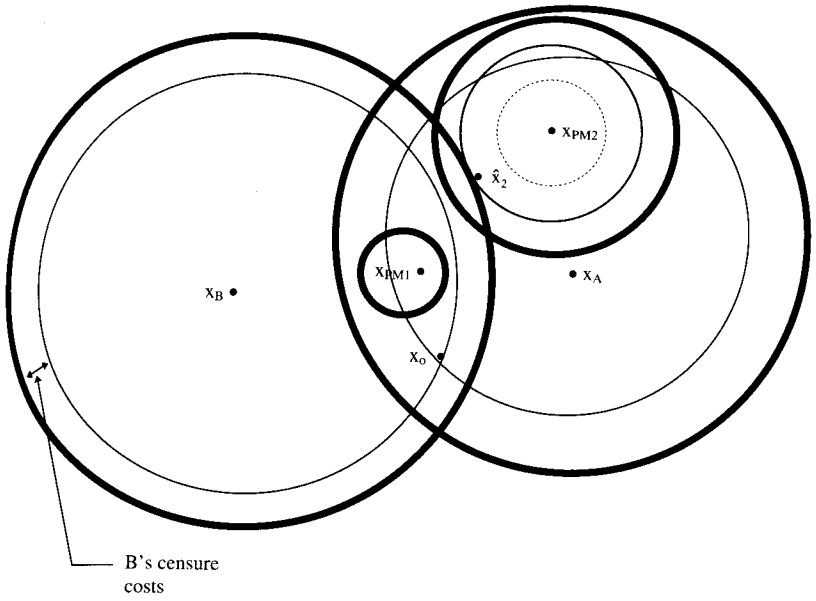

Figure 5.1. The Prime Minister's Best Obtainable Policy.

invokes the confidence vote procedure, each of these two members will vote to censure if the Prime Minister's proposal is not within each respective member's bold indifference curve (surrounding each member's thin indifference curve through x_0). The Prime Minister could, however, propose any policy in the set circumscribed by the intersection of the two bold indifference curves without fear of censure. One could call this set (the large region the shape of a football) the "set of obtainable policies" for the Prime Minister.

During the Procedural Stage, the Prime Minister can always use the confidence vote procedure to propose the policy she most prefers from the set of obtainable policies. As in the Policy Conflict Model, we could call this policy the Prime Minister's "best obtainable policy." For any location of the Prime Minister's ideal point, the best obtainable policy always exists and is unique. In Figure 5.1, for example, if the Prime Minister's ideal point were at x_{PM1}, then the best obtainable policy would be the Prime Minister's ideal point, which is within the set of obtainable policies. If the Prime Minister's ideal point were at x_{PM2}, the best obtainable policy would be at $\hat{x}_2$. One can see that for any location of the Prime Minister's ideal point in Figure 5.1, the best obtainable policy is the policy that is in the set of obtainable policies and that is closest to the

Prime Minister's ideal point.[5] This leads to the first result of the Electoral Politics Model.

> ***Result 1.*** *The preferences of the members of the Majority about the induced outcome from censure define a unique policy that represents the best outcome that the Prime Minister can achieve if she uses the confidence vote procedure to make a policy proposal.*

The logic of the Electoral Politics Model is in this respect identical to the logic of the Policy Conflict Model. The introduction of censure costs does not change the fact that there always exists a unique policy representing the best outcome that the Prime Minister (or Government) can achieve using the confidence vote procedure. These censure costs obviously can influence the location of this "best outcome," but not its existence. In the Policy Conflict Model, however, the Government's procedural decision is based simply on whether the Government prefers the Parliament's policy proposal to the best outcome. In the Electoral Politics Model, the Prime Minister's decision is more complex because of the potential electoral costs of using the confidence vote procedure.

Consider the Prime Minister's strategy in the Procedural Stage. Under what circumstances should the Prime Minister accept the Majority's proposal, and under what circumstances should the Prime Minister invoke the confidence vote procedure to propose some other policy? If the Prime Minister invokes the confidence vote procedure, she will obviously propose the unique best obtainable policy. She can do no better. But the utility the Prime Minister receives from making this proposal depends on the electoral implications of using the confidence vote procedure. When there are no electoral implications, the Prime Minister simply receives the policy utility associated with the best obtainable policy. In this case, the Prime Minister's procedural decision is simple. If she prefers the Majority's proposal to the best obtainable policy, she will accept the Majority's proposal. Otherwise she will use the confidence vote procedure to propose the best obtainable policy. In Figure 5.1, if the Prime Minister is at x_{PM1}, she will invoke the confidence vote procedure if the members of the Majority propose any policy other than the Prime Minister's ideal point. And if the Prime Minister is at x_{PM2}, she will invoke the confidence vote procedure if the Majority proposes any policy that is not inside the Prime Minister's indifference curve through $\hat{x}_2$.

When the Prime Minister receives a benefit from using the confidence vote procedure, then the members of the Majority, if they wish to avoid the confidence vote procedure, must adopt a policy that the Prime Minister actually prefers to the best obtainable policy. In Figure 5.1, when the Prime Minister's ideal point is at x_{PM2}, if the Prime Minister receives

some benefit from simply invoking the confidence vote procedure, the dashed indifference curve may define the set of policies that the Prime Minister would prefer to accept rather than using the confidence vote procedure to propose the best obtainable policy. If there are electoral benefits associated with using the confidence vote procedure, it might be the case that no policies that the members of the Majority could propose that would be accepted by the Prime Minister. This would occur, for example, if the Prime Minister were located at x_{PM1} in Figure 5.1 (because, given the electoral benefits, the Prime Minister would prefer to propose her ideal point using the confidence vote procedure to accepting this policy were it adopted by the Majority in the Parliamentary Stage).

The more interesting and plausible scenario occurs when the Prime Minister pays an electoral cost for using the confidence vote procedure. When electoral costs of using the procedure are positive, there exist policies that if proposed by the Majority, the Prime Minister would prefer to accept rather than invoke the confidence vote procedure to propose the best obtainable policy. The logic is exactly parallel to the concern that the members of the Majority have about the induced outcome from censure, but instead of being concerned about censure, the Prime Minister is concerned about the induced (electoral) implications from using procedural force to get the best possible policy outcome. Returning to Figure 5.1, the bold indifference curve around the Prime Minister's indifference curve through $\hat{x}_2$ defines the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies (when the Prime Minister's ideal point is at x_{PM2}). For x_{PM1}, this set is defined by the bold circle around the Prime Minister's ideal point. More generally, the location of the best obtainable policy and the Prime Minister's electoral costs (or benefits) of using the confidence vote procedure determine the *Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies* – that is, the set of policies that the Prime Minister would prefer to accept rather than propose the best obtainable policy using the confidence vote procedure.

> ***Result 2.*** *The Prime Minister will invoke the confidence vote procedure to propose the best obtainable policy whenever the Majority's proposal is not in the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies, which is defined by the location of the best obtainable policy and the Prime Minister's electoral costs (or benefits) of using the confidence vote procedure.*

The Prime Minister can always guarantee a final outcome of the best obtainable policy. The members of the Majority can therefore never obtain a policy that differs from this best obtainable policy *unless* the Prime Minister bears an electoral cost of using the confidence vote procedure.

Of course, whether members of the Majority can make an acceptable policy proposal that extracts policy concessions from the Prime Minister

depends not only on the Prime Minister's electoral costs, but also on the position-taking incentives present during the Parliamentary Stage. If a proposal by the Majority is accepted by the Prime Minister, then each member receives the policy utility associated with the proposal (because the proposal will be the outcome), and each member will pay an electoral penalty, which is a function of voter attentiveness and the distance from a member's ideal point to the proposal. If the proposal provokes the confidence vote procedure, then each member receives the policy utility associated with the Prime Minister's best obtainable outcome (which is what the Prime Minister will propose using a confidence vote procedure), and each member will pay an electoral penalty, which again depends on the level of voter attentiveness and the location of the proposal relative to a member's ideal point. Of all proposals that provoke the confidence vote procedure, the one that gives a member the greatest utility is the member's ideal point, which results in no electoral penalty, regardless of the level of voter attentiveness.

The magnitude of the electoral penalty associated with particular proposals, along with the Prime Minister's electoral costs of using the confidence vote procedure, jointly determine the circumstances under which the members of the Majority will make a proposal acceptable to the Prime Minister. A member of the Majority must determine which policies, if proposed by the Majority and accepted by the Prime Minister, would yield a higher utility for the member than proposing his ideal point and receiving the best obtainable policy following use of the confidence vote procedure. In Figure 5.2, the dashed indifference curves (which lie inside the indifference curves of each member that would pass through $\hat{x}$) define these policies for some arbitrary level of electoral sanctions.[6] That is, if a proposal inside these dashed indifference curves is accepted by the Prime Minister, then the proposal is sufficiently close to the member's ideal for the member to prefer (1) propose this policy, paying a (small) penalty for making a proposal that is away from his ideal point, and (2) receive the policy utility associated with the policy. He does this *instead* of (1) proposing his ideal point, paying no electoral penalty, and (2) receiving the policy utility associated with an outcome of the (more distant) best obtainable policy. As the benefits of position-taking increase, these dashed indifference curves will become smaller and smaller. Of course, the converse is also true: as the electoral penalties associated with policy proposals decrease, the dashed indifference curves will grow larger.

The intersection of the dashed indifference curves of the two members defines the set of policies giving both members a higher utility if proposed and accepted than would proposing the members' (respective) ideal points (and obtaining an outcome of $\hat{x}$). We can call the area inside the intersection of these dashed curves the *Majority's feasible set*. The optimal strategy of the members of the Majority depends on the relationship between the Majority's feasible set (which is determined by the electoral implications of proposals) and the Prime Minister's set of acceptable polices (which is determined by the electoral costs associated with using the confidence vote procedure). The Majority will only make acceptable proposals from the feasible set. Proposals from the feasible set will provoke a vote of confidence if they are not in the set of acceptable policies. The Majority will be unable to avoid a confidence vote procedure only if there are no policies that are at once in the feasible set and the set of acceptable policies.

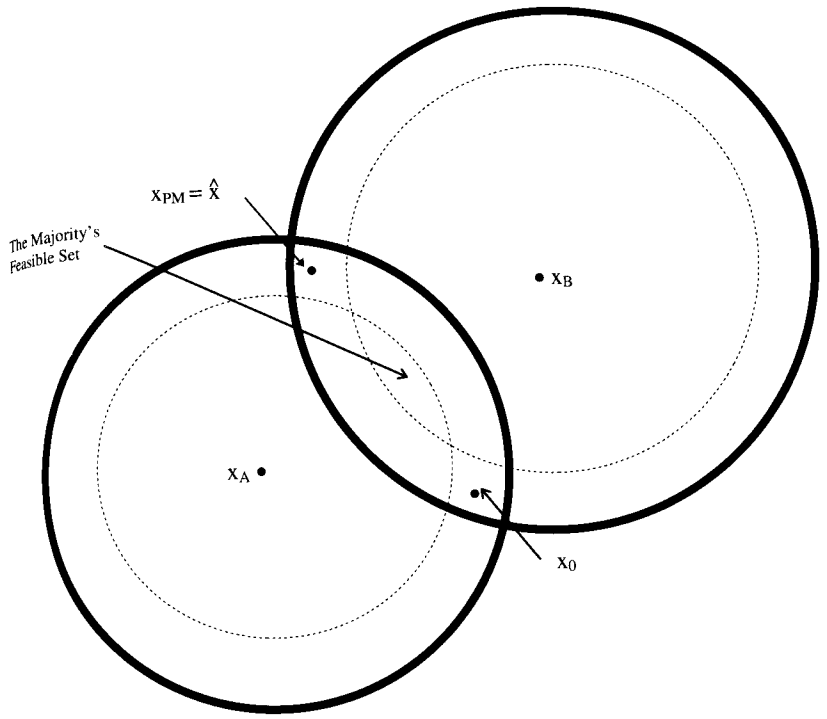

Figure 5.2. The Majority's Feasible Set.

Result 3. *The Prime Minister will use the confidence vote procedure whenever there are no policies that are at once in the Majority's feasible set and the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies.*

The logic at work is really quite simple. A member of the Majority knows that the final policy outcome will be the Prime Minister's best obtainable policy if the member provokes the confidence vote procedure. If the Prime

Minister bears some electoral cost for using the confidence vote procedure, then the member of the Majority might be able to propose a policy that he prefers to this reversion outcome under the confidence vote procedure. But if position-taking incentives are important, the member must think twice about making an acceptable proposal. When the amount of policy concessions a member can earn are small, obtaining these concessions may not be worth the electoral penalty associated with making a proposal that is distant from the member's electorally optimal policy. Consequently, the two most important factors in determining whether the members will force a confidence vote are the electoral costs to the Prime Minister of using a confidence vote procedure (which make policy concessions to members of the Majority possible), and the position-taking incentives of the members of the Majority (which determine the extent to which obtaining policy concessions offsets position-taking incentives).

The interaction of the Prime Minister's electoral costs with the position-taking incentives of the members of the Majority are depicted in Figure 5.3. Assume first that there are only two members of the Majority, with ideal points at x_A and x_B. The feasible set for these two members (the intersection of their dashed indifference curves) intersects the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies (the area inside the bold indifference curve around $\hat{x}$). The members of the Majority can therefore make a proposal from the intersection of these two sets. Such a proposal will be accepted by the Prime Minister, giving each member of the Majority a greater utility than they could ever receive from making position-taking proposals and obtaining a final policy outcome of $\hat{x}$.

But as position-taking incentives increase, the dashed circles will decrease in diameter, at some point growing so small that there will be no acceptable policies that the Majority can propose, and that would give each member of the Majority a higher utility than proposing their ideal points (the optimal position-taking proposals), receiving a final policy outcome of $\hat{x}$ (following the use of the confidence vote procedure by the Prime Minister). Similarly, as the Prime Minister's electoral costs of using the confidence vote procedure decline, the bold indifference curve defining the set of acceptable policies will shrink in size. At some point, there will be no intersection between the Majority's feasible set and the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies. When this occurs, the members of the Majority will make position-taking proposals, the Prime Minister will invoke the confidence vote procedure, and the final policy outcome will be $\hat{x}$. It is easy to see, then, that position-taking incentives among members of the Majority, as well as the Prime Minister's electoral costs, will be central to understanding the use of the confidence vote procedure.

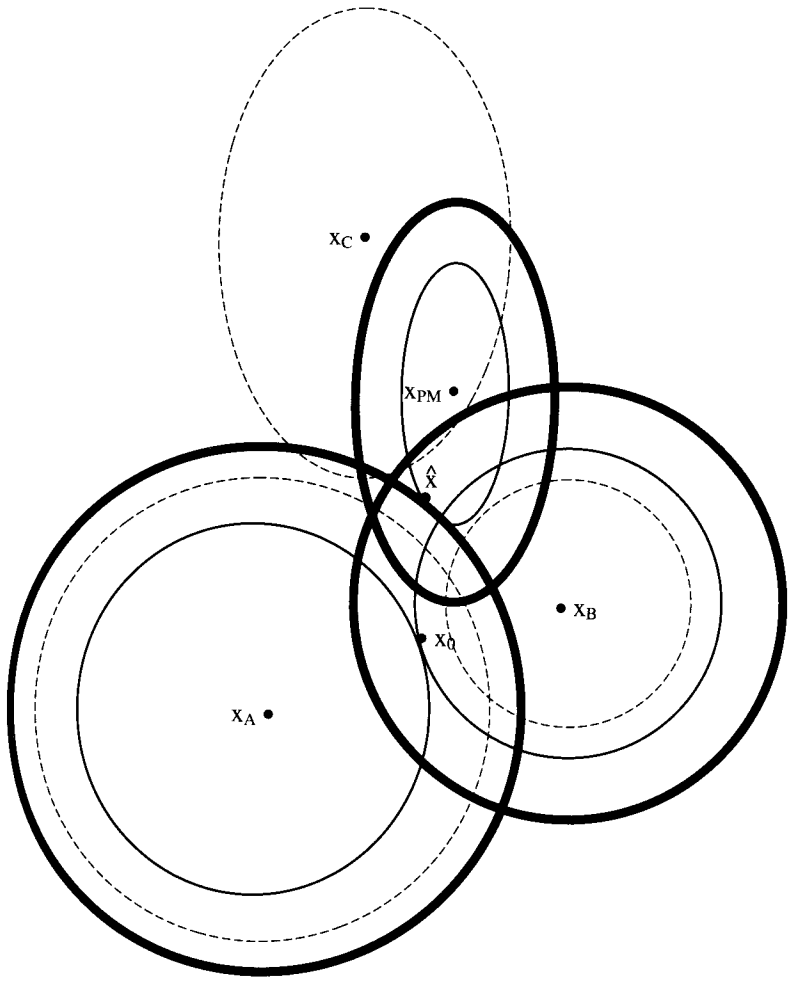

Figure 5.3. Electoral Incentives and Confidence Votes.

SOME NULL RESULTS

The chief insight from the analysis is that exogenous electoral factors, rather than policy considerations, shape the strategies of agents in the French parliament vis-à-vis the confidence vote procedure. But before discussing the more general implications of this result, it is important to recognize that the Electoral Politics Model also highlights the irrelevance of other factors one might expect to influence political behavior. The model predicts, for example, that the prime minister's censure costs, the

number of members of the majority, and the dimensional complexity of the policy space should have *no impact* on strategies or outcomes. Additionally, the model predicts that the heterogeneity of the majority, the censure costs of the members of the majority, and the level of policy conflict between the prime minister and the members of the majority can only *indirectly affect* strategies and outcomes. Furthermore, the indirect effect is intimately linked to the position-taking incentives of the members of the majority.

Consider the variables the model predicts will have *no effect* on procedural choice, beginning with the Prime Minister's censure costs. As a prime minister's cost of losing her job increases, one might expect the prime minister to be more inclined to avoid the confidence vote procedure (because she has more to lose if members of parliament fire her). One might also expect members of parliament to be able to extract more policy concessions from the prime minister (because the prime minister will pay more in policy concessions to keep her job). The Electoral Politics Model, however, demonstrates why both expectations should be wrong.

A prime minister's cost of losing her job should not affect her procedural decision because a prime minister can always propose a policy that will *not* lead to her censure. She therefore never need fear paying her censure costs.[7] And the members of parliament cannot extract the prime minister's censure costs in policy currency because they do not have the institutional means necessary to do so. The members of parliament cannot, for example, credibly use the threat of censure to obtain policy concessions because censure motions trigger only a vote on the government, not the proposal of a specific policy by members of parliament. If the censure motion succeeds, the government falls, but the ultimate change in policy depends on subsequent events regarding the formation of a new government, which may not occur until after elections are held. A prime minister, on the other hand, can always use Article 49.3 to make a final, take-it-or-leave-it policy proposal.

Another irrelevant variable in the Electoral Politics Model is the jurisdictional complexity of the issue space. Recall that the arguments in Chapter 4, which were not supported by the data, led us to expect the confidence vote procedure to be used to preserve policy bargains when the policy space has more than one dimension. The Electoral Politics Model, however, shows that whether the policy space has one dimension or many, there always exists a unique best obtainable policy that the Prime Minister will propose if the majority does not pass a bill that is in the Prime Minister's acceptable set. Consequently, although the procedure clearly permits a prime minister to preserve policy bargains in multidimensional policy spaces, the prime minister's incentives are identical

regardless of whether policies are chosen on multiple dimensions or on one dimension. The dimensionality of the policy space therefore should not directly influence the use of the confidence vote procedure.

Finally, the Electoral Politics Model suggests that the number of members in the government coalition should have no effect on procedural choice. Whether the members of the Majority can adopt a bill that is acceptable to the Prime Minister depends largely on the size of the Majority's feasible set. Adding members to the Majority will not alter the size of this set if the members have similar preferences. The simple number of members in the Majority will not, therefore, influence the use of the vote of confidence.

If it turns out, however, that the size of the Majority is correlated with heterogeneity in the preferences of the Majority's members, then there may be an indirect effect of majority size on the use of the confidence vote procedure. But this indirect effect can exist only when members of the Majority have position-taking incentives. With positive position-taking incentives, as the heterogeneity of ideal points among members of the Majority increases, the likelihood that the Majority's set of feasible policies will be empty also increases. The logic is depicted in Figure 5.3. If there are only two members of the Majority, with ideal points at x_A and x_B, then the Majority's set of feasible proposals is nonempty. But if the Majority contains a third member with an ideal point at x_C, then the feasible set will be empty for positive position-taking incentives. Thus, when the third member is added, all members of the Majority will make position-taking proposals, triggering the confidence vote procedure.

Note two things. First, if there are no position-taking incentives, the members of the Majority, regardless of the heterogeneity in their preferences, can simply propose the Prime Minister's best obtainable policy and avoid a confidence vote procedure. Position-taking incentives therefore interact with the heterogeneity of the majority in a fundamental way. Without such incentives, the heterogeneity of the majority is irrelevant to understanding procedural choice. Second, the location of the third member in Figure 5.3 is critical. If the third member's ideal point was near the ideal point of one of the other members, then the Majority's set of feasible policies could be nonempty. Consequently, when position-taking incentives exist, the heterogeneity of the members' ideal points rather than the size of the Majority should influence the behavior of agents in the legislature.

Another variable that can only indirectly affect behavior is the censure costs of the members of the Majority. One might expect these costs to the Majority to have a direct effect on use of the confidence vote procedure: as the costs of bringing down the Prime Minister decrease, the Prime Minister should be increasingly inclined to avoid the use of the confidence

vote procedure (for fear of censure). Although the Electoral Costs Model suggest that this association between censure costs and the use of the confidence vote procedure *may* exist, the association is not a direct effect of censure costs but rather an indirect effect due to the interaction of these costs with position-taking incentives.

For any level of censure costs for the members of the Majority, the Prime Minister's best obtainable policy exists and is unique. Since the Prime Minister can invoke the vote of confidence at the end of the legislative process – even after a bill has been defeated – the Prime Minister can always ensure a final policy outcome of the best obtainable policy without fear of censure. The Prime Minister's decision to use the confidence vote procedure therefore turns exclusively on the location of the Majority's proposal relative to the best obtainable policy. The censure costs of the members of the Majority will therefore influence the Prime Minister's procedural decision only if they influence the probability of an acceptable proposal by the members of the majority.

The magnitude of the censure costs for a member of the Majority can only influence the probability of observing a confidence vote procedure when two conditions are met. First, it must be the case that the censure costs for the member change the location of the Prime Minister's best obtainable policy, making it further from the member's ideal point. Second, position-taking incentives must exist. The logic of the interaction between censure costs and position-taking incentives is straightforward. As the best obtainable policy moves away from a member's ideal point (which *might* occur when censure costs increase), the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies may move away from the member's ideal point (depending on the Prime Minister's ideal point and assuming fixed electoral costs of using the procedure). With positive position-taking incentives, as the distance between the ideal point of a member and the best acceptable policy increases, so does the electoral penalty for making an acceptable proposal (because this penalty depends on the distance between the member's ideal point and his policy proposal). Thus, when an increase in censure costs increases the distance between a member's ideal point and the best acceptable proposal the member can make, then the increase in censure costs can trigger a position-taking proposal when position-taking incentives are sufficiently strong. One therefore cannot understand how censure costs influence behavior without considering position-taking incentives on the floor of parliament.

A similar argument exists for the level of policy conflict. Policy conflict between a member and the Prime Minister (i.e., the distance between the two agents' ideal points) has no direct effect on procedural choice in the Electoral Politics Model, but it may have an indirect effect. That is, an increase in policy conflict can increase the distance between a member's

torally induced ideal point and the best acceptable policy the member uld propose. When position-taking incentives are positive, this increase policy conflict may therefore trigger position-taking behavior (and nce the confidence vote procedure). As with censure costs, then, policy nflict becomes relevant to understanding legislative strategies only hen position-taking incentives are explicitly considered, and even when osition-taking incentives exist, policy conflict influences behavior only hen it affects the nature of the Prime Minister's proposal using a confidence vote procedure.

Empirical support for several of these "null results" emerges from the regression analysis at the end of the previous chapter. We found, for example, that prime ministers were no more likely to use the confidence vote procedure during coalition governments than during single-party governments and were no more likely to use the procedure on bills referred to more than one committee than on bills sent to only one committee, providing support for claims about the irrelevance of dimensional complexity. And if one assumes that the costs of censure for members of the majority are smallest during minority government, the regression results strongly indicate that prime ministers are not inclined to avoid the confidence vote procedure as the censure costs of members of the majority decline (supporting the hypothesis that censure costs have no direct effect on behavior). The fact that use of the confidence vote procedure was not found to increase during coalition government also provides support for the Electoral Politics Model's claim about the irrelevance of the number of members of the majority. Further support for this prediction is found in Table 5.1, which shows the percentage of bills subjected to

Table 5.1 *The relationship between the number of parties in government and the use of confidence vote procedures*

	Number of parties in government (minority government treated as one party)				Number of parties in government (minority government treated as two parties)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Percent of bills subjected to the confidence vote procedure	5.4	1.7	0.03	1.9	2.7	3.3	0.03	1.9

Note: Data are from Maus (1988b) and Secrétariat général de l'Assembleé Nationale (1988—92).

Article 49.3 from 1959 through 1992, with the number of parties in government as the independent variable. The data are presented two ways. In the first four columns, the Socialist minority government is treated as one-party government (because the Socialists were the only party in government). In the second four columns, the Socialist minority government is treated as a two-party government (because given their minority status, the Socialists depended on support from one opposition party). For either classification of the minority government, we see no trend in the relationship between the number of parties and the use of the confidence vote procedure. Thus, there exists evidence supporting the Electoral Politics Model's negative predictions. Further evidence will be presented in Chapter 6.

ELECTORAL INCENTIVES AND LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES

The main positive result from the Electoral Politics Model is that the prime minister's electoral costs of using the confidence vote procedure, on the one hand, and the position-taking incentives of the agents in parliament, on the other, interact to determine whether a prime minister will use a confidence vote procedure on a particular piece of legislation. This result leads to four more general insights regarding the impact of the confidence vote procedure on French politics.

The first and most important insight concerns the impact of the confidence vote procedure on shaping the ways in which political parties and party factions in the legislature communicate information to voters about issue positions and political accountability. The confidence vote procedure can affect communication with voters by influencing the types of "proposals" made by the members of the majority make during parliamentary deliberations. In the model, there are only two types of proposals that the members of the Majority ever make in the Parliamentary Stage. Under certain conditions, the members of the Majority can propose a bill that is in the Prime Minister's set of acceptable policies (and that therefore is accepted by the Prime Minister). These bills can be called "negotiable proposals" because they form the basis of agreement between the prime minister and the members of the parliament. But if there are no acceptable policies in the feasible set, then each member of the Majority does not simply propose any policy that will lead to a confidence vote procedure. Instead, each member proposes his most preferred policy, thereby maximizing the electoral utility from the Parliamentary Stage of the game. For obvious reasons, these can be called "position-taking" proposals. Such proposals can never form the basis of agreement between the Prime Minister and all members of the government's Majority, but they

do permit these members to signal electorally optimal policy positions to voters.

The Electoral Politics Model specifically predicts that whenever the confidence vote procedure is used, members of parliament should not make just any proposal but rather should make *position-taking proposals* – proposals that are purely ideological in the sense that they clearly distinguish a member's most preferred policy from the prime minister's policy. Such proposals never have a chance to form the basis of a policy compromise between a member of the majority and the prime minister. Whether such position-taking proposals are indeed made depends, of course, not only on the intrinsic value of making such proposals, but also on the prime minister's electoral costs of using a confidence vote procedure.

The nature of proposals by members of the government's majority should influence which parties or party factions will be held accountable for policy outcomes at election time. If the members of the Majority make position-taking proposals, then the Prime Minister and her party – and not other members of the government's Majority – should be viewed as responsible for policy outcomes because other members of the Majority (or at least one such member) will have clearly expressed a preference for a policy differing from the policy ultimately adopted. When "negotiable policies" are proposed, on the other hand, political accountability is blurred because the final policy outcomes should be perceived as the result of negotiation and compromise between the Prime Minister and the members of the majority.

Some casual empirical evidence supports this implication about political accountability. In parliamentary systems there is generally a large electoral penalty associated with incumbency: parties that join majority governments commonly lose support in subsequent elections (Paldam 1986 and Rose and Mackie 1983). However, for parties that form minority governments, the electoral loss is smaller or even translates into an electoral gain. That is, parties in minority governments often gain seats in subsequent elections (Powell and Whitten 1993; Strom 1990b: 124). One explanation for this is that during minority government, opportunities for obstruction by the opposition make it unclear to voters which parties are responsible for policy outcomes (Powell and Whitten 1993).

In France, during minority government from 1988 through 1993, the confidence vote procedure was used frequently and on major pieces of legislation. If the opposition was forcing this procedural pathway by making position-taking proposals, then we should expect the voters to hold the prime minister's party primarily, if not completely, responsible for policy outcomes. Thus, in the election following the Socialist minority government, we should expect the Socialists to suffer the same general

electoral fate as that of most incumbent majority parties. This is precisely what happened: in the March 1993 legislative elections, the Socialist Party was badly defeated and the conservative parties won a huge majority. There exists, then, a least circumstantial evidence that the confidence vote procedure in France clarifies responsibility for policy outcomes during minority government.

The second general insight from the model concerns the types of legislation that should be subjected to the confidence vote procedure. If there are no position-taking incentives during the Parliamentary Stage, then the model suggests that the Prime Minister should never use the confidence vote procedure. Instead, the members of the majority can simply adopt an acceptable policy. Because the confidence vote procedure should only be employed when position-taking incentives exist, it should be used only on major, politicized pieces of legislation – legislation to which the voters are significantly attentive. One should not expect the prime minister to use the confidence vote procedure on bills that are routine, apolitical, and largely noncontroversial.

Again, evidence from the statistical analysis in Chapter 4 supports this argument. If members of opposition parties are most likely to utilize obstructionist tactics on issues that are electorally salient, then the controversy variable in the regressions of Chapters 3 and 4 could be interpreted not as a proxy for the types of issues on which members of the Majority want to hide debate but rather as a proxy for the types of significant, politicized issues that raise position-taking considerations. In some respects, this is a more appropriate interpretation of the controversy variable than the one given in Chapter 3 because, although the confidence vote procedure permits the majority to avoid discussing and voting specific aspect of bills, it does not permit these members to evade criticism during the debate on the censure motion. Moreover, the confidence vote procedure only permits the government to evade debate on specific issues if it is invoked early in the legislative process, something that not only rarely occurs but that also never occurs when the controversy variable takes a high value (because it only take a high value if considerable legislative activity in the form of motions and amendments has occurred). Thus, if "Controversy" is viewed as a reasonable proxy for bills on which electoral salience is high, the significant impact of this variable on the probability of observing a confidence vote procedure is consistent with the theory emerging from the Electoral Politics Model.

The third implication from the model concerns the impact of the confidence vote procedure on the opportunities for different agents to influence final policy outcomes. The analysis demonstrates that the prime minister can use the confidence vote procedure to ensure that the final policy outcome corresponds to the best obtainable policy. Consequently,

a measure of policy influence by members of the majority should focus on the relationship between the final policy outcome and the prime minister's best obtainable policy. Importantly, the extent to which the members are able to obtain policy concessions depends neither on the prime minister's censure costs nor on the censure costs of the members of the majority. Instead, the policy concessions that can be gained by members of parliament depend solely on the prime minister's electoral costs of using a confidence vote procedure. As these costs grow, the opportunity for members in parliament to obtain policy concessions should also grow.

The final implication from the Electoral Politics Model concerns the role that the confidence vote procedure can play in stabilizing bargaining processes among members of the government's majority. The model demonstrates how the confidence vote procedure can facilitate bargaining processes among heterogeneous coalitions, especially those most prone to position-taking, by permitting members of the coalition to implement specific policy outcomes while at the same time indulging in position-taking on the floor of parliament. That is, the possibility of a confidence vote procedure enables parties to explicitly tell their supporters that a specific policy of the prime minister is repugnant but that censure of the government on this particular issue is not justified. The procedure therefore lets some members of the government coalition off the hook electorally. In so doing, certain policy bargains become feasible that otherwise would not be feasible, thereby stabilizing the cabinet.

In conclusion, the Electoral Politics Model offers rich empirical implications regarding those factors that should influence legislative behavior and those factors that should not. The analysis focuses attention in particular on the position-taking incentives of parties in parliament, revealing how these incentives influence the types of policies that agents in the legislature support, the prime minister's decision to invoke a confidence vote procedure, and the extent to which the prime minister's party can be held accountable for policy outcomes.

Nevertheless, despite the evidence in this chapter that supports implications from the model, many questions about its usefulness and appropriateness remain. Does the model accurately specify the motivations underlying the strategies of the agents? Is the distinction between a "position-taking proposal" and a "negotiable proposal" relevant or important? What influences the nature of electoral costs or the incentives to make position-taking proposals? I turn to such questions in the next chapter.