

Parliamentary Government

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1

Defining characteristic

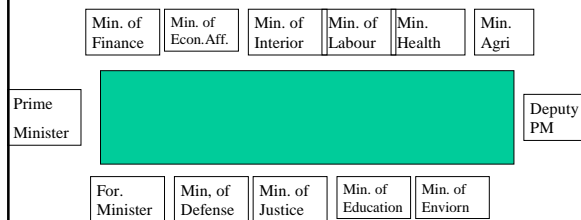
- Executive is directly controlled by the legislature
 - The parliament is elected by the citizens, and then appoints the “government” or “cabinet”

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2

A Hypothetical Cabinet



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3

A Legislature: The German Bundestag after the 1987 Elections

<i>Party</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Perc.</i>
Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU)	223	44.87
Social Democrats (SPD)	186	37.42
Free Democrats (FDP)	46	9.26
Greens	42	8.45
Minor Parties		
Total	497	100

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4

Since...

- The “government” serves at the pleasure of the legislature in a parliamentary system, the cabinet put forward must retain the “confidence” of the legislative assembly.
 - In some systems it must survive an “investiture vote”, some it must not.
 - But either way, it must retain support on a day to day basis.

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5

Typically, we think of “confidence” as being assured by

- The support of a majority of members of the legislature.
 - Given party discipline, this means that a government must obtain a commitment of support from the leaders of enough parties to command a majority of the seats of the legislature

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6

In the German Bundestag after the 1987 Elections,

- any combinations of parties controlling 249 $((497+1)/2)$ or more seats was a majority

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7

There are many possible coalitions

No.	Members	Seats Controlled
1	CDU, SPD	409
2	CDU, FDP	269
3	CDU, Greens	265
4	SPD, FDP	232
5	SPD, Greens	228
6	CDU, SPD, FDP	455
7	CDU, SPD, Greens	451
8	SPD, FDP, Green	274

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8

But remember, life's easier if you control a majority (249) of the seats

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9

Are all majority governments equally plausible?

No.	Members	Seats Controlled	Surplus
1	CDU, SPD	409	160
2	CDU, FDP	269	20
3	CDU, Greens	265	16
4	SPD, FDP	232	-17
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10

To answer that we need to

- Think about the process of government formation
- Think about what the goals of the actors involved in that process

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11

Formation process

- Typically, a *formateur* is chosen
 - The *formateur* is the person who manages the bargaining process that leads to the formation of the government

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The selection of the *formateur* differs across countries

Country	<i>Formateur</i> designated by	Process
Greece	Constitution	leader of largest party is first, leader of second largest party is next, etc.
UK, Ireland	Tradition	leader of outgoing government is first <i>formateur</i> , even after losing an election!
Finland	Head of State	President chooses <i>formateur</i>
Netherlands	Head of State	Queen choose <i>informateur</i> who recommends <i>formateur</i>

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13

The bottom line, often, is that

- A leader from the party winning the most seats, acts as *formateur*
 - This happens either by rule, by tradition, or as the result of strategic behavior
 - Leaders of most successful party can credibly threaten to veto any proposal by other *formateurs*

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14

Goals of actors: Alternative views

- Office-seeking – form cabinet with the hope of securing the largest number of ministerial portfolios
- Policy-seeking – form cabinet with hope of producing policies that maximize one's policy goals

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15

If you were a CDU leader and lived in an office-seeking world, and were named *formateur*, what would you propose?

No.	Members	Seats Controlled	Surplus
1	CDU, SPD	409	160
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16

Answer:

- What ever would allow you to put together a coalition that would
 1. command a majority of the seats in the legislature,
 2. Give you a most ministerial portfolios possible

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17

Bargaining process

- *Formateur* (representing largest party) makes offers to leaders of other parties.
 - Content of offer is "I'll give you X ministerial posts" in exchange for a promise of legislative support equal to the size of the number of seats your party controls."
 - Presumably, leaders of parties controlling a large number of seats will require a larger number of ministerial posts before they say "yes"
- When *Formateur* has gotten "enough" party leaders to say "yes", the government has "formed"

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18

The above logic, predicts “Minimal Winning Coalitions”

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19

Which coalition actually formed?

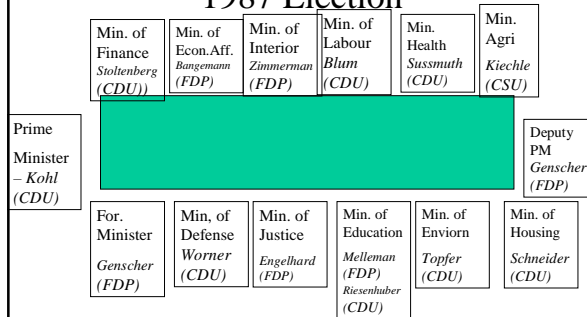
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20

The German Cabinet after the 1987 Election



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21

What happened?

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What happened?

- Maybe leaders aren't pure “office-seekers”?

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If you were a CDU leader and lived in a policy-seeking world, and were named *formateur*, what would you propose?

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24

To answer that you'd need to know something about the distribution of parties along salient issue dimensions



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25

Now, knowing what you know about the policy position of parties, what you do?

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Minimal connected coalition

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26

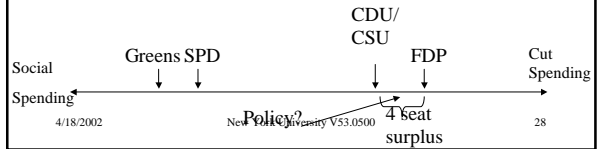
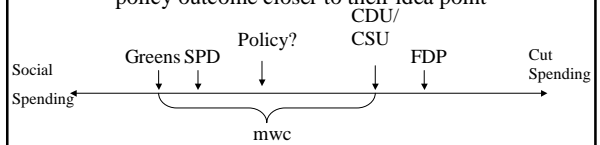
Does this mean that policy-seeking dominates office-seeking in Germany?

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27

Hard to say since CDU didn't have to totally ignore office-seeking to get a policy closer to their ideal point – they accepted a 4 seat surplus majority in exchange for a policy outcome closer to their idea point



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28

So, all the majorities are not equal...

No.	Members	Seats Controlled	Surplus	Type
1	CDU, SPD	409	160	Surplus Majority
2	CDU, FDP	269	20	Minimal Connected
3	CDU, Greens	265	16	Minimal Winning
4	SPD, FDP	232	-17	Minority
5	SPD, Greens	228	-21	Minority
6	CDU, SPD, FDP	455	206	Surplus Majority
7	CDU, SPD, Greens	451	202	Surplus Majority
8	SPD, FDP, Green	274	25	Minimal Winning

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29

Cabinet Formation

- Appears to be the product of complex bargaining game in which actors trade policy concessions for access to cabinet portfolios
 - Party leaders have a choice,
 - join forces with parties you disagree with and govern
 - Stay “ideologically pure”, act as opposition party, and wait for your turn to govern

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30

In light of this trade-off...

- Coalitions are likely to be minimal *connected* coalitions, not necessarily minimal *winning* coalitions

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31

The Essence of Parliamentary Rule is

- Cabinets have to worry about a vote of “no confidence”
 - If cabinet pushes legislature too far, the MPs can make the “government fall”
- MPs have to worry about the Prime Minister dissolving parliament and calling for new elections
 - New elections may make some parties unnecessary in forming new government
 - Can have reputational consequences for parties and individuals
 - “Party discipline” means cabinet members can punish MP’s that are not loyal

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32

Thus,

- Since cabinets serve at the pleasure of the legislature, the legislature is in the driver’s seat.
- But, since cabinet member control the political futures of MPs, the cabinet is in the drivers seat

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33

So, who “rules” in Parliamentary systems, the cabinet or the legislature?

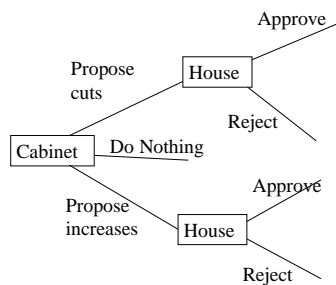
- From 1945 to 1978 97% of the bills submitted by the cabinet were approved by Britain’s House of Commons
- But is this evidence of a strong cabinet or a strong House?
 - A weak cabinet may submit only the bills a house would pass

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34

Suppose cabinet wants low social spending, and how wants high

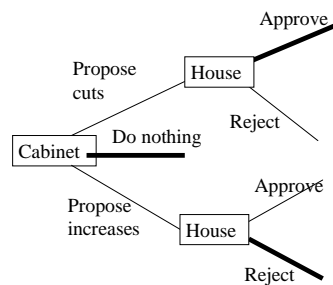


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35

If House can credibly threaten to reject bills, and the cabinet is the agenda setter, only bills that will pass will be proposed



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36

So, high success rate is not necessarily an indication of power

- But, since not cabinet members are allowed to offer amendments on bills, the approval of amendments might offer some relevant evidence.

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37

Cabinet amendments are much more successful than non-cabinet ones

		Fate of Amendment	
		Not Approved	Approved
Proposer	Cabinet Member	2	1770
	Other member of House	3988	210

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1967 to 1971 in Britain

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(But, the cost of failure may be different for non-cabinet members, so..)

38

Evaluating Parliamentarism

- Advantages:
 - Can respond quickly to changed circumstances with direct policy response
 - Lines of responsibility clear
- Disadvantages
 - Few protections for minority- Danger of tyranny of the majority.
 - Coalition government could be unstable
 - In part because of “tyranny of the minority”
 - Small parties may try to blackmail or free-ride on large parties

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39

Keep in mind, there are varieties of parliamentarism

		Majority Governments (Common in 2 party systems)	Coalition Governments (Common in multi-party systems)
		Strength of Parliamentarism Present	Quick Policy Response Clear Responsibility
Weakness of Parliamentarism Present	Unprotected minorities	Cabinet Instability	

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40