Bargaining in Legislatures, Portfolio Allocation, and the Electoral Costs of Governing

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Abstract: What motivates political parties in the legislative arena? Existing legislative bargaining models stress parties' office and policy motivations. A particularly important question concerns how parties in coalition government agree the distribution of cabinet seats. We add to this portfolio allocation literature by suggesting that future electoral considerations affect bargaining over the allocation of cabinet seats in multi-party cabinets. Some parties are penalized by voters for participating in government, increase the attractiveness of staying in opposition. This "cost of governing" shifts their seat reservation price– the minimum cabinet seats demanded in return for joining the coalition. Results of a randomized survey experiment of Irish legislators support our expectation, demonstrating that political elites are sensitive to future electoral losses when contemplating the distribution of cabinet seats. This research advances our understanding of how parties' behavior between elections is influenced by anticipation of voters' reaction.

Because many parliamentary elections fail to produce a political party with a majority of seats in the legislature, coalition (multi-party) governments are common. Which parties coalesce, and why, has been the subject of significant theoretical and empirical research (Golder 2015; Laver and Schofield 1990; Martin and Stevenson 2001; Müller and Strøm 2003). Central to this coalition formation literature is the fundamental question of what motivates parties in the legislative arena. Because the cabinet is at the apex of political power in most parliamentary democracies, the partisan distribution of cabinet seats (what scholars term *portfolio allocation*) is a topic of particular real-world significance. Reflecting the received wisdom, Morelli (1999, 808) notes that "the desire to be in office as well as the desire to affect policy outcomes' constitute parties' motivations in the portfolio allocation game."

We challenge this assumption by suggesting that some parties are likely motivated by future electoral considerations in bargaining over the distribution of cabinet portfolios. Decades of research on legislative behavior indicate that electoral considerations motivate legislators (Carey 2009; Downs 1957; Fenno 1978; Mayhew 1974; Strøm 1997) and the parties to which they belong (Downs 1957). The very act of being in government in many parliamentary systems may electorally disadvantage a party (Narud and Valen 2008). Anticipation of such electoral costs has consequences for a party's willingness to enter government (Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1984; 1990a; 1990b) and stay in government (Lupia and Strøm 1995). Electoral considerations matter also, this paper suggest, for how parties calculate their utility in bargaining over the allocation of portfolios.

Specifically, the suggestion is that parties that expect to lose votes as a result of being in government will demand a larger share of cabinet seats in exchanges for their participation in

the coalition. In other words, parties susceptible to electoral costs from joining the government have a higher reservation price – the minimum number of cabinet seats the party demands in return for participating in the coalition – compared with parties who do not suffer electorally, or suffer less, from participating in the coalition. Variation in reservation prices arises because, though largely unnoticed in the academic literature (but see further Narud and Valen 2008), not all governing parties are equally susceptible to the electoral costs of governing.[1] Consider as an example the 2015 British General Election. In net terms, the outgoing two-party coalition lost 25 parliamentary seats. But the cost of governing was not equally distributed. The Conservative Party gained 24 seats. In contrast, the Liberal Democrats lost 49 of their 57 parliamentary seats. Such possible variation in electoral fortunes is something that parties likely consider when contemplating joining a coalition (*à la* Strøm 1984; 1990) and, we suggest, when bargaining over

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[1] Research on *the economic vote* (the notion that positive national economic performance results in the incumbent government being re-elected, while negative economic performance leads voters to vote against the incumbent government) has tended to look at the overall electoral fortunes of the incumbent government or the performance of the party of the prime minister. The clarity of responsibility literature (the economic vote is conditional on voters' ability to assign credit or blame given political institutions and context) views coalition government as an obstacle to accountability because voters are unable to reward or punish a single party (Hobolt, Tilley, and Banducci 2013; Powell and Whitten 1993). In this paper, we explore the bargaining consequences where electoral costs arising from joining the coalition are pooled unequally amongst government parties.

the distribution of office payoffs.[2] We expect that, in equilibrium, parties who anticipate electoral losses at time *t+1* set a higher reservation price in terms of cabinet seat share at time *t*. In other words, would-be coalition parties most susceptible to electoral losses demand upfront compensation in the form of extra cabinet seats, in return for agreeing to join the coalition.

To help corroborate the idea that political elites consider future electoral considerations when bargaining over the quantitative distribution of portfolios, we conduct a randomized survey experiment of Irish legislators. We modify the standard divide-the-dollar/portfolio allocation game, treating some survey participants to information on electoral consequences of governing. To anticipate, the experimental evidence suggests that a party susceptible to electoral costs is awarded a larger share of cabinet seats, all else equal.

The novelty of this paper is in suggesting a link between electoral costs and how parties bargain over the quantitative allocation of cabinet seats. A number of consequences follow directly from the insight. First, our argument has consequences for the more general question of which coalitions form, in at least two ways. Coalition government formation is typically modelled as a multi-stage sequential game, beginning with the selection of a would-be prime minister (*formateur)*, leading to the emergence of a proto-coalition, moving to bargaining over portfolio payoffs and culminating in the investiture of the government (Rasch et al. 2015). However, because electoral considerations may create reservation prices which can be delivered or denied

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[2] Following the formation of the first post-WWII coalition Government in Britain, support for the Liberal Democrats party dropped in the very first post-government formation opinion poll. In contrast, Conservative Party support remained static in the opinion polls (Whitaker 2011, 1164).

during bargaining over portfolio payoffs, the list of politically feasible coalitions is determined in part by the willingness of parties to deal with electoral considerations during bargaining over portfolio allocations. Thus, whereas Strøm (1984; 1990a) sees future electoral considerations as influencing whether or not a party will enter government, participation in the coalition may be conditional on whether a party's fears over electoral costs can be overcome with the offer of a greater share of cabinet seats. To use the parlance of Laver and Schofield (1990) the questions of "who got in" and "who got what" may not be as inseparable as heretofore thought (see further, Cutler et al. 2016). In addition, our findings might imply that *formateur* parties may strive for coalitions with policy-seeking (rather then vote-seeking or office-seeking) parties, as these parties need not seek compensation for future vote losses.

Second, our findings highlight the fact that existing models of bargaining in legislatures in both parliamentary and presidential regimes are likely overly-static. Laver and Schofield's observation over 25 years ago that coalition theory suffers from the implicit assumption "that politicians do not look forward to the next general election when they bargain" remains largely true today. Because politics is fundamentally about who gets what, when and why (Lasswell 1950), understanding policy choices and outcomes such as government formation and performance requires an accurate understanding of what really motivates legislators and parties. Thus, a fuller understanding of politics requires us to better understand how vote-seeking models of legislative behavior interact dynamically with policy-seeking and office-seeking models of party behavior, as Müller and Strøm's (1999) have so capably suggested. This paper advances our understanding of how parties' behavior between elections is influenced by anticipation of voters' reaction.

Finally, our argument may help resolve the infamous "portfolio allocation paradox" (Warwick and Druckman 2001; 2006). Scholars have struggled to explain the gap between theoretical predictions from formal bargaining models and real-world patterns of cabinet seat distribution. As Laver, De Marchi, and Mutlu (2011, 288) note, "the profession's canonical theory of bargaining in legislatures is contradicted by one of the profession's strongest and most robust empirical laws." The paradox may exist because existing formal models exclude electoral considerations from bargaining over portfolio allocation. We are not aware of any study of quantitative portfolio distribution which includes potential future electoral costs as part of a party's utility function. Electoral considerations, this paper suggests, should form part of any model of bargaining in legislatures, likely reducing the agenda-setting power of the *formateur*.

Literature Review

Scholars have long debated exactly what it is that motivates political parties in the game of coalition government formation. Policy, office and electoral motivations serve as prominent, and typically competing, foundational assumptions in theories of coalition politics (Müller and Strøm 1999). Which parties, if any, coalesce, and how cabinet seats are distributed between parties in a coalition government is an important question and the subject of significant theoretical and empirical research. After all, cabinets are at the apex of political power in most parliamentary systems, with ministers typically enjoying considerable autonomy to design and implement policy (Laver and Shepsle 1994; Smith and Martin 2017).

Gamson's Law - the suggestion that each party receives "a share of the payoff proportional to the amount of resources which they contribute to a coalition" (Gamson 1961,

376) - dominates empirical research on portfolio allocations coalition government. Browne and Frendreis (1980, 753) note that "a proportionality rule governs *all* aspects of coalition payoffs" (see also Schofield and Laver 1985, Warwick and Druckman 2001). De Winter and Dumont (2006: 181) write of an "iron law" of proportionality. Cutler et al. (2016, 32) describe Gamson's Law as "a strong and non-trivial empirical regularity," while a skeptical Indridason (2015) nonetheless notes a "strong positive relationship between legislative seat and portfolios share."[3]

The empirical constancy of Gamson's Law contrasts sharply with predictions from game-theoretic legislative bargaining models. Building on Rubinstein's (1982) alternating offer model, Baron and Ferejohn (1989) model the allocation of portfolios between parties in coalition government with a clear prediction: The *formateur* party will receive a disproportionate share of cabinet seats. As defined by Müller and Strøm (2000, 15) the *formateur* is "a bargaining coordinator who is also the intended prime minister." Characterized as a simple divide-the-dollar game, with instant office payoffs as the prize to be distributed, Baron and Ferejohn (1989) conclude that the *formateur's* proposer advantage allows her or her party retain a disproportionately large share of portfolios (see also Baron 1991 and Diermeier and Merlo 2000). Aside from Ansolabehere et al. (2005), few scholars find any evidence of a *formateur* advantage in portfolio allocation (see, for example, Cutler et al. 2016, Laver et al. 2011, and Indridason 2015). The divergence between the predictions from bargaining theory and the empirical regularity of Gamson's Law leads Warwick and Druckman (2006) to speak of a "portfolio allocation paradox," and Cutler et al. (2016: 31) to note the "notorious contradiction"

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[3] Gamson's Law may also predict the distribution of cabinet seats between factions within a party (Ceron 2014; Mershon 2001).

between one of the most influential models in political science and real-world portfolio allocation.

Responding to this contradiction, Cox and Carroll (2007) suggest that the presence of pre-electoral coalitions makes an *ex ante* commitment to proportionality rational. Verzichelli (2008) considers whether the concept of 'fairness' – similar to the concept of distributive justice in economic bargaining models - explains the pattern of proportionality. Bäck, Meier, and Persson (2009: 11) suggest that proportionality is a "well-established bargaining convention that helps actors selecting equilibria when forming governments." Falco-Gimeno and Indridason (2013) suggest that proportionality helps simplify complex and uncertain bargaining situations involving policy and office considerations. Falcó-Gimeno (2011) argues that parties deprived of ministerial office for a long time will be impatient to enter government, reducing their demand for portfolios in return for participation in government. Bassi (2013) suggests that any *formateur* advantage disappears when the *formateur* is determined endogeneously.

Any attempt to explain the logic of portfolio allocation must contend with yet another common observation: smaller coalition parties tend, if anything, to be overpaid in their portfolio shares (Browne and Franklin 1973; Morelli 1999, 810). Indridason (2015) finds that this small party advantage is present in every country included in his sample (see also Back et al. 2009). Focusing on trying to explain this party-size paradox, Indridason (2015) suggest that the *formateur* will over-compensate the minor coalition partner, thus ensuring loyalty to that coalition. Golder and Thomas (2014) suggest that the presence of a vote of no-confidence explains small-party overpayment because the threat of no-confidence provides "an incentive

for large *formateur* parties to overcompensate smaller coalition partners in exchange for their sustained support over time" (Golder and Thomas 2014, 1).

In the midst of the mismatch between theory and empirical observations, Laver et al. (2011, 296) call for a "fundamental reconsideration of how to model bargaining over government formation," while Indridason (2015,10) warns that "the perceived robustness of Gamson's Law appears to have discouraged efforts to consider whether portfolio allocation is influenced by other factors." We respond to the challenge by suggesting the need to incorporate a previously unexplored variable into parties' utility function when bargaining over the quantitative allocation of cabinet portfolios: the fact that joining the coalition may come with a (relatively greater) electoral cost for some coalition parties. The lack of attention to electoral motivations may help explain the contradiction between (office- and policy-focused) bargaining theories and portfolio allocations within real-world coalitions.

Electoral Costs and Cabinet Seats

In this section we aim to explain how future electoral considerations impact bargaining over the quantitative allocation of cabinet seats. We begin by depicting a simple divide-the-dollar game where two parties, negotiating to form a coalition government, are entering the bargaining process for the allocation of cabinet seats. The *proposer* (or *formateur*) party is denoted by F and the *proposed-to* party is denoted by P. Let the total number of legislators be denoted by L, and l_F and l_P denote the numerical strength of each of the two parties in the legislature. For the coalition to be able to form a government, it has to be that $l_F + l_P > \frac{L}{2}$ (on the assumption that any government must survive a parliamentary investiture or confidence vote). Parties are

assumed to have two fundamental motivations: (i) securing as many cabinet seats as possible and (ii) with an eye to the future, winning votes at the next election.[4] As is standard in legislative bargaining models, each party $i \in \{F, P\}$ discounts the future by a factor δ_i. The utility function of party i, then, is

$$\tilde{U}_i(x, y) = u_i(x) + \delta_i V_i(y)$$

where x is the number of cabinet seats the party is allocated in the coalition government and y is the number of votes the party expects to win at the next election.

Party i must choose to join the coalition government or not. It also expects its number of votes at the next election to change (increase or decrease) by an amount Δv_i if it participates in government. Let g_i denote the party's decision to join the government or not ($g_i = 1$ if it joins the government and $g_i = 0$ if it does not become a member of the coalition) and v_i denote the number of votes the party expects to get at the next election if it does not enter the coalition. Then the number of votes party i expects to receive at the next election depends on g_i and is given by

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[4] We follow the convention in coalition studies by treating policy as a payoff of office. As Müller and Strøm (1999, 8) note, "policy pursuit is typically presented as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, office seeking." Our focus here and throughout this paper is on the quantitative distribution of cabinet seats. We do not consider qualitative issues, such as the fact that some parties may be particular keen to secure certain portfolios, such as a green party seeking the environment portfolio.

$$\tilde{v}_i(g_i) = \begin{cases} v_i & \text{if } g_i = 0 \\ v_i - \Delta v_i & \text{if } g_i = 1 \end{cases}.$$

Of course, if $g_i = 0$, the number of cabinet seats the party will get is $x = 0$ (government membership being defined as the party holding at least one cabinet seat).

Party i prefers to be in the government if

$$u_i(s_i) + \delta_i V_i(v_i - \Delta v_i) > \delta_i V_i(v_i)$$

The above condition implicitly defines a threshold number of cabinet seats s_i^* below which party i would prefer to stay out of the coalition government. The condition that gives this threshold, or what we refer to as the seat reservation price, is

$$s_i^* = u_i^{-1}\left(\delta_i\big(V_i(v_i) - V_i(v_i - \Delta v_i)\big)\right)$$

where u_i^{-1} is the inverse function of u.

From the above equation, we can observe that the reservation price s_i^* increases for party i as the number votes that it expects to lose at the next election Δv_i increases.[5] Accounting for electoral considerations in a party's utility function demonstrate that a higher incentive $s*$ is required to enter the coalition for those parties that value electoral results and who may be electorally disadvantaged by joining the coalition. Given the proximate goal of winning cabinet seats during the portfolio allocation stage of government formation, the

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[5] Note that Δv_i need not refer to losses but to the expected variation of votes, which can be negative or positive.

allocation of cabinet seats seems the ideal currency to incentivize overcoming such electoral fears.[6] A "cost of governing" has the effect of shifting a party's seat reservation price– the minimum cabinet seats demanded in return for participate in the coalition.

Our suggestion that parties seek to compensate future electoral losses by seeking more cabinet seats at the coalition formation stage relies a number of fundamental assumptions: (i) parties can anticipate whether joining a coalition will have electoral costs for them, (ii) these electoral costs may differ from party to party, (iii) a greater share of cabinet seats does not have the effect of also increasing a party's electoral losses, and (iv) parties value cabinet seats. As many of these issues have not been considered heretofore in the quantitative portfolio allocation literature, we discuss the validity of each in turn.

We make a strong assumption concerning parties' ability to gauge the likely electoral effect of government participation. Even if parties negotiating over government formation are concerned about future electoral costs, are they able to anticipate the electoral costs of governing, foreseeing, with sufficient confidence, their electoral fates perhaps years in advance? Other scholars certainly believe so. For example, in a ground-breaking contribution to the study of party behavior, Strøm (1984; 1990a; 1990b) suggests that foreseeing the electoral cost of governing cause some parties to abstain from participating in government. Parties may face

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[6] We assume, as discussed below, that membership of the government may result in electoral costs but that electoral costs do not increase with the number of cabinet seats held by the party. We also assume that parties care equally about electoral losses while acknowledging that in the real world, the same electoral loss from government participation can be more or less costly to a party depending on how much a party is policy-oriented or vote-oriented.

making a hard choice between participating in government and losing votes at the next election (Müller and Strøm 1999). As noted earlier, a party's mere presence in government may be sufficient for it to lose votes at the next general election. Governing may be unpopular and not all governments are capable of manipulating the economy in such a way as to help overcome the challenges of being responsible for shaping and implementing public policy. As Cheibub and Przeworski (1999, 225) note, "accountability is a retrospective mechanism, in that sense that the actions of rulers are judged ex post by the effects they have." Exploring national election results 17 European countries between 1945 and 1999, Narud and Valen (2008, 379) find that incumbent parties lost, on average, 2.59 percent of the vote, with the mean loss rising to 6.28 percent of the vote in the 1990s. Moreover, government incumbency may be detrimental to a party's performance at sub-national elections. The trade-off between (current) office and (future) votes causes some political parties to forgo office and policy for the "delayed gratification" of winning votes at the next election.

How parties evaluate future electoral losses has real-world consequences. For example, the leadership of the Irish Labour Party has often found it difficult to convince its legislators to enter coalition specifically because the latter readily anticipate the electoral costs of governing (*The Irish Times*, April 16, 2016). Following the 2016 election, the party leadership wanted to participate in a coalition government but withdrew from negotiations after the leadership realized that it would be unlikely to secure support from a party conference (O'Malley 2016, 265). Indeed, the Irish Labour party has often explicitly promised voters that it would not enter government, in an attempt to undo the electoral slump caused them by being in government (Laver and Schofield 1990, 2).

This office shyness (Strøm 1990b, 568) helps explain the phenomenon of minority governments in parliamentary democracies. As (Müller and Strøm 1999, 9) note, "participating in a cabinet coalition may be likely to carry a price in future elections, so that the trade-off is between office and future electoral performance" (see also Mattila and Raunio 2004). Parties are said also to think about electoral considerations when fixing the timing of an election (the political business cycle literature) and/or when leaving a coalition. As Grofman and van Roozendaal (1994, 158) note, "parties terminate a cabinet when they expect electoral gain." [7] In short, the suggestion that parties can anticipate the electoral consequences of entering, and leaving, a coalition is a well-established assumption in comparative politics, and one that resonates with party leaders contemplating such decisions. [8]

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[7] Exploring the causes of coalition termination, Lupia and Strøm (1995) argue that positive electoral expectations actually enhance bargaining power. Rejecting the conventional wisdom that electorally popular incumbent parties desire to call an election, they argue that (p. 655) "a party with favourable electoral prospects will also consider the option of extracting advantages through non-electoral means (e.g., bargaining with parties that have less favourable prospects)." Thus, the prospects of electoral gain cause a party to reopen bargaining during the lifetime of a coalition. Although their argument appears opposite to this paper's argument, the logic is not contradictory given their focus on incumbent governing parties' behaviour related to breaking the coalition once, in effect, electoral costs have been awarded.

[8] Moreover, the politicians who form a critical component of any political party are highly sensitive to re-election concerns and what it takes to get re-elected, as a well-developed literature in legislative studies attests to (for an overview see Andre et al. 2014).

But do electoral considerations differ fundamentally from party to party, creating the variation in parties' reservation price for participating in government? While much of the literature on incumbents' electoral performance explores the collective electoral fate of governments - treating the government as a single entity, - the potential for individual parties within a coalition government to achieve different electoral fates exists. Indeed, vote swings between governing parties from election to election may partially mask the true electoral cost of governing (by which we mean the net vote loss for a party as a direct result of being in government rather than opposition). Looking at the electoral performance of government coalitions, Rose and Mackie (1983) find that in 64 percent of cases one coalition party gained votes while another lost votes, noting further that "in nearly every country, jostling between coalition partners results in very little change in the collective vote for the government: it simply results in a redistribution of votes between coalition partners" (Rose and Mackie 1983, 127).

Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to think about why some coalition parties might be punished more harshly by voters for entering cabinet coalitions. A cause could be the policy compromises that the respective party is forced to accept (as, possibly was the case for the UK's Liberal Democrats during the 2010-15 coalition government where their 'u-turn' on University tuition fees angered many of their historical support-base). Another possible situation could be that the party reneges on a previous negative coalition signal and enters a coalition with the party their voters dislike the most (as possibly was the example with the Irish Labour Party enter coalition with the much-reviled *Fianna Fáil* in 1993, only to quit the government and coalesce with more common bedfellows a year later). As a former Irish prime

minister (*Taoiseach*) writing about his personal experience of leading a coalition governments notes:

> The relationship between a bigger and a smaller party in a coalition is a sensitive one because experience in Ireland has been that the smaller party tends to get more of the blame, and the bigger party more of the credit, for what the coalition does in government. Thus the smaller party runs the risk of doing relatively less well in the subsequent election.[9]

An overview of governing parties' electoral performance in Ireland adds credibility to the suggestion that electoral costs are unequally shared, typically at a cost to the smaller party in government. To see if politicians may form (reasonable) expectations about whether or not joining the coalition will have electoral costs, Table 1 reports percentage seat changes for parties with experience of re-election following government in Ireland from 1980 onwards.

Table 1: Electoral Performance (percentage Seat Change) of Key Parties, Ireland 1980-2016

Time Period	Government	FF Seat Change	FG Seat Change	Lab Seat Change	Green Seat Change	PD Seat Change
2011-2016	FG-Labour	109.5	**-24.2**	-78.78	200	n/a
2007-2011	FF-Green-PD	**-71.8**	49	85	**-100**	n/a
2002-2007	FF-PD	**-1.9**	59.4	-4.8	0	**-75**
1997-2002	FF-PD	**10.9**	-42.6	-4.8	200	**100**
1994-1997	FG–Labour–DL	14.9	**14.9**	-46.8	100	-55.5
1992-1994	FF-Labour	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1989-1992	FF-PD	**-11.7**	-18.2	120	0	**66.7**
1987-1989	FF	**-4.9**	8	25	100	-57.14
1982-1987	FG-Labour	13.3	**-27.1**	**-25**	n/a	n/a

[9] http:// johnbruton.com/coalition-experience-in-ireland-what-works. Last accessed 29 March 2017.

| 1982-1982 | FF | **-7.4** | 11.1 | 6.7 | n/a | n/a |
| 1981-1982 | FG-Labour | 5.1 | **-3.1** | **0** | n/a | n/a |

Notes: Seat change of outgoing governing parties in **bold**. The Progressive Democrats (PD) ceased to exist as a party prior to the 2011 general election. Democratic Left (DL) merged with the Labour Party prior to the 1997 General Election.

Only once have all parties in an outgoing coalition gained seats (in 2002, at the height of Ireland's economic expansion). In five cases, all governing parties lost seats (*Fianna Fáil* also lost as a single party cabinet in 1989 and November 1982). Yet, the level of losses within these 5 coalitions were not shared proportionately. For example, in the 2016 election, Fine Gael lost 16 of their 76 seats while Labour lost 26 of their 33 seats. And this pattern was arguably predictable: The previous time Fine Gael coalesced with Labour, Fine Gael actually gained seats while Labour lost half of their parliamentary seats. Indeed one has to look as far back as 1982 to find an election where Labour did not perform worse in terms of parliamentary seat loss than their coalition partner. But even in that election, Labour suffered a vote swing against the party of 0.8% (in contrast, Labour's coalition partner lost two seats despite a swing to it of + 0.8%). In other words, the pattern in the Irish case is clear: With few exceptions, being in government is particularly challenging electorally for specific parties.

Given what we know about these patterns and the causes of incumbent losses, could it be that obtaining more cabinet seats only exacerbates a party's subsequent electoral performance? We don't believe that a bigger share of cabinet seats may make the electoral cost higher than a smaller share. In other words, for those parties for whom participation is costly, participating in a coalition government is a normal good rather than an inferior good, given their voters' preferences. In formal terms, U_i is a positive function of s_i. We suspect that what is

electorally costly is mere participation (dichotomous) and not greater participation (continuous). It is clear from Table 1 that it is the junior coalition partner (the smaller party in government, holding fewest cabinet seats) which suffers most electorally. At the very least, the electoral costs of governing within the coalition are not positively correlated with the number of cabinet seats. Thus, we see no reason to suspect that a party, worried about electoral costs, would forego more cabinet seats once it agreed to be part of the coalition (although we don't disagree with Strøm [1990] that a party may decline participation altogether to avoid electoral costs). Indeed, if policy compromise is the reason for voter dissatisfaction with a given party, and if the share of portfolio allocation determines a party's influence over policy, then a party can minimize the electoral costs of governing by maximizing the number of portfolios held.

Finally, we assume that legislators, and thus the parties to which they belong, value their party being rewarded more, rather than fewer, cabinet seats. We feel fairly confident in assuming that legislators in most parliamentary systems have some career ambition, in that most backbenchers would like to be ministers. The more ministerial posts a party receives, the higher the chances of any single legislator from that party willing one of these prized posts. Why are cabinet seats so prized? Ministerial office can be used by officeholders to influence policy. Ministerial office also comes with a number of perquisites, such as increased salary, more staff, and perhaps even personal fame. Ministerial office may even bring personal electoral gain (Martin 2016). In short, ministerial office is an attractive proposition for most legislators and party leaders will want to maximise the number available to distribute within their party.

Our core suggestion is that the possibility for electoral losses to be unequally distributed within the coalition has consequences for the amount of office payoffs a party demands in

return for agreeing to participate in the coalition government. A comparison with conventional perspectives on portfolio allocation clarifies the novelty of our thesis. Our argument departs from Baron and Ferejohn by suggesting a cost from agreeing the bargain for some of the parties. Existing models take account of the cost of bargaining delays, but not the cost of bargaining success.[10] For *some* parties, taking a share of the pie may have medium-term negative consequences. Bargaining is impacted because each player must calculate a cost-benefit analysis, with the cost (future electoral considerations) varying among players. Similarly, while Strøm (1984; 1990a; 1990b) alerts us to the importance of policy and electoral considerations in shaping parties' preferences over entering government, that decision is presented in binary terms: a party decided to enter government or not to enter government having considered the likely electoral costs of doing so (and the potential to influence policy from the opposition).[11] Each party makes a trade-off between short-term benefits and long-term costs, with behavior based on how steeply parties discount the future. For us, the costs identified by Strøm can be softened by compensation in the form of a greater share of cabinet seats. A party fearful of

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[10] This makes sense given that Baron and Ferejohn's base model focuses on the allocation of particularism in a legislature. For each player, only benefits are derived from receiving a slice of that pie. This is not the case, we suggest, for political parties considering whether or not to enter a coalition government.

[11] Parties are assumed to be unitary actors. However, as Martin (2016) has argued, the costs and rewards of governing are not necessarily shared equally between legislators within governing parties. Instead, perquisites of ministerial office may be used by ministers in preferential electoral systems to insulate themselves electorally from any voter displeasure with the party.

future electoral losses may nevertheless choose to participate in government if the rate of office payoffs is sufficiently attractive.

The Experiment

We conduct a randomized survey experiment to ascertain the impact of electoral costs on political elite' preferences over the quantitative distribution of cabinet portfolios. Political science in general, and legislative studies in particular, have a venerable tradition of elite survey research (Bailer 2014). Survey experiments represent an innovative departure from traditional surveys in that the survey content is manipulated to "prime a particular thought or idea to determine how (or whether) the priming affects an opinion or attitude" (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007, 4). This experimental approach allows the direct effect of one variable (in our case electoral costs of governing) on another (in our case preferences over the distribution of cabinet seats) to be isolated, reducing methodological fears of confounding factors or causal complexity (Druckman et al. 2011).[12] A survey experiment of bargaining in legislatures involving actual

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[12] Employing observational data to test our argument creates significant identification issues in terms of causal inference. For instance, those circumstances in which "office-shy" parties eventually get in government might be situations in which, for whatever (non-)observable reason, there is no other alternative for the *formateur* but to seek the support of these parties. Then, the "office-shy" party, knowing that, may demand extra cabinet seats. In such circumstances, the bargaining context may be the omitted variable actually explaining why these parties are able to extract more.

legislators should eliminate external validity problems associated with more conventional randomized laboratory experiments on portfolio allocation based on the behavior of non-elites. Nevertheless, the traditions of elite survey research and experimental research have been slow to synergize in legislative studies (important exceptions include Harden 2013 studying US state legislators and Findley et al. 2017 studying Ugandan legislators). A recent review of the experimental approach in legislative behavior notes the lack of legislative survey experiments and encourages survey scholars to "embed experiments into such surveys to explore how respondent legislators would react to distinct scenarios" (Druckman et al. 2014, 207).

Conducting what we believe to be one of the first survey experiments of national legislators in a European democracy, we surveyed all members of the lower chamber of the Irish Parliament.[13] Ireland manifests the defining characteristics of a classic parliamentary democracy, with the cabinet coming from and remaining responsible to parliament's lower chamber (*Dáil Éireann*). The setting is a particularly obvious choice to study portfolio allocation because members of the *Dáil*, known as *Teachta Dala* (TDs), vote both to elect the head of government and again to confirm *en bloc* the remaining members of the cabinet. Due to the general absence of pre-electoral coalitions (Golder 2006), bargaining over coalition formation is a real and significant part of Irish political life (Laver and Schofield 1990; O'Malley 2016). While the Irish party system lacks the ideological divisions associated with other European countries, parties do find it difficult to form coalitions with each other. For example, neither of the two largest parties have formed a coalition together and the Labour Party Constitution makes agreeing to join a

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[13] While the lower chamber comprised 166 members, at the time of the survey experiment 1 seat was vacant.

coalition challenging.[14] It could be argued that Ireland offers an appropriate setting for a "hard test" of the theory. Ireland is a country in which smaller parties typically lose disproportionately more as a consequence of participating in government, when compared to larger parties. Knowledge of the electoral costs of governing means that the control group is somewhat "pre-treated" and therefore make the estimates of the average treatment effect arguably rather conservative.[15]

The core issue addressed in the survey experiment concerned how cabinet seats ought to be allocated as part of government formation negotiations surrounding the emergence of a notional two-party coalition government. Notional party labels (Party A and party B) are used so as to reduce any contamination effect. As Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk (2007, 14) argue, the likelihood of contamination in survey experiments from real-world experience is unavoidable, unless the topic is a largely irrelevant one. In the survey, a proto-coalition is described as having 100 seats in Dáil Éireann. Party A contributes 80 TDs and Party B contributes 20 TDs to the coalition. The cabinet was described as comprising 10 ministers – constitutionally, the Irish cabinet consists of between seven and fifteen members. Survey respondents were then asked how many cabinet seats Party B should receive, with the choice to select any number ranging from 1 to 9 seats (any more than nine would result in a single-party cabinet), as depicted in the appendix (the full survey is reproduced in the supplemental information).

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[14] Under the Labour Party Constitution, the "approval of the Party Conference, which can be given only on foot of the recommendation of the Party Leader, is required for the Party's entry into Government" (Source: https://www.labour.ie/party/constitution/).

[15] I am very grateful to a reviewer for alerting me to this point.

TDs were assigned randomly to a treatment or control condition using a within-group process. The treatment was designed to elicit whether electoral costs would affect the preferences of legislators over the distribution of cabinet seats. TDs in the treatment group received information about the likely electoral costs to Party B of participating in government. The first treatment sub-group were informed that Party B's participation in the coalition would result in 5 of the 20 TDs from Party B losing their seat. Party A, in contrast, would lose no or few seats. As with the control group, the treatment group was then invited to allocate between 1 and 9 cabinet seats to Party B. The second treatment sub-group received similar information, except this time the predicted losses of Party B were increased from 5 seats to 10 seats. This manipulation of the treatment was designed to elicit the sensitivity of Irish political elites to the level of electoral losses, hopefully allowing inferences to be drawn concerning the magnitude of trade-off between potential legislative seat losses and cabinet seats offered.

The names and contact details (email, postal address and telephone number) of TDs were obtained from the official parliamentary website.[16] Background and demographic data (party, gender, electoral record, past ministerial experience) is from Collins (2011) and the aforementioned parliament website. Low response rates constitute a real concern in elite surveys (Deschouwer and Depauw 2014), and the current survey was designed to maximize response rates. Questions were kept to a minimum, with the cover letter noting that the survey could be completed in 1-2 minutes. The survey experiment was conducted in three stages. In the first instance, the survey was distributed electronically via the Bristol Online Survey platform. A

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[16] http://www.oireachtas.ie/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=-1&CatID=138

week later a reminder email was send to non-respondents. Five days later, the survey was sent

via post to remaining non-respondents. Two weeks after that, non-respondents were emailed

and encouraged to complete the survey.

Of the 165 parliamentarians contacted, 34 online surveys were completed. An additional

32 parliamentarians returned the paper version of the survey. Of the latter, one is excluded from

the analysis as the respondent removed the identifying information and a further two are

excluded as the respondent did not answer the primary question. Thus, in total, 63 survey

responses were available for analysis, representing a response rate of 38 percent. As table 2

reports, the then junior governing party (Labour) and the center-left opposition *Fianna Fáil* are

over-represented relative to other groups. Nevertheless, responses are fairly evenly distributed

by group, although relatively fewer parliamentarians in treatment group one responded.

Table 2: Survey Responses by Party and Group

Party	Population	Overall Responses	Control Group	Treatment Group 1	Treatment Group 2
Fianna Fáil	19	11 (57.9%)	6	3	2
Fine Gael	74	22 (29.7%)	6	9	7
Labour Party	37	21 (56.8%)	8	3	10
Other	35	9 (25.7%)	3	3	3
Total	165	63 (38.2%)	23	18	22

Note: Percent of population in brackets

The results of the experiment provide at least modest evidence that real-world legislators

would choose to allocate disproportionately more cabinet seats to a party who expect to suffer

electoral losses from participating in the coalition. Figure 1 reports how responding legislators

would allocate cabinet seats under three alternative conditions prescribed in the experiment. A

plurality of respondents in the control group (65 percent) would allocate 3 seats to party B, with

all remaining respondents allocating seats exactly proportionately to the legislative seats Party B contributes to the coalition. No legislator in the control group suggested allocating more than 4 seats to party B. On average, Party B would be awarded 2.65 seats absent any information on electoral costs. Looking at the treatment groups, the treatment seems to have the effect predicted by our theory: introducing information on a party's electoral cost increases, on average, the number of cabinet seats which a legislator is willing to allocate. Ten of the 18 responding legislators in the first treatment group suggested 3 (n=7), 4(n=2) or 5 (n=1) seats. On average, legislators in this treatment group would allocate 2.78 cabinet seats. Strengthening the treatment in terms of the degree of likely future electoral losses increased the willingness of a legislator to over-allocate cabinet seats. The second treatment resulted in an average of 3.18 cabinet seats being awarded.

Figure 1: Cabinet Seats Awarded, by Experimental Group
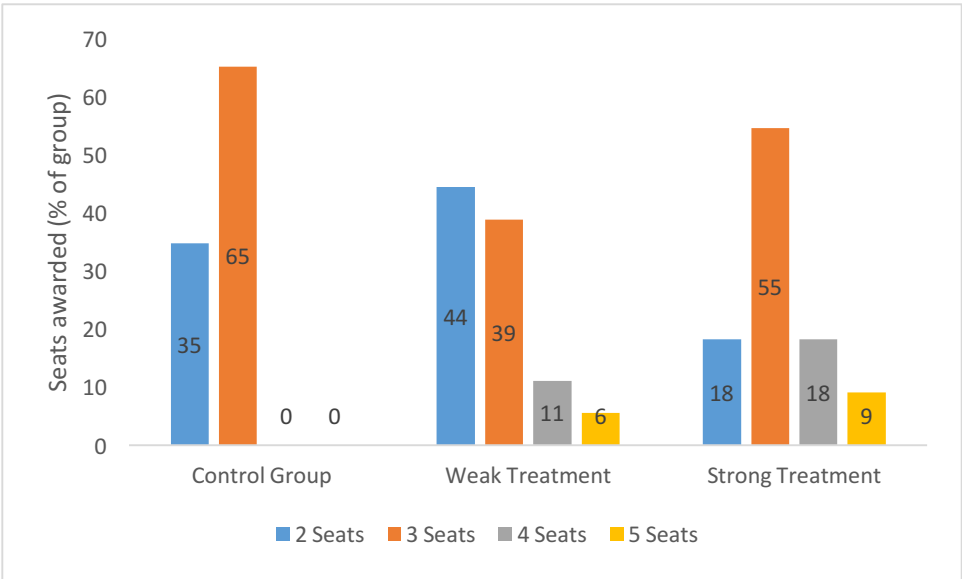
Looking at the overall difference between the control group and treatment groups, the difference between the control group and the treatment group equals 0.35. This difference is statistically significant at the 90% level. The one-tailed p-value for the alternative hypotheses (mean difference > 0) equals 0.04. The p-value is less than 0.05, allowing us to conclude that the mean difference is statistically significantly greater than zero. The two-tailed p-value equals 0.08 and thus we can conclude that the mean value of cabinet seats for the control and treatment groups is statistically significantly different from zero.

The differences between each group are somewhat more difficult to interpret. Comparing only the control group and weaker of the treatment groups, a difference exists in the direction predicted by our theory, but this difference is not statistically significant at the 95 percent level. Again, in comparing the weaker treatment group with the stronger treatment group, the difference is in the direction predicted, but the difference again fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. As one would expect, the strongest differences are to be found when the control group is compared to the second (strongest) treatment group. The magnitude of differences equals .53 at 95 percent levels of confidence in a 2-tailed t-test. Moreover, the one-tailed p-value for the alternative hypotheses (mean difference > 0) equals 0.007. One possible interpretation of these results is that the level of likely future electoral losses is an important factor. Disproportionately larger losses may result in exponentially larger compensation.

Although the sample is fairly balanced (see Table 2 above), any bias in response rates may introduce a worry that the experiment is capturing an effect other than the treatment. To control for the possibility that party affiliation is shaping a legislator's preference, Table 3 reports

the results of a regression analysis, controlling for the respondent's party and party size. The variable *Party Size* equals one when the respondent is a member of one of the two large parties and zero otherwise. In all three models, Treatment 2 ("if Party B enters the coalition, it can expect significant losses at the next general election, resulting in 10 TDs from Party B losing their seat") has a robust positive effect on *Cabinet Seats*. The positive effect of Treatment 2 is robust to the inclusion of party size and party fixed effects. Although the estimated coefficient on Treatment 1 (predicting a loss of 5 parliamentary seats at the next election) is also positive, it fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Table 3: Impact of Party on Cabinet Seat Allocation

	(1) Cabinet Seats	(2) Cabinet Seats	(3) Cabinet Seats
Treatment Group 1	0.126	0.230	0.308
	(0.230)	(0.203)	(0.214)
Treatment Group 2	0.530**	0.449**	0.478***
	(0.209)	(0.174)	(0.163)
Party Size		-0.717***	
		(0.158)	
Fine Gael			-0.334
			(0.239)
Labour			0.644**
			(0.244)
Other			0.384*
			(0.226)
Constant	2.652***	3.026***	2.465***
	(0.102)	(0.090)	(0.191)
Observations	63	63	63
R-squared	0.091	0.301	0.374

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.
The control group (Group 0) is the base, comparison group. *Fianna Fáil* is the base comparison party.

The estimated effect of party size is negative and statistically significant. Members of big parties demand fewer cabinet seats than members of small parties, all else equal. Controlling for party size, the estimated effect of Treatment 2 remains positive and statistically significant. In other words, Dáil Deputies treated to information on high electoral costs allocate more cabinet seats to the party with electoral costs whether they are from big parties or small parties.

Column 3 of table 3 includes party fixed effects. The positive effect of Treatment 2 remains statistically significant with the inclusion of party fixed effects. Controlling for party, Treatment 2 increases the number of cabinet seats awarded. In other words, Dáil Deputies respond similarly to Treatment 2, regardless of party; they respond by increasing the number of cabinet seats awarded. In Column 3 of table 3, *Fianna Fáil* is the base comparison group. The estimated coefficients on the party effects must therefore be interpreted with reference this comparison group (i.e. *Fianna Fáil*). No statistically significant difference exists between the number of cabinet seats awarded by parliamentarians from the centre-right *Fine Gael* and the centre-left *Fianna Fáil*. On average, Labour Party Dáil Deputies award more cabinet seats, as compared to *Fianna Fáil* legislators. This is perhaps not surprising given that the Irish labour Party often suffers disproportionately in terms of the electoral cost of governing, as Table 1 illustrates. Dáil Deputies from other parliamentary groups also appear to award more cabinet seats than *Fianna Fáil* parliamentarians, however, this coefficient is statistically significant at only the 90% level.

The coefficients and standard errors for both treatments are displayed visually in Figure 2. Treatment 2 significantly increases the number of cabinet seats awarded by parliamentarians. Dáil Deputies that were surveyed with treatment 2 allocate 0.5 more cabinet seats than their

colleagues in the control group, on average (out of a total of 10 cabinet seats). This positive effects is statistically significant at the 95% level. Dáil Deputies that receive treatment 1 award more cabinet seats than TDs in the control group. However, the confident interval for this estimated effect includes zero. Therefore, we cannot conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the control group and treatment group 1.

Figure 2: Estimated Effect of Treatment on Cabinet Seats
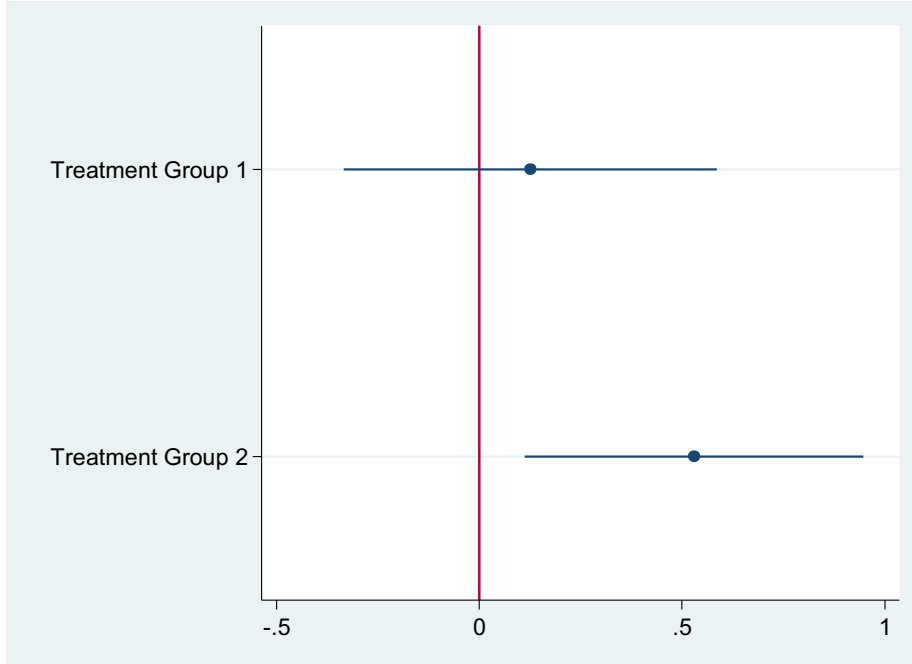
Notes: Estimated coefficients from Column 1 of Table 3 with 95% confident intervals.

Perhaps one of the most puzzling findings from the elite survey experiment is that, even without a treatment, a tendency exists to over-allocate seats to Party B as the results from the control group demonstrate (Figure 1). One possible reason for this is the nature of elite versus non-elite survey experiments. In standard laboratory or survey experiments, the issue of external validity is cause for concern. As Barabas and Jerit (2010: 228) note "the typical survey experiment generates effects likely to be observed only among the highly attentive in the real world." It is possible that experimental surveys of elites have the opposite problem: elites in the control group may nevertheless be attuned to the effect postulated by the treatment, owing to their knowledge of real world politics. Thus, in our case, politicians even without being prompted may act as if Party B would be likely to suffer an electoral loss, given their knowledge of electoral

politics. Ultimately, we can take comfort from the fact that the treatment did have an effect, but the presence of disproportionality in the control group may be accounted for by external, possibly tacit, knowledge which social science experiments are often unable to avoid.

In the survey, respondents were asked if it is generally more or less difficult for an incumbent from the governing parties to gain re-election, compared to an incumbent from an opposition party. 14 parliamentarians indicated that re-election as a government incumbent was much more difficult, 32 said governing made re-election somewhat more difficult, 6 reported feeling it made no difference and 10 said that being a government parliamentarian made make re-election somewhat easier. No respondent reported feeling that being a Government legislator make re-election much easier. The results indicate a mixed opinion, but some sensitivity to the electoral costs of governing, and may reflect Martin's (2016) argument that the electoral costs of governing are unlikely to be equally shared within parties between backbenchers and frontbenchers.

Conclusion

Under a parliamentary system of government, the cabinet comes from, and remains responsible to, the legislature. Where no political party controls a majority of seats in the legislature, cabinets comprising two or more political parties often emerge. Which parties coalesce and how the spoils of office - particularly cabinet seats - are distributed within the coalition has long fascinated scholars and citizens alike. Existing legislative bargaining models stress parties' office and policy motivations.

Our core suggestion is that an understanding of parties' incentives in bargaining over portfolio allocation must include recognition of the potential unequal electoral costs of joining the coalition. Some parties may suffer electorally from being in government, some significantly more than others. This paper has argued that the prospect of future electoral costs shapes not only the decision of a party to enter or not to enter government. Electoral considerations - the prospect of future losses and the possibility for these losses to be unequally distributed within the coalition – impacts a party's reservation price. By reservation price we mean the minimum number of payoffs needed to secure a party's willingness to participate in government. Thus, future electoral considerations may shape the amount of office payoffs a party demands in return for agreeing to participate in the coalition government. In equilibrium, parties who anticipate electoral losses at time *t+1* demand compensation in the form of a greater than proportionate share of office (cabinet portfolios) at time *t*.

To empirically assess this argument, we conducted a randomized survey experiment of Irish legislators. The results of the experiment provide some evidence that real-world legislators choose to allocate more cabinet seats to a party they expect to suffer disproportionate electoral losses from participating in the coalition. Providing respondents with information on electoral costs for a party increased the number of cabinet seats a legislator was willing to award to that party in return for joining the coalition.

A number of significant implications follow from our findings. Our research helps bridge the artificial divide between legislative studies (which stresses re-election as political elites' primary goal) and scholarship on party politics within the legislative arena, which has focused more on the search for government office and, through this, influence on public policy. Our

research illustrates how the anticipation of voters' reaction shapes parties' behavior in the legislative arena between elections.

Second, our argument has consequences for the broader question of who gets to govern in parliamentary democracies without a majority party. Portfolio allocation is a significant component of the government formation process, even if it has tended to be studied in isolation from the larger question of which parties choose to coalesce. The willingness of a *formateur* party to compensate for electoral costs, and the willingness of an electorally-vulnerable party to be compensated, likely shapes which government will form. Our perspective suggests that because parties take future electoral gains or losses into account, coalition formation should not be viewed as a zero-sum game. If a *formateur* party can choose between different coalition partners whose expectations of electoral costs differ, *formateur* may be more likely to select those junior parties that expect to be punished less harshly. In other words, parties with higher reservation values owing to higher electoral costs of joining the coalition make less attractive coalition partners, all else equal. In this respect, our model differs from the zero-sum logic of most quantitative portfolio allocation models. By extension, a *formateur* party may strive for coalitions with policy-seeking (rather then vote- or office-seeking) parties as junior partners - as these parties don't need, and therefore don't ask for, compensation for future vote losses. The ability of coalition theories to predict real world coalitions remains very limited, and our argument may provide valuable new insights into how coalition partners choose each other.

Finally, our argument has consequences for the debate on the portfolio allocation puzzle, and in particular the fact that smaller parties, rather than the party of the *formateur*, receives proportionately more cabinet seats. It has been suggested that small parties suffer most in the

electoral arena from governing (although the comparative veracity of this statement needs further empirical investigation). If true, then the cabinet bonus to smaller coalition parties could be caused by attempts to compensate electoral costs. The broader implication is that parties are indeed strategic in their portfolio allocation behavior.

Yet, a number of puzzles remain. For example, even without electoral losses being revealed, many Irish legislators award a greater than proportional number of cabinet seats to the junior coalition party. It may be, for example, that legislator' perceptions regarding *fairness* shape their allocation decision. A contamination effects, with the control group effectively pre-treated owing to their knowledge of electoral politics, may also explain the over-allocation. Second, we need to explore whether other mechanisms, such as policy compromise when bargaining over the coalition agreement, can be used to compensate electorally-vulnerable parties. In other words, the bargain to compensate future electoral losses could very well focus on policy rather than office. After all, parties will want to maximize the proportion of their party manifesto which gets incorporated into the coalition agreement. Compensation could also focus on the allocation of other, sub-cabinet offices, such as junior ministers, "mega-seats" within the legislature (such as committee chairs) and extra-legislative office prizes (such as appointment to state boards). Because individual cabinet ministers hold such significant agenda-setting and gatekeeping influence over their own portfolio, and because ministerial office is so prized by legislators, we suspect that cabinet portfolios may be a preferred compensation mechanism. Nevertheless, future research should explore all aspects of the coalition bargain from the perspective of our compensating votes for cabinet seats hypotheses. Finally, as we have already begun to do, it is worth exploring our arguments' scope conditions through cross-national

empirical analysis. We would expect to find that political parties bargaining over government formation and portfolio allocation take future election results into account, but that this pattern should be greatest in polities with "hyper accountability," that is to say, much harsher electoral punishment for some governing parties. This paper, we hope will motivate further theoretical and empirical work to explore the hypothesis that parties fearful of the electoral costs of participating in a coalition can be compensated by a disproportionate allocation of various policy and office payoffs during coalition bargaining.

Appendix: Survey Question on the Distribution of Cabinet Seats

Two political parties are negotiating to form a coalition government. Between them, they have 100 seats in Dáil Éireann. Party A has 80 TDs and Party B has 20 TDs.

The cabinet is to comprise 10 ministers.

How many cabinet seats should Party B receive?

○ Party B should receive 1 cabinet seat

○ Party B should receive 2 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 3 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 4 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 5 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 6 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 7 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 8 cabinet seats

○ Party B should receive 9 cabinet seats

Treatment Group A Vignette

If Party B enters the coalition, it can expect significant losses at the next general election, resulting in 5 of the 20 TDs from Party B losing their seat. Party A, in contrast, will lose no or few seats.

Treatment Group B Vignette

If Party B enters the coalition, it can expect significant losses at the next general election, resulting in 10 TDs from Party B losing their seat. Party A, in contrast, will lose no or few seats.

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