

Book review published in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71 (9): 1613-1615 – DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2019.1674530

**Chaisty, Paul, Cheeseman, Nic & Power, Timothy J. *Coalitional Presidentialism in Comparative Perspective. Minority Presidents in Multiparty Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, xiii + 267pp. £60.00 h/b.**

Philipp Köker \*

The phenomenon of “coalitional presidentialism”, the strategic efforts of directly elected presidents without a parliamentary majority to build and maintain alliances in fragmented legislatures, has been known to and analysed by students of Latin American politics for the last three decades. However, as the number of directly elected presidents grows and levels of legislative fragmentation increase around the world, more and more executive presidents find themselves in a situation where they need to build coalitions beyond their own party to implement policy programmes. Taking this trend as the starting point, this insightful co-authored volume by Paul Chaisty, Nic Cheeseman, and Timothy J. Power presents the first cross-regional analysis of coalitional presidentialism to date. Focussing on a ‘toolbox’ of five key presidential powers, the authors examine how presidents in nine democratising and hybrid regimes in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and post-Soviet Eurasia employ different strategies to build and manage legislative floor coalitions.

The book consists of ten chapters, including a substantive introduction and conclusion, and is supplemented by a brief methodological appendix. The first chapter

---

\* Email: [p.koeker@ipw.uni-hannover.de](mailto:p.koeker@ipw.uni-hannover.de)

situates the book and its subject matter in a wider empirical and theoretical context, showing among others the rise in minority presidents around the world and providing a concise summary of the extant literature on coalitional presidentialism. The second chapter subsequently introduces the nine countries chosen for analysis – Benin, Kenya, Malawi (sub-Saharan Africa), Brazil, Chile, Ecuador (Latin America), Armenia, Russia, Ukraine (post-Soviet Eurasia) – and discusses the advantages and challenges of such cross-regional comparison. The third chapter rounds off this introductory part by focussing on the formation of coalitions in presidential systems. In particular, the authors show that the formation and purpose of coalitions in these systems differs fundamentally from parliamentary regimes, and argue that the size, power balance, and heterogeneity of Day One coalitions (i.e. those formed at the beginning of a presidential or legislative term) determine the subsequent costs of coalition management for the president.

The fourth chapter then presents the theoretical core of the book and focusses specifically on presidents' continuous *management* of multi-party coalitions in the legislature. Conceptualising minority presidents as policy-motivated actors, the authors convincingly argue that presidents use a 'toolbox' of five key powers that any analysis of coalitional presidentialism must consider – (1) legislative powers, (2) power over the cabinet, (3) partisan powers, (4) budgetary authority, and (5) the ability to engage in exchange of favours. Depending on the specific incentive structures provided by the political system, coalition characteristics, and exogenous factors, presidents are expected choose the most cost-effective option to manage their coalitions. Thereby, the argument is made particularly compelling by the assumption of bounded rationality of presidents, which arguably provides a much better approximation of political realities in

the countries studied than any approach assuming fully rational behaviour under full information.

The subsequent five chapters analyse each of the five tools in turn, first discussing the factors affecting the costs of their use and then presenting them ‘at work’ through case studies of two to four selected episodes of minority presidentialism. Thereby, the analysis draws not only on ample legislative data, but also on insights from semi-structured interviews and surveys of over 370 MPs. The latter present a particular strength of the study as they are used to illustrate individual instances (or particular features) of coalition management by minority presidents as well as to test the validity of findings at the end of each chapter. Finally, the last chapter summarises the main findings and provides a highly useful overview of the different ways president can use the tools at their disposal, highlighting in particular how different tools can be employed achieve the same objective.

The authors clearly succeed in their declared goal “to shed light on the strategies and mechanisms used by minority presidents to cultivate cross-party support in fragmented legislatures” (p.3). Written by experts on both presidentialism and the regions in question, their descriptive-analytical approach innovatively blends a well-crafted theoretical framework with rich qualitative insights. Nevertheless, this is also where two smaller points of criticism emerge. First, it is not always clear whether the snippets from interviews with MPs and other empirical examples that accompany the theoretical considerations in chapters five to nine, respectively, merely illustrate or actually inform the formulation of theory. In contrast, several case studies of presidential tools “at work” could have benefitted from more explicit references to the theoretical concepts discussed earlier, as it is sometimes difficult to discern the relative importance of the

many details provided. Second, the selection of episodes for case studies in the same chapters is only very briefly justified and not explicitly placed into a wider (national or regional) context beyond the more general information contained in chapters two and three. Thus, the representativeness of the variations in presidential strategies examined cannot always be easily ascertained. Furthermore, the majority of case studies showcase only the successful use of tools by minority presidents. While the analysis includes some negative examples (and case studies in chapter seven only focus on cases where presidents' strategies misfired), introducing more contrasting cases arguably would have enhanced the analysis and provided an even stronger foundation for the authors' findings.

In summary, the book presents a major leap forward in research on coalitional presidentialism and comparative studies of presidential politics alike. It presents an excellent and insightful analysis based on an unrivalled breadth and depth of quantitative and qualitative data (available to other scholars through the UK Data Service). Given recent election results in several of the countries covered by this volume, it is clear that coalitional presidentialism is here to stay. As the first cross-regional analysis of coalitional presidentialism to date this book will hence undoubtedly serve as inspiration and benchmark for future studies of this intriguing phenomenon.

**PHILIPP KÖKER**, Department of Political Science, Leibniz University Hannover, Schneiderberg 50, 30167 Hannover, Germany. Email: [p.koeker@ipw.uni-hannover.de](mailto:p.koeker@ipw.uni-hannover.de)  
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2529-6947>