Making and Breaking Governments offers a theoretical argument about how parliamentary democracy works. The heart of a parliamentary regime is the process by which the elected representatives choose a government, consisting of a cabinet and ministers, to serve as the executive arm of the regime. Strategic interaction among parliamentary parties creates new governments and either maintains them in office or, after a resignation or vote of no confidence, replaces them with some alternative government. The authors formulate a theoretical model of this strategic interaction, derive consequences, formulate empirical hypotheses on the basis of these, and test the hypotheses with data drawn from the postwar European experience with parliamentary democracy.
MAKING AND BREAKING GOVERNMENTS
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INSTITUTIONS AND DECISIONS

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The Cambridge series on the Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions is built around attempts to answer two central questions: How do institutions evolve in response to individual incentives, strategies, and choices, and how do institutions affect the performance of political and economic systems? The scope of the series is comparative and historical rather than international or specifically American, and the focus is positive rather than normative.

Laver and Shepsle's theoretically innovative book pushes the study of government formation a big step forward. Rather than concentrating on the equilibrium collective policy that emerges from the balance and distribution of party strengths in the parliament, they treat governments as collections of ministers with individual jurisdictions and policy as a bundle of individual party-prefereed policies, depending on which party receives which portfolio. Jurisdiction is the key concept, in their view. It makes a party's promises credible to its electors, for it can carry them out (only) if it receives the relevant ministry. At the same time portfolio allocation monitors party behavior, for the party receiving a portfolio has no excuse for not carrying out its preferred policy.

Their portfolio-based model of government formation is based on constitutional features carefully documented in a massive 14-country study, published in the companion volume Cabinet Ministers and Parliamentary Government. The model bases its predictions on a sequence of proposals from an historically determined status quo. Bargaining takes place among rationally foresighted policy-motivated parties, each with an explicit veto over every cabinet in which it could participate, in a lattice of feasible governments. Laver and Shepsle's predicted importance for "strong" parties opens up significant possibilities for comparative empirical evaluations of theirs and other contending models.

Moreover, in their model, institutions limit the number of enforceable policy outcomes, providing the possibility of equilibrium results for the
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Government formation game where cycling would otherwise be inherent. Indeed, many other features of their model, including indivisible policies, explicit sequences, and the absence of exogenous enforcement, combined with rationally foresighted actors, also mark the work as a significant advance in the creation of theories about institutions as political solutions in situations involving politically costly transactions.
Acknowledgments

This project began in 1988 at Harvard University, where one of us (Shepsle) was a member of the faculty of the Department of Government and the other (Laver) was a visitor for the 1988–1989 academic year (on leave from University College, Galway). We taught together, played squash together, and even, from time to time, discussed research ideas together. We were especially fascinated by the fact that coalition theory—one of Laver’s specialties—had lost its head of steam in American modeling circles, whereas the formal study of institutions—one of Shepsle’s fields of concentration—had never really acquired a head of steam on the other side of the Atlantic. We believed that this confluence of possibilities, namely, the application of American-style institutional models to European-style coalition and governance arrangements, constituted a major opportunity, one that we investigated for the rest of that academic year. During this very fertile period, we wrote two articles (Laver and Shepsle, 1990a, 1990b) and managed to persuade the National Science Foundation to support further work (SES-8914294). At the very outset, then, we incurred a debt to University College, Galway, Harvard University, and the U.S. National Science Foundation for research leaves and financial support for which we are forever grateful.

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Michael Laver
Dalkey, Ireland

Kenneth A. Shepsle
Wellesley, Massachusetts
The political process that dominates our discussion in the rest of this book involves a set of politicians in a parliamentary democracy, each motivated to achieve some objective or another, competing and cooperating among themselves to form a government. The hopes and fears, aims and aspirations of each politician are fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent depending on the outcome of this process.

Before we can develop any systematic analysis of this crucial aspect of democratic politics, we must be explicit about our assumptions. In this chapter, therefore, we elaborate assumptions on a range of matters relevant to the making and breaking of governments in parliamentary democracies. These include the aims, aspirations, and rationality of key actors; the institutional process by which a government is formed; the manner in which actors forecast the likely consequences of having different governments in power; and collective decision making both between and within parties. We begin with perhaps the most fundamental assumptions of all, which have to do with the hopes and fears of politicians and the rational calculus that they use to make decisions.

**THE MOTIVATIONS OF POLITICIANS**

Those writing on the politics of government formation tend to assume one of two things about the fundamental motivations of politicians involved in political bargaining. Some assume that politicians are concerned above all else to get into office — and that they will say and do whatever is necessary to achieve this. In their search for power, politicians may make policy promises either to each other or to the electorate but, on this interpretation, such policies are promoted for purely instrumental

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1 For a review of writings on the motivations of politicians engaged in government formation, see Laver and Schofield (1990: chap. 3).
Social context of government formation

reasons. If the chances of getting into power are enhanced by changing policies, then an “office-seeking” politician will see no cost in changing.

Nonetheless, to assume that a politician is an office seeker is not necessarily to imply that he or she will change policies just to suit the time of day. The need to maintain long-term credibility, both with fellow politicians and with voters, may well provide politicians with incentives to stick with a policy that in the short term has come to look like a liability. Thus even office-seeking politicians may promote distinctive policies, and the need to maintain subsequent credibility may ensure that these policies are quite stable. Indeed, once office-seeking politicians have promoted a particular policy, a strong need for credibility may even result in them behaving just as if they were sincerely trying to achieve the policy in question.

Perhaps the most influential exponent of the office-seeking assumption about the motivations of politicians has been Anthony Downs, whose position is summed up in his famous statement that “parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies” (Downs, 1957: 28). Much of what Downs has subsequently become famous for is concerned with policy competition between parties. As his basic motivational assumption shows, however, the fundamental driving force behind such competition is the desire to get into office; policy advocacy for Downs is purely instrumental. Although Downs does have a brief discussion of multiparty politics, he was writing for the most part with a two-party system in mind. For him, “winning” an election automatically implies going into office and coalition building plays no part in government formation. He also assumed that parties behave as if they are unitary actors.

An alternative influential assumption about the fundamental motivation of key political actors is that they are intrinsically concerned above all else with public policy. De Swaan (1973: 88), for example, assumed the “considerations of policy are foremost in the minds of the actors . . . the parliamentary game is, in fact, about the determination of major government policy.” This is not, of course, to deny that it may be necessary to get into power in order to enact policy. Getting into power involves both making promises to the electorate and, in coalition systems, making deals with fellow politicians. Both in elections and in government formation, it may be necessary for a party to make compromises—changing ideal policies in order to make them more acceptable to some group or another. Just as office-seeking politicians may stick to certain policies that they don’t actually care about, policy-seeking politicians may change policies that they do care about. A policy-seeking politician trying to get into power in order to implement certain ideals may even behave as if he or she is a pure office seeker.
The context

What all of this implies is that the “big” political game—an indefinite sequence of elections and government formations—may force office-seeking and policy-seeking politicians, who seem on the face of things to be so different, to behave in quite similar ways. Most of the pressure to do this, however, comes from part of the political process that we do not consider in this book—the interaction between politicians and voters at election time. For this reason we do not need to commit ourselves here to assuming that the politicians we are modeling are either intrinsically or instrumentally concerned with promoting particular policies.

What we do assume is that, when politicians bargain with each other in an attempt to form a government, they behave “as if” they are committed firmly to implementing their public policy positions, should they be able to do so. We remain silent on whether this is because politicians really do want to implement their published policies, or because they feel bound to do so by the need to retain credibility in the wider political game. The assumption that politicians, if given the chance, will attempt to implement the policies with which they are associated is fundamental to our approach, however. For us, the implementation of public policy is at the heart of the government formation process.

RATIONAL FORESIGHT AND PERFECT INFORMATION

In addition to making assumptions about what motivates politicians, we must also make assumptions about how, given these motivations, they decide what to do. In common with a large number of other accounts of political competition, we assume here that politicians are rational actors in the sense that they act within the best of their capacities to fulfill their fundamental aims and aspirations. This should not be taken to imply that we assume politicians approach each decision with a computer at the ready, self-consciously determined to calculate all the angles. But it does assume that politicians make important political decisions in accordance with their own best interests. In effect we assume that they operate, quite possibly unconsciously, as if they were continuously performing quite sophisticated calculations designed to help them fulfill their basic objectives.

The continuous background of cost–benefit calculation that we assume to inform the strategic decision making of politicians is in many ways analogous to the continuous process of geometric calculation, most of it unconscious, that must inform physical decisions by people who are able to do no more than walk around their own homes without continuously crashing into things, or who can cross a busy road without being knocked over. These calculations, unconsciously performed by most of us effortlessly in real time, are far beyond our capacity to perform self-consciously in any but the most cumbersome manner. At the same time,
however, our knowledge of geometry allows an analyst explicitly, comprehensively, and realistically to model the decisions involved.

Similarly, we need not assume that rational politicians are continuously performing explicit cost–benefit calculations when they make strategic decisions designed to fulfill their basic objectives. What we do assume is that, just as people cross a crowded room as if they are performing a complex series of interlocking geometric calculations, politicians make strategic decisions as if they have the ability to perform a continuous cost–benefit calculus. And it is this calculus that we model.

An essential part of the process of making effective strategic decisions is looking ahead. Each course of action chosen leads to another set of decisions and, at any particular time, each decision maker stands at a node on a complex decision tree such as that shown in Figure 2.1.² For a person to get from A, where they are now, to B, where they want to be, typically involves decisions arising in a number of distinct stages. If nobody else is involved, then these decisions may all be taken by the same person. Getting from A to B in Figure 2.1 involves choosing option r over option q at Stage 1, option s over option t at Stage 2, option v over option u at Stage 3, option w over option x at Stage 4, and option z over option y

²Another way of thinking of Figure 2.1 is as the representation of an extensive form game generated by the decision process being modeled.
The context

at Stage 5. In this way an actor navigates her way toward her objective across a decision-making landscape that may be physical, social, or psychological. Knowing an actor’s preference for B over any other outcome and assuming her to be rational, one can predict her choice at any stage in the decision process. In this sense the outcome of the entire process is a foregone conclusion.

Most political decisions, of course, involve interdependent choices – outcomes depend on a sequence of choices made by a number of actors whose fates are intertwined with one another. Thus, for example, the decision tree in Figure 2.1 may involve two actors who make their choices in sequence. They could, for example, be two presidential candidates acting and reacting to each other during an election campaign. Actor 1 decides between q and r at Stage 1. Actor 2 decides between s and t at Stage 2, if Actor 1 has already chosen option r, and between other options if Actor 1 chose option q. If Actor 2 chose option s at Stage 2, then Actor 1 may choose between options u and v at Stage 3, otherwise she must choose between other options, and so on.

If the preferences of the various actors over the possible final outcomes are well known, then it is once more possible to predict the course of their interaction quite straightforwardly. This is done by working backward from each potential final outcome. To continue with the example in Figure 2.1, it will be known that, at Stage 5, if the game is at the node leading to outcome B, then Actor 1 will choose option z over option y, yielding her most-preferred outcome. Since this is the final move in the game, she will surely make such a choice if she is rational. Similarly, it is possible to predict with certainty the choice of Actor 1 at every one of the other decision nodes that might be reached in the final stage of the decision process. In effect, we can replace each decision node at Stage 5 with the outcome we surely know will be chosen by the actor with the power to do so. We can think of these outcomes as the “strategic equivalents” of the decision nodes we know will lead to them.

Having replaced every final decision node with its strategic equivalent and using the same logic, we can now predict which option Actor 2 will choose at each of the decision nodes in Stage 4 of the process. This is because, knowing what will happen at Stage 5, we know the particular final outcome generated by any choice Actor 2 makes at Stage 4. Knowing Actor 2’s preferences over these outcomes, we can predict which option she would choose if she were to find herself at any of the Stage 4 decision nodes. We can therefore replace each of these decision nodes with its strategic equivalent.

In this way, we work back up the decision tree, at each stage replacing decision nodes with their strategic equivalents. Once we have determined the strategic equivalent of the very first decision node, we have in effect
en

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forecast the entire course of the game and predicted the final outcome. If the strategic equivalent of being at the first decision node of the game in Figure 2.1 is outcome B, for example, then the strategic equivalent of the entire decision process is B.

Another way of putting this is that, given sufficiently rich knowledge, everyone will have rational foresight concerning the outcome of this decision process, if it is embarked upon. One important implication of this is that, since everyone can easily forecast this outcome, it is not necessary for the actors actually to work their way through the decision process in order to find out what the outcome will be. In a world of perfect and complete information, once the actors are at A, they might as well be at B.

For the same reason it is not necessary for two chess players actually to play a particular game out to a checkmate, once both recognize that this is the inevitable outcome. Once it is clear in the final move in the game that Cassie will checkmate Seth, then Seth will resign before this. Once it is clear that Seth can do nothing to avoid allowing Cassie into this desirable penultimate position, he will resign. Once it is clear that Cassie can make an antepenultimate move that puts Seth in this vulnerable position, then he will resign. Once it is clear that Seth cannot make a move that prevents Cassie’s antepenultimate strategic stroke, Seth resigns. In short, the players will work back up the game tree from the inevitable ending and anticipate it. As soon as the ending can be seen as inevitable – and the better the players, the further in advance this can be seen – the ending is assumed and the losing player resigns.

It should be clear that the logic of these examples assumes that each actor has perfect information about all aspects of the decision process, and complete information about the preferences of other actors. In the arguments that follow, we do for the most part assume that the rules of the government formation process and the preferences, expressed as policy positions, of all relevant actors are common knowledge in this sense. The knowledge allows each actor to forecast the choice of every relevant decision maker at each stage in the government formation process.

Obviously, the assumption that all actors have perfect and complete information about both the rules of the government formation process and the preferences of all other relevant actors can never be realized in practice. The big wide world is much messier than this, and bargaining over the formation of real governments will in practice be much more fluid than we assume. The same problem does of course apply to any

3However, it is important to bear in mind, as we saw in the previous section, that these policies do not necessarily represent sincere preferences, but may represent published positions from which parties, for reasons originating outside the government formation process, are unwilling to diverge.
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carefully specified assumption that we or anybody else might care to make about how politicians interact, and it is not an argument for not making assumptions or constructing models of the world. Notwithstanding this, the assumption that all actors’ policy positions are common knowledge is probably more realistic in a model of government formation than it is in models of many other political processes. Government formation, after all, is a game played by a very limited number of elite actors who have typically interacted over a long period and therefore know each other rather well. The assumption is useful analytically because it allows us to develop a relatively parsimonious model of government formation.

Politics within Parties

In all parliamentary democracies, politicians belong to political parties that are more or less disciplined, in the sense that most members, for the most part, follow party directives on both policy and strategy. It has thus been quite common for people writing about the politics of government formation to treat political parties as if they were unitary actors. Indeed it is common in this literature for references to political parties to be heavily anthropomorphic – and in particular to treat each party as if it thinks with a single mind.

Yet parties can and do both split and fuse. It is also quite clear that vigorous and sometimes bitter debate about both policy and strategy does go on inside political parties. Internal party turmoil, such as that which resulted in the replacement of Margaret Thatcher as British Conservative leader by John Major, can lead to dramatic changes at the governmental level. So are we justified in treating parties as unitary actors when we model the making and breaking of governments?

There are sound theoretical reasons to suppose that political parties in parliamentary democracies will behave in a disciplined manner. The rationale is straightforward: If individual party politicians were permitted to pursue their own private desires at every opportunity, then their party’s reputation in the wider political process would constantly be put at risk. People would not know what the party stood for, so that voters, interest groups, and others who might see the party as acting on their behalf would have nothing to rely on. As a consequence, the party would be severely hampered in its ability to attract support. Thus, the ultimate enforcers of party discipline are voters who want to know what they are voting for at election time, and who will not vote for parties if they cannot be confident that party politicians will stick to the party line after the election is over.

Empirically, the unitary actor assumption has been extensively re-
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viewed, from the perspective of government formation, by Laver and Schofield (1990: chap. 2, app. A.). Their conclusions on the matter are based primarily on the empirical observation that it is almost always the case that parties both enter and leave cabinet coalitions as unified blocs – almost never does only part of a party enter or leave a cabinet. They take this to imply that, for the purpose of analyzing cabinet formation and maintenance over a reasonably short time scale, nearly all Western European political parties can be treated as if they are unitary actors (Laver and Schofield 1990: 28).

This evidence has recently been supplemented by a series of country studies collected by Laver and Shepsle (1994). Individual authors were not asked explicitly to comment on the unitary actor assumption. Nonetheless, many were at pains to point out that strong party discipline in the parliamentary democracies with which they were concerned means that individual cabinet members, as well as backbenchers, are not able to act independently of their party organizations. Most described politicians as agents of their party, with politicians from the same party forecast to behave in more or less the same ways when placed in the same situations. Almost none was prepared to accept that it might make a difference which politician from a given party filled a particular role. Obviously, this line of argument provides further strong support for the assumption that political parties can be treated as unitary actors, as least as far as cabinet politics are concerned.

Taking all of this into account, therefore, we assume for the bulk of the argument that follows that individual politicians behave as perfect agents of their party. Thus, while we will shortly assume that cabinet ministers have discretion within their jurisdictions, we also assume that they exercise this discretion on behalf of their party, rather than “against” their party. For the most part, this means that we treat parties as if they are unitary actors. In Chapter 12, however, we do consider intraparty politics, and explore the internal processes that might lead a party to choose one strategy rather than another in the government formation process.

PARTY POLICY

One of the most significant implications of the assumption that politicians behave as perfect agents of their parties is that each party can be treated as if it has a unique ideal policy position. As we have already seen, this ideal position may reflect the intrinsic tastes of a policy-seeking party. Alternatively, it may reflect a published position that an office-seeking party has strong incentives – derived from the wider political game – to implement if given the chance. For our purposes, what is important is that a party’s ideal policy is the policy that the party is forecast to imple-
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ment if given the opportunity to do so. Note that an ideal policy position in these terms is a realistic policy. It is not the policy that the party would like to see implemented in a perfect world, but rather the policy that the party would implement in the real world in which it finds itself.

It has become conventional in recent years to describe the policy positions of political actors in terms of a set of key dimensions of policy. For many people, the most familiar of these is the left–right dimension of socioeconomic policy. Those who use this dimension in effect assume a correlation between party positions on economic issues such as public spending and on social issues such as capital punishment or abortion. The left–right dimension can then be used to describe a typical European party system by placing a communist or left socialist party at the left-hand end, followed by a socialist or social democratic party, perhaps by an agrarian or center party, a Christian democratic party, a secular conservative party, and possibly a neofascist party on the extreme right. The use of a single dimension of policy to describe a party system is simple and intuitive, has a tradition stretching back at least to the French Revolution, and of course loses a lot of detailed information about the party system. Using a larger number of independent dimensions of policy — separating economic and social policy, for example — enables richer descriptions of party politics, but can greatly increase analytical complexity.

This leaves us with some extremely difficult questions to answer. How many independent dimensions of policy should we use to describe adequately the ideal policy position of a given political party? Taking all parties in a given system together, how many dimensions of policy do we need for an adequate description of party competition? These are deep issues that we cannot explore fully here (for some thoughts on the matter, see Laver and Hunt, 1992). Nonetheless, since it is of the essence of our approach that party competition and government behavior are described in terms of positions on key policy dimensions, we cannot ignore them completely. The basic problem is one of deciding upon how to choose the most appropriate dimensionality of the policy space we use to describe party competition, in the knowledge that the choice of different dimensionality can yield quite different descriptions. In concrete terms, how do we decide whether the most appropriate description of party competition in Germany, say, is in terms of one, two, three, five, ten, or even fifty key dimensions of policy?

Obviously, depending upon the level of detail we are prepared to use in collecting information on policy positions, any number of independent dimensions of policy could be detected. For example, one research project

4 For example, a liberal party may now be placed toward the right of an economic policy dimension and toward the left of a social policy dimension.
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has estimated party positions by content analyzing party election manifestos for a range of European party systems on a total of 54 policy dimensions. Various techniques of dimensional analysis, such as factor analysis or multidimensional scaling, were used to collapse this large number of policy dimensions into a smaller number of underlying dimensions. Ultimately, all of these data were also used to estimate positions on a single left–right dimension. Thus the same dataset could in this case be used to generate anything from a 1-dimensional to a 54-dimensional representation of policies in a given party system (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl, 1987). Furthermore, there is no single “correct” representation. Just as there is no map of a given piece of territory that is perfect for every possible purpose – we need one map for locating mountain ranges or oceans and another for finding a needle in a haystack – there is no unambiguously correct dimensionality for the policy space we use to describe party competition. Different applications call for different levels of detail in our description.

At the same time, party positions on sets of policy dimensions can be highly correlated with one another. Thus it may well be the case that party positions on the public sector borrowing dimension, for example, can be very accurately predicted from their positions on the personal taxation and/or inflation dimensions. Positions on abortion might well be highly correlated with those on divorce, and so on. This implies that a reasonably parsimonious and intuitive description of party policy positions can be given in terms of a limited number of independent underlying dimensions of policy, a matter that we consider in more detail in Chapter 11. If this is true, almost any new salient policy area that we might think of will generate a set of party positions that is highly correlated with one or more of the underlying policy dimensions. The problem now becomes one of estimating the number of underlying policy dimensions necessary to generate party positions on any salient issue in party competition.

Estimating the dimensionality of a policy space in these terms is still not a straightforward task, once it is accepted that published policy positions may in some sense be as much a product of party competition as an exogenous input to it. Normal techniques of dimensional analysis all assume that, if positions on two dimensions are perfectly correlated, then there is a single dimension underlying them both. But in the present context it may equally be the case that the correlated party positions are a strategic response to a particular circumstance of party competition. Parties could in principle choose positions on the two dimensions quite independently; in a particular set of circumstances they do not. Thus, is there one underlying dimension, or two?

We offer no magic formula for determining the most appropriate dimensionality of any given representation of party competition. We have
The context

raised the issue in the preceding discussion, however, to highlight the fact that the choice of any given spatial representation of a particular party system is no more than one among many that could have been chosen. What we offer in the following chapters, therefore, is a set of tools that can be applied to a particular spatial representation of party competition that the analyst feels happy with for reasons that are quite outside our terms of reference. We have nothing to say about which particular spatial representation might be appropriate. But we must very firmly draw attention to the fact that the choice of one spatial representation over another has fundamental consequences for the ensuing analysis. This implies that, for obvious reasons, the analyst should be very sure that he or she feels comfortable that the spatial representation to be used is valid before the analysis is commenced — and should resist all temptations to fiddle with the space once the analysis is under way.

As we shall see when we come in subsequent chapters actually to apply our model to particular real-world cases, however, settling upon a particular set of policy dimensions on which to base an analysis of government formation is not the open-ended problem that it might appear to be when considering the problem in purely abstract terms. One of the interesting features of our approach is that we come to most real-world cases with much of the dimensional analysis already done for us by the political system itself. This is because particular policy dimensions have been formally identified as being salient by virtue of having been designated as part of the official jurisdiction of a cabinet ministry. Indeed the formal determination of the policy responsibilities of particular cabinet portfolios, and hence the identification of the policy dimensions that are “in play,” is something that we can typically take as given, even if somewhat fuzzy around the edges, at the beginning of the government formation process.5

THE GOVERNMENT

The government as the cabinet

People living in parliamentary democracies typically think of “the government” of their country in terms of the cabinet. Of the many arms of government — the civil service, the judiciary, publicly owned corporations, and the various tiers of local administration, for example — it is the

5Obviously, the allocation of policy dimensions to the jurisdiction of different cabinet portfolios may change as a result of the government formation process, a possibility to which we return in Chapter 12. Nonetheless, the set of portfolios that characterizes the outgoing government — the status quo in the government formation process — can be taken as identifying, almost in the manner of a giant living factor analysis, a particular set of policy dimensions as being salient.
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cabinet that symbolizes the apex of political responsibility. It is the cabinet that is expected to guide affairs of state by making and overseeing the implementation of policy on important issues. It is the cabinet that is expected to react to and deal with major crises and emergencies. And, perhaps most significantly of all, it is the cabinet whose survival is on the line at election times. If voters in parliamentary democracies feel that they have any control over their political destinies, it is because they can pass judgment on the cabinet, albeit indirectly, when they vote in national elections. For many people, the terms cabinet and government are more or less synonymous. Although many parliamentary democracies do not explicitly use the term cabinet, all have a functional equivalent, whether it is called a council of ministers, an executive council, or whatever.

The typical process of forming a government in a parliamentary democracy, to which we will return in more detail, involves the selection of a prime minister, who must win a majority vote (actual or implicit) in the legislature before he or she can take office. The prime minister then nominates a cabinet of ministers, which must also be capable of winning a majority vote (actual or implicit) in the legislature. The cabinet is free to set policy on any matter, subject only to the law of the land and to the constraint that it can be dismissed on the basis of a majority vote in the legislature. In practice, as we might expect, a rational anticipation of defeat may lead a cabinet to resign in advance of losing such a vote. In this way the cabinet is held collectively responsible for government policy decisions.

In parliamentary democracies, therefore, changes in government depend on changes in the cabinet generated by changes in the balance of forces in the legislature. It is by having an effect on the balance of forces in the legislature when voting at election time that voters in parliamentary democracies can have some control over affairs of state. The fact that many voters are in effect voting for potential governments rather than for individual candidates has profound effects upon party competition, many of which are far beyond our remit here. One, at least, is very important for the government formation process, however. If voters vote for parties and not candidates, then the party label is a very valuable commodity – and being denied the party label is a very serious sanction. This sanction is a powerful weapon in the hands of the party organization, and the threat of it reduces the incentives of individual legislators to defy their party line. This in turn contributes greatly to party discipline, and the consequent ability of parties to function as if they were unitary actors. Closing the circle, it is because parties are disciplined that it makes sense for voters to vote for them at election time, since a vote for a party has some foreseeable consequence on the balance of forces in the legislature that decides the fate of the incumbent government. The effective opera-
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tion of parliamentary democracy, in short, both depends upon and en-
courages disciplined behavior by political parties in the government for-
mination process. And the crux of that process is voting by legislators on
the future of the cabinet.

Given all of this, we assume in what follows that the government in the
political process we model can be taken to be the cabinet, and that
membership of the government is unambiguously defined in terms of
membership of the cabinet. This explicitly excludes from our notion of
government membership legislative actors who support the government
in votes of confidence, but who are not members of the cabinet. In other
words, we make a clear distinction between a government as such and its
legislative support coalition. It is this distinction that allows for the
possibility of "minority" governments, comprising cabinets whose parlia-
mentary parties do not between them control a majority of legislative
seats. Despite this, a minority government must still command majority
support in the legislature; otherwise it will be defeated and replaced, a
matter to which we return in Chapter 12.

The departmental structure of government decision making

Although the cabinet is in theory responsible collectively for taking deci-
sions on all significant affairs of state, the tasks involved in this are simply
too massive for most government decisions in practice to be taken in
cabinet. As well as being a member of the cabinet, each cabinet minister is
typically the political head of a major government department, staffed for
the most part by career civil servants. Each government department has
formal jurisdiction – determined by the constitution, by law, or by
precedent – over a particular set of policy areas.

It is clear that the pressure of work on cabinet ministers and senior
civil servants is immense. Each minister faces a very heavy administrative
workload, over and above the busy schedule of a full-time politician. The
resources available to ministers to allow them to discharge their responsi-
bilities are organized very much along departmental lines. Each cabinet
minister can call on a considerable pool of expertise in his or her own
department, expertise that is professionally focused in a very intense
manner on the policy concerns of the department. While cabinet minis-

6As we have seen in Chapter 1, for example, some analysts (e.g., Baron, 1991)
include as part of the government all parties who vote for it in a confidence vote. We
depart from this view.

7Although we can reject out of hand the Yes, Minister view of civil service domina-
tion of ministers, a view rejected by all country specialists in Laver and Shepsle (1994),
it does need to be said that ministers need to be vigilant in dealings with their civil
servants. This is for all the usual reasons concerning the possibility that civil servants
have their own political agendas.
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ters thereby have some hope of being able to master the affairs of their own departments, most will have very little of the time and energy needed to develop policy proposals in areas outside their jurisdiction. Not only this, but the departmental structure of the civil service means that ministers can call on very little expertise in policy areas that lie within the jurisdiction of some other department. Blondel and Müller-Rommel (1993: 13) sum up these points very elegantly:

Above all, the behavior of ministers is also likely to be affected by the belief that they will have a better chance of seeing their proposals adopted by the cabinet if they concentrate on the affairs of their department; this belief seems rather widespread. On the one hand, ministers are more likely to be left alone if they do not discuss, criticize or raise points about matters that concern other departments. On the other, even if they are or want to be “generalists,” ministers are close to their departments; they are in their office throughout their working day and are members of the cabinet only episodically. It is therefore the department rather than the cabinet that is likely to be their main reference point.

All of this obviously imparts a very strongly departmental character to government decision making – government departments are the only organizations with the resources to generate fully developed policy proposals and the expertise to implement and monitor any proposal that might be selected. This pattern may well have been intensified by the increasing tendency for cabinet discussions to be extensively prepared in committees. Thiebault (1993: 96), for example, argues that “committees can be instruments legitimizing the autonomy of individual ministerial departments.”

Each department has jurisdiction over a set of policy dimensions. We say that the jurisdiction is simple if it can be represented by a single dimension of policy. Bearing in mind our earlier discussion of the dimensionality of policy spaces, we might also think of a jurisdiction as being simple if it comprises a number of policy dimensions, but each party’s position on each of these dimensions can be predicted from its position on any other. In that case we can proceed as if they are in fact a single dimension. We say that a jurisdiction is complex if it comprises more than one independent policy dimension. A department of foreign affairs, for example, may have jurisdiction over policy in relation to the European Community and policy in relation to the United States. It is possible to find parties that are pro-EC and pro-U.S., whereas others are anti-EC and pro-U.S., so that positions on one dimension cannot be predicted from positions on another. In this event the foreign policy jurisdiction will be complex. As we shall see in Chapter 11, the possibility of complex jurisdictions makes a considerable difference to our analysis of the government formation process.

The departmental structure of government decision making is a vital
part of our model of politics in parliamentary democracies. It implies that
government decision making is broken up into a series of component
parts relating to particular policy areas, rather than ranging wild and free
over the whole political domain. The structure that the departmental
nature of cabinet life brings to government decisions creates a situation in
which cabinet decision making is far less chaotic than would otherwise be
the case. In this sense, government departments bring the same structure
to decision making in parliamentary democracies that congressional com-
mittees bring to decision making in the United States (Shepsle, 1979).

Ministerial discretion

Given the intense pressure of work and lack of access to civil service
specialists in other departments, it seems unlikely that cabinet ministers
will be able successfully to poke their noses very deeply into the jurisdic-
tions of their cabinet colleagues. This implies that members of the cabinet
will have only very limited ability to shape the substance of policy emanat-
ing from the department of a ministerial colleague, an assumption that
has received empirical support from a number of country specialists (La-
ver and Shepsle, 1994; see also Blondel and Müller-Rommel, 1993: 2;
Thiebault, 1993: 95). We therefore assume in what follows that each
minister has considerable discretion to act, in his or her own department,
independently of other members of the cabinet. A minister may be con-
strained by any number of extracabinet institutions — the most consequen-
tial of which is his or her own party — but these may be taken as exoge-
nous to cabinet decision making (and, often, more or less fixed for a
government’s life).

This discretion is sustained, principally but not exclusively, by the
control over the policy agenda that each minister exercises in his or her
own departmental jurisdiction. There seems to be common agreement
among country specialists that it is difficult if not impossible for ministers
to defy explicit decisions taken by the cabinet (Laver and Shepsle, 1994).
Ministerial discretion thus results from the ability of a minister to use his
or her position as the head of a major government department to do one
or more of three things. The first is to act on matters that are not decided
by the cabinet. The second is to influence which matters come to the
cabinet for decision and which do not. The third is to affect the substance
of specific proposals on those matters within his or her jurisdiction which
do come to the cabinet for decision.

In most countries, there are either rules or strong conventions that
determine which matters must be brought to cabinet, while the prime
minister typically retains firm control over the cabinet agenda, taken as a
whole (Burch, 1993: 112–113). The ability of individual ministers to
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exercise discretion over government decision making, therefore, derives from their ability to shape the substance of those proposals that do find their way onto the agenda. The prime minister can only fashion a cabinet agenda from the substantive raw material that he or she is presented with. This raw material is generated for the most part by the cabinet members with jurisdiction over the policy area in question.

Ministerial discretion, in short, results from the minister's ability to shape the agenda of collective cabinet decisions rather than to determine cabinet decisions once the agenda had been set. This in turn implies that removing the incumbent minister and putting someone with different policy preferences in charge of the department affects the shape of proposals on the cabinet agenda and, hence, the substance of eventual government policy in the jurisdiction concerned.

In the discussion to follow, we take two bites at the role of ministerial discretion in the making and breaking of governments. For most of the book we consider parties to be unitary actors and thus treat cabinet ministers as perfect agents of their parties. Thus, when we refer to ministerial discretion in this context, we are talking about a minister using discretion on behalf of his or her party vis-à-vis other political parties. Since many scholars, however, have reservations about treating parties as unitary actors, we feel that it is important to refine our model in order to take account of politics within parties. Hence, the second bite that we take at the role of ministerial discretion is to consider the departmental freedom of action a minister might have vis-à-vis his or her own party. A minimal departure from any conception of a party as a unitary actor, after all, involves treating party politicians as heterogeneous in their policy preferences and capable of doing something about these. If there is no diversity of tastes within the party or if the party leadership can enforce a party line on every policy decision that might be made, then the party is effectively a unitary actor.

The consequences of ministerial discretion are fundamental to our model of politics. If the policy positions of each party are well known prior to government formation, then legislators can forecast the consequences for eventual policy formulation and implementation of allocating a cabinet post to a particular party's politician. In what follows we assume that they will forecast that the minister in question will act, as far as possible, to implement party policy within his or her jurisdiction.

Finite number of governments

If there is strong party discipline, as we are assuming, so that ministers can be treated as if they are agents of their party, and if there is a strong departmental structure to government decision making, as we are assum-
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ong, then we can take two governments as effectively being the same if the same cabinet portfolios are allocated to the same parties. We can take them as being different if the same portfolios are allocated to different parties. This is because, if the same portfolios are allocated to the same parties, then key political actors will forecast, before the government is formed, that the same policy outcomes will be pursued. If the same portfolio is allocated in two prospective cabinets to two different parties, each with different policy positions, then key actors will forecast that different policy outcomes will result. They will therefore view these as effectively different governments.

This implies that, in any given government formation situation, there is only a finite number of governments that can be proposed, reflecting the number of different ways in which the fixed set of cabinet portfolios can be allocated between the fixed set of “coalitionable” parties. Indeed, if we concern ourselves only with a few key cabinet portfolios dealing with the most important political decisions, and if the number of parties is small, then there may be very few effectively different potential governments. To take almost the simplest possible example, imagine a three-party system in which all important decisions were taken either on financial policy or foreign affairs. There are only nine possible ways in which the two key portfolios of finance and foreign affairs can be allocated between three parties. In this important sense, there are thus only nine different potential governments.

We can think more systematically about the different potential governments in this simple example if we arrange them in a diagram such as that in Figure 2.2. The diagram shows two policy dimensions. The horizontal dimension represents financial policy, in the jurisdiction of the Department of Finance. The vertical dimension represents foreign policy, in the jurisdiction of the Department of Foreign Affairs. These dimensions describe a two-dimensional policy space. The ideal policies of three parties – Party A, Party B, and Party C – are shown by the black dots, labeled AA, BB, and CC respectively. These dots show the positions that we assume each party is forecast to try to implement if given control of both the finance and foreign affairs portfolios. There are six other points in the diagram, each marked with a small x. These represent a coalition government that gives one portfolio to one party and the other portfolio to another. Thus point AC represents the government in which Party A gets the (horizontal) finance portfolio and Party C gets the (vertical) foreign affairs portfolio. Note that there is another point, CA, which represents the cabinet formed when the allocation of portfolios between parties is reversed, giving foreign affairs to Party A and finance to Party C. This latter cabinet generates different forecast government policy outputs, even though it consists of the same government parties.
Two important technical assumptions of our model are, first, that what a party can do with one portfolio is not affected by which particular party controls some other portfolio and, second, that how people feel about what happens in one jurisdiction is not affected by what happens in another. In this particular example, these assumptions imply that what a party can do in finance is not affected by which party holds the foreign affairs portfolio, and that how people feel about decisions taken by the finance minister is not affected by the substance of decisions taken by the minister for foreign affairs. This assumption is of course restrictive, but we do not believe it to be too unrealistic, given the pressures toward the departmental structuring of decision making that we discussed earlier. The effect of the assumptions is to arrange the policy forecasts associated with each portfolio allocation in the form of an orthogonal “lattice” of the type shown in Figure 2.2. If the assumptions are violated, then the lattice will be distorted – what party C, for example, will do if it holds the foreign affairs portfolio (top row of the lattice) will not lie along a horizontal line, since it will depend upon which party holds the finance portfolio. (We return in more detail to this in Chapter 11.)

*Technically, this amounts to an assumption that portfolio allocation effects are separable.
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Each point on this lattice corresponds to a potential government, defined by an appropriate portfolio allocation. Any point not on the lattice does not represent a potential government in our approach, since there is no allocation of portfolios between parties that is forecast to generate such a point as a government policy output. Such a point can be talked about, even dreamed about, but it cannot be forecast to be credibly implemented by an actual cabinet made up of living and breathing cabinet ministers, each intent upon making his or her party’s preferred policies the law of the land.

Collective cabinet decisions

Most parliamentary democracies operate on the basis of a doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility – in many cases this is enshrined in the constitution. This doctrine implies that cabinet ministers are responsible as a group for every government decision. Inside the cabinet chamber, ministers may fight tooth and claw for a particular position. The cabinet may be deeply divided. In public, however, the cabinet must officially present a common front. If someone loses a fight in cabinet, then the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility nonetheless binds the minister to observe whatever cabinet decision is finally taken, however much he or she disapproves of it. In theory, and indeed to a large extent in practice, a minister must resign or be sacked if he or she defies, or even publicly dissents from, a collective cabinet decision.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that the collective responsibility of members of the cabinet for government decisions says nothing about how those decisions are taken in the first place. The prime minister might be an absolute dictator, for example, laying down the law in cabinet and ignoring all opposition. The process of decision making in such a cabinet would not be collective at all, but ministers would still bear collective responsibility for cabinet decisions. Thus, collective cabinet responsibility is quite different from using a process of collective decision making to formulate cabinet decisions in the first place.

Collective decision making in cabinet is much more likely in some circumstances than in others. Most obviously, if different government departments come into direct conflict with one another, then such conflicts must be resolved if deadlock is not to result. One way to do this is by making a decision on the issue collectively. Certain policy problems – for example, urban regeneration – are intrinsically interdepartmental in character and require coordinated policy making and implementation. New issues emerge for the cabinet to make decisions on – and these may not automatically fall within the jurisdiction of an existing portfolio. In this event they must be disposed of somehow, directly by the cabinet
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acting outside the normal departmental structure, or indirectly by making a cabinet decision to assign jurisdiction over the problem to a particular department. For major new issues, a new department may even be created, or the existing departmental structure may be radically redesigned. Finally, and perhaps most important, the cabinet will from time to time face the need to resolve unanticipated and unavoidable political issues. These may arise unexpectedly out of the process of party competition, or hit the government like a bolt out of a clear blue sky – turmoil in international currency markets suddenly put John Major’s Conservative cabinet in Britain on the spot, for example, in the autumn of 1992. Such issues, which could threaten the very life of the cabinet, may well involve collective cabinet deliberation and decision making.

The importance of collective cabinet decision making in parliamentary democracies highlights the need to be clear about the ways in which ministerial discretion has an impact on government policy. We assume in what follows that ministers make a difference, that putting a minister from one party in charge of a particular department has foreseeable consequences that are different from those of putting a minister from another party in charge. But if some, or even all, important cabinet decisions are taken collectively, how can individual ministers make a difference?

The answer is simple. A cabinet, or indeed any other decision-making body, does not make decisions in the abstract. Real-life decisions on complicated issues, such as those facing a cabinet, are choices that are made between reasonably detailed and well-elaborated programs that specify alternative courses of action. There is typically a large briefing paper for cabinet members, possibly a formal discussion document for public consumption, even detailed draft legislation. Every cabinet memoir with which we are familiar makes rueful reference to the enormous volume of paper that any minister is expected to process as part of the business of decision making. In short, the cabinet in practice does not look at a policy space in the abstract and consider proposals of the form “let’s go to x.” Rather, it considers whether to accept, reject, or amend a particular fully formulated policy proposal on some matter.

Such a proposal is almost always prepared by one government department or another. As Burch (1993: 109) has argued so forcefully, “the key agents for the preparation and development of policy coming to the cabinet are in the departments.” A particular proposal will, of course, be located at some point in the policy space – say y. But amending such a proposal is not simply a matter of collectively deciding to go from y to x, since the amended proposal at x is not yet sufficiently well specified to be capable of implementation. If the cabinet does not like a particular proposal, therefore, it must refer it back to the originating department for
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detailed amendment and subsequent reconsideration. But in practice the matter of whether the amended proposal is actually "at" x is of course not transparent from the detail of the proposal itself. Each complex proposal requires interpretation before ministers can assess its implications for the broad sweep of government policy. The initial interpretation, needless to say, comes in briefing papers from the originating department. All of this gives the originating department, and in particular the minister in charge of it, considerable ability to shape the substance of the cabinet agenda, even in relation to matters that on the face of it are decided collectively. Burch (1993: 107) puts this point very clearly:

Those within government who originate a decision proposal and who provide the information and advice attached to it are in a strong position to influence the final outcome since it is they who establish the framework of ideas and assumptions within which discussions take place; originators can therefore have a critical role. In general, this initiative is with the departments and not at the level of the cabinet system.

The collective choice is between alternatives that are departmentally conditioned. This will be known, and its effects anticipated, before the minister is appointed in the first place.

Thus even collective decision making in cabinet will, we argue, take place within the context of the departmental structuring of the agenda of choices. This is essentially because public administration is so very complex that any workable decision to be taken by the cabinet needs the expertise and resources of some government department before it can be specified in an implementable form. The person in charge of that department is clearly in the driver's seat in relation to policy areas under his or her jurisdiction. The main way to effect a major policy change in a jurisdiction is to replace the minister in charge with someone who has a different policy position.

All of this will be known in advance of the government formation process. Thus politicians will forecast that even essentially collective cabinet decisions will be heavily conditioned by their preparation (or pre-cooking to take a term from the low countries) within existing department jurisdictions. This does not, of course, deny any role for collective decision making in cabinet; it merely emphasizes that this role will be heavily conditioned by departmental agenda power.

There is, however, an altogether different, and in our opinion more important, role for collective cabinet decision making. This concerns decisions that were not anticipated at the time of government formation. Departmental influence on anticipated decisions will be fully discounted at the point the government is formed and be part of the policy forecasts that underpin the government. Unanticipated events, however, cannot be
impounded in expectations when the government is formed, may well not fall clearly under the jurisdiction of some particular government department, and thus may leave scope for a more collective form of cabinet decision making.

In essence, the distinction that we are making here is between routine and/or foreseeable executive decisions on the one hand, and those that are sprung upon the government unexpectedly, on the other. Unexpected decisions, by their very nature, are likely to impinge upon the government as a whole, and to represent a threat to its equilibrium. In a sense, every unexpected situation with which a government is confronted creates a new political world, and there is no guarantee that a cabinet that was in equilibrium in the world before the event in question will remain in equilibrium after it. On an extreme view, every unexpected event requires the renegotiation of the government, something that will inevitably involve the government as a whole, and thereby require collective decisions to be taken. While the prime minister typically has no line departmental responsibilities, and therefore no direct role in the process of policy implementation, a key role for the prime minister is dealing with the unexpected and managing the necessary collective responses to these unanticipated events.

At the same time, however, very much of what a government does is foreseeable and anticipated. Even though the crises provoked by surprises that threaten the life of governments are the things that make newspaper headlines and attract popular attention, the vast bulk of government decisions – most of the things that affect the day-to-day lives of voters and therefore affect the fates of politicians at election time – may be almost boringly predictable. Nonetheless it is these predictable but important matters that condition the negotiations that lead to the formation of a new government. And it is these decisions, we contend, that are strongly structured along departmental lines. It is simply not possible to negotiate in advance a cabinet response to every possible thunderbolt that may strike unexpectedly at the heart of a putative government. Such problems will inevitably be subject to collective responses after the event. But by the same token they cannot, by definition, impinge upon the process of government formation that is the main concern of this book.

Our discussion of the departmentalism inherent in government decision making is no better than a rough sketch of what happens in the real world. In reality, all sorts of complex interactions between departments are likely to condition actual decisions, and it would be silly to pretend otherwise. Once more, however, we do feel that the sketch we have drawn bears some resemblance to reality, providing a sound enough basis for the construction of a simplified model of government formation.
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Legislative control of the cabinet

Obviously, the effect of the cabinet on public policy would be very limited if every detail of policy were settled by parliamentary legislation. The partisan composition of the cabinet would be irrelevant, since policy outputs would be determined by the balance of forces in the legislature. Before we can model the political role of the cabinet, therefore, we need to know how much the legislature can constrain the ability of cabinet ministers to set policy. If parliamentary action can force the hand of an unwilling cabinet minister, then the legislature can let a minister occupy a portfolio secure in the knowledge that he or she can be forced to act in particular ways should the need arise. If the legislature cannot realistically bind a minister in this way, then the minister has some discretion vis-à-vis the legislature, at least within his or her jurisdiction.

Formally, in every parliamentary democracy, parliament is sovereign. A constitutionally valid law binds an individual minister, or indeed the cabinet as a whole. In terms of practical politics, however, a cabinet in which the government parties control a majority of seats in parliament can summon up a legislative majority whenever it cares to do so, provided party discipline holds firm. Thus a majority government with disciplined parties can comprehensively dominate any legislature once it has been installed in office. This in turn means that the legislature cannot in practice pass laws constraining the government. The possibility of the legislature imposing its will on a majority executive can only arise when party discipline breaks down and dissident members of a government party join forces with the opposition to pass legislation on some particular issue. In such cases, the key political action takes place within political parties, a matter to which we return in Chapter 12.

The possibility for confrontation between legislature and executive is far more clear-cut if there is a “minority” cabinet in which the government parties do not control a parliamentary majority. While a minority cabinet must retain majority legislative support in the sense that no credible alternative government is preferred to it by a legislative majority, this certainly does not mean that it can act at will. Even if a majority of legislators cannot agree on an alternative cabinet that they prefer to a particular minority administration, they can still defeat the incumbent cabinet in particular instances by passing particular pieces of legislation opposed by the cabinet.

The fact remains, however, that a minority cabinet retains the support of a majority of the legislature. If not, it would be defeated and replaced.

Minority governments in parliamentary democracies are in this sense analogous to situations of “divided government” in the United States—see Laver and Shepsle (1991).
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with an alternative. If cabinet members feel strongly enough about an issue to make it a matter of overall confidence in the government, threatening to resign if they are defeated, then the minority cabinet’s overall appeal to a legislative majority still puts it in a powerful strategic position vis-à-vis the legislature.

Cabinet control of the legislative agenda

One of the main ways in which the cabinet dominates the legislature in the business of making public policy has to do with the flow of legislative business. Typically in parliamentary democracies, the cabinet has a tight grip on the parliamentary timetable. By virtue of controlling the main departments of state, as we have seen, the cabinet also has a near monopoly of both the information and the drafting skills needed to prepare legislation. These factors make it very difficult for opposition parties to get significant draft statutes onto the legislative agenda and effectively prevent the legislature from imposing policies on an unwilling cabinet. Cabinet ministers thus have freedom of action relative to the legislature, subject only to the constraint that they cannot implement policies so unpopular with the legislature that a majority of legislators prefers to defeat the government as a whole. Overall, the government’s opponents in the legislature can find it almost impossible to get their own proposals on to the agenda. Firm cabinet control over the flow of legislative business thus vastly reduces the opportunity for a parliament to leave a cabinet in place and yet use its legislative power to impose policy on the government on an à la carte basis. In effect, the only way for the legislature to effect a substantial change in government policy is to change the government, or at least to mount a credible threat to do so.

SUMMARY

Let us now summarize the essential features of what we take to be the social and political context of government formation, bearing in mind that in later chapters we will consider the effect of relaxing some of our more restrictive assumptions. First, we are talking about a world in which policy outputs are important – either because politicians are intrinsically concerned about policy or because they are constrained by other aspects of the larger political game to honor policy promises made to voters. We assume the preferences of politicians over the various possible policy outputs to be common knowledge, and that politicians are forecast to act so as to implement more favored policy outputs rather than less favored ones. We are talking about a parliamentary government system in which the executive is a cabinet with real power over policy outputs, responsible
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to the legislature in the sense that a cabinet must resign if it is defeated in a confidence vote by a legislative majority. We assume that, in considering the fate of the government, political parties behave in a disciplined manner so that politicians can be viewed, by the outside world at least, as agents of the party to which they belong.

Once a government has formed, we assume that the immense weight of decision making for which the cabinet is collectively responsible, together with the departmental organization of a civil service responsible for the detailed preparation and implementation of actual policy decisions, will give a strongly departmental structure to cabinet decision making. Specific policy proposals are brought to cabinet by the minister with relevant jurisdiction, and implemented by the same minister.

All of this results in the forecast, shared by each of those involved in building and maintaining a government, that government policy outputs in any given policy area are best predicted by looking at the position of the party in control of the portfolio with jurisdiction over the policy area concerned. It is these forecasts that inform actors’ decisions during the government formation process, a process to which we now turn.