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# The Government Agenda in Parliamentary Democracies

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*Lawmaking is a challenge for coalition governments because it inherently demands cooperation and compromise by parties with divergent policy goals. The jurisdictional system of cabinet government exacerbates the problem by providing parties the means to undermine the coalition bargain in the pursuit of their own policy interests. In this article, I explore whether arrangements that allow partners to police one another induce compromise on one of the most important decisions taken by a government—the organization of the policy agenda. In an analysis of original data on the timing and policy content of over 800 government bills from four European democracies, I show that coalition governments pursue a largely "accommodative" agenda. Policy initiatives dealing with issues that are more attractive to all partners in the coalition are likely to be given priority on the agenda, while those dealing with relatively unattractive issues are likely to be postponed.*

For governments in parliamentary democracies, lawmaking often poses an enormous challenge. Because of the proportional nature of most electoral systems, it is rarely the case that any party will possess the majority of legislative votes necessary to enact policies on its own. In such situations, government by coalition is unavoidable.[1] Such an arrangement has the potential to lead to serious difficulties in lawmaking because coalition parties may differ substantially on important policy issues. Naturally, these differences can make it very tough for coalition partners to agree to an acceptable compromise in the negotiations preceding government formation, but even if they are able to do so, it is not a foregone conclusion that any of the resulting agreements can be enforced successfully. In particular, parties usually have incentives to renege on the terms of the coalition bargain, especially where the issues involved demand they make large policy concessions to their allies. Parties also have ample opportunity to renege, afforded by the fact that they are forced to delegate important policy-making powers to one another through the allocation of cabinet ministries. Such delegation creates the risk that ministers will be able to violate the terms of agreed-upon compromises by pursuing policies favored by their own party at the expense of their coalition partners.

Understanding the types of substantive policy decisions governments are able to make under these conditions is an important task for students of parliamentary democracy. It has been argued that constitutions in multiparty systems are designed to facilitate bargaining between parties and, to the extent possible, to *accommodate* the policy preferences of the different segments of society they are elected to represent (Lijphart 1977, 1999; Powell 2000). Unfortunately, it has not yet been firmly established whether, or to what degree, these goals are achieved in practice, or how different coalition partners manage to use their influence in the government to shape policy outcomes (Powell 2000, 92). Most studies of multiparty government have focused only on the "birth" or "death" of coalitions—dealing with such questions as who gets into government, which ministries each party controls, and how long the government will last (Laver and

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[1] Even if a party is able to rule alone in a minority government, it must rely upon one or more opposition parties to pass policy.

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Schofield 1998).[2] Very little attention has been devoted to understanding the "life" of a coalition, even though it is during this period that policy making actually takes place.

Clearly, the only way for comparative scholars to develop an adequate understanding of lawmaking in multiparty settings is to undertake a systematic investigation into the important policy decisions coalitions make *between* their formation and termination. In this study, I will focus on one of the first, and most important, decisions governments must make with respect to policy initiatives—their introduction. Specifically, I will investigate how coalition governments *organize the policy agenda*—that is, how they determine the sequence and timing of bills submitted to the legislature.[3] The importance of this decision for policy making derives primarily from the fact that time is an extremely scarce commodity for governments. Policy proposals must go through several stages in the legislature before they become law, and there simply may not be sufficient time to implement a significant number of them.[4] Legislative terms normally cannot exceed a maximum period of four or five years, and typically parliaments are "in session" for a much shorter period (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1986). In addition, the life of a government is always on the line in a parliamentary system, and it can be cut short unexpectedly well before the end of its maximum tenure. As a result of these factors, proposals introduced relatively early in a government's term, all else equal, have a greater chance of eventually becoming law. It is therefore critical for us to understand how coalition partners, in view of their differences, collectively prioritize their competing policy initiatives.

In the next section, I describe the process by which government policy proposals get developed and discuss the problems this process creates for cooperation between coalition partners. The central argument of the study is that the existence of arrangements through which parties can monitor one another and control actions that threaten to undermine the government agreement will allow them to overcome these problems and affect the policy agenda of the government. In the third section, I describe an original data set that will be used to test this claim, which consists of information on over 800 government bills in four parliamentary democracies. In the fourth section, I conduct an analysis of these data and summarize the results. The final section concludes and discusses several possible extensions to the study.

## Coalition Government and the Policy Agenda

In parliamentary democracies, it is the government, not the legislature, that determines the timing and substance of major policy initiatives. Thus, any attempt to understand the nature of the policy agenda in these systems must focus primarily on the goals and capabilities of parties in the governing coalition. Naturally, every party in the government would like to get its own way in the construction of the policy agenda, introducing to parliament only the policies it favors and introducing them quickly enough that they are virtually assured of being adopted before the end of the government term. Of course, it is usually not possible for *every* coalition party to get the agenda it most desires, since parties tend to prioritize different issues and take conflicting positions on these issues. The scarcity of parliamentary time only exacerbates this situation. How do governments go about organizing the policy agenda in such circumstances, and what type of agenda do they manage to produce?

The argument to be made here is that government parties, in the pursuit of their own interests, have the incentives to seek, and the means to secure, a policy agenda that *accommodates* (inasmuch as possible) the preferences of all partners in the coalition. While this argument is consistent with standard views of parliamentary politics that have been held for decades, it challenges recent work in the coalition politics literature that suggests that parties effectively lose their capability to (en)force policy compromises after government ministries have been allocated. The major point of departure between these arguments, as discussed in more detail below, involves differing assumptions about the existence and effectiveness of monitoring and control devices available to parties in the governing coalition.

The first step in the construction of the policy agenda after a government is formed is taken by individual cabinet ministers and their departments. Each minister (with portfolio) controls a single government department, which normally has jurisdiction over a single policy

[2] Exceptions in the last few years include the work of Alter (2002), Heller (2001), Huber (1996), Mitchell (1999), and Martin and Vanberg (2004).

[3] For a treatment of legislative scheduling in the context of the United States Congress, see the work of Cox and McCubbins (1993), especially chapter 9 and appendices 2 and 4.

[4] This is the case even for single-party majority governments. For example, as Loewenberg and Patterson point out in their study of the British House of Commons, "Only by carefully planning the use of the limited parliamentary time available to it can the cabinet hope to see its major policy proposals enacted, and in any case the cabinet must reconcile itself to the fact that the time available comes nowhere close to being sufficient for the enactment of all policies in which it may be interested" (1979, 256).

area (Blondel and Müller-Rommel 1993; Laver and Shepsle 1994, 1996). Each department is staffed by civil servants who, under the supervision of the directing minister, act as "the key agents for the preparation and development of policy coming to the cabinet" (Burch 1993, 109).

The jurisdictional system of cabinet governance, and the policy specialization it creates, allows cabinet ministers to play a crucial role in the construction of the government policy agenda. First, it allows ministers to act as "gatekeepers" within their own policy domains. That is, if a minister chooses not to bring forth a policy proposal to the cabinet by a given time (if at all), there are generally no procedures by which the full cabinet can discharge the proposal. Thus, cabinet ministers possess a substantial degree of *negative* agenda control in that they are able to keep proposals they deem unacceptable off the government's policy agenda. Second, this jurisdictional system gives ministers "proposal" power within their particular policy area, meaning that they (and their civil servants) get to determine the form and substance of the draft legislation that is brought forth to the cabinet. Because of the asymmetries in expertise across departments, the power to propose bills to the cabinet belongs exclusively to the minister with jurisdiction in the policy area concerned, meaning that, in practice, the proposal task cannot be referred to another ministry.

The proposal power belonging to ministers is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of *positive* agenda control. For such control to be complete, ministers would have to possess the means of ensuring that their proposals would not face defeat, extensive modification, or delay once they are introduced in the cabinet, and then in the legislature. It is on this issue that conventional views of coalition government, which place an emphasis on the necessity of bargaining between coalition partners and the "consensual" nature of cabinet decision making, differ from recent research that suggests that, for all intents and purposes, ministers do enjoy complete agenda control and can therefore make important policy decisions without regard to anyone else. Specifically, Laver and Shepsle (1996), in their "portfolio allocation" approach, argue that cabinet ministers—who are assumed to behave as perfect agents of their parties—are able to act as virtual *dictators* in the policy areas they control.[5] As Laver and Shepsle explain:

> [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. . . . 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 jurisdictions of their cabinet colleagues. This implies that members of the cabinet will have only very limited ability to shape the substance of policy emanating from the department of a ministerial colleague. . . . [Ministerial] 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. (1996, 31–32)

If this view of coalition government as *ministerial government* is correct, then there is clearly no reason to believe (as conventional views of parliamentary government would have us believe) that the organization of the agenda, or any important policy decisions for that matter, would be systematically related to the policy preferences of the cabinet *as a whole*.[6] Most certainly, coalition parties have *incentives* not to allow unfettered ministerial discretion, especially in key policy areas. Indeed, as Laver and Shepsle (1996, 283) point out, the aggregate policies emerging from their model are generally not Pareto-optimal (see also Thies 2001, 583–85). In most cases, all parties in the coalition would prefer a compromise policy package resulting from trades across policy areas to the policy package resulting from a situation where each

[5] Because of the assumption that ministers are perfect agents of their party, the notion of "ministerial discretion" and "ministerial autonomy" in the portfolio allocation approach refers to the actions of a minister *on behalf of his or her party* vis-à-vis other parties in the legislature.

[6] Because Laver and Shepsle focus almost exclusively on government formation and termination, it is not immediately clear what their ministerial autonomy assumption implies for any of the intermediate stages in the policy-making process, including the organization of the policy agenda. Final policy outcomes are treated more or less as a *fait accompli* at the time of government formation, subject to change only with the occurrence of unforeseen events that might force a restructuring of the government and a new allocation of portfolios. This is not to suggest, however, that their model necessarily implies that all policy implementation occurs immediately after the government is formed, i.e., that there is no policy-making *process* that departmental proposals must undergo before they are adopted into law, beginning with their introduction in some order on the agenda. For example, it would not be inconsistent with their claim that drafting legislation requires substantial informational expertise and civil service resources if we were to find that bills dealing with particularly complex issues tend to be introduced later in a government's term. (Such possible issue effects will be controlled for in the empirical analysis.) For present purposes, the more important point involves what the ministerial government model predicts we should *not* find, namely, a systematic relationship between policy decisions and the preferences of coalition parties without jurisdiction in the relevant policy areas.

party pursues its own ideal policy in the issue area(s) it controls. There are, in other words, "gains from cooperation" to be made by parties controlling different policy areas, and generally, the losses that a party would incur by making concessions in its own jurisdiction would be more than compensated by the concessions it receives from its coalition partners in their jurisdictions.

The problem with such cooperation on policy, however, is that each party in the coalition also has private incentives to *renege* on any bargain if it can get away with doing so, while hoping the other parties will play the "suckers" by continuing to stick to their end of the coalition deal. To the extent that every party has incentives to engage in this type of behavior, cooperation becomes unsustainable, thereby leaving coalitions to exist in the Pareto-inferior world of ministerial government. As is typically the case in such situations where the agent (here, the minister associated with a particular party) has incentives to act contrary to the interests of the principal (i.e., the coalition partners who have delegated responsibility to the minister to implement the compromise agreement in his or her jurisdiction), the only way for the principal to prevent subversion of the agreement is to *monitor* the actions of the agent and then to *counter* these actions when necessary (see Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). The fundamental premise of the portfolio allocation approach, of course, is that coalition parties without control of the ministry responsible for a particular policy area do not have access to information that will give them the *opportunity* to monitor and counter the actions of ministers from other parties. Partners simply may have no idea whether a cabinet minister from another party is proposing a policy that violates the terms of the coalition bargain (or, even if so, whether the minister is not producing the "best" policy possible given feasibility constraints).

As several recent studies have pointed out, however, there are actually several devices available to coalition partners that can be used to monitor and control the actions of cabinet ministers. For example, Thies (2001) shows that members of coalition parties routinely serve as junior ministers in the departments of ministers from other parties. Junior ministers have access to much of the same information and civil service expertise as the ministers they are shadowing, which may consequently allow them to perform an effective monitoring, or "watchdog," role. Moreover, as contributors to the Mueller and Strøm (2000) volume on coalition government point out, there are a number of other important information-gathering and conflict-management mechanisms coalition parties can employ to keep one another "on track." These include inner-cabinet committees of coalition leaders, interministerial committees, parliamentary leadership groups, and party summits. In many cases, the formal coalition agreement that parties negotiate in the process of forming the government specifies the monitoring and control mechanisms that are to be used when serious disagreements exist between partners.[7] Finally, as Martin and Vanberg (2004) point out, coalition partners can also make use of parliamentary oversight devices to monitor and correct the actions of cabinet ministers. Many parliamentary systems, especially in "consensus" or "proportional" democracies, provide strong standing committees—with jurisdictions that correspond closely to those of cabinet ministries—that provide opportunities for committee members to acquire policy expertise (Lijphart 1999; Powell 2000; Strøm 1990). These committees typically have broad investigative powers—such as the right to schedule hearings, call witnesses (including civil servants), and subpoena relevant documents. They also have the ability to propose amendments, and in some cases, to rewrite the text of government bills (Mattson and Strøm 1995).[8] Taken together, the existence of these multiple monitoring and control devices suggests that a minister may not enjoy such an insurmountable informational advantage after all, contrary to the assumptions of the ministerial government model.

The use of these devices, of course, is not a costless activity for coalition parties. Party members serving as junior ministers, for example, could perhaps more usefully be engaged in other important legislative activities. Moreover, extensive monitoring of a bill by partners in a cabinet committee or by coalition party groups in a parliamentary committee can lead to legislative logjams and costly delay in the enactment of the many other items remaining on a party's policy agenda. Because of the costs involved, parties therefore have incentives not to engage in monitoring activities indiscriminately. So when should coalition members be more likely to use control devices to counter the actions of ministers from other parties?

First, as is typically the case in principal-agent problems, the possibility that a minister will attempt to deviate from an agreed-upon compromise should be greater

[7]Echoing the central point made by Thies (2001), several of the country experts contributing to this volume also point out the important role of junior ministers. For example, as Saalfeld notes regarding the German case, "...[By] 'planting' junior ministers of one coalition party in a ministry controlled by another party, the Chancellor and coalition party leaders can create political heterogeneity and improve the monitoring of individual departments' activities" (2000, 66).

[8]Naturally, strong committee systems also afford *opposition* parties the opportunity to exercise influence on government policy (Powell 2000; Strøm 1990). The possibility that the preferences of opposition parties may have an impact on the government agenda will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

when the issues involved are more *divisive*.[9] On an issue that does not significantly divide coalition partners from the party controlling the relevant ministry, the minister has very little to gain by reneging on the coalition compromise. Moreover, even if the minister does successfully renege on such an issue, the consequences for coalition partners will be relatively innocuous, and therefore their need to engage preemptively in costly monitoring much less pressing. On an issue that does significantly divide partners from the party of the proposing minister, the opposite is the case. On this type of issue, any compromise is likely to require the party controlling the relevant ministry to pursue a policy that differs substantially from its most preferred policy, thus providing it with a strong temptation to renege on the compromise and shift policy in a direction it favors. For coalition partners, the efforts by a minister to renege on this type of issue, if successful, can impose significant costs on them since the preferences of the minister are "extreme" relative to their position. In short, for a contentious issue, the incentives to renege on the coalition agreement are strong for a minister, which provides other cabinet members with significant reasons to engage in monitoring and control.

In addition, the importance (or saliency) of an issue should have an effect on the incentives of coalition partners to monitor. Bills dealing with important issues can deliver greater benefits to coalition members, thereby giving them incentives not to engage in activities that will delay their enactment. In general, however, the effect of issue saliency should depend upon the level of divisiveness. For bills on which government partners and the party of the proposing minister are not significantly divided, the more salient the issues involved, the higher these policy benefits will be for all coalition partners, and thus the more likely that they will wish to move quickly to get these bills enacted. For bills on which government partners and the party of the proposing minister are extremely divided, saliency should have a much smaller, or even negative, effect. Thus, we should expect coalition parties to move more quickly (i.e., engage in *less* monitoring) on more salient legislation if the issues involved are relatively nondivisive, but we should expect them to move less quickly (i.e., engage in *more* monitoring) on more salient legislation if the issues involved are divisive. Similarly, the effect of the divisiveness of an issue should depend upon its saliency. That is, although an increase in divisiveness, for the reasons discussed above, should *always* lead to greater delay in the introduction of a bill, an increase in divisiveness on a relatively important issue gives ministers stronger incentives to renege, and coalition partners stronger incentives to monitor, than an increase in divisiveness on a relatively unimportant issue. In short, we should expect to see an *interactive* relationship between issue saliency and divisiveness.

If coalition partners use the monitoring and control devices available to them in this way, in keeping with their policy goals, then we should expect the government policy agenda to be organized in an *accommodative* fashion—that is, bills on the agenda should be ordered in such a way that those dealing with relatively "attractive" issues from the point of view of coalition members (e.g., important issues that do not divide coalition partners from the party holding the relevant ministry) will receive priority in scheduling while those dealing with relatively "unattractive" issues will be postponed. Following from the argument above, if a minister with jurisdiction on an important issue dimension holds a position that is extreme relative to those of other parties in the coalition, then any proposals coming out of his or her ministry are more likely to be greeted with suspicion and subjected to intense scrutiny. Again, on contentious issues, ministers have strong incentives to renege on the coalition bargain, and coalition partners have strong incentives to make sure this does not occur. Given this, partners should go to great lengths to investigate how closely a draft proposal dealing with such issues corresponds to the terms of the coalition bargain. If the proposal does not faithfully reflect the coalition agreement, then coalition parties can amend the proposal, reject it, shelve it, or remand it to the originating ministry.[10] To the extent that all of this occurs at the

[9]For a similar argument, applied to the question of parliamentary scrutiny, see Martin and Vanberg (2004).

[10]The precise rules that cabinets use to make these decisions are rarely formalized. Most experts seem to agree, however, that majority voting rules are uncommon, and that the predominant decision rule used is unanimity (see the various country studies in the edited volume by Laver and Shepsle (1994)). Even when a unanimity rule for cabinet decision making is not explicit, however, it may be made implicit by the fact that every party in the coalition possesses a veto with respect to its continued participation in the government. Naturally, a threat by a party to leave the coalition if it does not get its way in policy making may be more or less credible (and more or less damaging if the threat is carried out) depending on the importance of the party to the continuation prospects of the other parties in government. To the extent this depends upon the *size* of the party wielding the veto threat, it would then make sense to take account of the relative size of coalition parties when modeling the effects of issue saliency and divisiveness. Another reason to take party size into account has to do with monitoring capability. For instance, as Thies (2001) argues, while small parties would like to appoint junior ministers to serve in every ministry controlled by a "hostile" partner, they are effectively prevented from doing so simply because they do not have enough members to serve as junior ministers in every hostile ministry. Similar problems can occur in legislative committees, where the ability of a party to monitor cabinet bills effectively hinges on the policy expertise of its members on the committee as well as the time and resources these members are

cabinet level (e.g., in an interministerial committee), it will have a direct effect on delay in the introduction of the proposal, since such intense scrutiny (and back-and-forth bargaining with the proposing minister) can take a considerable amount of time. Even if most of the scrutiny of the proposal takes place after the cabinet allows it to be placed on the agenda (i.e., in parliamentary committees through the legislative party groups of coalition partners), the anticipation of this scrutiny (and possibly sweeping amendments or legislative rejection of the bill) can exert a powerful *ex ante* influence over the actions of a minister (Martin and Vanberg 2004). Thus, a minister drafting a proposal dealing with a particularly controversial issue for the coalition has an inducement to initiate bargaining with other parties and their parliamentary groups before the bill is even brought to the cabinet (and, in the extreme, if the minister expects such bargaining to result in a particularly unfavorable policy outcome from his point of view, his ability to "keep the gates closed" can result in the proposal being shelved indefinitely).[11] In this way, the monitoring and control ability of coalition members can also indirectly cause the delay of relatively "unattractive" legislation. In contrast, on an issue dimension that does not divide the party of the proposing minister from its partners, legislation should not be subjected to a great amount of scrutiny, especially if it deals with issues important enough to coalition members that they wish to get it pushed through to passage as quickly as possible.[12] Thus, we should expect particularly "attractive" legislation for coalition members to receive priority in scheduling on the legislative agenda.

able to devote to monitoring (Martin and Vanberg 2004). All else equal, parties that are large are more likely to have at least one policy expert in their ranks serving on a legislative committee and can also more effectively divvy up monitoring tasks, given that these parties have more committee members who can be scrutinizing different aspects of a cabinet proposal simultaneously.

[11]See the seminal work of Farquharson (1969) and Denzau and McKay (1983) for a discussion of "gatekeeping" and proposal powers and their implications for this type of sophisticated behavior by agenda setters. As to whether ministers actually engage in this sort of presubmission bargaining, other studies provide anecdotal evidence to suggest that ministers do attempt to "feel out" the opinion of coalition partners while working out the details of draft legislation. Much of this is accomplished through coordination between the proposing minister and the prime minister. In a recent survey, nearly two-thirds of ministers interviewed said that they discuss policy proposals with the prime minister, especially those of a controversial nature, before bringing them to the cabinet (Müller, Philipp, and Gerlich 1993).

[12]This also implies that coalitions that are not divided on policy should be able to enact a greater number of significant bills. See Tsebelis (1999) for evidence of this in the area of labor legislation.

# Data and Coding

To test the hypothesis that the government policy agenda should be arranged in an accommodative fashion, I will use original legislative data, covering a period of approximately a decade, from four European parliamentary democracies. Specifically, the countries in the study are Belgium (1979–92), Germany (1983–94), Luxembourg (1979–94), and the Netherlands (1979–94). In this section, I discuss issues relating to the selection of the countries in the study, the classification of government bills into particular policy areas, and the measurement of the dependent and independent variables.

## Country Selection and the Sample of Government Bills

The collection of cross-national legislative data is time consuming and resource intensive, which has forced a decision about which countries to include in the study and which to defer for future research. The main advantage of the present design is that the four countries above are very similar in terms of a number of institutional and coalition-specific features that, in addition to the policy preferences of coalition parties, may be important determinants of the policy agenda. In particular, these four countries are all nonmajoritarian (or "consensual") democracies, with proportional electoral systems and multiple parties, that share a number of legislative structures, procedures, and norms that strengthen the role of legislators in policy making (Döring 1995; Lijphart 1999; Strøm 1990). For example, lower houses in these countries have a relatively large number of specialized committees (on which seats are proportionately distributed among parties) with jurisdictions that "shadow" those of government ministries. Moreover, in all four countries during this period, governments were coalitions controlling a majority of legislative seats. In addition, this design has the advantage of extending over relatively few years, which should make the analysis less prone to unmeasured temporal effects. The choice of time frame also allows for the use of a recent expert survey conducted by Laver and Hunt (1992) that provides extensive information on both the policy positions and saliency weights for a large number of parties on eight theoretically distinct issue dimensions.

An obvious disadvantage of this design is that it makes it difficult to assess the impact of alternative institutional arrangements or certain coalition attributes on the organization of the government agenda. For example, it is not possible to make inferences about the effect of strong

committee systems (such as those found in the countries in this study) versus weak committee systems (such as those found in "majoritarian" democracies like Ireland or the French Fifth Republic). It is also difficult to draw conclusions about how the agenda is organized in situations where a minority administration is in power (e.g., in the Scandinavian countries during most of the postwar period) or where a single party controls a majority of legislative seats (such as in the United Kingdom).

The design does, however, allow for substantial variation in the main factors of interest in this study—the saliency and divisiveness of policy issues for parties in the governing coalition. There are three sources of variation in issue saliency and divisiveness across bills. First, for any given government, the saliency and divisiveness of bills will vary across issue areas. That is, a bill may deal with issues that are relatively important to all parties, to some of them, or to none of them, and a bill might deal with issues that divide parties or with issues over which there is general agreement. Second, saliency and divisiveness will vary across governments if there is a change in the party composition of the coalition or a change in the partisan control of particular ministries. Third, as explained below, the ideology measures are "weighted" by the relative size of each coalition party, which normally changed across elections.

I selected the sample of legislation by starting with the full set of government bills and then eliminating certain types of bills from consideration.[13] Specifically, I excluded budget bills and bills proposing changes to the constitution because many of the rules of procedure associated with these bills differ from those associated with ordinary legislation (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1986). Of the remaining ordinary bills, I excluded any that could not reasonably be classified into the eight policy areas from the Laver and Hunt study. For each remaining bill, I collected information on the date the bill was introduced, the ministry responsible for drawing it up, and its primary subject matter. The final data set consists of 833 government bills, each of which is classified into one (and only one) of the eight issue categories. In Appendix A, examples of the types of bills coded on the eight Laver and Hunt dimensions are presented, along with the percentage of bills in each category for the four countries in the study.

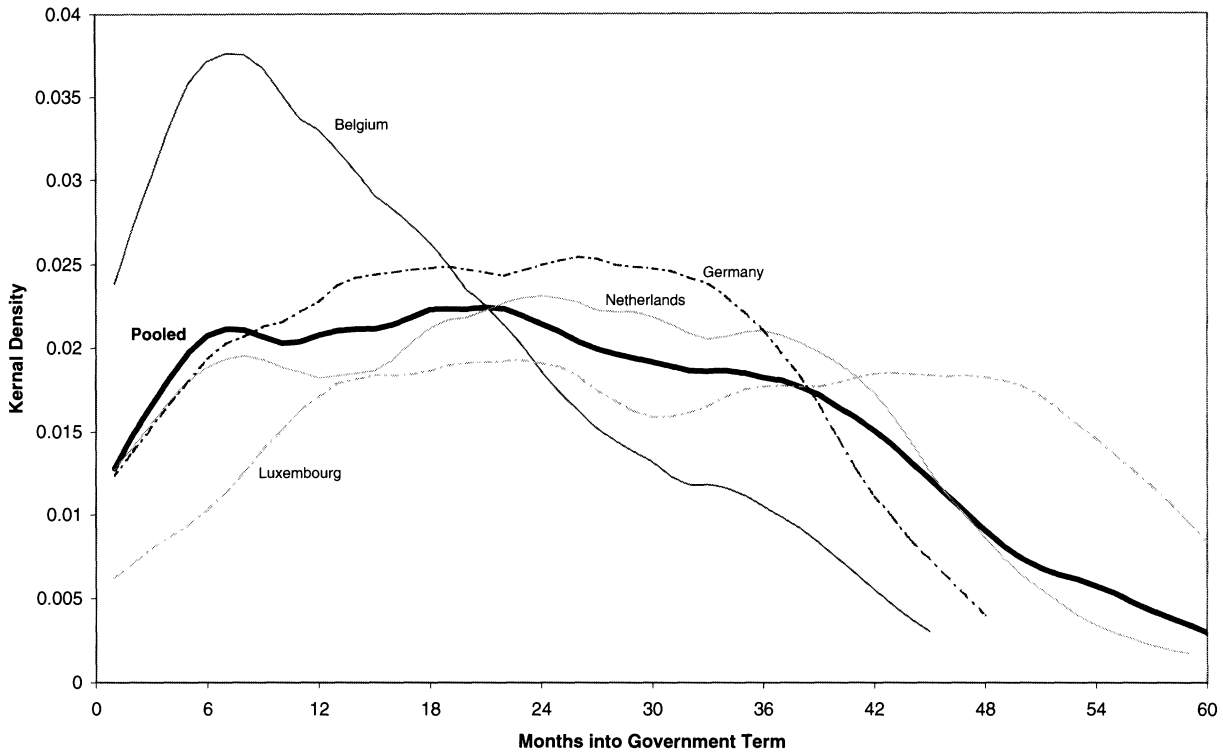
[13]The sample includes only government-sponsored legislation, excluding legislative initiatives submitted by members of parliament (Private Members' bills), directives from the European Union, and ministerial directives or other statutory instruments that do not require the express approval of the legislature.

## Measurement of Dependent and Independent Variables

The units of analysis are government bills. The dependent variable is the *timing of bill introduction*, which is coded as the number of days between the formation of the government and the introduction of the bill to the legislature.[14] In theory, this variable can take any value ranging from zero (if the bill is introduced on the same day the government is formed) to the total number of days in the legislative term (if the government forms immediately after an election, serves a full legislative term, and introduces the bill on its last day in office). In practice, the variable takes on a more limited range of values. Figure 1 displays kernel density estimates of bill timing from the current sample of legislation, pooled and country-by-country. As one might expect, there is considerable variation in the frequency of bill submission over the course of a government's life. For example, it is clear that for all the countries in the sample the first few months of a government's term constitute a "start-up" period in the legislative process, as a relatively small proportion of bills get introduced at this time. At the end of this period, the flow of legislation begins to increase, stays at a fairly sustained level for a number of months, and then tapers off for the remainder of the term. Beyond these general trends, bill timing appears to differ considerably across countries. In Belgium, for example, about half of the bills in the sample were introduced within the first 12 months of the government term, compared to approximately 25% in Germany and the Netherlands for the same period, and less than 15% in Luxembourg. After 12 months, bill submission in Belgium falls at a dramatic rate. This reflects the fact that Belgian governments were relatively short-lived over the time frame of the study (with an average duration of only 22 months). At the other end of the spectrum, Luxembourgian governments (which each served almost a full five-year term in office) introduced bills at a fairly steady pace from the end of their first year in office to the beginning of their fifth year, at which point the frequency

[14]The choice was made to use calendar days, rather than actual legislative sitting days, because of the possibility that the number of sitting days may be systematically related to cabinet decisions regarding the agenda. That is, it is normally not difficult for governments to convene special sessions of parliament so that legislation they wish to have enacted can be considered, and whether governments choose to call such sessions may be determined by some of the same (unmeasured) factors that influence the organization of the policy agenda. If this is the case, then the use of actual sitting days instead of calendar days (which can, in effect, be regarded as "potential" legislative days) could lead to bias in the empirical results.

**FIGURE 1 Bill Introduction by Governments over Time**




of bills submitted gradually declined. Between these extremes, governments in Germany and the Netherlands introduced bills at a very similar rate, with a fairly sustained flow of legislation throughout the second and third years of their terms.[15]

As stated in the previous section, the timing of a bill on the agenda should depend on the *saliency* and *divisiveness* of the issues taken up by the bill from the perspective of coalition partners vis-à-vis the party of the proposing minister. Testing this argument therefore requires the construction of two variables: *government issue saliency* and *government issue divisiveness*. To construct the measure of *government issue saliency*, I first *scaled* the 20-point party-specific *saliency* scores from the Laver-Hunt survey so that an issue of average saliency for any given party received a score of "1." A scaled saliency score greater than one indicates a relatively more salient dimension for a party, while a scaled score less than one indicates a relatively less salient dimension. Then, on a government-by-government basis, the eight scaled saliency scores for each coalition party were *weighted* by the proportion of legislative seats contributed by that party to the government's majority. This is meant to capture the possibility that larger parties in the cabinet should have a greater impact on the agenda decision than smaller parties, other things being equal (see footnote 10). Finally, on a dimension-by-dimension basis, an *average* weighted saliency score was derived by summing these seat-weighted saliency scores across coalition parties. Every bill in the sample has been assigned the government-specific average weighted saliency score for the issue dimension on which the bill is classified.

To create the measure of *government issue divisiveness*, I first calculated (using the 20-point party-specific *position* scores from the Laver-Hunt survey) the *absolute distance* of each party in the coalition from the party position of the minister drafting the bill along the relevant issue dimension. As above, these distance measures for each coalition party were then *weighted* by the proportion of legislative seats contributed by that party to the government's majority. These seat-weighted distances were then summed, on a dimension-by-dimension basis, across coalition parties to create the *average* weighted distance score for each issue dimension for each government in the sample. Finally, I multiplied this distance score by the *government issue saliency* of the bill, as defined above. The final measure of *government issue divisiveness* is therefore

[15]Unlike their German counterparts, Dutch cabinets did introduce a substantial amount of legislation after the end of their third year. Part of the reason for this is that the 1989 Lubbers government in the Netherlands had a maximum parliamentary term of five years instead of the normal four, pursuant to the provisions of article 64,4 of the Dutch constitution.

an interaction term, reflecting the logic discussed in the previous section.

To isolate the effect of coalition policy preferences, it is necessary to control for several other factors that may affect bill timing. One such factor involves the views of the opposition. It is reasonable to expect that the policy preferences of the opposition might have *countervailing* effects on the government's agenda decisions. On the one hand, the government would naturally prefer that legislative business flow as smoothly as possible given that, as discussed, the scarcity of parliamentary time makes it difficult for coalition members to achieve their policy goals. If the government chooses to introduce initiatives that provoke clashes with the opposition, it runs the risk of creating logjams in the legislative process, at least to the extent that opposition parties are able to engage in obstructive activities. On the other hand, this risk is probably quite low for majority governments (such as in the current sample), and additionally, provoking the opposition may provide certain benefits. For example, governments may want to introduce bills that incite the opposition and cause a parliamentary row to send a signal to their constituents that they are taking "bold" initiatives to change public policy. To account for these possibilities, I will include a variable for the saliency of the relevant issues from the point of view of opposition parties (*opposition issue saliency*) as well as a variable for the policy differences between these parties and the party responsible for initiating the bill (*opposition issue divisiveness*). (These measures were constructed in the same way as the government saliency and divisiveness measures.)

Lastly, we must be concerned about the effects of factors that are not captured by these ideological variables. As Figure 1 demonstrates, for example, there appear to be marked differences in bill timing across countries, which would suggest that country indicators need to be included in any empirical models. It would also be sensible to include separate indicators for issue dimensions (see footnote 6), since it is possible that bills dealing with certain types of issues *always* face longer scheduling delays, regardless of the policy preferences of coalition partners.

## Analysis and Findings

Event history, or survival, analysis will be used to test the "accommodative agenda" hypothesis.[16] A fundamental concept in survival analysis is the hazard function, or *hazard rate*, which is defined as the probability that an event (such as the introduction of a bill) will occur at a particular point in time, given that it has not yet occurred. The hazard rate has two components. The first is a set of covariates, or independent variables, that are believed to have some systematic impact on the timing of an event. Parameter estimates for these covariates denote the degree to which they increase or decrease the risk of event occurrence. The second component is an underlying baseline function that represents the rate of event occurrence if the effects of all the covariates are zero. In other words, the baseline hazard rate reflects how the rate of event occurrence changes only with respect to time.

One of the major issues involved in choosing among survival models concerns how to parameterize the baseline hazard rate (that is, how to characterize possible time dependence in the data). Unfortunately, an incorrect parameterization of the hazard rate can lead to biased estimates of the covariates in the model. For this reason, many scholars have opted for an approach that makes only minimal assumptions about the hazard function. The most common model of this type is the semiparametric (proportional hazards) approach devised by Cox (1972), which allows researchers to estimate the effects of covariates on survival time without having to specify a parametric distribution for the baseline hazard function. For an individual with a vector of characteristics, X, the hazard rate in the Cox model takes the form, $h(t \mid x) = h_0(t)e^{x'\beta}$, where $h_0(t)$ is the unspecified baseline hazard function. While less restrictive than the parametric alternatives, the Cox model does make the potentially erroneous assumption (just as parametric models do) that the hazard functions of any two units with different values on the covariates differ only by a factor of proportionality (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). This implies that the effects of the covariates are *constant* over time.

As the results below will show, the proportionality assumption of the Cox model is violated in the current data. This is problematic because estimation of the model when the hazard rate is in fact not proportional can result in biased parameter estimates, incorrect standard errors, and misleading inferences (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). (This is analogous to the familiar "omitted variables" problem in ordinary least squares regression.) Fortunately, a number of diagnostics are available for detecting violations of proportionality, and the most common remedy for the problem, which involves modeling the nonproportionality in the data, is straightforward to apply. As we shall see, beyond simply addressing statistical issues, accounting for temporal dependence in the

[16]Survival models have become the norm in political science applications where the question of interest concerns the timing of a event. For recent applications in comparative politics, see Warwick (1994) and Martin and Vanberg (2003).

covariates reveals substantively interesting patterns in the relationship between coalition policy preferences and the government agenda.

In Table 1, I report the findings from the Cox proportional hazards model. Instead of coefficient estimates, which are not particularly intuitive in this case, I report the *percentage change in the hazard rate* associated with a one standard-deviation increase in each of the ideology variables (one unit for indicator variables), along with 95% confidence bounds. (For interested readers, the coefficient estimates and standard errors can be found in Appendix B. In Appendix C, I provide the formulas needed to calculate the percentage change in the hazard rate.)

In interpreting the findings, it is important to keep in mind that the government and opposition issue divisiveness measures are *interacted* with the corresponding dimensional saliency weights, as discussed earlier. Again, this is meant to capture the idea that the "true" impact of the divisiveness of a policy dimension depends upon the importance of the dimension. Similarly, the impact of the saliency of a policy dimension depends upon its divisiveness. Given this interactive relationship, the interpretation of the effect of each ideology variable must be made *conditional* on the level of the "companion" ideology variable. The standard errors of these effects, as well as the accompanying test-statistics and confidence intervals, are also conditional (Friedrich 1982). Thus, for an estimated conditional saliency effect, the confidence interval will describe its range of error at a particular level of divisiveness, and for an estimated conditional divisiveness effect, the confidence interval will describe its range of error at a particular level of saliency.

For the models in Table 1, the effect shown for each ideology variable is evaluated at the mean value of its companion variable. Thus, the effect shown for *government issue saliency* is the effect of an increase of one standard deviation in this variable when *government issue divisiveness* is fixed at its mean value of 1.82. Similarly, the effect shown for *government issue divisiveness* is the effect of an increase of one standard deviation in this variable when *government issue saliency* is fixed at its mean value of 1.05. Where important, I discuss how the conditional effects of the ideology variables, as well as our uncertainty about these effects, change across the range of values of the companion variables.

In Model 1, I present the estimated effects of the two government ideology variables, along with those of the opposition control variables and the country and issue dimension indicators. Before we consider the findings regarding the main hypothesis of the study, it is worth noting the effects of the various control variables. First, bill timing appears to differ across countries, essentially

**TABLE 1 Survival Analysis of the Timing of Government Bills**

| Independent Variables† | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|---|---|
| *Government issue saliency* (mean = 1.05, sd = 0.23) | −18.2** (−31.9, −1.6) | 17.0* (−2.3, 40.2) |
| *Government issue divisiveness* (mean = 1.82, sd = 1.24) | −12.4** (−20.6, −3.4) | −26.0** (−33.3, −17.9) |
| *Opposition issue saliency* (mean = 1.09, sd = 0.24) | 4.6 (−12.0, 24.3) | 2.2 (−13.8, 21.2) |
| *Opposition issue divisiveness* (mean = 5.82, sd = 2.52) | 7.4 (−2.1, 17.7) | 16.4** (6.6, 27.1) |
| *Foreign policy* | −4.7 (−35.9, 41.8) | −17.2 (−44.4, 23.3) |
| *Industrial policy* | −38.7** (−55.0, −16.4) | −18.6 (−40.6, 11.5) |
| *Social policy* | 19.0 (−23.5, 85.1) | 102.2** (31.1, 211.8) |
| *Clerical policy* | 77.6 (−33.0, 370.5) | 323.2** (58.1, 1032.5) |
| *Agricultural policy* | −22.3 (−51.6, 24.8) | 0.5 (−37.5, 61.8) |
| *Regional policy* | −29.1 (−54.6, 10.8) | −22.5 (−50.0, 20.2) |
| *Environmental policy* | −20.0* (−38.4, 3.9) | −8.9 (−30.0, 18.7) |
| *Germany* | 7.4 (−17.6, 40.0) | −21.1* (−40.1, 4.0) |
| *Belgium* | 137.6** (90.7, 196.2) | 136.4** (89.3, 195.3) |
| *Luxembourg* | −46.0** (−55.8, −33.9) | −82.3** (−86.0, −77.7) |
| Log-likelihood | −4699 | −4251 |

*Note:* Cell entries represent the *percentage change in the hazard rate* resulting from an increase of one standard deviation in the associated independent variable (one unit for the country and issue dimension indicator variables). Lower and upper bounds for a 95% confidence interval are in parentheses. Policy dimensions are evaluated against the modal dimension, tax policy; countries are evaluated against the modal country, the Netherlands. N = 833.

*p < .10 (two-tailed), **p < .05 (two-tailed).

†In both models, the effect shown for government (opposition) issue saliency is evaluated at the mean value of government (opposition) issue divisiveness; similarly, the effect shown for government (opposition) issue divisiveness is evaluated at the mean value of government (opposition) issue saliency. In Model 2, the effects shown for the two time-interacted variables, *government issue saliency* and *government issue divisiveness*, are evaluated at the median time remaining in the constitutional interelection period (CIEP), 780 days.

confirming the patterns shown in Figure 1.[17] The timing of bills also seems to differ across issue dimensions, but mainly with respect to bills dealing with industrial policy, which tend to be introduced later in the government term (this is revealed in auxiliary analyses, not shown, in which the reference category is rotated among the eight issue dimensions). Finally, it appears that the policy preferences of opposition parties have no statistically discernable impact on the timing of government bills. This is perhaps reflective of the possibility, discussed earlier, that governments are driven by competing incentives in their policy-making behavior where the opposition is concerned. Interestingly, though, the direction of the estimated opposition effects suggests that governments are (weakly) more likely to introduce bills early onto the agenda the greater the potential conflict with the opposition.

In regard to the test of the accommodative agenda hypothesis, Model 1 indicates, first, that the divisiveness of an issue for coalition partners vis-à-vis the proposing minister has the expected impact on the timing of bills on the policy agenda. That is, consistent with the argument that ministerial proposals on conflictual issue dimensions are more likely to face resistance by coalition partners, the results show that bills on which cabinet members are divided take longer to be introduced onto the agenda. Specifically, as shown in the table, for issues of *average* saliency, an increase of one standard deviation in the level of government divisiveness on a bill decreases the probability that this bill will be introduced on any given day by approximately 12%. Across the full range of sample values for issue saliency, the effect of divisiveness varies from a decrease of about 5% in the hazard rate (for the lowest issue saliency score, 0.41) to a decrease of about 16% (for the highest issue saliency score, 1.41).[18] In other words, no matter how salient the issues dealt with by a bill, an increase in the level of government divisiveness on these issues leads to later introduction of the bill onto the agenda, though an increase in the divisiveness of bills dealing with issues of greater importance will face greater delay than those dealing with issues of lesser importance.

While issue *divisiveness* has the anticipated impact on bill timing, it seems that the issue *saliency* of a bill exhibits an effect that is contrary to expectations. In particular, it appears that policy proposals that touch on important issues for coalition partners are *more likely* to face scheduling delays. Specifically, for bills dealing with issues of average divisiveness for the government, the findings indicate that an increase of one standard deviation in issue saliency decreases the probability of introduction on any given day by approximately 18%. Of course, it would not be especially surprising if bills of greater issue saliency were more likely to face delay if these bills were also very conflictual for coalition members. In fact, the expectation is that these types of bills are the most likely among all bills to be delayed. However, even for the most noncontroversial bills in the sample (with a government issue divisiveness score of only 0.11), an increase in issue saliency leads to greater delay in introduction, which was not expected to be the case. All of this would seem to indicate that the types of bills governments are most likely to introduce on any given day are those with relatively low costs (since coalition partners are in agreement on the policy issues involved) but also relatively low benefits (since the policy issues involved are also relatively unimportant).

As will be shown below, however, it would appear that these seemingly inconsistent findings arise from the fact that the effect of government issue saliency on bill timing *varies* over the course of the parliamentary term.[19] It is certainly not surprising that the relationship between the policy incentives of coalition parties and how bills get scheduled on the legislative agenda might change over time. After all, as the parliamentary term begins coming to a close, it is less likely that *any* type of legislation will be able to make it all the way through the legislative process, "attractive" or otherwise. Thus, it becomes increasingly *less critical* for coalition partners to engage in monitoring in such a way that ensures that bills dealing with especially attractive issues receive priority on the legislative agenda, while bills dealing with especially unattractive issues get postponed. We might therefore expect that the effects of issue saliency and divisiveness on bill timing become increasingly *weaker* over the course of the parliamentary term.

There are several ways to detect whether temporal dependency of this sort exists. One straightforward method is to interact the variables suspected of being time-dependent with a time period indicator. This simple "piecewise" approach provides a useful initial diagnosis of whether the effects of the covariates differ from one period to the next (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001).[20]

[17]It is also important to investigate the sensitivity of the model results to the decision to pool legislation across the countries in the sample. I do this using a variety of pooling assumptions (see Bartels (1996) for a thorough discussion of "fractional pooling"). Fortunately, the results in Table 1 are extremely robust to the pooling decision.

[18]These results are not shown in the table but are available from the author upon request. Alternatively, they can be derived by using the information provided in Appendices B and C.

[19]Recall the earlier methodological discussion about the consequences of nonproportionality.

[20]The specific piecewise approach I employ involves interacting the four government and opposition ideology variables with a dichotomous indicator for whether the legislation was introduced relatively *early* in the parliamentary term or relatively *late* in the

The findings from this diagnostic test indicate that the government ideology variables differ significantly in their effects across time periods, but that the opposition ideology variables do not ($p < .05$, two-tailed). As a result, it becomes necessary to account for time dependency in the *government issue saliency* and *government issue divisiveness* variables in the analysis.

I do this in Model 2 by including interactions between these variables and the time remaining in the parliamentary term.[21] The effect shown for each government variable is the percentage change in the hazard rate resulting from a one-standard-deviation increase in the variable *780 days* before the end of the parliamentary term, the median sample value of the dependent variable. (I will explore the effects of these variables across the full parliamentary term in more detail below.) One particularly striking result from this model is that the effect for *government issue saliency* is now *positive* and statistically significant, in sharp contrast to the finding from Model 1. This provides support for the expectation that governments will give priority to legislation dealing with issues important to coalition members (presuming, of course, that these important issues are also nonconflictual). Specifically, we see that at this point in the parliamentary term, an increase of one standard deviation in the issue saliency of a bill increases the probability that it will be introduced by 17%. The findings also continue to support the idea that bills dealing with divisive issues for the coalition will face scheduling delays. Moreover, it now appears that issues that divide the government from the opposition are significantly more likely to be prioritized on the policy agenda, though the relative importance of these issues for the opposition does not appear to make a difference.

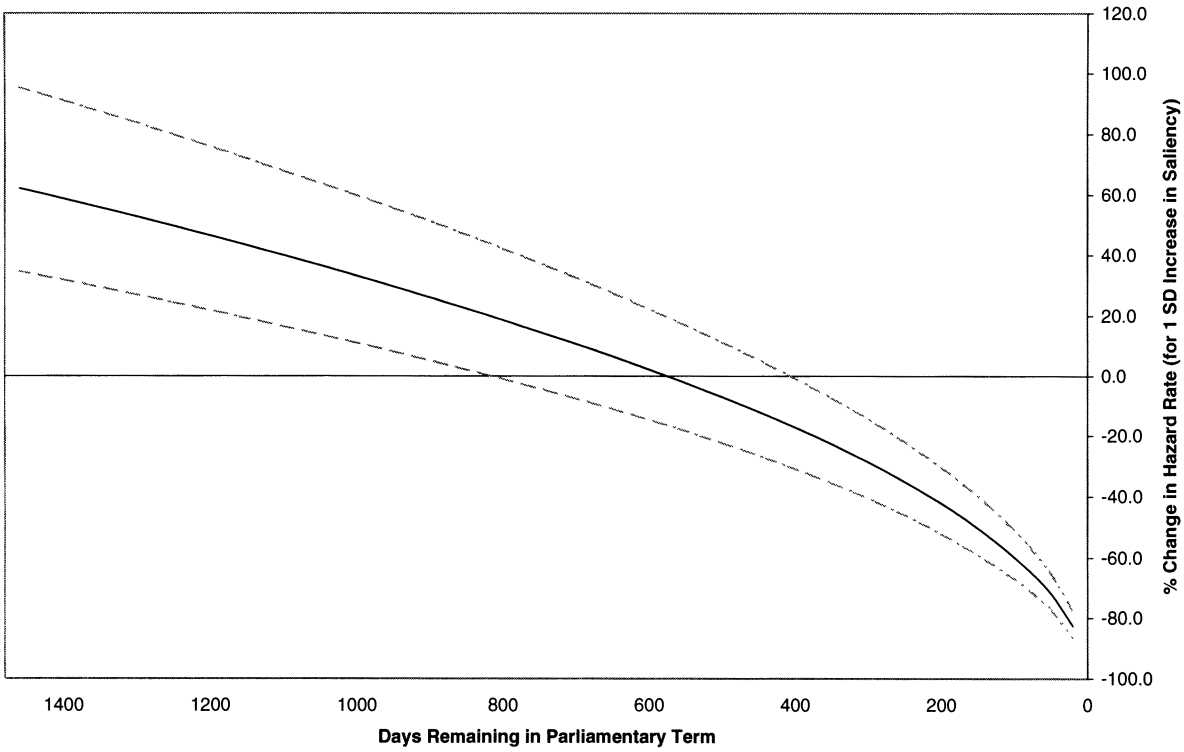
As stated above, the effects for the government ideology variables shown in Model 2 pertain only to a single day in the parliamentary term (i.e., 780 days before regular elections must be held). To develop a more complete picture of how issue saliency and divisiveness influence the organization of the agenda, we have to assess their effects over the entire course of the parliamentary term. Figure 2 illustrates the changing influence of issue saliency for coalition parties over the full CIEP (which is shown here as a four-year period). The solid curve represents the percentage change in the hazard rate for an increase of one standard deviation in the saliency of a proposal of average divisiveness. The dotted curves represent lower and upper confidence bounds for a 95% confidence interval. As the figure shows, at the very beginning of the parliamentary term, a bill on a highly salient policy dimension is over 60% more likely to be introduced on any day, given that it has not yet been introduced, than a bill on a dimension of average saliency.[22] This effect continues to be positive for approximately the first two years of the term. On average over this period, an increase in issue saliency increases the odds of bill introduction by slightly

parliamentary term. I define "early" in the term as an introduction date greater than the median sample value of the dependent variable, or 780 days before the end of the constitutional interelection period (CIEP); "late" in the term refers to any point less than 780 days before the end of the CIEP. (By the end of the CIEP, parliament must be dissolved and regular elections held. Thus, the time remaining in the CIEP represents the maximum length of time a government has available to enact legislation.) An alternative piecewise approach would be to stratify the sample of legislation according to these distinct time periods, estimate a separate survival model on each subsample, and then compare the parameter estimates over the subsamples to assess the consistency of the effects (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). This is equivalent to interacting all the variables in Model 1 (including the country and issue dimension indicators) with a time-period indicator. Both piecewise approaches yield the same conclusions in this case. The results of these diagnostic tests for nonproportionality are available from the author upon request.

[21] More precisely, I interact the government ideology variables with a *log-linear* function of the time remaining in the CIEP. The use of a log function is the most widely accepted approach for dealing with possible nonproportionality (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001).

[22] It is also worth noting that, if we were to look at bills dealing with highly divisive issues (rather than the issues of average divisiveness shown in the figure), issue saliency would still exhibit a positive effect on the probability of bill introduction for a considerable period of time (though the size of the effect and the length of time for which it is positive is substantially smaller). Possible reasons we see a positive effect for issue saliency even for highly divisive bills are that cabinets in the sample tend to be fairly compatible ideologically or tend not to introduce many bills that are characterized by "very high" levels of disagreement. A great deal of theoretical and empirical work on coalition formation suggests that the former explanation may be at play (see Laver and Schofield 1998 and Martin and Stevenson 2001), while the current sample of legislation suggests the latter is a possibility as well. For example, as the descriptive statistics listed under the ideology variables in Table 1 show, the party of the proposing minister and its cabinet partners are, on average, divided on bills that made it onto the agenda by only 1.82 units (compare this to the average of 5.82 units of separation between the party of the proposing minister and opposition parties). These factors would suggest that the analysis may be prone to sample selection bias (arising either from the government formation decision or from the decision about whether to introduce divisive legislation at any point in the term), with the likely consequence of *understating* the effects of coalition partner preferences on the agenda. Another source of selection bias in the sample data might arise from government decisions not to introduce bills that sharply divide the electorate (even if parties in the government agree on the relevant issues), which would most likely manifest itself in deeper divisions between the government and opposition. If this occurs very often, it would suggest that the findings that the government tends to give priority in scheduling to items that provoke the opposition is probably *overstated*. A partial way to solve these problems would be to incorporate information on "potential" proposals that were tabled at the cabinet or department level. As one might imagine, this sort of information is exceedingly hard to come by since the minutes of cabinet meetings, much less the details of department-level decisions, are rarely made public.

**FIGURE 2 Effect of Government Issue Saliency on Timing of Bills over Parliamentary Term**



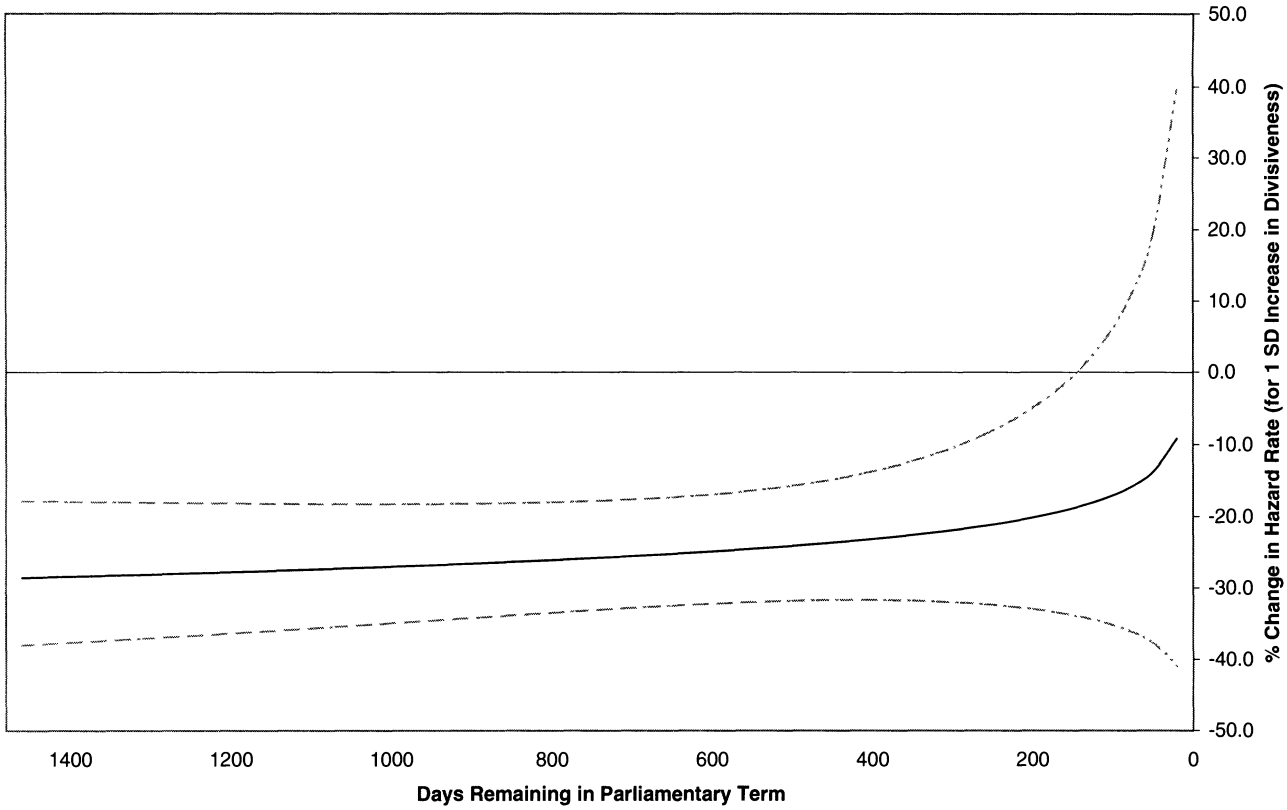

more than 40%. After this point in time, however, the effect of issue saliency becomes statistically indiscernible until the last year of the parliamentary term (shown by where the confidence bounds cross the horizontal bar at zero), at which point it becomes negative. On average during the final year, an increase in issue saliency actually *decreases* the odds of bill introduction by about 40%. This supports the idea that coalition members are less concerned about introducing important legislation late in the parliamentary term, when it is less likely that any bill will make its way through the entire policy-making process.

In Figure 3, I illustrate the changing influence of *government issue divisiveness* over the course of the parliamentary term. The solid curve in this case represents the percentage change in the hazard rate for an increase of one standard deviation in the divisiveness of a proposal of average saliency. One point that becomes immediately clear from this figure, in contrast to what we saw in Figure 2, is that the effect of government issue divisiveness—while it does change over time—does not change by very much. For approximately the first two years of the parliamentary term, an increase of one standard deviation in issue divisiveness decreases the odds of bill introduction on any given day by slightly more than 25%. For the last two years in the term, this effect falls to an average decrease of about 20%. Most importantly, the figure shows that the effect of divisiveness remains in the expected direction, and statistically discernible, up until the closing months of the legislative term. In other words, bills dealing with issues that divide government partners from the proposing minister are almost always more likely to be postponed in their introduction onto the policy agenda.

## Conclusion

Lawmaking is a challenge for coalition governments because it inherently demands cooperation and compromise by parties with divergent policy goals. It is often quite difficult for coalition partners to come to an agreement on important matters of policy in initial government negotiations, but even after they do so, the jurisdictional system of cabinet "power sharing" makes enforcement of the coalition bargain extremely problematic. The findings here indicate that, with respect to the organization of the policy agenda, coalition partners are largely able to overcome these difficulties. Initiatives dealing with issues that are more attractive to the cabinet as a whole tend to be introduced earlier on the agenda, while those dealing with relatively unattractive issues tend to be postponed. Thus, the policy agenda produced by coalition governments appears to be organized in a fashion that accommodates the policy goals of coalition members.

**FIGURE 3 Effect of Government Issue Divisiveness on Timing of Bills over Parliamentary Term**




These results clearly cast doubt upon a key assumption of the ministerial government model, or portfolio-allocation approach, as advanced by Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1994, 1996). In short, if ministers were indeed free to implement their party's most preferred policy in the jurisdiction they control, as their model assumes, then we should find no systematic relationship between the timing of government bills and the ideological preferences of any other parties in the coalition. To be fair to Laver and Shepsle, they admit that their characterization of departmentalism is "necessarily an abstraction from a rich and complex reality" and that one of the "amendments to it that might profitably be pursued . . . [is] the fact that the ministers of a government engage in policy making continuously in real time, rather than setting policy parameters in their respective jurisdictions once and for all" (Laver and Shepsle 1996, 282–83). They also point out that coalition parties could achieve gains from cooperation by not allowing full ministerial discretion. What they do not accept is that coalition partners can ever become confident that their partners will actually honor any agreed-upon compromises.

The findings here are consistent with previous arguments that partners gain such confidence through the use of mechanisms that allow them to control the actions of ministers from other parties. Thus, this project follows in the line of recent studies on how coalition partners can "keep tabs" on their partners (Thies 2001) or "police the bargain" (Martin and Vanberg 2004), but also expands on them by demonstrating that these control devices actually have an effect on important policy decisions made at the cabinet level. The results are also consistent with studies that emphasize the significance of policy divergence for other important episodes in coalition politics, such as pregovernment negotiations between prospective coalition partners (Martin and Vanberg 2003), government formation (Martin and Stevenson 2001) and termination (Warwick 1994).

There are several extensions to the current project that should be pursued in future research. It is worth repeating that the research design employed here limits the generalizability of the findings to a particular type of institutional setting ("consensus" or "proportional" systems) and governmental context (majority coalitions). The expansion of the study to predominantly "majoritarian" systems, such as Ireland or the French Fifth Republic, could be quite interesting from an institutional perspective. For instance, in these countries, one of the central monitoring and control devices available to coalition partners—a strong committee system—is normally considered to be quite weak.

This would suggest that, all else equal, coalition partners in these systems might find it much more difficult to force ministers from other parties to adhere to the terms of the coalition agreement (see Mitchell 1999, however, for an interesting account of how party leaders in Ireland manage to resolve *intraparty* conflicts over coalition policy agreements). A second useful expansion of the project would be to examine how the policy agenda is organized when a *minority* administration is in power. The findings here have indicated that the supposed "consensual" nature of politics in the democracies under investigation does not extend to parties in the opposition. Bills dealing with issues that divide the proposing minister from the opposition tend to be given priority on the agenda, and as Martin and Vanberg (2004) show, after these bills are introduced they are not especially likely to face delay in the legislative process. All of this would suggest that scrutiny by the opposition, at least when a majority coalition is in control, is not particularly effective. A minority government, however, by definition must depend on at least one opposition party to stay in office, and may engage in issue-by-issue alliances with any number of opposition parties. It would be intriguing to examine whether the preferences of opposition parties in these situations have an impact similar to those of government parties when a majority coalition is in power.

Of course, the most valuable extension to this project would be to consider how coalitions make substantive policy decisions at other important stages of lawmaking. The cabinet decision-making process between government formation and termination has for too long been a "black box" in coalition research. Although the organization of the policy agenda is one of the more important decisions governments must make in enacting legislation, there are clearly many more that must be made along the way (such as the attachment of special rules to bills, the proposal or acceptance of amendments from the committee and the floor, and the choice of voting procedures). It remains to be seen whether the accommodative behavior characterizing the introduction of policy initiatives on the agenda carries through to later stages of the legislative process.

# Appendix A

## Coding of Government Bills and Classification by Policy Dimension and Country

| Policy Dimension* | Types of Bills Classified | Percentage of Bills by Dimension† | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Belgium | Germany | Luxembourg | Netherlands | Total |
| *Tax policy* | Income taxes, value-added tax, tax allowances, welfare or health services benefits, disabled workers' benefits, family allowances | 16.2 | 58.6 | 33.0 | 43.9 | 38.5 |
| *Foreign policy* | Relations with the Soviet Union, NATO, or Warsaw Pact | 8.1 | 0.9 | 10.2 | 1.9 | 4.9 |
| *Industrial policy* | Industrial production levels, industrial relations, state-owned corporations, market (de-)regulation, unions and employer associations, wage policy, job training, economic competitiveness | 42.6 | 18.9 | 28.8 | 18.6 | 25.2 |
| *Social policy* | Abortion, homosexuality, alternative lifestyles, domestic cohabitation, pornography, "morality" issues | 1.5 | 1.8 | 0.9 | 7.0 | 3.8 |
| *Clerical policy* | State intervention into religious affairs | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.9 | 0.3 | 0.6 |
| *Agricultural policy* | Quota levels and price regulation of agricultural goods, farm subsidies | 0.0 | 6.3 | 3.7 | 5.7 | 4.3 |
| *Regional policy* | Centralization or decentralization, alterations to municipal or regional laws, redistricting of communal boundaries, regional reforms | 23.5 | 0.0 | 4.2 | 15.1 | 11.6 |
| *Environmental policy* | Air, soil, or water pollution, regulation of emissions standards, CFCs, ecological preservation | 8.1 | 13.5 | 17.2 | 7.5 | 10.9 |

*From Laver and Hunt (1992). †Number of bills (833): Belgium (136), Germany (111), Luxembourg (215), the Netherlands (371).

# Appendix B

## Coefficient Estimates and Variance-Covariance Matrices*

**Variable Labels:** *cbcopsi* = Government issue saliency; *ccbcopsi* = Government issue saliency ∗ *ln*(CIEP); *wcabdiv* = Government issue divisiveness; *cwcabdiv* = Government issue divisiveness ∗ *ln*(CIEP); *opcopsi* = Opposition issue saliency; *wopdiv* = Opposition issue divisiveness

| | | Variance-Covariance Matrix | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Coefficients** | | ***cbcopsi*** | ***ccbcopsi*** | ***wcabdiv*** | ***cwcabdiv*** | ***opcopsi*** | ***wopdiv*** |
| *Model 1:* | | | | | | | |
| −0.703 | *cbcopsi* | **.176670** | | | | | |
| −0.102 | *wcabdiv* | −.002256 | | **.001468** | | | |
| 0.034 | *opcopsi* | −.087064 | | −.000242 | | **.125088** | |
| 0.026 | *wopdiv* | −.001215 | | −.000008 | | −.000346 | **.000295** |
| *Model 2:* | | | | | | | |
| −14.750 | *cbcopsi* | **1.00059** | | | | | |
| 2.383 | *ccbcopsi* | −.13010 | **.020432** | | | | |
| 0.055 | *wcabdiv* | −.18845 | .028352 | **.094421** | | | |
| −0.043 | *cwcabdiv* | .02923 | −.004471 | −.014331 | **.002212** | | |
| −0.233 | *opcopsi* | −.08260 | −.000624 | −.001276 | .000178 | **.127747** | |
| 0.055 | *wopdiv* | −.00158 | .000175 | .000247 | −.000037 | −.000834 | **.000268** |

*Coefficients and variance-covariance estimates for dimension and country indicators are not displayed. (Variance estimates in bold type.)

# Appendix C

## Calculation of Percentage Change in the Hazard Rate

In Table 1, the percentage change in the hazard rate is calculated as, $\frac{100[e^{\lambda_k(x+\delta)}-e^{\lambda_k x}]}{e^{\lambda_k x}}$, for a change in $\delta$ units in the independent variable, $x$. $\lambda_k$ in this equation is the conditional effect of $x$ on the hazard rate. Because of the posited interactive relationship between saliency and divisiveness (discussed in the text), the value of $\lambda_k$ for each ideology variable (as well as the accompanying standard error) will depend upon the specified level of the "companion" ideology variable. Thus, $\lambda_k$ for *government issue divisiveness* will depend upon the level of *government issue saliency*, and vice-versa. The same holds true for the opposition ideology variables. Where these variables are further interacted with time remaining in the CIEP, as in Model 2, the value of $\lambda_k$ will also depend upon time. The value of $\lambda_k$ used to compute the percentage change in the hazard rate (along with the conditional standard error of $\lambda_k$ used to construct the 95% confidence intervals in Table 1) is calculated as follows:*

| **Ideology Variable** | **Conditional Effect ($\lambda_k$)** | **Standard Error of $\lambda_k$** |
|---|---|---|
| (*Without time interactions: Model 1*) | | |
| Government/Opposition Issue Saliency | $\beta_S + \beta_{SD}D$ | $\sqrt{Var(\beta_S) + D^2 Var(\beta_{SD}) + 2D\text{cov}(\beta_S, \beta_{SD})}$ |
| Government/Opposition Issue Divisiveness | $\beta_{SD}S$ | $\sqrt{S^2 Var(\beta_{SD})}$ |
| (*With time interactions: Model 2*) | | |
| Government Issue Saliency | $\beta_S + \beta_{ST}T + \beta_{SD}D + \beta_{SDT}DT$ | $\sqrt{Var(\beta_S) + T^2 Var(\beta_{ST}) + D^2 Var(\beta_{SD}) + D^2T^2 Var(\beta_{SDT}) + 2\{T\text{cov}(\beta_S, \beta_{ST}) + D[\text{cov}(\beta_S, \beta_{SD}) + T\text{cov}(\beta_S, \beta_{SDT}) + T\text{cov}(\beta_{ST}, \beta_{SD}) + DT\text{cov}(\beta_{SD}, \beta_{SDT}) + T^2\text{cov}(\beta_{ST}, \beta_{SDT})]\}}$ |
| Government Issue Divisiveness | $\beta_{SD}S + \beta_{SDT}ST$ | $\sqrt{S^2 Var(\beta_{SD}) + S^2T^2 Var(\beta_{SDT}) + 2S^2T\text{cov}(\beta_{SD}, \beta_{SDT})}$ |

*$S$: Level of government/opposition issue saliency; $D$: Level of government/opposition issue divisiveness; $T$: Logged number of days remaining in CIEP.
$\beta_S$: Government/opposition saliency coefficient; $\beta_{SD}$: Government/opposition divisiveness coefficient; $\beta_{ST}$: CIEP-interacted government issue saliency coefficient; $\beta_{SDT}$: CIEP-interacted government issue divisiveness coefficient. Coefficient estimates for Models 1 and 2, along with the variance-covariance estimates, can be found in Appendix B.

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