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## Original Article

# Cabinet ministers under competing pressures: Presidents, prime ministers, and political parties in semi-presidential systems

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**Abstract** Although Prime Ministers (PMs) often have the constitutional right to fire ministers, their ability to exercise this power is contingent on institutional rules and party politics. This article focuses on the relative powers of Presidents, PMs and political parties over cabinet composition in semi-presidential systems. Several expectations regarding their ability to fire ministers are tested on an original dataset on the tenure of French ministers under conditions of unified government and cohabitation. The analysis shows that presidential influence over cabinet composition strengthens during unified government. Although the influence of both PMs and parties increases during cohabitation, their bearing on cabinet composition varies less than expected across the two executive scenarios. Moreover, ministerial durability is shown to increase during cohabitation. These results highlight the impact of intraparty constraints on prime ministerial influence and the asymmetrical relation between executive format and the ability of the President and the PM to control executive decision making.

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## Introduction

Cabinet ministers are rarely seen as independent actors in their own right (Laver and Shepsle, 1994, p. 302). The amount of time ministers survive in office is believed to depend on the several masters they serve in parliamentary systems, such as the legislature, the prime minister (PM) and the extra-parliamentary political party (Strøm, 1994, p. 36). Indeed, a report published by the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the House of Commons (2013) shows that although the

appointment prerogatives of British prime ministers (PMs) are limited by some legislative constraints, there are no restrictions on when, or how often, or for what reasons ministers should be moved around. The report also draws attention to the close link between intraparty politics and cabinet politics. According to the witnesses interviewed by the Committee, reshuffles are rarely motivated by the PM's wish to change policy. Although some changes are unavoidable because of occasional resignations, illness or death, 'party management' is usually the main reason for reshuffles. According to Ben Bradshaw, a former Labour Minister for Health and Secretary of State for Culture, PMs reshuffle cabinets to 'balance governments politically and give "big beasts" jobs'. Similarly, former PM John Major emphasized that during his time in office the pressure for reshuffles built up in the parliamentary party regularly.

The strategic and party political character of cabinet reshuffles is nowadays the main focus of the literature on ministerial durability. These studies show that PMs use reshuffles as strategic devices to retain power in the face of intraparty and electoral challenges (Kam and Indridason, 2005). Another use of moving ministers around is that of containing agency loss generated by self-interested ministers at the expense of the cabinet's policy agenda (Indridason and Kam, 2008). Ministers are also more likely to step down when the government's popularity is low or falling (Dewan and Dowding, 2005), when the PM's approval rating begins to lag behind the government's and when the popularity gap between the PM's party and junior coalition partners narrows (Kam and Indridason, 2005). Whether ministers keep office when they are asked to resign depends on the position taken by their own party and the PM (Fischer *et al*, 2006). Party effects on ministerial appointments and dismissals increase considerably in coalition cabinets, where PMs must negotiate these decisions with coalition parties. In this context, party and prime-ministerial influence over hiring and firing decisions may be difficult to disentangle, as PMs and coalition partners may have different incentives to keep or remove ministers from office (Dowding and Dumont, 2009, pp. 14–15).

Similarly to coalition governments, the appointment and removal of cabinet members involves a complex web of political bargaining in semi-presidential systems, where hiring and firing decisions must be negotiated between presidents and PMs (Dowding and Dumont, 2009, p. 11). The power-sharing arrangement between a directly elected fixed-term president and a PM and cabinet responsible to the legislature may result in the occurrence of cohabitation, which divides political power between a President and a PM of different party coalitions (Lewis-Beck, 1997, p. 315). What difference does executive format make for ministerial durability and the relative influence of presidents, PMs and political parties over cabinet composition? This article tests several expectations derived from a competing-principals reading of ministerial accountability in the semi-presidential chain of delegation, where voters give both presidents and assemblies a mandate to exercise authority over the government (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a). The article looks for



evidence that the President's ability to reverse the agency relationship between parties and their minister-agents during unified government (Samuels and Shugart, 2010) strengthens his control over cabinet composition. Similarly, the article tests whether the shift from a mainly presidential to a mainly parliamentary mode of government under cohabitation (Duverger, 1980; Lijphart, 2004) increases the ability of PMs and parties to fire ministers.

The analysis confirms some of these expectations. Presidential pressure is strongly associated with a decrease in the length of ministerial tenure during unified government but not during cohabitation. Prime-ministerial and party control over cabinet composition increase during cohabitation. However, prime-ministerial influence over ministerial removal varies less than expected across the two executive scenarios. This result supports the view that intraparty ties become more restrictive under cohabitation, when the PM acts as a party agent, than during unified government, when parties have no ex-post control mechanisms for a directly-elected president (Samuels and Shugart, 2010, p. 121). Moreover, ministerial durability increases during cohabitation, confirming the veto-player theory's expectations that the increase in the number of actors involved in executive decision making should gear the system towards the *status quo* (Tsebelis, 2000; Leuffen, 2009). These findings draw attention to the asymmetrical relationship between the voting incentives generated by dual-executive arrangements, where voters hold the President and the PM responsible for executive decision making during unified government and cohabitation respectively (Lewis-Beck, 1997), and the ability of presidents and PMs to control executive decision making under the two executive scenarios.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section outlines the theory and the expectations regarding the effects of presidential, prime-ministerial and party pressure on the length of ministerial tenure under conditions of unified and split executives in semi-presidential systems. The subsequent section places these expectations in the context of the Fifth French Republic. The penultimate and the final sections present the data and the results of the empirical analysis. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for the study of ministerial durability and executive decision making in semi-presidential systems.

## **Executive Decision Making and Agency Relations in Semi-Presidential Systems**

This work follows the literature on ministerial selection and deselection that studies cabinet members as a link in the chain of parliamentary delegation from voters and political parties to civil servants (Strøm, 2000). Scholars of Westminster systems have focused on the role of cabinet members as agents of PMs (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Fischer *et al*, 2006; Dewan and Myatt, 2007; Indridason and Kam, 2008;

Berlinski *et al.*, 2010, 2012). Other works have argued that cabinet members may have several principals, such as parliamentary groups, extra-parliamentary parties, party factions and collective coalition principals (Andeweg, 2000; Dowding and Dumont, 2009; Kam *et al.*, 2010; Bäck *et al.*, 2013). The formal and informal involvement of presidents in the appointment and dismissal of governments further increases the number of principals who can put pressure on cabinet ministers in semi-presidential systems (Protsyk, 2006; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009b).

This article adopts a competing-principals perspective (Carey, 2007) on ministerial durability in semi-presidential systems. From a principal-agent perspective, the position of cabinets in semi-presidential systems is that of an agent facing two principals, as both presidents and assemblies are involved in the appointment and dismissal of the executive (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a). How much control does each principal exercise over the government? This is a challenging question, as the constitutional powers granted to presidents and PMs vary considerably among the countries included in the semi-presidential category. To systematize this variation, Shugart and Carey (1992) distinguish between premier-presidential and president-parliamentary forms of semi-presidentialism, depending on whether the President can dismiss the cabinet. In president-parliamentary regimes, both parliaments and presidents have the formal power to dismiss the government. In premier-presidential systems, presidents are not granted any constitutional powers to dismiss individual ministers or the cabinet collectively and PMs are formally in charge of the government's operation. In practice, though, whether the executive is unified or divided, in other words whether the President is a member or an opponent of the parliamentary majority, is expected to determine who controls the cabinet (Duverger, 1996; Samuels and Shugart, 2010).

Executive format makes a difference for the extent of presidential, prime-ministerial and party control over the government because a strong presidency can loosen the party–government relationship in semi-presidential systems (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009b) only when the President is the leader of the parliamentary majority. According to Samuels and Shugart (2010, p. 43), if the head of state acts as a *de facto* party leader, then the PM becomes an agent of the President. This is why presidents who lack formal dismissal powers have been able to fire PMs from their own party or coalition (Samuels and Shugart, 2010, pp. 103–105). Extending this argument for cabinet members, one can also expect the party–leader principal–agent relationship to be reversed in favour of the presidency during unified government. However, principal–agent relations change during cohabitation, when the President opposes the parliamentary majority. Under these circumstances, the President lacks both formal powers and partisan authority over the cabinet. As a result, periods of cohabitation are generally expected to spell an essentially parliamentary form of government (Pasquino, 1997, p. 127), where political power shifts from the President to the PM (Lijphart, 2004, p. 102). Indeed, Samuels and Shugart (2010, p. 106) found no cases of presidents who were able to push PMs from office during periods of



cohabitation. Thus, given the President's inability to undermine the principal-agent relation between parties and their representatives in government during cohabitation, the PM and political parties should emerge as dominant principals for cabinet members. Whether or not increased authority over the government during cohabitation generates the power to decide how long ministers can stay in office needs to be empirically verified.

To sum up, this article looks for evidence that executive format makes a difference for the extent of presidential, prime-ministerial and party effects on ministerial durability. The President's ability to undermine the agency relationship between parties and their minister-agents should be reflected in evidence that *presidential pressure has a negative impact on ministerial durability during unified government but not under cohabitation*. Conversely, if executive format changes markedly the ability of PMs and parties to remove cabinet members, then the evidence should indicate that *the pressure put by both PMs and parties on cabinet members has a negative impact on their length of tenure under cohabitation but not under unified government*.

## Ministerial Accountability in France

Empirically, this article focuses on ministerial turnover in the Fifth French Republic. France is a good case for this study for several reasons. First, the French convention of ministerial autonomy reduces the individual ministers' accountability to the parliament while making their position highly dependent on the President and the PM (Thiébaud, 1994, p. 139). The lack of a collective cabinet authority strengthens the ministers' ability to decide policymaking within their own portfolios and increases their reliance on the President and the PM, who are often called to arbitrate between inter-departmental conflicts (Elgie, 1993, pp. 32–33). Consequently, one can focus on presidents and PMs as the main political actors who can influence the course of ministerial careers.

Second, France is a good case to study the conditions under which presidential, prime-ministerial and party influence over cabinet composition waxes and wanes, as the 1958 Constitution provides conditions for both presidential and prime-ministerial leadership (Elgie and Machin, 1991). For example, Article 8 grants the PM the power to propose who should be hired or fired from the cabinet. However, the President holds the autonomous right to appoint the PM and must approve all proposals for cabinet appointments and removals. The PM directs the action of the government according to Article 21. He or she is also the only cabinet member who can initiate legislation (under Article 39), call an extraordinary session of the parliament (under Article 29), and influence legislative outcomes by putting a bill to the test of parliamentary confidence (under Article 49). On the other hand, the right to chair cabinet meetings (under Article 9) allows the President to set the agenda of cabinet

meetings and influence policymaking indirectly (Knapp and Wright, 2006, p. 89). Finally, a wide range of administrative and organization resources elevate the PM's office into the centre of the government machinery (Knapp and Wright, 2006, p. 91). Yet, Article 5 grants the power to ensure the proper functioning of public authorities through arbitration to the head of state. This provision has been interpreted as a firm basis for the President's ability to keep a tight grip over state institutions (Carcassonne, 2011, pp. 55–56).

A shift from presidential to prime-ministerial leadership occurs during cohabitation. However, several authors note that the PM is by no means omnipotent under these circumstances (Levy and Skach, 2008, p. 119). As far as cabinet composition is concerned, constitutional experts argue that both actors take part in this decision-making process, albeit to much varying degrees during unified government and cohabitation (Carcassonne, 2011, p. 84). For example, President Mitterrand was able to veto PM Chirac's nominations of François Léotard and Jean Lecanuet for the portfolio of defence and foreign affairs in March 1986 (Knapp and Wright, 2006, p. 123). This example tells us that president-prime-ministerial bargains over cabinet composition during cohabitation should not be ruled out (Kam and Indridason, 2009, p. 43). In addition, party politics may limit the PM's ability to hire and fire ministers. For example, Lionel Jospin had little choice but to appoint party seniors Laurent Fabius and Jack Lang to cabinet in the 2000 reshuffle (Jospin, 2010, p. 251). Therefore, one can legitimately enquire the extent to which the shift in power from the President to the PM during cohabitation is accompanied by full control over hiring and firing ministers.

Finally, one must consider the impact of political parties on cabinet ministers. Studies of executive decision making in the Fourth and Fifth French Republics draw attention to a radical change that occurred in the relationship between political parties and governments from one political regime to the other. During the Fourth Republic, PMs acted as mere brokers between political parties and cabinet members were directly responsible to their party (Petry, 1994, pp. 128–129). The minister-party relationship changed under the Fifth Republic that was designed to create the conditions for strong executive leadership and separate the government from political parties (Thiébaud, 1994, p. 141). The adoption of a directly elected and powerful presidency has also affected the organization and behaviour of parties. The transformation of Gaullist and Socialist parties into presidential machines has accentuated their organizational weaknesses, reducing the influence of party organizations on policy formulation and intraparty politics (Samuels and Shugart, 2010, p. 179). As *de facto* leaders of their parties, presidents have been able to hold cabinet ministers accountable during periods of unified government (Thiébaud, 1994, p. 144). Under cohabitation, though, cabinet members are expected to be less autonomous from their parties, as 'parliamentary party leaders and extra-parliamentary party heads play a much more active role in governance – either directly as part of government or indirectly as monitors of their parties' ministers' (Thiébaud, 1994,



p. 142). One should therefore test the extent to which the expected increase in party influence over the government under cohabitation impinges on the length of ministerial tenure.

## Data and Variables

This article studies ministerial turnover across two governments: the 1997–2002 cohabitation government led by PM Lionel Jospin and the 2007–2012 government formed under PM François Fillon after Nicolas Sarkozy and the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) won the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections. The third French cohabitation between PM Lionel Jospin, the leader of the Socialist Party (PS) and President Jacques Chirac, the founder of the conservative Rally for the Republic (RPR) was preferred to previous cohabitation periods as it was the only one to have lasted for the entire length of a parliamentary term. Like Lionel Jospin, François Fillon kept office as PM during the entire length of a parliamentary from 2007 to 2012. Moreover, Fillon's mandate fully coincided with Nicolas Sarkozy's five-year presidential term. Thus, while studying ministerial turnover in these two governments, one can focus on principal–minister relations without having to account for different prime–ministerial and presidential styles within each executive scenario.

The dataset includes 75 ministerial appointments and covers all cabinet members<sup>1</sup> who served in the two governments. A ministerial spell is defined as the uninterrupted length of time served by a minister upon appointment. The duration in office is not interrupted if ministers change portfolios as a result of cabinet reshuffles. However, if ministers leave the cabinet and return after a certain period of time, they are recorded as new cases. For example, Xavier Bertrand took office as a Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Solidarity in May 2007, stepped down in January 2009, and was reappointed again as Minister of Labour, Employment and Health in November 2011. His service in François Fillon's government is therefore recorded as two ministerial spells. For each ministerial spell in the dataset, the dependent variable records the length of tenure, which is the difference between the exact dates when ministers take and leave office.

Table 1 emphasizes some differences between the length of ministerial tenure and the frequency of deselection under the two executive scenarios. The mean observed tenure is 9 months longer during cohabitation compared with unified government. This difference may be explained by the number of actors whose agreement is necessary to carry out cabinet changes. During unified government, when the President and the PM are from the same party, the former may be able to dominate executive decision making because of his ascendancy over the parliamentary majority. However, despite the shift from presidential to prime-ministerial leadership during cohabitation, presidents may preserve some influence over cabinet composition, as PMs are formally required to propose cabinet changes to the President. PMs

**Table 1:** Events and personal characteristics by cabinet

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Jospin (Cohabitation)</i>		<i>Fillon (Unified executive)</i>		<i>Overall</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
No. of ministers		32		43		75
No. of failures		10		19		29
Length of tenure (days)	1059.69	566.91	790.14	446.68	905.15	515.65
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Gender	0.25	0.44	0.26	0.44	0.25	0.44
Cabinet experience	0.66	0.48	0.65	0.48	0.65	0.48
Deputy	0.75	0.44	0.58	0.50	0.65	0.48
Parliamentary experience	0.59	0.50	0.63	0.49	0.61	0.49
Mayor	0.53	0.51	0.44	0.50	0.48	0.50
Party experience	0.38	0.49	0.53	0.50	0.47	0.50
<i>Events</i>						
Conflicts PR	1.31	2.53	1.44	1.80	1.39	2.13
Conflicts PM	1.91	2.86	0.91	1.34	1.33	2.16
Conflicts PARTY	2.84	3.87	2.44	3.44	2.61	3.61
Resignation debates	1.13	2.34	0.51	0.96	0.77	1.71
Reshuffles	0.13	0.34	0.44	0.50	0.31	0.46

*Note:* Figures before treatment with the exponential decay function.

also need to take into account the preferences of their parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties. Thus, the increase in the number of political actors who need to agree on changes in cabinet composition may explain the rise in ministerial durability during cohabitation (Indridason and Kam, 2005, p. 8).

The data on the tenure of ministers draws on personal characteristics and political experience at the moment of appointment and on individual indicators of performance while in office. Summary statistics are presented in Table 1. *Gender* equals 1 for female ministers. Previous appointment to high executive office is captured by *Cabinet experience*, which equals one if ministers have previously served as full cabinet members. Parliamentary experience is captured by two variables. The first one, *Deputy*, indicates selection from among the number of incumbent deputies. The second one, *Parliamentary experience*, indicates which ministers were elected at least twice to the National Assembly. Experience in local administration is captured by *Mayor*, which equals one for incumbent mayors and presidents of municipal or regional councils. *Party experience* controls for the importance of political partisanship as a channel for ministerial appointments and equals one for party executives and leaders of local party organizations at the moment of appointment.





The data in Table 1 suggests that the two governments under study form a homogenous population of ministers. Women made up a quarter of each government. Two-thirds of ministers in either government had previously held a cabinet portfolio, three fifths of them were experienced parliamentarians and about half were mayors or presidents of regional councils at the moment of appointment. Some variation can be found with regard to the ministers' status as incumbent deputies at the moment of appointment and their experience in a political party. François Fillon's cabinet includes more non-partisan or politically inexperienced ministers because of Nicolas Sarkozy's policy of *ouverture*, which brought left-wing figures and civil society personalities, such as Frédéric Mitterrand and Bernard Kouchner, to the cabinet table. Overall, though, the homogeneity of personal characteristics across the two governments reduces the risk that idiosyncratic factors related to the process of ministerial appointment at different moments of time could be driving the results.

Three categories of events are used as measures of individual performance. The first one consists of resignation calls. Previous works have argued that PMs use this information to decide how long cabinet members can continue in office (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Fischer *et al*, 2006; Berlinski *et al*, 2010, 2012). Similarly to these studies, a resignation call was recorded each time a minister was asked to resign over a personal, professional, departmental, policy or party issue by fellow politicians or non-political organizations as reported in the press. Multiple resignation calls over the same issue are recorded only if new information is added to a case. This data is collected from 23 060 full-text articles published in *Le Figaro*<sup>2</sup> and selected from LexisNexis using a range of keywords.<sup>3</sup> The dataset includes 58 resignation debates.

The second category of events that act as indicators of performance concentrates on the individual relations between ministers and their principals: presidents, PMs and political parties. One of the difficulties of testing a competing-principals account of ministerial durability is that resignation calls are a source of information for more than one principal. Consequently, finding out who uses this instrument to sanction ministers is not straightforward. One way to solve this problem is to find a measure for how much ministers deviate from the preferred positions of each of their principals after appointment. This article focuses on public evidence of conflicts or disagreements between ministers and principals as an indicator of agency loss that the latter aim to contain.<sup>4</sup> Principals should be more likely to let ministers go as the evidence of agency loss increases. If ministers keep office despite the accumulation of publicly visible conflicts with a certain principal, then the latter may be unable to sanction agency loss.<sup>5</sup>

The dataset includes three explanatory variables that record conflicts between ministers, presidents, PMs and party principals. A conflict was recorded each time the President,<sup>6</sup> the PM<sup>7</sup> or the minister's party<sup>8</sup> condemned the minister for personal mistakes or overall performance; decided against the minister in interministerial arbitrations; passed negative judgements on ministerial policies and their consequences; or evaluated negatively the performance of a ministry. This information is

collected from the same *Le Figaro* articles selected from LexisNexis. One conflict is recorded for each issue over which ministers clash with one of their principals, unless new information comes to light. Biographies and autobiographies of ministers, PMs and former presidents were also consulted for a better understanding of the context behind some of the events recorded. The dataset includes 104 conflicts with the President, 100 conflicts with the PM and 189 conflicts with political parties.

The third category of events experienced by ministers is that of individual shifts from one portfolio to another. *Reshuffles* is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether ministers have changed their position in cabinet after appointment. This variable tests whether the PMs' use of reshuffles as a strategy for reducing agency loss (Indridason and Kam, 2008) has a positive impact on the length of ministerial tenure.

Altogether, the dataset contains 560 events experienced by ministers while in office, including termination events, reshuffles, resignation debates and conflicts with the three principals. The occurrence of these events does not vary markedly across the two governments. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 show that ministers experienced a similar number of conflicts with presidents and political parties in both governments. The number of conflicts with the PM is higher under cohabitation, which is not surprising given the increase in prime-ministerial activism under this executive scenario. Resignation calls and reshuffles follow different patterns in the two governments. The high number of resignation debates corresponding to the 'plural left' government can be put down to the range of bold reforms carried out during this time, such as the 35-hour working week and the youth employment policy, the healthcare reform, hunting policies and the autonomy plan for Corsica. Despite the fierce pressure of business and pro-hunting lobbying groups, and civil servants occasionally, Lionel Jospin carried out a single major reshuffle in March 2000, when he let go several embattled ministers. On the other hand, although ministers in François Fillon's government experienced fewer resignation calls, they were reshuffled more often. In this case, reshuffles had multiple political functions: some were triggered by changes in the government's political composition (November 2010); others were related to the decision to separate party and governmental responsibilities within the UMP (January 2009); while several other reshuffles reflected President Sarkozy's attempts to improve his and the government's popularity after electoral defeats in second-order elections (March 2008, June 2009, March 2010).

## Model Specification and Data Analysis

The technique used to estimate the impact of presidential, prime-ministerial and party pressure on ministerial durability is parametric survival analysis. To determine which parametric form describes best the baseline hazard of ministerial survival the



exponential, Gompertz, Weibull, log normal, log-logistic and generalized gamma were tested for goodness of fit according to the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004, pp. 41–45). The Weibull model, which allows the shape of the hazard function to increase or decrease monotonically over time, offered the best parametric description for a model that estimates ministerial turnover as a function of executive format.

One issue that needs to be considered while estimating the impact of events on the length of ministerial tenure is that simply summing up resignation calls and conflicts might overestimate the extent of the career-control powers held by principals. In this context, a simple additive model is completely oblivious to the passing of time and fails to take into account the relativity of the principals' powers because it has no capacity to 'forget'. As a result, the influence of a particular conflict on the risk of ministerial deselection cannot be observed as all conflicts are equipotent. The additive model can be improved by adding a specification that allows it to 'forget' events when the time of their occurrence is sufficiently far back into the past with respect to the moment of deselection. The use of decay functions is a common modelling strategy in civil war studies, as it allows scholars to estimate the declining utility of third party interventions over time (see for example Regan, 2006 and Gent, 2008). Similarly, an exponential decay function is used here to model the declining impact of the events ministers experience while in office:

$$e^{-\lambda(t-t_{\text{conflict}})}$$

The value of  $\lambda$  is determined with respect to the event half-life, defined as the period of time after which the likelihood of being fired because of that event drops to 50 per cent. As a result:

$$\lambda = -\frac{\log(0.5)}{t_{\text{half}}}$$

The value of  $\lambda$  is estimated from the data by iteratively fitting the Weibull model that estimates ministerial turnover as a function of executive format for all half-time values between 1 and 1816 days (which is the maximum length of tenure in this dataset). The model that best fits the data (that is, the one with the highest log-likelihood) is attained for a half-time value of 142 days. All models failing the link test, which verifies the use of an adequate parameterization, were not considered in the estimation of  $\lambda$ . The event's half-life indicates that following 142 days after an event occurs the likelihood of being fired because of that particular event is halved. All conflicts included in the analysis are weighted by this exponential.

The two models presented in Table 2 show coefficients from Weibull regressions and report standard errors clustered by ministers, which adjust for within-minister correlation without biasing the cross-minister estimators (Cameron and Trivedi, 2010, p. 335). Positive coefficients indicate that the risk of deselection increases, while negative coefficients decrease the hazard rate and increase the length of tenure.

**Table 2:** Personal background, events, and ministerial durability (Weibull survival models)

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
<i>Personal background</i>		
Gender	0.91 (0.80)	1.04 (0.84)
Cabinet experience	0.96 (0.62)	1.38** (0.70)
Deputy	-1.46** (0.72)	-0.41 (0.83)
Parliamentary experience	1.63* (0.86)	0.67 (1.04)
Mayor	0.08 (0.66)	1.51* (0.89)
Party experience	0.10 (0.59)	-0.12 (0.62)
<i>Events</i>		
Reshuffles	-1.49* (0.79)	-2.20** (0.90)
Resignation calls	0.84** (0.32)	2.02*** (0.53)
Resignation calls × Cohabitation	—	-1.75** (0.74)
PR Conflicts	1.40** (0.47)	3.07*** (0.78)
PR Conflicts × Cohabitation	—	-3.55** (1.38)
PM Conflicts	1.09** (0.35)	0.28 (0.59)
PM Conflicts × Cohabitation	—	1.06 (0.73)
PARTY Conflicts	0.28 (0.33)	-0.79* (0.46)
PARTY Conflicts × Cohabitation	—	2.40** (0.86)
Cohabitation	—	-19.72** (9.00)
Constant	-11.31*** (3.11)	-12.51*** (3.70)
Weibull shape parameter	1.46 (0.41)	—
Cohabitation (ancillary)	—	0.96 (0.37)
Log likelihood	12.10	21.90
Number of Events	560	560
Number of Ministers	75	75
Number of Failures	29	29
Linktest (hat squared)	-0.02 ( <i>P</i> = 0.80)	0.01 ( <i>P</i> = 0.10)

Note: \*  $P < 0.10$ , \*\*  $P < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$  (based on robust standard errors clustered on ministers).



Model 2 estimates the overall impact of personal background and events on the risk of losing office. The Weibull shape parameter is greater than 1, indicating that the risk of losing office increases over time. Model 2 estimates the impact of resignation calls and conflicts with principals on ministerial deselection as a function of executive format. For this reason, the resignation calls and conflicts variables are interacted with *Cohabitation*, a dichotomous variable that equals 1 for cohabitation and 0 for unified government. To allow the baseline hazard function to vary across the two executive scenarios, *Cohabitation* is included in the estimation of the ancillary parameter in Model 2. This specification allows executive format to affect both the scale and the shape of the hazard function (Cleves *et al.*, 2008, p. 297).

The results corresponding to personal characteristics indicate that *Cabinet experience* is associated with higher hazard rates. Although one may expect that experience correlates with ability and greater durability, this finding is in line with similar evidence showing that British ministers without previous experience are less predisposed to leave office early (Berlinski *et al.*, 2009). Being a *Deputy* at the moment of appointment has a positive impact on the length of tenure, while *Parliamentary experience* seems to have the opposite effect. Similarly to the case of ministers with a strong executive background, ministers who have already developed a career as deputies may be less inclined to engage in policy compromises with their principals than their less experienced colleagues and more preoccupied to protect their professional reputation. The same argument may apply to the case of ministers who are *Mayors* (or presidents of municipal or regional councils). However, as the statistical significance of the results corresponding to personal characteristics is not robust across the two models, these findings should be interpreted with caveats.

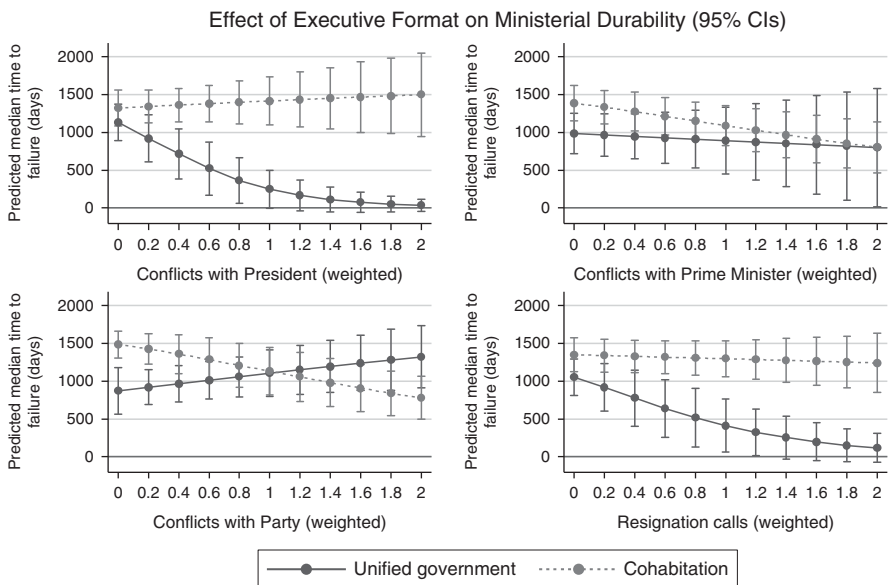
The negative and statistically significant coefficients on *Reshuffles* in both models indicate that ministers who change portfolios are likely to survive longer in office. Several studies argue that PMs use reshuffles strategically, as a way of preventing or sanctioning agency loss (Indridason and Kam, 2008). Some ministers may also be rewarded for their performance and promoted to higher profile departments. Whatever the reason for changing portfolios might be, reshuffled ministers do appear to spend more time in office.

Both models confirm the explanatory power of resignation calls and conflict variables. The positive and statistically significant coefficients of *Resignation calls*, *PR Conflicts* and *PM Conflicts* in Model 1 indicate that, overall, resignation debates and clashes with presidents and PMs increase considerably the ministers' risk of losing office. The positive coefficient of *PARTY Conflicts* indicate that clashes with the party principal also have a negative effect on the length of ministerial tenure, but the result is not statistically significant.

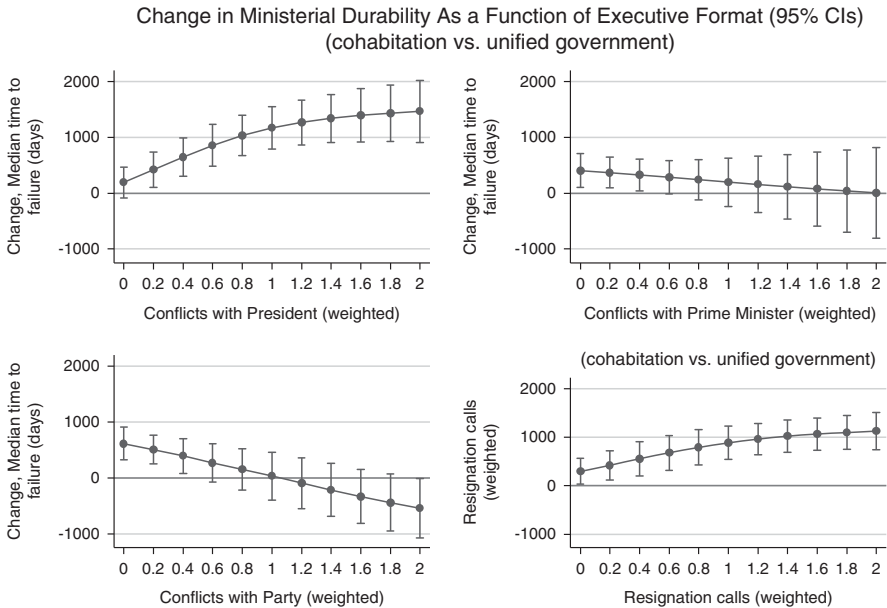
Model 2 estimates the extent to which executive format affects the impact of resignation calls and conflicts with principals on ministerial deselection by interacting these variables with *Cohabitation*. In addition, the parameterization of the ancillary parameter allows the baseline hazard to vary across unified government

and cohabitation. The statistically significant coefficient of the ancillary parameter suggests that the shape of the hazard does change according to executive format. Moreover, the negative and statistically significant coefficient of *Cohabitation* in the model indicates that executive format also influences the scale of the hazard, which as expected is lower during cohabitation. The results corresponding to the events variables show that resignation calls and conflicts with the President have a substantive and statistically significant reductive effect on the length of ministerial tenure during unified government (when *Cohabitation* is zero). However, as the impact of interaction terms on the risk of deselection is not directly revealed by regression coefficients outside unified government (when *Cohabitation* is one), the effect of executive format across the observed values of resignation calls and conflicts with presidents, PMs and party principals needs to be presented graphically (Brambor *et al.*, 2006, p. 75).

Figure 1 illustrates how the length of ministerial tenure changes during unified government and cohabitation across a common range of observed values for conflicts with the President (top-left), the PM (top-right), the party (bottom-left) and resignation calls (bottom-right). Figure 2 presents the change in ministerial durability as a function of executive format across the common range of observed values for conflicts with the three principals and resignation calls. 95 per cent confidence intervals around the sloping lines determine the conditions under which these events have a statistically significant effect on ministerial durability.



**Figure 1:** Effect of executive format on ministerial durability across events.



**Figure 2:** Change in ministerial durability as a function of executive format (cohabitation versus unified government) across events.

According to Figure 1, as the number of conflicts with the President and resignation calls increases during unified government, the length of ministerial tenure drops significantly. The slopes corresponding to these events are much steeper under unified government than under cohabitation and are also statistically significant across the entire range of their values. Their confidence intervals are also significantly narrower during unified executive than during cohabitation, which increases the certainty of results. These findings are confirmed in Figure 2, where the ascending lines corresponding to resignation calls and conflicts with presidents suggest that these events have opposite effects on ministerial durability under unified government and cohabitation. Specifically, a substantial and statistically significant reductive effect on the length of tenure is found only during unified government.

As opposed to conflicts with presidents and resignation calls, Figure 1 shows that as the number of conflicts with PMs increases, their reductive effect on the length of tenure grows stronger during cohabitation but not during unified government. The results are statistically significant within each scenario but the confidence intervals under unified government are considerably wider than under cohabitation, increasing the difficulty of determining their effect with certainty. Moreover, the results in Figure 2 suggest that the marginal effect of executive format on durability is

statistically significant only at the lower end of the range of observed values for conflicts with the PM. In other words, although clashes with PMs do seem to affect the length of ministerial tenure, their reductive effect does not vary greatly across unified government and cohabitation.

Similarly to PMs, Figure 1 suggests that conflicts with party principals have a comparable impact on the length of ministerial tenure under both unified government and cohabitation. However, as the number of conflicts with the party increases, their reductive effect on the length of tenure grows stronger under cohabitation but not under unified government. This finding validates the expectation that political parties have more opportunities to control cabinet members under cohabitation compared with unified government. The results in Figure 2 also indicate that the occurrence of cohabitation strengthens the reductive impact of clashes with the party on the length of ministerial tenure relative to unified government as the level of conflict increases.

The specification of the two models is examined in several ways. First, the linearity of the independent variables is probed in each case by running link tests (reported at the bottom of Table 2). Second, the Weibull and proportional hazards assumptions have been examined by plotting the log of the negative log of Kaplan-Meier survival estimates against the log of time (Kleinbaum and Klein, 2005, p. 274). This test showed that the proportional hazards assumption is violated when the cohabitation variable is included in the model, indicating that a Weibull model in which the shape parameter varies by executive format fits the data better. This result confirmed the initial assumption that a stratified Weibull model, where executive format is allowed to affect both the scale and the shape of the hazard function, is a good choice for this analysis. The AIC scores obtained for Weibull models with and without the parameterization of the ancillary parameter also indicated that the model in which both the scale and the shape parameters vary across executive scenarios provides the best parametric description. Third, alternative functions were used to obtain the value of the event's half-time, such as a squared reciprocal function and a logistic function. Although the values obtained for the event's half-life were somewhat different, the regression results did not differ greatly. Fourth, an alternative analysis using a semi-parametric stratified Cox model did not change the results significantly either.

## **Does Executive Format Matter for Ministerial Durability?**

The comparative analysis of ministerial durability under conditions of unified and divided government confirms the strong association between unified government and a presidential mode of government in France. Compared with PMs and party principals, conflicts with Presidents were shown to have a much stronger reductive effect on the length of ministerial tenure during unified government. This finding is





substantiated by President Sarkozy's extensive authority over the cabinet and the majority party between 2007 and 2012. Before taking office as President of France, Sarkozy argued that a presidential style of government should be accepted as the French executive's *modus operandi*, despite the leadership role conferred to the PM in the constitution.<sup>9</sup> The agreement between Nicolas Sarkozy and François Fillon on the *de facto* leadership of the head of state was advanced in two programmatic books published ahead of the 2007 elections (Fillon, 2006; Sarkozy, 2006). Once in office, Sarkozy made sure that his authority over the majority party could not be overshadowed. The directly elected position of the party president was suspended and replaced with an unelected collegial leadership in charge of the daily management of the party in July 2007. The swift revision of the UMP statutes and the acknowledgement of Sarkozy's *de facto* party leadership are indicative of the way in which the head of state was able to reverse the principal-agent relationship between the majority party and its representatives in government and turn the PM and cabinet members into his own agents. Sarkozy further strengthened his influence over the parliamentary majority and the cabinet by organizing informal meetings not only with the leaders of majority parties, but also with cabinet members in the PM's absence. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the pressure put by the PM and parties on ministers had a considerably weaker impact on their length of tenure than the President's.

The situation was markedly different during cohabitation. The rise in ministerial durability confirms the veto-player theory's expectations that an increase in the number of actors involved in decision making fosters stability (Leuffen, 2009, p. 1154). Although the impact of presidential pressure on the ministers' risk of losing office is negligible, confirming the presidency's lack of formal resources, the role of the PM and party in ministerial removal is clearly strengthened.

The increase in the impact of conflicts with the party on ministerial durability during cohabitation compared with unified government supports the principal-agent view that parties are in a better position to hold their minister-agents accountable when presidents are unable to compete for control over the cabinet. However, although the PM is more powerful during cohabitation, his influence on ministerial durability does not seem to increase markedly compared with unified government. Without calling into question the prime-ministerial model of government during cohabitation, this result underlines the impact of interparty and intraparty constraints on the PM's freedom of action.

The PM's relationship to his own party and to parties inside the governing coalition acts as an important determinant of his role in the policy process (Elgie, 1993, p. 162). Similarly, party politics should matter for the PM's ability to decide cabinet composition. Lionel Jospin's resignation as party leader before taking office as PM reflected his intention to establish a president-type relation with the majority party (Clift, 2003, p. 102). His authority over the PS and the parliamentary majority was uncontested (Glavany, 2001; Voynet, 2003, p. 63). This, however, does not

necessarily mean that Jospin could take unilateral decisions regarding cabinet composition. According to his own account, he was responsible for only one of the departures that broke up the ‘dream team’ cabinet, which brought together Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Claude Allègre, Martine Aubry, Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Dominique Voynet in June 1997 (Jospin, 2010, p. 251). Relations with the coalition parties in the Plural Left government were often described as a ‘second cohabitation’, because of the difficulty of keeping together a five-party heterogeneous coalition that included Socialists, Communists and Greens (Levy *et al*, 2008, p. 12). Concessions had to be made when ministers broke the rule of collective responsibility. For example, Dominique Voynet, the Green party’s Environment Minister and Marie-George Buffet, the Communist party’s Sports Minister, often sided with protest movements against their government’s policies without risking their cabinet seat. Thus, the analysis confirms the impact of intraparty and interparty factors on prime-ministerial influence (Elgie, 1993, pp. 158–162; Dowding and Dumont, 2009, pp. 14–15) even during cohabitation, when the PM takes the lead over executive decision making.

Although more data is needed to understand why resignation calls lead to deselection much quicker during unified government compared with cohabitation, one can speculate on the incentives of presidents and PMs to sanction ministers involved in political scandals. Previous studies show that presidents are primarily concerned with their popularity when it comes to deciding whether or not to reshuffle the cabinet (Indridason and Kam, 2005). We also know that voters hold presidents responsible for government performance during unified government (Lewis-Beck, 1997) and that ministerial resignations have a corrective effect on government popularity (Dewan and Dowding, 2005). Therefore, presidents have great incentives to prove their strong leadership during unified government by punishing cabinet members who perform badly or are unpopular and lack strong party support. For example, most of the ‘ouverture’ ministers invited to join the government in 2007, such as Bernard Kouchner and Éric Besson, were ousted by 2010, when President Sarkozy’s approval rating hit an all-time low.

With the responsibility for government performance shifting from presidents to PMs under cohabitation, one may expect the latter to use resignation calls similarly to the former. However, PMs may not always be able to respond to resignation calls by replacing problematic ministers. If they did so, they could weaken their government and encourage more criticism. As a result, they have more incentives to defend ministers even when criticism might damage the government and use reshuffles as a way of revitalizing their cabinets (Dowding and Dumont, 2009, p. 14). For example, Lionel Jospin only reluctantly replaced unpopular ministers, such as Claude Allègre and Christian Sautter, whose resignations were asked by angry public sector workers during weeks of street protests. Therefore, apart from intraparty and coalition constraints, PMs also have strategic reasons to respond differently than presidents to resignation calls.



## Conclusions

This article contributes to the growing literature on ministerial selection and deselection by studying the way in which ministerial durability varies across periods of unified government and cohabitation in semi-presidential systems. More specifically, this work has focused on the relative influence of presidents, PMs and political parties over cabinet composition across the two executive scenarios. Using a competing-principals perspective on ministerial accountability, two tests have been carried out. The first test asked whether the President's ability to reverse the agency relationship between parties and their minister-agents during unified government strengthens his control over cabinet composition. The second one looked at whether the shift from a presidential to a prime-ministerial model of government during cohabitation increases the ability of PMs and parties to fire cabinet members.

Overall, the analysis indicates that executive format makes a difference for ministerial durability and for the ability of presidents, PMs and parties to control cabinet composition. The President's ability to dominate the parliamentary majority during unified government has been shown to extend over ministerial deselection as well. Conversely, PMs and parties emerge as dominant principals during cohabitation. However, prime-ministerial influence over cabinet composition varies less than expected across the two executive scenarios.

These results highlight two aspects of executive decision making in semi-presidential systems. First, intraparty politics is shown to influence considerably the extent of prime-ministerial control over cabinet composition. Future work could examine how party leadership positions and different ways of selecting party leaders affect the agency relationship between parties and their agents in government and the accountability of cabinet members to presidents and PMs. Second, the variation in ministerial durability under conditions of unified government and cohabitation draws attention to the asymmetrical relationship between voting behaviour and executive decision making in semi-presidential systems. Voters assign executive decision-making responsibility to the President during unified government, while holding the Prime Minister responsible during cohabitation (Lewis-Beck, 1997). Thus, cohabitation occurs as a result of voter dissatisfaction with the President's *status quo*. However, the increase in the number of actors involved in executive decision making during cohabitation may limit the Prime Minister's ability to change the *status quo* markedly, although a vote in favour of the *status quo* during unified government may be followed by cabinet instability as executive decision making is concentrated in the hands of the President. More research on the factors based on which voters assign decision-making responsibility to the President and the Prime Minister under unified government and cohabitation could clarify the relationship between voting behaviour and outcomes of executive decision making in semi-presidential systems.

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## Notes

- 1 All cabinet members above the lowest rank of *Secrétaires d'Etat* who do not sit at the cabinet table are part of the analysis, including delegated ministers.
- 2 *Le Figaro* was preferred for data collection because LexisNexis did not cover *Le Monde* when this research started. However, political orientations were not considered problematic because the observations recorded in the dataset are related to the occurrence of events and draw exclusively on the newspaper's reporting function and not on the political stance it takes with regard to the events reported. Moreover, the correlation scores between the number of minister-related articles in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* for the time period under analysis indicate negligible differences in news reporting.
- 3 Year-by-year searches were carried out for each minister in the dataset. Each search included the full name of the minister and the following keywords: animosit!, arbitrag!, bras de fer, critiq!, confli!, contr\*d!, contest!, démiss!, demett!, destit!, désac!, discord!, dissens!, élimin!, écart!, erreur, revoc!, revoq!, reman!, responsab!. The searches included wildcard characters in order to maximize the number of articles returned.
- 4 Paying attention to public records of political conflicts pays off particularly well in France. Knapp and Wright (2006, p. 136) have characterized French executive power as a system of institutionalized tension, which manifests itself at different levels of government from the President down. The high level of secrecy that surrounds the operation of the French core executive (Elgie, 1993, p. 6) makes it impossible to record systematic evidence of political conflicts that occur in the Council of Ministers. However, far from being limited to administrative and political procedures, the manifestation of intra-executive conflict extends to the battle for public opinion (Elgie, 2002, p. 303).
- 5 Principals may have strategic reasons to keep their differences with ministers away from the public. Some may do so for popularity reasons, although others may see it in their better interest to keep political



rivals in office until they suffer long-term electoral damage (Dowding and Dumont, 2009, p. 15). Nevertheless, the systematic recording of publicly exposed conflicts can provide valuable information about the circumstances under which principals decide to distance themselves from their minister-agents and about their ability to sanction them.

- 6 Public criticism of the government's work is often the only instrument that Presidents can use to increase their visibility during periods of cohabitation and the ability to communicate with the public, either directly or through the media, is one of their main political resources (Knapp and Wright, 2006, p. 96). The President can use several means of political communication to distance themselves from ministerial policies. For example, President Chirac took advantage of his position as Council of Ministers chair to criticize the Agriculture Ministry's delay in banning meat and bone feed for animals when the mad cow disease broke out in October 2000. The traditional 14 July interview is also used to pass negative judgements on governmental policies. The 1997 and 2001 interviews were particularly harsh on the government's record. These messages are often reinforced in the President's numerous visits across the country and extensively reported in the media.
- 7 Public expression of disagreement with ministerial actions is not a tool exclusively used by the head of state during cohabitation. The President and the PM often need to mediate interministerial conflicts, which can take two forms. The first regards breaches of collective responsibility. For example, PM Jospin rebuked Dominique Voynet, the Green party's minister for environment, and Marie-George Buffet, the Communist party's minister for youth and sports, for campaigning against the government's policy for the regularization of illegal immigrants in January 1998. Similarly, President Sarkozy often admonished ministers who broke the collective responsibility rule. For example, he reportedly warned Minister of Housing Christine Boutin and Secretary of State for Family Nadine Morano during a Council of Ministers meeting in March 2009 that their public clashes on surrogacy legislation will no longer be tolerated. Christine Boutin subsequently left the government in the June 2009 reshuffle. The second way in which growing distances between presidents/PMs and cabinet members can be recognized is by paying attention to reports of arbitration decisions, which are key instruments of decision making in the French executive. This is a good way of spotting policy differences because the President and the PM promote their own preferred policy options when they arbitrate between the demands of conflicting ministries (Elgie, 1993, p. 154). Intra-executive conflicts can further increase if cabinet members appeal to the President against the PM's decisions. Policy disagreements within the cabinet are also likely to intensify when the President or the PM mediate between ministers and trade unions and decide in the latter's favour. For example, the sacking of Christian Sautter and Claude Allègre from Lionel Jospin's government in March 2000 was preceded by several arbitration decisions they lost to enraged trade unions and employees organizations. Thus, this information can add to our understanding of the positions taken by cabinet members in the policy-making process and on their evolution with regard to the President's and the PM's preferences.
- 8 The party principal is identified with members of parliamentary groups, members of central party organizations, leaders of local party organizations and key notables such as mayors and presidents of municipal or regional councils. Conflicts with party members in cabinet office are also included in this category, as ministers who are party executives are more likely to engage in policy arguments with other cabinet members and often owe their success in passing difficult reforms to their senior status in the party hierarchy (Elgie, 2005, pp. 79–80).
- 9 UMP Convention on the Institutions of the Fifth Republic, 5 April 2006, National Assembly.

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