



Theory Testing With Single-Case Designs and Small-*N* Comparative Research: Studying Ministerial Accountability in Semipresidential Systems

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Abstract

My PhD research focused on the decision-making process that leads to ministers being fired in semipresidential systems. Although scholars of parliamentary government study cabinet members solely as prime ministerial agents, I adopted a three-principal-agent model to examine ministerial accountability in semipresidential countries, where both directly elected presidents and parliaments are involved in the formation and survival of cabinets. Using a small-*N* comparison of ministerial resignations in France, Portugal, and Romania, my thesis examined the effect of institutions and parties on ministerial deselection through the use of quantitative case studies. This approach consists of combining a data collection method that generates a large number of observations from the context with a quantifying technique that relies on the qualitative analysis of each observation before it is transformed into a number. This case focuses on the process of data collection and analysis and the challenges of using them for both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The case also highlights the research design choices entailed by crafting a small-*N* comparative study, such as the formulation of a research question and testable hypotheses and the selection of cases for comparison.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case, students should be able to

- Have a better understanding of the logic of design choices when planning a single-case study or small-*N* comparative research
 - Be aware of how the hypotheses put forward condition choices about what to observe and what evidence to collect
 - Have a better understanding of the logic underpinning the most similar systems design and the problems associated with case selection
 - Be aware of some of the limitations of quantifying within-case evidence
 - Understand the logic through which the analysis carried out in a case study can generate strong causal inferences
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Studying Ministerial Accountability in Semipresidential Systems: Project Overview

Why Study Ministerial Resignations?

The amount of time cabinet ministers spend in their post has important consequences for government performance, policy outcomes, and political accountability. Often times, though, ministerial changes are seen

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as responses to political pressures on the government. Even British prime ministers, who are considered more powerful than their European counterparts, are constrained in their ability to decide whom to let go and whom to keep in office for the need to balance their governments politically and keep the “big beasts” happy. What form does this process take in other representative democracies? Do prime ministers have more or less authority over the composition of their cabinets? Do they have to share this prerogative with presidents? Are political parties able to influence this process? What circumstances are likely to increase or decrease each of these actors’ influence over cabinet composition? These are the kind of questions asked in the comparative study of ministerial accountability I carried out in my PhD thesis.

Although ministerial resignations attract considerable public attention and media coverage, little is known about the reasons why some ministers lose office whereas others do not under similar political circumstances. Consider the following examples from Portugal. Luís Campos e Cunha, a minister of finance in the Socialist government led by the Prime Minister José Sócrates, was forced to resign in July 2005 after criticizing his own government’s plan to build a new airport serving Lisbon in a neighboring region called Ota. Later on, President Cavaco Silva of the Social Democratic Party asked the Socialist government to consider an alternative location called Alcochete. Mário Lino, the minister for public works, rebuked the president, calling Alcochete a “desert” that lacked schools, hospitals, and big cities and had no potential for commerce and tourism. Opposition parties and local authorities reacted by asking for the minister’s resignation for his impartiality and offensive remarks. A few months later, José Sócrates announced the government’s decision to undertake the construction of the new airport in Alcochete. Nevertheless, the prime minister defended Mário Lino against calls for resignation for breaking the rule of collective ministerial responsibility.

Why did only one of the two ministers who commented on decisions that required the cabinet’s collective endorsement lose his job? Moreover, why did Minister Campos e Cunha’s concerns about the quality of government investments, which were shared by economists and public opinion, triggered his resignation, whereas Minister Lino’s offensive remarks and poor expertise did not, despite raising the anger of many professional organizations, local communities, President Cavaco Silva, and even PM Sócrates’ Socialist party? Despite the similarity of political circumstances, a principal agent’s perspective on the nature of executive conflicts that characterized the two situations reveals a significant difference between them. Luís Campos e Cunha confronted the prime minister on a policy matter of primary importance for the majority party, while Mário Lino acted in agreement with the prime minister. As the president’s party was not in government, the prime minister was able to exercise freely his career-control power over cabinet members.

The Research Question and Theoretical Puzzle

Who fires ministers? Why do some cabinet members lose their jobs whereas others do not under similar circumstances? This was the research puzzle that I set out to solve in my PhD thesis. The explanation proposed was that the length of ministerial tenure depends on the ability of presidents, prime ministers, and party principals to sanction agency loss under different political circumstances. To answer this question, I focused on the decision-making process that leads to the recalling of ministers.

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The typical way of studying ministerial accountability in cabinet government is in terms of principal–agent relationships. This means that one can use the tools of agency theory to study the relationships between ministers and their superiors in the government and in the party hierarchy. The only modification I made to the general model of delegation and accountability in representative democracies (Strøm, 2000) was to argue that in everyday politics cabinet ministers are accountable not only to prime ministers, but also to their own parties outside executive office and, under certain circumstances, to directly elected presidents. To maximize the number of “principals” who can hold cabinet ministers accountable, I decided to study this process in semipresidential systems, where a directly elected president shares executive power with a prime minister and cabinet, who are collectively responsible to the parliament. Therefore, given that presidents may be actively involved in the formation and termination of governments in these political systems, cabinet ministers find themselves subordinated to three “masters”: presidents, prime ministers, and their own political parties.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

One important step before designing my empirical work, including decisions over research design and evidence to collect, was to formulate several expectations about the circumstances under which presidents, prime ministers, and party principals should be able to control the process of ministerial deselection in semipresidential systems. The main hypotheses were related to institutional effects and party influence. As far as presidents were concerned, I argued that their influence over the government derives from their de facto position as party leaders. The literature tells us that when political parties have no ex-post control mechanisms for their agents in a directly elected presidential office, the pursuit of a highly valued presidential office introduces a tension between the executive and legislative branches of parties and decreases their leaders’ accountability (Samuels & Shugart, 2010). As a result, party leaders who win the presidency are able to use their informal partisan authority to control the political system as de facto leaders of their former parties. Put differently, presidents who act as de facto party leaders reverse the party–leader principal–agent relationship by turning prime ministers and cabinets into their own agents, depriving the ability of political parties to control either of their two agents. If this happens, then parties also lose control over cabinet ministers, who become presidential agents.

Apart from party leadership roles, institutional context also matters for the extent of presidential and prime ministerial authority over the cabinet. Not all presidents who take office as party leaders are able to take control of the government. Instead, as Duverger (1980) argued, the president’s authority over the political systems depends on whether she or he is the leader, a disciplined member, or opposes the parliamentary majority. Therefore, to account for variation in presidential influence as a function of institutional context, I operationalized the “modalities” of presidential influence according to the political affiliation of presidents and prime ministers. Thus, institutional context varies according to whether the president and the prime minister are from the same party (a situation known as unified executive), the president and prime minister are from different parties but the president’s party is in government (a scenario known as divided executive), or whether the president’s party is not in government (a situation defined as cohabitation). Institutions are expected to interact with party relationships and to modify their impact on presidential and prime ministerial

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authority. All else equal, I expected that presidents who act as de facto party leaders are able to influence the process of ministerial deselection when they are in the same party with the prime minister. The extent of their control over cabinet composition should decrease when they are not in the same party with the prime minister and should decrease even more so under cohabitation, when their party is not in government. However, presidents who do not dominate their parties are unlikely to influence cabinet composition either, regardless of whether or not their party is in government. For example, in countries such as Austria, Ireland, Slovenia, or Portugal, there is no variation in the presidents' influence regardless of the institutional context in which they take office. Instead, these countries reveal significant variation in the prime ministers' authority over the cabinet and in their autonomy with regard to political parties and parliamentary majorities.

The Way Forward: General Research Design Considerations

To sum up, my interest was to investigate why some ministers lose office whereas others do not under similar circumstances by paying attention to the actors who have the power to hold them accountable and to the circumstances that allow them to use such powers. Put differently, I wanted to know when we can expect prime ministers or presidents to have the power to fire cabinet members who appear to no longer act as faithful agents. However, the main difficulty in answering such a research question about cabinet decision making is that these institutions are rather black boxes for external observers: We do not know where decisions to fire ministers originate (i.e., whether such actions are taken by the prime minister alone, as most constitutions stipulate, or at the pressure of political parties, or heads of state). Politicians may choose to recount such important episodes in memoirs or interviews, while some light may be cast upon them if the minutes of cabinet or executive party meetings are made public. However, as these are rare events, it is difficult to use them for generalizations for a single country, let alone cross-country comparisons. For this reason, I decided to collect an original data set on the events that ministers experience during their time in office. Such events included not only resignation calls issued by different political or nonpolitical actors, but also conflicts between ministers and prime ministers, presidents, and political parties. Eventually, my data set included over 5,000 such events, collected from the qualitative analysis of over 50,000 newspaper articles, in three countries, over approximately one decade in each of them. Carrying out this research involved several key decisions, on which I elaborate below: How to balance the qualitative analysis involved by data collection with the quantitative investigation required for testing the theoretical argument developed deductively and thought to apply to semipresidential systems generally, how to select the countries for comparative analysis, which periods of time to select within each country, what kind of within-case evidence to observe and collect, and how to combine the case study analysis with the comparative approach.

The combination of case study and cross-country analyses confirmed my expectations, namely, that the ability of presidents and prime ministers to influence the process of ministerial deselection varies as a function of party leadership roles and institutional context. While the case studies tested separately the impact of institutions and party relationships on the ministers' risk of losing office, the cross-country analyses estimated the length of ministerial tenure as a function of both institutional contexts and party relationships between ministers, presidents, prime ministers and party principals. Therefore, the qualitative analysis within case

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studies allowed me to illustrate how party leadership roles matter in practice. Moreover, this in-depth analysis was instrumental in highlighting alternative explanations for the ability of political actors to sanction agency loss—such as the standing of prime ministers and presidents, the popularity of individual ministers, and the role of career concerns that have less to do with political institutions but may explain why political careers are more valuable in certain national contexts than in others. Therefore, the qualitative analysis was an important and productive method that opened up new research avenues for future work.

Research Design

Case Selection Under the Most Similar Systems Design

Given the focus on deductive hypothesis testing, my cases had to vary in ways that illustrated and tested the theoretical argument, while being as similar as possible on other background conditions. In other words, they needed to fit the most similar systems design. The only limiting condition for case selection was that of representative democracies with a semipresidential form of government, as this was the universe of cases to which my hypotheses applied.

France, Portugal, and Romania fitted these requirements due to the significant variation they present in the occurrence of institutional scenarios, which often change within and across these countries, and in the party leadership roles that presidents and prime ministers play in these countries. Conversely, I paid no attention to how much time ministers spent in office in these countries or how many of them had resigned before the end of term. Thus, I only discovered the values of the dependent variable (i.e., the length of ministerial tenure) after the data collection was completed. Moreover, as these countries vary with respect to the age of democracy, they also allowed for a progressive testing of the theoretical argument. This strategy works as a way of testing for omitted variable bias and verifies that the scope conditions within which this theory is developed work in other national contexts irrespective of their democratic experience (Tarrow, 2010, p. 249).

The next decision regarded the time period during which the analysis should focus in each country, so that the process of ministerial deselection can be observed under different political circumstances within and across national contexts. To determine which principal–agent relationships are associated with shorter and longer spells of ministerial tenure, I focused on the most recently completed periods of unified executive, divided executive, and cohabitation (i.e., two government terms for each country, which amounted to between 7 and 10 years of coverage in each country). The selection of cases based on these criteria ensured that institutional context varied within and across the three cases. Each country included a period of unified executive and cohabitation. The Romanian case also included a period of divided executive. Once again, the selection of beginning and end points of country coverage was not correlated with the values taken by the dependent variable.

Party relationships also varied within and across countries. Recall that my theoretical framework suggested that if the presidency is a highly valued office, then political parties are likely to nominate their leaders as

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presidential candidates. This expectation is confirmed in France and Romania, where the heads of state contested the presidential race as party leaders. Party relationships do not vary in Portugal, where political parties do not nominate their leaders as presidential candidates. Although the Portuguese presidents whom I covered had also been party leaders at some point during their political career, they had not contested the presidency of the country from this position. The importance of party leadership roles in Portugal was nevertheless confirmed by the fact that all prime ministers included in my analysis had held the presidency of their parties before and after elections, regardless of the executive scenario under which their government operated. Thus, the situation of French and Romanian presidents differed from that of Portuguese presidents, as all of them contested the presidential race from the position of party leaders. The French and the Romanian cases also varied as far as the party leadership positions held by prime ministers before and after elections were concerned. Altogether, the variation in party relationships across the three countries allowed me to estimate their impact on the length of ministerial tenure within and across the same institutional context (i.e., in unified executive, divided executive, and cohabitation scenarios).

The comparative analysis of the principal–agent approach to ministerial deselection gained analytical leverage from the various methods that I used to investigate the research question from different angles. In addition to quantitative analyses, the case studies included short narratives, descriptions of intraparty mechanisms of accountability and leadership selection processes, and detailed analyses of different routes to ministerial office. The individual cases also highlighted country-specific factors that differentiate the three countries from one another. As a result, the cross-country findings were strengthened by the replication of the general hypothesis at a smaller scale. In this way, the conditions were set for the larger scale hypothesis to be replicated at a smaller scale through paired comparison. Overall, this combination of research design helped to localize theory as well as to strengthen it (Tarrow, 2010, p. 252).

Quantitative Case Studies

Although there are many styles and traditions of doing single-case study research, most of them share an emphasis on the intrinsic qualitative nature of the evidence collected. Thus, approaches such as thick descriptions, interpretative case studies, analytical narratives, and process-orientated case studies (to name just a few) rely on single-case-study evidence that is not quantifiable (Toshkov, 2016, p. 295). On the contrary, many quantitative studies can be considered as case studies. For example, the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey is a case study of life satisfaction in the European Union. Indeed, in a sense, all research projects are case studies (Toshkov, 2016, p. 285). What distinguishes the “qualitative” nature of the first type of studies from the quantifiable approach that predominates in the second group is the extent to which their primary observations are comparable. For example, the single-case observations collected through, say, a process tracing study of the extent to which advocacy intervention caused a policy change in a developing country are not comparable in the way observations on public perceptions of international development interventions across a large sample of respondents in different EU countries are.

Either approach could have worked in my project, though in different ways. A process-tracing study of

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a particularly salient example of a ministerial resignation could have revealed which of the minister's principals—the president, the prime minister, or the party leader—had the most influence in causing the minister's sacking. However, while the in-depth investigation of this particular episode could have potentially given me valuable information about the balance of power within the executive branch of government, the conclusions of such a study could have hardly traveled to other episodes of ministerial resignations. Alternatively, I could have collected information on the reasons why ministers resigned within a particular term, or within one country over a long period of time, or even cross-nationally. This time around, I could have learned a lot about the kind of faults that are more likely to jeopardize a minister's office, but hardly anything about the process that led to these ministers' resignations. Instead, the information that I wanted to work with was halfway to each approach: It needed to be specific enough so that it tells us something about the power relations within executive cabinets and systematic enough so that we can compare it within and across national contexts. In other words, I tried to find a way to quantify essentially qualitative data about what cabinet ministers experience during their term in office so that I can uncover the reasons why some of them kept office whereas others did not under similar circumstances.

What to Observe?

There were two types of events that I was primarily interested in. First, to understand why some ministers lose their jobs whereas others do not under similar circumstances, it is important to pay attention to both instances where ministers resign when confronted with a resignation call and when they get to keep office. Thus, resignation calls worked as a rough proxy for the ministers' performance in office. If this is a plausible assumption, then there should be a negative correlation between the number of resignation calls and the length of ministerial tenure. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that principals use this information to evaluate ministers and weigh up decisions to fire them. The resignation calls are also triggered by various reasons. Thus, whether calls related to personal faults, departmental errors, or policy-motivated actions are more likely to lead to resignations can have important implications for democratic accountability. At the same time, the non-resignation cases are essential for getting some insight into the causes of ministerial sackings as well, particularly given their puzzling nature, as some ministers survive in office under similar circumstances that cost other ministers their jobs. From this point of view, previous immunity to resignation issues could indicate a set of political circumstances under which ministers may expect to survive resignation debates, as well as the existence of a "threshold" of resignation issues that ministers may accumulate before they are constrained to leave office. In addition, non-resignation instances may also indicate the circumstances under which the decisions to resign and dismiss depend on the agency relationship established between ministers and different principals and are not necessarily a consequence of the offense committed.

The second type of event I wanted to collect data on were conflicts between ministers and presidents, prime ministers, and party principals. These were the sort of "black box" observations that allowed me to observe latent power processes at the elite level, such as the extent of political influence of the president, prime ministers, and party leaders on decisions to fire ministers. Of course, observing such events does not tell us

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whether a direct link exists between their occurrence and the minister resigning or keeping office. The main assumption I made in this regard was that the risk of losing office increases when conflicts between ministers and their principals are made public. Thus, the accumulation of conflicts between ministers, presidents, prime ministers, and parties was a proxy for the agency loss that each principal should aim to contain. If the principals have the power to fire agents, then they should be in a position to do so when the level of conflict with their agents increases. If the ministers' risk of losing office does not increase in the presence of conflicts with principals, then I assumed that the latter do not have the ability to sanction agency loss.

Collecting and Using the Evidence at Different Levels of Analysis

The approach I used consisted of combining a data collection method that generates a large number of observations on individual ministers from each national context with a quantifying technique that relies on the qualitative analysis of each observation before it is transformed into a number. As cabinet politics receive high coverage in the media, I decided to use the print press as the main data source. This is a convenient solution for systematic data collection due to the popularity and widespread use of online newspaper archives, which makes the print press one of the most tractable media sources. Therefore, I selected a well-known daily national newspaper that could be treated as an independent and reputable media source for each of the countries in my study.

Altogether, the three data sets I collected included over 5,000 observations recorded from nearly 51,000 newspaper articles. One of the advantages of collecting a large number of data points was that it increased the analytical leverage of the case studies and allowed me to circumvent the “many variables, small-n problem” typical for the comparative method (Lijphart, 1971, p. 685). At the same time, these data met the internal validity standard required for within-case analysis. The use of identical units of measurement for all the cases included in the analysis ensured that the basic criteria for internal validity of the new data were met (Pennings, Keman, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006, pp. 11–12). In addition, the fact that all the indicators were conceptualized for the purpose of testing the specific argument I put forward maximized the validity of measurement (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 25).

This data was used to test whether the causal relationships posited by my theoretical argument were replicated within case studies through a qualitative examination of institutional and party relations and across case studies through multivariate statistical analysis. The quantitative and case study analyses were clearly integrated. The case studies did not simply test or illustrate the theory. They included fine-grained analyses of intraparty politics and examination of the organizational transformation undergone by the parties of presidents and prime ministers. In each national context, the qualitative analysis explored the validity of coding decisions corresponding to the de facto party leadership roles played by presidents and prime ministers although they did not test directly the process of ministerial deselection predicted by the principal–agent theory.

The quantitative analyses carried out in the case studies did not simply reproduce the cross-country statistical analysis either. The case studies were an integral part of the investigation and deepened the analysis in

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two different ways. First, the country-based quantitative analyses paid attention to the impact of country-specific factors on the length of ministerial tenure. For example, in the case of France I took into account the importance of the local route to ministerial office and the practice of combining local and national offices in this country and I controlled for the impact of local electoral defeats on the ministers' risk of losing office. Second, the qualitative analyses of intraparty politics singled out the conditions under which the main explanatory variables are likely to have an impact on the length of ministerial tenure. For example, the cross-country analysis confirmed that presidents who act as de facto party leaders during periods of unified executive are more likely to exert control over cabinet members than presidents who are not party leaders. The case study analyses addressed this issue by contrasting the impact that a directly elected presidency has on the organization and behavior of political parties in different countries.

Research Practicalities

Selecting Newspaper Articles

As mentioned above, the units of observation in my data set were the individual ministers, and the units of analysis were the events experienced by ministers while in office. Overall, 5,072 observations related to various events were recorded from 50,291 newspaper articles. These articles were selected using 24 keywords related to major events, such as resignations, dismissals and reshuffles, and to conflictual situations with the three principals. To see how effective these keywords were in picking up relevant events, I conducted validity tests for several ministers in the three countries. One such case was that of Luís Campos e Cunha, the Portuguese minister of finance, who stepped down in July 2005 after serving in José Sócrates government for 4 months. I carried out two searches in the online newspaper archive, one with the Portuguese keywords and another one without keywords. The keyword search returned 34 articles, whereas the simple search returned 112 articles. However, the information contained in the 34 articles returned by the keyword search led to the identification of the same number of terminal and nonterminal events as the simple search: one resignation, one resignation call, and four episodes of policy disagreements. Similar test results for other ministers increased my confidence that the keywords I used were effective in retrieving relevant newspaper articles.

Altogether, the collection of data using the content analysis of print press news increased the reliability and internal validity of the quantitative data sets that served as the basis for the within-case and cross-case statistical modeling. Unavoidably, though, the adoption of such a labor-intensive method of data collection involved a trade-off between the internal validity of the quantitative measures and the replicability of the data collection process. Although the selection of articles using keywords involved some degree of arbitrariness, the advantages of using reliable data to test a general theory in a way that is consistent with the context outranked the disadvantages of ensuring exact replications of data sets.

Coding Resignation Calls

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Often times, it was difficult to find a single, unequivocal reason associated with resignation calls and termination events. As a result, in cases where ministers were asked to step down over a mixture of motives, I coded two or three proximate reasons. Where possible, I also relied on cross-references to interviews, biographies, autobiographies, and any other sources available to reach a decision regarding the categorization of termination reasons. Some doubts remained about the coding of some cases where personal and departmental errors overlapped, whereas performance and policy disagreements were closely related. Due to the sample size of resignation calls, though, the advantages of estimating the combined effects of closely related reasons for resignation, such as personal errors and performance, instead of estimating the separate impact of several very small categories of reasons for resignation outweighed the disadvantages.

Issues in Event History Analysis

One issue that I needed to consider while estimating the impact of events on the length of ministerial tenure was that simply summing up resignation calls and conflicts might overestimate the extent of the career-control powers held by principals. For example, when presidents are unable to influence executive affairs during periods of cohabitation, they are likely to adopt a going-public tactic to pass judgments about the government's performance. 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 resulting risk of ministerial deselection cannot be observed because all conflicts are equipotent. To get around this problem, I improved the additive model by adding a specification that allowed it to "forget" events when the time of their occurrence was sufficiently far back into the past with respect to the moment of deselection. Practically, what I did was to estimate the average event half-life for my data, which indicated that following 142 days after an event occurs the likelihood of being fired because of that particular event is halved. Consequently, the statistical analysis halved the impact of events on the likelihood of resignations every 142 days after their occurrence.

Such problems are common when one aims to estimate the impact of various events on political outcomes. However, while an artificial threshold for modeling decaying effects can be derived from the data under analysis, which is what I did, it is important to consider the theoretical reasons that might justify a different approach. For example, one might consider how long scandals last and may be able to sway public opinion in modern, media-frenzy democracy. From this perspective, a threshold of 142 days might fit poorly under 24/7 news cycles. It is also possible that nobody resigns during summer recesses, when parliaments are closed. Therefore, when making a decision about how to model data in statistical analysis, the best advice is to take into account both theoretical and practical considerations.

Case Studies and Alternative Explanations

In addition to the main theoretical arguments, the case studies were instrumental in drawing the attention toward several alternative explanations about the conditions under which we are actually able to observe

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conflicts between ministers and their principals. Although public evidence of a conflictual relationship between ministers and their principals is a strong indicator of agency loss, we cannot rule out the possibility that principals may see it in their interest not to make public some conflicts. For example, presidents, prime ministers, and parties outside public office may not wish to harm their electoral chances by publicly exposing the mismanagement errors of their representatives in government. In this case, the reasons for the ministers' demotion may be difficult to observe. Unpopular principals may also find it disadvantageous to criticize or sanction popular ministers. Principals who lack the formal power to fire ministers, such as presidents under a situation of cohabitation, may criticize cabinet members simply to draw attention upon themselves. By contrast, principals who can actively exercise the dismissal power may choose not to criticize their ministers in public. All things considered, although the publicness of conflicts may often be strategic, their systematic recording can still provide valuable information about the timing and the circumstances under which principals decide to make public their perception of agency loss. These are just a few examples about the ways in which the qualitative analysis proved an important and productive method that opened up new research avenues for future work.

Conclusion

Combining Single-Case and Small-*N* Comparative Designs for Theory Testing

A research design is able to fit the case-oriented and variable-oriented types of investigations closely together when they are both anchored by the same explicit model (Ragin, 1987, p. 78). This is the role that the principal-agent theory played in my study, as I employed it to propose a deductive explanation of ministerial turnover in semipresidential systems beyond the three countries I particularly focused on. This theoretical framework guided both qualitative and quantitative analyses. As a result, this approach allowed me to interpret the results more in light of their generality than toward appreciating the complexity and specificity of the case studies. At the same time, I paid particular attention to the impact that country-specific factors have on the length of ministerial tenure. The generality of the findings was borne out by the cross-country analysis, which showed that the relationship posited between the dependent and independent variables still held when country-specific factors were taken into account. As a result, the integration of case-oriented and variable-oriented comparison methods allowed me to use a middle path between complexity and generality to test the internal validity of a theoretical argument using the same method that would be applied for its analysis across a large population of cases.

Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. Thinking about your research question, try to address it using a single-case design or small-*N*

comparative design. Make a case for your study design by answering the following questions:

- (i) What do you expect your case study to achieve? Do you want to test an argument or to explore alternative explanations?
 - (ii) Why is your case/sample/data set the right one for your research question?
 - (iii) Why is your method the right method for your research question?
 - (iv) What is the main strength of your case study?
 - (v) What is the main weakness of your case study?
 - (vi) What is there to gain by comparing a few cases instead of focusing on just one case?
2. In my research, I used a “quantitative” format for case study work. What could be the pitfalls of such an approach? To what extent could it be used to explore the causal mechanism and/or alternative explanations?
 3. In how far does a “quantitative case study” undermine the qualitative nature of typical case study work?

Further Reading

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(Especially Chapter 9, which includes a detailed examination of most similar and most different systems design)

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