

# Intra-Party Politics and Coalition Governments

*Edited by*

**Daniela Giannetti and  
Kenneth Benoit**

Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science

# Intra-party Politics and Coalition Governments

This book explores how intra-party politics affects government formation and termination in parliamentary systems, where the norm is the formation of coalition governments.

The authors look beyond party cohesion and discipline in parliamentary democracies to take a broader view, assuming a diversity of preferences among party members and then exploring the incentives that give rise to coordinated party behaviour at the electoral, legislative and executive levels. The chapters in this book share a common analytical framework, confronting theoretical models of government formation with empirical data, some drawn from cross-national analyses and others from theoretically structured case studies. A distinctive feature of the book is that it explores the impact of intra-party politics at different levels of government: national, local and EU. This offers the opportunity to investigate existing theories of coalition formation in new political settings. Finally, the book offers a range of innovative methods for investigating intra-party politics which, for example, creates a need to estimate the policy positions of individual politicians inside political parties.

This book will be of interest to political scientists, especially scholars involved in research on political parties, parliamentary systems, coalition formation and legislative behaviour, multilevel governance, European and EU politics.

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# **Intra-party Politics and Coalition Governments**

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*in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions* (1999), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe* (2000) (both with K. Strøm) and *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies* (2003) (with K. Strøm and T. Bergman).

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# Series editor's preface

The study of political parties has always taken a strong interest in how parties function internally. Going back to Robert Michels' famous analysis of the German Social Democratic Party in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a focal point has been the quality of intra-party democracy and the alleged inherent limitations to rank-and-file participation. Party factionalism has been another important theme in party research for many years and the difficult path of many new parties towards their first participation in government has often been accompanied by factional strife.

Much of this has been largely disregarded by coalition theory that has preferred to treat parties as unitary actors for the sake of parsimonious modelling. Given that parliamentary systems depend on party discipline to keep a government in office, it is, of course, also a fairly plausible assumption in the context of formal models of coalition formation.

On the other hand, it has been shown that despite continuous refinement of such formal models they have not fared exceedingly well in predicting coalition formation and portfolio allocation. Furthermore, as the editors write in their introduction, "many coalition phenomena were hard to explain without relaxing the assumption that parties are unitary actors". Clearly, Italian coalition politics is not really a convincing case for assuming that parties are unitary actors, and there are many examples of parties ridden by endemic factionalism that equally call the usefulness of this assumption into question. However, intraparty politics covers far more than organized factions. Political parties are complex organizations which assemble very different actors including party employees, parliamentary candidates, officials and members of legislatures and, of course, ordinary rank-and-file activists. They are subject to different incentives and may follow quite diverse motivations – think of Panebianco's distinction between 'believers' and careerists'. Also, institutions matter and even though the preferences of core actors may be quite diverse systemic requirements may still induce cohesive behaviour. Clearly this list is far from complete but it indicates that there are many aspects of intraparty politics that are likely to have an effect on coalition governance. Particularly approaches that focus on policy as a crucial goal of political parties are prone to relax the unitary actor assumption and include intra-party politics into models of coalition formation and coalition behaviour and government termination.



Following a theoretical chapter by Strøm and Müller which lays the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analyses, the current volume assembles studies on the interrelation of intraparty politics and coalition governance on local, sub-national, national and supra-national levels. Coalition politics in local government is a particularly interesting phenomenon in that there is often less party politics at the local level because pragmatism, politicians' personalities and their appeal may weight heavier than party political considerations. Several chapters focus on regional politics including the intricate relationship between regional and national coalition formulae which add further complexity to coalition politics.

Factionalism and coalition politics is another fruitful perspective that is explored in this volume. Unsurprisingly, one of the case studies focuses on Italy but the example of the relatively united German parties demonstrates that intraparty factions are relevant factors in coalition governance also in countries where factionalism is not endemic, because factions influence policy, portfolio allocation and government duration. Clearly, the European Parliament is a special case in that there is no EU government that would be accountable to the legislature. Yet, EP legislation often requires legislative coalitions and this raises the question of voting coherence of EP party groups.

Two perspectives stand out in the contributions to this volume: The effect of intra-party politics on policy-making and the actual life of coalition governments. The latter is particularly relevant because it draws our attention to the fact that coalitions are the product of continuous negotiations and decisions that party elites can only make within the parameters set by the internal politics of their parties. A crucial aspect of it are the preferences and it is fitting that the editors conclude this important contribution to the field with a discussion of existing methods and new avenues to measuring the preferences of those who determine intraparty politics.

Thomas Poguntke, Series Editor  
Bochum, May 2008

# **PART I**

## **Overview**



# 1 Intra-party politics and coalition governments in parliamentary democracies

*Daniela Giannetti and Kenneth Benoit*

## Introduction

As Schattschneider (1942) pointed out more than half a century ago, political parties are the key institutions of representative democracy. It is not surprising that a long tradition of scholarship in political science focuses on parties, as reflected in the enormous literature dealing with party emergence, party organization and party change in electoral democracies. The ‘internal life’ of political parties, to quote the title of an essay by Katz (2002), has thus been the subject of extensive debate. Classic works by Ostrogorski and Michels highlighted the inner complexities of a party as a modern organization. And from Duverger (1951) to Katz and Mair (1994), the internal organizational structure of political parties has been the basis for distinguishing different types of parties, as well as conceptualizing their role and evolution in modern democracies. Finally, a tradition of empirical research on party cohesion and unity in different political systems, driven by a concern for the functioning of the basic democratic mechanisms of representation and accountability, dates back to early studies by Rose (1964) and Sartori (1976).

Within the rational choice approach to analysing political competition, the focus has been mainly on how parties relate to voters. In the classic Downsian approach to party competition, parties are defined as unified ‘teams’ seeking to control the governing apparatus by winning elections. To win elections, parties take those policy positions they think will gain them the most votes. Parties, however, do not aspire to serve voters, but to enjoy the benefits of office and to control government decisions. These Downsian assumptions have provided the basis for the development and testing of a generalized approach to the study of party competition, known as the spatial approach to voting. This approach has been extended from the experience of two-party systems to the study of party competition in multiparty democracies, in which parties almost never govern alone – meaning that electoral competition and coalition formation are inextricably linked. The spatial approach, based on party policy positions, has provided a coherent framework to analyse coalition formation replacing early ‘policy-blind’ models (Laver and Schofield 1998).

Most coalition theories operate under the simplifying assumption that parties can be treated as unitary actors. Justifications for this assumption typically invoke both substantive plausibility and analytical tractability. Only recently have scholars started to relax the assumption of parties as unitary actors, paying systematic attention in formal models of political competition to intra-party politics. This has led them to analyse not only the impact of intra-party politics on bargaining over government formation, but other important political phenomena such as party switching, splits and fusions. This represents a tendency to ‘endogenize’ parties themselves, rather than treating parties as exogenous ‘given’ facts of political life.

Despite significant advances, intra-party politics remains a significantly under-researched area. This book sets out to put together some pieces of this puzzle by focusing on the specific setting of multiparty parliamentary democracies and by investigating the impact of intra-party politics at different levels of government. In addition to politics at the national level, the study of local government coalitions at the sub-national level allows us to evaluate old theories using new data – and more particularly offers a significant methodological bonus by allowing us to investigate a range of different political settings, while holding constant a number of key institutional and cultural variables. Moving to the supra-national level, the European Parliament offers an attractive research site for the study of party cohesion and party discipline. While there are several studies on party unity in the European Parliament (Hix 2002; Kreppel 2002; Carrubba *et al.* 2004), there are both methodological and theoretical reasons to pay further attention to the difficult task of relating party cohesion and discipline to theoretically driven models of individual legislators’ voting calculus in the multilevel EU setting.

In this chapter, we set the intellectual scene by outlining some of the key questions that have arisen in the analysis of intra-party politics within the rational choice approach. We first offer a brief overview of common themes within the study of intra-party politics more generally, including the nature of party unity and cohesion, as well as of explanations for why parties differ, both within and between national contexts. We then conduct a brief review of rational choice scholarship on intra-party politics which has to a very large degree been focused on the US context. We then expand this discussion to include analyses of intra-party politics in the multiparty parliamentary government systems that predominate in Europe. The penultimate section of this chapter discusses how relaxing the assumption that parties operate as unitary actors underlines the need to adopt a dynamic model of party competition and coalition formation. The final section provides a road map for the rest of the book.

### **Comparative research on intra-party politics**

An important focus of comparative research on internal party behaviour in contemporary democracies has been the cohesiveness of political parties, both at the legislative party level and at the level of party organization. The literature abounds with different definitions of party cohesion, coherence and party discipline. Thus Ozbudun (1970) differentiated between ‘cohesion’ (voting together

for whatever reason) and ‘discipline’ (voting together due to a party leaders’ influence). More recently, Kitschelt and Smith (2002: 129) define a party’s ‘programmatic cohesion’ as the ‘general agreement within a party organization on specific issue positions’. In contrast, ‘party discipline as measured by the uniformity of legislative roll-call voting conduct among representatives of the same party ... may be a matter of organizational coercion more than of programmatic cohesion’ (Kitschelt 2000: 859). Party cohesion or unity has also been used to refer to both homogeneity of policy *preferences* among party members, and to the *behavioural* phenomenon of voting as a bloc in parliament. In a similar vein, party discipline has been used to refer to both uniformity in legislative voting behaviour and to the combination of carrots and sticks administered by party leaders. Despite this significant degree of conceptual overlap and confusion, however, there is some agreement that party ‘cohesion’ arises when similar preferences are held by different party members, while party ‘unity’ refers to coordinated party behaviour by legislators. Such coordinated party behaviour may be driven by rewards and punishments imposed by party leaders, or by those who control the legislative agenda (Bowler *et al.* 1999; Cox 2000).

Traditional comparative politics scholarship has offered a number of taxonomies and typologies of parties, based on their degree of internal cohesion. The focus has been mainly on the static properties or ‘(dys)functions’ of factions, defined as party subgroups having similar preferences on relevant policy issues (Rose 1964; Sartori 1976; Beller and Belloni 1978; Hine 1982; and, more recently, Bettcher 2005). In the past, some political scientists tended to regard party factionalism as pathological (Sartori 1976) while others pointed out that factionalism may play a positive role in providing a way for parties to manage internal dissent (Leonardi and Wertmann 1989). These scholars have for the most part treated party cohesion and unity as dependent variables, attempting to explain variations in party behaviour across different political systems, in terms of three main sets of explanatory variables: constitutional or institutional factors, party system features and internal structures within political parties.

### ***Institutional perspective***

Several authors have focused on the impact on intra-party politics of *institutional factors* such as federalism (Mainwaring 1999; Desposato 2004; Carey 2007), legislative-executive relations (Cox 1987; Huber 1996a, 1996b) and different electoral rules (Carey and Shugart 1995; Bowler *et al.* 1999). Thus, on one hand, federalism is argued to weaken legislative party unity at the national level by encouraging the organization of parties at the regional or local level (Mainwaring 1999). On the other hand, studies of Latin American legislatures show that federalism has little effect on party unity when various procedural devices provide party leaders the capacity of centralizing control over the legislative agenda (Figuereido and Limongi 2000; Desposato 2004).

Perhaps the most common recently deployed institutional explanation of party unity has to do with the different executive – legislative relations that characterize

presidential and parliamentary systems (Owens 2003). The logic of parliamentary systems requires cohesive parties to build and sustain the government. In separation of power systems that accord substantial legislative powers to presidents, legislators have fewer incentives to support the executive because voting against the president and/or losing a particular vote in the legislature does not necessarily weaken the party or the individual legislator's chances of nomination or re-election.

Electoral rules also figure prominently in accounts of intra-party politics. Carey and Shugart (1995), for example, argue that where the electoral system fosters a large 'personal vote', parties should be less cohesive. Other scholars have analysed in detail how electoral systems such as the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) in Japan engendered systematic intra-party competition inside the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), within which longstanding factions supported candidates for office. Differences in electoral incentives have been shown to generate different patterns of factionalization in the Japanese Upper and Lower Houses (Cox *et al.* 2000). However, empirical evidence for a larger cross-section of countries is still lacking, which has led Shugart (2005) to start collecting comparative data about the intra-party dimension of electoral systems. This promises the discipline a major advance in the availability of basic data on which to build theoretical and empirical accounts of the behaviour of legislators under different electoral rules.

Much of the current literature on the role of institutional factors in intra-party politics does not capture significant differences between parties operating within the same institutional structure. Thus, all parties within a given country operate under the same electoral rules, but different parties nonetheless operate in different ways (Morgenstern 2004). Alternatively, under different electoral rules operating in different contexts within the same country, as in Brazil, levels of party unity do not show significant differences (Desposato 2006a).

To sum up, the comparative politics literature highlights the role of institutional factors in generating different incentives for legislative party unity. However, empirical research indicates that most hypotheses proposed relating institutional factors to party unity need to be qualified. If party unity depends on the extent to which 'legislators are subject to pressure from other principals whose demands may conflict with those of party leaders' (Carey 2007), different combinations of institutional factors may account for different levels of party unity.

### ***Party system perspective***

A second strand of research on party cohesiveness focuses on the *characteristics of the party system* itself including, for example, the presence of a dominant party such as the now defunct Italian Christian Democrats or the Japanese LDP. Long ago, Golembiewski (1958) noted that 'party cohesion is a direct function of the degree of competition between political parties'. In a similar vein, Sartori (1976: 86) argued that 'when a party finds for itself an electorally safe situation, party unity tends to give way to sub-party disunity' (Sartori 1976: 86). This line of argument has been recently reformulated by Boucek (2005). The causal mechanism linking

factionalism and dominant parties concerns intra-party competition for distributive goods such as the perquisites of office. Assumptions about the individual motivations of self-interested politicians are at the centre of an argument according to which party elites seek to maximize their individual policy influence and office rewards, whereas party leaders seek to maximize unity. Asymmetries in the supply and demand of distributive goods create an obvious potential for intra-party conflict, a potential that tends to grow the longer a party is in office, as expectations increase but the capacity of party leaders to meet these expectations decreases. A key factor in the capacity of disappointed intra-party elites to have their grievances redressed relates to electoral conditions. Competitive electoral conditions increase the bargaining power of dissidents, but party unity is enhanced because the cost of dissent is higher. If party unity breaks down, government survival may be seriously endangered and political parties may be voted out of office. Non-competitive conditions decrease the cost of dissent and create incentives for party dissidents to 'free ride' on the efforts of co-partisans. Under this situation party leaders may tolerate intra-party dissidents and contain factionalism.

### ***Party organization perspective***

There is a considerable literature on how parties are organized in which intra-party political competition has been a central, even when not an explicit, theme (Katz and Mair 1994; Narud *et al.* 2002; Katz and Crotty 2006). With the growing democratization of party organizations, stemming from a wish to halt long-term declines in party membership and partisanship, there has been a considerable expansion in scholarly knowledge of internal party rules and their effects (Scarrow 2000). The consequences of democratization have most often been explored in the context of the debate on the emergence of something that has become known as a 'cartel party' (Katz and Mair 1994).

When focusing on the relationship between the organizational features of political parties and party cohesion and unity, scholars have highlighted the role of candidate and party leader selection procedures (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Pennings and Hazan 2001; Le Duc 2001). The most important source of variation in candidate selection procedures is their degree of inclusiveness, ranging from the less inclusive (elite agreements) to the most inclusive (primaries open to voters). Party cohesion and unity are expected to be higher when party leaders strictly control candidate selection. In contrast, when candidate selection is beyond the control of the national party leadership, as when there are open primaries, the door opens for local activists to select MPs who do not share the leadership's policy preferences, thereby loosening party control over the behaviour of the party's representatives and affecting its legislative voting patterns (Pennings and Hazan 2001). Evidence from countries such as Israel shows that introducing more inclusive methods of candidate selection may dramatically weaken legislative party unity, causing 'the breakdown of disciplined and institutionalized parties' (Rahat and Hazan 2001).



More generally, empirical studies show that ‘the types of consequences produced by democratizing candidate selection are not unequivocal, because there are different degrees of democratization. The empirical evidence shows ... that moderate forms of democratization can have beneficial effects on political parties ... but their effect is far from certain. Radical forms, on the other hand, are more likely to distort party cohesiveness’ (Pennings and Hazan 2001: 273).

### **Rational choice approach to intra-party politics**

Following Downs’ seminal contribution, the rational choice approach focused predominantly on competition between political parties, treating these parties as unified teams seeking to control the government. The main prediction of the Downsian model was the convergence of parties, in a two-party system, toward the median voter’s ideal policy position. Since this is far from being what is typically observed in the real world, many subsequent scholars have occupied themselves with the problem of why rational parties might *not* converge on the median voter. Thus Aldrich (1983), for example, added assumptions about the role of policy activists within the party who pressure party leaders to take ideologically extreme positions. Indeed a general trend within this type of approach has been to look inside political parties for explanations of their *non-convergence* on the ideological centre ground.

A more recent focus on intra-party politics has arisen from theoretical attempts to explain the origins of political parties. The central question addressed by such theories concerns the incentives for ambitious politicians to create or join parties. As Aldrich (1995: 29) notes, ‘Shared preferences are important bases of political parties. Parties-in-government are also institutions with rules and procedures for selecting leaders, providing them with power and resources, and structuring Congress and government more generally.’

One strand of research in this tradition focuses on *electoral payoffs* to party members. Politicians who seek re-election can benefit from the party ‘brand’, which conveys a great deal of information to voters at little cost. Thus party affiliation, providing reputational cues, mitigates the collective action problem for voters who might otherwise have little incentive to become sufficiently informed to cast a vote. This theory of party formation has been best articulated by Snyder and Ting (2002).<sup>1</sup>

A second strand of research focuses on the *legislative payoffs* to forming a party. Schwartz (1989) shows that, given the cyclicity of majority rule, potential gains from legislative trade cannot be accrued. Incentives exist for individual legislators to form ‘long’ or durable coalitions in order to deal with the unpredictability – and unprofitability – of the unorganized legislature. Aldrich (1995) develops this perspective to explain the birth of Federalist and Jeffersonian Republican parties. More recently, Cox and McCubbins (2005) developed a theory of party affiliation that stressed the benefits to party members arising from legislative agenda control.

These electoral and legislative incentives for politicians to form political parties arise under both parliamentary government systems and the US separation-of-powers regime. They are important because they make it clear that parties are not monolithic

entities, but are more appropriately seen as durable 'endogenous' coalitions,<sup>2</sup> created by ambitious politicians who aim not to create parties *per se*, but to be re-elected to control legislative decisions.

The most commonly studied *behavioural* manifestation of intra-party politics analysed within the rational choice tradition has been roll-call voting in the US Congress and, to a very much more limited extent, in parliamentary systems such as Britain and France. Analyses of the cohesion of party roll calls have tended either to be preference-driven or institutional models of legislative behaviour. Preference-driven models, such as those generated by Krehbiel (1993) for the US Congress, see parliamentary party unity merely as a function of the distribution of politicians' policy preferences – since legislators who want the same things can be expected to vote in the same way. Consequently, preference driven models do not make any distinction between party cohesion and party discipline – what looks like discipline is seen simply as a result of the common interest of legislators.

Most theoretical accounts of intra-party politics, however, assume the actions of politicians to stem from both preferences themselves and from the institutional structures within which competition between politicians with different preferences takes place. Thus models of the institutional structuring of legislative behaviour stress the importance of formal and informal rules and procedures, which are seen to structure decision-making by politicians. Arguing in this vein, Cox (1987) showed that changes in Britain's electoral laws in the nineteenth century provided incentives for MPs to shift from being primarily servants of their constituents to being members of cohesive legislative parties that competed with one another in offering voters alternative policy platforms. Later work by Huber (1996b) on politics in the French Fifth Republic examined how specific legislative rules such as the vote of confidence procedure and time allocation provisions bolstered party cohesion.

Another important stream of work within the rational choice approach has centred on agenda setting. Agenda-setting models provide an account of how, if some political actors control both what the legislature discusses and the order of such discussions, they can influence the particular decisions the entire chamber eventually makes (Romer and Rosenthal 1978; Cox 2000; Tsebelis 2001). Models that stress the role of legislative agenda setting in intra-party politics typically cast leaders as agents of party members (Rohde 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993), with huge incentives to manipulate the legislative agenda for internal party reasons. For example, party leaders may set the legislative agenda so as to minimize the salience of disunity within their own party on a specific issue. In this respect, leaders may prefer to find an accommodation with other party leaders; they may agree to non-partisan votes on especially divisive issues; or they may plump for cross-party consensus and hence avoid divisive legislative votes altogether. These are just some of the agenda-setting strategies open to party leaders in their efforts to manage intra-party conflicts.

The theoretical accounts of intra-party politics discussed above are not necessarily exportable to the constitutional setting of parliamentary governments, in which the executive is responsible to the legislature and party unity is crucial