

The exceptional Belgian case? Government formation duration in comparative perspective

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Abstract

Cabinet formation in Belgium has proven to be protracted in recent years, leading to long periods of government formation in both 2007-2008 and 2010-2011. But is this a typical Belgian problem, or do we see a similar trend across Europe? Populist politics and dramatic economic conditions could have made it more difficult to find political compromises. We know, however, little on whether such a trend has also effected the creation of the ultimate compromise: a coalition cabinet and a government agreement. Previous research indicates that uncertainty in the bargaining structure increases government formation duration (Diermeier and Roozendaal 1998; Golder 2010; Martin and Vanberg 2003). As these studies are limited to pre-1998 data, however, it remains unclear to what extent polarization and fragmentation have increased government formation duration in the last twenty years. We use a nested analysis of the duration of government formation processes in the last 50 years. First, we will map the duration of government formation process across Western democracies over the last 50 years based on the recently developed ParlGov database. Next, we examine different responses to the increased complexity of the party system in Belgium, which has seen a clear increase of government formation, and the Netherlands, which has not. These analyses should allow us to place the recent long government formation process in Belgium in a broader longitudinal and comparative perspective.

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Introduction

Forming a government in Belgium has never been easy. In its post-war history Belgium frequently had difficult processes of government formation, occasionally taking more than 100 days. More recently, however, cabinet formation has proved to be extremely protracted: after the 2007 election it took 194 days to form a government, while the 2010 election led to a world record breaking process of 541 days. Is the Belgian case an extreme outlier or does it point to a broader problem of more polarized politics at the expense of consensus seeking? Several scholars believe that making compromises between parties has become ever more difficult. According to Gutmann and Thompson (2010) this had mainly to do with growing importance of election campaigns. During campaigns politicians make strong claims and mistrust opponents. This 'uncompromising mind-set' is good to win elections, but problematic to govern and pass legislation. This old dilemma in democratic politics is becoming more pressing when politics turns in a permanent campaign mode, which the authors observe in the US, but also to a lesser extent in other Western democracies. In the European context, the 'end of compromise' is also linked to the rise of populist parties. The anti-establishment nature of these parties works well in election time when appealing to popular discontent, but is often unsuccessful when entering government (Heinisch 2003). Therefore, these parties mostly remain outsiders that pressure other parties to stick to their principles and campaign promises. Furthermore, the latest economic crisis has further pressured governments to make hard and unpopular decisions. In sum, recent political evolutions could make compromises in politics less evident. We know, however, little on whether such a trend has also effected the creation of the ultimate compromise: a government cabinet/ a government agreement.

In this paper we focus on government formation duration. First, we will map the duration of government formation process across Western democracies over the last 50 years. We analyse the change over time and focus explicitly on the last 15 years. Building on the existing literature, we explore whether the duration of the government formation process can be related to a pattern of increased uncertainty and complexity across industrialised democracies. We observe that while uncertainty and complexity can generally be linked to the length of government formations, not all

countries respond similarly to increased bargaining complexity in the last 15 years. Following the suggestion of Bäck & Dumont (2007) we explore these mechanisms more in depth and look for additional explanations in a limited number of cases (see also Andeweg, De Winter, and Dumont 2011). Therefore, the second part of our paper examines recent government formations in Belgium and the Netherlands. These analyses should allow us to place the recent long government formation process in Belgium in a broader longitudinal and comparative perspective.

Theory: explaining government formation duration

Although the field of comparative politics is expanding, the issue of government formation duration or what is called ‘bargaining delays’ has received limited attention. This is surprising as an extended period without a government with full power might lead to uncertainty and influence the behaviour of political and economic actors (Martin and Vanberg 2003); hinder the implementation of structural policy measures (Golder 2010); or temporarily change the executive-legislative relationship (Van Aelst and Louwse 2013).

To our knowledge four comparative studies have dealt with formation duration as the main dependent variable (Diermeier and Roozendaal 1998; Golder 2010; Martin and Vanberg 2003; De Winter and Dumont 2008)³. Influenced by studies on government formation (e.g. Strom, Budge, and Laver 1994) these studies suggest that two related concepts are crucial to explain the time that is needed to form a government: uncertainty and complexity. Uncertainty refers to the lack of complete information about the position of the different parties in the negotiation. If parties are not explicit about how far they would be prepared to go during negotiations and on what elements they are (un)willing to compromise it becomes difficult to find common ground. The problem is that uncertainty remains hard to operationalize and scholars used very general indicators such as dummy

³ Government formation duration has been discussed as one element in the broader study of coalition governments and parliamentary politics (see for example Strom, Laver, Budge, 1994; Gofman & Van Roozendaal, 1997).

variable that indicated whether the negotiation attempt started right after the election or not⁴. Not surprisingly, they show that it takes longer if the negotiations start after the elections when the *formateur* has little information on what parties are willing to offer. In reality many bargaining situations that are not preceded by elections involve the replacement of the government leader or a smaller coalition party and are therefore far less complex. Furthermore, as stated in the introduction, election campaigns and making compromises do not go well together.

This leaves us with bargaining complexity as a central concept in post-electoral formation processes. Complexity refers to the number of options and actors that are available to form a government. Put simply, the more ideas and players potentially involved the longer the process can take. Generally, two main indicators of bargaining complexity are distinguished in the literature. The first is the number of parties involved. Intuitively, more parties mean more potential combinations and therefore more options and strategies that need to be explored (De Winter & Dumont, 2008: 136). The second indicator of complexity refers to ideological polarization. The more parties differ on the main issues the more difficult it becomes to find middle ground. Diermeier and Roozendaal (1998) have operationalized this degree of polarization by looking at the strength of extremist parties. Martin and Vanberg (2003) use in contrast the ideological distance (based on manifesto research) of the parties that join the coalition and Golder (2010) prefers the ideological polarization between all parties in the legislature. While findings on the importance of complexity are somewhat contradictory, Golder (2010) has demonstrated that complexity increases the duration of coalition formation processes in post-electoral bargaining situations.

Recent developments in government formation duration

If government formation is indeed linked to bargaining complexity and uncertainty, we would expect to see an increase in government formation duration in recent years. The financial and economic downturn that plagues the world economy and the Eurozone in particular, has deeply affected political

⁴ De Winter & Dumont also use electoral volatility as a measure of uncertainty.

trust in some countries, which has also resulted in complex election outcomes (Norris 2011). Take, for example, the Greek situation where a party competition that was dominated by the large parties of the centre-left and centre-right, has been completely changed by the electoral success of radical alternatives that have gained momentum since the economic meltdown (Gemenis and Nezi 2012). In other countries, bargaining complexity has increased already over a longer period of time. The success of new (populist) parties has increased the effective number of parties in Scandinavia and the Low Countries. This increased complexity has arguably rendered coalition formation more difficult. Is this reflected in longer periods of government formation?

We focus on the formation of post-electoral cabinets, which have been shown to present the most challenging situation for coalition bargaining (Golder 2010). Table 1 displays the mean duration of coalition formation of non-caretaker post-election cabinets in 24 industrialised nations which have been democratic at least since the 1980s. While there are a great variety of patterns, we do see that the longest periods of coalition formation are in the 2000s or 2010s in 9 out of our 24 cases. The increase is strongest in Belgium, but we also see longer coalition negotiations recently in Austria, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. For some of the countries the increase in formation duration is admittedly small, such as the duration of Italian cabinet formations with 61 days, which is just one day longer than the average formation duration in the 1970s. For other countries, the length of coalition formation does not vary strongly over time, especially for countries with relatively short bargaining periods. There are also a number of countries which witnessed long bargaining periods in the 1960s or 1970s, a reduction of bargaining length in the 1980s and 1990s, but somewhat of an increase in the most recent decades. This includes the Scandinavian countries and Germany. In sum, table 1 does not show a systematic increase of coalition formation duration across Western countries, but rather a diverse picture. Only in Belgium the increase seems to be extreme, while in several other countries duration has increased moderately.

In most countries in our dataset, there has been a noteworthy increase of bargaining complexity as measured by the effective number of parties (ENP) (see Figure 1). If we compare the 1950-2000 period with the years between 2000-2013, we witness an increase in the mean number of

effective parties in many countries, including traditional 'majoritarian' systems such as the UK. There are only a few exceptions, such as France, which moved from a proportional to a majoritarian-style democracy.

For some of the countries the increase in the ENP goes hand in hand with an increase in the length of coalition negotiations (Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Austria). In other countries both ENP and the length of coalition negotiations decreased (France, Malta). In a way both of these patterns are to be expected based on previous research. For other countries, however, we see an increase in the ENP, but no significant increase of coalition formation duration (Netherlands, Greece, New Zealand). In two countries the ENP decreased, but the government formation duration stayed the same (Spain, Japan).

If we take party system polarization into account, the second variable that has previously been associated with bargaining complexity, we see a mixed picture (Figure 2). Party system polarization is measured as the square root of the seat-weighted sum of squared difference between the left-right position of a party and the mean left-right position (Dalton 2008). These left-right positions have been taken from expert surveys closest to the year of the election, which may affect the validity of the measurements before 1980 as no expert surveys were held back then. Moreover, left-right positions do not fully reflect party policy differences in all of our countries. Belgium is a point-in-case where recent problems in forming a government can be related more easily to the communitarian conflict rather than left-right policy differences. Bearing in mind these concerns regarding the validity of the indicator, we do still observe a correlation between polarization and the length of government formation. We would expect the patterns here to be less straightforward, because polarization does not necessarily result in long formation processes. For example, party competition can be quite polarized in majoritarian democracies, while these systems at the same time tend to produce parliamentary majorities for the election winner and therefore more or less guarantee short government formation processes. Still we do witness a moderate increase in party system polarization in many countries, but an increase in government formation in only a smaller number.

While the comparative data largely supports the findings of earlier research that a high ENP and, to a more moderate degree high polarization, go hand in hand with long government coalition negotiations, we do find diverging patterns. In the remainder of the paper we explore these patterns by looking at two different countries which followed divergent pathways: Belgium, which saw increased complexity both in terms of the number of parties and party system polarization and longer formations, and the Netherlands, which witnessed increased complexity, but government formations remain equally long as before⁵. By providing more in-depth analysis of these cases we hope to shed more light on the question why increased complexity leads to much longer negotiations in some countries but not in others.

The Netherlands

The Dutch consensus democracy has a tradition of long coalition negotiations. On average government formation takes longer than in any other country in our dataset except Belgium, but the Belgian average is somewhat inflated by the extreme case of 2010-2011. Even in the 1960s, when post-electoral government formation was relatively quick, these did take an average of 60 days. This is much longer than in other countries with proportional electoral systems, such as Denmark, Germany or even Italy before the 1990s.

Generally, the Dutch case fits with Golder's model of bargaining duration: bargaining complexity is usually high, due to a fragmented party system and the absence of pre-electoral coalitions. Party competition occurs along multiple policy divides: while the economic left-right scale has always been important, religious conflict has also been a prime factor shaping Dutch (party) politics (Pellikaan, Van der Meer, and De Lange 2003). More recently cultural issues such as immigration and integration of minorities have shaped the political debate (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). In addition, many smaller parties create their own political niche, which further complicates the bargaining environment for potential governments.

⁵ In a future version of this paper we aim to include Italy and Greece as well.

The electoral fragmentation of Dutch politics can be related to the almost perfectly proportional electoral system: the country uses proportional representation in a single nation-wide constituency without a meaningful electoral threshold (two-thirds of a percentage). This allows a wide variety of voices to be represented in parliament, but it complicates finding parliamentary majorities. As there has not been a dominant party in terms of size, a minority cabinet in the style of the Swedish social democrats has never been regarded as a viable option. Therefore the post-electoral puzzle is usually very complicated.

If we take the effective number of parties and party polarization as an indicator of bargaining complexity, we would expect that difficulties for coalition-building would have increased over the last 15 years. The number of parties has increased strongly. In the 1986 parliament the three major parties (Christian democrats, social democrats and liberals) together held 89% of the parliamentary seats. After the 2010 elections, their seat share had declined to only 55%. Parties at the left and right side of the spectrum are now regarded as viable electoral alternative with both the left-wing Socialist Party and the right-wing Party for Freedom gaining more than 15% of the vote at some point in the last decade. At the same time smaller new parties such as the Party for the Animals and the party for the elderly '50PLUS' managed to get access to the political stage, further fragmenting the political playing field.

Yet this increased level of complexity has not resulted in longer bargaining duration. The average formation process took 95 days in the 2000s and 91 days in the 2010s, which is not very different from the duration in the 1990s. During the last 15 years, two formation procedures were clearly longer than the others: Balkenende II (126 days) and Rutte I (128 days) (see Table 2). Both represent cases where more than one coalition option was explored. In the case of Balkenende II, a large part of the formation was taken up by negotiations between CDA and PvdA, which eventually failed. Only after this failure a cabinet of CDA, VVD and D66 was formed (relatively quickly, in 42 days). Something similar happened in the case of Rutte I. Before the eventual supported minority cabinet of VVD, CDA and support party PVV was formed, there were short-lived negotiations between VVD, PvdA, D66 and GreenLeft. Moreover, the formation of the VVD-CDA-PVV coalition

at one point failed due to a rebellion within the CDA parliamentary party. Only after one of the rebels resigned his seat did negotiations resume. What we see in both cases is that some options had to be explored first before the eventual solution could be found. D66 was only prepared to enter a coalition with CDA and VVD after a CDA-PvdA coalition failed. CDA was only prepared to enter into talks when the other viable option (VVD/PvdA/D66/GreenLeft) failed. This relates not so much to complexity rather than uncertainty of the main players. During the election campaign, most parties do not want to express their preferred coalition (and if they do it is usually highly unlikely that their first preference would actually win a parliamentary majority). After the election, this uncertainty usually persists. Only after some of the options have been tried and tested are parties likely to engage in serious negotiations.

Some of the other more recent formations were relatively short. In all three of the cases there was a feeling that the eventual outcome was the most viable option. Balkenende I was formed after the electoral victory of his Christian democrats and the new populist party of Fortuyn. They were able to forge a right-wing coalition together with the VVD relatively quickly. Here, the fact that policy differences were smaller than in other coalitions has perhaps also played a role. For other governments, however, Balkenende-IV and Rutte-I, government formation was relatively short for Dutch standards, despite having to deal with larger policy differences. What might have played a role in the 2007 formation of CDA, PvdA and CU, apart from the fact that it was the most viable option after the centre-right coalition of CDA, VVD and D66 had lost its majority, is the legacy of failed negotiations between CDA and PvdA 2003. Despite mutual distrust, parties had reason not to let the process fail again. In fact, an *informateur* was brought in who was very much aware of this past and who was well respected by members of both parties. This case illustrates how past experiences can influence the process and duration of government formation.

The Rutte III formation was special, because the two main parties from the centre-left and centre-right were able to form a government relatively quickly. In fact, after a hard-fought election campaign in which both parties had warned against a government led by their competitor, the party leaders said that they felt that there was no other option than to work together as neither the left nor

the right parties received a clear electoral mandate (after all, the electoral fragmentation and multidimensionality of policy positions means that it is not possible to distinguish clearly between two blocks). As both parties vetoed the inclusion of smaller parties from the other side of the main political divide, negotiations got underway quite quickly. The party leaders motivated their decision also by reference to the desire to get a government in office quickly. After the ‘failed’ experiment with a supported minority cabinet of VVD-CDA-PVV which had collapsed five months before the 2012 elections, they wanted to start governing as soon as possible. Paradoxically, prior political instability seems to have contributed to a relatively short formation process. Critics, however, point out that VVD and PvdA did not compromise, but log-roll issues, which seems to affect their ability to govern effectively. Moreover, the parties lack a majority in the second chamber of parliament (which has veto power over legislation) which further reduces the effectiveness of the government. The formation might have been short, because many (political) problems had been ignored.

The most troublesome consequence of political fragmentation and polarization in the Netherlands is not so much an increase in government formation duration, but the fact that government do not finish their term. Since 2002 all government have ended prematurely, often after only two or three years. After each of these new elections were held and as the law implies that (in practice) elections have to be announced 81 days in advance, this takes up a lot of time. As a result, parties feel that they do not have the time to ‘play games’ at the negotiation table. Of course this does not mean that parties no longer have any bargaining strategies, but at least the once-popular strategy of failing one coalition option before another could be tried and the tactic of waiting out the political opponent in long negotiations have lost some appeal.

Belgium

Belgium has a tradition of long government formation processes, but until recently these were never considered to be exceptional. Belgian formation duration was similar as in Austria and Iceland and clearly shorter than in the Netherlands (De Winter and Dumont 2008). It seems that something has

changed between 2003 and 2007. Can we explain this transition by means of our central concepts, uncertainty and complexity, or do alternative explanations provide more insight?

According to Strøm, Bergman, and Müller (2003) Belgium is prime example of a country where the institutional environment strongly constrains and complicates the negotiations to form a government. Parts of these rules are imbedded in the constitution mainly to protect the rights of the linguistic groups in the country. Belgium is a federal country mainly based on a linguistic cleavage between Francophones and Dutch-speaking inhabitants⁶. This linguistic divide and the on-going federalization process has certainly increased the bargaining complexity. First, it has affected the number of parties. At the end of sixties the Christian-Democrat and liberal families split in a Flemish and Francophone party. The socialist party remained united until the end of the seventies. Furthermore, in the 1970s on both sides of the language border new parties were formed on the linguistic cleavage. The effect on formation duration seems quite strong: Until 1968 the average time was 28 days, afterwards it took always longer than that to form a new cabinet (Deschouwer 2009). The number of parties alone, can however, not explain the recent increase formation duration. The number of parties has increased since the 1990s, but not spectacularly, contrary to the formation duration, which has skyrocketed recently.

A second element that might have complicated the Belgian formation is the growing ideological polarization. In terms of the traditional left-right divisions there are no clear indications that positions have become more polarized over time. In terms of the linguistic divide, however, increased polarization seems to matter more. In the campaigns of 2007 and 2010 state reform was a prominent issue, certainly compared to the two previous campaigns (Van Aelst 2008). Flemish parties, in particular the electoral cartel of Christian-Democrats (CD&V) and Flemish nationalists (N-VA) led by Yves Leterme, focused on increased autonomy for the Flemish region and a split of the (last) bilingual electoral district Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) (Sinardet 2008). French-speaking parties, however, opposed such a split, and were more generally opposed yet another constitutional

⁶ Besides Flanders and Wallonia, the two largest regions in terms of population (60% and 30% respectively), Belgium also consists of a third region: the bilingual capital Brussels (10%).

reform. These conflicting positions led to a difficult formation: only after 194 days and attempts by several different mediators, was former Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt able to form a new ‘interim’ government (see Table 3). Several months later (March 2008), a real government led by Yves Leterme replaced this temporary government. The Flemish nationalists decided not to join the government, leading to the end of the cartel of CD&V and N-VA in September 2008. The Leterme government was never very stable and tensions between French-speaking and Dutch-speaking parties resulted in early elections in June 2010. These elections made the N-VA the biggest party of Flanders. The unwillingness of the French-speaking parties to take another major step in the reform of the state and split the BHV electoral district boosted the popularity of the Flemish nationalists led by Bart De Wever. In Wallonia the Parti Socialiste (PS) of Elio Di Rupo became the undisputed leader of the electoral market. Although PS and N-VA had little in common in terms of socio-economic policy and state reform, they tried for several months to reach a compromise. But all attempts failed and distrust between the leading parties of both regions gradually increased. During the 541 days of government formation, the Belgian King Albert II asked seven people from five different parties to take up a role as informateur, mediator, negotiator, clarifier or (pre-) formateur. The latter role was finally taken up by Elio Di Rupo after almost a year of negotiations. It took him another half year to reach an agreement on state reform with eight parties and a new government with six parties (the greens were needed to achieve a two-thirds majority for state reform but did not enter the government coalition). The nationalist N-VA, the biggest party in Flanders, was involved in neither agreement.

Can we conclude that (linguistic) polarization explains the exceptional long protracted periods of government formation of 2007 and 2010? Only partly, as outspoken polarization between the North and the South are not new in Belgium. Since the end of the seventies conflicting views on how and to what extent the state needed to be reformed led to longer coalition formations. In 1979 and 1988 it took more than 100 days. However, it never took more than five months.

We see two additional explanations that are related to the Belgian case and have received limited attention in previous comparative research on coalition formation. First, the unique federal structure of the country has led in the 2000s to asymmetric coalitions and an inflation of (first-order)

election campaigns. The absence of national parties and the on-going disintegration of formerly united Flemish- and French-speaking parties have created two diverging political regions (De Winter, Swyngedouw, and Dumont 2006) and two parallel sub-national party systems (Bardi and Mair 2008). Because the Belgian electoral system provides no national constituency, campaigns are run largely independently on both sides of the language border. Until 2004, however, federalism was tempered by the fact that the coalitions between the federal and the regional level had always consisted of the same parties (Billiet, Maddens, and Frogner 2006; Deschouwer 2009). Only the regional parties have been included only in the regional government in a few cases. In 2004, regional elections for the first time created real asymmetric coalitions. This asymmetry complicated the government formation at the national level of 2007 as some parties wanted to remain loyal to their partner at the regional level. This was in particular the case for the French-speaking Christian-democrats (Cdh), who preferred to include the *Parti Socialiste* in the federal coalition (Deschouwer, 2009: 155). One could argue that other federal countries are confronted with asymmetric governments as well, but in the Belgian case this is more problematic as the country is effectively composed of only two regions. Furthermore, the regional level is no longer a 'lower level' of governance as the budget of the regional government is now comparable to that of the national level. This also means that elections at the regional level have become first-order elections. Furthermore, after 1999, these regional elections are no longer organized on the same day as the federal elections. This led to an inflation of elections and has pushed parties in a sort of permanent campaign modus, having to fight elections in 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2010. If we include the local elections of 2006 and 2012 (in which all major politicians were involved) there were never two successive years without elections in the last ten years. It is clear that this high amount of elections in combination with a volatile electorate limits the intention to compromise. Traditional partners seem to be aware of this problem and deliberately planned the federal elections of 2014 on the same day as the regional and European elections.

Besides the particular form of federalism in Belgium, there is a second explanation for the recent problematic government formation processes. The 2010 elections made the Flemish-nationalists of N-VA the largest party of the country. This is unprecedented situation in Belgium

history. In the past, regionalist parties have performed well before, but never to this extent. Furthermore, the N-VA is a more moderate party compared the extremist Vlaams Belang and was therefore not excluded from the negotiations. But the N-VA differs from previous electoral market leaders in at least two ways. First, the N-VA has little experience in coalition formation. Previous experience and expertise are often seen as necessary to deal with negotiations in highly complex and uncertain situations (De Winter & Dumont). Second, the party and its main leader Bart De Wever are not interested in the leading position of Prime Minister. This highest position in Belgian politics has been seen as one of the rewards for the leading party, and the *formateur* in particular, for their willingness to compromise. For the N-VA this position and even participation at the national level in general is not a goal in itself. One could even argue, that for party militants striking a compromise at the national level goes against the party doctrine.

Preliminary conclusion

- Belgium is exceptional in comparative perspective. In some countries government formation duration has increased, but nowhere nearly as much as in Belgium.
- This is partly related to growing complexity and uncertainty, but additional explanations play an important role.
- These explanations are related to the federal structure and the the centrifugal tendency between the regions of the country. In the Netherlands politics remains highly centralized.
- In the Netherlands, economic and political tensions are rather influencing government duration and not the duration to form a government. This suggests that striking political compromises has become more difficult in both Belgium in the Netherlands, but in the Netherlands this has not manifested itself in an extension of government formation duration.

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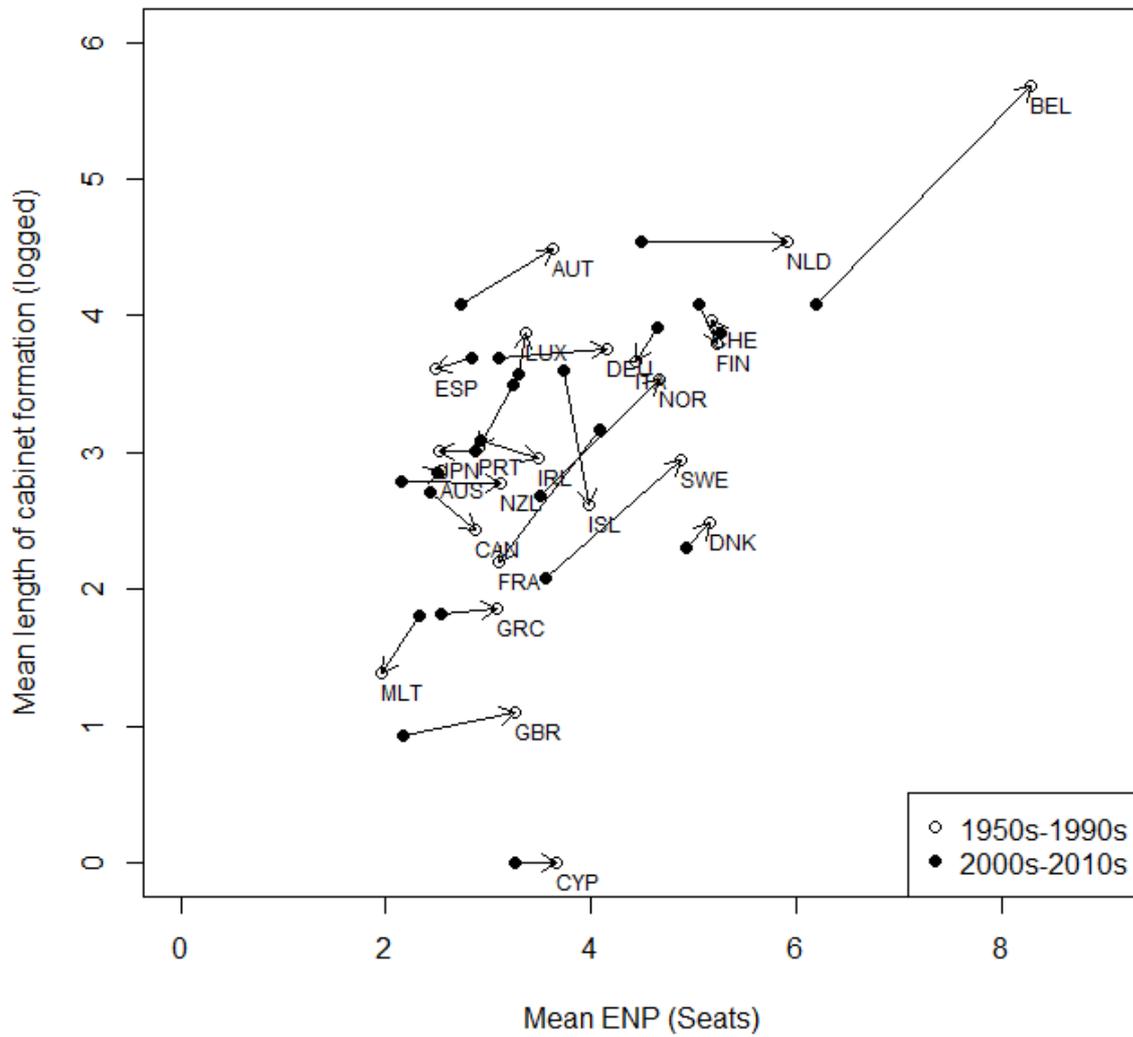
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Table 1: Mean duration of post-electoral non-caretaker cabinet formation per decade

Country	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Mean
Australia	26	17	15	12	12	14	24	16
Austria	51	87	32	45	83	88		63
Belgium	17	58	69	78	55	170	541	98
Canada	4	16	24	14	10	13	0	13
Cyprus				0	0	0	0	0
Denmark	7	4	15	12	4	9	17	9
Finland	63	67	79	46	30	32	66	56
France	44	23	26	10	8	8	8	20
Germany	42	40	50	33	36	42		40
Greece			8	7	3	6	3	5
Iceland	43	0	56	54	12	8	26	30
Ireland	25	12	17	21	34	22	12	21
Italy	38	45	60	42	52	31	61	46
Japan	23	18	21	17	16	22	10	19
Luxembourg	29	46	28	30	43	47		36
Malta		10	7	5	3	4	2	5
Netherlands	86	60	147	70	100	95	91	93
New Zealand	8	15	14	10	26	20	0	15
Norway	0	10	19	22	16	33		18
Portugal			90	25	22	23	10	28
Spain			35	35	48	38	31	38
Sweden	0	0	11	6	17	27	0	9
Switzerland	48	46	43	49	50	52	52	48
United Kingdom	2	3	2	0	1	1	5	2

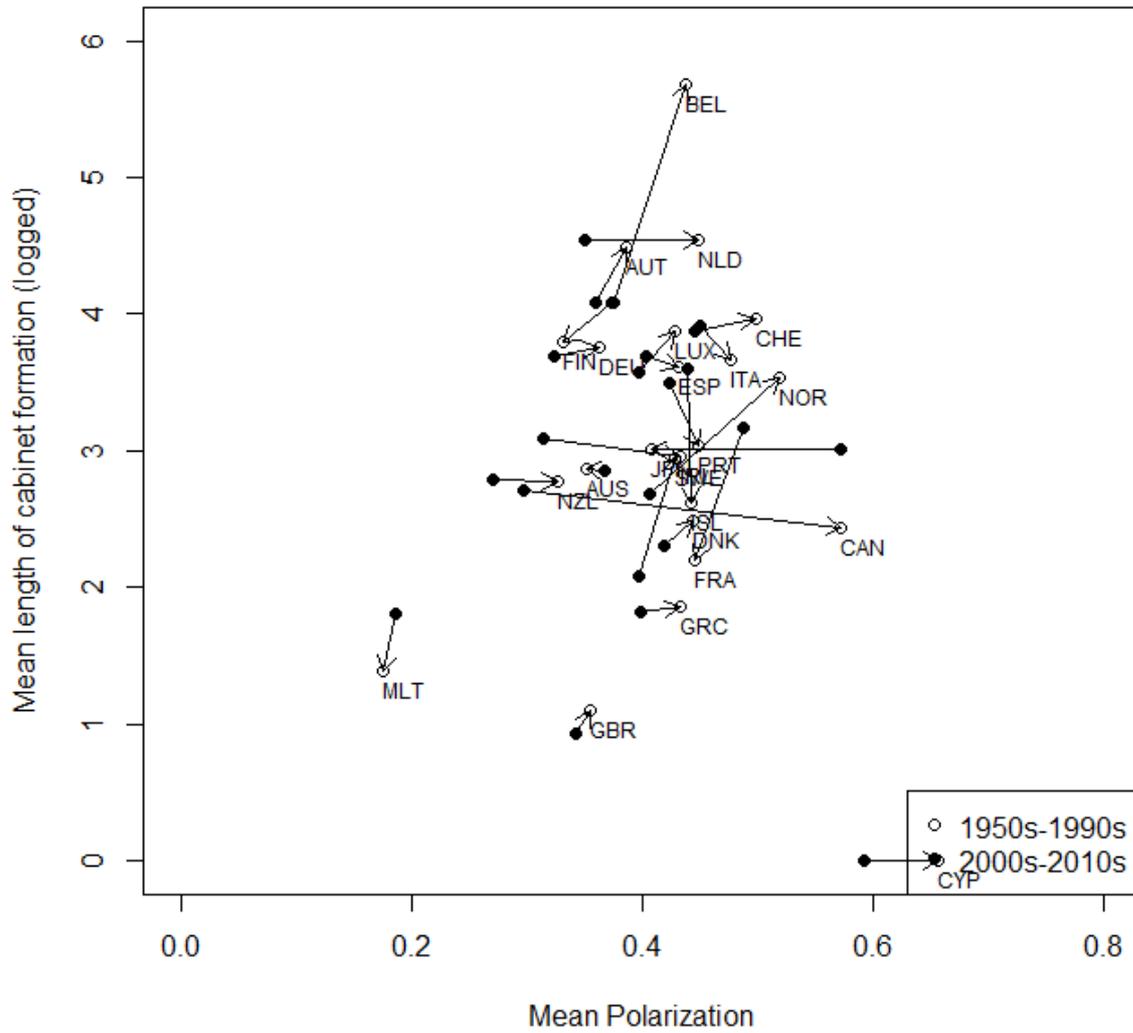
Note: Duration is defined as the number of days between the election and the day of inauguration of the cabinet. The table includes only the first non-caretaker cabinet that was formed after an election. Data are derived from the ParlGov database (<http://www.parlgov.org>).

Figure 1: ENP and cabinet formation



Note: Data are derived from the ParlGov database (<http://www.parlgov.org>).

Figure 2: Party system polarization and cabinet formation duration



Note: Data are derived from the ParlGov database (<http://www.parlgov.org>).

Table 2: Recent post-electoral cabinet formations in the Netherlands

Cabinet	Years in office	Duration of government formation
Balkenende I	2002	68
Balkenende II	2003-2006	126
Balkenende IV	2007-2010	93
Rutte I	2010-2012	128
Rutte III	2012-	55

Table 3: Recent post-electoral cabinet formations in Belgium

Cabinet	Years in office	Duration of government formation
Verhofstadt II	2003-2007	56
Leterme I	2008	285*
Di Rupo	2012-	542

* After 194 days an interim cabinet led by the incumbent prime minister Verhofstadt was formed, but only after 285 days did a government with a full mandate take office.