Governmental stability and the durability of political parties in office

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Abstract

This paper makes a case for studying parties' duration and durability in government, suggesting that this can contribute to the study of governmental stability and party outcomes. It describes parties' duration in government in 17 countries, arguing that it is empirically distinct from other forms of governmental stability. Framing the process of party stability as an ongoing negotiation of participation in government, and with the general expectation that parties influence their own duration in government, the paper asks which party characteristics are associated with party durability in government. It finds that party size, electoral success, political experience, and centrality in the policy space each influence the risk of a party exiting government and, thus, party durability in government.

Introduction

> While political stability may be a unitary concept at some abstract level, its referents and concrete indicators are extremely multifarious. That there is some statistical tendency for symptoms of stability and instability to co-occur seems likely, and without this there would be little meaningful discussion of stability in the abstract at all. Yet the correlation among any full gamut of such symptoms is mild at best, and statements about stability are likely to remain weak until more specific components of stability are singled out and their dynamics understood. (Converse 1969, 140).

The stability of governments and their constituent elements (i.e., 'governmental stability') has long been a central concern in political science (Laver 1974; e.g., Taylor and Herman 1971). Some of the reasons for this are well-known: governmental stability is at the core of political stability; turnover in government is central to accountability and democracy (Przeworski 2011); governmental stability and change influences policy outputs and outcomes (Hall and Nishikawa 2014). Accordingly, the question of governmental stability has received considerable scholarly attention. In the study of parliamentary democracies, this attention has focused on the multiple, nested levels at which governmental stability is generated, as governmental leaders, ministers, parties, cabinets, and coalitions each come and go.

Similarly, party goals, their corresponding outcomes (e.g., votes, office, policy, cohesion), and ultimately parties' success and failure, have also received considerable attention. Parties' governmental office-seeking outcomes are no exception: most prominently, they have been the subject of studies of accession to government and portfolio allocation (e.g., Browne and Franklin 1973; Döring and Hellström 2013; Warwick and Druckman 2006).

Notwithstanding the large bodies of work that focus on stability in governments and on parties' office-seeking outcomes, respectively, parties' stability in government – which lies at the intersection of these research themes – has not received sustained, systematic attention, with few, partial exceptions. Amidst the concern with the stability of governments and their constituent elements, the study of partisan stability in government is almost absent. In the large literatures on parties' office-seeking outcomes, parties' office-*retention* outcomes are likewise absent. Yet there is good reason to believe that party stability in government is empirically distinct from other forms of governmental stability (e.g., cabinet stability, ministerial stability), while at the same time being systematically related to them such that it can make a substantial contribution to our understanding of them.

This paper examines party stability in government in 17 countries. It describes parties' duration in government, arguing that it is empirically distinct from other forms of governmental stability. This description highlights the considerable variation

to be explained, ranging from spells in office that have lasted a matter of weeks to cases of parties that have dominated their party systems and societies through continuous long-term incumbency. Framing the process of party stability as an ongoing negotiation of participation in government, and with the general expectation that parties influence their own duration in government, the paper asks which party characteristics are associated with variation in parties' durability in government. It finds that party size, electoral success, political experience, and centrality in the policy space each influence the risk of a party exiting government and, thus, party durability. Before proceeding in this way, however, it situates party stability in the context of relevant bodies of work and develops the argument that it can contribute to our understanding governmental stability.

Why study parties' stability in government?

Scholarly attention to parties' stability in government has focused on 'ruling parties' and dominant parties. The former has been concerned with the effects of political institutions and economic crisis on the duration of parties' control of the political chief executive's office (Crespo-Tenorio, Jensen, and Rosas 2014; Maeda and Nishikawa 2006; Nishikawa 2012). The latter has used parties' stability in office (typically a threshold of twenty years) as a criterion for identifying dominance (Greene 2007; Magaloni 2006; Pempel 1990, 3–4; Templeman 2010, 5–11). While these studies serve to highlight the importance of parties' stability in office, they focus only on subsets of parties in government. In parliamentary democracies, dominant parties are rare, while in the data presented in this paper, 'ruling parties' account for a minority (44%) of the parties in government.

Outside of these two bodies of work, studies relating to parties' stability in government are few and far between. Mershon (1996, 534, 2002) examines an extreme case of 'partisan stability amidst government instability' (the Italian First Republic), providing explanations for the latter. The small literature on parties' defections from government focuses on the incentives for and consequences of these defections, rather than their timing (Tavits 2008; Warwick 2012). Other studies have developed measures of partisan turnover between governments, but do not focus on

parties' duration in government as such (Maeda and Nishikawa 2006; Mair 2007, n. 6; Strøm 1985, 744). Others still have described the cumulative (non-continuous) time spent in office by various subsets of parties' (Socialist parties, ideologically central parties, parties with a plurality of seats) over several decades (Bartolini 1998, 2000; Keman 2011a, 2011b). One unpublished paper compares the system-level determinants of party duration to those associated with cabinet and prime ministerial duration (Döring and Jäckle 2012). Thus, comparative cross-national studies of parties' durability in office are lacking.

At the same time, the importance of governmental stability is widely recognized. The literature on cabinet stability in parliamentary democracies is so extensive that one review suggested that the relevant data sets had been 'effectively mined out' (Laver 2003, 33; see also Grofman and Van Roozendaal 1997; Diermeier 2006 for reviews; see e.g., King, Alt, Burns, and Laver 1990; Diermeier and Stevenson 1999, 2000; Saalfeld 2008, 2009). The growing literature on government ministers has been primarily concerned with stability (see Fischer, Dowding, and Dumont 2012; Dowding and Dumont 2009 for reviews; see Hansen, Klemmensen, Hobolt, and Bäck 2013; Bright, Döring, and Little 2015 for recent examples). There are also studies of individuals' tenures in particular offices, mainly in political chief executive offices (Alt and King 1994, 200–209; Bienen and Van de Walle 1991; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Silverson, and Smith 2000; see also Quiroz Flores 2012).

Studying parties' stability in government can make a substantial contribution to our understanding of governmental stability more generally. This is, first, because it is a form of governmental stability that is distinct from ministerial and cabinet stability, which have received more intensive attention. When a minister leaves government, this does not necessarily mean that the minister's party leaves government: a majority of ministerial exits from government occur independent of the minister's parties (Bright, Döring, and Little 2015).[3] Likewise, in its predominant operationalization, a cabinet is terminated at elections, a change of prime minister, an accepted resignation, or a change of party composition (Müller, Bergman, and Strøm 2008, 6). These events (even the latter) do not necessarily mean that any party leaves government; indeed,

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[3] Bright et al.'s (2015) study of ministerial stability in seven countries shows that approximately 60% of ministerial exits occurred without the minister's party, while 40% occurred when the party left office.

38% of cabinets in Western Europe have been succeeded by cabinets with exactly the same party composition (Damgaard 2008, 312). Thus, transitory cabinets can be staffed by permanent partisan incumbents, while those same durable parties can be represented by transitory ministers (Mershon 1996, 549).

If the distinctiveness of party stability from cabinet and ministerial stability is one reason for studying it, then its close, systematic relationships with those processes is a second reason for doing so. Given that a party's exit from government is sufficient for cabinet termination, we can expect that a better understanding of this risk to cabinet stability will lead to a better understanding of cabinet stability as such. Likewise, as parties are ministers' effective principals (Andeweg 2000) and platforms for their careers, and given that a substantial minority of ministerial exits occur when their parties' leave government, we cannot fully understand ministerial stability without understanding parties' stability in government. Moreover, the timing of ministers' exits with their parties has quite different determinants than the timing of exits without their party (Bright, Döring, and Little 2015, 453–455). Understanding processes of party survival and the timing of parties' exit from government can therefore inform our understanding of governmental stability more generally.

Studying parties' retention of governmental office can also contribute to the study of party outcomes and, ultimately, to our understanding of party goals and behaviour. Office retention is a central party goal (Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011, 226–227); important party payoffs (e.g., policy) accrue over time in office (Diermeier, Swaab, Medvec, and Kern 2008, 485; Rose 1971, 406, 1990); and prospects of party durability in government may influence policy design (Hicks 2013). Yet, while the empirically successful and increasingly sophisticated research on parties' office-seeking outcomes is partly framed in terms of its importance for policy-seeking outcomes (e.g., Browne and Franklin 1973, 453–454; Druckman and Warwick 2005, 18–19; Verzichelli 2008, 237; Warwick and Druckman 2006, 660, fn.1), it has focused on portfolio allocation and accession to government, to the exclusion of office retention outcomes and, thus, parties' stability in government.

Against this backdrop of extensive concern with and research on governmental stability and party outcomes, respectively, the neglect of parties' stability in government is surprising. Explaining this is beyond the scope of this paper. However,

it may reflect the predominant focus on cabinets (and ministerial stability within cabinets) as units of analysis in the study of governmental stability (challenged by Laver 2003, 37). Moreover, as cabinets are defined, *inter alia*, by their party composition, all parties spend the same amount of time in office within a given cabinet by definition, meaning that, within cabinets, party stability is an unvarying, uninteresting outcome. It may also reflect the empirical successes of the existing literature on office-seeking outcomes and cabinet stability, which may have inhibited alternative measures of parties' office outcomes and governmental stability (Bäck, Debus, and Dumont 2011, 443; cf. Warwick and Druckman 2006, 658).

To summarize: I suggest that understanding parties' stability in government can strengthen and complement our understanding of governmental stability and party outcomes. It is distinct from the stability of other significant governmental actors and it is substantively important for democracy, for stability, and for policy.

Parties' time in office in seventeen countries

The data used in the analyses that follow are drawn from the *ParlGov* database (Döring and Manow 2015) and the *European Representative Democracy Data Archive* (Andersson, Bergman, and Ersson 2012). The former is used as a source of party- and government-level data, while the latter is used as a source of institutional data. For most of the seventeen countries studied here, the data cover parties in cabinets that started in the 1940s until cabinets that started the late 2000s (Table 1). For a number of countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain), coverage begins in the 1970s; for France, only the Fifth Republic is covered. Parties that continued in cabinet after their last observation (cabinet) in the data set (n=24) are coded as right-censored. Parties that were in office in the period immediately prior to their earliest observation in the data are coded as left-truncated (n=20).

A spell in office is identified as a continuous period in government, which can traverse multiple cabinets.[4] The 428 party spells in office included in the data set encompass 510 unique cabinets, 292 unique legislative periods, and 1216 parties-in-

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[4] There is a special case that is coded as continuity in government in the *ParlGov* data set, in which a party leaves cabinet for less than three months and then returns to the same cabinet (Döring and Manow 2015).

cabinets. Table 1 shows, first, that there is considerable cross-national variation both in the number of spells per country and in their median duration. Spain has remarkably few spells (even taking into account its relatively short democratic history), while Italy has remarkably many. This is a function of the number of parties that participate in government coalitions, the emergence and dissolution of parties that acceded to government and, more generally, the frequency of party entry into government. Second, there is wide variation between median spell durations by country, from Spain and Germany (characterized by few parties in government over time) to Italy and Greece. Third, there is evidently wide variation within countries. Although Italy and Greece were both contexts in which incumbents survived for a long time, they also have very low median survival. This appears to be the result of 'peripheral turnover' (Sartori 1976, 139).

Table 1. Party spells in office and data set coverage by country

	Spells* (n)	Median spell duration (years)*	From	To	Cabinets (n)	Legislative periods (n)
Austria	9	5.2	Dec-1945	Dec-2008	31	19
Belgium	38	4.0	Mar-1946	Jun-2010	42	20
Denmark	25	3.9	Nov-1945	Oct-2011	35	25
Finland	66	2.4	Apr-1945	Jun-2011	49	18
France	29	4.8	Apr-1962	May-2012	33	13
Germany	16	9.4	Sep-1949	Dec-2013	24	17
Greece	12	1.3	Nov-1977	Nov-2011	17	12
Iceland	24	4.7	Oct-1944	May-2013	32	21
Ireland	22	3.6	Jun-1944	Mar-2011	23	17
Italy	70	2.0	Jul-1946	Nov-2011	61	17
Luxembourg	13	5.6	Nov-1945	Jul-2013	19	15
Netherlands	27	5.9	Jul-1946	Apr-2012	29	20
Norway	33	2.9	Nov-1945	Oct-2013	30	17
Portugal	14	2.9	Jul-1976	Jun-2011	20	12
Spain	4	7.8	Jul-1977	Dec-2011	11	10
Sweden	17	6.0	Jul-1945	Feb-2014	30	21
UK	9	5.7	Jul-1945	May-2015	24	18

*Includes censored and truncated spells.

Figure 1 shows the Kaplan-Meier survival curve for parties' time in office. The median (uncensored) spell in government is 3.7 years (95% CI: 3.4 to 4.1). The minimum spell in office in the data set is 27 days; by 1.8 years in office (CI: 1.5 to 2.1 years), one quarter of parties have exited government; and by the seventh year (CI: 6 to 7.7), approximately three-quarters of parties have left office.
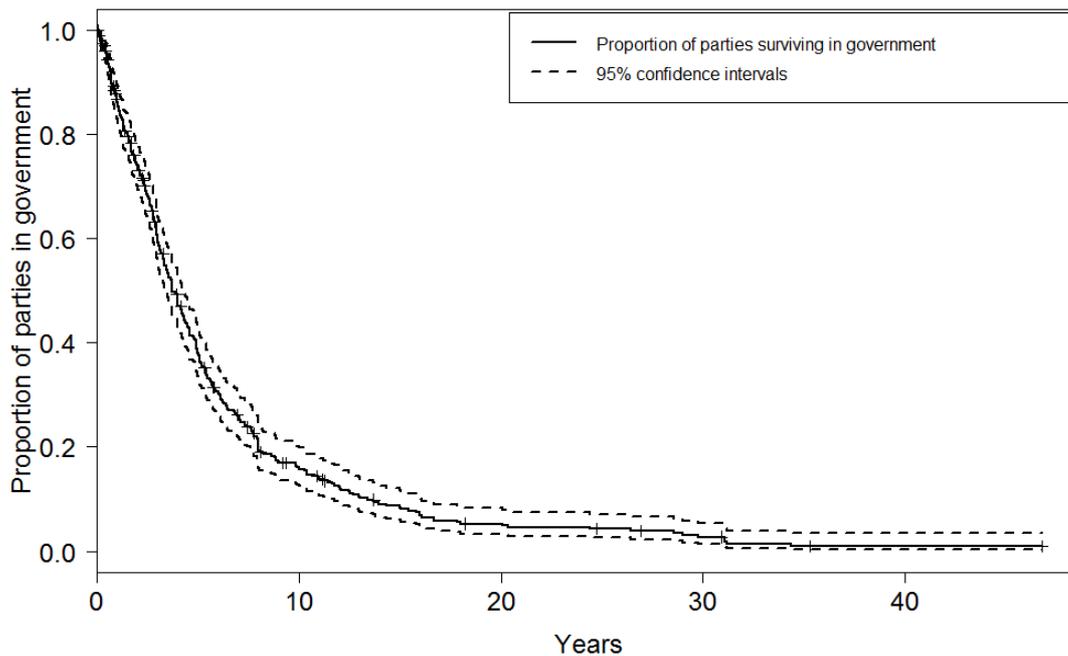
Figure 1. Kaplan-Meier survival curve for parties in government

Some parties have enjoyed much longer periods in office (Table 2). The Italian Christian Democrats continuously held office for longer than any other party in the data set. Table 2 highlights that it was not only parties that regularly held a plurality of seats in parliament that enjoyed these spells: the Swedish People's Party (RKP-SFP), for example, also managed to enjoy an exceptionally long spell in office.[5]

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[5] Party identifiers in the *ParlGov* data set change under the following condition: 'Mergers and party divisions are only added as a new party if (largest) predecessor party won less than 75% of the combined vote of all preceding parties in the last election.' (http://www.parlgov.org/documentation/codebook/#party, accessed 15 May 2015).

Table 2. Spells in office longer than 30 years

Country	Party	Start date	Left-truncated	Spell duration (years)	Right-censored
Italy	DC	Jul-1946	Yes	48	No
Luxembourg	CSV	Jul-1979	No	34	Yes
Finland	RKP-SFP	May-1979	No	32	Yes
Sweden	SAP	Jul-1945	Yes	31	No
Netherlands	KVP	Jul-1946	No	31	Yes
Belgium	CVP	Jun-1968	No	31	No
Belgium	PSC-CDH	Jun-1968	No	31	No

This description of party duration in office, and a comparison with cabinet duration in the same data set supports the argument that party and cabinet stability are distinct. In the data set examined here, median cabinet duration is only 1.6 years. Nor, of course, does cabinet duration include extreme values: the maximum cabinet duration is little over five years. One-third of the parties-in-cabinet continue in office in the subsequent cabinet. This empirical distinctiveness is largely due to the fact that cabinet tenure is limited, by definition, to inter-election periods and is frequently ended by events unrelated to party turnover.

Party attributes and the ongoing negotiation of participation in government

After they take office, parties must negotiate on an ongoing basis with one another and with parliament as a whole in order to remain in government. Junctures at which there is an opportunity or a demand to renegotiate a party's participation in government can result in one of two outcomes: the party's continuation in government or its exit from government. These 'renegotiation junctures' are especially likely to take place after general elections, given the redistribution of bargaining resources (parliamentary seats) that they entail. However, general elections are just one case of a renegotiation juncture; they can, in principle, occur at any time.

The explanations of variation in the timing of parties' exits from government developed here, therefore, focus on conditions that might influence the timing of renegotiation junctures or their outcome. While ultimately there are two possible

outcomes (exit or continuation), the proximate causes of party exit may be diverse, including the party choosing to leave government, the party being dismissed from government,[6] or the party losing office in legislative bargaining for government formation following an election which, in turn, may be a scheduled election or an early election.

Although our comparative, empirical knowledge concerning parties' durability in government is limited, several well-developed literatures can help to inform our expectations concerning the role of a range of covariates. This is especially the case for cabinet- and system-level variables which are known to influence cabinet survival, ministerial survival, and the timing of elections. We know less, however, about the relationships between party attributes and party survival in government. These are important not only because we can reasonably expect that they influence the outcome, but also because they relate to the party's effectiveness in achieving an important party goal (office-retention) (Deschouwer 1994): some parties will be more durable (or effective, in this respect) than others.

If viewed as ongoing negotiation of a party's presence in government, the outcomes of negotiation junctures may be influenced by party attributes that also influence accession to government (Döring and Hellström 2013; Dumont and Bäck 2006; Glasgow and Golder 2014). For the purposes of this study, I focus on five such attributes: a party's control of the prime minister's office, party size, electoral gains and losses, experience in government, and the centrality of the party in ideological space, while controlling for institutional and cabinet-level covariates.

H1. If a party holds the office of prime minister, then its risk of exit from government will be reduced.

Just as holding the office of prime minister appears to reduce the risk of exit from government by individual office-holders (Bright, Döring, and Little 2015), we might expect parties that hold this office to be more likely to be able to remain in government, as their hand is strengthened at renegotiation junctures. Prime ministers'

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[6] While this is rare, it is not without precedent. See e.g., Dumont et al. (2009) on Belgium.

parties ought to have greater agenda-setting capacity, thus having greater control of factors that might affect their stability in government than other parties. In many settings, they will have considerable institutional powers of ministerial appointment and of parliamentary dissolution and, unlike other ministers and parties, they will not be subject to dismissal where they hold that prerogative. Moreover, the opportunity costs of voluntarily leaving government (in terms of policy and office foregone) should be particularly high for these parties.

H2. The larger (smaller) the party, the lower (higher) the risk of exit from government.

Viewed as an ongoing process of government re-formation, larger parties ought to be more likely to be involved in a wider range of feasible coalitions and are more likely to be needed to form (or re-form) a government. Keman (2011b, 18) shows that the largest party has been in office almost 90% of the time in seventeen stable democracies between 1970 and 2005. In some cases, larger parties will have an overall majority. Small parties, on the other hand, are less likely to be needed for coalition formation and re-formation and they may be more likely to defect from government (Klecha 2011 cited in Sturm 2013, 2). One explanation for this is that the opportunity costs of leaving government are lower for these parties, which typically gain fewer office and policy benefits from coalition than larger parties (Warwick and Druckman 2006). Another is that smaller parties are aware that they are punished more heavily than their coalition partners (Font 2001; Buelens and Hino 2008; Van Spanje 2011) and that their electoral punishment may have severe, and even existential, implications for them.

H3. The greater a party's gain (loss) in seat share, the lower (higher) the risk of exit from government.

Existing studies have asked whether winning elections 'pays' in terms of accession to government (Mattila and Raunio 2004; Döring and Hellström 2013). Does electoral success pay in terms of office retention? Controlling for party size, parties that gain

seats may have a greater capacity to remain in government due to the effects this may have in terms of legitimacy and their attractiveness as coalition partners, as well as their capacity to participate in government. Incurring electoral costs in government may also discourage a party from continuing in office, even where the opportunity to continue exists.

H4. The greater (lesser) is a party's political experience, the lower (higher) the risk of exit from government.

Inexperienced parties may be less durable than their experienced counterparts. Panebianco (1988, 219) argues that the less institutionalized party in a coalition will be more likely to become unstable and to break with the coalition. Inexperienced parties may be inadequately prepared for the organizational strain of incumbency (Bolleyer 2008). Inexperience may contribute to unsuccessful bargaining with coalition partners or poor internal political management, leading to intra-party dissent, poor strategic decision-making, and the premature termination of their participation in government. Certainly, there is some evidence to suggest that inexperience counts against political parties when it comes to their postincumbency electoral outcomes (Buelens and Hino 2008), but the relationship between experience and durability remains largely unexplored.

H5. The less (more) central is the party in the party system, the higher (lower) the risk of party exit from government.

Given the role of party positioning in the literature on accession to government, we might expect parties' positions in the party system to influence office retention outcomes (Döring and Hellström 2013; although see Keman 2011b, 18). Parties that are central in policy space should be included in more feasible potential coalitions, while parties with outlying policy preferences may be more inclined to leave government early, otherwise contribute to government instability, or be less likely to be invited to continue in government (e.g., Brancati 2005; see also Schofield and Sened 2006, 3–4).

Non-party covariates will also influence a party's survival in government and the models that follow control for several of these. Membership in a *cabinet with lower seat share*, for instance, may put party survival in government at risk. We can expect that *caretaker cabinets* will take place only for short periods and thus may be associated with shorter terms in office for parties. Institutional rules should also shape opportunities for office retention. *Party system polarization* may also make coalition (re-)formation more difficult and wholesale alternation, rather than partial turnover, more likely. Longer *parliamentary terms* should mean longer spells in government, all else being equal. *Negative parliamentarism* should mean it is easier for incumbents to remain in government at elections (Bergman 1993); on the other hand, governments that win a vote of investiture and by extension, the parties that comprise these governments, may be more secure between elections. Ordinary *confidence rules* rather than special no-confidence rules requiring an absolute majority or a constructive motion of no confidence should mean that it is easier to stay in government. Where prime ministers can *dissolve* parliament early, this may negatively affect the office retention prospects of coalition partners.

Operationalization and description of covariates

For the main analyses in this paper, the data are structured such that party spells are split according to the cabinets that they encompass. Thus, covariates vary over time between cabinet episodes. The party's control of the *prime minister's office* is measured as a time-varying binary covariate. *Party seat share* is measured as the party's percentage point seat share in the lower house of parliament at the beginning of each cabinet period and can vary by cabinet period (not only by legislature). *Changes in party size* are calculated as percentage point change at the end of the cabinet period. Most changes in party size are accounted for by general elections that occur towards the end of party-in-cabinet episodes. Where parties dissolve or otherwise drop out of the *ParlGov* data set[7] their seat shares are coded as having declined to zero. I measure a *party's political experience* as its experience under continuous independent, democratic rule since it first emerged (according to *ParlGov*

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[7] *ParlGov* includes all parties that are in cabinet, parties that win more than one percent vote share at a given election, as well as several exceptional cases, including parties that win at least one seat at two consecutive elections (http://www.parlgov.org/documentation/codebook/#party, accessed 10 May 2015).

coding criteria: see fn.7), or since 1917, whichever is later. The party's distance from the centre of parliament is calculated using data on the Manifesto Research Group's time-varying right-left (*rile*) dimension, weighted by party seat share (Volkens et al. 2015). Summary values for the covariates are set out by country in Table 3. Prime ministerial status, size and changes in size match some general expectations concerning cross-national variation, particularly concerning the distinction between majoritarian-style systems (e.g., UK, Spain, Greece) and more proportional, multi-party systems. Experience is related to the date on which the current democratic regime was founded.

System-level covariates can also vary over time, although some are effectively time-invariant (Table 4). One quasi-institutional variable that varies both over time and between cabinets is the maximum time remaining until the next obligatory election. Measured at the beginning of each cabinet, it declines as successive cabinets approach the next obligatory election and rises once that election has taken place. Two cabinet-level variables from the *ParlGov* data set are used. The first is the cabinet seat share. The second is the caretaker status of the government. Caretaker governments are coded as those with a "limited legislative mandate" (Döring and Manow 2015 citing McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014). Continuation (post-election) caretaker cabinets (Conrad and Golder 2010) are coded as caretaker cabinets if they last longer than three months. Party system polarization is calculated using Dalton's (2008) measure and Döring and Manow's (2015) aggregation of left-right values from multiple expert surveys. Three institutional variables indicating the presence of positive parliamentarism, the prime minister's prerogative to dissolve parliament, and the presence of special no-confidence provisions (i.e., an absolute majority *or* a constructive no-confidence rule) are drawn from Andersson et al.'s data set (2012).

Table 3. Party-level covariates for parties in government

	Parties holding PM office (%)	Mean seat share (%)	(sd)	Mean seat share change (pct. pt.)	(sd)	Mean party experience (years)	(sd)	Mean distance from centre of parliament (scale 0-10)	(sd)
Austria	57	40.3	12.5	-1.1	4.3	28.1	19.6	1.5	0.8
Belgium	28	17.6	11.2	-1.3	4.7	12.8	11.0	1.2	1.0
Denmark	48	19.5	13.3	-0.4	3.4	29.4	18.4	1.8	1.0
Finland	27	15.7	9.8	-0.4	1.6	45.9	22.5	1.6	1.5
France	34	23.6	20.7	-2.6	9.4	16.6	14.1	1.3	0.8
Germany	35	20.4	15.2	-0.4	3.7	22.8	18.0	1.3	1.0
Greece	97	52.5	8.9	-4.3	6.9	13.4	11.2	1.4	0.9
Iceland	44	27.0	10.1	-1.3	4.2	27.5	19.8	1.6	1.3
Ireland	57	29.1	20.7	-2.7	6.6	41.9	26.5	1.4	1.2
Italy	29	14.8	16.4	-0.9	4.2	19.7	16.2	1.2	1.1
Luxembourg	49	32.4	8.8	-0.8	7.2	25.6	21.2	1.1	0.9
Netherlands	31	19.2	10.5	-1.3	4.2	20.3	15.9	1.3	0.9
Norway	55	25.6	18.0	-0.9	3.6	33.3	16.5	1.3	0.8
Portugal	74	37.9	18.0	-2.3	7.6	9.9	10.5	0.6	0.5
Spain	100	49.4	3.8	-7.6	14.3	13.4	10.5	0.8	0.2
Sweden	60	28.3	17.6	-1.1	2.5	58.0	21.8	1.5	1.0
UK	93	51.8	12.5	-3.5	7.6	55.4	20.7	1.2	0.8

For this descriptive overview, PM status, party seat share, and distance from the centre of parliament are weighted by time in office (i.e., party-weeks). Seat share change (at the end of each cabinet episode) and experience (at the beginning of each cabinet episode) are summarized at the party-in-cabinet level. At this level, the data include 1216 observations. There are 101 observations missing for the 'distance from the centre of parliament' variable.

Table 4. System-level covariates

	Years remaining until next obligatory election (mean)*	(sd)	Cabinet seat share (mean %)	(sd)	Polarization (0-10) (mean)	(sd)	Caretaker govt (%)	Positive parliamentarism (%)	PM dissolution powers (%)	Special no-confidence rule (%)
Austria	3.2	1.0	74.6	18.1	3.7	0.4	3.5	0	0	0
Belgium	3.1	1.0	62.5	9.4	3.8	0.4	4.1	100	100	31
Denmark	3.4	0.9	42.0	7.1	4.1	0.3	0.0	0	100	0
Finland	2.7	1.3	63.1	13.3	3.7	0.2	1.7	13	0	0
France	3.4	1.6	62.5	9.7	4.9	0.7	0.0	0	0	100
Germany	3.3	0.9	58.3	9.4	3.5	0.4	0.0	100	0	100
Greece	3.7	0.7	55.0	9.1	4.2	0.6	3.5	100	0	100
Iceland	3.4	0.9	62.5	10.2	4.5	0.3	0.8	0	0	97
Ireland	4.4	0.9	50.7	3.4	3.1	0.7	0.0	97**	0	0
Italy	3.3	1.4	53.8	9.3	4.5	0.2	1.6	97	0	0
Luxembourg	4.0	1.5	66.7	10.2	4.1	0.3	3.8	100	100	0
Netherlands	3.3	1.0	63.0	10.9	3.7	0.4	5.4	0	0	0
Norway	3.2	1.1	46.3	8.2	4.4	0.6	2.4	0	0	0
Portugal	3.2	1.0	52.5	9.0	4.5	0.3	3.7	0	0	100
Spain	3.7	0.6	49.4	3.8	4.2	0.4	0.0	95	95	100
Sweden	3.0	1.0	48.6	6.5	4.1	0.4	0.0	0	3	70
UK	4.3	1.3	55.5	4.4	3.5	0.4	0.0	0	100	0

*Measured at the beginning of each cabinet period. Other variables are weighted by time (party-weeks).

**This reflects a minor coding error in the ERRDA data (cf. Martin 2011), which will be corrected.

Analyses

The development of the literature on political survival has been fueled by the increasing use of duration models in political science (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997, 2004). This study follows that methodological approach, using time-varying covariates in a series of Cox-proportional hazards models. The Cox model is chosen due to the absence of strong theoretical expectations *ex ante* as to the shape of the baseline hazard of party exit.

The first model in Table 5 includes party attributes, system-level covariates, and a covariate that indicates whether the spell in government is left-truncated. An analysis of Schoenfeld residuals from this model (see Appendix) indicates that the three institutional covariates and the 'caretaker cabinet' covariate are associated with statistically significant violations of the proportional hazards assumption, which can lead to incorrect estimates of the hazard and standard errors (Mills 2011, 152). In an attempt to rectify this, Model 2 is stratified by non-party covariates that are of marginal theoretical interest for this study, given its focus on party durability and, thus, party attributes. Models 3 to 5 include a frailty term at country level in order to account for intra-country correlation.

Several of the party attributes are associated with consistent, statistically significant effects on the hazard of exit from government across these models. As suggested by Hypothesis 2, larger parties are at lower risk of exit: one percentage point greater seat share is associated with reduced risk of exit of approximately five percent. Gaining and losing seats (H3) also matters: holding party seat share and other covariates constant, a gain of one percentage point in seat share is associated with a reduction in the risk of exiting government of approximately six percent: electorally successful parties that are already in government are considerably more likely to remain there.

Party experience (H4) is also associated with a reduced risk of exit. Each additional year's experience in national parliamentary politics is associated with a reduction in the risk of exit of approximately two percent. This is substantial, taking into account the variation present in the data (sd = 22 years). However, it could be argued that any measure of experience should take account of the relatively low returns of distant historical experience compared to the value of recent experience. For this reason, I

include a transformed version of party experience (the square root of party experience in years + 1) in Model 4. A one-unit change in this variable is the equivalent of the difference between 3 and 8 years' experience, 24 and 35 years' experience, or 48 and 63 years, to take three intervals by way of illustration. A one-unit increase in this transformed experience variable is associated with a considerable (20% in Model 4 or 17% in Model 5) reduction in the risk of exit.

The hypothesis that centrality in the party system is associated with increased survival (H5) also receives support: the further parties are from the centre of the party system, the greater the risk of exit. Each one-unit increase in distance from the centre on an 11-point scale is associated with an increase in the risk of exit of 15%, which is significant at the 0.05 level (p=0.013) in Model 5.

Thus, several hypotheses concerning party attributes receive support. An exception to is the effect of being the party of the prime minister (Hypothesis 1): there is no evidence in any of the models that prime ministers' parties (unlike prime ministers themselves) are protected from the risk of exit from government. This may be because prime ministerial parties are relatively inflexible coalition partners: they fight election campaigns and define their identity on the basis of aspiring to continuing to lead the government and are therefore less likely to be invited to be part of an alternative coalition or to take a back seat in such a coalition when the opportunity arises. This negative finding suggests that a revision of the relatively strong expectations set out concerning Hypothesis 1 is warranted.

As expected, an additional year until the next obligatory election is associated with reduced risk of exit: approximately ten percent across models. This, as well as the coefficients associated with parties' seat share changes, supports the common-sense notion that elections are key points of renegotiation. Cabinet seat share becomes non-significant when the country-level frailty term is introduced and there is little evidence of party system polarization influencing party duration in government. As expected, left-truncation is associated with increased risk of exit, albeit with a small pool of spells characterized by this condition.

Table 5. Cox proportional-hazards models

	Model 1	Model 2: Stratified	Model 3: Shared frailty	Model 4: Shared frailty, sqrt(experience + 1)	Model 5: Shared frailty, includes position
Prime minister's party	1.32 (0.16)	1.2 (0.17)	1.26 (0.18)	1.24 (0.18)	1.06 (0.19)
Party seat share (%)	0.95 (0.01)***	0.95 (0.01)***	0.95 (0.01)***	0.95 (0.01)***	0.95 (0.01)***
Party seat share change (pct. pt.)	0.94 (0.01)***	0.94 (0.01)***	0.94 (0.01)***	0.94 (0.01)***	0.95 (0.01)***
Party experience, years	0.99 (0.00)***	0.99 (0.00)***	0.98 (0.00)***		
Sq. root (party experience + 1)				0.8 (0.03)***	0.82 (0.04)***
Position (distance from centre of parliament, scale 0-10)					1.15 (0.06)*
Years until next obligatory election	0.91 (0.04)*	0.89 (0.04)**	0.88 (0.05)**	0.88 (0.05)**	0.89 (0.05)*
Cabinet seat share (%)	0.98 (0.00)***	0.99 (0.00)**	1 (0.01)	1 (0.01)	1 (0.01)
Caretaker cabinet	0.78 (0.19)				
Polarization (0-10)	1.23 (0.08)*	1.01 (0.10)	0.89 (0.23)	0.88 (0.23)	0.84 (0.23)
Positive parliamentarism	0.66 (0.11)***				
PM dissolution power	0.73 (0.13)*				
Special no-confidence rule	0.84 (0.12)				
Left-truncated spell	11.5 (0.40)***	11.75 (0.42)***	5.47 (0.43)***	4.68 (0.43)***	4.52 (0.48)**
N (parties-in-cabinet)	1216	1216	1216	1216	1115

Exponentiated coefficients (hazard ratio). Standard errors in parentheses.

Statistical significance: < 0.001 ***; < 0.01 **; < 0.05 *

Conclusion

This paper has made a case for the study of parties' stability in government. It makes three broad arguments in this regard. First, party stability is empirically distinct from other forms of governmental stability, such as cabinet stability and ministerial stability and is thus a new subject for analysis. This was supported by a description of party duration in government in 17 countries. Second, because of parties' key roles in coalitions and in ministerial careers, the study of parties' time in office can contribute to improving our understanding of ministerial and cabinet durability. In order to understand the timing of a significant proportion of cabinet terminations and ministerial exits, respectively, we need to understand why parties left office when they did. Third, as office retention is a central party goal, studying parties' office retention outcomes can help us to better understand party behaviour.

The study of the stability of governments and their constituent parts has gone hand-in-hand with the study of the durability of those actors in government. Parties' stability in government is no different: it offers an opportunity to examine the role of party attributes on party durability in government. This paper has made a preliminary effort to theorize and to explore empirically some of these factors at the level of party attributes. The results of its analyses indicate that some party-level covariates – specifically party size, electoral success, experience, and centrality – are associated with variation in the risk of party exit from government and, thus, durability. Larger parties, parties that achieve better electoral results, more experienced parties, and more ideologically central parties are more durable in government.

The systematic comparative study of parties' durability in office is relatively new and there are a number of paths that this paper has not taken, but that merit further attention. Theoretically, the study of parties' time in office could benefit from greater integration with the literatures on government formation, accession to government, strategic dissolution, and defection. Moreover, it may be able to contribute to these literatures: for example, the analysis of party survival in government may provide an improved understanding of the literature on parties' accession to government. Furthermore, as parties' exits from government may take multiple forms, a richer understanding of these exits may involve distinguishing between various routes to exit

(e.g., 'dissolvers, disputers and defectors' (Warwick 2012)) within a competing risks framework. Examining the differences between parties that leave government with their coalition partners (i.e., alternation) and those that leave without (i.e., turnover) may also shed new light on party system dynamics. Examining the effects of parties' opinion poll ratings is another path that has been trodden by existing studies of political stability (Lupia and Strom 1995; Hansen *et al.* 2013).

One set of potential covariates that remains largely unexplored in this paper is parties' organizational attributes. Some researchers have suggested that parties with decentralized or participatory decision-making processes are more likely to be less durable in government. Lupia and Strøm (1995, 651, 659) suggest that internally democratic parties impose bargaining costs on themselves and their coalition partners, providing the example of the Irish Labour Party. On the other hand, decentralizing decisions concerning accession to government within a party may help to ensure that important party members are 'on board' for the venture, thus stabilizing the party's position in government; decentralization may also allow parties to accommodate dissent while continuing in government, rather than excluding dissenting members (Maor 1998); and decentralizing the decision to leave government may allow individuals and groups to veto or delay decisions to defect (e.g., Boyle 2012). With the development of new data sets on party organization (Kölln 2015; Scarrow and Webb 2013) to complement the Katz and Mair (1992) data, this is an emerging possibility.

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Appendix

Table 6. Schoenfeld residuals for Cox PH models

```
> cox.zph(CoxModel1)
                      rho     chisq         p
prime_minister.x  0.018527  1.52e-01  6.97e-01
psize             0.059793  1.67e+00  1.96e-01
seatchange1      -0.000246  1.62e-05  9.97e-01
age1years         0.108841  4.99e+00  2.55e-02
newciepyears      0.021900  2.04e-01  6.52e-01
cabsize          -0.038765  9.15e-01  3.39e-01
caretaker.x      -0.125051  7.74e+00  5.40e-03
polarization10   -0.047430  8.71e-01  3.51e-01
v505e            -0.134161  7.83e+00  5.15e-03
v515e             0.200701  1.69e+01  4.00e-05
specialconf       0.245262  2.56e+01  4.21e-07
ltruncate        -0.017030  1.26e-01  7.23e-01
GLOBAL                  NA  7.24e+01  1.15e-10
> cox.zph(CoxModel2)
                     rho    chisq       p
prime_minister.x  0.02593  0.3434  0.558
psize             0.06040  1.9173  0.166
seatchange1      -0.02397  0.1679  0.682
age1years         0.06382  1.6669  0.197
newciepyears     -0.01132  0.0533  0.817
cabsize          -0.01202  0.0802  0.777
polarization10   -0.03192  0.5065  0.477
ltruncate        -0.00671  0.0190  0.890
GLOBAL                 NA 12.3973  0.134
> cox.zph(CoxModel3)
                     rho     chisq       p
prime_minister.x  0.04101  0.99612  0.3183
psize             0.00968  0.09366  0.7596
seatchange1      -0.04782  0.87115  0.3506
age1years         0.05601  3.01760  0.0824
newciepyears     -0.00688  0.02555  0.8730
cabsize          -0.00599  0.02204  0.8820
polarization10   -0.03785  3.53517  0.0601
ltruncate        -0.00334  0.00531  0.9419
GLOBAL                 NA 14.48894  0.0699
> cox.zph(CoxModel4)
                     rho    chisq      p
prime_minister.x  0.04018  0.98655  0.321
psize             0.01356  0.19310  0.660
seatchange1      -0.05651  1.20925  0.271
sqage1            0.01934  0.40198  0.526
newciepyears     -0.00301  0.00479  0.945
cabsize          -0.01442  0.12806  0.720
polarization10   -0.02597  1.69840  0.192
ltruncate        -0.00352  0.00602  0.938
GLOBAL                 NA 10.77467  0.215
> cox.zph(CoxModel5)
                    rho   chisq      p
prime_minister.x  0.06080 1.8269  0.176
psize            -0.00692 0.0442  0.833
seatchange1      -0.03157 0.3724  0.542
sqage1            0.01233 0.1875  0.665
```

```
fromparlcentre20  0.03093 0.8881 0.346
newciepyears     -0.01380 0.0860 0.769
cabsize           0.00623 0.0260 0.872
polarization10   -0.01995 0.8484 0.357
ltruncate        -0.00962 0.0406 0.840
GLOBAL                 NA 6.3072 0.709
```