

Toward a theoretical explanation of premature cabinet termination

With application to post-war cabinets in the Netherlands

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Abstract. We propose a rational choice model of premature cabinet termination involving considerations of expected gain in terms of electoral payoffs, policy payoffs, or portfolio payoffs. This approach, which distinguishes contextual variables that will generally affect the nature of cost-benefit calculations made by political actors from the factors that are most likely to have a direct impact on a particular decision to precipitate a cabinet crisis, leads us to several testable hypotheses. We provide a first illustrative test of our predictions with data from the Netherlands.

Introduction

An important area for the application of theories about coalitional processes has been the study of cabinet formation in multi-party democracies. This research has had four main questions: predicting which parties will join the government, predicting the allocation of portfolios among parties in the governing coalition, predicting policy choices of coalition governments, and predicting cabinet durability.¹ Formal models have been developed that address these questions (Axelrod 1970; Taylor & Laver 1973; De Swaan 1973; Dodd 1974, 1976; Schofield 1992; Schofield et al. 1988; Grofman 1982; Grofman et al. 1993; Austen-Smith & Banks 1988, 1990; Laver & Shepsle 1990; Laver & Schofield 1990; Van Deemen 1991; Van Roozendaal 1992a, b). The focus of this paper will, however, be confined to the question of cabinet duration and the nature of the cabinet dissolution process on which there has been a considerable amount of work (e.g., Axelrod 1970; Taylor & Herman 1971; Sanders & Herman 1976; Browne et al. 1984, 1986; Robertson 1983, 1984; Grofman 1989; King et al. 1990; Warwick 1979, 1992a,b,c; Warwick & Easton 1992).

In general, we share the view of King et al. (1990) that it is desirable to approach the study of cabinet dissolution from a two-pronged perspective. On the one hand, we want to understand the variables that systematically affect cabinet duration; on the other hand we also wish to allow for a stochastic component to a model in which the presence of exogenous shocks could lead to a cabinet 'crisis' that might result in changes in cabinet composition or the calling of an 'early' election.² However, in this paper we will

emphasize that random exogenous shocks themselves do not bring cabinets down; only the *choices* of actors (especially the parties that make up the cabinet) can do that, either under influence of a certain situation created by exogenous shocks, or as a result of other factors that have yet to be explained. We will therefore operate from a rational choice perspective on cabinet dissolution. Cabinets should not dissolve prematurely except in circumstances where (one of) the pivotal actors expect that dissolution will lead to an improved situation for themselves. Of course, political actors suffer from imperfect information and the vagaries of change in a world filled with uncertainty. Thus, decisions that appear rational *ex ante* may not appear so *ex post*, and decisions that once were rational may cease to be so in the light of changed circumstances (such as exogenous shocks).

From a perspective in which the cabinet dissolution process is viewed as the result of rational choices made by political parties and cabinet members embedded in a particular institutional and historical context,³ our aim is to offer some new hypotheses about cabinet termination. We seek to distinguish contextual variables that will generally affect the nature of cost-benefit calculations made by political actors from the factors that are most likely to have a direct impact on a particular decision to precipitate a cabinet crisis and/or force a cabinet breakup. We also informally exposit a rational choice model of premature cabinet termination from which we derive a number of specific hypotheses. At the heart of this model is the claim that there are three types of benefits that might be sought in bringing down a cabinet: electoral payoffs, policy payoffs, and portfolio payoffs, respectively.⁴

Besides the first theoretical results of our current work on cabinet termination, this paper also reports some preliminary empirical findings. We provide a first illustrative test of our predictions with data from the Netherlands.⁵

Premature cabinet termination as a result of party choices: Theory and hypotheses

Theoretical starting point

Our theoretical approach toward cabinet termination is guided by the ideas put forward by Grofman & Van Roozendaal (1993). Before we develop our hypotheses, we briefly recall the main points of their argument.

In a number of studies (Browne et al. 1984, 1986; Cioffi-Revilla 1984; Frendreis et al, 1986) it is suggested that cabinets are terminated because of randomly occurring events. Like King et al. (1990), however, we believe that cabinet dissolution may have a patterned, as well as a stochastic component. Exogenous events may well be important in setting the stage for a cabinet crises, but these events themselves do not cause cabinet dissolution. Only individual actors are capable of doing that. If a link between random events and cabinet termination exists, then we need to account for that in a theory

of the motivations of the actors who bring down the cabinet. Thus, cabinet termination has to be understood as the result of choices made by the political actors that interact with one another in the parliamentary and/or cabinet arena.

In this section we will offer a first and admittedly rough attempt at an integrated explanation of cabinet termination based on a rational choice perspective. The specific hypotheses that are derived in that section are tested later in the note in an illustrative fashion, using data from the Netherlands. First, however, we discuss the need for distinguishing between-country effects from within-country effects.

Operating from a rational choice perspective, some of the variables used in cabinet durability research could be most useful in accounting for the average length of cabinets across different countries; while other variables should be most useful in accounting for variations in cabinet length/likelihood of a cabinet crisis within a given country. Grofman (1989) showed that Dodd's (1976) hypothesized relationship between minimal cabinets and cabinet durability is spurious and that the minimal winning hypothesis fails to account for significant variation in cabinet durability within most countries. Furthermore, he argued that the relationship between cabinet duration and minimal winning coalitions that appears in cross-national pooled data sets is largely an artifact of the high average duration of cabinets in countries where there are only a two or three significant political parties and the low average duration of cabinets in countries with a very large number of parties. The same may be true for many other variables used in cabinet durability research.

On the basis of our concern to distinguish between-country variables from within-country variables in the study of cabinet durability, we consider factors other than those standard in the cabinet coalition literature. We believe that, if we wish to account for variations in cabinet length within a given country, we need to focus on variables that can be specifically linked to the cost-benefit calculations that structure the choices of actors at a given point in time and leading them to behave in ways that would precipitate a cabinet crisis or require cabinet breakdown.

Cabinet Crises

If cabinets are terminated as a result of rational choices, then we must identify the goals parties (or possibly individual ministers) seek to achieve in bringing down the cabinet. Three such complementary goals will be identified here, and a corresponding hypothesis will be derived for each one. The three hypotheses involve considerations of expected gain in terms of electoral payoffs, policy payoffs, and portfolio payoffs, respectively.

Electoral payoffs. First, let us suppose that the termination of a cabinet will

be followed by new (early) elections. In such situations parties can anticipate whether or not they will do better in the new elections than they have done in the previous elections. That is, anticipation of future electoral gains may cause a certain party or a group of parties to seek to bring down the cabinet at a moment when their anticipated electoral success will be greatest (see Balke 1988). If their anticipation was correct, they will gain seats in the legislature; if it was not correct, they will lose or remain at the same level.

Cabinet termination hypothesis 1: Parties terminate cabinets when they expect electoral gains.

If we assume that a party's actual electoral success is positively correlated with its expected electoral success at the time that the cabinet dissolution occurred, then this hypothesis can be tested post hoc by examining the electoral results of parties that have caused cabinets to break down prematurely.⁶

Cabinet termination hypothesis 1': Parties that precipitate crises that lead to the breakdown of cabinets and to new elections will, on average, register electoral gains.

Policy payoffs. A second reason why parties might wish to terminate cabinets is that they anticipate policy gains from doing so. A review of nine country-specific chapters in the volumes edited by Browne and Dreijmanis (1982) and by Pridham (1986), and our independent reading of *Keesings Contemporary Archives*,⁷ shows that policy disagreements between the coalition parties which lead to a pull-out of one or more parties, is an important factor for cabinet termination in these nine countries.

Cabinet termination hypothesis 2: Parties terminate cabinets when they expect policy gains in the succeeding cabinet.

Clearly, parties will not easily defect from a cabinet in which they play an important role. It seems plausible, however, that a party is more eager to move toward a cabinet crisis potentially to improve policy outcomes when it believes that there are fruitful coalition – alternatives to the present coalition, i.e. coalitions that reflect more of the party's policy preferences.

During election periods which precede cabinet formations, each party forms an opinion on every political issue it considers relevant to attract voters. In other words, in order first to get into parliament parties develop a position on every relevant policy dimension. If we assume that parties are unitary actors and that they have single peaked preferences, then every party has exactly one most preferred position on every policy dimension.

If a party, by whatever mechanism, gets to be involved in the cabinet formation process, its individual most preferred position on each dimension has to be merged by some formula with the most preferred position(s) of the other party or parties involved in the process, into one collective policy

position of the cabinet on that dimension. The outcome of this bargaining process can be that there is a reasonably even distribution of losses – one party will get more of what it wants on dimension A while it has to give in on B, while for another party it is the other way around. However, it might also occur that on the whole some parties come out of the process better than others. This could come about, for instance, in situations of uneven power distribution between the parties, or when one party has had imperfect or incomplete information about the motives of the other party or parties involved in the process.

It is reasonable to assume that the less well off a party came out of the cabinet formation process, the greater the chance that it will become dissatisfied with cabinet policy during the period the cabinet is in office. Hence, the greater the chance that such a party, at a given moment, might seek to terminate the cabinet.⁸

Cabinet termination hypothesis 2': *Ceteris paribus*, parties that suffer from great discrepancies between their most preferred positions on the relevant policy dimensions and the collective positions of the cabinet, are more likely to precipitate a cabinet crisis than parties that do not or suffer less from such discrepancies.

This theoretical prediction is not straightforward to test. The crucial issue at stake is how we should measure the discrepancies mentioned here? Detailed information on the exact positions of parties on relevant policy dimensions for many consecutive cabinet formations is scarcely available beyond the level of newspaper information. The exact collective position of cabinets on the dimensions is sometimes also hard to assess.

We have chosen to use the following indicator for the total amount of 'policy discrepancy' of the parties that together compose the cabinet. We can reasonably expect that when the cabinet formation period was long, it was rather difficult to reconcile the individual most preferred positions of the parties involved into collective cabinet policy positions. Thus, the longer the cabinet formation process, the greater the chance that the eventual outcome of the bargaining process is one consisting of more discrepancies between the parties' individual positions and the collective positions of the cabinet. Thus we will use the length of the cabinet formation process as a proxy for the total amount of policy discrepancy in the cabinet, and for thus for the chance that the cabinet will come to a crisis or even a premature termination.⁹

Cabinet termination hypothesis 2'': The longer the formation period of a cabinet takes, the greater the chance that the cabinet comes to a cabinet crisis and/or to a premature termination.

Portfolio payoffs. The third reason why a party may wish to precipitate a cabinet crisis is because it anticipates a gain in the number or importance of

its ministerial portfolios or a change in which ministerial portfolios it occupies in a direction that improves its ability to impact on policy domains that the party considers important.¹⁰ The following general hypothesis is warranted:

Cabinet termination hypothesis 3: Parties terminate cabinets when they expect the formation of a new cabinet with a distribution of the ministerial portfolios that better fits that party's interests.

Most party's interests are centred around the key issues that play a role in a political system: the economy, welfare issues, foreign issues. Therefore, we can assume that in most cases, the parties will be most interested in controlling the key ministerial portfolios, such as finance, economy, labour/welfare affairs, the interior, and foreign affairs. This leads us to propose a related hypothesis:

Cabinet termination hypothesis 3': Parties terminate cabinets when they expect the formation of a new cabinet in which they will occupy more of the key ministerial portfolio than they do in the present cabinet.

Cabinet termination in the Netherlands

In this section we will provide a first illustrative test of the three hypotheses identified in the previous section. We chose the post-1945 cabinets of the Netherlands because we are familiar with the politics of that country.¹¹

Before we consider testing our specific hypotheses we first give a general overview of post-1945 cabinets in the Netherlands. We identify how many cabinets ended because of elections, and how many because policy disagreements between parties led to crisis. We then take a closer look at the cabinet crises and identify the parties that caused the crisis. We will also look at whether those crises ended in a reinstatement of the cabinets, or in cabinet breakdown.

Overview of the data

A basic overview of the political parties, the elections and cabinets that occurred during the post-1945 period is given in Tables 1 and 2. Table 2 identifies the party that can be said to have precipitated the crisis.

Of the fourteen elections held in the Netherlands after 1945, ten were normally planned elections, and four were early elections. In the inter-election periods (the period between two subsequent elections) a total of twenty-two cabinets have been formed. Four cabinets were interim cabinets, eighteen were 'normal' cabinets. Important for our discussion of premature cabinet termination is that only four cabinets served out their full term – which is four years in the Netherlands (FT in Table 2). Ten of the remaining fourteen cabinets ended in a crisis. Of these ten cabinets, three were re-

Table 1. Political parties in the Netherlands (post 1945 period)

Abbreviated party name	Party name
CPN	Communist Party of the Netherlands
PSP	Pacifist Socialist Party
PPR	Radical Party
GL	Green Left, post-1989 combination of CPN, PSP and PPR
PVDA	Social Democratic Party
D'66	Radical Democrats, founded in 1966
DS'70	Democratic Socialists, founded in 1970
KVP	Catholic Peoples Party
ARP	Anti-Revolutionary Party
CHU	Christian Historian Union
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal, a 1977 merger of KVP, ARP and CHU
VVD	Party for Freedom and Democracy: Liberals
GPV	Reformed Political League
SGP	State Reformed Party
RPF	Reformatoric Political Federation
BP	Farmers Party (Poujadist type)
CP	Center Party (Extreme rightist party)

instated after new formation discussions. These three cabinets belonged to the group of cabinet crises that arose as a result of conflict between the cabinet and parties at the parliamentary level (CPR). The three other cabinets of this group broke down beyond repair and triggered new elections (CPB). It is striking to observe that all four cabinet crises that arose between the parties at the cabinet level, did lead to a breakdown of the cabinet (CCB). The last cabinet identified in Table 2 is still in office at the moment we are writing this note.

Another striking feature of the data reported in Table 2 is that there is no obvious pattern to the timing of cabinet crises or in which parties were responsible. KVP precipitated a couple more cabinet crises than other parties, but virtually all of the major parties in the Netherlands at one time or another were involved in precipitating a cabinet crisis. The only minor party that precipitated a cabinet crisis was DS70, whose actions terminated the 1971 Biesheuvel cabinet. We will now briefly discuss the cabinets that ended in a crisis on a case by case basis.

The 1951 crisis in the Drees cabinet came about when an internal crisis within the parliamentary fraction of the VVD developed on the matter of decolonization policy. After a formation period of 50 days the cabinet was restored, having the same party composition. A fairly similar pattern can be detected in the 1955 crisis in the Drees cabinet. The parliamentary fraction of PVDA was divided on housing policy and brought about a cabinet crisis. After a cabinet formation period of 16 days the cabinet was restored in its previous form.

In 1958 the last Drees cabinet was steered into a crisis when the parliamen-

Table 2. Cabinets in the Netherlands (1945–1994)

Election		Cabinet name	Composition ^b	Duration (months)	Cabinet status ^c	Formation (days)	Term status ^d
Year	Status ^a						
1945	P	Beel	PVDA KVP	24	N	47	FT
1948	P	Drees	PVDA KVP CHU VVD	29.5	N	31	CPR
		Drees	PVDA KVP CHU VVD	15.3	N	50	PT
1952	P	Drees	PVDA KVP ARP CHU	32.5	N	69	CPR
		Drees	PVDA KVP ARP CHU	13	N	16	PT
1956	P	Drees	PVDA KVP ARP CHU	26	N	122	CPB
		Beel	KVP ARP CHU	2.7	I	10	PT
1959	E	De Quay	KVP ARP CHE VVD	19	N	68	CPR
		De Quay	KVP ARP CHU VVD	29.5	N	10	PT
1963	P	Marijnen	KVP ARP CHU VVD	19	N	70	CCB
		Cals	PVDA KVP ARP	18	N	46	CPB
		Zijlstra	KVP ARP	3	I	38	PT
1967	P	De Jong	KVP ARP CHU VVD	48.5	N	49	FT
1971	P	Biesheuvel	DS70 KVP ARP CHU VVD	11.5	N	69	CCB
		Biesheuvel	KVP ARP CHU VVD	4	I	22	PT
1972	E	Den Uyl	PPR PVDA D66 KVP ARP	46.5	N	163	CCB
1977	P	Van Agt	CDA VVD	41.5	N	208	FT
1981	P	Van Agt	PVDA D66 CDA	6	N	108	CCB
		Van Agt	D66 CDA	4.5	I	17	PT
1982	E	Lubbers	CDA VVD	42.5	N	54	FT
1986	P	Lubbers	CDA VVD	33.5	N	52	CPB
1989	E	Lubbers	PVDA CDA	This cabinet is still in office (May 1994)			

^aP = Planned election; E = early election.

^bParty that precipitated cabinet crisis is printed in bold.

^cFT = Full term cabinet, ends with elections; PT = Part term cabinet, ends with elections; CPR = Cabinet crises, precipitated at parliament level, cabinet restored; CPB = cabinet crisis, precipitated at parliament level, cabinet breakdown; CCB = Cabinet crises, precipitated within the cabinet, cabinet breakdown.

tary fraction of KVP came in conflict with the parliamentary fractions of other political parties, on the issue of tax policies. The cabinet broke down, and an interim cabinet took over before an early election was held in 1959.

The De Quay cabinet entered a crisis in 1960 when the parliamentary fraction of the ARP could not agree among themselves on the cabinet housing policy. After a cabinet formation period of 10 days, the cabinet was restored in its old form.

The next inter-election period was one of the most problematic in Dutch cabinet history. The first cabinet formed after the 1963 election, the Marijnen cabinet, came to a crisis in 1965 when at the cabinet level all parties disagreed on broadcasting policy. The KVP, ARP, CHU, VVD cabinet broke down and, after a formation period of 46 days in 1965, a new cabinet headed by Cals took office. The cabinet consisted of KVP, ARP and PVDA. This cabinet came to crisis when KVP took offence at the financial policies of the cabinet.¹² An interim cabinet led by Zijlstra consisting off KVP and ARP bridged the period until the next scheduled elections of 1967.

The 1972 crisis in the Biesheuvel cabinet was caused by the cabinet members of the new DS70 party because they disagreed with the cabinet's financial policies. The cabinet was beyond repair, and an interim cabinet without DS70 took over until the 1972 early elections were held. This election was succeeded by the second longest cabinet formation period in the Netherlands to date: 163 days. When in office, the Den Uyl cabinet managed to stay there for a long time, but it eventually came to a crisis at the cabinet level when KVP and ARP did not agree to the cabinet's land policy. The cabinet broke down in 1977.

The Van Agt cabinet consisting of CDA, D66 and PVDA, formed in 1981, entered a crisis on the cabinet level when PVDA opposed the financial policies of the cabinet. Eventually the cabinet broke down, and a CDA, D66 cabinet functioned as interim cabinet until the early 1982 elections.

The Lubbers CDA/VVD cabinet entered a crisis in 1989. The parliamentary fraction of VVD opposed the cabinet's proposal on a house owners tax. The cabinet broke down, and early elections were called.

Preliminary test of hypotheses

We turn to the analysis of our hypotheses. For the first hypothesis we should find that parties who forced cabinets to breakup experience subsequent electoral gains. For the second hypothesis we should find that the occurrence of a cabinet crisis is positively related to the time it takes to form cabinets. This means that we should see more cabinet crises, and thus more often a premature cabinet termination, with cabinets that had long formation times, as opposed to the cabinets that experienced comparatively short formation times. For the third hypothesis we should see changes in portfolios that benefit the party precipitating the crisis.

Of the 22 post-1945 cabinets, four are interim cabinets. Their termination

Table 3. Cabinet termination, parties that precipitate crises, and their electoral performance, in the Netherlands (1945–1994)

Election		Cabinet name	Premature termination (y/n)	Party causing crisis	In next election performance party % of total vote
Year	Status ^a				
1946	P	Beel	n		
1948	P	Drees	y	VVD	+0.9
		Drees	n		
1952	P	Drees	y	PVDA	+3.7
		Drees	n		
1956	P	Beel	y	KVP	-0.1
		De Quay			
1959	E	De Quay	y	ARP	-0.7
		Marijnen ^b	n		
1963	P		y	KVP	-5.4
				ARP	+1.2
				CHU	-0.5
		Cals		VVD	+0.4
		Zijlstra	y	KVP	-5.4
			n		
1967	P	De Jong	n		
1971	P	Biesheuvel	y	DS70	-1.2
		Biesheuvel	n		
1972	E	Den Uyl	y	KVP CDA: ARP	+0.6 ^c
1977	P	Van Agt	n		
1981	P	Van Agt	y	PVDA	+2.1
		Van Agt	n		
1982	E	Lubbers	n		
1986	P	Lubbers	y	VVD	-3.0
1989	E	Lubbers	This cabinet is still in office (May 1994)		

^aP = Planned election; E = early election.

^bIn this inter-election period, there are two terminated cabinets. The electoral performance is taken from one election result.

^cIn the next election, KVP, ARP and CHU competed as CDA. It got more of the vote in 1977 than the three parties got combined in 1972.

was fully determined in advance since their only purpose was to bridge the time until new elections are held. These cabinets are therefore excluded from the analysis. The third Lubbers cabinet is still in office at present (May 1994), and thus is also excluded from the analysis.

Electoral gains. First we test the prediction that the parties that have terminated cabinets will experience electoral gains. The results of our descriptive analysis are listed in Table 3.

Recall from Table 2 that three of the six cabinet crises that arose as a result of conflict between the government and other parties at the parliamentary level were reinstated after a new formation period, and that, in contrast,

all the cabinet crises that were precipitated within the cabinet, did lead to a breakdown of the cabinet. Looking at the results displayed in Table 3 for the three cabinet crises that came about at the parliamentary level and that in the end did lead to reinstatement of the cabinet, we find that the evidence is mixed. One of the parties that precipitated the crises suffered a minor setback in the next election (ARP lost 0.7 percent of the total vote in the 1963 election), but in the other two instances there was a vote gain (PVDA gained an additional 3.7 percent in the 1956 election, VVD 0.9 percent in the 1952 election).

If we consider the three crises that came about at the parliamentary level and that ultimately lead to cabinet breakdown, we find that the parties that were responsible for the crisis received a minor to a severe setback in the next election (KVP lost 5.4 percent in 1967 election, and 0.1 percent in the 1959 election, VVD lost 3 percent in the 1989 election).

Finally, if we look at the four cabinet crises that developed within cabinets, each of which eventually did lead to a breakdown of the cabinet, the evidence for the claim that the parties that precipitated the crisis benefitted is again mixed. The Marijnen cabinet whose fall was precipitated in 1963 by all parties in the cabinet was succeeded by two other cabinets before a new election was being held. In this election two of the parties that caused the crisis in the Marijnen cabinet, KVP and CHU, lost some portion of the vote, the other two parties gained a small portion of the vote. The second situation in this category, the 1971 Biesheuvel cabinet, resulted in an electoral loss for DS70 in the 1972 election.¹³ The third situation, the 1973 Den Uyl cabinet, is very difficult to assess because the two parties that brought down the cabinet, KVP and ARP, competed in the next election in the newly formed CDA (together with CHU). Their combined total was 0.6 percent higher than their total in the previous election, which suggests at least some electoral success. In the fourth case, involving the crisis in the 1981 Van Agt cabinet precipitated by PVDA, resulted in electoral gains of 2.1 percent.

Thus, in conclusion, the empirical results of Hypothesis 1' are mixed, and therefore it can not be not supported for the cabinets in the post-1945 period in the Netherlands.

Cabinet formation time. Our second cabinet termination hypothesis posited that cabinet formation time should be related to cabinet termination (the longer the cabinet formation time, the higher the chance of a premature cabinet termination). The 10 cabinets that resulted in a cabinet crisis had a mean cabinet formation time of 79.8 days. The seven cabinets that did not result in cabinet crisis had a mean cabinet formation time of 62.0 days.¹⁴ In a T-Test, we found a T-value of 0.69 (Df = 15; $p = 0.50$). Thus we find that, indeed, the mean cabinet formation period of cabinets that experienced a crisis was longer than the mean cabinet formation period of the cabinets that

did not experience a crisis, as predicted in our hypothesis. Unfortunately, this result is not statistically significant.

If we delete the outlier of the longest cabinet formation period from our analysis, the results change drastically.¹⁵ We then find that the mean cabinet formation time of cabinets that did not experience a crisis is only 37.7 days. The correlation between the cabinet formation time, and the occurrence of a cabinet crisis is + 0.54. In a T-Test, we now find a T-value of 2.40 (Df = 14; $p = 0.03$). Thus, we find that the prediction is confirmed in a much stronger fashion, with a statistically significant effect at $p < 0.05$ in the predicted direction. Moreover, the cabinet formation period of each of the three cabinets whose crisis did not lead to the final breakdown of the cabinet but ended in the restoration of the cabinet after new formations is below the mean cabinet formation time for all cabinets that ended in a terminal crisis. The mean cabinet formation period in these 3 cabinets is 56 days. The mean cabinet formation period of the 7 cabinets that did lead to a final cabinet break down is a hefty 93 days.

Thus, in conclusion, although the basic result of this analysis was not statistically significant, we do believe that this a very promising hypothesis. The main result of the analysis clearly points in the right direction: cabinets that came to a premature end had longer formation times than cabinets that did not experience a crisis.

Cabinet portfolio shuffles after a crisis. We consider the four cabinets that ended in crisis, and that were not followed by new elections or an interim cabinet. These cabinets are the 1948 Drees cabinet, the 1952 Drees cabinet, the 1959 De Quay cabinet, and the 1963 Marijnen cabinet. The 1948 Drees cabinet was toppled by VVD. In this cabinet VVD occupied only the ministry of finance. Although there was a reshuffle of cabinet posts prior to the restoration of the cabinet, VVD did not gain from the reshuffle. It continued to control only the finance department. The 1952 Drees cabinet and the 1959 De Quay cabinet were restored without a reshuffle of cabinet portfolios. The 1963 Marijnen cabinet was terminated by all parties. The two parties that returned in its successor, the Cals cabinet, were KVP and ARP. KVP had to give up one cabinet post (Education) but remained in control of the most important cabinet posts, ARP gained one cabinet post (it had Transportation and Agriculture, and it returned with Agriculture, Education, and Interior). In short, this overview does not provide much empirical support for our third hypothesis.

Concluding remarks

The main purpose of this research note was to make a first effort at an integrated rational choice perspective on the premature termination of cabi-

net coalitions in western democracies. Our chief behavioural assumption was that cabinets are brought down by individual choices of rationally acting parties. We have seen that it is possible to derive various testable predictions from this perspective.

The results of the preliminary empirical tests of the three specific hypotheses we proposed are mixed. We found little support for our first and third hypothesis. In our analysis of data from the Netherlands, the first cabinet termination hypothesis, saying that parties are pursuing electoral gains when they precipitate a cabinet crisis was not confirmed. On portfolio changes in the four cabinets that reformed after a cabinet crisis we similarly found little support for the portfolio gains hypothesis.

However, on the relation between the occurrence of cabinet crises and the formation time of cabinets, our second hypothesis, we were more successful. We found that the direction of the predicted effect was correct. The result is statistically significant when one outlier is removed from the analysis.

We must be cautious about overstating these results, in either direction, because of the limited nature of our data analysis, especially the fact that we could study only 18 cabinets in one country, and that the variables we use are only indirect proxies for the variables we are most interested in.

The next step in our research on cabinet termination in the future will be to address the issue more thoroughly than could have been done in this first paper. Clearly the major task at hand is to develop better indicators of our main variables and, maybe most importantly at this stage, to replicate the analysis with data from many more countries. We hope that these analyses will demonstrate the viability of the novel theoretical approach toward cabinet termination that was proposed in this article. We also hope that these analyses will provide further evidence for our conviction that, in terms of cost-benefit calculations as to cabinet dissolution, the variables that are most useful in identifying conditions that help account for the average length of cabinets *across different countries* need not be the same as those most useful in accounting for variations in cabinet length/likelihood of a cabinet crisis *within a given country*.

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Notes

1. The cabinet formation process is a less simple process than many coalition models have recognized. It is not a one-shot process, and it is a process that consists of at least three sub-processes: party selection, policy programme formation, and portfolio distribution. Unfortunately, with a few very recent exceptions (e.g., Laver & Shepsle 1990; Van Roozendaal 1993), these aspects of coalition formation are rarely studied from an integrated perspective.
2. As we note when we review data on the Netherlands below, a cabinet crisis may also be resolved in a way that permits continuation of the previous coalition.
3. Of course, other political actors, such as a president, or even some non-parliamentary societal actors, can also be of influence.
4. After a draft of this paper was written we learned that a very similar approach to understanding cabinet termination has been independently developed by Mershon (1993).
5. We wish to emphasize the limited nature of the empirical tests we offer. This is primarily a theoretical/conceptual paper. In later papers we will test our hypotheses against more extensive data sets.
6. Of course, a party may have chosen to bring down the cabinet in the belief that their continued participation in the cabinet was causing them to lose ground electorally. This would mitigate against the hypothesis proposed.
7. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, West Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, and the Netherlands.
8. While dissatisfaction can lead to an effort at changing cabinet policy that gets out of hand and precipitates a crisis that leads to the termination of the cabinet, it would still seem that rational parties would not risk destroying the present cabinet arrangement unless there were other feasible alternatives under which their situation might improve. Of course, a party can also anticipate that its electoral loss will be greater the longer the cabinet stays in office. Then this party has a clear rationale for terminating the cabinet, or at least to steer the cabinet in a crisis which may lead to a rethinking of the cabinet's policies. This rationale is closely related to the first goal parties might have – anticipation of electoral gains.
9. Of course this will only be a rough proxy.
10. In policy situations, new policy is first initiated and developed by a cabinet minister and his staff. A party will be able to have more influence on policy formation regarding salient issues when it occupies the ministerial portfolios that are most important to that party.
11. Further analyses would of course need to include data from other countries and time periods.
12. This is one of the most famous nights of modern Dutch political history, also known as the 'night of Smelser'.
13. Indeed, not only was DS70 not able to hold on to its newly won parliamentary representation, its number of seats declined sharply in subsequent elections, and in 1981 it disappeared from parliament.
14. An alternative model of the relationship between cabinet formation time and cabinet duration also occurred to us. While a long period of cabinet formation suggested a difficult formation process in which there were alternative coalition structures that the parties were considering, a very long bargaining time might also mean that the agreements reached would be likely to be durable and would anticipate the possible problems that might bring the cabinet down. Since these two effects go in opposite directions in terms of the sign of the predicted relationship between cabinet formation time and cabinet durability, we would then posit a curvilinear pattern.

Cabinet termination hypothesis 2''': The relationship between cabinet formation period and cabinet durability will be curvilinear.

When we test this curvilinear model we find a reasonable fit ($r^2 = 0.28$), but neither the x nor the χ^2 coefficients are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

15. The outlier is the cabinet formation period that followed the 1982 early election. PVDA won the election but lost the coalition formation. The first period of the 208 day formation took place between PVDA and CDA. After a very long time of formation, the process finally broke down. CDA then continued a new formation with VVD, and in a very short period of time a coalition of CDA and VVD was formed.

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