

# Puzzles of Government Formation

Coalition theory and deviant cases

*Edited by*

**Rudy B. Andeweg, Lieven De Winter  
and Patrick Dumont**



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# Puzzles of Government Formation

Understanding the formation of governments has always been central to political science. Traditionally this topic has been considered from a rational choice theory perspective and the empirical testing of these theories; however neither approach alone is able to explain a large proportion of actual coalition formations.

This comparative volume brings together a rational choice theory perspective and the empirical testing of these theories to study government formation. It provides in-depth studies of government formations in Europe that cannot be accounted for by existing coalition theory in order to identify potential explanatory factors that have been neglected so far. These “coalition puzzles” are reconstructed by country experts based on secondary sources, newspaper accounts, internal party documents, and interviews in an effort to understand why particular governments were formed. In conclusion, this book assesses whether new factors can be integrated into rational choice theories or whether these analyses point to the need for a different paradigm.

This important volume will be of interest to students and scholars of political science, European politics and comparative politics.

**Rudy B. Andeweg** is Professor of Political Science at Leiden University, the Netherlands.

**Lieven De Winter** is Professor of Comparative Politics and co-director of the Belgian National Election Study, Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium.

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*Europe Make Hard Decisions* (with Kaare Strøm, CUP, 1999), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe* (with Kaare Strøm, OUP, 2000) and *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining* (with Kaare Strøm and Torbjörn Bergman, OUP, 2008).

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# Preface

This book addresses “puzzles” of coalition formation that the editors encountered during their long collaboration within the seminal research project directed by Kaare Strøm, Wolfgang C. Müller and Torbjörn Bergman. Studying coalition governments in preparation for the various edited volumes that came out of that project,<sup>1</sup> we ran into numerous government formations that in one way or the other did not confirm the hypotheses from the wide range of existing theories in the field of coalition formation. In fact, the up to now most comprehensive statistical model, integrating two dozen variables drawn from various theoretical schools, only explains less than half of real-world government formation outcomes (Martin and Stevenson, 2001: 47).

In order to understand better these frequent deviations, and trying to find the rationale(s) that could add additional explanatory variables overlooked by existing theories, Lieven De Winter and Rudy B. Andeweg organized, with the help of Patrick Dumont, a workshop “*Government Formation: a theoretically informed inductive approach*” at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Torino (2002) that produced a variety of papers focusing on the in-depth analysis of the formation of one or a few governments that deviate from theoretical expectations. On the basis of this “raw material”, we selected the theoretically most relevant puzzles. By careful reconstruction of the formation dynamics in these deviant cases, based on secondary sources, detailed media accounts, internal party documents and interviews with key players, the authors in this book explain why in particular situations a deviant coalition was formed.

In the introductory chapter, we present what are the most common coalition puzzles one encounters in coalition research, which are the theories that they seem to violate most often, and how the selection of theoretically interesting deviant cases analysed in the book was made starting from a large-*n* analysis. In the second chapter, Ilja Van Beest provides a state of the art of social psychological experimental research on coalition formation and compares it with progress made in political science research on the same field. Then we present seven chapters in which the authors trace the formation dynamics of one or two deviant formations in their country: Nicholas Aylott and Torbjörn Bergman analyse why the median-legislator theory failed under Swedish government formations of 1998 and 2002, Hanne Marthe Narud and Kaare Strøm examine the puzzling



portfolio allocation in the Bondevik II minority government in Norway (2001), Wolfgang C. Müller examines the formation of Kreisky's minority government in Austria (1970), Josep M. Reniu explains why parties do not coalesce in minority situations in Spain, Ann-Cathrine Jungar examines the formation of the unconnected surplus majority Rainbow coalition in Finland (1995), Rudy B. Andeweg analyses the unconnected 1994 and the oversized 1998 "Purple" governments in the Netherlands, while Patrick Dumont focuses on the formation of the unconnected surplus Purple–Green coalition in Belgium (1999).

The concluding chapter summarizes the type of puzzles that were addressed in the various country chapters, and scrutinizes the accounts of these case studies in search of explanations that can help us to better understand why numerous formations diverge from theoretical predictions, suggest how these new explananda can be integrated into future large-*n* research, and lead to an exciting agenda for future coalition studies, by both improving coalition theory within the dominant paradigms and developing alternatives to it.

We would like to thank all the participants in the Torino workshop, with a particular thought for our colleagues in the Strøm, Müller and Bergman project mentioned above, for their inspiration, their criticism, and their good company. Isabelle Hennau provided invaluable editorial work, paid by the Institut de Sciences Politiques, Louvain, Europe. Most of all, we are grateful to the politicians and commentators who helped us make sense of some of the most intriguing coalition puzzles.

## Note

- 1 Strom, K. and Müller, W.C. (eds) (2000) *Coalition Government in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press; Strom, K., Müller, W.C. and Bergman, T. (eds) (2003) *Delegation and Accountability in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press; and Strom, K., Müller, W.C. and Bergman, T. (eds) (2008) *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining*, Oxford University Press.

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