THE STRATEGIC USE OF PARLIAMENTARY DISSOLUTION POWERS

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Within a few weeks in the spring of 1997, new elections were held to the lower houses of parliament in Great Britain, France, and Canada. Only in Britain was this election mandated by the expiration of the parliamentary term. The Canadian House of Commons could have served for about an additional year, and the French National Assembly for two. It was also only in Britain that the incumbent government went into the election as a decided underdog. As it turned out, the incumbent parties lost ground in all three countries, and only the Canadian government managed to retain its majority, and then just by the skin of its teeth. The conjunction of these three elections was caused by the use of discretionary dissolution powers, by decisions to call elections before the expiration of the parliamentary term. This decision was effectively made by Prime Minister Chretien in Canada and by President Chirac in France. Neither of these leaders was responding to any political crisis, and in neither case was there much doubt about their motivations. Observers in both France and Canada perceived these parliamentary dissolutions as strategic and opportunistic, driven by favorable poll results and a desire to prolong the life of the incumbent government.

In parliamentary democracies (for our purposes including the French Fifth Republic), legislative elections are the primary mechanism through which accountability is established and maintained between representatives and citizens. Political scientists have paid great attention to the results of such contests and to the popular preferences they signal. A central theme in this vast literature is whether or not (and how) governments are rewarded and punished for their performance -- most commonly, their economic performance -- while in office (e.g., Rose and Mackie 1983; Powell and Whitten 1993; Anderson 1995a; Anderson 1995b). What has been less widely studied, however, is how incumbent politicians might use the agenda powers at their disposal to strategically manipulate this relationship. But although the literature on parliamentary dissolution is by no means large, recent years have witnessed several interesting efforts to understand the phenomena and its implications. Empirical analyses suggest for example that Japanese governments may be more likely to dissolve strategically than may Indian ones (Chowdhury 1993; Ito 1990).

Parliamentary dissolution prior to the end of the regular term is an option in almost every parliamentary system (see below). Yet, the frequency with which these powers are exercised varies a great deal, so much so that it should arouse the curiosity of the student of political elections. Why are their some countries in which the relevant political authorities (typically, presidents and prime ministers) hardly ever use their constitutional agenda powers? Why does parliamentary dissolution seem to occur more frequently in Westminster democracies than elsewhere, despite the fact that such regimes rarely need such devices to resolve legislative deadlock or crises? And why do presidents whose approval is required for dissolution hardly ever reject the requests of their prime ministers, even when their partisanship and political preferences may be quite different?

These are the sorts of questions that motivate this analysis. In this paper, we take a closer look at the relationship between agenda powers and electoral success in parliamentary democracies. Specifically, we examine the use of parliamentary dissolution powers and their effects on the electoral fortunes and popularity of incumbent political parties. The analysis consists of seven parts plus the
PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT AND DISSOLUTION POWERS

In this paper, we take parliamentary government to mean the institutional arrangement in which the chief executive is accountable, through a confidence relationship, to the parliamentary majority, and can be removed from office by the latter (Strøm 2000). In most such regimes, simple legislative majorities have unrestricted dismissal power, i.e., the power to recall the executive at will. Most parliamentary democracies also feature a potentially offsetting dissolution power. That is to say, specific political actors can dissolve parliament and force new elections before the regular legislative term is up.¹

The dissolution power is often viewed as a key characteristic, or even a defining property, of parliamentarism. Douglas V. Verney, for example, counts it among the eleven defining characteristics of parliamentary democracy (Verney 1959). When vested in the head of government, the authority to dissolve parliament represents a counterweight to the parliamentary majority's dismissal power. Parliamentary government is commonly conceived as a system of "fused powers," in which the legislative and executive branches of government are forced to represent consistent policies. The dissolution power forms a particularly fitting part of the institutional repertoire of such a regime. These two “doomsday devices,” the dismissal power and the dissolution power, erect checks between the legislative and the executive branch and force them into interdependence (Lupia and Strøm 1995).

Like any other form of government, parliamentary government thus privileges some political players by granting them preferential rights with respect to the political agenda. That is to say, particular politicians and political parties are endowed with the power to determine how and when various policy decisions are made. As the social choice literature tells us, such powers can critically influence the

¹ We refer to parliamentary dissolutions and early elections synonymously. That is, we assume that whenever parliament is dissolved, a general election is constitutionally required and indeed takes place. We thus ignore potential dissolutions followed by states of emergency, coups d’etat, and the like.
outcomes of these social decisions. The most obvious way in which elections might be manipulated is through the strategic timing of when they occur. The ability to frame and time the process by which the voters elect their representatives, therefore, can be an invaluable asset. Yet, parliamentary constitutions vary widely in the discretion that they allow governments in such matters. Different dissolution powers have different implications for the government's ability to manipulate electoral outcomes, as we elaborate below. In systems where political discretion over elections is greatest, we would expect the strategic manipulation of elections to occur more frequently and to be more effective than in situations where elections are protected from such manipulation.

Most constitutions that permit parliamentary dissolution place the ultimate decision to dissolve in the hands of the head of state, whether that person is a monarch or an elected president. In some cases, France and Italy among them, the head of state is constitutionally free to dissolve parliament at his or her discretion. In most cases, however, the head of state can only dissolve parliament after the prime minister has requested such a dissolution. In some cases, such as Germany, the constitution also seeks to circumscribe the conditions under which dissolution can take place, even if the prime minister (in this case, the federal chancellor) may request it. There are some constitutions in which the responsibility for dissolution is instead vested in the prime minister, who may then be able to dissolve unilaterally (as in Sweden), or with the consent of the parliamentary majority (as in Belgium since 1995). In some cases, parliament may by majority vote decide to dissolve itself (Austria and, by implication, Sweden). Finally, several regimes (mainly in Continental Europe) permit or mandate dissolution upon the passage of a constitutional amendment (e.g., Denmark and Belgium).

**Table 1 about here**

Table 1 surveys the dissolution powers of 20 advanced industrial democracies. As the table shows, we can distinguish between seven different forms of dissolution power. Some constitutions (e.g., Belgium or Denmark) feature a combination of different dissolution powers. Note also there are some systems in which no discretionary dissolution is constitutionally possible. Switzerland is one case in which parliamentary dissolution can occur only upon constitutional amendments, though the country would not by our criteria qualify as a parliamentary democracy. Norway is a more interesting case of a constitution which is otherwise clearly parliamentary, but which does not permit early dissolution of the Storting (the Norwegian Parliament). Overall, the variety of institutional arrangements displayed in
Table 1 is quite remarkable. Except for the states in the Westminster tradition, hardly any two parliamentary systems are alike in their dissolution provisions.

STRATEGIC DISSOLUTION

Those endowed with agenda powers may use them for either public-spirited or partisan purposes, or both. Our concern here is with the partisan use of dissolution powers, though we in no way intend to discount its more public-spirited use. Hence, we need to understand the objectives that such politicians typically pursue as well as the institutional means at their disposal. Thus, in this section we discuss the identities of the constitutional agents that are involved in the parliamentary dissolution game, their strategic motivations for parliamentary dissolution, and the opportunities for such behavior.

Constitutional Agents

There are essentially two types of agents that may figure as players in the game of parliamentary dissolution. The first type consists of those institutional agents who control the decision to call elections, such as the Prime Minister, the President, possibly the speaker of Parliament, and the like. As our survey has shown, such authority can be vested in a single individual (the President or Prime Minister), in the government as a whole (the Prime Minister and his or her cabinet), in some combination of these two (and, in some cases, the Monarch), or in the legislature itself.

The second type, partisan agents, consists of the different parties that control the governing coalition, the legislature, or the office of the head of state. Tsebelis (1995) argues that each party in government constitutes a potential veto player in national policy making, a premise that could be extended to decisions concerning parliamentary dissolution. Since the institutions endowed with agenda powers are commonly controlled by party leaders, we examine the strategic use of early elections largely in partisan terms. And while most analysts recognize that political parties are complex organizations, the literature overwhelmingly assumes them to be unitary actors. Members of the same parties are particularly likely to act cohesively on such dramatic issues as parliamentary dissolution or cabinet dismissal. They maintain cohesion in large part because they face powerful constraints and incentives to do so, driven by the very electoral connection that forms the most important grounds for party organization (see Cox and McCubbins 1993; Laver and Schofield 1990; Müller and Strom 1999). Disunited behavior on the eve of elections can drastically reduce whatever collective reputational benefits co-partisans enjoy.

We therefore conceive of political parties in the dissolution process as unitary actors. More strictly, we think of these parties as governed by single dictatorial leaders, or by teams of leaders with
Motivations for Dissolution

It is difficult to make simple generalizations about the motivations of all the relevant players in the game of parliamentary dissolution. Surely, these motivations vary, most notably between partisan and institutional players. The coalition-theoretic literature has long striven to characterize the motivations of party leaders. These motivations may include policy goals, office benefits, or votes (Strøm 1990a; Müller and Strøm 1999). As the legislative politics literature tells us, the electoral connection is a powerful constraint on those agents who have to face it (Mayhew 1974). When the critical behavior consists of calling early elections, electoral pursuits are therefore presumably key. Nonetheless, party leaders experience mixed incentives concerning parliamentary dissolution. By dissolving parliament, the governing party or parties give up benefits that they could otherwise continue to enjoy until the constitutionally mandated end of the parliament’s term. In exchange, they get the distribution of power and implicit policy outcomes that a new election implies. In a situation of information uncertainty, in which electoral results cannot be precisely predicted, this may appear to the parties as a lottery in which the expected value may or may not be greater than that of the existing parliament. In addition, there may be transactions or opportunity costs associated with the holding of elections, such as the costs of campaigning or the disagreements that might be generated (and have to be resolved) between different institutional or partisan agents, or between members of the same party. Hence, all constitutional agents, whether or not they are partisan, may face trade-offs between different expected costs and benefits that are associated with parliamentary dissolution.

Opportunities for Dissolution

As with most other political behavior, however, we cannot fully understand parliamentary dissolution by focusing strictly on the demand for such occasions. We need to consider also the opportunities that governing parties have to make use of this mechanism. These opportunities are in large part determined by the institutions of parliamentary government.

Building on the survey reported in Table 1, we see two important constitutional powers typically associated with the process of parliamentary dissolution. One is the power to propose dissolution. In some countries, a single agent, typically the prime minister, has strict agenda control. That is to say, dissolution is feasible only after he or she has proposed it. In other countries, however, proposal power is shared by several different constitutional agents. The second important power is the authority to effect
or prevent dissolution. The most obvious such veto players are the constitutional agents whose consent is required for parliament to be retired, most commonly the head of state. As Tsebelis would argue, an increase in the number of veto players should diminish, or at least not increase, the opportunities for dissolution. Put slightly differently, the fewer the veto players, the greater the opportunity, for such figures as the Prime Minister, to call early elections. And the more the preferences of the different veto players diverge, the stronger the effect of their numbers.

Beyond these two critical powers, we should recognize that some constitutions mandate or favor a procession of “advice and consent,” in which other agents are consulted on the question of dissolution. Whether or not such a process of consultation is institutionalized, some agents typically have a legitimate claim to be heard on the issue, though their advice may well be disregarded. The coalition partners of prime ministerial parties may most prominently fall into this category.

Finally, constitutions sometimes constrain the circumstances or timing of parliamentary dissolution. Many constitutions (e.g., the German Basic Law) more or less vaguely reserve this mechanism for emergency or crisis situations. The French Constitution does not allow the President to dissolve within the first year of the parliamentary term. And the Italian Constitution permits no dissolution in the last six months of the President’s term (the so-called “white semester”).

Existing Scholarship

There have been several recent theoretical efforts to analyze parliamentary dissolution choices in decision-theoretic or strategic terms. In his analysis of parliamentary dissolution, Balke (1990) models the government’s decision to call early elections as an optimal stopping problem. Balke assumes that governments attempt to maximize tenure in office in a world of zero-sum politics. He finds, among other results, that parliamentary dissolution should be more common when governments enjoy high popularity and when the end of the parliament’s regular term (the time at which elections must be held under the constitution) approaches. Smith (1996) analyzes the decision to call early elections in majoritarian systems as a sequential equilibrium game. He assumes that the voters use their information about dissolution decisions to update their beliefs about the government’s competence, and that the opposition devotes resources to a campaign aimed at affecting these perceptions. Ultimately, the voters choose whether or not to reelect the government, guided by their perception of the competence of the government relative to the opposition. Given these assumptions, Smith reports, among other analytical results, that early elections are called when the government is popular and when the current value of holding office is low compared to the expected value of future office–holding. This might, for example, be the case under a minority government (1996: 103–04).
Neither Balke nor Smith models situations in which the decision to dissolve must be reached by a coalition of parties with diverging preferences. Hence, they do not fully capture the multiparty bargaining that characterizes most parliamentary democracies. Lupia and Strøm (1995), however, analyze the strategic timing of parliamentary elections in such coalition systems. Their game begins when an event (e.g., a credible poll) provides all parties with information about what would happen to them if an election were to be held. Each coalition member can then offer a reallocation of power to any other party. If no party is willing to make an acceptable offer, there is either a majority vote of confidence in the existing coalition, or parliament is dissolved and new elections held. Calling elections can also impose several types of costs: opportunity costs to calling elections, and transaction costs related to bargaining, campaigning and electioneering.

Lupia and Strøm find that dissolution is most likely when there exist parties that: (a) expect large benefits from an election; (b) face small election costs, (c) face large costs for negotiating non-electoral transfers of power, (d) derive little value from the seats they currently control and (e) derive little value from the other coalitions they could enter. The model also suggests that, all else equal, dissolution becomes more likely as the end of the constitutional term of parliament approaches (Lupia and Strøm 1995: 655–56).

While the early literature that we have reviewed attempts to capture the logic of dissolution decisions in rigorous ways, it does not capture the effects of the institutional environment in a fully satisfactory way. Both Balke’s and Smith’s seminal analyses, for example, assume unitary governments that can dissolve parliament at will. Needless to say, this is a simplistic characterization of parliamentary democracies, most of which have multiparty cabinets and more complex constitutions. Similarly, Lupia and Strøm assume that dissolution occurs only when it is majority-preferred to the status quo by the legislators. This may not be strictly necessary, particularly if dissolution powers are vested in a single constitutional agent such as the president. Moreover, Lupia and Strøm model dissolution only as a last stage in a process that begins with coalition bargaining. This may seem unrealistic, since casual observation tells us that there is often no coalition bargaining at all before parliament is dissolved. Yet, the most serious limitation of the existing literature is that it is entirely theoretical, and that it has not so far spawned any serious empirical investigation. In this paper, we shall move forward in both respects,

\[2\] Nonetheless, the stipulation makes sense as an equilibrium institution, since we would not expect parliamentary majorities to sustain rules under which the legislature could routinely be dismissed against the preferences of its majority.

\[3\] The best interpretation of such cases, however, may be that the relevant party leaders bypass the bargaining stage because they correctly anticipate its costs (see above) relative to the expected benefits. In other words, if party leaders perceive a substantial probability of winning an outright majority, they may be unlikely to accept the transaction costs of coalition bargaining and the hassles of actually implementing such a deal. This is particularly likely to happen in majoritarian systems, such as the ones analyzed by Smith.
by considering more complex and plausible institutional environments, and by subjecting our theoretical results to systematic empirical testing.

MODEL

We now develop a model of strategic parliamentary dissolution that builds on a number of these insights and intuitions. Building on the modal case in Table 1, our basic model assumes that parliamentary dissolution can take place only when it is initially requested by the prime minister and then approved by the head of state. We later show the implications of varying these institutional assumptions. We thus identify the causes of parliamentary dissolution by modeling the process that may lead to new elections as a game between three players. These players are (1) the prime minister, whom we assume to be the leader of one of the governing parties, (2) the leader of a party that is a pivotal coalition partner, and (3) the head of state. We make no assumption here as to whether the head of state holds an elective or hereditary office, or whether or not that person is a partisan. We shall, however, return to these issues later in the discussion.

Our model is intended to capture the processes that may lead to a strategic dissolution of parliament. We assume that all players are rational and that all the features of the game that we describe are common knowledge. We thus exclude from our consideration all dissolutions that are caused by such events as unforeseen national or international crises, or all dissolutions that result from the government’s own defeat or collapse. Building on Lupia and Strøm’s (1995) model of cabinet termination, we focus on those circumstances in which the option of renegotiating an existing coalition or forming a new one, rather than calling elections, can be excluded. In Lupia and Strøm’s terms, this could be because the transaction costs of coalition bargaining are too high relative to the benefits. Compared to the Lupia and Strøm model, we thus simplify our assumptions about the bargaining environment, while our model is institutionally more contextual.

The game takes place during the parliament’s term, after it has been elected and before its maximum constitutional term has been reached. The events we describe may be set in motion by a change in one of the relevant payoffs, such as for example the expected benefit to one of the parties of holding an election at that time. We assume that each player has a specific power, and that their actions must be taken in a specific sequence. The prime minister has agenda control. He, and only he, has the power to propose dissolution, and unless he does so, elections will not be held at that time. The coalition partner has the power to oppose the prime minister’s request for dissolution. After the prime minister requests dissolution, the coalition partner (she) may choose either to oppose or acquiesce to that request. Finally, the head of state has veto power. Once the prime minister has requested dissolution, and
regardless of whether or not the coalition partner opposes this request, the head of state has the power to either grant or refuse this request. The extensive form of the game is illustrated in Figure 1.

(FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE)

There are five possible outcomes, identified by Roman numerals in Figure 1. Either the prime minister proposes dissolution, or he does not. In the latter case, no election is held and the game ends (outcome V). If, on the other hand, the prime minister does call for new elections, the coalition partner has the choice whether or she wants to oppose this request. If she acquiesces, the game proceeds to the upper subgame at the final decision node. If the coalition partner opposes the prime minister’s call, then the game advances to the lower subgame at the final node. Finally, the head of state decides whether to heed or reject the request by the prime minister. If the head of state dissolves, the game ends at outcome I (if the coalition partner has acquiesced) or III (if she has opposed the call for elections). If, on the other hand, the head of state refuses to dissolve, then the end result is either outcome II (if the coalition partner has acquiesced) or IV (if she has opposed dissolution).

Before we can solve this game, we shall describe the objectives and payoffs of the players. For each player, there is an expected net value of holding the election now, which we denote $E_p$ for the prime minister, $E_c$ for the coalition partner, and $E_h$ for the head of state. We can think of this value as the difference between the value of holding elections now and the value of continuing the existing parliament, either until its term expires or until some other opportunity for dissolution may arise. We make no assumption as to precisely why the players might or might not prefer the outcome of a new election to the current parliament. For example, the prime minister might prefer to dissolve because he believes that his party will make gains in the polls compared to the previous election, because he believes that the party will do better now than at any feasible time in the future, because he believes that he may be able to form a more valuable coalition now than later, or for some combination of such reasons.

We do assume, however, that to the prime minister and the pivotal partner the value of the existing parliament will tend to decline continuously over the course of the parliamentary term. The value of the existing parliament derives from two things: the values of the existing seats and bargaining power that the party enjoys, and the value of future opportunities to call early elections. With each passing day, the time left in the existing parliament diminishes, and so do the opportunities to call early elections. On the very last day of the parliamentary term, existing seats have to be relinquished, and the opportunity to decide the timing of elections disappears. Hence, as the value of the existing parliament declines, the net value of holding new elections rises over the course of a parliamentary term.
We noted above that the head of state is a generic player in our model. In reality he or she may be either a non-partisan figure (e.g., a monarch such as the Danish queen) or a partisan one (e.g., the French or Finnish president). If the head of state is a partisan, then we expect his value from early elections to vary with poll numbers and the electoral cycle in the same way as those of the party leaders. If, on the other hand, the head of state is non-partisan, then we expect his net value from new elections to be zero.

**Costs**

Each player faces a specific cost associated with the exercise of their respective powers. The prime minister faces a *proposal cost*, \( P \), where \( P > 0 \), which he incurs if he chooses to request a dissolution of parliament. We can think of this as a cost that the prime minister incurs vis-à-vis his supporters. Proposing dissolution means subjecting the party organization to the rigors and costs of a potential election campaign. It may also mean putting at risk a number of parliamentary seats, whose occupants may not at all cherish the idea of having to face an early election. Finally, a request for dissolution may put the prime minister at odds with his coalition partners and require additional coordination and bargaining among the coalition parties. We therefore assume that there is always some non-zero cost to such proposals.

The coalition partner faces a *dissent cost*, \( D \), where \( D > 0 \), if she opposes the prime minister’s request. Any such expression of dissent generates conflict within the governing coalition. Awkwardly, this conflict may have to be resolved at the same time that the parties are going into an electoral campaign, when organizational resources are stretched to the limits, and when voters seem to be particularly unforgiving of squabbles within the incumbent government.

Finally, the head of state faces a *veto cost*, \( V \), where \( V > 0 \), if he vetoes a prime ministerial request for early dissolution. Refusing such a request means picking a fight with the prime minister. Although the head of state’s constitutional powers may be more or less strong, in parliamentary democracies he is typically a less powerful figure than the prime minister. We therefore assume that, all else equal, the head of state will prefer not to frustrate the prime minister in this respect. Note, however, that we assume that the head of state’s veto cost is contingent on the behavior of the coalition partner. If the coalition partner has opposed dissolution and we are located in the lower end subgame in Figure 1, then the head of state’s veto cost is lower than it would have been in the upper subgame, in which the coalition partner has acquiesced to dissolution. In other words, it is less costly for the head of state to refuse a contested request for dissolution than an uncontested one. We denote the former (contested) veto cost \( V_L \) (representing the lower subgame) and the latter (uncontested) veto cost \( V_U \) (representing the upper subgame).
For simplicity, we have assumed that no player is indifferent between any of the potential outcomes and that the head of state prefers stability (certainty) to instability (uncertainty) as his tie-breaking rule. Given these assumptions, Table 2 illustrates the payoff to each player under each of the five possible outcomes. All features of the game are assumed to be common knowledge.

**TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE**

We solve the game through backward induction. As the simple proof in the appendix shows, three of the five outcomes (numbers II, III, and IV) never occur in equilibrium. The coalition partner will never oppose if she knows that the head of state will dissolve regardless (outcome III). And the prime minister will not propose if he knows that the head of state will veto that request (outcomes II or IV). It is important to note that in equilibrium, we should never observe dissolution requests that are opposed by the prime minister’s coalition partner, nor vetoes by the head of state. This should serve as a caution against interpretations to the effect that heads of state are powerless to execute their constitutional powers to withhold dissolution, or that parties that do not control the prime ministership are powerless to prevent dissolution at the hands of the PM. One cannot infer from the lack of occurrence of such events to their impossibility. Rather, vetoes and intra-cabinet conflict over dissolution requests fail to occur because the prime minister anticipates the costs they would impose and refrains from such brinkmanship.

Empirical evidence suggests that such "out of equilibrium" behavior is, in fact, quite uncommon. There have been cases in which presidents apparently have considered vetoing dissolution requests. One such example was when Helmut Kohl engineered the parliamentary defeat of his coalition in 1983 and then requested dissolution. Another case was in 1995 when Ireland's Mary Robinson intimated that she might not accede to a request for dissolution. Tellingly, however, the veto did not materialize in either case. The German president acceded to Kohl’s request, whereas the Irish prime minister decided not to press the case for dissolution. It is likely that these decisions represent exactly such calculations as the model implies.

The condition under which dissolution will occur can be summarized as follows:

\[
\text{When } E_P - P > 0 \text{ and } E_H > -V_L > -V_U \text{ (regardless of the coalition partner's incentive condition), and}
\]

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(2) When \( E_P - P > 0 \), if \( E_C > -D \), and \( V_L > E_H > -V_U \)

Under all other conditions, the prime minister will not propose and no dissolution will occur.

Given the conditions for dissolution summarized above, further inferences can be drawn as to the likelihood of dissolution through the use of simple comparative statics in relation to the various costs and benefits outlined in each condition. For example, the likelihood of dissolution, all else equal, should never go down as the perceived benefit of an election increases for the prime minister, the head of state, or the coalition partner. Similarly, dissolution may be caused by a decrease in the prime minister’s proposal costs or by a decrease in the coalition partner’s dissent costs.

All of these comparative statics results are entirely intuitive. Note, however, that no such straightforward relationship applies to the head of state’s veto costs. Rather, the effects of veto costs are contingent on the payoffs to the coalition partner as well as on the head of state’s electoral benefits. Note also that the veto costs most likely to be decisive are those that the head of state incurs when the prime minister’s dissolution request is contested.

Further implications of the model can be reached when we modify the basic model in some simple ways. There are three degenerate versions of the model. One such degenerate version is when there is no pivotal coalition partner (for example, because the prime minister leads a single-party majority government). We can think of the latter case as always satisfying the condition that \( E_C > -D \).

Since the possibility of a contested dissolution proposal is then also moot, the necessary and sufficient conditions for dissolution reduce to \( E_P - P > 0 \) and \( E_H > -V_L > -V_U \). In other words, when the existence of a pivotal coalition partner affects whether or not early parliamentary elections are proposed and held, dissolution occurs more easily when such a coalition partner does not exist.

A second degenerate version of the model is the case where the head of state has a zero net benefit from calling an election, or, in other words, is always indifferent between existing and future parliaments (for example, because he is a hereditary monarch). In this case, we can think of the head of state's incentive condition always being satisfied, which means that dissolution will take place whenever the prime minister’s incentive condition is satisfied (e.g., if and only if \( E_P - P > 0 \)). In other words, when the head of state’s type affects whether or not early parliamentary elections are proposed and held, dissolution occurs more easily (though not necessarily more frequently) under non-partisan heads of state than under partisan ones.

Finally, the third special case is when the head of state is constitutionally permitted to dissolve parliament unilaterally, as in France or Sweden. For simplicity, we can think of this particular case as one in which the incentive conditions of both the prime minister to propose and the pivotal coalition partner to acquiesce are satisfied. Since the initiative then rests with the head of state himself, he faces
no possibility of veto costs in this situation. The necessary and sufficient conditions for dissolution hence reduce to $E_H > 0$. Once again, in other words, when the head of state can dismiss parliament unilaterally, dissolution depends strictly on whether his own incentive condition is satisfied.

HYPOTHESES

These results lead to a number of straightforward hypotheses that can be tested against existing data. The specific hypotheses that will guide our analysis are summarized below. All should be read as *ceteris paribus* expectations. The hypotheses will be presented in the order in which we deal with them empirically.

Our first two hypotheses focus on the variable of net electoral benefits. Recall that net electoral benefits are equal to the expected benefits from an early election, minus the continuation value of the existing parliament. Since the latter will decline over the course of the parliamentary term (see above), the expected net electoral benefits for all players should, all else equal, increase as the end of the constitutional term approaches.

**Hypothesis 1:** The later in a parliament’s constitutional term, the more common is dissolution (see Balke 1990, Lupia and Strøm 1995).

The continuation value of the existing parliament may also systematically differ depending on the type of government currently in office. Some governments are less capable of controlling the legislative agenda than others, and therefore, may more easily be induced to dissolve parliament. The less effective and secure the government is under the existing distribution of parliamentary forces, the lower the value of continuing the existing parliament. Specifically, we expect minority governments to be more frequently persuaded or compelled to call early elections. As Balke points out, “the fact that the government might be forced from power sometime in the future lowers the opportunity costs of losing the election. Thus, governments in parliamentary systems that allow the dissolution of Parliament by a vote of no confidence or systems where coalitions are relatively unstable will call early elections more often” (Balke 1990: 211-12; Smith 1996 makes a very similar argument).

There are actually two reasons to expect minority governments to call early elections more frequently than other administrations: their vulnerability and their electoral prospects. A minority government may easily find itself in a situation in which it has much to gain and little to lose through elections. It might under such circumstances call an election in the hope of significantly improving its bargaining power, for example, by gaining a parliamentary majority, as Harold Wilson did in Britain in
October 1974. Both of these factors enhance the expected benefits from an election, relative to the benefits they currently enjoy.

**Hypothesis 2:** Early dissolution is more common under minority governments than under majority governments (Balke 1990; Lupia and Strøm 1995; Smith 1996).

The logic of hypothesis 3 is based on the first of our degenerate models outlined previously. It applies to a situation in which there is no coalition partner present. In such a setting, the likelihood of an early election should increase because the coalition partner's incentive condition is no longer a hindrance to the prime minister's choice. Specifically, because there is no possibility that the pivotal coalition partner may dissent, the head of state’s veto cost is always of the high type. Therefore, he is less likely to exercise his veto than where there may be dissent about the request for dissolution.

**Hypothesis 3:** Parliamentary dissolution is more common under single-party than under coalition government.

The logic of hypotheses 4 and 5 are based on the logic of our second degenerate game. In this instance, the head of state is an inconsequential actor, either because he has no power to refuse dissolution (the prime minister has unilateral authority over dissolution) or because he is indifferent between the status quo and an early election (a non-partisan head of state). In either case, the obstacles to dissolution are lowered and the frequency of early elections should be greater.

**Hypothesis 4:** When the prime minister has unilateral discretion over dissolution, dissolution will be more frequent than when dissolution power is shared.

**Hypothesis 5:** Parliamentary dissolution is more common under non-partisan heads of state than under partisan heads of state, except under conditions in which the head of state has unilateral dissolution control.

The nature of the third degenerate form of this game, unilateral control of dissolution by a partisan head of state, introduces a much more complicated set of expectations. In this case, the only condition that matters is the incentive condition of the head of state. Under such a condition, the sole determining factor for dissolution is a positive net electoral benefit for he head of state. In other words, the expected net electoral benefit of a non-partisan head of state is equal to 0.

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4 As stated previously, the expected net electoral benefit of a non-partisan head of state is equal to 0.
if the head of state wants to dissolve parliament he will and if the head of state wants parliament to continue it will.

When compared to the logic of the regular version of the model, two countervailing expectations arise. On the one hand, we would expect that dissolution would be less frequent because adding an agenda setting prime minister to the game would raise the possibility that the dissolution process would not be started in some situations where the head of state would prefer that it were. On the other hand, adding a agenda setting prime minister to the game also means that the agenda setting process will be started in situations where the head of state would prefer that it was not, but the head of state would be unwilling to block dissolution because the value of the election is insufficiently high for him to be willing to pay the veto cost. Overall, the net likelihood of dissolution, therefore, depends on the balance between these conditions. Whenever the incentive conditions of the prime minister and coalition partner are satisfied and the veto costs are decisive for the head of state, dissolution should become less common than if the head of state were allowed to dissolve unilaterally. On the other hand, the opposite effect should be observed whenever the expected net benefit of election is positive for the head of state but the incentive condition of the prime minister is not satisfied.

**Hypothesis 6:** Parliamentary dissolution is more common under unilateral dissolution by the head of state if the prime minister has few incentives to request dissolution relative to those of the head of state. Conversely, it would have the opposite effect when the head of state has a negative expected benefit for elections but a significant veto cost, and when the prime minister’s incentive condition is satisfied.

Finally, it is difficult to observe the electoral expectations of the different parties and thus their incentives to dissolve. Yet, in according with a rational expectations logic, we expect these anticipated benefits to be positively related to the actual benefits that they receive in the subsequent election. In other words, regardless of how incumbent parties specifically calculate their incentives to call early elections, we expect incumbent parties to do better when they strategically call an early election than when they face the electorate at then end of their constitutional term.

**Hypothesis 7:** Incumbent parties do better in early elections than in elections held at the end of the regular parliamentary term.
DESIGN

The empirical analysis will be divided into three sections. Our first goal will be to investigate the frequency with which various dissolution powers are used (H1) and the extent to which this frequency is dependent upon the time left in the parliamentary term. In section two, our analysis turns to the types of governments most likely to dissolve parliament and the institutional rules under which dissolution is most likely to occur (H2 to H6). And finally we analyze whether or not the use of various dissolution powers has proven to be strategically effective (H7).

We address these questions by examining all elections in 18 parliamentary democracies for the period from 1960 to 1995, inclusive. The sample includes most of the world's stable parliamentary regimes, and a particularly high proportion of those in Western Europe. We have, however, excluded some states that have not been democratic throughout the 1960-95 period, such as Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Two additional countries, Switzerland and Norway, have been excluded from most of the analysis because neither provides for the constitutional possibility of early elections.

Our units of observation are national legislative elections. In cases of bicameral legislatures, our data refer to the lower (popular) chamber. For cabinet data prior to 1990 we rely on Woldendorp, Keman, and Budge (1993), whereas subsequent cabinet data have been compiled from *Keesing’s Record of World Events*. Our data on dissolution powers has been primarily drawn from the handbook *Parliaments of the World* (1986) and the *World Encyclopedia of Parliaments and Legislatures* (1998) with supplementary data drawn from personal communication with country experts. Finally, election data are primarily compiled from the *International Almanac of Electoral History* (Mackie and Rose 1989). For more recent election data, we have once again consulted *Keesing’s Record of World Events*.

HOW FREQUENT ARE EARLY ELECTIONS?

Since remarkably little attention has been paid to the use of dissolution power, our first task is to examine the frequency with which such powers have been used. In Table 3, we present, by country, the frequency of early elections in the 20 parliamentary democracies that we survey. Since there exists no standard definition of what constitutes an “early” election, we have chosen to report several different measures. The various measures are divided into two categories. Recall that the maximum constitutional terms varies from three to five years across countries. To compensate for variations in constitutional term across countries, the first set of measures considers the percentage of the constitutional term that has expired since the previous election. We report the number of elections called prior to the 95th percentile of the maximum parliamentary term as well as the number of elections called prior to the 90th percentile.
The second set of measures considers only the absolute number of days remaining prior to the end of the constitutionally defined term. In the right half of the table we report the number of elections that were called at least 100 days prior to the end of the term (roughly 3 months early), those which were called at least 180 days before the end of the term (roughly 6 months early), and those that occurred at least one year early. The final column reports a summary statistic of early elections: the average of the five specific measures we report divided by the total number of elections contested in each country during our time period. To provide a general overview of the relative frequency of early elections, countries are ranked according to this last column.

(TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE)

From 1960 to 1995, there were a total of 192 general elections in the 18 countries that we survey. Australia and Denmark held the most elections during that period (14) and Luxembourg the fewest (7). Depending on the definition of “early” that one chooses, of these 192 elections, the proportion of early elections falls somewhere between approximately 29 percent (55/192), by the one-year criterion, and 58 percent (110 of 192), by the 95% standard. If we average these results across the five specific definitions, we find that approximately 44 percent of all elections during this period were held early. Note also that the relative rankings of the countries remains quite stable regardless of the specific operationalization chosen. Only for Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Australia does the order dramatically change, and then only in the case in which early elections are defined as those occurring more than year before the end of the constitutional term.

Early Elections and Constitutional Terms

Turning now to our first hypothesis, we expect that the frequency of calling early elections will become more common as the parliamentary term wears on. Using a proportional measure for simplicity of comparison, Table 4 clearly shows that parliamentary dissolutions become more common as the end of the parliamentary term draws near. Of the 110 parliaments dissolved before the 95th percentile of their regular term (slightly more than half the parliaments in our sample), almost half (53) were in fact dissolved after the three-quarter mark (the 75th percentile). That is to say, more parliaments were dissolved during that 20% of their terms than during the preceding 75%. Let us look more closely at this rising rate of parliamentary dissolution. During the first quarter of their terms, no more than 8 of our 210

\[ \text{Again, the numbers are cumulative totals.} \]

\[ \text{We have excluded Norway and Switzerland from the aggregate analysis because neither constitution provides for the possibility of early elections (in Switzerland, barring the passage of a constitutional amendment).} \]
parliaments were terminated, which amounts to only 3.8%. Over the next quarter of the terms, 16 of the remaining 202 parliaments were dissolved, or 7.9%. Then the third quarter of the term claims another 33 parliaments out of 186 survivors, or 17.7%. Finally, 53 parliaments come to an end during the next 20% of the term, or 34.6% of the 153 that remain intact. Clearly, Hypothesis 1 is supported: the later in the term, the more likely parliamentary dissolution becomes. In fact, the probability of dissolution roughly doubles with each passing quarter of the constitutional term.

(TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE)

WHO DISSOLVES?

We now turn to trying to predict by what kinds of governments and under what institutional conditions early elections will be called. Recall that we have five specific hypotheses relating to these issues. First, that dissolution is more likely under minority governments than under majority governments (H2). Second, that dissolution is more likely under single-party governments than under coalition governments (H3). Third, that dissolution is more likely when the prime minister has unilateral dissolution control than when he does not (H4). Fourth, that dissolution is more likely under non-partisan heads of state than partisan heads of state (H5). And finally, that under unilateral dissolution rules controlled by the head of state the frequency of early elections is determined by the relative values of the prime minister's incentive to call and early election and cost of the head of state's veto (H6).

(TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE)

In Table 5, we report a set of simple bivariate relationships between the variables just outlined and the incidence of early elections. As hypothesis 2 predicts, early elections are called more frequently under minority governments (62.5%) than under majority governments (40.3%). Likewise, as expected, single-party governments call early elections much more (53.7%) than do multi-party governments (40%). The interactive effects of these two hypotheses are even more striking. Single-party minority governments have called early elections in nearly 69% of all cases whereas multiparty majority governments have dissolved prematurely in just under 37.4% of the cases. Hence, hypotheses 2 and 3 are both further corroborated. The remainder of the results reported in Table 5 are less satisfying. Contrary to our expectations, prime ministers with unilateral control over dissolution call early elections much less

7 For these tables and for the remainder of the paper, unless otherwise indicated, an “early” election is one that occurs at least 180 days before the end of the constitutional term. We have continued to check whether the results are sensitive to this operational choice, but none of the results are.
frequently (33.3%) than those in multilateral situations (48.4%). And there seems to be no evidence of any difference in behavior between partisan versus non-partisan heads of state.

We conclude this section by reporting a multivariate model of the frequency of early elections. We rely on the various hypotheses above to predict whether or not dissolution will take place. In Table 6, we report the standard logistic regression estimates for the following model:

$$Y_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{Partisan} + \beta_3 \text{Unilateral} + \beta_4 \text{Single} + \beta_5 \text{Minority} + \text{error}$$

where $Y = 1$ if the election was called early and 0 if not; Partisan = 1 if a the head of state is a partisan actor, 0 if otherwise; Unilateral = 1 if the prime minister has unilateral dissolution powers, 0 if otherwise; Single = 1 if there is a single party government, 0 if otherwise; and Minority = 1 if there is a minority government, 0 if otherwise. To control for possible country effects, we have estimated this model with and without an exhaustive set of country dummies. We do not use a standard “fixed effects” model because our data is neither rectangular across panels, nor are the observations temporally uniform. The results of the bivariate analysis aside, a priori, the coefficients of $\beta_2$, $\beta_3$, $\beta_4$, and $\beta_5$ are expected to be positive. Similarly, we have estimated two regular OLS regression models, in which the dependent variable is the number of days remaining in the regular constitutional term when the election was called. Again, the OLS models have been estimated with and without country dummies. These estimates of specific country effects have been deleted from Table 6 for simplicity of presentation.

(TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE)

The overall fit of the models is quite good. In all four specifications, we may reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients are jointly zero beyond the .0000 level of significance. Only two of the four variables in the analysis reach conventional levels of statistical significance, with the effect of minority government being in the direction expected and that of unilateral dissolution powers contrary to expectations (reinforcing the bivariate findings). Minority status, the OLS models tell us, hastens elections by a little more than a year. Single party government similarly is positively and significantly related to the holding of early elections in two of the models, but this effect fades to insignificance when we control for country effects. Thus, hypothesis 2 holds up well in these models, whereas support for hypothesis 3 is less impressive. Hypothesis 4 is consistently contradicted by the data, whereas the evidence on hypothesis 5 is weak and inconsistent.

8 Note also that the estimation of this equation results in four additional countries being dropped from the analysis: France and the Netherlands because they predict failure perfectly and Israel and Sweden due to perfect collinearity.
WHO BENEFITS?

The final issue to be examined is the extent to which dissolution works to the strategic advantage of governing parties. Above, we have tried to uncover the conditions under which these powers are used. Ultimately, however, the critical test of whether or not the right to dissolve parliament is an important strategic power is whether or not parties improve their political fortunes when they choose to employ it. Recall that hypothesis 7 states that incumbent parties do better in early elections than in elections held at the end of the maximum parliamentary term. As noted above, this hypothesis rests on a rational expectations logic. Building on the argument that the prime minister’s party may be uniquely favored to dissolve parliament strategically, we further expect the favorable effects to be particularly significant for this party. Also, the earlier in the parliamentary term, the larger the opportunity costs of dissolving parliament (Lupia and Strøm 1995), and hence the greater the expected electoral benefits necessary to motivate the incumbent parties to dissolve. Therefore, we also expect the incumbent parties to do better the earlier in the term parliament is dissolved. We can therefore elaborate our Hypothesis 7 in this way:

**Hypothesis 7a:** The electoral performance of the parties in government is better in early elections than in elections held at the end of the regular parliamentary term.

**Hypothesis 7b:** The electoral performance of the parties in government is better the earlier in the parliamentary term the election is held.

The tests of these hypotheses are relatively straightforward. The first part of Table 7 presents the pertinent data for Hypothesis 7a, including four different measures of success, compared with the previous general election: (1) change in the total percentage of votes for governing parties, (2) change in vote percentage for the party of the prime minister, (3) change in the number of seats won by governing parties, and (4) change in the number of seats won by the party of the Prime Minister.

*(TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE)*

The data presented in Table 7 are highly consistent with our expectations. Regardless of the measure employed, governing parties do improve their electoral performance much more frequently in early elections than in elections following the constitutional end of the term. The government as a whole is more than twice as likely to do better in aggregate after an early election than after a normally scheduled election (approximately 40% of the time as compared to 16% of the time). The party of the prime minister is also considerably more likely to improve its standing in early elections (approximately
36% of the time as compared to 22% of the time). Contrary to our expectations, however, the effect is slightly less pronounced for the prime minister’s party than for the government as a whole. As the literature on incumbency advantage suggests (Rose and Mackie 1983; Strøm 1985; Paldam 1991), governing parties are still punished more frequently than they are rewarded, but the relative incidence with which they are punished is much lower if they can determine when the election is called.\(^9\)

A second question is whether or not dissolutions sooner in the election cycle are more likely to result in an improvement for the governing parties than early elections called later in the election cycle. Early in the term, a government risks a tremendous amount of guaranteed tenure if it decides to call an election. Therefore, all else equal, for an election to be called early in the term, the expected payoffs must be greater than they would need to be later in the term. Though we cannot measure expected payoffs, we can measure whether or not parties consistently do better the earlier the election is called. If they do, then this would be consistent with the logic just presented.

In the second part of Table 7, we report the electoral success for governing parties and the party of the prime minister while controlling for how early parliament was dissolved. The entries represent the percentage of elections in which an improvement was realized. The results show a clear tendency for elections early in the term to produce better results for the incumbents than premature elections called late in the term. Thus, elections held in the first half of the constitutional term produce much better results than those held very late in the term. The turning point seems to lie around the 75\(^{th}\) percentile of the term. In elections held before this point, the ruling parties have an almost even chance of improving on their previous performance. In elections during the last quartile, on the other hand, the incumbents lose out in about three out of four cases. However, the trend is not linear, and it is not clear that very early dissolutions, say, during the first half of the constitutional term (of which there are few) produce better results for the incumbents than those that are only moderately premature. Table 7 further demonstrates that it makes little difference whether we define electoral performance in votes or seats, or whether we measure it for the party of the prime minister or for all incumbent parties.

\((\text{TABELE 8 ABOUT HERE})\)

Finally, we have examined the electoral effects of early elections, controlling for the various structural features associated with such contests. Again, Table 8 reports these results with as well as without an exhaustive set of dummy variables capturing country-specific effects. Regardless of

\(^9\) We also examined whether the calling of an early election could manipulate public opinion, but found no evidence to suggest that this was the case. In other words, public support for the governing parties or the party of the Prime Minister was no more likely to be favorable after an early election than it was after normally scheduled elections.
specification, Table 8 demonstrates that incumbent governments are significantly more likely to prosper in early elections than at the end of the regular term. Thus, the effects evident in Table 7 are robust to the introduction of these various controls. The estimates also show that minority governments do significantly better at the polls than others (Strøm 1985), whereas the effects of the other structural variables are less consistent and/or significant. Thus, there is ample evidence to corroborate hypothesis 7 and to support the rational expectations model of early dissolution. Governments do in fact tend to do better among the voters when they dissolve before the end of the regular parliamentary term.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the power of parliamentary dissolution is a key feature of most parliamentary democracies, it varies substantially from one such system to the next. And even though dissolution powers can be designed to give specific constitutional actors significant agenda powers, there has been very little systematic study of this institution. Agenda powers are of particular interest to the political observer when they can be used in such a way as to confer a partisan advantage on those in whom they have been vested. Our interest in dissolution powers has been focused on three issues. Are dissolution powers used differently over the course of a constitutional term? Are there systematic differences in the frequency with which various dissolution powers are exercised? And, can such powers be used effectively for partisan advantage? Building on several recent works in the neo-institutional tradition, we have formulated a set of specific hypotheses concerning the effects and strategic use of parliamentary dissolution powers.

Our results suggest that the answer to each of these questions is “yes,” although in some cases the specific effects have been different from our initial expectations. We have found strong evidence that the likelihood of parliamentary dissolution increases substantially and apparently monotonically as the end of the maximum parliamentary term approaches. Indeed, the hazard rate of parliaments to dissolution seems to fit an exponential function remarkably well. In examining who dissolves parliament, our strongest results are (1) that dissolution powers are used more frequently by minority governments, and (2) that the partisan nature of the head of state seems to play some role. There is also statistical support for the fact that there is a substantial difference between the unilateral and multilateral use of dissolution powers, but the direction of this effect is contrary to our theoretical expectation. Finally, the strength of the relationship between early elections and electoral success suggests that governing parties are well aware of how to strategically manipulate the timing of elections. We have found a clear relationship between early dissolution and electoral success. As we expected, the use of
dissolution powers results in significant electoral rewards for the ruling parties, relative to their results in elections at the end of the regular term. Moreover, these rewards seem to be more likely the earlier in the term that parliament is dissolved, at least up to a point.

Polities all over the world are contending with issues of institutional reform. Recently, in several parliamentary systems, significant institutional changes have been made (as, for example, in Italy, Japan, and New Zealand) and in several others important institutional reforms are being proposed and debated. All of these efforts are based on the explicit or implicit belief that institutions, and the ways in which they structure the policy agenda, matter. We concur. It is therefore somewhat surprising that one such important institutional mechanism, namely the authority to dissolve parliament and call early elections, has received such scant attention among political reformers as well as among students of politics. We believe it is well worth further study. Dissolution provisions give constitutional agents such as prime ministers and presidents important powers, which our results show that they tend to use to their advantage. On the other hand, the existence of dissolution power lessens the temporal rigidity with which Juan Linz (1994) is so concerned. The choice is constitutional design, then, is what price to pay in partisan opportunism for the flexibility and safety valve that dissolution powers represent.
APPENDIX A

We here state more fully and precisely the conditions under which requests for parliamentary dissolution are made and accepted by the head of state. We proceed by way of backward induction and employ the solution concept of subgame perfect Nash equilibrium. Please refer to Figure 1 for an extensive-form representation of the game and to Table 2 for a presentation of the payoff matrix.

Head of State
We first describe the behavior of the head of state at the last stage of the game. Given his payoffs, the head of state will dissolve in the upper subgame, when the prime minister has proposed and the coalition partner acquiesced, whenever \( E_H > -V_U \). Otherwise, he will veto. In the lower subgame, when the prime minister has proposed and the coalition partner dissented, the head of state will dissolve whenever \( E_H > -V_L \) and otherwise veto.

Coalition Partner
We next describe the behavior of the coalition partner at the penultimate stage of the game. Her choices depend on her own payoffs, as well as on her expectations concerning the subsequent behavior by the head of state. In order for the coalition partner to dissent, two conditions must be satisfied: her own incentive condition, and the condition under which her choice would sway the head of state’s decision with respect to dissolution. There are three possible configurations of the head of state’s preferences: (1) \( E_H > -V_L > -V_U \), (2) \( E_H < -V_U < -V_L \), and (3) \( -V_L > E_H > -V_U \). The full set of configurations bearing on the coalition partner’s decision, and the related equilibrium conditions in the subgame, are thus as follows.

1. \( E_h > -V_I > -V_u \), \( E_c > -D \), then acquiesce, dissolve (Outcome I)
2. \( E_h > -V_I > -V_u \), \( E_c < -D \), then acquiesce, dissolve (Outcome I)
3. \( E_h < -V_u < -V_I \), \( E_c > -D \), then acquiesce, veto (Outcome II)
4. \( E_h < -V_u < -V_I \), \( E_c < -D \), then acquiesce, veto (Outcome II)
5. \( -V_I > E_h > -V_u \), \( E_c > -D \), then acquiesce, dissolve (Outcome I)
6. \( -V_I > E_h > -V_u \), \( E_c < -D \), then dissent, veto (Outcome IV)

Note that outcome III never occurs in equilibrium in this subgame, because \( E_c - D < E_c \), by definition. Hence, the coalition partner will not dissent in situations in which the head of state will never veto.

Prime Minister
Finally, we describe the necessary and sufficient conditions for the prime minister to propose or not propose dissolution, as well as the equilibria in each case. For the prime minister to propose dissolution, his incentive condition must be satisfied, which means that \( E_P - P > 0 \). In addition, the outcome must be one that gives him a payoff greater than 0, which is his payoff from not proposing. In describing the payoff configurations and the corresponding equilibria, we refer to the possible configurations of preferences on the part of the head of state and the coalition partner by the numbers with which they have been identified above (1 through 6). Thus,

1. If (1) and \( (E_P - P > 0) \), then propose, acquiesce, dissolve (Outcome I)
2. If (1) and \( (E_P - P < 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
3. If (2) and \( (E_P - P > 0) \), then propose, acquiesce, dissolve (Outcome I)
4. If (2) and \( (E_P - P < 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
5. If (3) and \( (E_P - P > 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
6. If (3) and \( (E_P - P < 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
7. If (4) and \( (E_P - P > 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
8. If (4) and \( (E_P - P < 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
9. If (5) and \( (E_P - P > 0) \), then propose, acquiesce, dissolve (Outcome I)
10. If (5) and \( (E_P - P < 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
11. If (6) and \( (E_P - P > 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)
12. If (6) and \( (E_P - P < 0) \), then not propose (Outcome V)

Note that outcomes II and IV never occur in equilibrium, because by definition \( P > 0 \), which means that the prime minister will not propose if his proposal will be vetoed.
APPENDIX B: VARIABLES IN THE ANALYSIS

**Early Elections [early]:** number of days prior to the end of the constitutional term at which an election was called.
Sources: Wolendorp, Keman and Budge (1993); Keesing’s Record of World Events

**Constitutionally Designated Single-Actor of Parliamentary Dissolution**
- **[single1]** = 1, if either the President or the PM has exclusive control over parliamentary dissolution, 0 if otherwise.
- **[single2]** = 1, if either the President, the PM, or one of these two actors in conjunction with the Monarch has exclusive control over parliamentary dissolution, 0 if otherwise.
Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (1986).

**Minority Government [minority]:** = 1, if government is of minority status, 0 if otherwise.

**Number of Parties in Government [parties]:** = the number of parties in government.

**Change in Votes for Government Parties [chgovvc]** = Absolute change in vote percentage of sitting government parties from previous election to present election
Sources: Mackie and Rose (1991)

**Change in Seats for Government Parties [chgovsc]** = Absolute change in seats of sitting government parties from previous election to present election.
Sources: Mackie and Rose (1991)

**Change in Votes for Party of the Prime Minister [chpmvc]** = Absolute change in vote percentage of party of the sitting Prime Minister from previous election to present election.
Sources: Mackie and Rose (1991)

**Change in Seats for Party of the Prime Minister [chpmse]** = Absolute change in seats of party of the sitting Prime Minister from previous election to present election.
Sources: Mackie and Rose (1991)

**Change in Votes for Government Parties [chgovvc]** = Absolute change in vote percentage of sitting government parties from previous election to present election
REFERENCES


Table 5. Bivariate Relationship Between Institutional Structures and Frequency of Early Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compare</th>
<th>Frequency of Early Elections</th>
<th>Difference of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minority v. Majority Governments (H2)</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>t = -2.7131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minority (N = 48)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Majority (N = 144)</td>
<td>40.28%</td>
<td>p &gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-party v. Multi-Party Governments (H3)</td>
<td>53.66%</td>
<td>t = -1.8865</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single-party (N = 82)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-party (N = 110)</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>p &gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining H2 and H3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single-Party Minority Governments (N = 39)</td>
<td>68.97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-Party Minority Governments (N = 19)</td>
<td>52.63%</td>
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<td>Single-Party Majority Governments (N = 53)</td>
<td>45.28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-Party Majority Governments (N = 91)</td>
<td>37.36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral PM v. Multilateral Dissolution Rules (H4)</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>t = 1.6734</td>
</tr>
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<td>PM Has Unilateral Powers (N = 36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multilateral Powers (N = 128)</td>
<td>48.44%</td>
<td>p &gt;</td>
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<td>Partisan v. Non-partisan Heads of State (H5)</td>
<td>51.72%</td>
<td>t = -0.6306</td>
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<td>Partisan Heads of State (N = 87)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-partisan Heads of State (N = 32)</td>
<td>46.88%</td>
<td>p &gt;</td>
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Table 6. Governmental Status Variables and Early Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Logit 1</th>
<th>Logit 2</th>
<th>Regression 1</th>
<th>Regression 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Head of State</td>
<td>9.2025</td>
<td>0.6263</td>
<td>28.2189</td>
<td>-54.0594</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11.0119)</td>
<td>(0.2428)</td>
<td>(342.9649) (63.3938)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.855)</td>
<td>(-1.207)</td>
<td>(0.082) (-0.853)</td>
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<td>PM Has Unilateral Dissolution Power</td>
<td>0.0759</td>
<td>0.2216</td>
<td>-520.1030</td>
<td>-333.5830</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.0839)</td>
<td>(0.1061)</td>
<td>(146.1769) (75.3694)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(-2.333)</td>
<td>(-3.149)</td>
<td>(-3.558) (-4.453)</td>
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<td>Single Party</td>
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<td>2.5975</td>
<td>35.3355</td>
<td>182.2880</td>
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<td>Governments</td>
<td>(0.697)</td>
<td>(0.9379)</td>
<td>(73.3921) (58.6476)</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.528)</td>
<td>(2.644)</td>
<td>(0.481) (3.108)</td>
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<td>Minority Governments</td>
<td>3.2905</td>
<td>2.4583</td>
<td>452.8472</td>
<td>374.7864</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.8725)</td>
<td>(0.9016)</td>
<td>(73.3922) (59.3593)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.093)</td>
<td>(2.452)</td>
<td>(6.150) (6.314)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>187.3802</td>
<td>200.8128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(90.7188) (38.3686)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2.066) (5.234)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo/Adjusted R-squared</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td>0.0755</td>
<td>0.3394</td>
<td>0.2411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Squared/Prob &gt; F</td>
<td>49.81 (p = .0000)</td>
<td>19.99 (p=.000)</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-94.272</td>
<td>-122.4204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For the logistic regressions, the dependent variable of this model is a dummy variable that takes on a value of 1 when an election was called early, and 0 if otherwise. For the 2 OLS regressions, the dependent variable is the number of days prior to the end of a constitutional term that an early election was called. The first logistic and OLS models are run with an exhaustive set of country dummy variables.
Table 7. Early Elections and the Percentage of Time that Electoral Success Occurs for Governing Parties and the Party of the Prime Minister

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Called at Least 180 Days Early</th>
<th>Percent of Constitutional Term Exp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (N = 86)</td>
<td>&gt; .95% (N = 82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (N = 104)</td>
<td>.75% - .95% (N = 53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.50% - .75% (N = 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.25% - .50% (N = 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; .25% (N = 8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increase in Votes
For Governing Parties
39.54% 16.35%

\[t = -3.1904\]
\[P > |t| = 0.0017\]

For Party of the PM
36.05% 22.12%

\[t = -2.6950\]
\[P > |t| = 0.0077\]

Increase in Seats
For Governing Parties
40.70% 18.27%

\[t = -2.8598\]
\[P > |t| = 0.0047\]

For Party of the PM
41.86% 21.15%

\[t = -1.4198\]
\[P > |t| = 0.1573\]
Table 8. Predicting Government Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Head of State</td>
<td>0.1124</td>
<td>2.2340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.1144)</td>
<td>(0.8740)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.147)</td>
<td>(2.055)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM Has Unilateral Dissolution Power</td>
<td>0.0596</td>
<td>0.6220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0677)</td>
<td>(0.3214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.483)</td>
<td>(-0.919)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Party Governments</td>
<td>2.0012</td>
<td>1.1472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.0460)</td>
<td>(0.4276)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.327)</td>
<td>(0.368)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Governments</td>
<td>4.7579</td>
<td>2.0492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.7420)</td>
<td>(0.7627)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.706)</td>
<td>(1.928)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Elections</td>
<td>3.1822</td>
<td>2.0359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.4300)</td>
<td>(0.6948)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.576)</td>
<td>(2.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R-squared</td>
<td>0.1734</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Squared</td>
<td>41.75 (p = .0030)</td>
<td>16.90 (p=.0047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-99.5122</td>
<td>-112.328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable for these two models is a dummy variable that takes the value of "1" if the government did better in a subsequent election, "0" if otherwise. The first model is run with an exhaustive set of country dummies. Model 2 is run without dummies.