

Making a Difference? Public Perceptions of Coalition, Single-Party, and Minority Governments

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It is often argued that coalition governments are less accountable to voters than single-party governments. Because they are composed of multiple actors who need to agree to policy innovations, coalitions are associated with fewer policy differences and there tend to be fewer personnel changes between successive coalition governments than between single-party governments. Put simply, there is less for coalition governments to be accountable about. From these assumptions, a key precondition for accountability is identified, that governments be perceived to 'make a difference'. From this it follows, all other things equal, that public perceptions that governments should 'make a difference' will be weaker under coalition, and stronger under single-party governments. Following the same logic that applies to coalition governments, minority governments requiring support to pass legislation from nongovernment parties also ought to be less able to deliver on their commitments. Thus it will again be harder for voters to have substantive grounds on which to hold them to account. Thus perceptions of minority governments making a difference to mass publics should also be lower than under single-party majority governments, although not perhaps as low as under coalitions. Using data from modules 1 and 2 of the Comparative Study of Electoral systems (CSES), this paper tests these hypotheses. The expected effects, albeit small ones, are found for coalition governments, but only in old democracies.

Keywords: coalitions, minority governments, accountability, public perceptions, CSES

Making a Difference?

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1: Introduction

The implications of coalition and minority governments loom large in the ongoing debate between proponents of alternative electoral systems and styles of government. Compared to single-party majority governments, critics of coalition or minority governments say that they limit direct accountability between citizens and government and are therefore 'less democratic' (Farrell 2001, 196-198). Such direct accountability is, of course, most emphasised by those who follow in the wake of Joseph Schumpeter, in whose theory the ability to retrospectively dismiss officeholders becomes the essence of democracy. If democracy is simply about the ability to 'throw out the rascals' then considerations such as policy responsiveness are minimised in a vision that privileges elites and sidelines the substantive preferences of the mass electorate. All that remains is accountability as estimated by a direct relationship between voters' evaluations of incumbents and changes of governments.

Even for those who do not concur with this minimalist theory of democracy, accountability remains an important normative concern. This article focuses on the potential for electoral accountability, as grounded in mass perceptions. Unlike other approaches, it does not estimate the extent of accountability through electoral outcomes, either directly, or through the lens of economic voting. Instead, it seeks to uncover what may lie behind such accountability. It argues that one of the key preconditions for electoral accountability is a perception that there are real choices between alternative officeholders. Whoever is in power

must be expected to be able to 'make a difference'. Coalition and minority governments ought to be less able to generate such perceptions than single-party majority governments.

This article also addresses the hypothesis that citizens of new and old democracies may vary in their perceptions of types of government. In new democracies, 'difference' may be conceived as being between an authoritarian past and a democratic present. Given this, coalition governments could be perceived as more different from that past than single-party majority governments. Or, simply, voters might not have enough experience of democratic government to expect any difference in accountability potential between types of democratic government. But as time goes on, perceptions among citizens of newer democracies should converge with those of older democracies.

2: Theoretical Discussion. Literature, and Hypotheses

Despite its importance, the concept of electoral accountability has had somewhat less attention than it deserves (but see Przeworski, Stokes and Manin 1999). Two related brands of theory underpin the claims to be tested here: those that focus on 'clarity of responsibility', and those that focus on veto players. As Powell explains, clarity of responsibility directly focuses on citizen perceptions, and in particular their ability to identify who is responsible for decisions and policy outcomes (Powell 2000, 52). Types of government are assigned different levels of clarity, with minority governments having the least and single single-party majority governments having the most. The order runs from minority government; minority government with outside support (thus giving it potential majorities); majority coalition negotiated post-election; majority coalition negotiated pre-election; single-party majority government. This theoretical approach can be underpinned by obvious empirical examples in

which political party 'A' may be able to escape attribution of responsibility for policies or performance by blaming its coalition partners, parties 'B', 'C', as so on, for not delivering what party 'A' promised (Gallager, Laver and Mair 2000, 383). Minority governments have much the same opportunity to blame uncooperative non-government parties for frustrating their goals.

The theory of veto players suggests a different ordering and somewhat different outcomes. Here the initial distinction is between minimum-winning coalitions (inclusive of single-party majority governments), oversized coalitions, and minority governments. Minority governments are assumed to face a single veto player, coalitions the number of parties in the coalition less one. The more veto players, the greater the extent of policy stability (Tsebelis 2002, 163). While the thrust of the theory centres on policy change within coalitions, it has obvious implications for change between governments as well. Minority governments or core parties within new coalition governments may wish to innovate, but those plans may be vetoed. Empirical observation indicates that much change between coalition governments is on the basis of circulation or 'reshuffle' of parties rather than dismissal and complete replacement or 'throwing out the rascals' (Rose and Mackie 1983, 134; Pinto-Duschinsky 1999). Parties in a previous government may continue into a new one, with their key leaders. Under coalitions, there is wide agreement that there will be less policy difference as a result of electoral outcomes and thus less potential for accountability (Finer 1975; Alessina, Roubini and Cohen 1997; Lijphart 1999; Franzese 2002). The same problem of finding support for policy innovation obviously applies to minority governments as well.

These propositions have generally been supported by empirical evidence, although not necessarily as consistently and as clearly as some might have expected. As taken into account in Powell's ordering of types of governments in terms of their clarity of

responsibility, some coalitions are announced in advance, and clear policy alternation between coalitions based on relatively stable party blocs can take place. Often, too, voters can expect clear alignments as the result of historical experience even without formal commitments (Armstrong and Duch 2010). In countries most accustomed to coalition governments, power can circulate rather than alternate between parties, but such circulation can be both substantial and effective. And coalition governments can be thrown out wholly if enough electors consider them ‘rascals’ and thus elites may be sufficiently constrained or at least chastened (Farrell 2001, 196-198; Vowles 1999). And again as recognised by Powell, minority governments may be able to form stable relationships with outside ‘support parties’ within the same party system bloc, or even outside it, and deliver much of what they promised. And claims made about the superior accountability of single-party majority governments are usually founded in an ideal-typical construction of their performances that is not always matched when tested empirically.

The approach adopted here draws on both theories, acknowledging the importance of public perceptions, but choosing to test the theory on the basis of the number of veto players. If responsibility is not clear, the number of veto players should be a key influence, not only because of the policy stability associated with a higher number of veto players, but also because there is an obvious relationship between the number of players and the ability of voters to ascribe responsibility. Without policy variance, voters will have less substantive basis on which to hold governments to account. In addition there is a further element already noted: the more veto players, the more likely that change in government will be through circulation rather than dismissal. Changes in personnel as well as in policy will be more limited, once more limiting the potential for accountability. Voters will perceive less difference in both policies and leaders. The two sources of theory do however imply one

significant difference in predictions: for Powell, minority governments should be the least accountable. For Tsebelis (2002, 98) for 'most of the time' minority governments have only one veto player. Thus minority governments should be more accountable than coalitions of more than two members, and citizens therefore might perceive this to be the case.

This article also tests a hypothesis that perceptions of difference are likely to vary between citizens of new and old democracies. Citizens with little experience of democracy could have different perceptions of the same or similar events or circumstances than those of old democracies. In new democracies, for example, perceptions of efficacy are likely to be less stable, and probably more extreme (Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan and Listhaug, 2005, 92-93). Pre-adult socialisation into an existing democracy and repeated experiences of elections that change governments should make citizens of older democracies more sanguine and relaxed about changes of government, and give them lower expectations of change between elections. They will be less likely to perceive or expect major consequences. Meanwhile citizens in new democracies have fewer experiences of democratic alternations. The closer they are in time to the point of transition to democracy, the more likely that their main point of comparison is likely to be the old regime prior to the transition to democracy (Mishler and Rose 2001, 36). For citizens of new democracies, 'difference' may be conceived as being between an authoritarian past and a democratic present. Given this, as compared to single-party majority alternatives, coalition governments could be perceived as more different from that past. Alternatively, a recent shift to democracy will inevitably generate expectations of greater accountability of elites to masses, and changes of government will reflect voters' judgements of their policies and performances regardless of the number of parties in those governments, simply because citizens have not yet had time to learn about the

differences. As time goes on, perceptions among citizens of newer democracies are likely to converge with those of older democracies.

Turning next to relevant literature, following in the wake of Downs' influential work half a century ago (Downs 1957, 142-163), recent studies develop inferences about the effects of coalition, minority, and single party governments on various dependent variables: turnout (for example, Brockington 2004) and party choice (for example, Kedar 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Alternative approaches to the study of variations in accountability of course abound. Some examine patterns of government turnover, assuming accountability indirectly by comparing different institutions and conditions (Powell 2000, 47-50; Katz 1997, 166-167). There is a large literature that estimates accountability via economic voting, the most recent comprehensive study being that of Duch and Stevenson, who report that retrospective economic voting is indeed strongest for single-party majority Cabinets followed, however, by single-party minority governments, with coalition governments below again (2008, 265). Hobolt and Fisher (2010) focus directly on evaluations of government performance, distinguishing effects between large and small parties in coalitions, finding that the large parties are held more responsible than the small parties, but less so than single party majority governments. Aarts and Thomassen (2008) and Listhaug, Aardhal, and Ellis (2009) compare perceptions of responsiveness and the potential for accountability across electoral systems, as in this paper, using 'making a difference' as the accountability proxy. Vowles (2008) similarly tests the potential effects of the extent of globalization on accountability potential. These three studies also confront a paradox in the context of dominant assumptions about electoral system consequences: such perceptions of the potential for accountability are unexpectedly higher under systems of proportional representation (PR) than under majoritarian systems. For Vowles, the indicator is a scale of 'consensus democracy', but

again the key driver is the electoral system rather than the type of government and party system variables also included.

To summarise, the key hypotheses derived from the discussion above are as follows.

1. The larger the number of parties in government, the less likely that members of the mass public will have perceptions consistent with an expectation of democratic accountability.
2. Under minority government members of the mass public will also be less likely to have perceptions consistent with an expectation of democratic accountability. Specific expectations differ between the two most relevant theories.
 - a. Clarity of responsibility theory hypothesises that minority government will have the most negative effects of perceptions of accountability potential.
 - b. Veto player theory hypothesises that those effects will be only slightly more negative than those of single-party majority governments, with coalition governments having the most negative effects.
3. In new democracies, in terms of such perceptions, members of the mass public will either be –
 - a. Be less likely to distinguish between coalition or minority governments or single party and majority governments because they have less experience of them: or
 - b. Will perceive coalition governments as offering more potential for accountability compared to an authoritarian past.

3: Operationalization, Data, and Model Specification

Here these questions are investigated with data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). In the field since 1996, the CSES contains relevant data in two modules, both of which share the key dependent variable. This is a question that addresses perceptions of policy differences between governments, and thus the potential for citizens to attribute responsibility on the basis of policies and/or personalities: *'Some people say it makes a (big) difference who is in power. Others say that it doesn't make a (any) difference who is in power'*. Solicited across a five-point ordinal scale, this question was designed to estimate perceptions of government accountability, playing a particularly important role in module two's investigation of responsiveness and accountability trade-offs (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). A complication in its interpretation is variation in its form between the addition of 'big/any' for some country/election cases in module two. However, the effect of this difference is easily controlled for.

Types of government are defined simply as *minority versus majority government*, and for *coalitions*, the number of government parties. The effects of these types of government both before and after the election in question were tested in exploratory analysis, both separately and as the mean of the two. As expected, the most consistent effects were found for government type pre-election. While the CSES is made up of post-election surveys, it is most reasonable to expect that their brief experience of the incoming government would mean that most respondents' perceptions would be based on the performance of the previous incumbent. Data currently available containing the relevant variables from the CSES covers 38 countries and 70 elections. 29 of these country-elections had single-party governments prior to the election sampled, 16 had two-party coalitions, 11 three-party coalitions, 7 four-party coalitions, and seven 5 or more. 29 had minority governments (which include

Presidential systems in which the President's party did not have a legislative majority). The countries and elections are listed in the Appendix. While not a representative sample of country/elections (Vowles 2008, 72) the CSES is the best source of comparative data for the purposes at hand.

In most research on the difference between *new and old democracies*, this variable is expressed in nominal terms, with a dummy variable. Other than in preliminary analysis, this was not the approach taken here. To take account of the full variation of the experiences of new and old democracies, and the gradual maturing of new democracies, the differences are expressed by an average of the Freedom House index for each country/election case since its first appearance in 1973. This enables a more sophisticated estimate of the accumulation of democratic experience, consistent with the expectations outlined above, rather than assuming an arbitrary cut-off between new and old democracies.

The remaining variables in the model are control variables for other forms of institutional variation that are likely to affect perceptions of potential accountability, and thus need to be taken into account in order to identify the net effects of government type on accountability. *Party system fragmentation* at the legislative or parliamentary level sets the scene for either coalition or minority government, but does not determine either outcome and thus is a necessary control in the form of an index of effective parliamentary parties (for more detail see Appendix). This index is usually logged to capture the levelling-off effect of fragmentation as the number of parties increases. As suggested earlier, a multi-party system may create more choices and this more perceptions of difference.

Similarly, whether the *electoral system* is proportional or majoritarian emerges as a relevant control particularly given previous findings of its substantial effects of perceptions of governments 'making a difference'. Without this control it is likely that coalitions and

minority governments, more likely found under proportional representation systems, would appear more potentially accountable than single-party majority governments. Once more, details of operationalization can be found in the Appendix, although it should be noted that semi-proportional systems take an intermediate position on a scale that is shaped by a combination of district magnitude and effective threshold.

In addition, separating out types of government from electoral systems is a good principle. More often than not debates about electoral systems rest on an assumption that coalition and minority governments inevitably follow from proportional representation, single-party government from majoritarian systems. But the relationship is probabilistic, not deterministic, and the correlation far from perfect. Coalitions and minority governments are not confined to countries with systems of proportional representation, and there is still little if any research that contrasts public perceptions under types of government. Landmarks in the literature subsume coalition and minority governments into the ‘proportional’ or ‘consensus’ model of democracy (Powell 2000; Lijphart 1999). While such broad constructions have their own value, not enough research partials out the specific effects of coalitions and minority governments and sets them against those of electoral systems. Yet the majoritarian and consensus models are ‘bundles of institutions’ (Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan and Listhaug, 2005, 124) with different aspects potentially having different effects, some reinforcing each other, but others perhaps not doing so.

If public perceptions of democratic accountability are in secular decline, as some fear, one might expect the *passage of time* to have a negative effect of perceptions that who is in power makes a difference. The year of the election from which data was collected therefore becomes an appropriate control variable. The nature of the dependent variable, notably its personalised format of ‘who’ is in power, makes it highly likely that members of mass

publics in presidential systems are more likely to agree that ‘who is in power makes a difference’. Further, they will be more likely to agree where presidential power is high, and somewhat less likely when it is lower. For this variable, the Shugart-Carey index of *presidential power* is brought to bear, with parliamentary systems scoring 0 (again, see the Appendix for further details).

Another reasonable expectation is that the greater the *role of government in the economy*, the more likely members of the mass public will consider that who is in power makes a difference, making an estimate of government expenditure over GDP an appropriate control. The *extent of change in government* at the election in question is another important control, represented in the model below at the macro-level by the percentage of people voting for a winning party, and the percentage voting for a party losing office. This estimates the effect of government change on the respondents in each country as a whole. This does mean that the estimates of the effects of coalitions and minority government are conservative, as this is a control for the effects of government circulation at the election in question. However, this should have little or no bearing on evaluations of the government in power before the election, the focus of the analysis.

The remaining control variables are micro-level. It is obvious that perceptions of government accountability will differ not only across country-elections but also among respondents within each macro-level case. Without taking the most likely causes of such variations into account, the model may not be fully specified. However, these variables are only controls. One has only a passing interest in their slopes or intercepts or their direct effects on the dependent variable.

One assumes that people expressing *party preferences*, and the more particularly the *strength* of those preferences, will make them more likely to perceive that who is in power

makes a difference than those with no or weaker preferences. Following Karp and Banducci (2008), this variable is constituted from like/dislike scales for the various parties in each country (see Appendix). *Winners* are defined as people who voted for the parties in government after the election. Over and above party preferences, one would expect to see winners more likely to perceive difference, as compared to those who did not vote or who voted for parties that remained out of office. We might expect, however, an even stronger perception of difference from *losers*: those who voted for parties in government before the election that failed to regain office afterward. This also estimates the effects of government change at the micro-level, making it possible to distinguish between the effects of government change on everyone (as in the macro-level above) and on those it most affected.

Further expanding partisan effects, one might expect voters to be more likely to perceive differences than nonvoters, and for those who vote for major parties for perceive greater differences than those who vote for minor parties. Two dummy variables, one for *large parties*, one for *small parties* are therefore assessed against a residual nonvote category. A further measure is also used to estimate the effects of *ideological polarisation*: at the micro level, the absolute difference between respondents' positions on the left-right scale and the mean for their country/election (or alternative location in political 'space', in the case of Japan). The more extreme respondents' positions, the more likely they should perceive a difference between officeholders.

Finally, *education* is likely to effect perceptions that power makes a difference. One infers that the effect should be positive, unless alternative political elites have converged in their policies and behaviour so much that the most politically-informed persons will tend to reflect that situation in their perceptions, while those less-informed could continue to

perceive differences. This variable is estimated by a simple dummy variable for university degree.

4: Empirical Results

Preliminary investigation of the structure of the data and the relationships between some of the key independent variables now follows. Of particular interest are the distributions of coalition/non-coalition and minority/majority governments across electoral systems and the newer and older democracies.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Coalitions are almost equally common in the ‘newer’ and ‘older’ democracies, with a slight edge to the old. There are ten country/election cases in the dataset that are fully majoritarian (from five countries), and five that are more majoritarian than proportional (from three countries). Australia, France, and the Philippines are responsible for an average of almost two-party coalitions in the majoritarian cases. Minority governments are clearly more popular in the older democracies, and in the PR and semi-PR cases. Nonetheless, there were some minority governments in majoritarian countries: the United States in 1996, with government divided between a Democratic President and Republican Congress, the Philippines in 2004, and before the two Korean elections. Majoritarian electoral systems were unsuccessful in bringing about effective two-party systems in all situations registered in this data, the average being a three-party system. Nonetheless, parliamentary party fragmentation was considerably higher in the PR cases, as one would expect. The importance of government in the economy was only slightly higher in the older democracies, but considerably higher under PR than in the majoritarian and semi-PR cases.

The average old democracy was very close to a full rating on the adapted Freedom House index: it is worth noting that the average for new democracies is far more shaped by their histories rather than their more current Freedom House scores. The lower average for democratic history in the semi-PR category similarly reflects choices made by those setting up many new democracies to adopt non-compensatory mixed electoral systems, the main grouping in this category. The newer democracies in the dataset have also been more likely to adopt presidential than parliamentary systems, and presidential systems are also more popular in the majoritarian and semi-proportional systems. The proportion of ‘winners’ is slightly higher in PR systems, indicating their governments are more broadly-based, coalitions being the main explanation. However, there are almost twice as many ‘losers’ in PR systems. At least in this selection of countries and elections, this indicates that movement out of office is more common than might be expected. Claims that government change is less prevalent under PR, and thus ‘rascals’ are more likely to stay in office do not appear to be borne out here. Finally, party preferences appear as strong in newer as in older democracies, and slightly higher under PR, consistent with other evidence (Karp and Banducci 2008, Bowler, Lanoue, and Savoie 1994).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 maps out partial correlations between the dependent and independent variables, controlling for the ‘big/any’ shift in question format for ‘who is in power makes a difference’. All individual-level relationships are significant and no robust estimation of standard errors was possible in the available statistical procedure to take into account the clustering of micro-cases within the country/election macro-cases. However, this information is primarily to demonstrate the approximate zero-order correlations before moving on to multivariate analysis. On the surface, the relationships between ‘who is in power’ and the two

key government-type variables are not promising. Both are positive rather than negative, but the differences are inconsequential. PR has a positive effect of a greater magnitude, albeit consistent with findings from previous analysis of this CSES data (Listhaug, Aardal, and Ellis 2009; Aarts and Thomassen 2008). The negative effect for passage of time, ‘year’, is in the expected direction. Party system fragmentation is associated with higher perceptions of difference, again unexpected, and new democracies are associated with lower perceptions of difference.

Table 3 reports findings from an ordered logit model that regresses these independent variables against the five-point ordinal variable ‘who is in power makes a difference’, with robust standard errors adjusted for clustering (more statistical information can be found in the Appendix). Using this method rather than a multi-level model assumes that the intercepts and slopes of the micro-level variable effects are the same across all country-elections, which is almost certainly not the case. It is more reasonable to assume that, if these differ, the effects will be too small to matter. These are all control variables and indeed in practice alternative multi-level models indicate little or no effect on the key macro-level findings (again, see the Appendix).

Probability change effects have been estimated for each category of the dependent variable, for each independent variable. For example, the effect of being asked the ‘big/any’ version of the question is such that a person perceiving the maximum power effect is 6-7 per cent less likely to have been asked the ‘big/any’ version. (The probability estimates across each independent variable category, it can be noted, sum to zero, with positive/negative effects at one end of the range offset by negative/positive effects at the other).

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

For the most part the various control variables have the expected overall effects, some significant, some not: for example, presidential power, strength of party preference, winners and losers (with losers, as anticipated, having the bigger impact). The higher the proportion of losers in a country, and thus the greater the extent of government change, the more likely people will perceive that who is in power makes a difference. Voters for small parties are more likely to perceive difference associated with who is in power, and the difference between them and those who vote for large parties is relatively small: as noted, the effects are calculated against those who did not vote. Ideological polarization has a strong effect in the expected direction. University education has positive effects on perceptions of who is in power making a difference. Testing the possibility that this relationship might reverse in older democracies, an interaction found no significant difference. One could infer, on this basis, that perceptions of no difference are mainly those of the less informed. Analysis of political knowledge across the dataset is, unfortunately, limited by the inconsistency of questions asked across different countries and a high number of missing values.

The effects for minority government are not statistically significant in the model reported here. Persons in a country where the government in power before the election was of minority status were just over three per cent less likely to be in the ‘most difference’ category. They were correspondingly more likely to be in the lesser difference categories. In an alternate model minority government did have a significant effect of somewhat over 4 per cent. That model lacked the two macro-level winner and loser variables estimating the extent of government circulation on the entire electorate. This finding could mean that any negative effects for minority governments are reduced when they are removed from office, although there were no significant interaction effects to confirm this. An interaction with Presidential power was also insignificant, in both its main and interactive effects: one might have

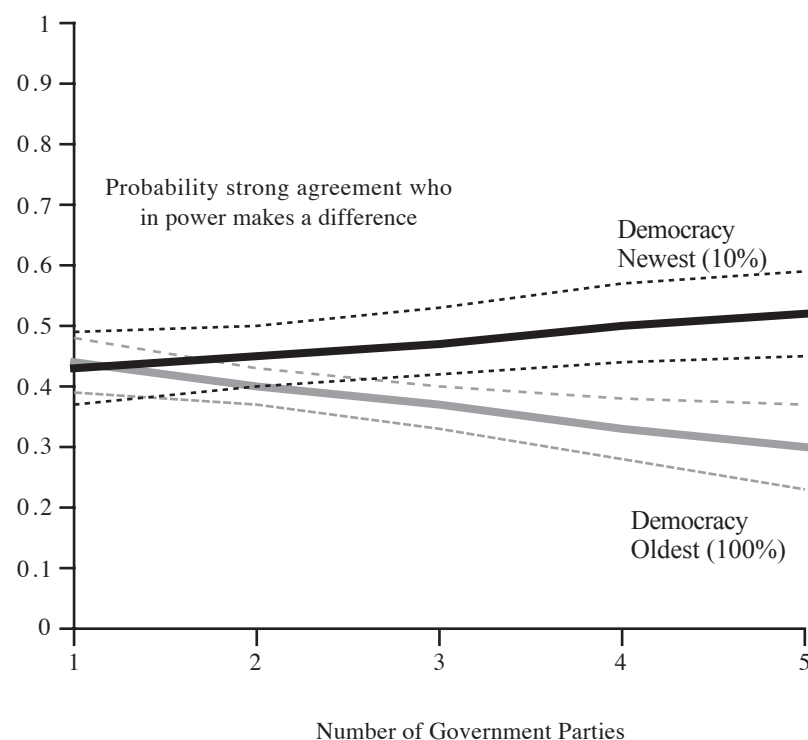
expected stronger effects for minority government in parliamentary systems, but there is no sign of this. An interaction between the minority government and coalition variables to test for minority versus majority coalitions produced nothing of significance.

Without interaction with the democracy index, there were no effects for number of parties in government. But as hypothesised, differences between the newer and older democracies interact strongly with the effects of the numbers of parties in government. In the newest democracies, the number of parties in government appears to have a positive effect on perceptions of difference: in the oldest democracies, it appears to have a negative effect. Admittedly, with democracy at 0, this scenario would represent the first election in a transition to democracy. Consequently it is somewhat theoretical, as no cases in the dataset represent this possibility.

Probability estimates from interaction effects can be misleading, particularly when they are measured from the minimum to maximum of the independent variables in question and thus reflect the most extreme values. Figure 1 indicates the shape of the relationships more clearly over the range of most of the values for coalition parties. (Dropping the country with the largest number of coalition parties from the analysis does not affect the slope of these estimates). The figure provides 95% confidence intervals that further demonstrate that the differences are statistically significant. In the oldest democracies, there is a 14 per cent *decrease* in the probability of choosing the 'most difference' category between a person in a country having had a five-party as compared to a one-party government, all other variables held constant at their means. In the newest democracies, there is a nine-point *increase* over the same range, although inspection of the slope and the confidence intervals around it indicates that there is some likelihood within those 95% confidence intervals that the real relationship could be flat. A very new democracy is defined for the purposes of the Figure as

at 0.1 on the scale: a democratic history of 10 per cent, as it were (about the scores for Albania or the Ukraine, as it happens). In these cases, increase in government parties by one has a 2 per cent effect in the other direction. With democratic history set at 0.4 or '40 per cent', at about the mean for new democracies, an alternative plot of those probabilities indicates an almost completely flat line. The number of government parties makes no difference in these cases. A similar interaction between democratic history and minority government had no effects.

Figure 1: Probability Changes in Perceiving Most Difference in Who is in Power from a One-Party to a Five-Party Government in the Oldest and the Newest Democracies



5: Conclusions and Implications

We find that the negative effects of minority government are small and not significant once government circulation is taken into account. However, the size of coalition governments does have effects that are different in the old and new democracies. But one should also note

that the distinction between a single party government and a two-party coalition is within the confidence intervals in Figure 1. Only the comparisons between a single party government and coalitions of three or more parties are outside them.

Hypothesis 1 is therefore confirmed, although only for coalition governments of three parties or more, and in old democracies. Hypothesis 2 is not supported. However veto player theory postulates that minority governments are only slightly less accountable than single-party majority governments, and this turns out to be closer to the mark than clarity of responsibility theory, which assumes they are least accountable (and thus would be perceived to be so). As for hypothesis three, it is confirmed. There is weak evidence for version b) – that citizens of new democracies will perceive coalitions as having more potential for accountability – but the safest conclusion is a more conservative one, opting for hypothesis a) that there is no difference.

These findings both extend our understanding of the implications of coalition and minority governments for perceptions of government accountability, or, at least, its potential. Further research could explore the more fine-grained differences between types of coalitions in particular, most notably the distinction between minimum-winning and overfull coalitions. However, much of this is likely to be captured by the number of government parties. The effects of government circulation could be estimated in their own right, although in this dataset cases of change from one type of government to another are fairly limited.

The central thrust of this article is on types of government and accountability, but one cannot ignore the strong findings about PR that have again emerged even after controlling for type of government effects. Why should PR enhance perceptions that alternative governments can ‘make a difference to what happens’? The notion that governments under PR are more accountable than those under majoritarian systems is counter-intuitive and does

raise questions about what ‘who is in power makes a difference’ is measuring (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). Perhaps respondents construct the question as meaning making a difference to them by way of reflecting their concerns, importing perceptions of responsiveness into a question not intended to estimate them. Yet the claim that coalitions under PR are closer to the median voter is confounded by conflicting findings from different datasets in different time periods (Powell 2000; Blais and Bodet 2006). Perhaps there are too few majoritarian systems in the dataset to properly estimate these effects, which may be country or culture-specific rather than system-specific. Yet the dataset includes the most notable and significant cases that are, however, mainly although not wholly confined to Anglo-American societies.

Or perhaps the standard intuitive expectations about PR and accountability are simply wrong. Torben Iversen argues that PR actually nurtures programmatic and responsible parties whereas majoritarian systems give parties incentives use leadership appeal rather than clear policy commitments to attract the median voter (Iversen 2005, 123). John Gerring and Strom Thacker argue that the institutional arrangements most conducive to good government in democracies combine centralised unitary states with inclusive electoral systems: again, a positive accountability effect for PR (Gerring and Thacker 2008). Who is in power therefore may make more of a difference under PR than hitherto expected.

Returning to the main themes of this article, the most obvious conclusion from the analysis returns the discussion to a constant refrain in debates about electoral systems: the question of trade-offs, and how they can be traded. Political actors in democratic societies face combinations of constraints and choices. In old democracies actors are more constrained, in new democracies less so. System-reinforcing constraints lie in historic cleavage structures, and the interests of entrenched elites. Electoral systems in old

democracies are generally 'givens', although less so than in the past. Choices of government types are constrained by voters within systems, and elites negotiate what choices are provided for them. In most countries, one government type dominates. Where elites have choices, within multi-party systems in the oldest democracies, citizens' perceptions conform to the theory that smaller coalitions, minority governments or single-party governments are more likely to be seen to 'make a difference'. In terms of public perceptions of accountability, in the oldest democracies where elites cannot construct a single party majority government, either a two-party majority coalition or a minority government are probably indistinguishable, at least in terms of statistical tests. If such governments are deemed to be less accountable, the difference is probably too small to matter. But if the cost of a majority is a three or four party coalition, the evidence presented here suggests that if a minority government can be constructed instead, it should generate higher expectations of 'difference'.

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Appendix: Acknowledgements, Variable Definitions, and Statistical Issues

Acknowledgements are due to the work of Dave Howell, Ashley Grosse and Karen Long of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, its Organising Committee, and to the collaborators who collected the data in the various countries. The CSES dataset and full documentation (CSES 2003, 2005) can be downloaded from <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/cses/cses.htm>.

The full list of 70 country/elections from CSES modules one and two included in this dataset are listed below. Countries missing from the current list of CSES cases either had key missing variables, either the dependent variable ‘who is in power’, or data making it possible to identify winners and losers, or could not be classified in terms of the types of government.

Variable Definitions and Sources

% Government component Share/Real GDP, current year Penn World Tables 6.2 (Heston, Summers and Aten 2006). After 2004, the most recent year available in the dataset.

Proportional representation systems score 1, majoritarian systems score 0, and mixed or semi-proportional systems score appropriately in between. Where a country shifts from one system to another at the election concerned, the score is averaged between the two systems: for example, New Zealand in 1996 scores 0.5, because it changed from a pure majoritarian to a fairly pure PR system at that election. Japan in 1996 is scored 0.5. It changed from SNTV to a mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system in 1996. The effects of SNTV appear to have advantaged one large party but allowed representation from a variety of small parties, and the MMM system appears to have similar effects. Codings for other mixed countries require explanation. Chile is coded at 0.25 because of its unique system of two-member districts and the party coordination within left and right blocs that takes place to preserve a

multi-party system. Where MMM systems have a relatively even split between single member districts (SMD) and PR lists, they are coded at 0.5 (Hungary, Lithuania, Mexico, Taiwan, Ukraine). Where the PR component is significantly smaller, they are coded depending on the ratio of seats in each component. For example, Korea scores 0.25. Spain, although technically with a PR system, does not produce proportional outcomes because of the institutional factor of low district magnitude, and was therefore coded at 0.5. Switzerland, although normally classified as having a PR system, elects its government by a joint sitting of two Houses that form the Federal Assembly, one of which is elected by two members from each canton, and forms about 20 per cent of the Federal Assembly. Thus Switzerland is scored at 0.8. This formula favours the two traditional large parties, and helped prevent a change in government composition after the 1999 election that would have produced a more representative government.

Legislative party fragmentation is as an average of the legislatures before and after the election in question and estimated using a transformation of the Herfindahl index, from the World Bank's Database of Political Institutions (Beck et al, 2001). This is similar to the denominator of the better-known effective number of parliamentary parties formula, 1 divided by the sum of the squares of the fractional shares of each party's seats. It differs in that except it includes all parties, however small, and counts each independent member as a party. Dividing one by the Herfindahl index produces the effective number of parliamentary parties, subject to the difference noted above. This is then transformed again into its natural log so as to capture leveling off effects at higher levels of fragmentation.

Presidentialism and Presidential Power. Presidential systems provide examples of executive government as its most powerful. The more powerful a single directly elected leader, the more likely that citizens might feel who is in power makes a difference, on top of possible

'framing' effects suggested above. Therefore the index of *Presidential Power* developed by Shugart and Carey (1992, 150) is employed here. All countries lacking a directly elected President score=0. Others scored according to Shugart and Cary 1992, Pennings 2000, or from CSES macro-data and constitutional documents (Taiwan, Ukraine, and Albania).

'Democracy since 1973' is estimated by a reversed average of the Gastil or Freedom House index over the years since its beginnings in 1973 (<http://freedomhouse.org>), transformed to run between 1 and 0. This means that the oldest democratic countries score high, the newest democratic low. Where countries did not exist, as part of larger states, the index scores for those countries are applied for those years.

Winners and losers. Winners are respondents voting for winning parties, defined as those remaining in or entering government after the election. Losers are those who voted for parties that were defeated, or leaving government due to the election.

Large and Small Parties. Voters for large parties are those who vote for the two largest parties at the previous election. Voters for small parties are those who vote for the rest, leaving nonvoters as the residual category.

Strength of Party Preference. The highest score given by each respondent on the party like/dislike scales in the two CSES modules (0-10). In other words, this represents the score given between 0 and 10 to the respondent's most preferred party.

Statistical Issues

Because the main relationship of interest is a ‘macro-micro’ relationship, a multi-level model for this analysis turns out to be of little extra value. Full replication of the model by that means would be heavily demanding of computer processing capacity given the size of the dataset, the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, and the need for weighting. Weighting the CSES is desirable because some countries contain oversamples of minorities or regions, and to correct for differences in the sample sizes of different country-election cases. The data here is therefore weighted to correct for these potential biases, with addition of political weights for all countries to ensure each sample is representative of voting groups and of nonvoters.

The initial assumption was that that variation in the intercepts and slopes of the micro-level effects should be minimal enough to have no significant impact on the macro-level findings. However, this assumption has been tested with a series of alternative models. Fortunately, while the basic functional form of the ordinal logit model on the dependent variable is non-linear, it can be closely approximated by use of the anti-log of the dependent variable in OLS. Comparison of weighted and unweighted models indicates that weighting slightly enhances the statistical significance of the macro-level findings. However, an unweighted multi-level OLS model also slightly enhances this, quite closely conforming to the original findings. Given this, one concludes that, if anything, the model specified in the paper errs slightly on the side of conservatism and is therefore sufficiently ‘fit for purpose’. Output from these various models is available from the author on request.

Probability estimates and predicted values were estimated with Scott Long and Jeremy Freese’s *spost* procedures, documented in Long and Freese 2006 (also see <http://www.indiana.edu/~jslsoc/spost.htm>). Collinearity diagnostics indicated high levels of

less than perfect collinearity between the interaction variables. However, none of the negative effects to look for could be found in the model (see Leahy 2000). Multicollinearity reduces the likelihood of statistical significance, thus biasing findings in a conservative direction, and has no effect on probability estimates. Given this, inferences based on the relationship displayed in Figure 1 should be reasonably robust.

One further issue remains: several countries appear twice, and some even more, with data collected at successive elections. This raises the question of independence among the macro-level country-election cases. The data was aggregated at the macro country/election level, and the macro-level variables were regressed against the percentage, by country-election, of those perceiving a (big) difference. Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering were applied to the multiple country cases and no significant differences in findings emerged whether or not they were applied. The micro-level controls were also taken into account in a 'two-step analysis'. The predicted values of the dependent variable where all independent variables were set at their means, calculated separately within each country-election dataset, were subtracted from the matching country-election averages and entered as a control in the macro-level dataset. The adjusted R-Squared was .55.

Appendix Table 1: Country/Election Cases

Country	Year	Pres. Power	Min. Govt.	Parties Govt.
Albania	2005	0	0	4
Australia	1996	0	0	1
Australia	2004	0	0	2
Belgium	2003	0	0	6
Belgium	1999	0	0	4
Brazil	2002	12	0	5
Bulgaria	2001	0	0	1
Canada	1997	0	0	1
Canada	2004	0	0	1
Chile	1999	12	0	4
Chile	2005	12	0	4
Czech Republic	2002	0	1	1
Czech Republic	1996	0	0	2
Denmark	1998	0	1	3
Denmark	2001	0	1	4
Finland	2003	8	0	5
France	2002	5	0	3
Germany	1998	0	0	3
Germany	2002	0	0	2
Hungary	1998	0	0	2
Hungary	2002	0	0	3
Iceland	1999	11	0	2
Iceland	2003	11	0	2
Ireland	2002	0	1	2
Israel	1996	0	1	3
Israel	2003	0	1	5
Italy	2006	0	0	5
Japan	1996	0	0	2
Japan	2004	0	0	3
Korea	2000	15	1	2
Korea	2004	15	1	1
Lithuania	1997	3	1	10
Mexico	2000	17	1	1
Mexico	2003	17	1	2
Mexico	1997	17	0	1
Netherlands	1998	0	0	3
Netherlands	2002	0	0	3
New Zealand	2002	0	1	2
New Zealand	1996	0	0	1
Norway	1997	0	1	1
Norway	2001	0	1	3
Peru	2001	11	1	1
Peru	2006	11	1	1
Peru	2000	11	0	1
Philippines	2004	11	1	2
Poland	2001	6	1	2

Poland	1997	6	0	2
Portugal	2002	8	1	1
Portugal	2005	8	0	2
Romania	2004	4	1	1
Romania	1996	4	0	2
Russia	1999	16	1	1
Russia	2004	16	1	1
Slovenia	1996	5	0	3
Slovenia	2004	5	0	3
Spain	1996	0	1	1
Spain	2000	0	0	1
Spain	2004	0	0	1
Sweden	1998	0	1	1
Sweden	2002	0	1	1
Switzerland	1999	0	0	4
Switzerland	2003	0	0	4
Taiwan	2001	3	1	1
Taiwan	2004	3	1	1
Taiwan	1996	3	0	1
Ukraine	1998	14	1	5
United Kingdom	1997	0	0	1
United Kingdom	2005	0	0	1
United States	1996	13	1	1
United States	2004	14	0	1

Table 1: Selection of Independent Variables Across Electoral Systems and Newer and Older Democracies

Means	No, govt. parties	MinG	Eff, Parl. Parties	Govt/ GDP	Dem.	Pres. Power	Win	Lose	Party Pref.	c/ele N
Democracy										
Newer Half	2.24	0.53	3.93	19.94	0.37	7.32	0.27	0.09	6.76	35
Older Half	2.42	0.31	3.77	17.80	0.96	2.17	0.32	0.08	6.70	35
System										
PR	2.59	0.43	4.51	20.13	0.73	3.27	0.32	0.10	6.96	34
Majority	1.93	0.27	3.07	14.56	0.75	6.47	0.29	0.06	6.29	10
Semi-PR	2.11	0.50	3.14	19.75	0.50	6.06	0.26	0.08	6.64	26

NOTES

1. Democracy Newer and Older, based on a 50:50 split of the country/election cases, thus the 35 most low ranked democracies and the 35 higher ranked democracies. This nominal variable is used in Table 1 only for an indicative comparison of means.
2. System: PR=1-.51, Majority 0-.49, Semi-PR .5.
3. No. govt parties: absolute number of parties in government before election
4. MinG: Minority=1, Majority=0
5. Eff. Parl. Parties: Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties
6. Dem: Average Freedom House index 1973-election (High Democracy=1, Low=0)
7. Pres. Power: The Shugart-Carey index of Presidential Power, 0= No elected President, up to a maximum of 17 in this dataset.
8. Win: Voted for Party in government after the election=1, Others=0
9. Lose: Voted for party losing office after the election=1, Others=0
10. Party Preference: Respondent's level of preference for their highest scoring party (10-0).
11. c/ele N: Country-Election N

Table 2: Partial Correlations (Controlling for Big/Any) Between 'Who is in Power Makes a Difference' and Key Independent Variables

Minority Govt, 0.01	Parties in Govt. 0.03	PR 0.11	Year -0.07	Govt/ Economy 0.13	Pres. Power 0.30
Winner 0.11	Loser 0.06	University 0.05	Party Pref. 0.16	Log. Eff. Parties 0.07	Democracy -0.06

Table 3: Who is in Power Makes a Difference: Ordered Logit Model

Macro-Level	Coef.	r.s.e	Min-Max % effect when in power =					
			No Difference			Most Difference		
Year	-0.02	0.02	1.6	1.1	1.9	0.3	-4.9	
Big Difference	-0.25 *	0.11	2.1	1.4	2.4	0.2	-6.1	
Number Government Parties Pre-election (main effect)	0.12 *	0.05	-6.3	-4.7	-10.0	-5.5	26.5	
Democratic History (main effect)	0.31	0.24	-2.4	-1.6	-2.8	-0.2	7.1	
Democratic History * Number Pre-election Government Parties	-0.27 *	0.10	16.7	8.9	10.9	-3.2	-33.2	
Minority Government Pre-election	0.14	0.09	-1.1	-0.8	-1.3	-0.2	3.4	
Log Effective Parliamentary Parties	0.23	0.21	-2.6	-1.8	-3.2	-0.6	8.3	
PR versus Majority	0.35 *	0.16	-2.9	-1.9	-3.3	-0.3	8.4	
Government in Economy	0.02	0.01	-3.7	-2.5	-4.7	-1.1	12.0	
Presidential Power	0.03 **	0.01	-3.3	-2.3	-4.5	-1.3	11.5	
Proportion Vote for Winner	0.99	0.63	-3.9	-2.6	-4.3	-0.3	11.2	
Proportion Vote for Loser	0.81 *	0.38	-2.2	-1.6	-2.9	-0.7	7.5	
Micro-level								
Vote for Winning Party	0.22 **	0.05	-1.7	-1.2	-2.1	-0.4	5.3	
Vote for Outgoing Party	0.19 **	0.07	-1.4	-1.0	-1.9	-0.5	4.8	
(Reference: Nonvoters + consistent nongovernment voters)								
University Degree	0.20 **	0.03	-1.5	-1.1	-2.0	-0.5	5.0	
Partisanship (Extent of Most Favoured Party Preference)	0.08 **	0.01	-6.9	-4.4	-6.8	0.1	17.9	
Voted for Large Party	0.19 **	0.05	-1.5	-1.0	-1.8	-0.3	4.7	
Voted for Small Party	0.23 **	0.05	-1.8	-1.2	-2.2	-0.4	5.6	
(Reference Category: Nonvoters)								
Ideological Polarisation	0.12 **	0.01	-6.4	-4.7	-10.0	-5.1	26.2	
/cut1	-40.95	36.82						
/cut2	-40.27	36.82						
/cut3	-39.21	36.82						
/cut4	-38.21	36.83						

Number of obs = 110864

Number of clusters = 70

Pseudo R-Squared estimates: McFadden = 0.03, Cox & Snell = .08, Nagelkerke = 0.09

** statistically significant at 99 per cent * statistically significant at 95 per cent