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Coalition Government and Political Communication

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One of the central challenges facing multiparty governments in parliamentary democracies is the need for coalition parties to communicate to their constituents that they have not strayed significantly from their electoral commitments when agreeing to policy compromises. We argue that one of the main ways parties attempt to make their case to constituents is through their behavior in legislative debate. Debate provides a unique opportunity—tied directly to the policy the government is implementing—to declare party positions on the coalition compromise. In an analysis of several hundred legislative speeches in two parliamentary democracies, we show that coalition parties communicate with constituents much more extensively on internally divisive issues, especially as the next parliamentary elections draw near. We also demonstrate contextual and institutional effects (including the impact of junior ministers) that complement emerging findings in the literature on coalition governance.

Keywords: *coalitions; legislatures; debates*

In the majority of the world's parliamentary democracies, coalition government is the norm. In Western Europe, for example, roughly three-fourths of all governments formed in the postwar era have been composed of multiple political parties (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2005). Not surprisingly, the prevalence of these governments, combined with the complex nature of the challenges they face, has given rise to a voluminous body of research on coalition behavior.¹ Unfortunately, while this research has clearly been among the most productive in comparative politics, it remains limited in important respects.

Most notably, studies of coalition behavior have largely been *static* in the sense that they have been primarily concerned with explaining coalition behavior at a single point in time—typically, at the very beginning of the life of a government, when parties decide the questions of who gets in and who gets what (Laver and Schofield 1990). Even studies that have focused on the question of government survival—an inherently dynamic phenomenon—have usually modeled the process as a function of factors that are fixed at the point of government formation (such as the coalition's size and ideological compatibility).² More problematically, few researchers have focused on coalition behavior

between the points of formation and dissolution, when the real business of governance takes place. The initial coalition bargain is by no means set in stone or implemented on the day of formation. Consequently, scholars cannot develop a full picture of coalition behavior without understanding how partners manage their day-to-day relationships, especially in the face of various institutional and contextual conditions that might encourage them to amend or even to abandon their initial agreement (Laver and Shepsle 1996; Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2005). In other words, much of what is interesting about coalition behavior involves how partners play the coalition game between the birth and death of the government.

In this study, we investigate how coalition parties attempt to manage one of the most delicate problems of participating in coalition: reconciling the tension between the need to compromise on policy with the

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need to maintain the party's public profile with respect to certain policy commitments. Since multiparty governments generally involve parties with policy preferences that diverge on some issues, successful governance requires compromise, as parties search for middle ground. This need for compromise often ensures that the policy output of a coalition government, at least in some policy areas, is not a good reflection of the policies preferred or advocated by party leaders. In this sense, compromise obscures the relationship between the policies a party supports as a member of the government and its "pure" policy commitments (Powell 2000, 51-52). As a result, participation in coalition has the potential to undermine a party's carefully established profile and to erode support among constituents with a particular concern for the party's traditional goals. Perhaps supporters regard deviations from the party's policy objectives as the acceptable price of compromises necessary to achieve some of its other goals. But it is also possible that constituents who become dissatisfied with compromises may blame party leaders for selling out the party's goals in return for a seat at the cabinet table. If they draw this conclusion, they may withdraw their support (electoral or otherwise) and shift it toward other parties.

Once they have decided to join a coalition, party leaders must confront this tension. How do they engage in the compromises required for successful coalition governance, while maintaining the party's public profile and convincing supporters that the party represents their interests effectively? We argue that one key strategy parties adopt is to refuse to let the government's policy record simply speak for itself. Instead, party leaders will try to communicate with the party's target audiences to justify unpalatable compromises the party has supported and to argue that the party serves constituents' interests as well as can be expected, given the constraints of coalition.

While there are a number of fora that party leaders can use to communicate with their constituents (including media interviews, campaign literature, political advertisements, etc.), we investigate how coalition members use *legislative debates* for this purpose. We focus on floor debates for several reasons. Most important, floor debates constitute one of the most obvious—and prominent—avenues for coalition parties to publicly justify their position on policies they are about to adopt. Focusing on floor debates also has methodological advantages. To examine how coalition parties communicate with their constituents about the government's policy record, we must be able to link statements by parties to specific policy choices made by the

coalition. Presumably, in the debates surrounding the passage of a government bill, parties will be concerned with laying out their positions on that particular piece of legislation. As a result, focusing on legislative debates provides one of the most reliable ways of matching a party's rhetoric to a specific policy decision. And while there are certainly other venues that parties use to make their case to their constituents, these other modes of communication are much more difficult to link to *particular* policy choices. Moreover, we believe that legislative debates provide us with a good picture of other rhetorical strategies because debate behavior is likely to be highly correlated with other popular forms of communication. For example, a parliamentarian who has prepared a detailed floor speech on a bill is presumably more likely to give a media interview or write a political opinion piece than one who has not. Similarly, if a party has decided to engage in a major media campaign on a particular issue, this is likely to be reflected in extensive participation in floor debates on legislation falling within the general policy area. In short, legislative debates provide us with a highly reliable way to link party statements about the policy record of a coalition government to particular pieces of legislation, and they are also likely to be a good proxy for broader attempts by parties to make their case to target audiences.

In addition to its methodological advantages, our approach allows us to address open questions in legislative research regarding the importance of parliamentary debate. Observers of the U.S. Congress have long recognized that politicians use their speeches on the floor to advertise their positions to supporters (Mayhew 1974; Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Hill and Hurley 2002). With few exceptions, however, the conventional view in the comparative literature (which has never been subjected to a systematic investigation) is that parliamentary debate fails to serve any meaningful purpose (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2005), apart from possibly allowing opposition parties a bully pulpit from which they can criticize the policies of the government. Our analysis permits a partial evaluation of these arguments by assessing whether parties make systematic use of legislative debate to defend the government's record.

Before we launch into our investigation, it may be useful to consider a brief example of how parties participating in a coalition can use legislative debates in an attempt to reconcile the tension between engaging in compromise and maintaining the party's policy profile. In early 2006, the grand coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (SPD) in power in

Germany passed a bill to reform unemployment and welfare benefits. A key feature of the law was to restrict benefits for persons below the age of twenty-five, who had been entitled to unemployment benefits, housing assistance, and an allowance for furniture if they moved out of their parents' home under the existing provisions. These provisions, which had been adopted by the previous government headed by the SPD, had come under strong attack from conservatives, who pointed to sharp increases in the number of young people establishing their own households as evidence of widespread abuse. Striking a compromise on this issue presented a delicate problem for the two coalition partners. In the parliamentary debate held prior to final passage of the bill, both worked hard to present the new policy in a manner that stressed those aspects of the compromise policy likely to appeal to their natural constituencies. Speaking for the Social Democrats, in a debate on February 17, 2006, Klaus Brandner rejected allegations of widespread abuse. While allowing that the old law had had some unintended side effects, he deemed these as minor. More important, he emphasized that the new policy did not represent a retreat from a traditional social-democratic commitment to provide benefits to younger workers:

We want to stress that young people will continue to receive the help they need and that families will not be forced to live together in the future. To say it clearly: whoever has good reason to move out of their parents' home will be able to do so in the future.

In contrast, Gerald Weiss, speaking for the Christian Democrats, stressed themes of individual responsibility and the need to run a more efficient unemployment program:

We must use the scarce resources of our welfare state in a more targeted manner; they are not provided like milk and honey in the Promised Land; they must be provided through the hard work of those who hold down a job. . . . Young people moved out of their parents' home at public expense, at the expense of the community. They exploited the opportunities that were provided by a legal framework that was too generous. . . . We are not dictating anyone's lifestyle. . . . That is an issue that everyone must decide for themselves. But it is impermissible to burden the community with private lifestyle choices.

In short, the two coalition partners used the parliamentary debate surrounding the reform bill as an opportunity to defend their support for a compromise policy and to stress that support for the compromise was consistent with the general policy commitments of the party. Speakers for both parties emphasized elements of the compromise that were likely to be of particular concern to their natural constituencies: a commitment to state-provided assistance for the Social Democrats, and a concern for a lean welfare state that emphasizes individual responsibility for the Christian Democrats. Is this a more general pattern? Do parties make systematic use of floor time? And if so, under what circumstances and on what types of issues do parties engage in vigorous debate?

In the next section, we develop an argument about how parties might use the process of legislative debate to manage their relationships with their constituency groups and to reconcile the tension between the need to compromise and the need to maintain the party's profile. We then evaluate these expectations using an original data set consisting of over thirteen hundred party speeches on almost two hundred government bills in two parliamentary democracies. We conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of our findings for our understanding of legislatures and coalition governance.

Theory and Hypotheses

Scholars of American politics have long argued that floor speeches provide politicians and parties with an important avenue for communicating with their constituents (Mayhew 1974), and a number of studies have demonstrated that members of Congress make use of floor speeches to take positions that appeal to central target audiences (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Hill and Hurley 2002). In short, for the U.S. Congress, there is good reason to believe that politicians make systematic use of the opportunities provided by floor debates to communicate with their supporters. In contrast, floor debates have attracted virtually no scholarly attention in the comparative literature. Yet we believe that parties in parliamentary systems are subject to similar pressures. In fact, the need to communicate with target audiences becomes even more acute for parties that participate in coalition government. Because participating in coalition requires compromise, it may alienate supporters who believe that party leaders are selling out the party's goals in return for a seat at the cabinet table. Laver and Schofield (1990) summarize this tension well:

The general rule is that the rank-and-file, more concerned with ideology and less in line for the other spoils of office, tend to resent the policy compromises necessary to enter coalition and hence to oppose them. The parliamentary leaders, at least some of whom will become cabinet ministers, are more inclined to see the virtue of policy compromises if these increase the chance of the party going into government. (p. 24)

As a result of this potential conflict, parties are under pressure to justify and explain the policies that they support as part of the cabinet to their constituents. Sustaining (and increasing) support depends on persuading the party's supporters that the party has successfully defended their interests and that it has been able to secure favorable compromise policies as part of coalition negotiations—in other words, that the party has stayed true to its principles. The process of legislative debate on the government bills that embody these compromises provides a crucial opportunity for parties to do so.

At the same time, engaging in debate is costly. Speeches consume scarce floor time that parties could put to use for other purposes. Preparing speeches requires time and effort, not just of legislative staff, but of the senior legislators (including cabinet ministers) who must prepare for and deliver them. Moreover, to the extent that engaging in vigorous debate on an issue serves as a cue to other political actors (e.g., other political leaders, media, interest groups, etc.) that a policy is central to a party's concerns, preserving the value of this signal demands employing it *selectively* (Quinn et al. 2006). For all of these reasons, parties have good reason to be discriminating in using legislative debate (and other forms of communication) to make the party's case to its target audiences.

One consequence is that debate behavior is likely to be driven—at least in part—by party leaders' concern about a potential backlash by the rank and file against particular policy compromises. How concerned party leaders have to be about such a backlash depends centrally on the level of policy disagreement within a coalition. On an issue on which coalition parties share roughly the same preferences, supporters have little reason to be wary of the compromise reached. No party needs to make significant policy sacrifices. As the divisions within a coalition increase, however, this is no longer true. Because parties prefer different policy outcomes, compromises may involve significant sacrifices for at least some, and perhaps all, of the coalition partners. As a result,

party leaders must be concerned about the reactions of party supporters to policy choices as the ideological divisions within a coalition on a particular issue increase. When a coalition adopts legislation on an issue that is internally divisive, we therefore expect party leaders to engage in attempts to manage the potential backlash that a compromise can induce by trying to justify the party's position and to convince supporters that the leadership has fought hard to represent the party's interests. Such attempts to make the party's case are likely to be reflected in more extensive participation in legislative debate on a bill—after all, party representatives need to lay out a convincing argument. This leads us to the following expectation:

Hypothesis 1: Ceteris paribus, governing parties will engage in more extensive debate on government bills the greater the ideological divisions within the coalition on the issue at hand.

It is worth contrasting this hypothesis with another line of reasoning that has been developed in the context of examining the coalition agreements that parties typically sign at the outset of multiparty governments. Scholars have argued that in these agreements, parties tend to downplay issues that divide them and focus instead on issues on which they agree (Luebbert 1986). As Laver (1992, 45) remarks about joint coalition programs in Ireland, for example, one of their most notable features is that “issues on which the potential coalition partners are diametrically opposed tend to be ignored. . . . Joint programmes do not, for obvious reasons, draw attention to outstanding points of difference. . . . Leaving something out of the joint programme, indeed, is a typical response to a deadlock in coalition negotiations.” Similarly, Saalfeld (2000, 57) argues that in Germany, “coalition agreements exclude unresolvable conflicts or just flag them up and effectively postpone a settlement to a later stage in the life of a coalition. [This] allows party leaders to signal to their rank and file that they have stood by the parties' principles in coalition negotiations.” In other words, when coalition partners are initially laying out the policy agenda, it is often politically expedient to emphasize areas of agreement and not draw attention to potential trouble spots (or at least to postpone dealing with them); however, once a coalition has chosen to address a divisive issue, the situation changes dramatically. When a policy that deviates from a party's preferred position is actually being adopted, the dynamics of party competition demand that parties

attempt to justify their support for the compromise. In other words, while disagreement within the coalition may lead parties to leave issues off the agenda when they can (at the initial negotiation stage), such divergence creates *greater* need to justify actual conduct once a policy is being adopted to maintain the party's support.

In addition to the direct impact of intracoalition divisions, there are strong reasons to suspect that if debates are used to justify coalition compromises to constituents, debate behavior is likely to be influenced by the electoral calendar. Elections provide party supporters with the most dramatic opportunity to reward or punish government parties for their accomplishments (or lack thereof) during the previous legislative period. As a consequence, leaders of coalition parties are likely to be particularly concerned about managing the potential conflict created by the deviation between policy compromises the party has supported and the expectations of the party's constituents when elections are near. In other words, as elections approach, we expect that parties have good reason to engage in more vigorous efforts at justifying the party's position on particular policies.

At the same time, as a parliamentary term nears its end, using legislative debate for this purpose becomes more and more costly. Approaching elections place more demands on legislators' time as the party begins to prepare for elections (party congresses, campaigning, etc.). Moreover, as Martin and Vanberg (2004) show, bills generally require several months to run the parliamentary gauntlet, and thus legislation that is introduced near the end of the term has reduced chances of being scheduled for a vote. As a consequence, legislators may be wary of devoting time and effort in preparing speeches that may never be given. For government parties, this downward pressure on the incentive to debate is particularly strong because elections create the risk that the current government will lose control of the policy-making process; that is, remaining floor time becomes even more valuable since other business that could be placed on the agenda has to be sacrificed to engage in extensive debate on a given bill.

Because impending elections create these countervailing incentives, we have no clear prediction about the net effect of approaching elections on debate behavior; however, the argument does entail a testable implication about the *differential* impact of election dynamics on more and less divisive issues. The value of communicating a party's position is particularly high on issues that divide the coalition. On

less divisive issues, communicating the party's position is less pressing. Thus we expect that parties are going to be most sensitive to the rising costs of engaging in debate on nondivisive issues. In more technical language, the elasticity of demand for debating a highly divisive issue is likely to be low: the party needs to justify its position on this issue, especially at election time. In contrast, the elasticity of demand for nondivisive issues is high: communicating the party's position is not very pressing, and as a consequence, raising the cost of doing so has a large effect. In other words, because highly divisive issues are less sensitive to the rising costs of engaging in debate, the gap between the debate behavior on divisive versus nondivisive issues should become more prominent as elections approach.

Hypothesis 2: As elections approach, the impact of intracoalition ideological divisions on debate behavior becomes more pronounced.

Data and Measurement

Testing these hypotheses requires us to analyze the extent to which parties engage in legislative debate on government bills. To this end, we have constructed an original data set consisting of all party floor speeches made in the lower chamber on a sample of government-sponsored bills in Germany (1994–2002) and the Netherlands (1994–2002). The main advantage of focusing on these countries is that they are similar in terms of a number of coalition-specific features and institutional rules that, in addition to the policy differences between parties, may be relevant in explaining party behavior in legislative debates. For example, during our time frame, both countries were governed by coalitions that controlled a majority of legislative seats. Both countries are nonmajoritarian (or *consensus*) democracies, with proportional electoral systems, multiple legislative parties, and four-year legislative terms. In addition, parliaments in these countries share a number of institutions that strengthen the role of legislators in policy making. For example, both the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer feature a large number of specialized committees (on which seats are proportionately distributed among parties), with jurisdictions that shadow those of government ministries (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1986). These institutions should have a bearing on the informational resources legislators require to engage in extensive debate. Finally, the agenda for plenary debate in these legislatures is determined by

the chamber itself (the Netherlands) or by a committee of the chamber, in which parties are proportionally represented (the Council of Elders in Germany; Döring 1995). It is also worth noting that with respect to each of these institutional features, the plurality of European parliaments fall into the same general category as Germany and the Netherlands; moreover, most postwar European democracies have been governed by majority coalitions. We therefore believe that these two countries are representative of other European democracies in a number of important ways.

Our design also has the advantage of extending over a relatively small number of years, making our investigation less prone to unmeasured temporal effects. Furthermore, the choice of time frame allows us to use a recent expert survey conducted by Benoit and Laver (2006), which provides extensive information on issue saliency and policy positions for a large number of parties on a variety of issues. For parties in Germany and the Netherlands, we have saliency and position data in five policy areas: tax and welfare policy, industrial and regulatory policy, social policy, regional policy, and environmental policy.³

Within our set of countries and time frame, we began with the full set of government bills for which there was a plenary debate. We systematically eliminated certain types of bills from consideration, namely, budgetary bills, treaties, Kingdom bills (in the Netherlands), and bills proposing constitutional amendments, because the rules of procedure and practices associated with them are substantially different from those associated with ordinary legislation (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1986). From this set of bills, we excluded any that we could not reasonably classify into any of the policy areas from the Benoit and Laver (2006) study. The final data set consists of 1,323 party speeches (or nonspeeches, if a party chose not to participate in debate) on 189 bills, each of which is classified into one (and only one) of our five issue categories.⁴

The central claim of our argument is that coalition parties make systematic use of legislative debates to make their case to their target audiences concerning the stance the party has taken on a particular bill. For example, a speech from a party that is endorsing a given bill might provide a summary of the reasons the bill is good for the party's constituents and/or make the case that the legislation helps the party fulfill one or more of its campaign pledges. If the bill represents a compromise for the party, we might expect the speech to lay out why party leaders believe a compromise solution is both acceptable and necessary.⁵ Critically,

we expect that parties will make more vigorous efforts to engage in such justification as an issue becomes more internally divisive for the coalition, especially as the next parliamentary elections approach.

One of the first tasks in testing our hypotheses is to develop a measure of the extent to which parties participate in debate to justify their position. To do so, we focus on the length of legislative speeches as our dependent variable. While this measure is obviously a proxy that does not directly tap the content of speech, it has several advantages. The position-taking activities discussed previously require a certain amount of space (and time). The greater the amount of positional information party leaders want to disseminate to their supporters about a bill, the longer a speech will tend to become. For example, if a party has agreed to a small concession on a relatively innocuous subsection of a bill, it probably sees little need to spend a lot of time writing a detailed speech to explain such a so-called failure to its supporters. In contrast, a party that agrees to large concessions on many of the most important portions of the bill should feel a need to defend its actions in great detail and perhaps to sell each of the individual compromises made to party supporters. We therefore believe that speech length is a reasonable proxy for the extensiveness of a party's attempt to communicate its position on a particular bill. This measure also has the advantage of being relatively simple to construct for a large number of speeches and can thus be reliably coded by other researchers.

The unit of analysis is a party speech on a government bill. In Table 1a, we present descriptive statistics for party speech length (which we measure in words) for the 1,323 speeches in our sample. Of these speeches, 477 were made by parties in the government, and the remainder were made by the opposition (we discuss the need to incorporate speeches by the opposition in more detail subsequently). In principle, this measure is bounded from below by zero (in the event that a debate occurs but a party chooses not to make a speech) and has no upper limit. We see from Table 1a that, on average, speeches were slightly more than four thousand words in length, while the median speech contained approximately two thousand words. Moreover, we see that in a significant number of cases (approximately 15 percent of the sample), parties chose to make no speeches at all in the course of legislative debate.⁶ The descriptive statistics for our key explanatory and control variables can be found in Table 1b.

The primary variable of interest is the degree of intracoalition policy divergence on the bill being

Table 1a
Descriptive Statistics: Dependent Variable—Length of Party Legislative Speech (in Words)

Percentile	Speech length (in words)	Mean	Variance	<i>N</i>
0	0	4,227.62	37,301,507.39	1,323
10	0			
25	733			
Median	2,192			
75	5,217			
90	10,695			
100	58,051			

Note: *N* (party speeches/bills) = 1,323/189 (Germany: 450/90; the Netherlands: 873/99).

Table 1b
Descriptive Statistics: Independent Variables*

Independent variables	Mean	SD
Issue divisiveness for government party	2.77	2.18
Expected speech length for opposing side	17,039.88	10,043.82
Coalition partner party	0.22	0.41
Coalition partner party with junior minister	0.08	0.28
Opposition party	0.64	0.48
Issue divisiveness for opposition party	0.56	0.71
Party seat share	0.14	0.14
Days remaining in electoral cycle ^a	657.99 ^b	359.40 ^b
Days spent by bill in legislative process ^a	129.07 ^b	132.41 ^b
Number of committee referrals	3.56 ^b	3.57 ^b
Number of articles in bill ^a	53.18 ^b	79.05 ^b

Note: Descriptive statistics for country and issue indicators not shown. SD = standard deviation.

a. Variables to be logged in the statistical analysis.

b. Means and standard deviations shown for these variables based on bills, not party speeches.

debated. To construct our measure of government issue divisiveness for a given bill, we first used the twenty-point Benoit and Laver (2006) position scores to calculate the absolute policy distance (in the relevant issue area) between each party in the coalition and the party holding the proposing ministry. Each individual partner-to-minister distance score was then weighted by the proportion of legislative seats contributed to the coalition by the partner party. These individual weighted scores were then summed across coalition parties, creating a single seat-weighted issue divisiveness score for the bill. This score was then multiplied by a relative issue saliency score for the government as a whole.⁷ The purpose of this final weighting is to account for the possibility that policy divisions are more likely to lead to lengthy debate when coalition parties care more intensely about the issues under consideration. To test our second hypothesis, we required a measure of the electoral cycle. We used the number of days remaining

until regularly scheduled elections (which we will log in the statistical analysis) for this purpose and included the variable in our analysis. Since we expect electoral concerns to condition the impact of intra-coalition divergence, we also created an interaction between this measure and the divisiveness variable.

In addition to the variables of theoretical interest, we also control for several other factors that may affect debate behavior. Of particular importance is the potential impact of speeches made by opposition parties. Conventional wisdom holds that a primary purpose of legislative debate is to provide opposition parties an opportunity to criticize government policy and to present policy alternatives. In consequence, it is plausible that in addition to intracoalition dynamics, the interactions between government and opposition provide important information about coalition party behavior in debates. Specifically, we would expect that on bills where opposition parties choose to participate extensively in debate, government parties

have greater incentives to craft lengthy responses or to devote more effort to engage the opposition preemptively. In turn, opposition parties then have incentives to engage in even lengthier debate as a result of longer government speeches, which might then elicit even more responses by government parties, and so on. In short, we expect that government and opposition party speeches may be systematically related, if not simultaneously determined, which implies that we must also include speeches by opposition parties in our analysis. To investigate the possibility of a systematic dependence between these speeches, we will use the statistical procedure described in the next section to generate the expected total length of legislative speech for the opposing side in a debate on government policy, which will then be used as an independent variable to predict the length of party speech. We should note that this variable will be based only on factors that are known to parties prior to legislative debate on a bill. Thus, for opposition parties, the expected total length of speeches from the opposing side (the government) will be predicted from the government-specific theoretical variables discussed previously, plus all the control variables discussed subsequently. For government parties, the expected total length of speeches from the opposition will be predicted from all the control variables, plus two additional opposition-specific variables: a measure of opposition issue divisiveness, which is analogous to the government divisiveness measure for each of the opposition parties in the legislature, and an interaction between this variable and the (log-)time remaining in the electoral cycle.⁸

Another set of factors that we need to consider take into account the resources available to parties for engaging in legislative debate. Debates focus on specific policy proposals, and the greater the informational resources available to legislators about the policy issue under consideration—for example, the actual policy consequences of the proposed legislation, available alternative policies, and their advantages and disadvantages—the easier it will be for them to effectively defend their endorsement of the compromise. Therefore legislators are more likely to engage in extensive debate the more easily they can acquire such expertise. The institutional resources to which parties have access in the policy-making process—most important, the informational resources controlled by the ministry with jurisdiction over a particular policy—are crucial in this context. Parties that control the relevant ministry are typically in the most favored position. As scholars have argued, it is

precisely this privileged access to policy expertise within a ministry that provides ministers with significant influence over policy areas under their control (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Even without control of a ministry, coalition parties that have a junior minister in the relevant ministry (we refer to such parties as *shadow partners*) potentially enjoy the same informational advantages that control of the ministry provides to the minister's party (Thies 2001). Coalition parties who do not control a junior ministry (*common partners*) are in the least advantaged position among government parties. The impact of such differential access to information is reinforced by the role that ministerial parties play in the policy-making process. Because bills are drafted within ministries, the minister in charge of a particular portfolio (or the junior minister in the minister's absence) is typically charged with representing the government position on a bill when the bill is debated in parliament; that is, because ministers are expected to play a particularly prominent role in introducing and defending government legislation drafted by their ministry, we would expect parties that control the relevant ministry to be more heavily engaged in debate on a bill. Finally, we expect opposition parties to be less advantaged in terms of their informational resources than any type of government party. To model these effects, we include separate dichotomous variables, indicating whether a party is in opposition or is a coalition partner of the proposing minister, and if the latter, whether this partner has a junior minister placed in the proposing ministry.

We also control for party size, measured as the proportion of a party's parliamentary seats. The larger the party, the more legislators who are able to scrutinize legislation (particularly at the committee stage) and the more likely it becomes that the party has at least one legislator available with relevant policy expertise. In addition, in most proportional parliamentary systems (including the two in our study), floor time for speeches is allocated on the basis of legislative seat share, reinforcing the importance of controlling for party size. We also take into account the number of committees to which a government bill is referred. It is quite common for bills to be referred to more than one legislative committee. In our sample, approximately three committees, on average, are assigned the task of reviewing a government bill. In general, we expect to see a party making longer speeches on bills, other things being equal, the greater the number of committees involved in the review process. This may be partially related to seat

share; that is, the greater the number of committees reviewing a bill, then (normally) the greater the number of legislators from each party who have extensive information about the bill by the time it reaches the debate stage. Even where this is not the case—for example, parties with only two or three parliamentary seats may have no representation on the relevant committees—there will be several committee reports, or a single, more comprehensive report, when the bill has been referred to multiple committees, which presumably increase the amount of reference materials that all party groups can use in the subsequent debate. For similar reasons, we also include a variable measuring the length of time in the legislative process consumed by a bill up to the point of floor debate (logged in the statistical analysis). This is meant to capture the fact that bills that have spent a considerable amount of time in committee have probably received a greater level of scrutiny (Martin and Vanberg 2004), which should enable to parties to engage in more extensive debate. For reasons related to the incentives of parties to engage in debate, we also account for the degree to which the bill under consideration changes existing law. Bills are normally divided into numerous articles and sub-articles, each of which modifies a particular section of legal code (Martin and Vanberg 2005). We therefore include a measure of the number of articles/sub-articles in the government bill (logged in the statistical analysis), with the expectation that draft bills with many articles are likely to receive greater attention from parties due to their significantly broader scope.

Finally, we take into account two types of fixed effects. First, we include separate indicators for the particular issue area addressed by a bill in recognition of the possibility that bills dealing with certain types of issues will tend to be debated at greater length regardless of the policy preferences of legislative parties. This could occur for a variety of reasons. One possibility is that some types of issues are inherently more complex than others, thereby requiring greater informational resources from legislators to participate extensively in debate. Another possibility is that outside lobby groups or advisory bodies are better organized in some policy areas than in others, and the information provided by these groups to legislators will facilitate participation in debate. We also consider the possibility of system-level effects. As discussed earlier, we are focusing our attention on Germany and the Netherlands because of their similarities in a number of important respects. In terms of the rules governing debate, in particular, they differ in

only minor ways; however, there is the obvious issue that since our dependent variable is a count of words, we should be concerned about pooling legislation across languages. In general, we believe this to be an important matter, though we are somewhat less concerned in the current context. As West Germanic languages, Dutch and German share a common heritage (Dutch is the closest related living language to German) and are very similar in their morphology—in particular, both are synthetic languages that are moderately agglutinative, especially with respect to their legal and technical terminology. This feature is especially relevant when counting words as it implies that speakers of one language will not require significantly more space than speakers of another language to say essentially the same thing.⁹ Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the fact that language (and other cross-national) differences exist and that these differences may distort the results. In the empirical analysis in the next section, we address this issue by including a country-specific (language-specific) indicator in the analysis. Importantly, we do not expect linguistic or cross-national differences to alter the nature of the relationship between our theoretical variables and the extent of debate. For example, we expect that an increase in government issue divisiveness will increase the length of government party speeches (and in roughly the same proportion), regardless of whether the speeches are in German or Dutch. As a robustness check, however, we will also investigate whether separating bills by language and country has any impact on our conclusions.

Analysis and Findings

Our dependent variable is a count, and we will therefore use an event count model (specifically, the negative binomial) to evaluate our argument empirically. Event count models have become the standard approach in political science applications where the question of interest concerns the number of events that occur over a particular period of time, such as in the present case, where we focus on the number of words spoken by party groups on a bill in the course of legislative debate. In most event count formulations, the systematic component of the parameter λ_i , which is defined as the rate of event occurrence (or incidence rate) for an observation period i , is expressed as an exponential function of a set of covariates. Thus, for a random event count Y_i , the incidence rate is defined simply as $\lambda_i = \exp(x_i\beta)$. The

Table 2
Negative Binomial Model of Length of Party Speeches in Legislative Debate

Independent variables	Coefficient estimates ^a	Incidence rate ratios ^b
Issue divisiveness for government party	0.31 [†] (0.08)	1.16 [†]
Issue divisiveness for government party (log days remaining in electoral cycle)	-0.04 [†] (0.01)	-
Expected speech length for opposing side	0.00* (0.00)	1.32*
Coalition partner party	-0.34 [†] (0.08)	0.71 [†]
Coalition partner party with junior minister	0.47 [†] (0.11)	1.59 [†]
Opposition party	-0.75 [†] (0.12)	0.48 [†]
Issue divisiveness for opposition party	0.24 (0.35)	1.28 [†]
Issue divisiveness for opposition party (log days remaining in electoral cycle)	0.02 (0.05)	-
Party seat share	1.94 [†] (0.26)	1.31 [†]
Log days remaining in electoral cycle	0.13* (0.08)	1.02
Log days spent by bill in legislative process	0.00 (0.09)	1.00
Number of committee referrals	0.04 (0.03)	1.15
Log number of articles in bill	0.15* (0.09)	1.15*
Germany	-0.56* (0.32)	0.57 [†]

Note: N (party speeches) = 1,323. N (bills) = 189. Log-likelihood: -11,473.84 ($p < .001$).

a. Entries are unstandardized maximum-likelihood coefficient estimates with robust standard errors (clustering on bill) in parentheses. Estimates for the dispersion parameter and issue-specific intercepts are not shown.

b. Entries are incidence rate ratios for an increase of one standard deviation (or one unit for dichotomous indicator variables) in the corresponding independent variable. For independent variables that are interacted with other variables in the model, the incidence rate ratio is calculated with the other constituent variables held at their mean values. Descriptive statistics for means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1b.

* $p < .05$. [†] $p < .01$.

stochastic component of λ_i is most often assumed to follow the Poisson distribution, which implies that the events accumulating during the observation period are conditionally independent and that the rate of event occurrence is homogenous across a given time period. These are strong assumptions that are probably violated in our case. In particular, we expect that once parties have expended the legislative resources to write a short speech, it becomes marginally less costly for them to lengthen the speech by a few more words. If this is the case, then legislative speeches will exhibit *positive contagion*. This results in overdispersion in the observed number of events and, consequently, standard errors that are biased downward (King 1989). The general solution for this problem involves making the assumption that the stochastic component of the count process follows the negative binomial distribution, which allows λ_i to vary across an observation period.¹⁰

As discussed in the previous section, preliminary to the evaluation of our hypotheses, we will use this model to estimate the expected size of all legislative speeches on a bill made by the opposing side in debate (where for government parties, the opposing side is defined as the opposition, and for opposition parties, the government). These predictions will be

generated from the theoretical and control variables discussed earlier, all of which are known to parties prior to the occurrence of legislative debate. After this stage of estimation, we will use the expected speech length from the opposing side as an independent variable in our analysis of all party speeches.¹¹

In Table 2, we present the results from the negative binomial analysis.¹² In column two of Table 2, we present the coefficient estimates (and standard errors) for our independent variables. A positive coefficient implies that an increase in the level of the independent variable will lead to a longer legislative speech, while a negative coefficient implies a shorter legislative speech. As in most other nonlinear models, the coefficient estimates from an event count model do not immediately lend themselves to an intuitive interpretation. To assess the substantive significance of our findings, we therefore construct two quantities that are readily interpretable. First, since the negative binomial is a log-linear model, it permits an odds-ratio interpretation of the estimated coefficients. Thus, in column three of Table 2, we express our coefficient estimates in terms of the incidence rate ratio (IRR). For a coefficient estimate β_k and a δ -unit change in an independent variable x_k , the IRR is calculated as $\exp((x_k + \delta)\beta_k)/\exp(x_k\beta_k)$, or simply $\exp(\delta\beta_k)$. An IRR

equal to 1 implies that a change in the independent variable *does not alter* the expected length of a legislative speech, whereas an IRR greater than 1 implies a proportionate *increase* in speech length, and an IRR less than 1 a proportionate *decrease* in speech length. We provide IRRs for all the independent variables shown in Table 1b.¹³ Second, we will interpret the effect of our theoretical variables in terms of their impact on the predicted length of legislative speech, which is calculated as $\exp(\sum_k x_k \beta_k)$.

Before evaluating our central claims, we should note several interesting findings regarding our control variables. First, we find that a legislative speech from any given party tends to become longer as parties from the opposing side engage in more extensive floor debate. Specifically, we see from the incidence rate ratios that an increase of one standard deviation in expected speech length by opposing parties will, on average, increase the size of a party's speech by approximately 32 percent. Thus it appears that one reason government parties engage in lengthy debate has to do with how parties on the opposition benches choose to use their floor time to discuss government policy. We also find that while opposition parties tend to give shorter speeches than government parties on average, they do use their opportunities for debate selectively. Specifically, the extent of opposition party debate increases substantially on issues that greatly divide them from the government. An increase of one standard deviation in issue divisiveness for opposition parties, at the midpoint of the electoral cycle, increases the length of their speeches by about 28 percent. Moreover, as the results for the interaction between opposition issue divisiveness and the electoral calendar reveal, this effect appears to be more or less constant over the course of the legislative term. As we shall see, the steadiness of this effect contrasts sharply with the trend for parties in the government.

Second, we find support for the argument that the institutional advantages accorded to parties by the positions they hold in government are important in determining their debate behavior. In particular, the findings reveal a dramatic difference between coalition partners with a junior minister placed in the proposing ministry (shadow partners) and their common partner counterparts. As the incidence ratios show, speeches by common partners are expected to be less than three-fourths the size of speeches given by the party controlling the proposing ministry. In contrast, shadow partners are expected to debate just as extensively as ministers, crafting speeches that are over 50 percent larger than those by common partners.¹⁴

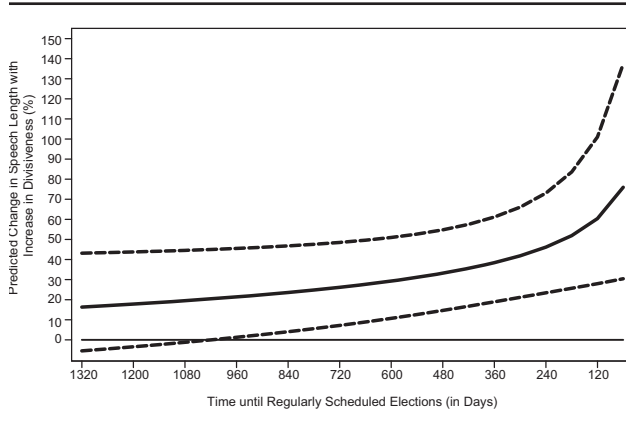
This is an interesting result that further bolsters claims by comparative scholars that junior ministers play an integral role in coalition government. Previous arguments have highlighted the fact that possession of junior minister positions allows coalition partners to keep tabs on one another and thus more effectively police the coalition bargain (Martin and Vanberg 2005; Müller and Strøm 2000; Thies 2001). Our findings imply that another important advantage of having a junior minister is that it enables coalition partners to communicate their policy stances to constituents in much greater detail in legislative debates; that is, junior ministers also appear to serve the purpose of allowing government partners to better articulate their positions on the policy compromises they jointly support.¹⁵

The central empirical claim that flows from our argument is that coalition parties will communicate more extensively on those issues that more profoundly separate them from their government partners (hypothesis 1). In addition, we expect this effect to intensify with the approach of the next parliamentary elections (hypothesis 2). As the incidence ratio in Table 2 shows, an increase in government issue divisiveness does lead to an expected increase in the level of rhetoric from coalition parties, at least at the midpoint of the electoral cycle; however, as the estimate for the electoral calendar interaction reveals, this effect changes perceptibly over time, implying that we must evaluate our two hypotheses jointly. We do so in Figure 1, which displays the predicted length of legislative speeches made by government parties over the course of the electoral cycle, along with 90 percent confidence intervals.¹⁶

As Figure 1 clearly shows, the impact of government issue divisiveness varies dramatically over the course of the electoral cycle. At the beginning of a parliamentary term, government parties appear to debate no more extensively on internally divisive bills than on nondivisive ones.¹⁷ Approximately four months into the term, for instance, a government party speech on a highly divisive bill is expected to be only 16 percent longer than a speech on a nondivisive bill. Moreover, at this point in the electoral cycle, we cannot reject the possibility that issue divisiveness has no impact or, indeed, even a slightly negative impact. This tendency (or lack thereof) continues for another year into a government's term. Thus, at the early stage in the life of a government, we cannot clearly dismiss the notion that coalition parties tend to play down their internal policy conflicts.

After approximately a year and a half into the legislative term, however, we begin to see a marked shift

Figure 1
Impact of Issue Divisiveness on Political
Communication Coalition Parties



in the debate behavior of coalition parties. Most notably, as elections continue to draw near, the difference between government party speeches on relatively divisive bills and their speeches on relatively nondivisive bills begins to widen, and at a dramatically increasing rate. Approximately two and a half years (960 days) before regularly scheduled elections, government party speeches on bills dealing with highly divisive issues are expected to be about 20 percent longer than their speeches on bills dealing with less divisive issues. Six months from that point, their speeches on divisive issues are expected to be 25 percent longer, and six months after that, they are expected to be about 30 percent longer. By the time elections are only two months away, coalition parties are expected to make speeches on legislation dealing with internally divisive issues that are over 75 percent longer than their speeches on legislation for which there is relative government unity. This provides clear support for our argument that coalition parties face greater incentives to use legislative debates to justify compromise policies as the next parliamentary elections approach.¹⁸ Electoral pressures force partners to communicate more intensely with their constituents on those issues that divide the coalition.¹⁹

Discussion

The process of electoral competition is meant to induce political parties to deliver policies that enjoy constituency support. In many democracies, however, the combination of parliamentary government and proportional electoral rules can make it difficult for

parties to meet their policy commitments. The necessity of coalition forces parties with preferences that may diverge to pursue a compromise policy. To manage the resulting tension between stated policy goals and the policies a party agrees to as a member of the government, party leaders in the cabinet must find ways to inform supporters about the policy positions the party endorses, to justify the compromises it has supported, and to persuade its constituents that it has bargained effectively on their behalf, given the constraints of coalition. Parliamentary debate on government bills provides a unique opportunity—tied directly to specific compromise policies the coalition has decided to adopt—to achieve these goals.

The idea that legislative debates are useful for this purpose is consistent with the common notion held by scholars of the U.S. Congress, who have long argued that politicians use floor speeches to engage in electorally driven activities such as credit claiming and position taking (Mayhew 1974). Although legislative debate has received scant attention in comparative research, scholars have at least speculated that parties in parliamentary systems make similar use of floor speeches to communicate with their supporters (Huber 1996). In this study, we have made the first systematic attempt to uncover whether, and how, parties that participate in a coalition government use this opportunity. Our view of parliaments is very much in line with an emerging research program that regards legislatures in multiparty systems as important institutions primarily because they can be used as tools by coalition parties to overcome the challenges of collective governance (Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2005; Kim and Loewenberg 2005). While previous work in this program has been concerned with the *policy-making* role of parliamentary institutions in helping parties to police the coalition compromise, our focus has been on the use of parliaments for the purpose of *communication* by coalition parties who wish to sell the compromise to their constituencies.

Our analysis suggests that debate behavior is largely driven by the internal dynamics of coalition governance. Using the length of legislative speeches as a proxy for the extent to which parties employ debates to communicate with their constituents, we demonstrate that government parties engage in more extensive debate on issues that separate them from their partners and that they do so increasingly as elections approach. Naturally, mere length does not provide direct insight into the *content* of speeches, and we hope that future work will be able to tap more complex, content-oriented measures of debate behavior. Nevertheless, our

findings provide strong circumstantial evidence for the claim that parties attempt to use legislative debate to convince constituents that they have not given away the store in exchange for the spoils of office. Perhaps our most intriguing piece of evidence in this respect is the tendency of coalition parties to debate more extensively on divisive issues as elections approach. When governments are relatively fresh, and all the potential opportunities associated with policy making and office holding lie before them, coalition parties do not appear especially keen to engage in debate on internally divisive issues. As the term wears on, however, the potential benefits of further cooperation begin to dissipate at the same time that the possible electoral costs of compromise begin to loom large. At this stage, coalition parties engage in more vigorous debate on those issues that separate them from their partners. The most plausible explanation of this electoral cycle effect is that debates are targeted at audiences *outside* the legislative chamber who are expected to be especially influential at election time: party constituencies.

Our findings have a number of additional implications. Most obvious is the fact that parties do not engage in legislative debate indiscriminately—the extent of participation in debate depends crucially on the political context and, in particular, on the perceived need to justify the party's policy choices to its constituents. This finding has consequences for recent attempts to use automated content analyses of legislative speeches to estimate the ideological positions of parties and legislators (e.g., Laver and Benoit 2002; Giannetti and Laver 2005). Such work is exciting because it promises to deliver much more finely grained depictions of the ideological positions taken by various policy makers. At the same time, scholars must be aware of the potential difficulties introduced by the fact that speeches are not created equal. As we have shown, the external political and electoral context powerfully shapes debate behavior. As a result, legislative speeches will not be equally revealing of ideological positions in all policy areas or at all times.

Our findings also imply that the institutional position occupied by parties matters for their debate behavior. Parties that control the ministry introducing legislation enjoy significant advantages over their partners, but only if these partners have no direct access to the ministry. This finding provides support for the idea that there is a departmental structure in cabinet decision making that strengthens the influence of certain government parties (Laver and Shepsle 1996), but it adds the qualification that this greater degree of influence is not only accorded to the

party controlling the top job in the ministry. The dominance of ministers with respect to their partners at the plenary stage depends crucially on whether the partners have institutional measures in place that ensure that they have the same (or nearly the same) level of access to civil service expertise as the ministers themselves.

Perhaps the most important implication of our findings is that scholars should take a more nuanced view of how coalition partners manage their policy differences. Most coalition research has come to the conclusion that coalition parties strive to avoid expressions of policy conflict. At the formation stage, there exists the clear empirical regularity that parties choose their cabinet bedfellows partly on the basis of their ideological compatibility (Martin and Stevenson 2001). Furthermore, policy agreements drawn up during coalition negotiations tend to highlight unifying issues (Luebbert 1986), which are then given priority on the legislative agenda once the government takes office (Martin 2004). Taken together, this work is consistent with the idea that there are benefits from cooperation that coalition parties want to attain and that avoiding conflict raises the level of these benefits substantially. In contrast, the argument in this article reminds us that coalition governance is a mixed-motive game. The logic of coalition behavior appears to change gradually over the life of the government from one of cooperation and compromise to one of electioneering and position taking. This leads us to conclude that future work in coalition research—especially concerning the behavior of governments between their birth and death—should be much more cognizant of how coalition parties reconcile the competing incentives to cooperate with, and distinguish themselves from, their partners in government and how the dynamics created by these divergent motivations unfold over time.

Notes

1. The most comprehensive review of the coalition politics literature is provided by Laver and Schofield (1990). For more recent reviews of research on government formation, portfolio allocation, and government dissolution, see the work of Martin and Stevenson (2001), Warwick and Druckman (2001), and Laver (2003), respectively.

2. For a lively debate on the value of the fixed-attributes approach to studying coalition survival, see the exchange in Strøm et al. (1988). For recent examples of dynamic (events-based) approaches, see the work of Warwick (1994), Lupia and Strøm (1995), and Diermeier and Stevenson (1999).

3. For German parties, positions on the industrial/regulatory dimension were imputed by Benoit and Baturo (2005). The

Benoit and Laver (2006) survey contains information on all German legislative parties over our time frame but does not have information for three small parties in the Netherlands that won seats in the 1994 elections: the Algemeen Ouderen Verbond, Unie55+, and the Centrum Democraten.

4. The types of bills classified on these dimensions include the following: tax and welfare policy (income taxes; value-added tax; tax allowances; and benefits for welfare, housing, education, disability, and health), industrial or regulatory policy (privatization, market deregulation, wage policy, job training, and employment contracts), social policy (abortion, euthanasia, domestic partnerships, and same-sex marriage and adoption), regional policy (decentralization, alterations to municipal or regional laws, and regional institutional reforms), and environmental policy (air/soil/water pollution, emissions standards, and ecological preservation).

5. Thus we are assuming that parties are generally not making speeches for the purpose of persuading other legislators. We do not view this as controversial. In parliamentary systems generally, party discipline is sufficiently high that legislators rarely need to expend effort to convince members of their own party to vote together (and certainly when they do, such an effort is normally not made in a public forum). Also, in proportional systems, most of the real legislative work on a bill is done in committee. Thus party positions on a bill are usually entrenched by the time the bill reaches the floor, so there is little reason for legislators from one party to use their speeches to persuade legislators from other parties to come on board.

6. In approximately 90 percent of these cases, the party abstaining from debate was very small, controlling fewer than 4 percent of parliamentary seats. We discuss the need to control for party size in more detail subsequently.

7. Our measure of relative issue saliency for the government was computed by first standardizing the twenty-point Benoit and Laver (2006) party-specific saliency scores so that an issue of average saliency for any party received a score of 1. Each coalition party's relative issue saliency score was weighted by the proportion of legislative seats contributed to the coalition by the party. These individual weighted scores were then summed across coalition parties. The results from the empirical analysis do not appear to be sensitive to the use of these weights.

8. The issue divisiveness measure for an opposition party reflects the distance of the party from the party of the minister introducing the bill, weighted by the issue saliency of the bill for the opposition party and the opposition party's seat share. At first glance, the descriptive statistics seem to suggest that opposition issue divisiveness is, on average, smaller than government issue divisiveness; however, this is only because there are a large number of observations on very small opposition parties, which drive down the seat-weighted opposition divisiveness mean. The non-seat-weighted opposition divisiveness measure is substantially larger than the government divisiveness measure; that is, opposition parties are, on average, much more divided from the party of the proposing minister than coalition partners are.

9. In their study of bureaucratic discretion, Huber and Shipan (2002) grapple with similar issues when analyzing the length of bills across languages. They develop a *verbosity multiplier*, which they use to inflate or deflate bill length, depending on how many words languages use to say exactly the same thing. As Huber and Shipan (2002, Table 7.1) show, Dutch and German are of very similar verbosity, with Dutch texts being only 5 percent smaller than German texts.

10. The negative binomial model provides an estimate of the degree of overdispersion in the data. The dispersion parameter can be evaluated against the null (Poisson) hypothesis using a likelihood-ratio test.

11. Our two-stage procedure for dealing with possible dependence between speeches is properly characterized as a limited-information approach in that we are only taking into account the effects of the systematic determinants of speeches from the opposing side. We will, however, account for the effects that possible stochastic dependence between party speeches have on the variance-covariance structure by adjusting the standard errors for clustering (by bill) using the Huber-White-sandwich robust variance estimator (Huber 1967; White 1980; Rogers 1993). Results from the first stage of the analysis are available on request.

12. The estimates for the issue-specific intercepts and the dispersion parameter are available on request. The dispersion estimate indicates that we can safely reject the Poisson assumption of event independence.

13. For variables with interactions, the incidence rate ratios are computed holding all other constituent variables in the interactive relationship at their mean values.

14. Note that the party of the minister is the excluded (reference) category in the table. The IRR for the coalition partner party variable as well as for the opposition party variable takes into account the interaction with the appropriate divisiveness and electoral cycle effects. Note also that the reference category in Table 2 for the coalition partner with junior minister (i.e., shadow partner) variable is the coalition partner party (common partner) variable. The IRR for the shadow partner versus the party of the minister (at any level of government issue divisiveness) is $\exp(-0.34 + 0.47) = 1.13$, which is not statistically distinguishable from zero ($p > .25$).

15. Regarding our other control variables, we find that larger parties engage in lengthier debate than smaller parties and that large bills are debated in more detail than short bills. We do not find that bills referred to multiple committees or bills that had spent a longer time in committee are debated more extensively. We also find that party speeches in Germany tend to be smaller than speeches in the Netherlands.

16. We use 90 percent confidence intervals because we are evaluating the statistical significance of our theoretical variables using one-tailed tests with a 5 percent significance threshold.

17. We define *low divisiveness* issues for the government as the first quartile value of government party issue divisiveness and *high divisiveness* as the third quartile value. This corresponds to a difference of roughly 1.5 standard deviations in the government issue divisiveness variable.

18. It is worth noting that almost one-fourth of all coalition party speeches in our data occur late in the electoral cycle (with less than a year remaining in the parliamentary term). Moreover, consistent with the findings of Martin (2004), the issues on the agenda at this point are more internally divisive for the government than at any other point in the term. Specifically, the issues debated by coalition parties in the final year of their tenure are approximately 25 percent more divisive than the average issue debated throughout the legislative term and approximately 50 percent more divisive than the typical issues under debate in the first year of the term.

19. Using fractional pooling techniques (Bartels 1996), we check the robustness of these findings to our choice to pool bills across countries. In fractional pooling, each observation in a

(country) subsample is weighted by a pooling fraction γ , which reflects the degree to which one believes the observation should be discounted. Using multiple values of γ , we perform tests of parameter equality, where the null hypothesis is that the fractionally pooled coefficients are equal to the fully pooled coefficients ($\gamma = 1$) shown in Table 2. These tests show that even when $\gamma = 0$ (i.e., when the model is estimated separately for each country), our conclusions remain essentially unchanged. The only noteworthy difference is that in Germany, common partners and opposition parties appear slightly less disadvantaged vis-à-vis ministers than in the Netherlands, though these disadvantages are still statistically discernible and substantively large.

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