



## Updating the *Party Government* data set



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 26 August 2013

Received in revised form 8 October 2013

Accepted 9 October 2013

#### Keywords:

Governments

Cabinets

Ministers

Stability

Duration

### ABSTRACT

Scholars have identified the crucial role of government characteristics in studies of political behavior, comparative institutions, and political economy. An invaluable data source for government characteristics is the Woldendorp et al. (2000) *Party Government in 48 Democracies* data set. We describe our update to this data set from the late-1990s through 2011. We then present a variety of additions to the data set that are intended to increase its usage by reducing the obstacles associated with using the data in conjunction with other popular data sets. We illustrate the utility of this update by providing a variety of means of conceptualizing government stability.

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### 1. Introduction

In the study of politics, the government (or “cabinet”) occupies a central link in the representation of voters’ preferences. As such, the government—as either an influence on politics or a consequence of—has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. A notable example of this is Budge and Keman’s (1990; see also 1993) general theory of party government, which explains a variety of political phenomena related to government formation, the distribution of cabinet ministries, government termination, and the policy consequences of these phenomena. A by-product of Budge and Keman (1990) is the creation of an extremely valuable data set on the composition of governments (further updated in Woldendorp et al., 2000; hereafter “WKB”). The availability of these data has allowed the exploration of the formation of cabinets (e.g., Warwick and Druckman, 2001), their duration (e.g., Somer-Topcu and Williams, 2008), and termination (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009). In addition to being the subject of these

studies, the composition of governments has been shown to influence nearly every substantive area of politics, ranging from economic policy (e.g., Brauninger, 2005) to foreign policy (e.g., Clare, 2010) and ideological shifts (e.g., Bawn and Somer-Topcu, 2012), as well as electoral accountability for economic performance (e.g., Duch and Stevenson, 2008).

Unfortunately, the WKB data collection ends in the late-1990s, which limits the ability of scholars to test their hypotheses after this period. We feel that this prevents scholars from adequately incorporating government characteristics into empirical analyses that use a wide range of more recent data sets—such as the Comparative Manifesto Project (Klingemann et al., 2006) and Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). In this project, we describe our extension of the WKB data set, which applies the same coding rules to 35 democracies from the late-1990s through 2011.

We present a number of innovations to further our goal of increasing the utility of the WKB data set. First, we make the entire data set (1945–2011) available in electronic format, including the more recent sample (1991–2011) of detailed information regarding the distribution of cabinet portfolios (such as minister name, gender, party, duration, etc). Second, we include a series of variables that have been

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useful in studies examining cabinet duration (such as different categorizations of cabinet terminations). Third, we produce variables that uniquely identify observations such that the merging of other commonly-used data sets in political science is made considerably easier. Finally, we offer Stata code that produces the desired data set in a variety of units of analysis (e.g., country, government, minister level, etc) and time periods (e.g., annual, quarterly, daily, etc).

In the next section we briefly describe the original WKB data collection and provide a general survey of its usage in political science. In the second section we compare and contrast this data collection to its primary alternatives, and raise some potential limitations. We then highlight our additions to the WKB data set that are intended to increase its applicability. Next, we present some alternative methods to characterize patterns of government stability in advanced democracies. In the final section, we conclude.

## 2. Overview of the WKB data set

The WKB data set represents the first systematic effort to provide cabinet composition data on a wide range of democracies.<sup>1</sup> For each of 48 countries in the post-World War II period, the WKB data set describes the start date of each government (typically the date of investiture), its duration (the government lasts until the next government's investiture),<sup>2</sup> the parties that control ministries (and thus comprise the government) as well as their distribution of seats, the type of government (in terms of government and supporting parties, majority support, and ideological complexion), the reason for termination, among others.<sup>3</sup> Data on the ministers (and their gender) who occupy each cabinet are also available. Though the number of “reshuffles”—instances of simultaneous movement or replacement by two or more ministers—is available, the exact resignation or appointment dates of individual ministers are not given in the original WKB data. These data are available for the updated time period (early-1990s–2011), and are therefore included in the update.

Table 1 shows the various end dates for the 48 countries in the sample. Fortunately, in each December issue of the *European Journal of Political Research* dating back to 1992, a collection of authors write country-specific articles for the Political Data Yearbook, detailing the “election results, national referenda, changes in government, and institutional reforms in all of the EU member states plus Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United States” (accessed 9-6-12). Of

particular interest to scholars includes the dates of cabinet resignations and appointments, which are not available in WKB (as shown in the last column of Table 1).

Though some of the original countries are unavailable (most notably, India, Turkey and Russia) (see Table 1), we are able to use the Political Data Yearbook to update the variables in the WKB sample through 2011. Scholars interested in a much broader sample are encouraged to use the *Keesing's World Archives* to fill in the gaps, which is a beneficial source for verifying the accuracy of other information.

Until now, scholars interested in using the WKB data in a cross-national empirical analysis have had to put the approximately 450 pages of tables in the original volume into a machine-readable format. If their research question required more recent data, scholars have had to cobble together the 21 years of Political Data Yearbooks (covering 1991–2011) containing over 20 country-specific articles each. The next step is then to marry the WKB data (and updates) with other data sets of interest, which often have different codes indicating parties, governments and countries. Once these labor-intensive steps are completed, scholars are unlikely to change the unit of analysis (i.e., going from a government/month unit of analysis to a government/year or government party/year) because of the additional hand inputting required.

We hope that these obstacles have not deterred scholars from using this valuable resource in their empirical investigations. We are therefore encouraged by the following survey, which broadly categorizes the various ways in which the WKB data set has been used in published work in the last decade and a half.<sup>4</sup> Table 2 reveals 149 instances that scholars have looked to the WKB data set as important elements of their research. The first section of Table 2 shows that the *ToG* variable (i.e., type of government) and the *cabinet summary* variables (i.e., summarizing the parties in the cabinet) are used far more often than *RJT* (i.e., reason for termination) and *minister summary* (i.e., the specific composition of the cabinet in terms of ministers).<sup>5</sup> In the second section of Table 2, we categorized the WKB variables in terms of whether they were used as the dependent, key explanatory variable of the theory, a control, or as a robustness check. While the WKB data are most often used as either control variables (37.6%) or in robustness checks (28.6%), in a substantial portion of the cases scholars either seek to explain the WKB variables as their outcomes of interest (12.8%), or use them as their key theoretical variable (24.2%).

We are encouraged by the observation that scholars have overcome the difficulties listed above in their efforts

<sup>1</sup> WKB is an update to, and encompasses previous versions like Woldendorp et al. (1993, 1998), which are partly derived from the annual *European Journal of Political Research* Political Data Yearbook. Basic government composition data is updated through 2008 in Woldendorp et al. (2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Conrad and Golder (2010) for potential problems with inferring cabinet stability from this duration.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 2 of Woldendorp et al. (2000) offers a detailed survey of the institutional features that distinguish among the different forms of parliamentary and semi-presidential regime types.

<sup>4</sup> This simple survey aggregates all the scholarly publications that have referenced the Woldendorp et al. (2000) volume with the Google citation index and Web of Science. From this list of citations, we then exclude unpublished manuscripts and non-English texts. This simple method most likely underestimates the actual usage of the WKB data set because it does not incorporate earlier versions of the data (Woldendorp et al., 1993, 1998), and therefore only includes research published since 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Other valuable data were used even less often. We identified only two projects out of 149 that incorporated the institutional features data contained in Chapter 2 of WKB.

**Table 1**  
Sample countries.

Country	WKB (2000)		EJPR		Ministers	
	Govt's	Sample <sup>a</sup>	Govt's	Sample <sup>a</sup>	Govt's	Sample <sup>b</sup>
Australia	29	1945–1996	35	1945–2011	10	1990–2011
Austria	21	1945–1996	28	1945–2008	11	1990–2008
Bangladesh	8	1973–1996				
Belgium	37	1945–1995	45	1945–2011	12	1988–2011
Botswana	8	1966–1994				
Bulgaria	6	1991–1997	8	1991–2009	2	2005–2009
Canada	21	1945–1997	27	1947–2011	10	1988–2011
Croatia			8	1992–2008		
Cyprus			17	1977–2011		
Czech Republic <sup>c</sup>	5	1990–1996	12	1990–2010	12	1990–2010
Denmark	29	1945–1994	35	1945–2011	10	1990–2011
Estonia	6	1992–1997	12	1992–2011	7	1999–2011
Finland	46	1945–1995	51	1945–2011	10	1990–2011
France IV	28	1945–1958	28	1945–1958		
France V	28	1959–1997	35	1959–2007	12	1991–2007
Germany	26	1949–1994	29	1949–2009	6	1991–2011
Greece	54	1946–1996	59	1946–2011	9	1990–2011
Guyana	8	1964–1997				
Hungary	3	1990–1994	9	1990–2010	9	1990–2010
Iceland	22	1944–1995	28	1944–2009	10	1989–2009
India	18	1947–1996				
Ireland	21	1948–1997	24	1948–2011	9	1989–2011
Israel	43	1948–1996	67	1948–2011	33	1990–2011
Italy	56	1946–1996	62	1946–2011	15	1989–2011
Jamaica	11	1962–1997				
Japan	41	1946–1996	55	1946–2011	21	1991–2011
Latvia	3	1993–1995	19	1993–2011	11	2000–2011
Lithuania	4	1992–1996	15	1992–2011	8	2000–2011
Luxembourg	17	1945–1995	19	1945–2009	6	1989–2009
Macedonia	2	1994–1996				
Malta	9	1962–1996	13	1962–2008	7	1987–2010
Namibia	2	1990–1995				
Netherlands	21	1946–1994	29	1946–2010	11	1989–2010
New Zealand	27	1946–1997	30	1946–2011	11	1990–2011
Norway	26	1945–1997	29	1945–2009	8	1990–2009
Pakistan	20	1947–1997				
Poland	8	1991–1997	18	1991–2011	18	1991–2011
Portugal	13	1976–1995	18	1976–2011	9	1987–2011
Romania	6	1990–1996	18	1990–2010	7	2004–2010
Slovakia	6	1992–1994	10	1992–2010	10	1992–2011
Slovenia	4	1993–1997	10	1993–2011	5	2000–2011
South Africa I	13	1948–1981				
South Africa II	3	1984–1989				
South Africa III	3	1993–1996				
Spain	8	1977–1996	11	1977–2011	7	1989–2011
Sri Lanka	22	1947–1994				
Sweden	25	1946–1996	28	1946–2010	8	1990–2010
Switzerland	54	1944–1997	69	1944–2011	24	1990–2011
Turkey	38	1946–1997				
United Kingdom	20	1945–1997	24	1945–2010	7	1990–2010
Russia <sup>d</sup>		1990–1998				
United States <sup>d</sup>		1946–1998		1946–2011		1991–2011

<sup>a</sup> Government sample dates represent the start dates of the first and last government.

<sup>b</sup> End date represents start of last government; ministers data is complete through 2011.

<sup>c</sup> includes governments for the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.

<sup>d</sup> fixed election cycles.

to use the WKB data. In order to complete our objective of removing the obstacles associated with these data, we also categorized the research projects based on elements of their research designs, including the countries under examination, the unit of analysis (i.e., the entity that we want to explain) and the time period (i.e., measurement interval of the unit of analysis). Our first observation is that the WKB data is extremely helpful in terms of its breadth;

scholars have used the 48 democracies' data on a wide variety of samples including Western Europe (21.5%), Central and Eastern Europe (4.0%), parliamentary democracies (28.2%), and all democracies (33.6%). Still prevalent, though much less common, are those single-country examinations (for instance, 2.7% of the studies look at the US only). Though the samples in this survey are quite varied, the vast majority of studies employ the country as the unit of

**Table 2**  
Survey of common usages of WKB (2000) data set ( $N = 149$ ).

WKB variable used in the research:	Type of Government (ToG)	63	(42.3%)
	Reason for Termination (RfT)	13	(8.7%)
	Cabinet Summary	51	(34.2%)
	Minister	7	(4.7%)
	Other	23	(15.4%)
Primary usage of WKB variable:	Dependent Variable	19	(12.8%)
	Theoretical Variable	36	(24.2%)
	Control Variable	56	(37.6%)
	Robustness Check	42	(28.6%)
Sample countries:	Western Europe	32	(21.5%)
	Central & Eastern Europe	6	(4.0%)
	Parliamentary Democracies	42	(28.2%)
	All Democracies	50	(33.6%)
	Other	19	(12.8%)
Unit of analysis:	Country	133	(89.3%)
	Government	4	(2.7%)
	Party	4	(2.7%)
	Ministers	2	(1.3%)
	Other	4	(2.7%)
Time period:	Annual	136	(91.3%)
	Quarterly	1	(0.7%)
	Election	3	(2.0%)
	Other	9	(6.0%)

Note: those studies failing to be accurately categorized are excluded. Since studies may fit in multiple categories, percentages may not sum to 100.

analysis (89.3%), most often with an annual time period (91.3%).

This survey demonstrates that scholars look to the WKB data set for a wealth of information related to government characteristics, and use that information in a variety of ways and contexts. Although the number of studies citing WKB is impressive, it is surprising that some of the variables—such as the minister summary data—are not used more often. One explanation for scholars overlooking the minister summary data is that using it in a large- $N$  quantitative analysis would require manually inputting hundreds of pages of minister information into electronic format in addition to collecting the dates of each individual minister's tenure. It is also telling that scholars have primarily used these data in country-year research designs. By using these data at the annual period of analysis, scholars have been forced to gloss over those characteristics of governments that are often extremely dynamic throughout the year. Certainly, there are times when an annual analysis makes the most sense theoretically, but one of our objectives is to give scholars the flexibility in terms of choosing the most appropriate period of analysis. Based on the simple survey of the literature, we feel that the current update—in combination with the innovations described below—can be of substantial benefit to scholars.

### 3. Alternative sources

Given the importance of cabinets in representative democracy, it is not surprising that there are other sources of cabinet composition data (e.g., von Beyme, 1985; Paloheimo, 1984; Strom, 1985; King et al., 1990; Lane et al., 1997; Muller-Rommel et al., 2004; Conrad and

Golder, 2010). A recent alternative to the WKB data set is the Parliament and Government Composition Database (ParlGov), produced by Holger Doring and Philip Manow (Doring and Manow, 2012). While it provides data on a similar sample (38 EU and OECD states in the post-war period),<sup>6</sup> one of the many benefits that this data set offers is its extremely helpful web interface. While the web interface makes accessing a variety of information on parties, elections, and cabinets quite easy, transferring the comma-separated files to a format needed for advanced empirical analysis involves quite a bit of work. In addition, the WKB data set offers detailed information on the composition of cabinet ministries, which is currently unavailable for the entire sample of states in the ParlGov database.<sup>7</sup>

Of these alternatives, the Muller and Strom (2000) edited volume (and the accompanying Strom et al., 2003; hereafter “MS/SMG”) is the most often used alternative to WKB, so we will focus our attention on detailing the similarities and differences between the two. Both data sets begin at very similar definitions that the government formed following an election changes if there is a change in the prime minister, change in parties comprising the cabinet, or the government resigns (Woldendorp et al., 2000: 10; Muller and Strom, 2000: 13).<sup>8</sup>

The biggest difference between the WKB and MS/SMG data sets is that the former is motivated primarily by empirical considerations while the latter is motivated by theoretical concerns. The WKB data book “is an attempt to provide a compact and comprehensive data collection, which *simultaneously* provides *comparative* and *complete* information on the composition of governments” (emphasis in original) (2000: 1). At the risk of oversimplification, the goal of the MS data set is to “shed some light on the actual coalition politics in the major coalitional systems in Europe” (Muller and Strom, 2000: 3). Likewise, the SMG data set is also theoretically-driven; “this volume examines political delegation and accountability in the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe” (Strom et al., 2003: 4). The differences (and similarities) of the two data sets therefore reflect these concerns.

As a result of the different intellectual pursuits, the two data sets offer tradeoffs between depth of information and breadth of cases. The WKB data set includes 48 parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies, and excludes cases that are presidential (though including Russia and the US), not democratic in terms of party competition of the alternation of governments, or “comparatively speaking insignificant” Caribbean nations (7–8). On the other hand, the

<sup>6</sup> While there is considerable overlap between the two samples, the WKB data set offers government data (through the late-1990s) for Bangladesh, Botswana, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Macedonia, Namibia, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Russia. More detailed information (including minister data) is available in the WKB data set for Croatia, Israel and the United States.

<sup>7</sup> As of October 2012, they have started collecting data on ministerial appointments (Doring and Manow, 2012: 4).

<sup>8</sup> One difference between the two definitions is that the MS/SMG is not clear whether resignation qualifies as a new cabinet if the prime minister and same composition of parties occupies the new cabinet.

MS/SMG data set collects information on 17 Western European parliamentary democracies.<sup>9</sup> By focusing on fewer countries, the MS data set can include a wider variety of variables, including the seat shares of all parliamentary parties, factors related to the cabinet formation process (i.e., number of rounds, set of parties involved, the number of days), coalition agreements, and types of termination. While the MS data set offers more in terms of sheer information about the institutional structures of these democracies, the WKB presents more detail about the composition of specific ministries (i.e., names, gender, ministry, etc).

Thus, both data sets offer a number of advantages, allowing the scholar to have her pick of quality data sources based on the research question. While some questions are better suited for the smaller, more in-depth sample of the MS/SMG data set, our survey of usage of WKB indicates that scholars have found a wealth of diverse applications for the WKB data. As with any research question, it is imperative that the researcher considers whether the data provide the appropriate test of the theory. As [Conrad and Golder \(2010\)](#) caution, seemingly innocuous coding decisions can have profound impacts on inferences about government stability. In the next section we describe a few innovations intended to improve the utility of the WKB data.

#### 4. Innovations

In addition to updating the WKB data for 35 countries through 2011, we implement a series of innovations with the goal of improving the utility of these data. The first innovation is to make the entire data set—the original WKB volume and the annual updates—available in electronic format. Since the *EJPR* annual volumes offer more detail regarding the minister summary data, we produce a separate data set from 1991 to 2011 with the minister/government as the unit of analysis. This data set (containing the “detailed minister summary”) includes the official name of the ministry as well as the appointment and resignation dates of the individual ministers. The “cabinet summary” in the WKB book, on the other hand, places country-specific ministries into broad categories (such as Social Affairs), and does not provide the appointment and resignation dates of individual ministers. For example, the Social Affairs category for Belgium’s 36th government (lasting from March 13, 1992 to June 22, 1995) contains four ministers in WKB: Moureaux, Willockx, Smet and Onkelinx. Yet, without additional information scholars are unable to determine whether multiple individuals controlled the same ministry at the same time, or whether a resignation forced a minister to resign, or whether different ministries were coded into the same broad category. In reality, these

four ministers controlled different portfolios<sup>10</sup> and, with the exception of Smet, those ministers left the cabinet before the government ends (Moureaux resigns May 4, 1993, Onkelinx is replaced May 4, 1993, and Willockx is replaced June 18, 1994). Thus, the “detailed minister summary” data set offers a higher level of precision that we hope will be helpful in empirical studies of cabinet ministers. Furthermore, by offering the electronic version of these data sets, we hope that scholars will be more likely to use these data in cross-national, empirical studies.

The second innovation includes a number of variables that others have found useful. Some of these use information that is available in different formats in the current volume, while other variables have been included in alternative data sources. WKB’s “reason for termination” variable has been particularly useful in studies of cabinet duration (see [Table 2](#)). However, other scholars have distinguished between the types of termination in terms of whether they led to parliamentary dissolution or the replacement of the government (i.e., [Diermeier and Stevenson, 1999](#)), or whether they resulted from “acts that were both political and discretionary” or were terminated “beyond the control of the relevant parties” ([Muller and Strom, 2000: 26](#)). Other variables included in the updated data set include those that measure the time left in the constitutional inter-election period (CIEP) (e.g., [King et al., 1990](#)), and the government’s duration as a percentage of the maximum potential duration ([Muller and Strom, 2000: 16](#)). Not only do these variables better reflect the institutional arrangements present in each country, but they allow the substantive inferences to be more easily compared across data sources.

The third innovation makes it easier for scholars to incorporate other commonly-used data sets. Toward this end, we include variables that allow merging with the Comparative Manifesto Project data set (this entails adding the correct election dates for the previous and next election, and country and party codes),<sup>11</sup> and the 17 Western European democracies in the MS/SMG data set, as well as country codes for the Correlates of War data set, International Monetary Fund’s *International Financial Statistics*, and World Bank’s *World Development Indicators*. Since these other variables are readily available in the online version of this data set, scholars will be able to easily incorporate these other economic and political variables in their research projects.

The final innovation reflects another practical consideration. Given the wide range of research questions incorporating the WKB data, scholars use a variety of units of analysis (see [Table 2](#)). Modifying the original data set (at the government level of analysis) to reflect changing time periods includes either a great deal of hand coding, or a significant amount of programming abilities. In addition to making the WKB data available electronically, we also provide Stata code to modify the data to fit one’s research question, whether that means a unit of analysis at the country, government, government party, or minister/

<sup>9</sup> Since the original focus in the [Muller and Strom \(2000\)](#) volume was on coalition politics, Greece, Spain and the UK were omitted because they lacked experience with coalitions. However, those countries, in addition to Iceland, are included in the [Strom et al. \(2003\)](#) volume.

<sup>10</sup> Ph. Moureaux was the Minister of Social Affairs, of Family Policy, and of the Disabled, F. Willockx was the Minister of Pensions, M. Smet was the Minister of Employment and Work, and L. Onkelinx was the Minister of Health, of Environment and of Social Integration.

<sup>11</sup> We also provide Stata code that uses the CMP data to calculate the weighted government position at a variety of time periods.

executive level, or evaluated at the annual, quarterly, monthly or daily time period, or any combination thereof. We are confident that these four innovations will increase the usefulness of these data, as well as improve our understanding of a wide range of questions related to parliamentary governance.

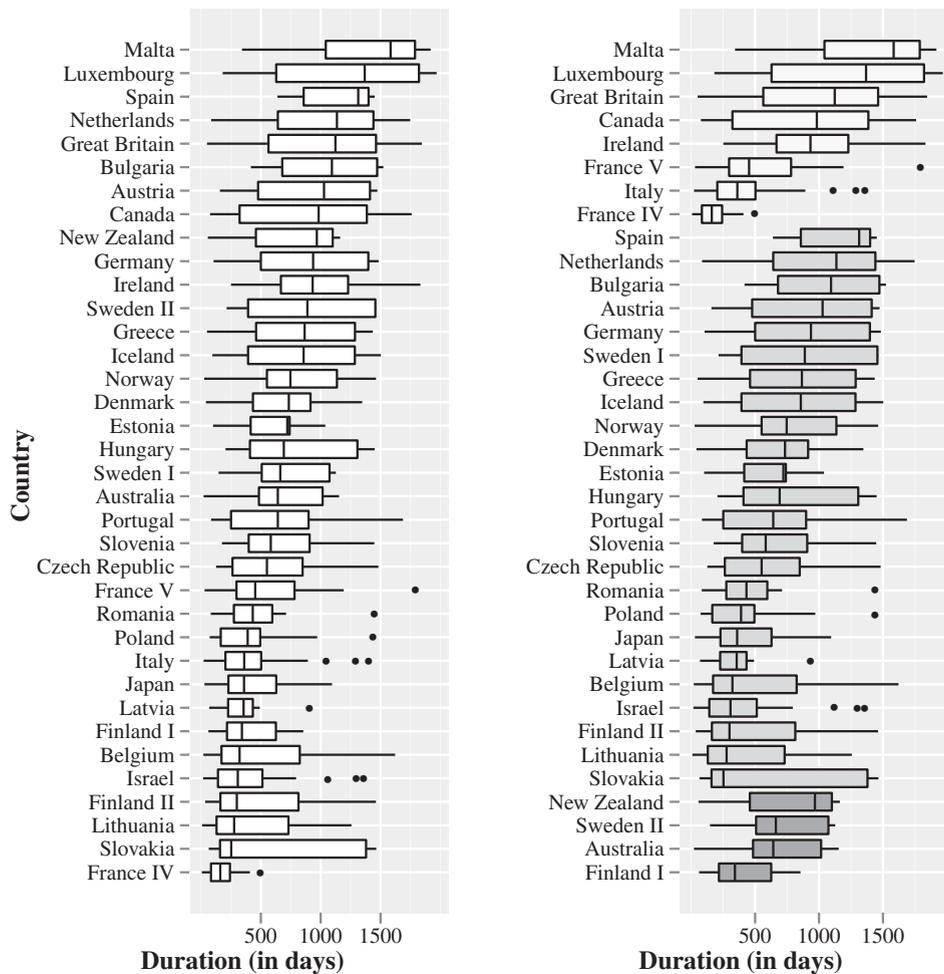
In the next section we demonstrate the usefulness of this update by presenting some alternative methods of characterizing government stability.

### 5. Patterns of government stability

In this section, we present a preliminary empirical exploration of overall government stability. These examples are not meant to provide a definitive statement on the stability (or instability) of these countries; rather, our intention is to demonstrate the utility of this update in an examination of government stability.

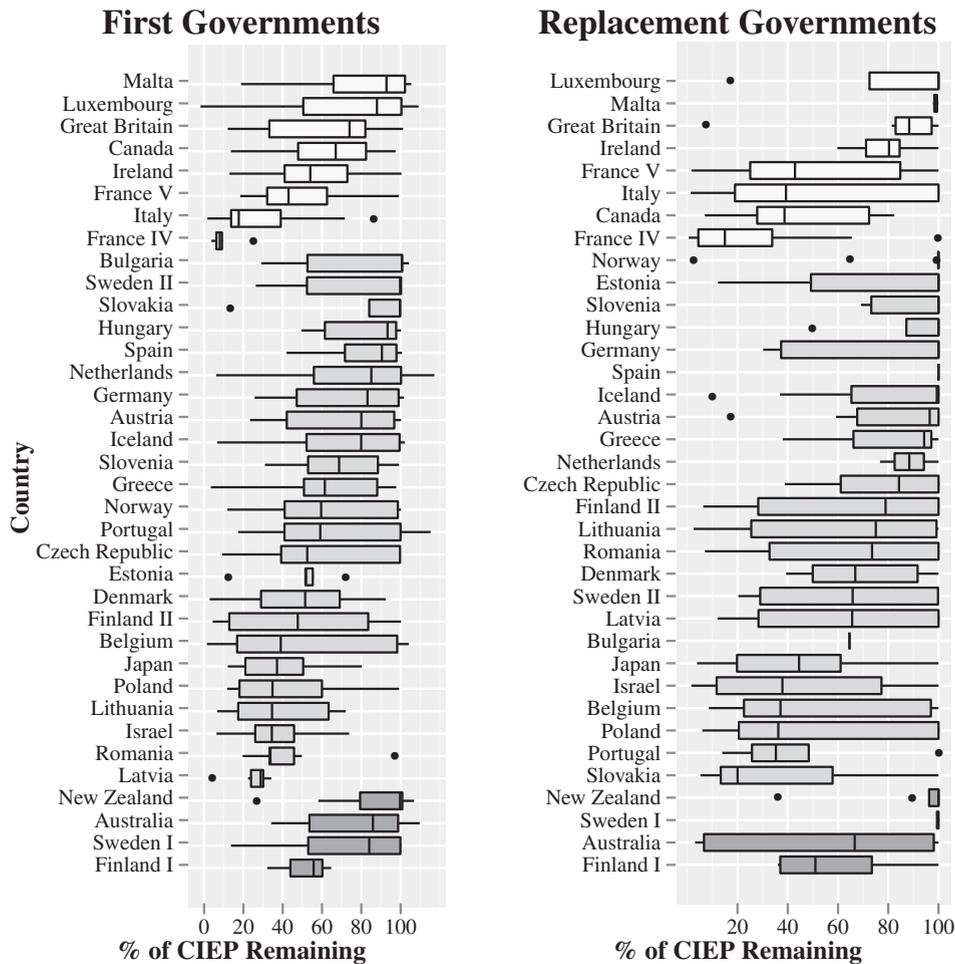
In the left panel of Fig. 1 we show box-whisker plots of government duration (in days) for 35 countries (those with available *EJPR* data) for the entire time period. The countries are then sorted from the shortest median duration (bottom) to the longest (top). We exclude caretaker governments and states with fixed election cycles.

Fig. 1 shows the wide variation in the distribution of government duration across these sample democracies. Malta and Luxembourg, for example, have median durations that last longer than three years. On the other hand, a number of countries have short median durations, which have been explored elsewhere, including Italy (see Curini, 2010) and France’s IV Republic (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2004). Of course, simply evaluating the “average” government duration is too simple of a characterization, and it falsely portrays some countries as unstable because it ignores circumstances unique to each country (i.e., length of the constitutional inter-election



Note: Caretaker governments are excluded. The dark grey, medium grey and light grey shades represent 3-, 4-, and 5-year CIEP, respectively. Finland I and II represent Finland before and after, respectively, their 1954 constitutional reform. Sweden I represents Sweden prior to 1970 and after 1993, and Sweden II represents the middle period.

Fig. 1. Government Duration Sorted by Median Durations (Left) and Divided into Lengths of Constitutional Inter-Election Period (CIEP) (Right).



Note: Caretaker governments are excluded. The dark grey, medium grey and light grey shades represent 3-, 4-, and 5-year CIEP, respectively. Finland I and II represent Finland before and after, respectively, their 1954 constitutional reform. Sweden I represents Sweden prior to 1970 and after 1993, and Sweden II represents the middle period.

Fig. 2. Duration as a Percentage of Constitutional Inter-Election Period (CIEP) Remaining for First Post-Election Governments and Replacement Governments.

period (CIEP)), circumstances unique to the government itself (i.e., whether it is the first post-election government or a replacement), and the role of ministers as autonomous centers of policy and technical expertise. When we reconceptualize government duration to account for these complexities, we get a more nuanced sense of political stability.

In the right panel of Fig. 1 we divide the 35 countries into groups based on the length of the CIEP with expectation that some of the variation in government stability can be attributed to mandating a maximum length.<sup>12</sup> We can see that the CIEP does not completely determine government duration. In fact, there is considerable duration within each one of the groups. At the same time, in each

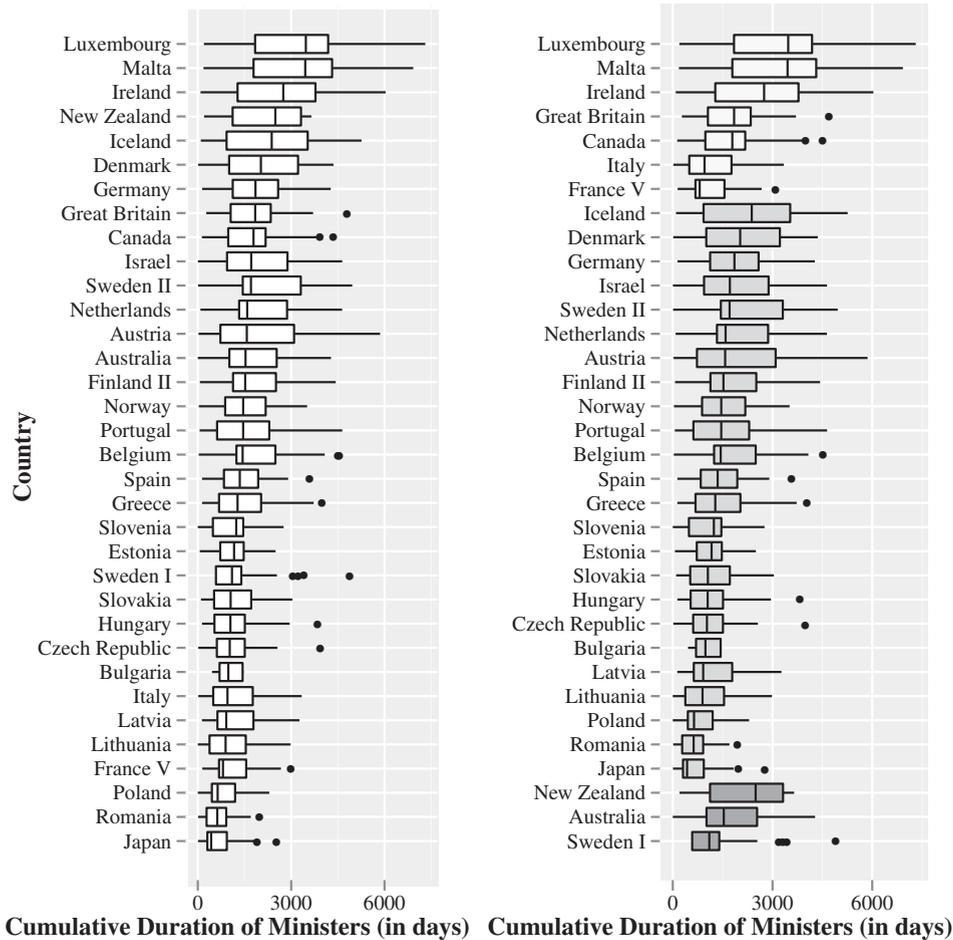
group there are countries which typically last nearly the entire election cycle (such as Malta, Spain and New Zealand), which gives some credence to the idea that the CIEP matters.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps comparing all governments in such a way leads to incorrect assessments of overall government stability. The variation across election cycles depicted in Fig. 1 suggests that a better indicator of stability is the length of the government as a percentage of CIEP remaining.<sup>14</sup> This takes into account the maximum length that a government can last, as well as understanding that the first government

<sup>12</sup> In two cases, the length of the election cycle changed due to constitutional reform: Finland (which switched from a 3- to 4-year term in 1955) and Sweden (which had a 3-year term between 1970 and 1995).

<sup>13</sup> In these governments, it is impossible to know how long they would have lasted if an election did not have to be called. This is the problem of right-censoring that event history models help scholars overcome (e.g., King et al., 1990: 852–854).

<sup>14</sup> Muller and Strom (2000: 17) call this the “maximum potential duration”.



Note: Caretaker governments are excluded. The dark grey, medium grey and light grey shades represent 3-, 4-, and 5-year CIEP, respectively. Sample includes governments available in the EJPR annual yearbooks.

Fig. 3. Cumulative Duration of Ministers Sorted by Median Durations (Left) and Divided into Lengths of Constitutional Inter-Election Period (CIEP) (Right).

established following an election faces different possibilities in terms of duration than replacement governments. Otherwise, scholars are assuming that governments can possibly last longer, when in reality they are constitutionally constrained from lasting beyond a certain time.

In Fig. 2 we show the distribution of government duration as a percentage of CIEP remaining<sup>15</sup> for the first non-caretaker government following an election (left) and non-caretaker replacement governments (right). By looking at Slovakia, we can see how this distinction helps further illustrate government stability. In Fig. 1 Slovakia had the shortest median duration of those states with 4-year

CIEP. Fig. 2 demonstrates that Slovakia's short median duration is due to a large number of replacement governments that do not last a large percentage of the CIEP remaining. While the first post-election governments (left panel) tend to last a substantial percentage of the CIEP remaining, subsequent replacement governments (right panel) are short and frequent.

The survey has revealed that the WKB data set is an invaluable tool for scholars exploring research questions from a variety of areas, the most notable of which is the expansive literature on government duration and stability (see Laver, 2003 for an in-depth review). While the focus on government stability is certainly helpful in determining a wide range of political outcomes, we suggest that scholars also explore the causes and consequences of ministerial stability. This update is structured in such a way that scholars can easily assemble the necessary cross-national data set needed to address a wealth of questions related to government and ministerial stability. For 35 democracies from the early-1990s through 2011 (see Table 1), we provide the names, genders, portfolios,

<sup>15</sup> To ease interpretation, we calculate these values based on the date of the previous election plus the maximum length of the CIEP (in days). Keep in mind that institutional rules regarding the beginning of the CIEP vary in small ways across these sample countries. For example, there is no formal maximum duration of cabinets in Belgium; instead, elections must be held at the latest four years after the final composition of the Senate (De Winter et al., 2000: 343). This also explains why some countries have percentage values greater than 100%.

parties, and tenure dates. Thus, these data can be used to create some recently proposed measures of operationalizing stability, such as portfolio volatility (Huber, 1998), portfolio experience and political experience (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2004), as well as other innovative measures (see Fischer et al., 2012 for a review). Given the impact that party control over specific ministries can have (Laver and Shepsle, 1996), the consequences of individual turnover on policy outcomes (e.g., Alderman and Cross, 1979; Huber, 1998), and the integral role of cabinet ministers in the overall delegation relationships (Kam and Indridason, 2005; Indridason and Kam, 2008), we stress that scholars must explore cabinet stability in tandem with ministerial stability to paint a comprehensive picture of overall stability.<sup>16</sup>

The final method of characterizing government stability that we explore is based on the cumulative duration of cabinet ministers.<sup>17</sup> Once we consider the actual political experience that individual cabinet ministers contribute to the cabinet, we gain a more nuanced picture of government stability. While Spanish governments have the longest median duration of states with 4-year CIEP (shown in Fig. 1), frequent ministerial turnover and reshuffles severely constrain long-term political experience (Fig. 3). Israel, on the other hand, experiences a large number of short governments due to changes in the composition of government (Fig. 1), but accumulates a substantial number of cabinet ministers with significant political experience.

In this section we provided some preliminary analyses on the updated data set to demonstrate how characterizing government stability in various reasonable ways produced different assessments of stability in these countries. Of course, the preliminary nature of these findings should limit the extent of these inferences, so we strongly encourage scholars to produce their own in-depth explorations.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we describe an updated data set on the composition of democratic governments. Our primary goal is to increase its usage in a wide array of applications in political science by eliminating some common practical barriers. Toward this end, we offer the data set with a number of variables that will aid the scholar in merging different data sets, in addition to offering the main data set in a variety of units of analysis. These data sets—as well as the code necessary to create and replicate the results presented herein—are available on the corresponding author's personal website. While we hope that scholars will be more likely to use these data than previously, we think it is

paramount that scholars also keep in mind the potential limitations described above and make theoretically-informed research design choices rather than those based on methodological concerns.

## Acknowledgments

Data and replication files can be found at [web.missouri.edu/~williamslaro/](http://web.missouri.edu/~williamslaro/). We would like to thank the editor, two anonymous reviewers, Michael T. Koch, Zeynep Somer-Topcu and Guy D. Whitten for their helpful comments and Jessica Anderson, Jonathan Martin, Tyson Meredith, Krisztina Pusok, and Jason M. Smith for their invaluable research assistance. Any remaining errors are our own.

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<sup>16</sup> Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008: 169) stress the distinctive components of stability when they suggest that “theories of cabinet duration can at best contribute to a partial understanding of stability among individual ministers”.

<sup>17</sup> This is similar to Huber and Martinez-Gallardo's (2004) measure of “political experience”, except that our measure is based on the minister's cumulative duration controlling any ministry. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2004) examine the political experience within the top 10 most important portfolios for that year (32–33).

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