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Drawing from the bargaining pool: Determinants of ministerial selection in Germany

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Abstract

This article expands our current knowledge about ministerial selection in coalition governments and analyses why ministerial candidates succeed in acquiring a cabinet position after general elections. It argues that political parties bargain over potential office-holders during government-formation processes, selecting future cabinet ministers from an emerging ‘bargaining pool’. The article draws upon a new dataset comprising all ministrable candidates discussed by political parties during eight government-formation processes in Germany between 1983 and 2009. The conditional logit regression analysis reveals that temporal dynamics, such as the day she enters the pool, have a significant effect on her success in achieving a cabinet position. Other determinants of ministerial selection discussed in the existing literature, such as party and parliamentary expertise, are less relevant for achieving ministerial office. The article concludes that scholarship on ministerial selection requires a stronger emphasis for its endogenous nature in government-formation as well as the relevance of temporal dynamics in such processes.

Keywords

Candidates, Germany, government-formation

Introduction

The comparative politics debate devotes increasing attention to ministerial selection as one of the key aspects of government-formation (e.g. Bäck et al., 2009a, b; Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Dowding and Kang, 1998; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2003, 2008; Indriðason and Kam, 2008; Kaiser and Fischer, 2009; Kam et al., 2010). Yet, the existing literature about ministerial selection after general elections has three shortcomings: First, it is mostly limited to incoming cabinets and examines only the succeeding individuals in these selection processes. The complex nature of the phenomenon – whereby certain ministrable candidates acquire a cabinet position and others do not – is rarely examined in a rigorous fashion. Second, many authors follow the principal–agent (PA) approach and conceptualize ministerial selection as the screening and selection of cabinet ministers as future agents, assuming a singular relationship between cabinet members and their principals at this stage of the delegation process. However, the selection of cabinet members after

general elections is presumably influenced by political parties acting as multiple principals that are simultaneously engaged in complex inter-party bargains influencing the selection if not the screening activities. Lastly, many scholars agree that government-formation is a ‘tortuous process’ (Dowding and Dumont, 2009: 3), but the effects of its temporal dynamics are rarely analysed for ministerial selection. Instead, existing studies on temporality in government-formation processes focus on office and policy payoffs while mostly neglecting ministerial selection.

We argue that political parties forming coalition governments select future cabinet ministers from a bargaining pool

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that emerges in inter-party bargaining after general elections. Although the screening and selection of ministrable candidates may start in intra-party bargaining processes before general elections, we assume that political parties forming a coalition have a real interest in forming such bargaining pools in order to signal their office and policy preferences in the complex inter-party bargains during government-formations (Laver and Shepsle, 2000: 115). In turn, their 'office-holder preferences' comprise various alternatives combining distinct candidates with specific portfolios.

As a consequence, these bargaining pools of ministrable candidates are dynamic and inherently smaller than the 'talent pools' of political parties emerging from intra-party selection processes (see Dewan and Myatt, 2010). In some parliamentary systems, these bargaining pools are institutionally determined, i.e. cabinet members have to hold parliamentary office (Alderman, 1976; Kerby, 2009; O'Malley, 2006; Rose, 1971). Yet, for many other parliamentary systems the bargaining pools of ministrable candidates emerging after general elections are less predetermined – despite the general finding from existing scholarship that political parties tend to favour ministerial candidates with previous party and parliamentary experience (Kaiser and Fischer, 2009; Laver and Shepsle, 2000; Saalfeld, 2000).

In this article we aim to uncover the characteristics of ministerial selection after general elections by analysing why ministerial candidates succeed in achieving ministerial offices during government-formation processes. In particular, we have three aims: First, we theorize ministerial selection as the screening and selection of future agents by political parties acting as multiple principals that are simultaneously engaged in inter-party bargains over offices and policies. Second, we assess the temporal dynamics of these inter-party office-holder bargains and their effects on ministerial selection after general elections. Lastly, we study the bargaining pools of ministerial candidates for German cabinets between 1983 and 2009 that have been publicly discussed by political parties during government-formation processes – of which several succeed and acquire a cabinet position whereas others fail. We derived our empirical data by conducting a text analysis of newswires referring to a candidate associated with a distinct portfolio that have been issued during eight government-formation processes in Germany. This event-oriented information was transformed into a candidate-oriented dataset, complemented with additional information on the candidates extracted from a biographical analysis. Thus, we gained a dataset including all potential ministerial candidates. Furthermore, we selected a statistical model which is sensitive to the selection of a single ministerial candidate from a pool of possible candidates. This implies that common statistical models like simple regression analysis are inadequate, so we employed a conditional logit model.

The article proceeds as follows: The next section presents our theoretical framework, emphasizing the twofold nature

of ministerial selection during government-formation, i.e. the selection of future agents by multiple principals engaged in bargains over offices and policies. We then present our research design and discuss the data of our empirical analyses. Lastly, we assess the determinants for succeeding in acquiring a ministerial position in Germany between 1983 and 2009. We conclude that the temporal dynamics of the bargaining processes have a significant impact on ministerial selection, whereas the selection criteria discussed in the existing literature are less relevant, except the portfolio expertise of ministerial candidates.

Ministerial selection in coalition governments

This article understands ministerial selection as an endogenous feature of government-formation processes (Laver and Shepsle, 2000: 114) whereby certain ministrable candidates succeed in acquiring a ministerial position and others fail. Many authors assume that political parties have a fixed set of ministerial candidates:

For a given government-formation situation, therefore, it seems reasonable to assume the set of ministrable politicians to be fixed in advance. Each party, in effect, has a cadre of ministrables, each with a particular reputation, from which it can select senior political office-holders to underwrite its position in government. (Laver and Shepsle, 2000: 115)

We argue that political parties in coalition governments negotiate future office-holders as part of their complex inter-party bargaining during government-formation. Put differently: The parties' distinct cadre of ministrable candidates may be less fixed and instead political parties are very likely to create volatile bargaining pools after general elections entailing all potential office-holders from which they select the future agents as inherently linked to their office and policy bargains.

More importantly, the inherent link of future office-holders and portfolio allocation relates these bargaining pools of ministrable candidates with office and policy bargains. In addition, future ministers tend to bias policy initiatives at the expense of the coalition compromise (Martin and Vanberg, 2011) and thus political parties are further encouraged to make strategic choices over ministerial selection in order to ensure their policy preferences in government. As a result, the bargaining pools emerging after general elections encompass a dynamic set of ministrable candidates from which political parties select their favourable cabinet members.

The principal-agent perspective on ministerial selection

The dominant theoretical reasoning about ministerial selection follows the PA approach and its understanding

of parliamentary systems as chains of delegation (Blondel and Cotta, 1996; De Winter and Dumont, 2006; Müller, 2000; Strøm, 1995). The key argument claims that future cabinet members are screened and selected by their principals before entering the delegation relationship in order to reduce agency loss and ensure congruence between the agent's and the principals' policy preferences (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Müller, 2000; Strøm, 2000). More importantly, the PA approach assumes that institutional context features affect the delegation relationship. The current literature on ministerial selection discusses various institutional context characteristics, e.g. constitutional features, formal rules on cabinet governance such as cabinet size or investiture rules, and intra-party features shaping the competition between ministerial talents, etc. (De Winter, 1995: 119; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008; Laver and Budge, 1992; Strøm et al., 1994).

The PA debate on ministerial selection identifies different principals conducting the screening and selection of cabinet ministers as future agents (Debus and Bräuninger, 2009; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008; Kam et al., 2010; Laver and Shepsle, 2000; Martin and Vanberg, 2003). This article argues that in contrast to ministerial selection during legislative periods, which is presumably more strongly influenced by the incumbent PM and/or parliamentary parties (see Bäck et al., 2009a; Indriðason and Kam, 2008), ministerial selection after general elections is often predominantly influenced by extra-parliamentary political parties acting as multiple principals (see Dowding and Dumont, 2009: 9; Müller, 2000: 330). Although the PM designate may be pivotal, especially if she acts as party leader, she is not regarded as a solitary actor deciding upon ministerial selection (De Winter, 1995: 116; Laver and Shepsle, 1996: 260; Strøm et al., 1994).

The PA approach argues that principals screen future agents in order to reduce incongruent policy preferences – assuming that the agent's policy preferences do not change after the appointment (Andeweg, 2000: 390). The comparative literature discusses several selection criteria. First, previous party-political offices, it is argued, increase the likelihood of ministerial candidates acquiring a cabinet position because they allow principals to assess the agent's policy positions *ex ante* (Lupia, 2006: 45–47; Strøm, 2006: 67, 70). Other authors emphasize the explanatory relevance of informal norms related to party-political profiles of ministerial candidates, e.g. requiring agents that balance the ideological distance of intra-party factions (Kam et al., 2010; Müller and Meyer, 2010: 106). In turn, a previous party-political position is crucial to gauge the policy positions of ministerial candidates. Following this finding about the relevance of previous party-political careers for inaugurated cabinet ministers, we assume that this selection criterion is likewise applied on the selection of ministerial candidates who entered the inter-party bargaining pools of potential office-holders. Thus:

Hypothesis 1: The more extensive the party-political career of the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio in the bargaining pool the more likely she succeeds in acquiring this cabinet position.

Second, various authors emphasize parliament as a 'school for ministers' (Rose, 1971: 403) and stress that the parliamentary career, particularly a membership in senior parliamentary party bodies, increases the chance of being selected as a cabinet minister because the principals could screen the potential agent and her policy positions prior to her appointment (Indriðason and Kam, 2008; Kaiser and Fischer, 2009: 144; Stratmann and Baur, 2002). Similarly, we expect that an extensive parliamentary career enhances the likelihood of ministerial candidates being selected from the inter-party bargaining pools of office-holders once they entered that pool. Hence:

Hypothesis 2: The more extensive the parliamentary career of the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio in the bargaining pool the more likely she succeeds in acquiring this cabinet position.

Third, the previous policy experience of ministerial candidates is discussed as a selection criterion because it allows the principal to estimate the agent's policy positions *ex ante* (Lupia, 2006: 48). We differentiate between two opportunities to gauge the future policy positions of ministerial candidates. The most basic is a previous cabinet membership of ministerial candidates in bargaining pools, disregard for which portfolio, because it allows direct recollection of previous stances in the decision-making processes in cabinet. Thus:

Hypothesis 3a: If a ministerial candidate in the bargaining pool is a previous cabinet member, she is more likely to succeed in acquiring a cabinet position.

Another possibility to estimate the policy positions of ministerial candidates is an executive office during her previous career, outside cabinet, because this provides information on the 'management expertise' of ministerial candidates in leading large bureaucratic apparatuses (Bäck et al., 2009a; see also Goetz, 2007: 181 f.). Hence:

Hypothesis 3b: If a ministerial candidate in the bargaining pool gained previous executive experience, she is more likely to succeed in acquiring a cabinet position.

Furthermore, the 'portfolio expertise' of ministerial candidates in the bargaining pools covers previous executive expertise that they acquired within a particular policy sector (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008). We assume that the congruence between this previous portfolio expertise and the distinct ministerial office for which the candidate is discussed in the bargaining pool increases the

probability that she is eventually selected and inaugurated as cabinet minister leading that particular ministry. Thus:

Hypothesis 3c: The more congruent the portfolio expertise of the ministerial candidate in the bargaining pool with her associated portfolio, the more likely she succeeds in acquiring this cabinet position.

Lastly, many authors refer to socio-demographic features of ministerial candidates as determinants of ministerial selection, such as age, gender or educational background. All these features refer to formal and/or informal rules balancing cabinets in representative terms in order to satisfy intra-party fractions as well as more general requirements of the electorate (Dowding and Dumont, 2009: 5 f.). Although these individual attributes of future cabinet members may vary across countries and time, it is reasonable to assume that compliance of ministerial candidates in the bargaining pool to these requirements enhances the likelihood that they become cabinet members. For the German case, no formal obligations exist regarding these attributes of cabinet members. Yet, the existing literature agrees that cabinet members are predominantly male, of senior age and have obtained high educational degrees (Fischer and Kaiser, 2009). We expect that these criteria also affect the success of potential cabinet members being selected from the inter-party bargaining pools of office-holders. Hence:

Hypothesis 4a: If the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio in the bargaining pool is older, she is more likely to succeed in acquiring this cabinet position.

Hypothesis 4b: If the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio in the bargaining pool is male, he is more likely to succeed in acquiring this cabinet position.

Hypothesis 4c: If the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio in the bargaining pool holds a university degree, it is more likely that she succeeds in acquiring this cabinet position.

Modelling bargaining in ministerial selection

A wide-ranging literature applies game theoretical modelling to understand government-formation processes as inter-party bargains, assuming that political parties follow two basic motives (Laver and Schofield, 1998: 89–123): Early scholars suggested that political parties act as *office-seekers* and considered the strength of a political party as cohesive and unitary actor within a legislature as best predictor of government participation (Riker, 1962; von Neumann and Morgenstern, 1944). Later, scholars criticized this approach and argued that political parties act as *policy-seekers*, showing that the policy positions of parties predict best the party composition of governments (Axelrod, 1970; De Swaan, 1973). Nowadays, most authors agree that political parties in government-formation aim at

both offices and policy, although they may favour one of these objectives over the other – which may also vary over time (Müller and Strøm, 2000).

We argue that ministerial selection is an endogenous feature of government-formation, interrelated to the office and policy bargains between political parties after general elections. In turn, intra-party decisions over ministrable candidates can be regarded as the ‘proto-stage’ of ministerial selection. The final selection decision, though, is taken during government-formation processes. In turn, we assume that if a political party presents a ministerial candidate unacceptable to the coalescing party, it is very likely that the former’s position in the office and policy bargain is weakened. This link between portfolio allocation and policy compromise and ministerial selection may be even stronger in countries with a comparatively stable portfolio allocation over time, thus reducing the uncertainty of political parties which portfolios may exist in the new cabinet or rather for which offices they have to include ministerial aspirants within the bargaining pool. Put differently: We argue that the selection of potential cabinet members during government-formation is dynamic – making it reasonable to assume that bargaining dynamics are also relevant in explaining ministerial selection.

The game theoretical debate on portfolio allocation in coalition governments differentiates the quantitative outcome of the game, i.e. how many portfolios each party obtains, and the qualitative outcome of the game, i.e. which portfolios each party receives. The key finding of the quantitative portfolio allocation literature is the ‘proportionality norm’, whereby the share of political parties in portfolios is proportional to the parliamentary seats they contribute to the governing legislature (Browne and Feste, 1975; Browne and Franklin, 1973; Gamson, 1961: 376; Schofield and Laver, 1985; Warwick and Druckman, 2001). In addition, these studies argue that smaller political parties in coalition governments receive slightly more offices than they are expected to gain according to their seat-share (Browne and Franklin, 1973; Budge and Keman, 1990). In countries where each portfolio is filled with one office-holder, the same near-proportionality exists between the number of *successful* ministerial candidates discussed by political parties and their share of parliamentary seats in the governing coalition. In turn, one may expect for those countries a similar near-proportionality for all *discussed* ministerial candidates: Political parties present a certain number of ministerial candidates proportional to the number of portfolios they gain – which, in turn, is interrelated to their legislative size.

Yet, since ministerial selection is linked to inter-party bargains over offices and policies, it is reasonable to assume that the share of ministerial candidates presented by political parties in the bargaining pool is not proportional to their parliamentary seat-share. Instead, political parties may deliberately present a disproportionate number of ministerial candidates than their legislative size would

predict in order to signal that they can provide ministrable talents for various portfolios and thus demonstrate their office preferences and policy competencies, i.e. their preference for participating in government. We expect that smaller parties, in particular, are more likely to present such a disproportionate number of ministerial candidates in order to indicate their policy competence to the larger coalescing party and the electorate (Strøm et al., 1994) – and thus their ministrable candidates in the bargaining pool are eventually more likely to fail during the bargaining process because of the office proportionality noted above. Moreover, owing to their smaller talent pools, it is reasonable to assume that these smaller parties present and discuss the same ministerial candidate for various portfolios, thus reducing the likelihood that she achieves the rest of her associated ministerial offices. Put differently: If these ministerial candidates succeed, they gain only one portfolio and fail for all other ministerial offices.

Put together, the game theoretical modelling of government-formation suggests that the legislative size of political parties matters for ministerial selection from inter-party bargaining pools of potential office-holders: Those candidates presented by the *larger coalescing* party are more likely to succeed in being selected from the inter-party bargaining pools of office-holders. Hence:

Hypothesis 5: If the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio in the bargaining pool is a member of the larger coalescing party she is more likely to succeed in acquiring this cabinet position.

The existing studies analysing the temporal dynamics of bargaining processes during government-formation address primarily the duration of such processes (Diermeier and van Roozendaal, 1998; Golder, 2005, 2010; Martin and Vanberg, 2003).¹ They argue that uncertainty and ‘bargaining complexity’ affect the duration of government-formation: Whereas uncertainty refers to information asymmetries on office and policy preferences between coalescing parties, bargaining complexity refers to the variety of options in terms of portfolio allocation and policy directions (see also De Winter and Dumont, 2008). Applying this argument on ministerial selection after general elections, we expect that the uncertainty about office-holder preferences between coalescing parties affects the likelihood of their ministerial candidates in the bargaining pool succeeding and acquiring a cabinet position: A lengthy repetition of office-holder preferences should decrease the uncertainty among political parties in government-formation processes and simultaneously strengthen the signalling into the bargain. In a similar vein, the earlier political parties present ministerial candidates to the bargaining pool for a distinct portfolio, the less uncertain office-holder preferences are in the bargaining process, enabling strategizing and sophisticated choices in ministerial selection – increasing the likelihood of these

ministerial candidates succeeding and being selected for cabinet from the inter-party bargaining pools of office-holders. Thus,

Hypothesis 6: The earlier the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio enters the bargaining pool, the more likely she succeeds in acquiring this cabinet position.

Research design and data

This article analyses ministerial selection after general elections and argues that bargaining pools emerge during government-formation processes from which political parties select future cabinet members. Although these negotiations between political parties may unfold rather hidden, we argue that their media coverage entails reliable information about the members of the bargaining pools and thus the office-holder preferences. In fact, it is almost immanent that political parties act as ‘initiators of political news’ (van Aelst et al., 2008: 196) during government-formation processes and reveal their ministerial candidates to the general public via the media to inform their members, supporters and voters on their office and policy preferences.

We reduce the ideological bias of media analyses (see Hackett, 1984) by gathering our data from newswires issued by a German newswire agency (*Deutsche Presseagentur*, dpa) which services media from the entire left–right spectrum.² This data source has an additional unique advantage compared to newspapers and magazines: Newswires provide information ‘to the second’ and thus allow identifying bargaining dynamics *during* the days of government-formation. Our unit of analysis is *candidate and portfolio*, i.e. a ministerial candidate who is discussed as office-holder for a distinct portfolio. The dichotomous dependent variable describes whether or not the ministerial candidate succeeds in acquiring this particular cabinet position.

Our analyses are based on a new dataset with reported candidates and their associated portfolios for German cabinets between 1983 and 2009, excluding the chancellorship which we regard as negotiated and thus exogenous to government-formation (Neto and Strøm, 2006). The creation of the dataset has been conducted through the following steps. First, we extracted the newswires for the time periods under scrutiny from a full-text database of the dpa, i.e. all newswires issued after the general election, and prior to the cabinet inauguration, that include information on a candidate and her associated portfolio. Second, these extracted newswires were sorted and the sample further refined by excluding those covering comments from the press distributed via the dpa newswire service. In total, 5,500 newswires were considered for our dataset, issued during eight bargaining processes between the general election and cabinet inauguration that lasted between 23 days in 1983 (Kohl II) and 65 days in 2005 (Merkel I). The

number of newswires ranges from 118 (Kohl III) to 2,032 (Merkel I). The Kohl III government reveals the smallest number of candidates discussed for a distinct portfolio ($N = 25$), while for the Merkel I government the maximum number of candidates was associated with certain portfolios ($N = 73$).³ The suitability of this data source for informing on parties' office-holder preferences is reflected by the fact that all inaugurated members of German cabinets between 1983 and 2009 have been discussed as ministerial candidates for at least one portfolio during the respective bargaining process. Third, the newswires were entered into a new dataset containing the time of the newswire as well as the candidate and her associated portfolio. Afterwards, this event-oriented dataset was transformed into a candidate-oriented dataset, and further information on the candidates was entered into the dataset, gathered from a biographical archive (Munzinger Archive; see also Kempf and Merz, 2001, 2008).

Furthermore, we considered the design of the candidate dataset, acknowledging the challenge that the choices for ministerial candidates associated with a particular portfolio are not independent of each other. If one candidate is selected for a distinct portfolio she will presumably not be selected for another one. As a consequence, we deleted all cases where a successful candidate did not get the other associated portfolios, reducing the overall number of cases from 389 to 319 but producing some kind of 'independent' bargaining pool dataset. Otherwise the characteristics of successful candidates will also occur as characteristics of unsuccessful candidates for a different portfolio.⁴

We employed a conditional logit model to estimate why candidates were chosen from the bargaining pool for a distinct portfolio and others not. Modelling solutions like linear regression analysis would seem inappropriate because they treat all ministerial candidates as separate cases (see Martin and Stevenson, 2001: 38). The conditional logit model is also adequate for portfolios where only two candidates were presented compared to portfolios where many candidates have been discussed. Overall, our dataset includes 319 candidates for eight cabinets and 142 opportunities to get a portfolio.⁵

Our independent variables are constructed as follows: The age of all ministerial candidates in the bargaining pools was assessed for each single bargaining process, i.e. it was measured for each candidate's entry year in each bargaining process, whereas their gender was measured as dichotomous categories and their educational background was measured with the highest educational degree.⁶ To assess the party-political career of ministerial candidates, we constructed a simple additive index counting each party office at *Länder* and federal level that a ministerial candidate held until the year before each general election with a value of '1'.⁷ Under the same premise we constructed an additive index for the parliamentary career of ministerial candidates, encompassing their formal offices in *Länder*

parliaments and the Bundestag. Measurement of the portfolio expertise of ministerial candidates is more demanding because these variables need contested coding decisions (see Bäck et al., 2009a: 235). We followed a recent categorization of German portfolio allocation at *Länder* level (Linhart et al., 2008, Pappi et al., 2008)⁸ and coded the portfolio experience of each ministerial candidate for the policy field she was presented for. Therefore we considered the policy fields of previous executive offices of each ministerial candidate until the year before each general election. Afterwards, we compared this policy field with the associated portfolio of each ministerial candidate in the bargaining pools and counted 'portfolio congruence' with a value of '1', aggregating the portfolio expertise in one single index.

A descriptive analysis of bargaining pools in Germany

In Germany, there are no formal requirements on how many cabinet ministers can be appointed, but three ministerial posts are determined by the Basic Law, prescribing the offices of the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Defence (Böckenförde, 1964). In addition, German cabinets include one minister per portfolio, except those appointed as ministers without portfolio.⁹ Yet, German cabinets are comparatively stable, i.e. the sets of portfolios witness no radical changes, also after general elections with government turnover.

No formal obligations exist with regard to the socio-demographic background or previous party, parliamentary or portfolio expertise of cabinet ministers. Yet, informal norms result traditionally in cabinets predominated by male and senior members with university degrees (Fischer and Kaiser, 2009: 31). In addition, the majority of German cabinet ministers have previous party expertise, held several positions as an MP at *Länder* and/or Federal level, and gained executive expertise prior to their inauguration (Bäck et al., 2009b; Fischer and Kaiser, 2009).

In our dataset, there are some differences between the bargaining pools emerging after general elections and the inaugurated cabinets in Germany. Almost 70 percent of the ministerial candidates in the bargaining pools are over 50 years of age, approximately 80 percent are male and more than 90 percent hold a university or a doctoral degree (see Table 1). In addition, nearly 50 percent of the ministerial candidates had held at least two offices in their party and more than 65 percent had held at least two offices in parliament; nearly 70 percent had been MPs. Put differently: The majority of ministerial candidates in the bargaining pools can be regarded as political insiders (De Winter, 1991). More importantly, a large share (more than 50 percent) of ministerial candidates had previous executive expertise – at least two offices – but only slightly more than 45 percent gained expertise in the policy sector of their associated portfolio in the bargaining pool.

Table I. Descriptive statistics of the bargaining pools in Germany, 1983–2009.

	Kohl II	Kohl III	Kohl IV	Kohl V	Schröder I	Schröder II	Merkel I	Merkel II	all cabinets
Party-political career (at least two offices)	51.6%	40.0%	44.7%	35.3%	41.9%	37.3%	53.4%	72.2%	47.6%
Parliamentary career (at least two offices)	71.0%	68.0%	52.6%	47.1%	51.6%	47.1%	52.1%	72.2%	56.1%
Previous cabinet member	54.8%	76.0%	55.3%	58.8%	3.5%	35.3%	27.4%	25.0%	39.2%
Portfolio expertise (at least one)	64.5%	72.0%	50.0%	61.8%	12.9%	39.2%	42.5%	25.0%	44.5%
Executive experience (at least two offices)	58.1%	56.0%	47.4%	67.6%	25.8%	52.9%	64.4%	36.1%	52.7%
Age (>50 years)	77.4%	92.0%	65.8%	58.8%	61.3%	66.7%	86.3%	50.0%	70.8%
Gender (male)	96.8%	92.0%	81.6%	76.5%	67.7%	70.6%	76.7%	66.7%	77.4%
University education	83.9%	92.0%	92.1%	97.1%	83.9%	88.2%	93.2%	97.2%	91.2%
Entry day (during the first quarter)	45.2%	16.0%	57.9%	55.9%	80.6%	60.8%	32.9%	50.0%	49.2%
Presence after completion of coalition bargains	80.6%	48.0%	84.2%	73.5%	93.5%	68.6%	34.2%	88.9%	67.4%
MPs	74.2%	80.0%	68.4%	76.5%	61.3%	62.7%	52.1%	75.0%	66.1%
No. of candidates	31	25	38	34	31	51	73	36	319

Looking at the temporal features of the bargaining pools, we find that the majority of all ministrable candidates (approximately 50 percent) have been entered during the first quarter of the respective bargaining process. Besides, more than 70 percent of all ministerial candidates remain in the bargaining pool after the formal coalition negotiations have been officially completed.

Over time, no clear trends emerge with regard to the socio-demographic features of ministerial candidates in the bargaining pools; instead, some deviant bargaining pools can be identified, especially after the 1998 general election; they emerged during the only government-formation processes following a complete government turnover in our dataset. Accordingly, the share of female ministerial candidates in this bargaining pool is relatively high and their educational degree the lowest (equal to the 1983 cabinet, Kohl II), presumably because of the talent pool of the coalescing Social Democratic and Green Party, from which they select their ministrable candidates for the bargaining pool. The educational background of SPD party members is likewise relevant for the comparatively low educational background of ministerial candidates in the bargaining pool that emerged after the general election in 2005 leading to a Grand Coalition between the Conservatives and the Social Democratic Party.

Also the pattern of party-political and parliamentary expertise shows no general longitudinal trend. Yet, the bargaining pool that emerged after the general election with the complete government turnover in 1998 reveals the lowest share of ministerial candidates with previous cabinet members, previous executive experience as well as congruent portfolio expertise in comparison to the other bargaining pools, presumably because the years of both parties in opposition reducing the available number of potential candidates in their talent pools. Moreover, this particular

cabinet tends to be a ‘turning point’ of some longitudinal trends: Until the Schröder I cabinet, more than half of all candidates in the bargaining pools were previous cabinet members with apparent expertise. Afterwards, the share of previous cabinet members was more volatile and rose from less than 5 percent (for the Schröder I cabinet) to approximately 40 percent during the last Merkel II cabinet. More importantly, until the Schröder I cabinet the share of candidates with congruent portfolio expertise has been higher than of those with executive experience, revealing that political parties preferred candidates with profound sectoral knowledge during government-formation. Since then, however, the share of candidates with such portfolio expertise is lower than the share of candidates in the bargaining pools with executive experience, signalling a decreasing interest of political parties to present and discuss sectoral experts for future cabinet posts.¹⁰ The temporal dynamics likewise show no clear trend, but again the bargaining pool in 1998 is dissimilar by having the largest number of ministerial candidates presented already during the first quarter of the bargaining process, presumably reducing the uncertainty among two political parties rather new to coalition bargaining.

A conditional logit model of ministerial selection from bargaining pools

To study the determinants of ministrable candidates’ success in achieving ministerial office after general elections, we use conditional logit models for testing the hypotheses on ministerial selection informed by the PA as well as the game theoretical modelling perspective. Our dependent variable assesses whether a ministerial candidate succeeded in achieving a distinct portfolio for each government-formation process, measured as a dichotomous variable.

Table 2. Conditional logit analysis of ministerial selection.

	Ministerial selection (1)	Ministerial selection (2)	Ministerial selection (3)
Party-political career	-0.20 (0.15)		-0.19 (0.14)
Parliamentary career	0.13 (0.16)		0.13 (0.17)
Previous cabinet member	0.92*** (0.34)		1.15*** (0.40)
Executive experience	0.09 (0.12)		0.12 (0.11)
Portfolio expertise	-0.06 (0.21)		-0.07 (0.20)
Age	-0.02 (0.03)		-0.02 (0.03)
Gender	0.56 (0.48)		0.61 (0.50)
Education	-0.06 (0.14)		-0.06 (0.16)
Party talent pool size	4.12*** (1.53)		4.06** (1.64)
Entry day in bargaining pool		0.66 (0.72)	1.54** (0.74)
Coalition negotiations		1.72*** (0.46)	
No. of obs.	235	241	235
Log-likelihood	-64.84	-65.30	-62.04
IIA-test. <i>p</i> -value	0.96	0.95	0.98

****p* < 0.01, ***p* < 0.05, **p* < 0.10.

A *p*-value < 0.05 indicates that the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) does not hold.

Following our twofold theoretical approach, we estimate two separate conditional logit models for ministerial selection, assessing the relevance of the hypothesized selection criteria for ministerial candidates, and the temporal dynamics of the bargaining processes. Lastly, we summarize all selected determinants in one model in order to assess the relevant conditions for succeeding in ministerial selection.

The first model reveals that from all hypothesized selection criteria, the membership in the previous cabinet and the size of the party talent pool have a significant positive effect on ministerial selection, i.e. membership in the previous cabinet and a larger party talent pool increase the likelihood that the candidate becomes a cabinet minister for a particular ministerial office (see Table 2). Our model therefore confirms the relevance of executive experience and the party talent pool size, but rejects our other hypotheses on socio-demographic features as well as party-political and parliamentary experience. The coefficient for party political career reveals a negative sign, indicating that extended party political careers have a negative impact on being selected from the bargaining pool.¹¹ Nevertheless, the results for socio-demographic characteristics are rather expected given the descriptive analysis of the bargaining

pools showing that political parties put mostly those ministrable candidates into the bargaining pools who comply with the selection criteria predicted by the PA approach. Although the coefficients for age and educational background reveal a negative sign, their influence can be neglected. In contrast, the insignificant coefficient for gender reveals interesting results, indicating that female candidates have better chances of being selected and leading a portfolio. This is against our hypothesis but not implausible because, as shown above, female candidates are comparatively less often considered in the bargaining pools, thus increasing their relative chances of becoming selected – either to create gender balance in cabinet or because of their seemingly better qualification that supported their entry into the bargaining pool in the first place. More importantly, the results for the three distinguished types of previous expertise, i.e. previous cabinet membership, executive experience and portfolio expertise, show only for the cabinet membership a significant relevance for getting the associated portfolio for which the candidate has been discussed and entered the bargaining pool. This interesting finding reveals that previously obtained experience in executive office or sectoral knowledge gained in the same portfolio for which a candidate is discussed between the political parties, is of no significant relevance for ministerial selection from the bargaining pool. In fact, the significant relevance of membership in the previous cabinet implies that political parties may include a larger variety of ministrable candidates in that respect in the bargaining pools, i.e. they present and discuss ministerial candidates lacking previous sectoral or executive expertise for their associated portfolios – but eventually select those who obtained experience in the last cabinet and are thus regarded as ministrable.

In a second conditional logit model, we inserted three parameters in order to assess the effects of the temporal characteristics of the bargaining process (see Table 2), i.e. the entry day for each ministerial candidate into the bargaining pool for each government-formation process, measured from the day of the general election. This variable was standardized as a quota of the total duration of each bargaining process.¹² The second variable is dichotomous, measuring whether the ministerial candidate for a distinct portfolio was still discussed or entered into the bargaining pool after official completion of the formal coalition negotiations.

The results of our second model confirm only one of our hypothesized effects of bargaining dynamics on ministerial selection. First, the entry day of a ministerial candidate has a positive effect on ministerial selection, revealing the opposite direction from expected, i.e. an early entry of a ministerial candidate into the bargaining pool decreases the likelihood that she succeeds and acquires the associated cabinet position. This is related to our unit of analysis, which refers to distinct combinations of candidates and associated portfolios: It is very likely that political parties

enter candidates in the bargaining pool at an earlier stage but associate them with different portfolios over time – which reveals the strategizing behaviour of political parties during government-formation. Second, the presence of the ministerial candidate after completion of the formal coalition negotiations has a significant positive effect, which is in accordance with our hypothesis. Hence the survival of coalition negotiations enhances the chances of becoming selected as cabinet minister.

For our final model, we selected distinct independent variables explaining ministerial selection. In order to avoid problems of endogeneity, we excluded the variable measuring survival after official completion of the coalition negotiations (see Table 2). This model reveals that most of the relationships of the first and second models remain stable, namely membership in the previous cabinet and size of the party talent pool. More importantly, the entry day into the bargaining pool becomes significant. Thus, the final model indicates the importance of structural parameters such as the party talent pool size and executive experience (as members in the previous cabinet) and temporal characteristics of the bargaining process in explaining why distinct ministerial candidates are drawn from the bargaining pool as cabinet ministers while others fail.

Lastly, we checked all our models with the so-called IIA test, because one of the weaknesses of conditional logit regression is the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA). This implies that ‘the odds of choosing one alternative over another do not depend on any other alternatives in the choice set or on the values of the covariates associated with those alternatives’ (Martin and Stevenson, 2001: 39). As recommended, we drop a random set of alternatives and apply the Hausmann test.¹³ The results are listed in Table 2 (IIA-test, *p*-value) and indicate that we are far away from rejecting the null hypothesis, which means that the IIA assumption holds in our dataset.

Conclusion

In this article we have examined ministerial selection and analysed why some ministrable candidates succeed in achieving cabinet office after general elections whereas others fail. We argue that political parties form bargaining pools of ministrable candidates in order to signal their office-holder preferences during government-formation. These bargaining pools are interrelated to the inter-party bargains over offices and policies. The existing explanatory perspectives in the scholarly debate over ministerial selection and government-formation suggest that distinct selection criteria and temporal dynamics in these processes are relevant when explaining the composition of incoming cabinets.

Our analysis reveals that the classic determinants of ministerial selection presented in the existing literature applying a PA perspective are rather weak predictors of the success of ministrable candidates being selected from the

inter-party bargaining pools and achieving their associated ministerial offices. These findings confirm the relevance of intra-party screening and selection mechanisms prior to general elections. Hence, the bargaining pools already include those ministrable candidates complying with the set of predefined selection criteria. Yet, our analysis also reveals that the portfolio expertise of cabinet ministers is a criterion that is less strongly fixed by such preliminary screening and selection mechanisms within political parties. Instead, the policy experience of ministrable candidates – in terms of being members in the previous cabinet – is predetermined; but future cabinet ministers gain this experience not necessarily in an executive position for the policy sector for which they are eventually inaugurated. Furthermore, the size of the party talent pool matters. These results reveal the importance of inter-party bargaining over office-holders during government-formation and the strategizing behaviour of political parties during these processes, because German cabinets have comparatively fixed sets of portfolios: Political parties have almost complete information about the portfolios to be filled after general elections and thus the significant effect of the portfolio expertise of ministerial candidates shows that their office-holder preferences are relevant strategizing signals for their bargaining over offices and policies during government-formation processes.

In addition, our analysis reveals that ministerial selection after general elections is interrelated with the temporal dynamics of office and policy bargains. Many candidates were presented early during the selection process but not necessarily for the portfolio they eventually get as future cabinet minister. The strong effects of the duration of a ministerial candidate in the bargaining pool suggest that the stability and predictability of office-holder preferences of the coalescing parties increase the likelihood of ministerial candidates succeeding and acquiring a cabinet position. Yet, political parties tend not to put the most successful ministerial candidates for a distinct portfolio into the bargaining pool early, suggesting that the inter-party bargaining over office-holders is indeed a relevant aspect of government-formation that requires sincere choices and unfolds in distinct bargaining sequences.

As a consequence, our study of bargaining pools of political parties engaged in government-formation processes after general elections and the success of their ministrable candidates in achieving a ministerial office shows the crucial links between office-holder bargains and the inter-party bargaining over offices and policy. More importantly, it pleads for more theoretical scholarly work on the temporal dynamics of inter-party bargains during government-formation processes as well as their influence on ministerial selection.

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Notes

1. In a similar vein, the literature about cabinet stability and survival shows that the length and number of bargaining rounds before a cabinet is formed is decisive (Laver and Schofield, 1998; Strøm, 1995).
2. The dpa database was also used because it provides a full collection of its newswires since the early 1980s, whereas other databases offering digitalized content of German media (e.g. Nexis) offer these services only since the mid-1990s. In addition, the dpa has been used in qualitative studies on coalition negotiations in Germany as a reliable source for studying the dynamics of these processes (Dexheimer, 1973).
3. The Merkel I government can be regarded as a deviant government-formation process because the electoral outcome encouraged four political parties to start negotiations and thus to contribute ministerial candidates to the bargaining pool until the CDU/CSU and the SPD decided to form a grand coalition.
4. This procedure is adequate for answering our research question; an inclusion of all candidates who have been unsuccessful for other portfolios would create problems of endogeneity and thus compromise the interpretation of our results.
5. Nevertheless, there is a lively debate on conditional logit models and their limitations but also on modelling alternatives (see Glasgow et al., 2011). This is especially relevant for further research perspectives because the conditional logit model takes only portfolios into account where at least two candidates have been discussed.
6. In our dataset, one ministerial candidate did not obtain any educational degree, thus reducing the number of observations for the first and final models.
7. We also constructed several sub-indices to check the influence of different state levels in more detail, but the aggregated results indicate that none of the analysed levels seems to be a superior determinant for the appointment of cabinet minister.
8. We added the policy fields that exist only at Federal level, i.e. foreign affairs, defence and development aid.
9. These include the Chiefs of Staff at the Federal Chancellery and were coded as a separate portfolio. In addition, five Federal ministers for special issues were inaugurated after the German reunification in October 1990 but prior to the general election in December 1990. These were excluded from our dataset because their appointment was not decided in bargaining processes after a general election.
10. This finding resembles scholarly work on other European cabinets detecting a growing number of outsiders, i.e. of cabinet ministers with no governmental experience (e.g. Bäck et al., 2009).
11. This finding resembles other scholarly work on ministerial selection in Germany showing that executive experience at *Länder* level is relevant, whereas parliamentary party careers decrease in importance (Fischer and Kaiser, 2009: 29).
12. Strictly spoken for conditional logit regression this standardization is not necessary because the model considers only differences between candidates of a particular choice set

which holds the absolute length of every bargaining process constant for each. Nevertheless, we needed these values for our descriptive analyses (see above).

13. Based on the test design, we drop 10 percent of the alternatives from each set of candidates presented for a distinct portfolio and repeat this procedure 50 times. For the test result, average *p*-values are presented.

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