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A Special Majority Cabinet? Supported Minority Governance and Parliamentary Behavior in the Netherlands

Abstract: This article studies how the presence of the supported minority government Rutte-I affected patterns of legislative behavior. On the basis of the literature on minority cabinets, one would expect that during supported minority cabinets parliamentary parties cooperate more often across the division between coalition and opposition than under multiparty majority cabinet rule. Examining almost 30,000 parliamentary votes between 1994 and 2012, this study finds that on a host of indicators of coalition-opposition-cooperation, there was *less* cooperation “across the aisle” during the Rutte-I cabinet than during any cabinet before it. We explain this with reference to the encompassing nature of the support agreement as well as the impact of the cabinets’ ideological composition.

Keywords: minority cabinet; majority cabinet; parliamentary behavior; the Netherlands.

DOI 10.1515/wpsr-2014-0016

1 Introduction

In October 2010 a minority cabinet was formed in the Netherlands. The Rutte-I cabinet was the first minority cabinet since 1922, except for cabinets that formed as caretakers following a cabinet crisis. The radical right-wing PVV played the role of support party, supplying no ministers but supporting the coalition in the *Tweede Kamer*, the Dutch House of Representatives. Two center-right parties, CDA and VVD did supply ministers. Because of the status of the PVV as a support party, politicians and pundits alike did not know what to expect. Multiparty majority cabinets had been the norm (Andeweg 2011). During such

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cabinets, the opposition was sidelined, because political decisions were made during intra-coalition bargaining (Andeweg 2004). Therefore, some scholars, such as De Vries and de Lange (2010) saw the formation as an opportunity for the opposition to increase its influence. There was hope that the supported minority cabinet would offer more room for cooperation between parties in government and those in opposition. The new prime minister said he would “reach out to the opposition.” Would there be considerable cooperation “across the aisle?” Or would the coalition use its small majority in the *Tweede Kamer* to implement its policy agreement?

The Dutch cabinet Rutte I is one of a growing number of supported minority cabinets worldwide. Due to political fragmentation and the rise of new parties with radical ideologies, a number of countries, such as Denmark, New Zealand, Spain and Sweden, have seen experiments with supported minority cabinets (Bale and Bergman 2006b; Field 2009; Christiansen and Pedersen 2012). These supported minority cabinets do not easily fit the simple distinction between majority and minority cabinets. As the founder of the Rutte-I cabinet, Ruud Lubbers, explained, supported minority cabinets have characteristics of both government types. He called the Rutte-I cabinet both a “special minority cabinet,” because it actually did command a parliamentary majority, and a “special majority cabinet” since one of the parties involved did not supply ministers. The political science literature on supported minority cabinets lacks consensus regarding the likelihood of cooperation across the conventional coalition-opposition divide: on the one side, as the agreement between the cabinet parties and the support parties do not cover all policy area, these cabinets have to search for alternative, *ad hoc* minorities on some issues (Christiansen and Pedersen 2012). On the other side, Strøm (1990) considers such supported minority cabinets “majority cabinets in disguise,” because in the daily practice of governance, they function much like multiparty majority cabinets.

There is relatively little empirical research into parliamentary behavior in situations with supported minority government. Insofar as existing studies of these cabinets have focused on how they work, these analysis have been mainly descriptive and qualitative (Bale and Dann 2002; Bale and Bergman 2006a,b). From existing literature on parliamentary (voting) behavior we know that the distinction between opposition and coalition parties is pivotal in explaining voting behavior in majority cabinet situations (Hix and Noury 2011). We ask whether this changes when a supported minority cabinet is present. The aim of this article is to contribute to our insights in these general theoretical questions. Our analysis focuses on the Dutch case which, as we will argue below, provides relevant theoretical lessons. Our key question is: *to what extent did the presence of a supported*

minority cabinet affect patterns of legislative cooperation between coalition and opposition parties in the Netherlands?

The case of the Netherlands is interesting from a comparative perspective, because the country has traditionally had a sharp contrast between the coalition and the opposition (Andeweg 2004). Recent studies of minority cabinets have focused on three groups of countries: first, Scandinavian countries, like Denmark and Sweden, where minority cabinets are the norm (Bale and Bergman 2006b; Valen and Narud 2007; Christiansen and Pedersen 2012); second, South Korea and Spain, whose recent history is characterized by constitutional instability (Kim 2008; Field 2009); and, third, Commonwealth countries that were forced to deviate from the tradition of single party majority governments because of recent party system changes (Bale and Bergman 2006b; Godbout and Høyland 2011). The Dutch case allows us to compare legislative behavior during a supported minority cabinet with the country's tradition of majority cabinet rule.

While we expect that the type of cabinet will impact on legislative cooperation between opposition and coalition parties, we have to consider alternative explanations of legislative cooperation. One factor that has been put forward in the literature is the policy position of political parties (Hix and Noury 2011; Louwerse 2011; Otjes 2012). When ideology and government participation are concurrent, there is not a lot for coalition parties to win from cross the aisle: they disagree with the opposition on policy. This has to be taken into account in our analysis of the case of Rutte I.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We will first discuss a typology of cabinets. Next, from a review of the cabinet governance literature, we will derive expectations of how parliamentary parties are likely to behave under majority and minority cabinets. We will then turn to the Dutch case, discussing case selection, the party system and the governments examined in this article. After outlining our data sources, we will present the empirical results. In the conclusion we will discuss the comparative insights and theoretical implications for the study of supported minority cabinets this study offers.

2 A Typology of Cabinets

In systems with parliamentary government, a cabinet must enjoy the explicit or implicit confidence of a majority of the MPs. There are different ways to get a majority of MPs to support or at least tolerate the government. There are two basic distinctions in the literature on government types (Herman and Pope 1973: p. 192): first, between one party and multiparty governments. That is, whether all

ministers come from a single party or a coalition of parties. The second distinction is between minority and majority governments: whether the party or parties these ministers come from command a parliamentary majority. With these two distinctions we can recognize four different types of cabinets, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 further differentiates between a number of categories of minority and majority cabinets. A multiparty majority cabinet can be a minimal winning cabinet or an oversized cabinet. In a minimal winning coalition, each party is necessary for the government majority; and in an oversized coalition, one or more parties in the coalition are not necessary for a majority. Minority cabinets can be subdivided in supported and unsupported minority cabinets. In an unsupported minority cabinet, the cabinet has to build a majority for every vote on an *ad hoc* basis. These kinds of cabinets must negotiate continually with one or more parties outside of the government coalition to stay in office and implement their policy agendas (Lijphart 1999: p. 104; Strøm 1984, 1990). In a supported minority cabinet, government parties can form an agreement with one or more parties in the legislature to assure their support for the government in crucial votes, such as budget votes or confidence votes. In order to qualify as a supported minority cabinet, the support agreement must meet five criteria (Bale and Bergman 2006b: p. 424; Strøm 1984, 1990):

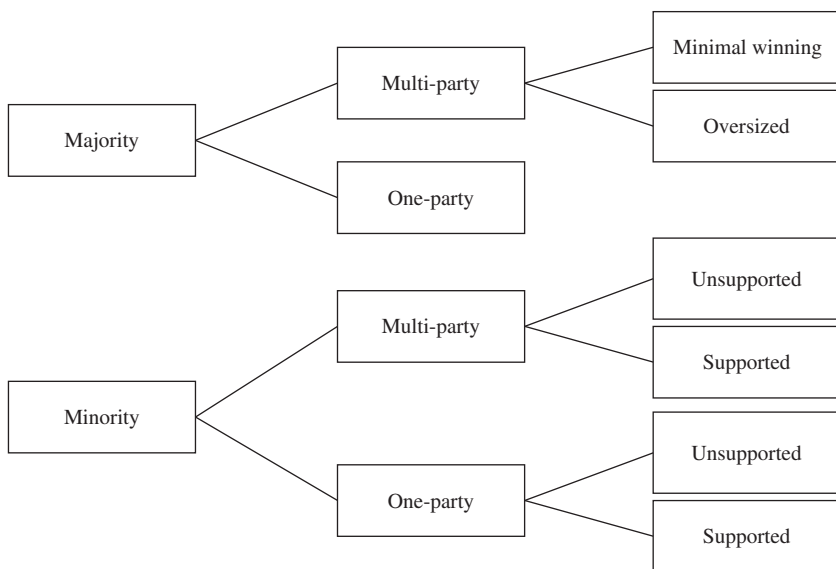


Figure 1: Different Types of Cabinet Government.

Adapted from Herman and Pope (1973).

1. it must involve parties that together command a parliamentary majority;
2. it has to be made public by the parties involved;
3. it ought to cover long-term policies of the cabinet in a comprehensive fashion;
4. it has to be negotiated prior to the formation of the cabinet;
5. and it must concern the continuation of cabinet.

As discussed above, such cabinets have been characterized in different ways: Strøm (1984: p. 223; 1997: p. 56) considers such cabinets, pejoratively, “majority cabinets in disguise” or “imperfect majority” cabinets because they actually command a majority in parliament. Bale and Bergman (2006b) use the more positive term “contract parliamentarianism,” because the cabinet has a written contract with one or more parties in parliament. This reflects a different assessment of this kind of in-between cabinet type: in the eyes of Strøm such cabinets are likely to function like majority cabinets because they can count on a reliable majority. In the eyes of Bale and Bergman, this majority is less monolithic: continual negotiation between the cabinet and the parliament is necessary.

Before we continue, a number of key terms need to be defined. First, a *government* party is a party that supplies ministers and has signed a coalition agreement. A *support* party is a party that does not supply ministers but has signed a support agreement. Together, government and support parties are called *coalition* parties. Any party that does not support the government in a written agreement is an *opposition* party.

3 Expectations

The division between coalition and opposition parties has a large impact on how parliament works, as research on the behavior of parties and individual MPs shows (Laver 2006; Hix and Noury 2011; Otjes 2011; Louwerse 2012). The type of cabinet may weaken or strengthen this division.

Laver (2006: p. 137) argues that coalition parties in multiparty parliamentary systems are “bound together by constitutional rules of collective cabinet responsibility” and will therefore vote alike. The opposition, which wants to differentiate itself from the coalition, will vote in the opposite way. Hix and Noury (2011: p. 9) hypothesize that in such systems, opposition MPs have a strong incentive to vote against any government proposal: if the coalition government is defeated in a parliamentary vote, this may lead to a cabinet crisis, snap elections and a change in the composition of the coalition. MPs from coalition parties have a strong incentive to vote in favor of any government proposal, because in a snap

election they risk losing their seat and their position as part of the governing coalition. While this does not mean that coalition parties will *always* vote in the same way, records of parliamentary voting behavior usually show high levels of agreement between government parties in parliamentary systems (Hix and Noury 2011).

Dutch cabinet governance so far has been characterized by close cooperation between coalition parties. Parliamentary multiparty majority governments are associated with “monism”: the osmosis of the government parties in parliament and the cabinet (Andeweg 1992: p. 161; 2004: pp. 575–576; 2006: p. 232). Cabinet and coalition parties set the broad outlines of government policy. Dutch cabinet ministers and MPs of coalition parties are closely bound together by a coalition agreement, which consists in a set of package deals, compromises and agreements not to deal with certain issues (Timmermans and Andeweg 2000: p. 376). A coalition party will certainly not accept its coalition partner sponsoring bills that go against the coalition agreement (Holzhacker 2002: p. 472). On issues outside of this agreement, in principle, parties have more liberty to pursue their own policy goals. In practice, however, the cabinet and MPs from coalition parties tend to foster close relations with each other and coordinate compromises and package deals on new issues, as they arise during weekly consultation of the prime ministers, the vice-prime minister(s) and the leaders of the government parliamentary parties (Timmermans and Andeweg 2000: p. 383).

How a support party may function depends on the presence and the nature of the support agreement between coalition parties. The differentiation between unsupported and supported minority cabinets only tells so much, as support parties can support cabinets on a selective basis. There is a host of different ways in which the relationship between parties that agree to take the full responsibility for government and parties that only support it can be organized. New Zealand offers a cornucopia of hybrid coalitions (Boston and Bullock 2010: p. 351). Support parties may offer confidence and supply: the support party will support the cabinet in motions of no confidence and budget-related votes. In return, these support parties may cooperate with government parties on policy issues. Parties can agree on a joint policy agenda, consultations about policy proposals and sharing information about policies (Bale and Bergman 2006b: pp. 435–436). If government and support parties agree to disagree on certain issues, the government parties have to search for *ad hoc* majorities like an unsupported minority coalition. Such *ad hoc* coalitions have formed in New Zealand, Denmark and Sweden, for instance on trade policy and EU integration (Bale and Bergman 2006b; Christiansen and Pedersen 2012). If there is a strong need for a minority cabinet to reach out on an *ad hoc* basis, this will result in cooperation “across the aisle,” or cooperation between the government and opposition parties in

parliament. In general, we expect that *party behavior is structured along coalition-opposition lines more often during multiparty majority cabinets than during supported multiparty minority cabinets.*

An alternative explanation for the extent to which coalition and opposition work together in parliament is the ideological composition of a cabinet. Ideology has been identified as one of the main factors driving parliamentary (voting) behavior (Alemán et al. 2009; Hix and Noury 2011; Louwerse 2011; Otjes 2012). We expect that voting along coalition-opposition lines will be the strongest when the ideological divide and the coalition-opposition divide are concurrent. One example is when all parties on the right form a coalition and all parties on the left are in opposition, as has been the case, for example, in Germany (CDU-CSU-FPD) between 2009 and 2013. Contrast this with a situation of a broad coalition, for example the CDU-CSU-SPD coalition that ruled Germany from 2005 to 2009. In the latter situation, the coalition parties have ideological incentives to work with opposition parties to reach certain policy goals or at least to signal to the voters that they are trying (Martin and Vanberg 2008). In the former situation, when ideology and government participation overlap to a large degree, there is little to win for coalition parties to work together with the opposition: they disagree with the opposition on policy. Opposition parties in the former situation will probably vote cohesively, because they are all from the same part of the political spectrum. The coincidence of the coalition-opposition divide and the left-right divide is likely to increase the degree of coalition-opposition voting. Thus we expect that *party behavior is structured along coalition-opposition lines more often during cabinets composed of parties that are either left-wing or right-wing than during cabinets consisting of both left-wing and right-wing parties.*

4 Party System and Governments

The Dutch political system is characterized by a proportional electoral system and a fragmented party system (Mair 1997: p. 210). In the period we study, 1994–2012, between eight and eleven parties gained parliamentary representation. In addition to the three main parties – the Christian-democratic CDA, the conservative-liberal VVD and the social-democratic PvdA – a number of parties were present during the entire period: the social-liberal D66, the green left GL, the socialist SP, the Christian party CU (through its predecessors RPF and GPV) and the orthodox Christian party SGP. They were joined by a number of new parties, such as the right-wing populist parties LPF and PVV. The last party is of special importance here, as it served as the support party during the 2010–2012 cabinet. The PVV was

formed when Geert Wilders, a VVD MP and a strong critic of Islam was required to leave the party in 2004.

While government formation is traditionally dominated by the big three parties, new parties can relatively easily participate in the government formation process (Mair 1997: p. 210). In addition to the systemic parties (PvdA, VVD, CDA and their predecessors), five parties have entered government since 1946. Between 1994 and 2010 eight different cabinets were formed (see Table 1). Three cabinets are of special importance to this study. The majority cabinet Balkenende-I was formed after the 2002 elections by CDA, VVD and LPF. It is considered one of the most right-wing Dutch cabinets in the period under study in terms of its ideological composition. The second cabinet of special importance, Balkenende-III, was formed in 2006, after the fall of Balkenende's second cabinet. CDA and VVD shortly formed a caretaker cabinet to prepare the budget. This cabinet acted as a *missionnaire* minority cabinet, without a support party.¹ The last cabinet of special importance to our analysis is the supported minority cabinet Rutte-I: CDA and VVD formed a minority cabinet, supported by the PVV, in 2010. The support agreement between the PVV, CDA and VVD covered four areas: the budget, immigration, safety and care for the elderly. The support agreement stipulated that the parties were divided on the position of Islam: according to the PVV, it was an ideology but according to the CDA and VVD it was a religion. The financial

Table 1: Cabinets in the Netherlands 1998–2010.

Cabinet	Parties	Period	Type
Kok-I	PvdA, VVD, D66	1994–1998	Minimal winning cabinet
Kok-II	PvdA, VVD, D66	1998–2002	Oversized cabinet
Balkenende-I	CDA, LPF, VVD	2002–2003	Minimal winning cabinet
Balkenende-II	CDA, VVD, D66	2003–2006	Minimal winning cabinet
Balkenende-III	CDA, VVD	2006–2007	Unsupported minority caretaker cabinet
Balkenende-IV	CDA, PvdA, CU	2007–2010	Minimal winning cabinet
	CDA, CU	2010	Unsupported minority caretaker cabinet
Rutte-I	VVD, CDA, PVV ^a	2010–2012	Supported minority cabinet
	VVD, CDA	2012	Unsupported minority caretaker cabinet

^aThe PVV served as support party.

¹ Dutch constitutional law differentiates between *demissionnaire* and *missionnaire kabinetten*. The former are cabinets that have offered their resignation to the King. The latter are cabinets that have not. This distinction is similar to but not the same as the distinction between caretaker and non-caretaker cabinets. A cabinet can be *missionnaire* and caretaker, if after the resignation of one cabinet a second cabinet is installed by the King in order to oversee daily affairs until the elections, as was the case with the cabinet Balkenende-III.

paragraph was of particular importance: the PVV agreed to support the budget (including the budget cuts that were foreseen), which more or less bound the party to all government policies that had financial consequences, even if these policies were not specified in the support agreement. In the coalition agreement the CDA and the VVD covered all aspects of government policy, including a number of issues on which they did not agree with the PVV, such as European integration. This coalition met the criteria for a supported minority cabinet: the parties had a majority in the *Tweede Kamer*; the agreement was public and negotiated before the cabinet's formation; it covered continued support of the cabinet and the most important political themes, both economic and cultural. On a number of issues, especially in the realm of foreign policy, the cabinet relied on the support of opposition parties. In the 2011 Provincial Council elections the cabinet parties failed to win a majority in the (indirectly elected) Senate. The government could, however, rely on the support of a single SGP senator, who agreed with the policy agenda of the cabinet. No agreements between the cabinet and the SGP were published. In 2012, the cabinet lost parliamentary support after the PVV refused to sign a new deal on the budget that would go beyond the bounds originally set out in the support agreement.

5 Research Design

We study voting behavior and proposal co-sponsorship in the Dutch parliament during seven different cabinets in the 1994–2012 period. We are particularly interested in the supported minority cabinet Rutte-I. The cabinet does present a challenge, however, in terms of analysis. It is not only the single supported minority cabinet that has existed in the Netherlands, it is also cohesive in ideological terms: almost all right wing parties were part of the coalition, while all left wing parties were in opposition. Therefore, we must be careful to disentangle the impact of the type of cabinet and its ideological stance on the extent to which opposition and coalition worked together in parliament.

Therefore our research design has a comparative logic. First, we compare the different measures of coalition-opposition behavior for the different cabinets during the 1994–2012 period. Two comparisons are particularly important to understanding the nature of the Rutte-I supported minority cabinet. Like the Rutte-I cabinet, the Balkenende-III cabinet was a *missionaire* minority cabinet. The Rutte-I cabinet had a support partner; the Balkenende-III cabinet did not. If the parliamentary behavior during the Rutte-I cabinet is similar to the Balkenende-III cabinet, this suggests that parliamentary behavior in the Rutte-I cabinet was

likely the result of its minority status. The second comparison is between Rutte-I and Balkenende-I: like the Rutte-I cabinet, the Balkenende-I cabinet was supported by a coalition that exclusively consisted of parties of the political right: in both cases, the conservative liberal VVD, the Christian-democratic CDA and a right-wing populist party (LPF in the one case, PVV in the other case). If the parliamentary behavior during the Rutte-I cabinet is similar to the Balkenende-I cabinet, this suggests that parliamentary (non)cooperation between opposition and coalition during the Rutte-I cabinet was the result of its political composition. In addition to this comparative analysis, we will also delve into specific voting patterns during the Rutte-I cabinet to understand the underlying dynamics.

The data for this analysis was obtained from an automated analysis of parliamentary minutes (*Handelingen*), which contain voting behavior of parties and MPs on bills, amendments and motions (Officiële Bekendmakingen 2013).² Votes are normally recorded per party, unless a roll call vote is requested. Therefore, we analyse patterns of behavior on the party level. We added information on the subject and sponsors of these proposals from the parliamentary database (Officiële Bekendmakingen 2013). We have a database with 29,894 parliamentary votes between 1994 and 2012.

We operationalize coalition-opposition cooperation by means of five indicators. The first is the percentage of unanimous votes: if many votes are unanimous, it is testament to a consensual style of politics in which differences between coalition and opposition parties are not pronounced (Pedrazzani 2012). If a (supported) minority cabinet would truly try to reach out to the opposition, we would expect to see a higher percentage of proposals adopted unanimously. The second indicator captures the extent to which government and opposition parties vote differently in non-unanimous votes. This was measured as follows. We determined a ϕ_{co} coefficient of association between opposition or coalition membership and an MP's voting decision for each vote (Van Aelst and Louwerse 2013). This measure equals *one* if all government MPs vote in favor of a proposal that is rejected by all opposition MPs (or if all opposition MPs vote in favor and the government MPs oppose). In those cases, the vote is split perfectly along coalition-opposition lines. For example, if all 90 coalition MPs vote in favor of a proposal and all 60 opposition MPs vote against, this coefficient equals 1. If, however, 50 coalition MPs vote in favor and 40 against, while 20 opposition MPs vote in favor and 40 against, ϕ_{co} equals 0.22. If there is no relationship between coalition or opposition membership and the voting decision – for instance when two MPs vote against a

² This database goes back to 1 January 1995. For the period 1994–1995, we rely on similar data from the Staten-Generaal Digitaal (Koninklijke Bibliotheek 2010) database. This database does, however, not contain information on the subject area of proposals.

bill, one from the opposition and one from the coalition – ϕ_{co} will equal zero. This can be expressed in the following formula:

$$\phi_{co} = \frac{|(C_y O_n) - (C_n O_y)|}{\sqrt{YNOC}}$$

Where C_y is the number of coalition MPs voting yes, C_n the number of coalition MPs voting no (defined similarly for the opposition O), and Y, N, O and C correspond to the total number of yes votes, no votes, opposition members and coalition members, respectively. In these calculations, the PVV, support party of the Rutte-I cabinet is included as belonging to the coalition side of the divide. In this way we observe whether it acts as if it were a normal coalition party.

The third and fourth variable measure whether the coalition and the opposition, respectively, vote in a coherent way. This can help to understand whether a low value of ϕ_{co} is caused by a lack of unity among coalition parties or among opposition parties. The third indicator captures the extent to which government MPs vote similarly. It equals *one* when all MPs belonging to government parties vote the same, and *zero* when these MPs are equally divided between supporting and rejecting a proposal (this is simply a Rice index). The fourth indicator captures in much the same way the extent to which opposition MPs vote the same. Our final measure of coalition-opposition cooperation, co-sponsorship of parliamentary proposals, is the percentage of motions sponsored by both opposition parties and coalition parties.³ We present all measures as means per cabinet period.

6 Results

The degree to which patterns of parliamentary voting behavior change between different cabinet periods is displayed in Figure 2. The first indicator of cooperation between coalition and opposition is the level of unanimous votes, votes in which there is no opposition from any party. This shows the ability of MPs and government ministers to build broad coalitions in parliament. If Rutte-I would really try to build bridges towards the parliamentary opposition, we would expect more unanimity in parliamentary voting behavior. We

³ The analysis of this variable is limited to proposals (motions or amendments), which are supported by at least two parties. As bills are tabled by the government in a large majority of cases, we exclude those from this analysis.

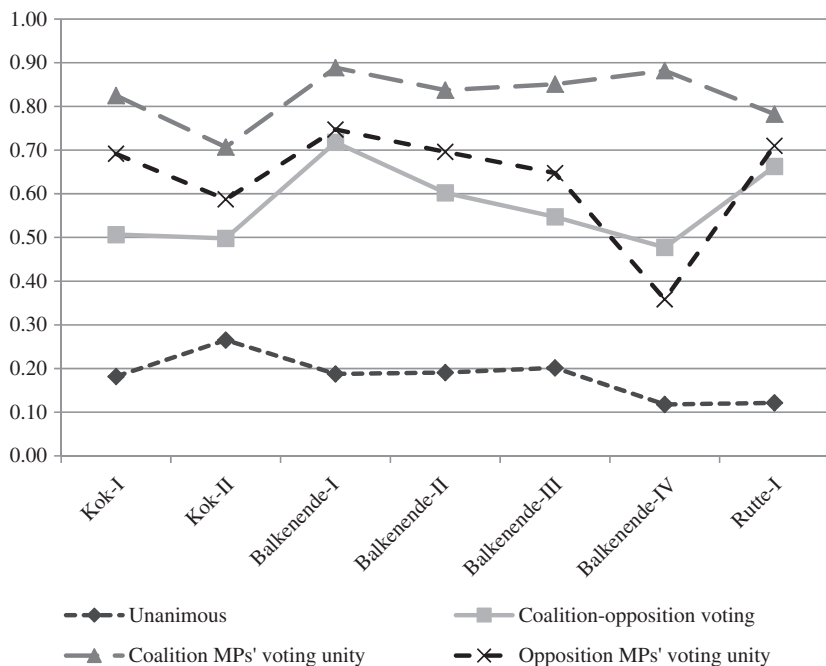


Figure 2: Voting Along Coalition-opposition Lines.

Note: The figures refer to the “*missionaire*” periods of the cabinets. Figures for all indicators except “Unanimous” refer to non-unanimous votes.

find, however, that during the Rutte-I cabinet, the percentage of unanimous votes was lower than the average of the entire period 1994–2012. During the Balkenende-III and the Balkenende-I cabinet the levels of unanimous voting were above average. This suggests that neither the composition nor the majority status of the cabinet affects the level of unanimous voting. Instead there appears to be a decline in unanimous voting over the last few years, which most likely relates to the oppositional stance taken by new populist parties in parliament, especially the PVV.

The second variable that we examine is the strength of the coalition-opposition divide in voting, the ϕ_{co} . We would expect the level of coalition-opposition voting to be lower during Rutte-I, but we find that the level of coalition-opposition voting during the Rutte-I term is actually *higher* than the average value of ϕ_{co} for the entire period. Only during the majority cabinet Balkenende-I, which was similar to Rutte-I in terms of its ideological composition, do we find a higher level of ϕ_{co} . The value of ϕ_{co} is lower during the Balkenende-III minority cabinet. This shows that, when measuring the strength of coalition-opposition voting, the

Rutte-I cabinet is much closer to the other right-wing cabinet than to the other minority cabinet in our dataset.

We also examine the voting unity of coalition MPs. We expect the Rutte-I coalition parties to vote divided on certain issues. On this variable, the Rutte-I cabinet scores *slightly* below average: the coalition votes similarly less often than the average coalition in the 1994–2012 period. This is the only standard by which Rutte-I meets our expectations of a supported minority cabinet. At the same time, the Balkenende-I and Balkenende-III cabinet score above average. This suggests that insofar as we can ascribe these differences to the type of cabinet, the support role of the PVV is important: the PVV does not support certain parts of government policy and therefore votes against it.

The final voting-based indicator we examine is the level of opposition unity: like coalition unity, we expect this to be lower during a minority cabinet, because in ad hoc coalitions the government could acquire the support of some of the opposition parties, breaking their unity. The Rutte-I cabinet, like the Balkenende-I cabinet, had the highest level of opposition unity voting. During these right-wing cabinets, the (left-wing) opposition acted in a unified fashion. The unsupported minority cabinet Balkenende-III cabinet has the second lowest value in the period. This suggests that insofar as the supported minority cabinet Rutte-I would have wished to work together with the opposition, there simply was little common ground between the right-wing government parties and the left-wing opposition.

The extent to which opposition and coalition parties propose motions and amendments together is the final standard by which we judge cooperation between political parties. Figure 3 displays the percentage of proposals with multiple sponsors that were supported by members from at least one government party and at least one opposition party. This percentage ranges from 17 during the Balkenende-I cabinet to 58 during the Kok-II period. During Rutte-I, this kind of cooperation occurred slightly more often than during the Balkenende-I cabinet. During the Balkenende-III cabinet half of the motions and amendments were co-sponsored by the coalition and the opposition. The patterns of co-sponsorship between the opposition and the coalition during Rutte-I fit with that of a cabinet that is ideologically distant from the opposition.

Overall, the data provide little support for the idea that the supported minority government opened up avenues for cooperation between coalition and opposition: three of our five indicators (coalition opposition voting, opposition voting, cosponsorship), show that during the Rutte-I cabinet, MPs did not behave as one would expect MPs to behave during a minority cabinet. Rather, the patterns were similar to the ones under the Balkenende-I cabinet and to the patterns that one can expect for a cabinet that united the political right. The only standard by

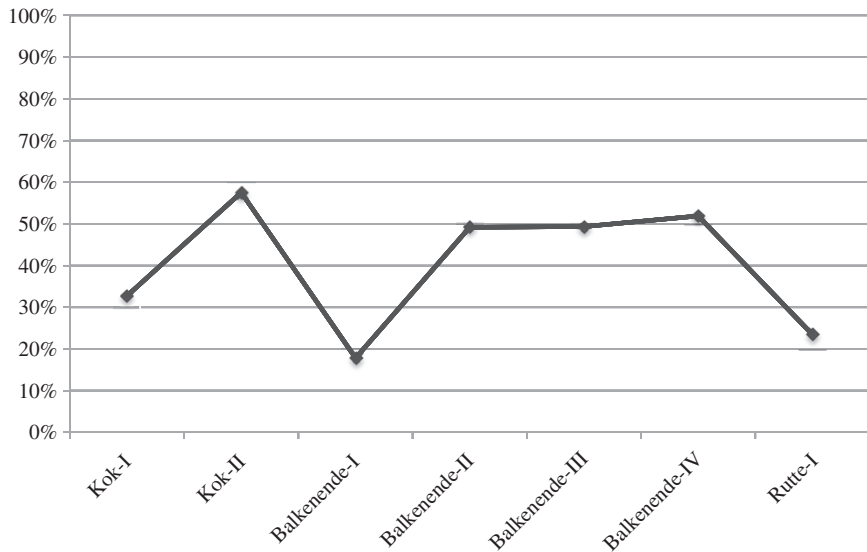


Figure 3: Coalition-opposition Co-sponsorship of Parliamentary Proposals.

Note: The line represents the percentage of cosponsored parliamentary proposals that were supported by at least one party from both the coalition and opposition side.

which the Rutte-I cabinet deviates from that standard is the extent to which the coalition parties voted in unity.

7 Cooperation during the Rutte-I cabinet

A possible objection to the preceding analysis is that too much focus is put on the general patterns in parliamentary behavior and that specific instances of cooperation between opposition and coalition parties were omitted. The content of the support agreement is especially relevant to a supported minority government: we would expect that there are more opportunities for cooperation between opposition and coalition parties on issues that are not covered by this agreement. Moreover, we could expect that the government focuses its efforts on finding support for legislation rather than trying to influence the vote on parliamentary motions and resolutions. Last, there are specific instances in which the supported minority government had to secure support from the opposition. Therefore, we will look at the Rutte-I period more in depth.

The support agreement between the CDA, VVD and PVV did not cover all political issues. One may expect that this affects the cooperation between

government parties, support parties and opposition; on issues included in the support agreement the government and support parties act as a traditional coalition, but on issues outside of the support agreement, there is more room for *ad hoc* cooperation across the aisle. We can match two categories of motions and amendments to the support agreement: “migration and integration” and “justice and crime.” The level of coalition-opposition voting is 0.72 on these issues (see Table 2). One issue area, international affairs, is clearly outside the remit of the agreement: level of coalition-opposition voting is 0.58. The remaining categories of issues fall under the support agreement for as far as they have financial consequences. We lack, however, data on the financial consequences of each vote. Coalition-opposition voting on these proposals holds in the middle between issues that are fully included or fully excluded from the support agreement (0.66). The more clearly an issue falls under the remit of the support agreement, the stronger parties’ voting behavior relates to their opposition or coalition role.

The pattern is similar when we look at the extent to which government parties vote the same: 0.87 for proposals within the scope of the agreement, 0.71 for international affairs and 0.78 for proposals in the “gray area.” If we look at coalition-opposition co-sponsorship, we find that even proposals on issues outside the scope of the support agreement – which therefore required cooperation with the opposition – were co-sponsored by government and opposition in only 29% of the cases. This is more frequent than proposals on issues that were part of the agreement (20%), but still well below the average for the entire 1994–2012 period. When considering all the votes, we find that coalition-opposition voting is somewhat more pronounced for issues that lie within the remit of the support agreement. On those issues, the cabinet operates clearly as a majority government. For issues outside the support agreement (international affairs), coalition-opposition is similar to what one observes on average during periods of majority government.

Table 2: Coalition-opposition Behavior per Issue.

Issue type	Coalition -Opposition voting	Coalition voting unity	Coalition- Opposition co-sponsorship
Included in support agreement ^a	0.72	0.87	0.20
Grey area ^b	0.66	0.78	0.23
Excluded from the support agreement ^c	0.58	0.71	0.29

^aImmigration and integration, justice and crime.

^bIssues not under a or c.

^cInternational affairs.

Minority governments mainly need to find support within the opposition for their legislative agenda. Voting on motions tabled by opposition parties is of lesser importance for the cabinet's ability to implement its policies. What happens if we restrict our analysis to bills? We do not find a major change in voting patterns on bills after the supported minority cabinet took office. Coalition parties voted in favor of legislation 97% (Rutte-I, Balkenende-II) to 99% (Balkenende-IV) of the time. Opposition parties supported legislation on average 87% (Kok-II, Balkenende-II, Balkenende-IV) to 88% (Rutte-I). Insofar as there are changes in voting behavior on legislation, these are small. Overall, most opposition parties support bills, and this did not change in any significant way after the minority government took office.⁴

The results presented here, namely the Rutte-I cabinet coalition parties' close collaboration, stand in contrast to some prominent examples of cases in which there was cooperation across the coalition-opposition divide (see Table 3). Rutte-I managed to convince many of the opposition parties to provide *ad hoc* parliamentary support on a small number of important political themes, such as a Dutch involvement in international operations in Afghanistan and Libya, pension reform and the European debt crisis. These were cases in which the PVV did not support the government. Three of four cases concerned foreign affairs, which was not part of the support agreement. While these examples did concern important issues, they were the exceptions to a general rule of relatively little cooperation between government and opposition parties. Similar examples of

Table 3: Prominent Issues with Cross-divide Cooperation.

	Kunduz mission	NATO actions in Libya	Support for Greece	Pension agreement
CDA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
VVD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PVV	No	No	No	No
D66	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
GL	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CU	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
PvdA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
SGP	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
SP	No	No	No	No
PvdD	No	No	No	No

⁴ Moreover, for the ten bills that were not supported by the PVV in the Rutte-I government, the PVV support was not "replaced" by other political parties as the average majority of the government was sizeable even in those cases.

cooperation across the aisle can also be found for periods of majority coalition government. Consider the Balkende-II cabinet: during this cabinet D66 did not support important issues, such as military missions to Uruzgan (Afghanistan) and the child care bill, and it even supported a censure motion against a government minister (Verdonk). In each of these cases opposition parties came to the rescue: the SGP and respectively the PvdA, the CU and the LPF. What was special during the Rutte-I period was that opposition parties felt they could hardly withhold their support on these issues, because opposing the government provided an even worse outcome than supporting it. The government only left issues for which it could relatively easily find opposition party support outside the remit of the support agreement. The opposition parties that supported the cabinet in these votes may be characterized as “captive” parties, which had no other option than supporting the cabinet (Bale and Bergman 2006a: p. 193). Not supporting the cabinet on this meant undermining the financial stability of the Netherlands and the Euro zone and the international reputation of the Netherlands.

The analysis of patterns of legislative cooperation between coalition and opposition parties during Rutte-I supports the general pattern found: the Rutte-I cabinet functioned much like a conventional majority cabinet. Even on issues excluded from the support agreement, the division between coalition and opposition was stronger or as strong as it was during majority cabinets; legislation received broad support from the coalition and the opposition, as it had been the case with most preceding cabinets; and the cabinet received support from the opposition on crucial votes when one of the coalition parties refused to support it, which had also happened in previous cabinets.

8 Discussion and Conclusion

The data presented show that patterns of conflict and cooperation between coalition and opposition during the Rutte-I cabinet are quite similar to the cooperation during a majority coalition. The PVV voted loyally with the government, especially on the issues that were covered in the support agreement. The cabinet could be described as a “special majority cabinet.” Strøm’s phrase “a majority cabinet in disguise” might be even more appropriate. Neither the parliament nor the government took the opportunity to build majorities across the coalition-opposition divide on a regular basis.

The patterns found here indicate that rather than the majority status of the cabinet, its political composition is key to understanding parliamentary behavior during a cabinet. The two cabinets in which MPs from coalition and opposition

voted the most often in two blocs were the Balkenende-I and the Rutte-I cabinets. While the first cabinet was a multiparty majority cabinet and the other was a supported minority cabinet, both cabinets consisted of parties from the (center-) right: CDA, VVD and either LPF or PVV. In both cases the opposition consisted mainly of left-wing parties. The political divide between opposition and coalition and the left-right policy dimension coincided in these two cases. The coalition-opposition divide was strongest during the governments that had the most outspoken policy positions (the right-wing Balkenende-I and Rutte-I governments) and the most coherent opposition. In contrast a number of the cabinets studied (Kok-I, Kok-II and Balkenende-IV) were formed by parties from the left as well as the right. This also meant that the opposition was divided between left and right. In order to reach their policy goals (other than the compromises in the coalition agreement), left-wing coalition parties could work together with left-wing opposition parties; and right-wing coalition parties could cooperate with right-wing opposition parties.

Our findings do not imply that the nature of the cabinet government does not at all affect the legislative relationship between opposition and coalition parties. During the minority cabinet Balkenende-III we do see at least some indication of increased cooperation between opposition and coalition (compared to the previous majority coalition). However, any effect of a (supported) minority status failed to materialize in the case of Rutte-I because of its ideological composition (a right-wing cabinet versus a left-wing opposition) and because of the encompassing nature of the support agreement. If the support agreement would have been more limited and the government more centrist, we would have expected to see more opportunities for parliamentary cooperation between opposition and coalition. To an extent, the centrist Rutte-II cabinet that took office in 2012 shows this. While the government parties have a majority in the House of Representatives, they lack a majority in the Senate. As a result, the government has already struck a deal with opposition parties on a number of issues (housing, budget) to secure support for their proposals in the Senate.

Our case study of the Netherlands can help to shed light the relationship between the type of government and parliamentary behavior but our analysis cannot falsify or corroborate hypotheses. One alternative explanation for our findings that cannot be tested within the limits of our design stems from sociological institutionalism perspective (Hall and Taylor 1996). It may be argued that patterns of parliamentary cooperation are rooted in existing norms, which persist in shaping behavior even when the formal institutional context changes. In the Netherlands, majority cabinets with their intra-coalition bargaining are the norm: political parties only pursued a minority cabinet after ninety years of majority government, even though there are no constitutional rules preventing the formation

of such a cabinet (Andeweg et al. 2011: p. 147). It appears to be the case that the preference of Dutch politicians for multiparty majority government over minority government is rooted in social norms, not in legal rules. A division between coalition and opposition parties may also be a reflection of a persistent norm. MPs may act from a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1984). Coalition parties may cooperate because that is what coalition parties “do.” The change from majority to minority cabinet governance did not affect coalition-opposition behavior along the lines we expected, perhaps because of persistent norms. We need more variance to determine, which pattern holds in more general terms. If we contrast the results found here with those found for Denmark, a country with a tradition of minority cabinets (Christiansen and Pedersen 2012) we can see that in Denmark, room for *ad hoc* legislative minorities was larger during both those minority cabinets which were formed by parties of the left and those which were formed by parties of the right. This is an indication that it is not the type of cabinet or its ideological composition that matters for the behavior of MPs, but the tradition of minority cabinet rule: the parties forming the Dutch Rutte-I government acted as though they were in a multi-party majority cabinet, because that is the norm.

These results provide an agenda for further research. In order to test the results of this study further, researchers may want to consider a quantitative approach that takes into account multiple alternative explanations of parliamentary cooperation between opposition and coalition parties. This would allow them to tease out more precisely to what extent the political color of the cabinet or its majority status matters. Our study also found marked differences between votes on different issues and different kinds of proposals. Further research may want to find out to what extent this impacts upon coalition-opposition voting behavior. A comparative analysis that compares our findings with those in other countries is also worthwhile: as we discussed above, a tradition of majority cabinets may be a third explanation of the level of coalition-opposition voting. A comparative study of countries with traditions of majority and minority cabinets may be worthwhile to determine whether persistent norms of a political system, rather than the composition or nature of coalition cabinet determine the behavior of MPs.

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