

**HAS THE LABOUR PARTY OR THE  
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS PROVED MORE  
SUCCESSFUL IN THE PARTNERSHIP FOR  
SCOTLAND COALITION 1999-2003?  
AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT**

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On 6 May 1999 elections to the first democratic Scottish Parliament were held. The design of the institution itself owed much to the work of the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Its recommendations included the use of the Additional Member System for elections to the Parliament. Scottish Labour adopted this policy and enshrined it in the Scotland Act 1998, which gave birth to devolved government. In multi-party Scottish politics it was always probable that this broadly proportional electoral system would result in no single party having a parliamentary majority. This meant that coalition government was likely – and likely by design, not accident, for the first time in Scottish politics. Consequently, when Labour won the election of 6 May (with fifty-six seats) it was indeed short of an outright majority. Whether fearing the potential pitfalls of leading a minority administration, or in an attempt to embrace the power-sharing principles espoused by the Constitutional Convention, Labour leader Donald Dewar approached Liberal Democrat leader, Jim Wallace (whose party had taken seventeen seats), to propose a coalition government. On 14 May the two leaders signed a Partnership for Scotland agreement with **A Programme for Government** outlining an agreed, joint policy platform. With the May 2003 election the

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first session of devolved government was brought to a close and, consequently, the function and achievements of the concluded Partnership are open for scrutiny.

Academics have paid little attention so far to the dynamic of coalition government in Scotland. Indeed this is the first attempt to evaluate how successful the Scottish Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats have proved as respective coalition partners in the first session of the Scottish Parliament (1999-2003) and to explain why this might have been the case. In order to do this it is prudent to evaluate the Partnership in light of international comparative literature on the topic of coalition government. I will also then seek to highlight the ways in which unique aspects of the Scottish case may, in turn, inform the theories of coalition government.

#### **PARTY SUCCESS IN A COALITION GOVERNMENT – WHAT IT ENTAILS AND HOW IT IS ACHIEVED**

When theorists discuss the dynamics of coalition government, they tend to treat political parties as individual rational actors. Consequently, they contend that parties only join coalition governments to serve their own self-interest and that their success as a coalition partner can be determined by their ability to achieve their defined ends within that coalition, and relative to its other member parties.

In **Policy, Office or Votes**, Müller and Strøm (1999) comment that all theories suggested as to how party leaders make 'hard decisions' may be viewed as inter-linked in a 'unified framework of analysis' consisting of three motivating factors: office, policy, or vote seeking on behalf of their party (Müller and Strøm 1999, p.12). These three influences vary and may co-exist and conflict. Müller and Strøm's analysis is of behaviour wider than that of coalition dynamic, but it may be considered adaptable to the examination of parties' motivation in joining a coalition government.

Müller and Strøm note that the second of these factors, the policy-seeking objective of a party, 'derives mainly from coalition theory' (Müller and Strøm 1999, p.7). Parties, they argue, seek to participate in a coalition government in order to put their policies into practice. Certainly, all parties are likely to hold office and influence policy, but they may vary over how much emphasis they place on either one, depending upon their own

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conception of success. In particular, Müller and Strøm contend that the greater the degree of decentralisation within a political party, the more policy-motivated it becomes, because of its empowered membership (Müller and Strøm 1999, p.17). The decentralised party is therefore more likely to seek policy influence than more centralised parties which are more concerned with the 'goal of assuming governmental office' (Müller and Strøm 1999, p.292). It is important then to bear the different emphases in mind when examining criteria for success.

Gamson (1961) wrote one of the first major studies of coalition bargaining. He hypothesised that coalition partners could expect to receive portfolio allocations that were proportionate to their 'seat share' in the coalition – a view supported by further studies (Browne and Franklin (1973) and Morelli (1999)). For a party to obtain more or fewer government seats than their proportion of parliamentary seats in the coalition could therefore indicate success or failure, respectively. In the view of these earlier theorists of government coalitions (in parliamentary democracy), obtaining the largest possible share of seats in the government was certainly the principal aim of political parties. Government positions were seen as the greatest means to obtaining 'political office benefits' (Riker 1962, p.33).

However, later theorists have tended to recognise that holding office is very often instrumental to influencing policy, rather than a prize in itself. Various theories were integrated in a study by Paul Warwick (2001) that sought to establish which factors determined parties' influence on coalition policies. Warwick used data from the Comparative Manifestoes Project (CMP), first employed by Budge and Laver (1992). This research assesses the government's declared policy position across a standard range of subjects as the weighted mean position of the parties composing the cabinet, with each party's seat share providing its weight. The effect of a factor on policy formation is measured by looking at the degree to which that factor creates a significant policy outcome – i.e. the deviation from the cabinet weighted mean. This study is the most comprehensive analysis of factors affecting policy outcome yet undertaken.

Warwick's study found that very few factors significantly influenced policy formation. It did find that the connection between the weighted mean position of cabinet parties and the government's declared policy stand is very close. Warwick cites this as evidence of the validity of Gamson's Law (1961) in application to overall coalition policy pay-offs, as well as its traditional

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application to portfolio allocations. Secondly, he argued that the formateur<sup>1</sup> party is able to exert disproportionate influence – as suggested by Budge and Laver (1992) – but notes that the ‘effect is quite limited’ (Warwick 2001, p.1231). Thirdly, Warwick found that the finance minister’s party does gain in policy influence or ‘wield some degree of influence ... beyond that to which its size alone would entitle it’ – supporting the hypothesis of Laver and Shepsle (1996) that ministers act as ‘policy dictators’ seeking the implementation of their own party’s policies within their department and that the finance minister tends then to allocate greater funds to ministers from his/her party. Fourthly, he held that the political mean (i.e. how left/right wing) of the opposition parties tends to encourage the attitude of the government to move away from its original mean position to take account of theirs. However, these effects were also quite small (Warwick 2001, p.1232).

Yet if these factors indicate measures by which to judge individual parties’ relative success in coalition governments, they do not provide an explanation for the variation in parties’ ability to negotiate these outcomes. The impact of structural organisation on political parties must also be analysed. Academics have divided over whether the key factor of bargaining power – that is the ability of a party to commit itself to parliamentary co-operation over its decisive preferences (Leubbert 1986), by over-coming internal divisions – is best achieved by political parties with centralised or decentralised internal structures. For a definition of ‘centralised’ and ‘decentralised’ Moshe Maor’s (1998) distinction may be used. That is to say parties that involve more individuals in the formulation of policy at each stage of its development, with ‘horizontal’ influence by party members and sub-groups, are decentralised. Those parties are centralised that involve fewer individuals and show more ‘vertical’ influence in policy formation, in that leaders impose decisions on members and subgroups (Maor 1998, p.9). Clearly these categories lack definitive borders, but that is satisfactory for the point of view of this study: it makes sense to see centralisation as a continuum, rather than categorical, especially as the parties studied will be considered in relative terms.

The traditional view has tended to support strong party structures as being best placed to bargain within a coalition. For example, Panebianco (1988) believed that the strength of centralised parties was greatest where the party

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<sup>1</sup> *The formateur party is the party that proposes coalition government to another party or parties. It usually is, but need not be, the largest coalition party.*

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was strongly institutionalised and therefore better able to defend its stability against internal challenge than weaker counterparts, especially as party alliances were considered to be inevitably destabilising. However, such views were never tested by a comprehensive empirical study.

By contrast, Moshe Maor's more recent work has looked at post-war coalition building behaviour in five parliamentary democracies in Western Europe and concluded that decentralised parties have more bargaining power and are better placed to cope with internal dissatisfaction. This leads to greater policy influence in the formation and maintenance of governing alliances.<sup>2</sup> In his study, which has provided the best empirical evidence yet of the effect of internal party structure, Maor provides the following principal hypotheses:

- Firstly, when the leader of a centralised party faces dissent arising from either intra-elite (i.e. other parliamentarians) or elite-follower (i.e. extra-parliamentary party members or supporters) conflict over an issue, they will seek to emphasise the decisive preferences – or main policy aims within the coalition – of the leadership. The leadership then tends to impose structural constraints on the coalition or party, in order to quell rebellion. In this situation openly expressed disagreement or 'voice' opposition is given no outlet within the party and the dissenters may either seek to voice private opposition, or adopt the 'exit strategy' – that is for the parliamentarians to leave the coalition, and members to leave the party.
- Secondly, decentralised party leaderships, when faced with intra-elite or elite-follower conflict also tend to emphasise decisive preferences. However, they tend to tolerate more internal dissent at both levels. At the parliamentary level a greater level of voice opposition is accepted, and it is rarer for such a party to seek structural constraints to prevent its parliamentarians rebelling. At the level of membership and supporters, the leadership tends to tolerate factional activities that oppose the leadership view, so that opposition may be voiced from within the party.

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<sup>2</sup> *The five states selected by Maor are the UK, France, Norway, Italy and Denmark (Maor 1998, p.xiv)*

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- Thirdly, Maor therefore contends that the toleration of dissent shown by decentralised parties to their elites and followers allows their leaders to be more flexible in coalition negotiation than centralised party leaders, offsetting ‘any attempt for dissatisfaction to emerge outside the leadership’s “zone of control”’ (Maor 1998, p.65). This increases the bargaining power of the decentralised party over the centralised and gives them a better negotiating position to achieve their ends.

To determine whether Labour or the Liberal Democrats has proved most successful as a coalition partner within the Partnership for Scotland and why this has been so, the theories above provide a series of questions to be addressed. The first issue to explore is one that underpins the further questions: which party has the more decentralised structure.<sup>3</sup>

As regards measuring the success of the coalition parties, the pertinent questions derive from the conclusions of Warwick (2001). They are: whether any partner succeeded in achieving a disproportionately high number of ministerial portfolios within the Executive; whether any party was able to gain an overall policy influence disproportionate to its size within the Partnership; whether the formateur party’s role gave it disproportionate influence; whether either party proved more able than the other to use ministerial office as a means for ‘policy dictation’; whether the finance minister gave a material advantage to departments headed by ministers from his party; and whether the mean position of the opposition parties on the left-right scale has affected the policy outcomes of the government, to the advantage of either party.

Finally, I will then seek to look at how Moshe Maor’s theories on party structure may apply to the Partnership parties. Firstly, I will examine whether patterns of internal party dissent within the Partnership parties have been dealt with by their respective leaderships in accordance with the way in which Maor hypothesised. Secondly, I will seek to show whether the more

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<sup>3</sup> *It is essential to establish this first as Strøm and Müller’s (1999) theory that a party’s view of what constitutes success is influenced by its degree of structural centralisation and Moshe Maor’s (1998) notion that centralisation affects a party’s ability to achieve party ends mean that that this issue will underpin all further chapters.*

decentralised party has therefore maintained greater bargaining power and 'success' within the coalition government.

### **WHICH PARTY HAS THE MORE DECENTRALISED STRUCTURE?**

Before progressing any further, we have to establish which party is most centralised. Maor's definition that parties with more 'horizontal' policy influence from members and subgroups (rather than those with 'vertical' imposition of policy by the leadership) is relevant here. The influence of party members on leadership policy can be examined at two levels in this case. The first is the development of policies for the 1999 manifestoes of each party. The second is the degree to which the revised policy programme agreed by party leaders Dewar and Wallace in the Programme for Government (Dewar and Wallace 1999) was consulted upon and agreed by party members from each party.

There is little doubt that Liberal Democrat members had more influence on their party's policies than was the case in the Labour Party. When the two parties set about determining their policies for the Scottish Parliament election in 1999, they both did so with the recognition that their conference is the only place in which official party policy may be decided. This approach was utilised for policy development by the parties throughout the course of the coalition term. However, mechanisms for determining policy settlement within conference itself were much less open to Labour members' influence.

For Labour, party conference motions determining manifesto commitments in the run-up to the 1999 election were primarily the work of the Scottish Policy Forum (SPF)<sup>4</sup>. This body consists of ninety four members, with thirty two constituency representatives, twenty trade unionists, five national policy

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<sup>4</sup> *It should be noted that the Scottish Policy Forum Process was in the process of being established in 1999. Although it contributed much of the policy adopted at conference for the 1999 manifesto (and has since become the only body charged with proposing motions) through a 'pilot' scheme, other actors were able to exert influence at that time – and, according to a party worker who assisted with the 'rolling out' of the scheme, they tended to be more elite-driven than the SPF (interview, 12 December 2003). For the sake of clarity however, it will suffice to consider the role of the SPF as being relevant to this study.*

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representatives and four Young Labour members, all elected by their own constituency/group, plus seventeen MPs, MSPs, MEPs and councillors (Scottish Policy Forum News 2001, p.1). Not only does this mean that the motions that reach conference are decided by a small group, but the SPF's decisions over what to table are highly influenced by more senior elites within the party during the Forum's policy formulation process.

In particular, the SPF operates through eight Policy Commissions, which are subdivisions of the SPF and create policy for specific areas. Here, SPF members sit alongside representatives of the government and the Scottish Executive Committee (SEC). The SEC is dominated by Labour politicians, elected at both the local and national levels. The policy commissions do discuss policy proposals from local and regional policy forums, but are free to select from these those that they wish to discuss. Moreover, the Commissions then draft 'by consensus' policy documents in their given area, put them out to consultation (and a preliminary conference vote), but amend them as they see fit, vote within the full policy forum on the wording of the final draft, and then present it for debate at conference, where the policy is either adopted or fails, at the end of this two-year process. In this way the SPF is involved in policy influence, at every stage. Consequently, the leadership elites are able to influence every policy-forming motion that goes to conference from what is in any event a very small number of people who are entitled to table them (**Labour Party Policy Making – Who Does What?** 1999)<sup>5</sup>. This is not to say that the process is undemocratic, or completely vertical in nature, but it does highlight the way in which party elites are able to control Scottish Labour policy to the exclusion of ordinary members.

By contrast, the Liberal Democrats' conferences are much more open to policy influence by the membership. Under Part E, Section 18 of the party's constitution, motions for debate – that become policy if passed – can be tabled by much lower-level individuals including 'any Local Party, Associated Organisations, not less than twenty-five representatives or, at the discretion of the Conference Committee, any member of the Party who is not a member of a Local Party' (Scottish Liberal Democrats 1998, p.11). Under Part G, Section 2 a Policy Committee, heavily dominated by elected representatives of the party, exists in order to take soundings, consider policy

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<sup>5</sup> (<http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/howthepartyworks/> 20 March 2003)

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and table motions to conference (Scottish Liberal Democrats 1998, pp.16-17). However, those motions may of course be rejected by the said conference – and the Policy Committee has no authority to over-rule motions tabled to conference by other groups or individuals. In this way Liberal Democrat manifesto policy was more heavily influenced by members due to its internal decentralisation.

Between 7 May 1999 – when Labour’s Dewar approached Liberal Democrat leader Wallace to propose discussions with the view to forming a coalition – and 13 May 1999 when the deal was signed, there were intensive negotiations over the arrangements of a possible deal. Any agreement deal would clearly compromise policies from both parties – and the lack of consultation from outwith the negotiating team picked by Dewar demonstrates the way in which Labour’s decision-making was much more centralised than the Liberal Democrats’.

In ‘The Negotiation Diaries’, Henry McLeish makes clear that Dewar picked Labour’s negotiation team without wide consultation (Finnie and McLeish 1999, pp.57-58). This team consisted of five MSPs, including Sarah Boyack and Tom McCabe, who had not been seen as particularly prominent until that point and whose appointments therefore, according to one Labour MSP, ‘raised a few eyebrows within the SPLP’<sup>6</sup> (Watson 2001, pp.6-7). However, the views of the SPLP on the make-up of their negotiating team, or the terms of any potential deal with the Liberal Democrats, were never sought until the evening of Thursday 13 May – the day before the party leaders wanted the Partnership Agreement signed – when it was presented to the SPLP for approval as a completed document (Finnie and McLeish 1999, p.60). Labour’s position on the deal, until that time, had been decided entirely by the centralised workings of five Labour Parliamentarians, including the leader who chose them for the task.

By contrast, the Liberal Democrats adopted a much more decentralised approach to deciding on its coalition strategy. The party’s Executive had, in anticipation of a possible coalition with Labour, published a Coalition Framework earlier in the year. This made clear that any coalition agreement had to be based upon a joint programme of government, approved by a two thirds majority vote of both the Executive and the Parliamentary Party.

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<sup>6</sup> *Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party (SPLP)*.

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Moreover the negotiating team had to be elected by and from the Executive. It therefore included three non-parliamentarians at the internal party level and one of those on the group that met directly with the Labour team (Lynch 2001, pp.30-31). This strategy was deployed, and one of the negotiators, Ross Finnie, reveals that throughout the week, the Parliamentary Party and Executive met regularly to discuss the progress of talks, including the drafting of policy concessions. Ordinary members did not have a large influence, but the Liberal Democrat process was certainly less elitist than the Labour Party's approach.

There can be little doubt then that at both the policy and coalition negotiation levels, the Liberal Democrats were, throughout the course of the Parliament, in possession of a more decentralised and inclusive party structure that welcomed wider party member influence than Labour's. In Moshe Maor's terms, the Liberal Democrats tended towards more 'horizontal', less 'vertical' means of policy decision than Labour.

### **MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIO ALLOCATION IN THE PARTNERSHIP FOR SCOTLAND**

As noted, coalition partners seek to achieve success in a coalition by achieving office and by seeking to influence policy. It is pertinent then to examine the extent to which Labour and the Liberal Democrats succeeded in attaining ministerial portfolio allocation. This may be done firstly by looking at which party received the disproportionately greater allocation and, secondly, by looking at the importance placed upon these statistics by the parties themselves, in light of their relative degrees of structural centralisation.

In raw, numerical terms the Labour Party was the more successful of the coalition partners concerning the acquisition of office – but only by a fraction. With fifty-six MSPs, compared to the Liberal Democrats' sixteen (the seventeenth, Sir David Steel, had left the Liberal Democrats in order to become Presiding Officer, before the coalition deal was agreed) Labour parliamentarians comprised 77.8% of the government benches in the Scottish Parliament, compared to 22.2% for the Liberal Democrats (see Table 1). In a representative split, the two parties would be expected to obtain the same percentage of ministerial portfolios in the coalition – in order to achieve the distribution envisaged by Gamson's Law. However, the initial agreement

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reached between the two parties gave the Labour Party 82% of the ministerial posts, and the Liberal Democrats 18% (of both cabinet and deputy ministerial posts). Had the Liberal Democrats negotiated a further ministerial post both parties would have been as close as possible to their statistical entitlement, with 77.3% and 22.7%. This would have resulted in the Liberal Democrats being over-represented by a marginal 0.5% – but Labour were successful in negotiating that the over-representation ought to fall on their side.

In the subsequent ministerial reshuffles of October 2000 and November 2001 (see Table 1), the Liberal Democrats gained in ministerial representation, with 20% of ministers, overall – the nearest that the two parties could come to statistical proportionality. It is clear then that Labour did have a consistent ministerial advantage. However, this ‘over-representation’ was always marginal – and became more so as time passed by – to the extent that any reduction in representation would have left them with a proportional deficit.

**Table 1**

**Ministerial Appointment in the Scottish Executive coalition 1999-2003  
(excluding non-party political appointments: Advocate-General and Solicitor-General)**

%	May 1999 - Oct 2000	Oct 2000 - Nov 2001	Nov 2001 - Mar 2003
Coalition MSPs in Labour Party	77.8	77.8	77.8
Coalition MSPs in LibDems	22.2	22.2	22.2
Labour Ministers in Cabinet	81.8	81.8	80
Lib Dem Ministers in Cabinet	18.2	18.2	20
Labour Deputy Ministers	81.8	77.8	80
Lib Dem Deputy Ministers	18.2	22.2	20
Labour Ministers Overall	82	80	80

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Lib Dem Ministers	18	20	20
Overall			

### *Sources:*

*May 1999 – October 2000: New Scotland, New Politics? (Paterson et al 2001, p.23).*

*October 2000 – November: Scottish Government and Politics (Lynch 2001, p.37).*

*November 2001 – March 2003: Scottish Executive Online, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics?pageID=61> (accessed 27 March 2003).*

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It seems likely that Müller and Strøms' contention that the more decentralised the party 'the more policy-oriented the party is likely to become at the expense of office-seeking' (Müller and Strøm 1999, p.17) is in effect here. For the initial allocation, the more centralised Labour Party was able to construct its negotiating team from its elected MSPs, without wider party consultation. By contrast, the decentralised Liberal Democrats appointed their party's treasurer, Denis Robertson Sullivan, to their team (Watson 2001, p.7). This is evidence in itself of Strøm and Müllers' view that the decentralised party encourages wider influence from a more policy-oriented membership. The logic of this position is that Labour would be more focused on ministerial office and less distracted from this by their emphasis on policy considerations than the Liberal Democrats. Certainly that is the view of the Liberal Democrat MSP Donald Gorrie:

Our team were concerned almost purely with policy commitments and foolishly, in my view, they therefore drifted from paying sufficient attention to securing an appropriate balance of portfolios between the parties. We could certainly have got another minister if we had pushed for it. In many coalition governments the smaller parties are always given disproportionately high representation. We weren't, and Labour were in no hurry to offer it. They were rather more concerned with ministerial jobs.

(interview, 28 January 2003)

This does not however explain why the Liberal Democrat leader, Jim Wallace, never attained a disproportionately large share of ministerial portfolios, at subsequent ministerial reshuffles. The joint Labour-Liberal Democrat Programme for Government makes clear that it would be possible

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for him to request this, with ministerial appointments made 'by the First Minister, following consultation with the Deputy First Minister' (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.12). There are two potential reasons for this.

The first is that Wallace felt that the original allocation of four ministers was fair and not worth changing. The second is financial. According to Liberal Democrat MSP Margaret Smith, the rules governing the allocation of Short money, to fund 'opposition' parties, was a major factor. This money is used by parties to employ researchers and thus develop policy. In accordance with Section 3(2) of Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 1745: **The Scottish Parliament (Assistance for Registered Political Parties) Order 1999**, the Liberal Democrats would have forfeited their entitlement to Short money if their MSPs had exceeded 'one fifth of the total number of members of the Scottish Executive and junior Scottish Ministers' (Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 1745 1999, p.4). Section 2 (3) and (4) of the Act set the amount of Short money available per MSP – excluding those serving as an Executive Minister (Section 3 (1)) – at £5000 per annum, rising in line with inflation thereafter (Section 2 (5) – (7)) and totalling an initial £65000 per annum for the Liberal Democrats (Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 1745 1999, pp.3-4). Smith said this was simply deemed 'unacceptable – both by Jim (Wallace) and the (parliamentary) group as a whole' (interview, 28 February 2003). Either way, it would suggest that portfolio allocation is less of a priority to the Liberal Democrat leadership than policy. This may help explain Labour's ability to maintain a small advantage in the portfolio allocation.

### **INFLUENCING POLICY IN THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE**

The second relevant measure of coalition success highlighted by Müller and Strøm (1999) is that of policy influence. It is therefore appropriate in assessing who did the better job to look at the overall performance of the two parties in contributing policy to the coalition, by examining the factors that Warwick (2001) cites as relevant to facilitating this. It is also pertinent to assess, again in light of the degree of the parties' centralisation, how much of a 'success' policy influence is considered by them.

In terms of influencing policy, it is the smaller coalition partner that has proven able to obtain the disproportionately high level of influence. The theory that the weighted mean position of cabinet parties on an issue and the government's declared policy stand on that issue are 'very close' (Warwick

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2001, p.1231) would suggest, as with portfolio allocation, that the Labour Party could expect to exert more influence on policy than the Liberal Democrats when negotiating policy outcomes. These outcomes came to be published as coalition policy in **A Programme for Government** (Dewar and Wallace 1999). For this study it is appropriate to amend Warwick's Comparative Manifestoes Project, by looking at which of the coalition parties was able to place the greatest number of their policies in the Programme, where only one of those parties had proposed it in their manifesto. It is assumed that a party does not naturally support a manifesto policy of the other, where it is not mirrored in the other party's manifesto.<sup>7</sup>

When the 'initiatives' agreed in the Programme are compared to the 1999 manifesto policy proposals of the two parties, it is found that of the eighty two joint initiatives, only twenty five of them – or 30.5% – had the explicit pre-coalition support of the Labour Party (see Table 2). By contrast, fifty-seven – or 69.5% - had been supported by the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrats may therefore be seen as having influenced policy by 47.6% more than might have been expected.

To highlight the depth of the Liberal Democrat advantage, it is also worth looking at comparative influence on policy in the individual areas outlined in the Programme. In nine of the eleven policy areas stipulated, the Liberal Democrats contributed 50% or more of the adopted initiatives that were proposed by only one party. Labour held a plurality in only two areas. One is 'Celebrating Scotland' and the other 'Finance', at 75% and 100% of additional policies, respectively. However, 'Celebrating Scotland' was concerned with cultural policies such as the development of Gaelic which, important though they may be, do not have attached to them the level of public concern associated with matters such as health and education. Further,

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<sup>7</sup> *Using the exact model of the Comparative Manifestoes Project was not possible for two reasons. Firstly, the data set that it employs is relevant to national/federal level governments in Europe and therefore places heavy emphasis on a range of policy issues, such as foreign and defence affairs, that fall outwith the remit of the Scottish Parliament. Secondly, the reduced data set provided by the case of the Scottish Parliament provides few instances of policy deals being done in which coalition policies are compromised between two stances in the parties' manifestoes. It would therefore be impossible to produce meaningful statistical analysis of inter-party negotiation over individual policies.*

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the 100% contribution of 'Finance' policies becomes less significant when it is considered that only one additional finance policy was agreed.

Added to this is the issue of Labour's status as the formateur party. In truth, it is not possible to say whether Labour would have achieved more or fewer policy gains in the coalition deal had they been approached by the Liberal Democrats, rather than the other way around. However, the findings of Warwick (2001) that the formateur party tends to exert greater influence, for its size, than the non-formateur finds little support in the reality of disproportionate Liberal Democrat influence on policy. Indeed it is dismissed by one of Labour's negotiating team – who would be more likely to over-emphasise than talk down their position – the former First Minister, Henry McLeish:

That [formateur status] was never really an issue for either side. There had always been a feeling within the leadership of both parties that if Labour was the largest party and short of a majority, we [Labour] would approach the Lib Dems. Both teams were expecting it and prepared for it. I don't think that it [formateur status] helped or hindered either side. (interview, 26 January 2003)

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**Table 2**

**Breakdown of party origin for policy initiatives contained in only one party's 1999 Scottish Parliament election manifesto**

Initiative Area	No. of initiatives not in both manifestoes	No. of Labour initiatives, not in both manifestoes	No. of Lib Dem initiatives, not in both manifestoes	Percentage of Labour initiatives	Percentage of Lib Dem initiatives
Student Finance	2	0	2	0	100
Education	10	3	7	30	70
Health	14	7	7	50	50
Enterprise	5	2	3	40	60
Justice	7	1	6	14.3	85.7
Building Communities	14	5	9	35.7	64.3

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Rural Scotland	7	1	6	14.3	85.7
Environment/ Transport	10	1	9	10	90
Celebrating Scotland	4	3	1	75	25
Government	8	1	7	12.5	87.5
Finance	1	1	0	100	0
Total	82	25	57	30.5	69.5

*Sources: A Programme for Government (Dewar and Wallace 1999), Building Scotland's Future (Scottish Labour 1999), Raising the Standard (Scottish Liberal Democrats 1999).*

It would appear that there is little evidence to suggest that either party has been able to use ministerial office in order to advance the policy agenda of their own party, due to specific planning on the part of the Labour and Liberal Democrat leaderships, when they drafted the Programme. The policy document that was signed by Dewar and Wallace set about doing three things that would make party influence on the future Executive policy hard to achieve. Firstly, the agreement is detailed in terms of policy and seeks to deal with all of the major policy ambitions of both parties – defining how they are to be approached over the course of the four-year parliamentary session. According to Henry McLeish, this was intentional, in an attempt to head off future arguments about policy ambiguity.

The negotiators didn't want to leave policy commitments any more open-ended than they needed to be. It was in everyone's interests to tie down the joint policy ambitions in the Partnership document. That way we could minimise future disputes between the parties – and yes, make sure that individual ministers weren't able to manufacture policy.  
(interview, 26 January 2003)

Secondly, there was a commitment to close consultation between the partners, particularly between the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, in order to make the Partnership a success. This specifically included 'the Executive's policy and legislative programme ... the conduct of its business' in order to make sure that policy was not developed without the approval of both parties (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.12). This was underpinned by the decision to define the role of the Deputy First Minister, as being one that

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entitled its holder 'to engage in any issue where he considers that appropriate', with all official papers sent to the office of either the First Minister or Deputy being copied to the office of the other also (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.12). In this way, policy could not be privately developed by ministers, but would be open to scrutiny and intervention by both parties.

Thirdly, as mentioned, the Partnership document required the First Minister to consult with the Deputy First Minister over the allocation of ministerial portfolios (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.12). This resulted in the informal, but consistent arrangement of creating 'internal balances' by placing ministers from both parties in the departments that may be seen as most controversial (Lynch 2001, p.35). This safeguards against any one party being able to dominate a sensitive office and its policy development.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there also evolved a convention by which both parties must be represented on ministerial committees and working groups, in order that both can monitor and participate in policy discussions (Lynch 2001, p.39).

In terms of one specific portfolio allocation, the Scottish Executive showed no sign of following the pattern found in Warwick's Comparative Manifestoes Project: there is no evidence of the Finance Minister, whose post and its deputies were given to Labour members throughout the course of the coalition, seeking to give a financial advantage to fellow Labour members. Indeed the two largest increases in departmental spending throughout the coalition (whilst going to departments headed by Labour ministers) were intended to finance policies that the Labour Party was reluctant to adopt but was forced to accept due, at least in part, to pressure from its Liberal Democrat partner. These were the abolition of university tuition fees and the implementation of the Sutherland Report's recommendation of free personal care for the elderly, for which the Finance Minister allocated extra resources to the Departments of Education and Health and Community Care, respectively.

There are several contributory reasons for this. Firstly, the factors outlined above as to why ministers find it difficult to promote their own parties' policy preferences apply equally to the Finance Minister. Secondly, the

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout the coalition there were ministers from both parties in the Departments of Justice, Rural Affairs (later Environment and Rural Affairs), Education and in the Business Management of the Parliament.

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Finance Minister has had limited ability to discriminate with his financial allocations since Part III of the Scotland Act 1998 establishes that the Scottish Executive's budget is allocated by block grant, determined by the Westminster government (Himsworth and Munro 1999, pp.82-90), bar tax-varying powers of three per cent that the Partnership made clear would not be used during the course of the four-year session (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.11). Moreover, with the departmental destination of increases provided by the Comprehensive Spending Review largely determined at Westminster, the Finance Minister is limited in his freedom to both raise and allocate new monies. Thirdly, it is fair to suggest that it is not the Labour ministers who are inclined to push for extra public spending, but rather the Liberal Democrats whose 1999 manifesto sought a higher level of public spending. This tendency is evidenced by their positions on tuition fees and care for the elderly.

It is difficult to make a fair assessment as to whether the mean left-right position of the opposition parties has allowed either party to make policy gains at the expense of the other. As yet, there have been too few occasions on which opposition policy has had a discernible effect on the policy agenda of the coalition parties for a meaningful statistical analysis to be achieved. However, it is fair to say that during the course of the four year term there have been two notable, high-profile developments of coalition policy that have been at least partly influenced by the opposition and have favoured the policy position of the Liberal Democrats. Again, these were the abolition of university tuition fees and the implementation of the Sutherland proposals.

In the case of tuition fees the Liberal Democrats had secured, in the Programme for Government, a review of student finance to be undertaken by Andrew Cubie (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.3) but stopped short of giving the Liberal Democrats their target of the abolition of fees. However, when the report was delivered in 2000, the coalition agreed an amended version of its recommendations that would abolish fees and replace them with a levy of a lesser amount, paid after graduation. The issue had been a point of contention until this time, as Labour was reluctant to commit the financial resources that ending fees would require. There is a strong view that they would have refused to do a deal, but for the influence of the opposition parties. All of those parties opposed fees and were suggesting that they would have joined with the Liberal Democrats to abolish them had Labour not done

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a deal. One Liberal Democrat who was pushing for his party to do just that was Donald Gorrie:

Like many of my Liberal Democrat colleagues, I made perfectly clear that it was not possible to tolerate the coalition's retention of tuition fees. We felt passionately about it and it was the will of the majority of the Parliament. Labour knew it and in the end they had to support abolition of the fees.

(interview, 28 January 2003).

A similar outcome occurred over the Sutherland Report, although here the pressure was not simply ad hoc amongst the parties, but channelled through the institutions of the Parliament – namely the committee system. In October 2000 Scottish Labour, in an announcement by the Health Minister, Susan Deacon, rejected the official recommendation of the UK Royal Commission on Long Term Care (the Sutherland Report) that personal care for the elderly ought to be paid for through taxation (Simeon 2003, p.221). However, the Liberal Democrats had fought the 1999 election with a manifesto commitment to 'raise the threshold at which older people have to contribute to their own care' (Liberal Democrats 1999, p.13) and announced their support for the Sutherland Report's proposals. Again, this was supported by other parties. Consequently, on 28 November 2000 the Scottish Parliament's Health and Community Care Committee, representative of the Parliament's political make-up, published a report recommending the implementation of Sutherland. The Convener of the Committee, Margaret Smith, saw this as the main reason that on 29 January 2001 the First Minister Henry McLeish reversed his policy and committed Labour to adopting Sutherland's recommendations:

He [McLeish] was personally more open to the idea than other Labour ministers, who were strongly opposed, but Liberal Democrat threats to support the Committee's recommendations were instrumental. If we didn't have it as a policy, it would never have happened.

(interview, 28 February 2003).

The depth of policy influence success depends upon how both parties value it – and the comparatively centralised Labour, in the view of Müller and Strøm (1999), may be less concerned with policy achievement than the more decentralised Liberal Democrats. This view is strengthened by the fact that

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the Liberal Democrats sought to achieve more policy ends than Labour not just within the coalition negotiations, but also in their manifesto: they went into negotiations with more policy ambitions (Lynch 1999, p.32). Henry McLeish points to the specifics of party experience in this area, noting that Labour's tendency to release detailed, member-driven policy manifestoes in the 1980s and early 1990s allowed the party's critics to focus on analysing those details in order to criticise the party, 'but the Liberal Democrats never had experience of fighting for an election victory, so they still included more policies, and that may be why they got more in the Partnership agreement' (interview, 26 January 2003).

This may partially account for the Liberal Democrat advantage in obtaining policy inclusions. However the fact that this scaling back of Labour policy innovation occurred simultaneously to the centralising of policy control itself suggests that this centralisation process encouraged Labour priority to shift from policy to office-seeking. Moreover, although Labour's manifesto had fewer policies, there were still a number of included proposals that were not accepted by the Partnership agreement. The Liberal Democrats appear to have regarded policy inclusion as their principal indicator of success and, ultimately, done a better job of attaining it.

Due to the specific formal and informal rules of the Partnership's policy conduct, agreed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the roles of formateur status, portfolio allocation, policy dictatorship and the finance minister appear to have been eradicated from influencing the ultimate policy outcomes.

### **PARTY STRUCTURE AND BARGAINING POWER**

It is important to consider Moshe Maor's theory that decentralised parties (the Liberal Democrats) are better able to influence policy than centralised parties (Labour) as they have a greater degree of bargaining power, derived from their ability to diffuse internal disagreement and division. Maor suggests that this occurs at both intra-elite and elite-follower levels. It is appropriate then to look at two issues that have caused division within both coalition parties, one at the intra-elite level and the other at the elite-follower level, and compare the ways in which both parties dealt with those divisions.

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The issue of whether the two parties ought to join the Partnership for Government under the terms agreed by their negotiating teams was divisive for the elites, i.e. the parliamentarians, on both sides. According to Maor's theory, the predictable response would be that both leaderships would emphasise their decisive preferences i.e. their principal intentions in recommending coalition membership. However, the more centralised Labour Party would be likely to impose structural constraints in order to silence intra-elite opponents, whilst the Liberal Democrats would be more inclined to tolerate open expressions of dissent. This is indeed what happened.

From the start of the negotiations Donald Dewar made clear to his fellow Labour MSPs that he was seeking a coalition arrangement in order that a 'stable government' (i.e. one with a working majority) could be formed – so that Labour's policies could be more readily achieved (Finnie and McLeish 1999, p.57). Similarly leadership figures in the Liberal Democrats were emphasising their primary goal of influencing policy, by insisting upon the drafting of a policy document containing the coalition's stated policies, into which they sought to inject their views 'across the range' of topics (Finnie and McLeish 1999, p.53).

However, knowing that there were Labour MSPs who were sceptical about inviting the Liberal Democrats into coalition, the party leadership sought to avoid engaging them in the process. There was no vote amongst the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party to allow negotiations to start, and the negotiating team did not consult with the parliamentary party until the draft Partnership Agreement was complete and due to be signed by Dewar and Wallace the next day. Even then the group was not informed of the detail, leaving them to hear of it 'via our radios, the following morning' (Watson 2001, p.8). This resulted in a denial of Maor's 'voice' opposition to the leadership's strategy and caused long term resentment by some members, who feel that their legitimate views were ignored. A good example of this is John McAllion who did not support Labour approaching the Liberal Democrats and spoke at a Parliamentary Party meeting on 19 May to say that he would not have given his approval had it been asked (Watson 2001, pp.4-5). His only way of expressing active opposition would have been to take the 'exit' strategy from the party – a route that he clearly did not wish to take.

By contrast the Liberal Democrat leader and his negotiating team briefed the Parliamentary Party daily regarding policy progress and took soundings of their views on relevant matters. Moreover Wallace, bound by the Party

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Executive's Coalition Framework document, had to obtain his two thirds majority approval from the Parliamentary Party before committing to join the coalition. This occurred on the night of 13 May, with three MSPs choosing to vote against Liberal Democrat participation in government<sup>9</sup>. Liberal Democrat MSPs were fully consulted at every step of the process – and those who voted against, but were in a minority, have simply accepted that they were legitimately defeated in their attempts to stop the coalition being formed. Their opposition has been diffused. One of them, Donald Gorrie, simply states that: 'I didn't want it and I don't feel like I cast my vote the wrong way, but I was in a minority and so the proper thing to do is accept that and move on' (interview, January 28 2003).

An issue that proved troublesome throughout the period of coalition was whether a system of proportional representation ought to be implemented by the Scottish Parliament for local elections. **A Programme for Government** committed the Executive to follow the 1999 McIntosh Commission report on local government with 'an immediate programme of change including electoral reform' (Dewar and Wallace 1999, p.10). However, despite the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group (Kerley Committee) being appointed to follow up McIntosh and the endorsement, in its June 2000 report, of the single transferable vote system (STV) for local elections, Parliament stalled on legislation. The result was that Labour faced opposition from its extra-parliamentary members who wished to retain the first past the post electoral system, and Liberal Democrats faced regular calls at their party conferences for more progress to be made towards electoral reform.

Maor's theory would predict that both leaders would stress their preferences, with the more centralised Labour Party seeking to impose its decision, without debate, whilst the Liberal Democrats would be more likely to tolerate factional dispute over the lack of progress being made. Again these assumptions proved accurate.

Jack McConnell expressed his preference in November 2001 when he assured Liberal Democrats that he would support voting reform in return for

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<sup>9</sup> Donald Gorrie, John Farquhar Munro and Keith Raffan (Watson 2001, p.8).

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electing him as First Minister<sup>10</sup>. He did so again with the publication of a draft Local Governance (Scotland) Bill in February 2002, supporting a move to STV for local elections. However, he has not engaged or included his party members on this matter, denying them a meaningful 'voice' strategy. In turn, they have sought to make their views clear. An example of this came in 2002 when Labour's executive committee voted to reject PR for council elections (**The Sunday Times**, 8 December 2002, p.3). However, they are powerless to prevent McConnell endorsing the resulting draft bill. The result is an unresolved conflict between elite and follower.

By contrast, Jim Wallace has continually stressed his commitment to proportional representation. Although he has not been able to deliver it for his members as yet, he is able to point to the commitment to reform made in **A Programme for Government** and, more recently, the draft bill. The leadership has been seen, moreover, to allow members to debate and make clear their views on the progress of reform; there is no attempt to silence them, or ignore their views. Consequently any potential conflict has been diffused – those who are concerned have been allowed to show it and seen their leadership respond.

Again, when dealing with a limited number of examples from one term of Parliament, it is difficult to reach reliable conclusions about the effect of one variable upon another. However, the two examples outlined above have caused some of the greatest internal division amongst the coalition parties – and it is fair to say that in both cases, the Liberal Democrats have found it easier to diffuse internal division. They have exercised Maor's 'voice' strategy, rather than the choice of conflict or 'exit' strategy faced by more centralised Labour. As a consequence, the Liberal Democrats do appear to have acquired more bargaining power on these issues, as opposition is within the leadership's 'zone of control'. A direct link between this and increased policy negotiation powers cannot be proved by this case, but with their disproportionate policy achievements, this situation certainly fits the theory outlined by Maor.

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([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in\\_depth/scotland/2001/mcleish\\_resignation/1667647.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/scotland/2001/mcleish_resignation/1667647.stm), accessed 15 February 2003)

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, it is possible to assert that the most successful of the Partnership for Scotland parties was the Liberal Democrats. Müller and Strøm (1999) argue convincingly that coalition success should be judged by the ability to achieve office and to influence policy. Both parties sought those goals in the Partnership.

If it is to be presumed that both ought to have portfolio allocation proportional to their numerical composition in the Executive, it is true that Labour maintained an advantage. Moreover, if Labour's comparatively centralised (according to Moshe Maor's definition) structure is considered, as Müller and Strøm would see it, to make it more office- and less policy-oriented than the Liberal Democrats, they might rate their success as being greater than their partners would. However, it is an inevitable fact that their portfolio allocation advantage is extremely small – indeed, by the time of Labour's third First Minister, Jack McConnell, the advantage could not have been any smaller, statistically.

By contrast, the Liberal Democrats, whose more decentralised structure would encourage them to value policy influence more highly than office, are seen to have had a very great deal more policy input than did Labour. Of the policies set out in **A Programme for Government** that had not been in the manifestoes of both parties, 69.5% were Liberal Democrat innovations and just 30.5% Labour – though Liberal Democrat MSPs comprised just 22.2% of MSPs in the coalition group. Certainly this is due in part to a lack of Labour initiatives, resulting from their historical experience of vote loss in the 1980s and 1990s, when, as a more centralised party, they concentrated more heavily on policy production. Yet that in itself shows how much more policy-oriented the Liberal Democrats are and how effective at negotiating they proved.

The influences that Warwick (2001) found relevant to policy formation had little discernible impact in this case. It is unlikely that (though impossible to say whether) Labour's role as the formateur party helped it obtain more policy outcomes when they were so convincingly out-numbered by the Liberal Democrats'. There was also no evidence of policy dictatorship by individual ministers, or a finance minister giving material advantage to ministers from his own party. The opposition also had little consistent effect on the partners' relative achievement, barring the issues of the abolition of

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tuition fees and the implementation of the Sutherland report. On these two occasions, Liberal Democrat threats to ally with the opposition meant that Labour had to concede policy to its junior partner. There were certainly not enough of these incidents however to establish a pattern of opposition influence on the left-right mean of the Partnership. However, only after further sessions of the Parliament will it be possible to discern a cumulative effect of opposition influence that cannot yet be fairly measured.

A major reason why these influences did not come into effect in the Partnership is likely to come from the specifics of the Scottish case, agreed by the two parties. That is to say that the Partnership for Scotland/Programme for Government was a detailed effort that established joint ministerial allocation and policy intervention powers across the Executive for the two party leaders, in order to make sure that no party could attempt to gain undue influence, or to innovate in policy areas without the consent of the other. It also outlined a four-year policy agenda, which therefore reduced the opportunities for policy innovation from within and outwith the coalition during its tenure of power. It may be that the tightly defined Partnership agreement, founded on the expectation of a coalition in the new, post-devolution Scottish government and pre-emption of its potential sources of internal conflict, have effectively factored-out many of Warwick's features. Only time will tell if this aspect of Scotland's 'New Politics' will last, breaking with the patterns of coalition behaviour isolated by previous studies.

Moreover, whilst I leave examination of the May 2003 Scottish election results, and the new partnership agreement reached between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, to future studies, one aspect is striking and directly relevant to the focus of this article. Scottish Labour saw its percentage of votes drop from 1999, resulting in a net loss of six seats, whilst the Liberal Democrats gained on the first past the post ballot and lost a little on the proportional (party) ballot, with a net seat change of zero. In terms of coalition composition then, the Labour Party lost proportional strength to the Liberal Democrats. There are many factors that have been and will be commented upon, in order to explain this result, but it at least implies the possibility that the electorate made a more positive assessment of the smaller party's contribution to the coalition than they did Labour's. If so, Liberal Democrat strategy for achieving office and – more than Labour – policy, may have gained them more votes too – the third ambition in Müller and Strøms' troika of aims.

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Why it is that the Liberal Democrats were more effective cannot be proved in this study. However, the view of Moshe Maor that decentralised parties are able to diffuse and defuse internal conflict at both intra-elite and elite-follower levels, by encouraging 'voice' opposition, rather than 'exit', appears to be born out in the case of the partners in the Scottish coalition. Maor links this ability to strengthened bargaining powers within a coalition structure. That is very hard to prove, quantitatively, but it is a theory that fits this case well.

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