

# **Ministers as servants to three masters: testing a multiple-principal model for ministerial durability<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*Cabinet ministers have often been described as serving multiple principals in the government and in the party hierarchy in countries with directly elected presidents or where government coalitions are the norm. However, single principal-agent models are still the industry standard in studies of ministerial durability. Using data from France, this paper adopts a multiple-principal model to capture variation in ministerial accountability to presidents, prime ministers and party principals. To determine which principal-agent relationships are associated with shorter and longer ministerial tenures, a unique dataset on French ministers in office between 1997-2002 and 2007-2012 was compiled. Using data on personal characteristics and performance indicators such as resignation calls and conflicts with principals we find that the principals' ability to control cabinet composition varies as a function of the party relationship between the president, the prime ministers and cabinet members.*

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## **Introduction**

The amount of time cabinet ministers spend in their post has important consequences for government performance, policy outcomes and political accountability. A recent report published by the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the House of Commons (2013) has explored the impact of cabinet reshuffles on the overall effectiveness of the government. The report emphasises that while the appointment prerogatives of British prime ministers are limited by some legislative constraints, there are no restrictions on when, or how often, or for what reasons ministers should be moved around. Cabinet reshuffles destabilise the government, damage the effectiveness of individual ministers and are not good for policy continuity and consistent delivery. According to the witnesses interviewed by the House of Commons Committee, reshuffles are rarely motivated by the prime minister's wish to change policy. While some changes are unavoidable because of occasional resignations, illness or deaths, 'party management' is usually the main reason for most reshuffles. Ben Bradshaw, a former Labour Minister for Health and Secretary of State for Culture, told the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (2013) that prime ministers resort to reshuffles to "balance governments politically and give 'big beasts' jobs". The former Prime Minister, John Major, also told the Committee that during his time in office as prime minister, the pressure for reshuffles began to build up in the parliamentary party at regular intervals. Overall, reshuffles allow prime ministers to 'test and bring on young talent by giving them experience in different departments; resolve problems when ministers get into difficulty and are forced to resign or are sacked; refresh governments or departments that appear tired or underperforming; reward loyalty'.

The evidence collected by the House of Commons Committee substantiates the results of the academic literature on ministerial durability. This body of work has shown that ministers are more likely to step down when the government's popularity is low or failing (Dewan and Dowding 2005), when the prime minister's popularity begins to lag behind the government's popularity and when the popularity gap between the prime minister's party and the junior coalition partner narrows (Kam and Indridason 2005). Additionally, the amount of time ministers survive in office depends not only on how many calls there are for them to resign but also on how many calls there are for their colleagues in the cabinet as a whole (Berlinski *et al.* 2010, 2012). Overall, we know that whether or not ministers keep office when their resignation is demanded depends on the

position taken by the prime minister and their party (Fischer *et al.* 2006) and that prime ministers generally benefit from cabinet reshuffles (Indridason and Kam 2008).

The House of Commons Committee also raises questions related to the executive decision-making process. When the pressure for ministerial changes builds up outside the cabinet, whose wishes to fire ministers prevail, the prime minister's or the minister's party? Since most constitutions do not include any formal rules regarding the circumstances under which cabinet members should resign and are often silent about the political actors who can hold ministers accountable, the literature on ministerial durability has focused on singling out the proximate reasons for early exits and their effects. However, we know now that even British prime ministers, who are considered more powerful than their European counterparts, are constrained in their ability to decide whom to let go and whom to keep in office by the need to balance their governments politically and keep the "big beasts" happy. What form does this process take in other representative democracies? Do prime ministers have more or less authority over the composition of their cabinets? Do they have to share this prerogative with directly elected presidents? Are political parties able to influence this process? What circumstances are likely to increase or decrease each of these actors' influence over cabinet composition?

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on ministerial durability by highlighting the circumstances under which different principals are able to control cabinet composition. We argue that multiple-principal models can capture better the variation in ministerial accountability in countries where single-party cabinets are not the norm, such as coalition systems and countries with directly elected presidents. We adopt a three-principal model to study the variation in the ability of directly elected presidents, prime ministers, and party principals to control cabinet composition in France. We test this model on an original data set on the tenure of French ministers who served under unified and divided government. The data draws on personal characteristics and performance indicators such as resignation calls and conflicts with the three principals. Our results show that ministerial accountability varies as a function of the party relationship between the president, the prime minister, and cabinet members. Presidential influence over the cabinet composition increases when the president is on the same side of the parliamentary majority, while prime ministers gain control over the government when the president's party is not in government. Contrary to our expectations, party principals do not emerge as powerful principals under cohabitation, when they should be in a better position to control the government. This finding requires one to consider the extent to which political

parties are able to hold their agents accountable upon appointment to national office. Finally, this study also suggests that presidents and prime ministers may respond differently to calls to fire ministers under different political circumstances.

### **Ministerial durability and agency relationships**

The study of ministerial durability has considerably advanced in the last decade. While earlier landmark studies collected the data necessary for uncovering patterns in the length of ministerial tenure across political regimes and government systems (Blondel 1985), more recent work has advanced this research programme through theorised analysis of ministerial survival. The theoretically grounded study of ministerial turnover uses agency theory as an underlying framework for the analysis of accountability relations at government level. Single principal-agent models have been used to model the prime minister's incentives to fire ministers who are involved in political scandals (Dewan and Dowding 2005; Fischer *et al.* 2006) or who deviate from their principal's policy or spending positions (Indridason and Kam 2008). Single principal-agent frameworks have also been used to model ministerial turnover when prime ministers have a limited recruitment pool of talent and personnel (Dewan and Myatt 2007, 2010; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008). However, the extent to which cabinet members are fully accountable to prime ministers depends on both constitutional rules and party political constraints. The single principal-agent model to ministerial deselection has mostly been applied in Westminster systems, where prime ministers have an unusual discretion in hiring and firing ministers (Dewan and Dowding 2005: 561). In these political systems, where single-party governments predominate, it is usually considered that cabinet members are direct agents of prime ministers (Fischer *et al.* 2012: 506).

The institutional rules governing the hiring and firing of ministers vary considerably in coalition systems, where ministers are both prime ministerial and party agents (Dowding and Dumont 2009; Fischer *et al.* 2012). Andeweg (2000) has described cabinet ministers as double agents, due to their position in the chain of democratic delegation as both members of government and heads of department. This political scientist argued that only a direct link from parties to individual ministers can prevent the problem of agency loss and circular delegation (Andeweg 2000: 389). However, he found little evidence that the link between parties and their agents in cabinets goes beyond the appointment of party members to ministerial office and argued that only the use of recalls

and reshuffles could indicate that parties effectively control their agents in ministerial office. Scholars like Andeweg (2000) and Muller (2000) have particularly emphasised the role of parties in the process of political delegation and the existence of a double chain of delegation from voters and political parties to governments. However, the extent to which political parties control their agents in government following their appointment has hardly ever been tested empirically and comparatively. Overall, there is considerable reason to doubt that a single principal-agent model can accurately model the cabinet members' accountability to both prime ministers and political parties and the circumstances under which these political actors are able to fire their agents.

More constitutional constraints affect the durability of ministers in political systems where directly elected presidents share executive power with a prime minister and cabinet who are responsible to the legislature. From a principal-agent perspective, the position of cabinets in semi-presidential systems is that of an agent facing two principals (Protsyk 2006: 221; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a: 668) as both presidents and assemblies may be involved in the appointment and dismissal of the executive. As a result, the single principal-agent model is no longer an adequate tool for the study of ministerial durability, as the decision to fire cabinet members must be negotiated between prime ministers and heads of state (Dowding and Dumont 2009: 11).

To sum up the existing debate, there are good theoretical reasons to believe that a single principal-agent model does not accurately capture the decision-making process that characterises the firing of cabinet members beyond the case of Westminster systems. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on ministerial durability by testing a multiple-principal model to ministerial survival in office. Several studies have theorised the subordination of cabinets and individual ministers to multiple principals, such as chief executives and party principals (Andeweg 2000; Protsyk 2006: 221; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a: 668). However, to date this theoretical claim has not been empirically tested. We aim to test the impact of different principal-agent relations on ministerial durability in countries with semi-presidential constitutions. We believe that, due to the separation of powers element that direct presidential elections introduce in the institutional setting of this regime type, semi-presidential system maximise the formal intra- and inter-case variation in the principal-agent relationships between cabinet members and their superiors in the government and party hierarchy. Specifically, we aim to study the variation in the ability of directly elected presidents, prime ministers, and party principals to influence the deselection of cabinet members. That said, we believe

that a multiple principal-agent model can be used to study the variation in the length of ministerial tenure in any political system that is governed according to the principles of party government, regardless of whether it has a parliamentary, presidential, or semi-presidential constitution. Varying degrees of party factionalisation, the possibility that party leaders choose to monitor the action of their minister-agents from outside central government, as well as the tendency towards a growing autonomy between chief executives and their parliamentary parties (Webb *et al.* 2012) suggest that cabinet members may rarely have to report to a single principal even in purely parliamentary and presidential systems.

To capture the variation in the accountability of cabinet members to directly elected presidents, prime ministers and party principals we must take into account the operation of political institutions in semi-presidential systems. The literature on semi-presidentialism has highlighted the variation in presidential and prime ministerial powers over the political system across semi-presidential countries despite their similar constitutional design (Roper 2002; Siaroff 2003; Elgie 2009). To capture the variation in the chief executives' power over the political system, Shugart and Carey (1992) differentiate between premier-presidential and president-parliamentary forms of semi-presidentialism. The main difference between the two semi-presidential sub-types resides in the president's power to dismiss ministers unilaterally. Political systems where the government is collectively accountable solely to the assembly fall within the premier-presidential category, while those where the president and the assembly share the power to dismiss the prime minister and cabinet are defined as president-parliamentary (Shugart and Carey 1992: 24).

The involvement of both presidents and assemblies in the origin and survival of cabinets blurs the lines of ministerial responsibility and accountability. Are ministers more inclined to conform to the president's or to the assembly's position? Do institutional rules and institutional context make a difference for the extent of their accountability to competing principals? To answer these questions, Oleh Protsyk (2003: 1078) has drawn on the distribution of dismissal powers to predict the cabinet's behaviour towards the president and the parliament. From a purely institutional perspective, he argued, cabinets should conform to the interests of legislatures in premier-presidential systems, where the assembly has exclusive dismissal powers, and should follow presidential preferences in president-parliamentary systems, where both presidents and assemblies have the power to dismiss the government. However, Shugart (2005) points out that the institutional

definition of semi-presidential sub-types fails to take into consideration the president's informal authority over the cabinet, which varies depending on whether or not he or she is on the same ideological side with the parliamentary majority or an outsider to the parliamentary majority (Duverger 1980, 1996). Consequently, once the institutional variation between the two semi-presidential sub-types is situated in the party system context in which they operate, the behavioural patterns followed by political actors and the overall operation of the two systems may diverge from institutional expectations (Shugart 2005: 335). For example, although Austria is a president-parliamentary system from an institutional point of view, because the president has the constitutional power to dissolve the assembly, it operates like a parliamentary system due to the particular development of its post-war party system that has considerably limited the presidential sphere of action. Conversely, presidents have been shown to hold the cabinet accountable even in some premier-presidential systems, where they lack formal dismissal powers (Shugart 2005; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009a, 2009b). Using examples from France, Finland, and Romania, Samuels and Shugart (2010: 103–104) have shown that presidents have been able to fire prime ministers when they were on the same side of the parliamentary majority.

Overall, these authors find sufficient evidence to conclude that the influence of presidents over the deselection of prime ministers in premier-presidential systems during periods of unified government, when the president and the prime minister are from the same party, is “systemic and not limited to their own party” (Samuels and Shugart 2010: 105). By contrast, no instances where presidents were able to force prime ministers out of office during periods of cohabitation, when the president's party is not in government, have been found in either of the two semi-presidential sub-types (Samuels and Shugart 2010: 107). These findings indicate that the presidents' authority over cabinets is not constant across executive scenarios and that institutional factors alone do not fully capture the variation in presidential and prime ministerial authority over the cabinet.

To determine what explains the variation in ministerial deselection within premier-presidentialism we adopt a purely institutional view on the relationship between executive scenarios and the extent of presidential and prime ministerial influence over the political system. This idea is inspired by the operation of semi-presidentialism in France. Even before the first occurrence of cohabitation in France, there was an expectation that if the president ever had to put up with an opposing parliamentary majority, then semi-presidentialism would work not as a synthesis of parliamentary and presidential systems,

but as an alternation between presidential and parliamentary phases (Vedel, 1978 cited in Duverger 1980: 186). According to Duverger (1996: 516–517), the prime minister’s constitutional powers are weakened when the president leads the parliamentary majority as a *de facto* leader of the dominant party in the assembly. However, if the president is just a disciplined member of the majority or if he or she opposes the parliamentary majority then the prime minister may use the full extent of his or her formal prerogatives (Duverger 1996: 517). The idea of alternating phases of presidential and parliamentary government was also adopted by Arend Lijphart, who argued that semi-presidential governments could be classified as either presidential or parliamentary by asking the question of “who is the *real* head of government – president or prime minister (Lijphart, 1992, p. 8, his emphasis). According to Lijphart, the answer to this question depends on whether the president’s party has a majority in the legislature.

In this article we test the institutional view on the variation in presidential and prime ministerial power over the cabinet in semi-presidential systems. Thus, we expect that the ability of presidents, prime ministers, and party principals to fire their agents depends on the party relationship between the president, the prime minister and cabinet members. Specifically, we expect that the president’s influence over the deselection of ministers increases when the prime minister is in the president’s party (a situation known as unified government), while the prime minister’s influence increases when the president’s party is not in government (a situation known as cohabitation). Due to their centrality in the chain of democratic delegation in representative democracies, party principals should retain a certain amount of influence over the cabinet under all circumstances, as long as they can hold accountable their agents in government, including the president and the prime minister. Since parliamentary parties are formally able to influence the prime minister’s durability in office but are unable to influence the survival of directly elected presidents, we also expect party principals to be in a better position to control cabinet composition under cohabitation, when the president is opposed to the parliamentary majority and has fewer means to compete for control over the cabinet. Table 1 summarises our expectations regarding the variation in the authority of presidents, prime ministers and party principals over the cabinet as a function of executive scenarios.

### **Case selection, data and variables**

To determine which principal-agent relationships are associated with shorter and longer spells of tenure, a new data set on French ministers was compiled. According to the French constitution, the prime minister is in charge of the cabinet. The president can appoint and remove ministers only at the proposal of the prime minister. However, many French scholars have embraced the argument that presidents are powerful when they are on the same side of the parliamentary majority and weak when they oppose the majority. For example, typologies of French prime ministers have differentiated between prime ministers appointed during periods of cohabitation and outside cohabitation (Parodi 1997a; Portelli 1997). The former are defined as “institutional and political subordinates of a president who is the leader of the majority”, while the latter belong to the category of dominant prime ministers, who are indisputable leaders of the majority (Portelli 1997: 21). Periods of cohabitation are defined by “prime ministerial supremacy”, while “ordinary times” are characterised by “presidential supremacy” (Ardant and Duhamel 1999: 8). Thus, we should expect presidential leadership under unified government and prime ministerial leadership under cohabitation. The emergence of prime ministerial leadership during periods of cohabitation has not entailed a “de-presidentialisation” of government outside this executive scenario (Parodi 1997b: 310). François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac were able to regain full control over the government at the end of their experience with cohabitation in 1988 and 2002 respectively. Nevertheless, the occurrence of cohabitation has contributed to an unparalleled increase in the authority of prime ministers over their cabinets and parliamentary majorities, incomparable with the influence of prime ministers under the Third and the Fourth Republics or even with that of other European prime ministers (Parodi 1997b: 310).

France is a good case for the analysis of the variation in presidential and prime ministerial influence over cabinet composition across different executive scenarios. For a direct comparison of ministerial survival under different political circumstances the analysis focuses on ministerial durability during a period of cohabitation and one of unified executive. The most recent period of cohabitation occurred between 1997 and 2002, when the Gaullist President Jacques Chirac and the Socialist PM Lionel Jospin shared executive power. To control for different styles of prime ministerial leadership, the period of unified executive included in the analysis is that between 2007 and 2012, when President Sarkozy of the UMP shared executive power with Prime Minister Fillon for the entire length of the term. Had we decided to include in the analysis the second presidential term of President Chirac between 2002 and 2007, it would have been more

difficult to account for different prime ministerial leadership styles as two prime ministers held office during this period of time (Jean-Pierre Raffarin between 2002 and 2005 and Dominique de Villepin between 2005 and 2007).

The data set is made up of 75 ministerial appointments and included all cabinet ministers and delegated ministers who served in the two governments under study. State secretaries have been excluded from the analysis because their subordination to specific ministries rules out their accountability to multiple principals.

The data set includes the exact dates when ministers take and leave office. The dependent variable records the length of ministerial tenure. A ministerial spell is defined as the uninterrupted length of time served by the minister upon appointment. The ministers' observed tenure is right-censored if they leave office collectively as a result of a government termination. The duration in office is not interrupted if ministers are assigned to different portfolios. However, if the same ministers leave the cabinet and return after a certain period of time, they are recorded as new cases. Of the 75 ministerial appointments included in the analysis, 29 were early exits from office.

While the units of observation in the data set are the 75 ministers, the units of analysis are the events experienced by ministers. Overall, 2,815 observations related to the events experienced by ministers while in office were recorded from 23,060 full-text articles published in *Le Figaro*<sup>2</sup> and accessed through LexisNexis. The articles used for data collection were selected using keywords<sup>3</sup> related to major cabinet events, such as early exits<sup>4</sup> from the cabinets, movements to different ministerial posts, conflicts

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<sup>2</sup>Although *Le Monde* is seen as the French newspaper of record in France, *Le Figaro* was preferred for data collection because *Le Monde* was not included in the LexisNexis database when we began this research. However, the correlation scores between the number of minister-related articles in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* for the time period under analysis indicate negligible differences in news reporting between the two newspapers. As a result, the right-wing orientation of *Le Figaro* was not considered problematic, given that the observations recorded in the data set are related to the occurrence of events and draw exclusively on the newspaper's reporting function and not on the political stance it takes with regard to the events reported.

<sup>3</sup>Year-by-year searches were carried out for each ministerial appointment included in the data set for as long as the ministers held office. Each search included the full name of the minister and the following keywords: animosit!, arbitrag!, bras de fer, critiq!, confli!, contr\*d!, contest!, démiss!, demett!, destit!, désac!, discord!, dissens!, élimin!, écart!, erreur, revoc!, revoq!, reman!, responsab!.. The searches included wildcard characters in order to maximise the number of articles returned.

<sup>4</sup>Resignations are often perceived as “euphemistic words of use” when some ministers have to be moved out to make room for others (Arnold 1986). While in some cases ministers may be ‘pulled’ from the cabinet to be promoted to prestigious positions in international organizations (Dowding and Dumont 2009: 12), most resignations follow overt criticism from political actors and mass media and are seen as ‘pushed’ resignations (Fisher et al. 2006: 712). Overall, “resignations are not always what they seem” and “some that seem to be without fault may be in anticipation of future dismissal”, while “some others that are on the face of it stout-hearted withdrawals as the alleged result of policy differences may in reality be polite expulsions or prudent subterfuges” (Marshall 1989: 127). Due to the lack of theoretical criteria that could be used to

between cabinet members and their principals, resignation calls, and local electoral contests in which incumbent ministers were defeated.

As main explanatory factors we use one indicator of ministerial performance and one measure of principal-agent relationships. Our indicator of individual performance is the number of resignation calls experienced by ministers during their time in office. Resignation calls are recorded each time a cabinet member is asked to resign. If ministers are asked to resign repeatedly over the same issue, a new resignation call is recorded only if new information comes to light or if a different actor asks the minister to resign. The *Resignation calls* variable records 89 episodes of this type.

Our focus on resignation calls as individual performance indicators is in line with a growing literature that investigates the instruments that prime ministers can use to keep their cabinets under control: Dewan and Dowding (2005) showed that prime ministers are more likely to fire ministers who are involved in political scandals when the government's popularity is falling; Fischer and colleagues (2006) have argued that the outcome of resignation debates is determined by the position taken by the prime minister and the minister's own party; and Berlinski and colleagues (2010, 2012) have shown that the ministers' performance is evaluated relative to that of fellow ministers, in that resignation calls increase the risk of losing office for all ministers, not only for those who are asked to step down. We therefore expect that principals use the information provided by resignation calls when they decide to fire ministers and we expect the relationship between the number of resignation calls and the length of ministerial tenure to be negative. In addition to the focus of the current literature on the overall impact of resignation calls on the length of ministerial tenure, we also aim to determine whether the impact of resignation calls on the ministers' risk of losing office varies across unified government and cohabitation.

The literature that uses single-principal models to study agency relationships in parliamentary governments sees resignation calls as one of the main instruments that prime ministers can use to decide how long cabinet members can continue in office. The relationship between resignation calls and firing decisions is not straightforward in multiple-principals models, where this indicator of ministerial performance cannot indicate the principal who decides on when ministers should go. To identify who can hold ministers accountable we need a direct measure of each principal-agent relationship. Our

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differentiate between different types of early exits from the cabinet, we have preferred to lump together resignations and dismissals.

measures for principal-agent relations are three explanatory variables that record conflicts between ministers and their principals. This data is collected in the same way as the resignation calls and indicates the number of times ministers are criticised by their principals, as reported in the press. Similarly to resignation calls, we record one conflict for each issue over which ministers are criticised by their principals, unless new information comes to light. The subject matter of conflicts may be related to the ministers' performance in executive or party office, to ministerial departments and policy issues, and to personal behaviour. We assume that the risk of losing office increases when the occurrence of this kind of conflicts is made public. The accumulation of conflicts between ministers, presidents, prime ministers and parties is therefore a proxy for agency loss that each principal should aim to contain. If the principals have the power to fire agents, then they should be in a position to do so when the level of conflict with their agents increases. If the ministers' risk of losing office does not increase in the presence of conflicts with principals, then we assume that the latter do not have the ability to sanction agency loss.<sup>5</sup> To test our hypothesis regarding the variation in the influence of principals over cabinet composition as function of executive scenarios, the three variables recording conflicts with principals will be interacted with a dummy for the cohabitation scenario.

The remaining variables included in the analysis of ministerial durability control for the impact of other events that ministers may experience during their time in office on the risk of losing office. We also check whether several personal characteristics related to the ministers' political experience are related to their length of tenure.

The *Reshuffles* variables records individual shifts from one portfolio to another. The prime ministers' use of reshuffles as a strategy for reducing agency loss has already been highlighted in the literature (Indridason and Kam 2008). However, while the current

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<sup>5</sup>Several alternative explanations regarding the conditions under which we are actually able to observe conflicts between ministers and their principals must be considered. While public evidence of a conflictual relationship between ministers and their principals is a strong indicator of agency loss, we have to acknowledge the fact that principals choose to keep some conflicts outside the public arena and may see it in their best interest not to take action even when they make other conflicts public. For example, presidents, prime ministers and parties outside public office may not wish to harm their electoral chances by publicly exposing the mismanagement errors of their representatives in government. In this case, the reasons for the ministers' demotion may be difficult to observe. Unpopular principals may also find it disadvantageous to criticise or sanction popular ministers. Principals who lack the formal power to fire ministers, such as presidents under a situation of cohabitation, may criticise cabinet members simply to draw attention upon themselves. By contrast, principals who can actively exercise the power to fire may choose not to criticise their ministers in public. Other strategic reasons might determine principals to keep ministers who perform badly in office so that they suffer long-term damage (Dowding and Dumont 2009: 15). Overall, while there are numerous reasons why some conflicts are made public while others are not, their systematic recording can provide valuable information about the circumstances under which principals decide to make public their perception of agency loss and to sanction their agents.

literature focuses on the timing and effects of cabinet reshuffles on the welfare of prime ministers, their impact on individual ministerial careers has not been assessed yet.

The control variables capture information related to different aspects of prior political experience that have proven relevant for ministerial selection in France (Kam and Indridason 2009). Previous appointment to high executive office is captured by the *Cabinet experience* variable, which equals one if ministers have previously served as full cabinet members. Parliamentary experience is captured by two dichotomous variables. The first one, *Deputy/Senator*, indicates whether the minister was selected from among the number of incumbent deputies and senators. The second variable, *Parliamentary experience*, equals one for ministers who won a seat in last general elections and who were not at their first legislative mandate at the moment of appointment. The ministers' experience in local administration is captured by a dichotomous variable, *Mayor*, which equals one for incumbent mayors and presidents of municipal or regional councils. The *Party executive* variable controls for the importance of political partisanship as a channel for ministerial appointments and equals one for ministers who are members in their parties' national executive bodies at the moment of appointment. One may also expect that movements in the party hierarchy have an impact on the ministers' length of tenure, when a straightforward rule that bans the simultaneous holding of national and party office is not adopted at the moment of government formation. In the absence of such a rule, whether ministers are promoted or demoted in the party while holding national office may have an impact on their length of tenure. For example, Xavier Bertrand and Patrick Devedjian swapped their positions in the government and party leadership in late 2008, following the former's defeat in two consecutive local elections and the latter's growing unpopularity in the UMP's general secretariat. A more straightforward adoption of the party-government non-*cumul* rule was noticed after Jean-François Copé became the UMP secretary-general in November 2010, when most UMP ministers were excluded from the new leadership of the party (Rovan and Garat 2010). We control for the impact of movements on the party ladder on ministerial durability using the *Party demotions* and *Party promotions* variable that count the number of times an individual minister was promoted or demoted in the party hierarchy.

### **Model specification**

The technique used to estimate the impact of principal-agent relationships on the likelihood of ministerial deselection is survival analysis. Since there is no reason to assume that a minister’s risk of losing office increases or decreases as time passes, a semi-parametric Cox model that imposes no restriction on the shape of the hazard function appears as an appropriate model choice. As a result, the analysis focuses on how the events experienced by ministers shape the slope of the hazard function. However, simply summing up events and conflicts between ministers and their principals might overestimate the extent of career-control powers. In this context, a simple additive model is completely oblivious to the passing of time and fails to take into account the relativity of the principals’ powers because it has no capacity to “forget”. As a result, the influence of a particular conflict on the resulting risk of ministerial deselection cannot be observed since all conflicts are equipotent.

The additive model can be improved by adding a specification that allows it to ‘forget’ events when the time of their occurrence is sufficiently far back into the past with respect to the moment of ministerial deselection. The use of decay functions is a common modelling strategy in the study of civil war durations, as it allows scholars to estimate the declining utility of third party interventions over time (see for example Regan 2006 and Gent 2008). To weigh the impact of events on the hazard of early exits from the cabinet by the time left until the moment of deselection or collective government termination, we use the following exponential decay function

$$e^{-\lambda(t-t_{\text{conflict}})}$$

The value of lambda is determined with respect to the event half-life, defined as the period of time after which the likelihood of being fired because of that event drops to 50%. As a result:

$$\lambda = -\frac{\log(0.5)}{t_{\text{half}}}$$

The value of lambda is estimated from the data by iteratively fitting the Cox model for all half-time values between 1 and 1816 days (which is the maximum length of tenure corresponding to the ministerial appointments included in this dataset). The model that best fits the data (i.e. the one with the highest log-likelihood) is attained for a half-

time value of 87 days. All models failing the link test (which verifies the use of an adequate parameterisation) were not considered in the estimation of  $\lambda$ <sup>6</sup>.

The decay function allows us to model the declining impact over time of the events ministers experience while in office. The event's half-life indicates that following a certain period of time after its occurrence, the likelihood of being fired due to that event is halved. The half-time value corresponding to our data is 90 days. Thus, every 90 days after an event occurs, the likelihood of being fired because of that particular event drops by 50 per cent. This technique mirrors the occurrence of events in real life. While some ministers lose office within days or hours following their involvement in a political controversy, other scandals involve the set up of special investigations to determine the personal responsibility of the ministers in question. For example, this was the case of Eric Woerth, who was involved in a financial scandal during the summer of 2010 after he had been accused of receiving illegal campaign donations in 2007. Although an inquiry into these corruption allegations was immediately set off, Woerth left the government only several months later in the context of a major reshuffle. The improved specification of the model allows us to account for similar situations where the outcome of some events depends on the intensity with which they are followed up by the ministers' principals, by the media and by the public.

## **Results**

Table 2 provides summary statistics for the variables recording personal characteristics and events according to the government in which the ministers served. The two governments operated under different executive scenarios and lasted an equal period of time. Thus, the chance of observing ministerial deselections should be similar under the two scenarios and independent of the presence of exogenous shocks. However, if the occurrence of unified executive and cohabitation makes a difference for the dismissal powers of presidents, prime ministers and party principals, then the impact of principal-agent relationships on the risk of deselection should be different under the two scenarios.

Table 2 emphasises some differences between the length of ministerial tenure and the frequency of deselection under the two scenarios. The mean observed tenure is nine months longer under cohabitation than under unified executive. Thus, a scenario of

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<sup>6</sup> Out of the 1816 models estimated, only 51 failed the link test.

unified executive seems to increase the likelihood of losing office. The variation in the rate of deselection across the two scenarios may be explained by the number of actors whose agreement is necessary for the operation of cabinet changes during different executive scenarios. Under unified executive, when the president and the prime minister are from the same political party, the president is likely to dominate the executive decision-making process due to his or her ascendancy over the parliamentary majority. However, despite the shift from presidential to prime ministerial leadership under periods of cohabitation, presidents may still preserve some influence over cabinet composition, as prime ministers are formally required to propose cabinet changes to the president. Prime ministers also need to take into account the position of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party, who are the prime minister's formal principals. This increase in the number of political actors whose agreement on changes in cabinet composition may explain why periods of cohabitation are likely to increase ministerial duration (Indridason and Kam 2007: 8).

The impact of political background and events on the likelihood of losing office is estimated in the three models presented in Table 3. Model 1 focuses on personal characteristics, while Model 2 estimates the joint impact of personal background and events on the risk of losing office. Model 3 estimates the principals' influence on ministerial deselection as a function of political context. To do so, this model includes a contextual variable that tests the ability of principals to reduce agency-loss under unified executive and cohabitation. *Cohabitation* equals 1 to indicate the occurrence of cohabitation and 0 in the case of unified executive. The model specification adopts the chained-interaction technique, which is employed when one variable (in this case cohabitation) is believed to modify the effects of other variables (the impact of conflicts with presidents, parties and prime ministers), without conditioning each other's effects (Kam and Franzese 2007: 39–40). Thus, Model 3 includes three two-way interactions that separate the impact of principals on the deselection of ministers under unified executive and cohabitation and respects the recommendations regarding the inclusion of all constitutive terms in the case of multiplicative interaction models (Braumoeller 2004; Brambor et al. 2006). To adjust for within-minister correlation without biasing the cross-minister estimators we use cluster-robust standard errors (Cameron and Trivedi 2010: 335). The observations are clustered by ministerial spells and the data set includes 75 clusters. The models present coefficients from Cox regressions and report standard errors clustered by ministers. Positive coefficients indicate that the risk of deselection increases

and indicate a shorter length of tenure, while negative coefficients decrease the hazard rate and are expected to increase the length of tenure.

Model 1 emphasises the impact of personal characteristics on the length of tenure. The data shows that experienced ministers, who have previously been appointed to government, have higher hazard rates. Although one may expect that experience correlates with ability and greater durability, this finding is in line with similar evidence produced for the survival of British ministers, which shows that ministers without previous experience are less predisposed to a premature departure from office (Berlinksi *et al.* 2009). From a principal-agent perspective, the longevity of less experienced ministers may be accounted for by the longer period of time they need to master their jurisdictions. Under these circumstances, inexperienced ministers may be less likely to deviate from the preferred positions of their principals during the course of their first term in office and as a result less prone to conflictual relationships.

Ministers who are selected from among the number of incumbent deputies and senators are shown to be safer in office. However, parliamentary experience, which indicates ministers who have won more than one legislative mandate, increases the hazard of termination. Similarly to the case of ministers with a strong executive background, ministers who have already developed a career as deputies may be less inclined to engage in policy compromises with their principals than their less experienced peers and more preoccupied to protect their professional reputation. The same argument applies to the case of ministers who are mayors or presidents of municipal or regional councils. However, our results are not robust across the three models, emphasising some caveats in this interpretation.

The results shown in Model 2 confirm that, overall, resignation calls increase significantly ministerial hazard rates (Dewan and Dowding 2005; Fischer *et al.* 2006; Berlinksi *et al.* 2010, 2012). The negative and statistically significant coefficient on *Reshuffles* in Model 2 indicate that ministers who change portfolios are likely to survive longer in office. We know that prime ministers use cabinet reshuffles to sanction ministers who deviate from the preferred positions of their principals (Indridason and Kam 2008). Prime ministers may also promote good or supportive ministers to higher profile ministries. Some ministers may have to move for expedience, when other cabinet members have to go. Regardless of the reasons why ministers might be moved to different portfolios during their time in office, the results show that these events are likely to increase their length of tenure.

As far as the correspondence between movement on the party ladder and ministerial durability is concerned, the results show that only promotions in the party hierarchy have a significant impact on the length of tenure. This finding suggests that party promotions may be used as compensatory measures for ministers who are fired.

The explanatory power of the variables measuring principal-agent relationships is confirmed in Models 2 and 3. The positive coefficients of PR Conflicts, PM Conflicts, and PARTY Conflicts in Model 2 indicate that, in general, overall, only clashes with presidents have an impact on the risk of deselection. However, we are interested to see whether the impact of resignation calls and conflicts with principals varies across executive scenarios. Model 3 separates the effects of these variables in unified government and cohabitation by interacting them with Cohabitation, which is a dichotomous variable. However, the impact of interaction terms on the risk of deselection is not directly revealed by regression coefficients. Table 4 presents the values of coefficients associated with the conflict variables and resignation calls (when *Cohabitation*=0), the value of terms resulting from the interactions with the cohabitation variable (when *Cohabitation*=1) and their level of significance<sup>7</sup>. This presentation allows us to compare the impact of conflict variables on the risk of deselection across executive scenarios directly.

The results presented in Table 4 confirm that conflicts with presidents increase the risk of deselection during periods of unified executive, but not under cohabitation. Conversely, while conflicts with prime ministers do not pose a risk to deselection during periods of unified government, they are likely to cost ministers their jobs under cohabitation. Contrary to our expectations, the influence of the party principal over cabinet composition does not increase under cohabitation. There is some evidence that conflicts with the party principle increase ministerial hazard rates under unified government, but this result has a rather low statistical significance and should be interpreted with caveats. Resignation calls are also shown to increase the risk of deselection under unified government, but not under cohabitation. Figures 1 and 2 present a graphical interpretation of the impact that resignation calls and conflicts with the three principals have on ministerial hazard rates separately under unified government and cohabitation.

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<sup>7</sup>The standard error of the interacted coefficients is calculated using the formula  $\hat{\sigma} = \sqrt{\text{var}(\hat{\gamma}) + Z^2 \text{var}(\hat{\delta}) + 2Z \text{cov}(\hat{\gamma}\hat{\delta})}$ , where  $\gamma$  is the coefficient of non-interacted variables,  $\delta$  is the coefficient of the sum of the non-interacted and interacted variables, and  $Z$  is the dummy *Cohabitation*.

The specification of the three models is examined in several ways. The linearity of the independent variables is probed in each case by running link tests (reported at the bottom of Table 3). The proportional-hazards assumption on which the Cox model relies was assessed by testing the residuals. The analysis of Schoenfeld residuals at global level does not indicate a violation of the proportional-hazards assumption at the 0.05 significance level. However, this analysis has revealed that the variable recording reshuffles violates the assumption of proportional hazards in Model 2. To address its non-proportionality and increase the models' accuracy in assessing their effects, this variable was interacted with the natural logarithm of time (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001: 978). As a result, the three regressions presented in Table 3 are extended applications of the Cox model.

## **Discussion**

The comparative analysis of ministerial survival in France under both unified executive and cohabitation raise a number of issues. Firstly, these results confirm that executive scenarios make a difference for the ability of presidents and prime ministers to control cabinet composition: presidents are in a better position to influence the deselection of ministers during periods of unified executive, while prime ministers gain control over cabinet members under cohabitation. The fact that conflicts with the president are not completely risk-free even under cohabitation confirms Duverger's (1996: 517) intuition that although presidents have fewer power than prime ministers when this scenario occurs, they are still not completely powerless.

Secondly, we find no significant variation in the impact of conflicts with party principals across executive scenarios. The expectation that parties' influence over the cabinet members increases under cohabitation has not been confirmed. This finding is all the more surprising as the descriptive data in in Table 2 indicates that parties criticised ministers almost twice as much as presidents and prime ministers altogether. However, the regression results in Table 2 show that this criticism did not have an impact on deselection under cohabitation, where parties do not have to compete with presidents for control over the cabinet. Thus, although party principals were more vociferous, they were less able to contain agency loss than presidents and prime ministers.

The unexpected finding related to the lack of party influence on cabinet composition is nevertheless in line with the literature on French political parties, which

emphasises their weak organisation and dependence on strong leaders (Knapp 2004). Similarly to the impact of conflicts with the party principal, the multivariate analysis suggests that personal background has a limited effect on the length of ministerial tenure. This finding is surprising since we expect political parties to place a premium on political experience when selecting ministers. Previous appointments in government, as well as experience in local administration, a strong parliamentary record, and party service should correlate with longevity in office if parties have a say over cabinet composition. However, among the variables related to the ministers' political background in our data set, only incumbency in the parliament has emerged as a significant determinant of ministerial longevity.

Thirdly, we have found that the impact of resignation calls on the ministers' hazard rates varies with institutional context. It is only during periods of unified government that calls for resignation increase the ministers' risk of being fired. Under cohabitation, their impact does not appear to be significant. Although more data is needed in order to understand why this happens, one can speculate on the relationship between the variation in presidential and prime ministerial influence over the cabinet and their incentives to sanction ministers involved in political scandals.

Previous studies have indicated that presidents are primarily concerned with their popularity when it comes to deciding whether or not to reshuffle the cabinet (Indridason and Kam 2007). We also know that voters hold presidents responsible for government performance during periods of unified government (Lewis-Beck 1997) and that ministerial resignations may have a corrective effect on government popularity (Dewan and Dowding 2005). Therefore, there are good theoretical reasons why presidents should use resignation calls as an indicator of ministerial performance and aim to limit their negative effects by replacing the unpopular ministers. Since the responsibility for government performance shifts from the president to the prime ministers under cohabitation, one may expect resignation calls to have a similar impact on ministerial durability under this executive scenario. However, the extent to which prime ministers have full control over the cabinet during periods of cohabitation is not entirely clear (Indridason and Kam 2007). For example, it has been shown that presidents retain some power over cabinet changes under cohabitation and that sometimes prime ministers need to negotiate the outcome of cabinet reshuffles with presidents (Knapp and Wright 2006). Thus, prime ministers may not always be able to correct the negative effect of resignation

calls, while presidents may be pleased to keep unpopular ministers in a cabinet controlled by opposing parties.

Additional strategic factors could also explain why presidents and prime ministers respond differently to resignation calls. Presidents have strong incentives to prove their strong leadership during periods of unified government by punishing cabinet members who perform badly or are unpopular. For example, due to President Sarkozy's policy of opening government appointment to political opponents and minorities, many left-wing personalities (such as Bernard Kouchner, Eric Besson, and Jean-Marie Bockel) as well as representatives of ethnic groups (such as Rachida Dati, Fadela Amara and Rama Yade) were invited to join the conservative government formed under PM Fillon in 2007. Most of these outspoken ministers were nevertheless ousted by 2010, when the president's approval rating hit an all-time low. On the other hand, prime ministers under cohabitation may not always be able to respond to resignation calls by replacing unpopular ministers. If they did so, they could weaken their government and encourage more criticism. As a result they have more incentives to defend their ministers even when criticism might damage the government and use reshuffles as a way of revitalising their cabinets (Dowding and Dumont 2009: 14). For example, Lionel Jospin only reluctantly replaced extremely unpopular ministers, such as the education and finance ministers, Claude Allègre and Christian Sautter, whose resignations were asked by angry public sector workers during months of street protests. Jospin's unwillingness to fire ministers was not motivated by the lack of political power. Quite the opposite, he was recognised as the uncontested leader of the Socialist Party and the parliamentary majority during his time as a prime minister by political actors (Glavany 2001: 45; Schrameck 2001: 33; Chirac and Barré 2011: 213) and scholars alike (Portelli 1997: 21; Chevallier et al. 2009: 436; Duhamel 2011: 576). However, Jospin targeted the next presidential election and aimed to come across as a head of government free from both party and coalition constraints (Jospin 2010: 229). As the 2002 election approached, the prime minister took more distance from his own political party and refused to consider the PS first secretary's proposals for cabinet reshuffles (Hollande 2009: 185–191). This strategic approach to running the government explains why the prime minister was ready to sack ministers with whom he entered into conflict, but was not necessarily willing to satisfy the public and his coalition partners' demand for cabinet changes. While more data is needed to verify whether this finding applies to other prime ministers who take office under cohabitation

in different countries, this result seems to be in line with the current literature's approach to studying the strategic use of resignation calls as indicators of ministerial performance.

### **Conclusion**

This paper builds on a growing literature that provides theoretically grounded analyses of ministerial turnover. The use of principal-agent models as the underlying theory to study the relationship between prime ministers and cabinet members has advanced our understanding of the timing and consequences of ministerial resignations and cabinet reshuffles. We hope to have added to this literature by considering the case of political systems where cabinet ministers are subordinated to more than one principal, such as coalition governments and countries with directly elected presidents. To take advantage of the variation in the principal-agent relationships that characterise the position of cabinet ministers in political systems where directly elected presidents share executive power with a prime minister and cabinet who are accountable to the parliament, we have adopted a three-principal model to study the variation in the accountability of cabinet ministers to presidents, prime ministers, and party principals.

Our results confirm theoretical expectations regarding the variation in presidential and prime ministerial authority over the government during periods of unified government and cohabitation. These results, however, cast doubt on the assumption that political parties act as principals for their agents in government. One may expect that the influence of party principals over cabinet members increases under cohabitation for two reasons. While parties must share control over ministers with presidents and prime ministers under both executive scenarios, they have no formal means of holding the president accountable during periods of unified government. However, parties have the formal means of impacting the welfare of prime ministers under cohabitation. Additionally, prime ministers may be expected to negotiate cabinet seats with their parliamentary parties. However, our results have not emphasised any significant variation in the influence of party principals over cabinet composition across executive scenarios. While this finding may be explained by idiosyncratic factors related to the organisation and behaviour of French parties, a cross-country analysis of ministerial accountability could reveal the extent to which political parties have a say not only over the appointment but also over the deselection of their agents.

Finally, our findings draw attention towards the strategic and differentiated use of resignation calls by presidents and prime ministers. The literature on ministerial turnover has already stressed the important role of resignation calls as indicators of individual performance and agency loss (Dewan and Dowding 2005; Berlinski *et al.* 2010, 2012). The present article advances the understanding of resignation calls as tools that chief executives can use to limit agency loss and increase their own welfare by emphasising that presidents and prime ministers might use this information differently under different political circumstances. These results could form the basis for further work on ministerial durability in a comparative perspective.

Table 1 Expected variation in presidential, prime ministerial, and party influence over cabinet composition

	Unified executive	Cohabitation
PRESIDENT	++	0
PRIME MINISTER	0	++
PARTY	0	+

Table 2 Average events and personal characteristics by cabinet

Variables	Jospin (Cohabitation)		Fillon (Unified executive)		Overall	
	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.
N. Ministers	32		43		75	
N. Failures	10		19		29	
Length of tenure (days)	1059.69	566.91	790.14	446.68	905.15	515.65
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Cabinet experience	0.66	0.48	0.65	0.48	0.65	0.48
Deputy/Senator	0.81	0.40	0.67	0.47	0.73	0.45
Parliamentary experience	0.59	0.50	0.58	0.50	0.59	0.50
Mayor	0.53	0.51	0.44	0.50	0.48	0.50
Party executive	0.34	0.48	0.35	0.48	0.35	0.48
<i>Events</i>						
Conflicts PR	1.41	2.56	1.91	2.55	1.69	2.55
Conflicts PM	2.13	2.92	0.98	1.41	1.47	2.24
Conflicts PARTY	3.09	4.16	2.86	4.00	2.96	4.04
Resignation calls	1.50	3.03	0.86	1.79	1.13	2.40
Reshuffles	0.19	0.54	0.74	1.07	0.51	0.92
Party promotions	0.06	0.25	0.44	0.83	0.28	0.67
Party demotions	0.03	0.18	0.19	0.39	0.12	0.33

*Note:* figures before treatment with the exponential decay function.

Table 3 Determinants of ministerial turnover (Cox PH model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Personal characteristics variables</b>			
Cabinet experience	1.21** (0.48)	2.30** (0.94)	1.80** (0.55)
Deputy/Senator	-1.18* (0.70)	-1.43** (0.64)	-3.17** (1.02)
Parliamentary experience	0.57 (0.74)	0.64 (0.63)	1.93** (0.91)
Mayor	0.33 (0.45)	1.12** (0.43)	1.16** (0.57)
Party executive	-0.09 (0.35)	-0.48 (0.56)	-0.26 (0.66)
Party demotions		-0.08 (2.27)	-2.63 (2.81)
Party promotions		9.90*** (2.07)	10.97*** (1.66)
<b>Events variables</b>			
Reshuffles#		-0.94** (0.39)	-1.77*** (0.53)
Resignation calls		0.80** (0.38)	0.94** (0.39)
PR Conflicts		2.30*** (0.62)	3.40** (1.07)
PM Conflicts		1.22* (0.67)	-0.84 (1.44)
Party Conflicts		0.49 (0.44)	1.43* (0.77)
<b>Context variables</b>			
Cohabitation		-0.78 (0.55)	-0.71 (0.70)
Resignation calls × Cohabitation			-0.23 (1.11)
PR Conflicts × Cohabitation			-1.79 (1.58)
PM Conflicts × Cohabitation			4.63** (1.59)
PARTY Conflicts × Cohabitation			-1.86 (1.37)
<hr/>			
N Ministers	75	75	75
N Observations	2815	2815	2815
N Failures	29	29	29
Log likelihood	-95.055	-58.168	-52.966
Linktest hat(squared)	0.24 p=(.52)	-0.04 p=(.06)	-0.04 p=(.10)
Proportional hazards assumption	3.50(5 df)	9.36(13 df)	5.01(17 df)
global test chi(2)	p=(.61)	p=(.75)	p=(.99)

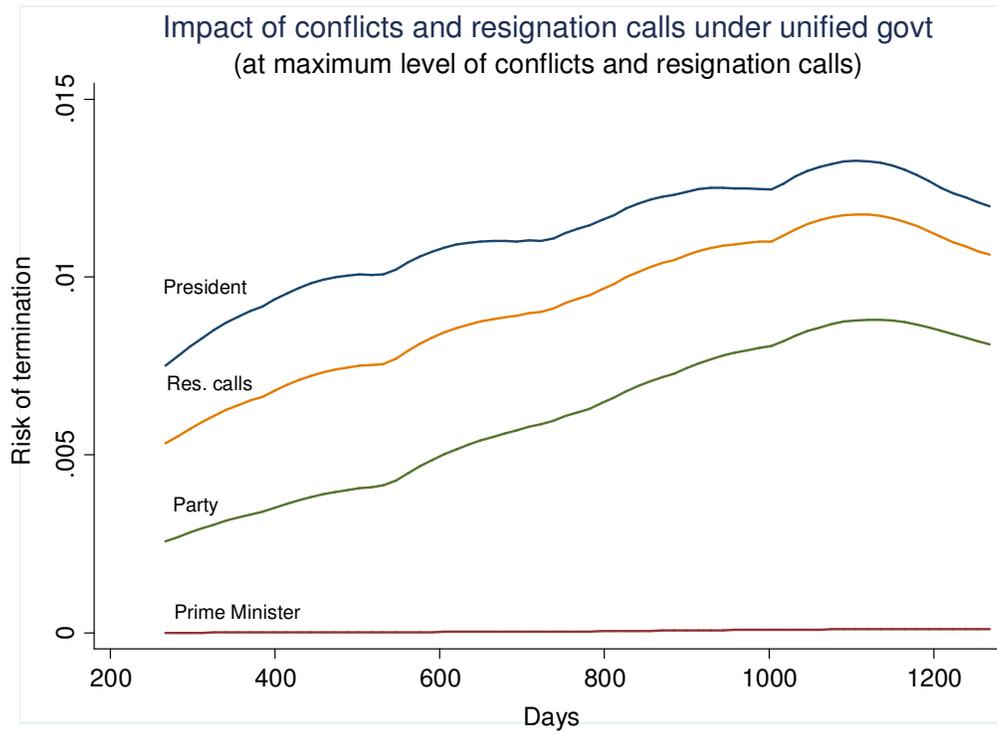
Note: Cell entries are coefficients computed using the Efron method of resolving ties. Figures in parentheses are robust standard errors clustered by minister (75 clusters). Levels of significance: \*\*\* 99%, \*\* 95%, \* 90%.

# Variables interacted with the natural logarithm of time to address their non-proportional effects.

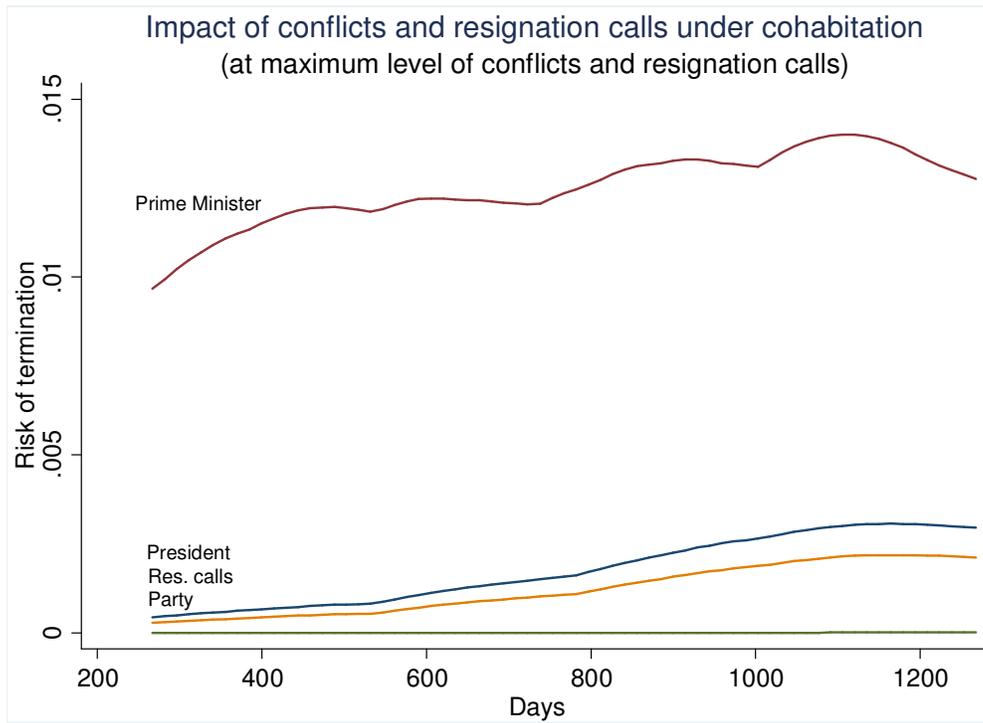
Table 4 Principal-agent relationships across executive scenarios

<b>Executive scenario</b>	<b>PR Conflicts</b>	<b>PM Conflicts</b>	<b>PARTY Conflicts</b>	<b>Resignation calls</b>
Cohabitation=0	3.40***	-0.84	1.43*	0.94**
Cohabitation=1	1.61	3.79***	-0.43	0.72

**Figure 1 Impact of conflicts and resignation calls under unified government**



**Figure 2 Impact of conflicts under cohabitation**



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