A Theory of Coalitions and Clientelism: Coalition Politics in Iceland 1945-2000

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Abstract

This paper serves a dual purpose. First, it considers the effects clientelism has on coalition politics through the inflated importance of the particularistic benefits the executive office offers. The patterns of coalition politics in the Nordic countries are compared to offer preliminary evidence in support of the theory. Secondly, it provides detailed information about coalition formation and termination in Iceland from 1945-2000 following closely the format of Müller and Strøm's, eds., (2000), which contains analysis for each of the other Western European democracies. The paper surveys the political landscape of Iceland and the institutional framework that structures the formation of coalitions, coalition governance, and cabinet termination. In addition, complete data regarding each of the three aspects is provided for every cabinet formed in the period allowing for the inclusion of Iceland in studies of coalition politics.

Coalition politics have received little attention in the study of Icelandic politics. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson (1977) is the sole publication on the politics of coalition formation in Iceland. Revisiting Icelandic coalition politics is thus a timely exercise. Although coalition politics in Iceland are in many respects similar to the rest of Western Europe there are some significant differences. Coalition formation in Iceland appears more competitive than in most countries, which is perhaps best exemplified by the lack of tolerance for minority governments. The contrast with the Nordic countries is especially stark. In some respect this finding is surprising – because of a tendency to emphasize the similarities of the Nordic countries and the similarities of the institutional framework, which structures coalition formation in the countries. In the end, however, these differences serve to highlight the sensitivity of institutional explanations of coalition politics to our assumptions about the behavioral strategies politicians adopt. This is not to say that institutions are unimportant. On the contrary, the effects of institutions are even more relevant as they determine the viability of different political strategies. The effect of a particular institution depends on the larger institutional context in which it is placed.

The competitive nature of Icelandic coalition politics is rooted in the clientelistic nature of politics in Iceland, which has been documented by Kristinsson (1996). Clientelistic politics reflect a choice of a political strategy that focuses on the delivery of particularistic benefits rather than public policies. The prevalence of clientelistic politics depends on factors such as the politicians' ability to claim credit for their actions, the opportunities to provide such benefits, and the relative cost of alternative political strategies. Rather than attempting to explain the importance of clientelistic politics in Iceland I focus on the implication its presence has for coalition politics. I argue that where clientelistic politics are an important political strategy, the importance of cabinet membership is inflated as it provides the means to successfully pursue clientelistic politics. This has important implications for coalition formation and governance that I detail below.

This study also complements Müller and Strøm's (2000) edited volume "Coalition Governments in Western Europe", which provides detailed information about coalitions in the Western European parliamentary democracies. To maximize comparability I have adopted the variable definitions used in their volume, and the eight standardized tables reported for each country in the volume are replicated here for Iceland. To ensure consistency the editors of the volume were consulted whenever questions arose.

The study of parliamentary government and coalitions in a comparative perspective has enjoyed increasing attention over the past decade. Our theoretical understanding of the process of coalition formation has been greatly advanced by the works of Austen-Smith and Banks (1988, 1990),

Baron and Ferejohn (1989), Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996), and others. Although perhaps not a central concern in the literature, it clearly suggests that institutions play a considerable role in the process of coalition formation. Rules of recognition have a clear impact on equilibrium outcomes in each of the papers. In Laver and Shepsle control over ministerial portfolios determines the stability of any coalition. Less attention has been given coalition governance and cabinet termination but the literature on the subject, Huber (1996) and Lupia and Strøm (1995), e.g., has also emphasized the role of institutions.

The emphasis on the role of institutions is echoed in this study. Detailed information is provided on the institutions that most likely are to influence coalition politics. It is important to note the limitations of using case studies to study coalition formation. The reason is simple, institutions do not change often and when they change the changes are usually not large. On the other hand, such changes can resemble a controlled experiment allowing us to isolate the effects of the particular institution. For a complete theory of the effects of institutions and their interactions we should, however, rely on cross-national studies. To alleviate some of the limitations of the case study I draw on similar studies of the other Nordic democracies and highlight the aspects of Icelandic coalition that appear unusual and that a theory of coalition politics should be able to account for. Perhaps more importantly, I provide data that facilitates cross-national studies of coalitions.

The first section of the paper provides an argument about the role of institutions, and their relationship with political motivations, in influencing coalition formation and governance. The second section contains a brief description of the Icelandic parliamentary party system, followed by an account of the institutional environment. These institutions include the electoral system and parliamentary procedures. I then turn my attention to the various aspects of coalition formation and termination in Iceland, and the role of clientelistic politics by comparing the Icelandic coalition experience with that of the other Nordic countries.

INSTITUTIONS, MOTIVATIONS, AND COALITIONS

A prominent theme in the study of coalition politics regards the motivations of politicians (e.g. Laver and Schofield 1990). For the study of electoral politics the assumption whether politicians seek to influence policy or simply to win office appears fairly innocuous (e.g. Calvert 1985) – to influence policy one must first win office. This is not the case when it comes to coalition politics. The specific assumption made about the motivations of politicians has implications for which coalition is expected to form. It is important to note that electoral or coalition politics are closely related. Coalition politics are influenced by what politicians must do to get elected and electoral politics by

what politicians do after they have been elected. It is the interdependency of these two areas of politics that I focus on in arguing that the presence of particularistic politics is an important factor in the study of coalition formation.

Within the literature on coalition politics the two assumptions of politicians' motivations are frequently treated as being mutually exclusive. Martin and Stevenson (2001) find support for a number of hypotheses derived from both assumptions. Their findings are thus consistent with politicians being motivated by both the desire to hold office and to influence policy. They are, however, also consistent with politicians in some countries being only concerned with policy and in other countries only with office. While the latter explanation is perhaps unlikely it highlights the possibility that politicians' motivations may not be uniform across countries. If politicians' motivations vary cross-nationally different patterns of coalition should be observed across countries.

Although political motivations are quite possibly influenced by norms and tradition they also have institutional sources. The effects of different electoral systems on electoral strategies are well known. Politicians' incentives to build a *personal vote* have, for example, been documented in a number of electoral systems including plurality rule and single-member districts in the USA (Cain, Fiorina and Ferejohn 1987), the single transferable vote in Ireland (Carty 1981, Gallagher and Komito 1999), the limited vote in Japan (Cox and Rosenbluth 1993), and open-list PR in Brazil (Ames 1995a,b). Carey and Shugart (1995) provide a general theoretical framework for considering the effects of electoral systems on the importance of the personal vote.

The incentive to cultivate a personal vote brings with it a need for resources that can be deployed for that purpose. Control of the executive branch of government generally provides access to important resources such as political appointments, the drafting of legislation and regulations, and the implementation of the law. The heightened importance of these aspects of government creates a powerful incentive for parties to be a part of the governing coalition. Hence, where clientelistic politics are important the politicians' *Induced preferences*' resemble more that of office-seekers than policy-seekers. Consequently clientelistic politics should lead to patterns of coalition formations and governance consistent with theories assuming office-seeking behavior. Recognition of this fact allows the deduction of a number of hypotheses about the influence of particularistic politics on coalition formation.

The length of coalition bargaining can be considered a measure of bargaining complexity, and to a lesser extent, the stakes of the bargaining. Where policy is important the bargaining process may be aided by the fact that all policies must meet the approval of the legislature.[1] The outcome of

[1] It may also be possible that higher stakes result in short bargaining process - if exclusion from the cabinet is very costly, the parties have an incentive to accept any offer.

the bargaining is therefore by no means final and still must be negotiated in the legislature. If clientelism is important, however, the bargaining is at least in part over privileged access to the discretionary powers of the cabinet.

Hypothesis 1: The greater the prevalence of particularistic politics, the longer the duration of coalition formation bargaining.

Coalition theories have aimed at characterizing coalitions by their size and/or policy range. Where politicians place a premium on holding office, minimal winning and/or disconnected coalitions should be frequent. If policy is the main concern, the size of the coalition matters less, more coalitions are connected, and the median party is in the cabinet. Accordingly Icelandic coalitions, given the prevalence of clientalistic politics, should adhere more closely to the size principle than the other Nordic countries.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the prevalence of particularistic politics, the higher the frequency of minimal winning coalitions and the lower the frequency of minority cabinets.

Hypothesis 3a: The greater the prevalence of clientelistic politics, the lower the frequency of ideologically connected coalitions.

Hypothesis 3b: The greater the prevalence of clientelistic politics, the less likely a coalition is to contain the median party.

The effect of clientelistic politics on cabinet duration is unclear. On one hand, the opposition has a greater incentive to topple the coalition and coalition party members will succumb more easily to constituency pressures. On the other hand, cabinet parties have a greater incentive to maintain the coalition. The overall effect is thus uncertain.

Finally, it can be argued that the causes of cabinet terminations will be influenced by clientelism. As the value of holding office extends beyond the ability to influence policy when clientelism is prevalent, the parties ought to be less willing to terminate a coalition over policy disagreements. In other words, the threshold of disagreement required for termination will increase as the cost of termination increases.

Hypothesis 4: The greater the prevalence of particularistic politics, the lower the likelihood of cabinet termination over policy disagreements.

Below I consider how patterns of coalition politics in the Nordic countries confirm to the above hypotheses. Among the Western European democracies, the salience of clientelistic politics has generally been considered high in Iceland, Ireland, and Italy (Kristinsson 1996) as well as Belgium and Austria (Kitschelt 2000). It is therefore safe to assume that clientelistic politics play a greater role in Icelandic coalition politics than in its Nordic counterparts. The analysis below is intended to highlight the important differences between coalition politics in Iceland and its Nordic neighbors rather than serve as a conclusive test of the theory described above.

It is important to clarify some of the assumptions guiding the analysis. Although it is recognized that political parties are hardly unitary actors, they are adopted here as the unit of analysis. Coalitions are generally formed by parties rather than individual members of parliament and it is thus reasonable to focus our attention on political parties – although one should not lose sight of how intra-party politics may influence the parties' behaviour (Bowler et.al. 1999, Indriðason 2000)

The basic observation of interest is the cabinet. A change of a cabinet is defined as: i) a change in the set of parties holding a cabinet ministership, ii) a change in the identity of the prime minister, and/or iii) *any* general elections. A distinction is drawn between a cabinet and government. A change in government occurs if condition i) or iii) is satisfied. That is, a change in the identity of the prime minister does not indicate a change in government. Note that the definitions used here differ from those normally employed in the study of Icelandic politics but are adopted here for sake of comparability.

The reader is also referred to the introductory chapter of Müller and Strøm (1997).

THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY SYSTEM

Parliamentary parties are the building blocks of most cabinet coalitions, as the cabinets rely on their support in passing legislation. Consequently they are in many ways the focal point of our attention. The bargaining power of the political parties is a function of the distribution of parliamentary seats, and the distribution of the parties' policy preferences. Bargaining power may also be influenced by other factors, such as reputations. It is worth pointing out two important facts about bargaining power. First, the number of parliamentary seats is not necessarily a good indicator of bargaining power. Small parties may have much bargaining power if they are pivotal to many potential coalitions.[2] Hence, the distribution of seats among the parties can be just as important as the number of seats. Second, the relative importance of the distribution of seats and the parties' policy preferences depends on how the political parties value them.

The Icelandic parliamentary party system has remained fairly stable over the course of the years. At its core are four parties; the Independence Party (IP), the Progressive Party (PP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the United Socialist Party/People's Alliance (SP/PA)[3] which have been represented in the Alþingi throughout the postwar period with the exception of the current legislative

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[2] The German FDP is an example of a small party that has been extremely successful in forming cabinet coalitions.

[3] The PA was initially an electoral alliance (1956) of the SP and a few of the more left wing members of the SDP. The National Preservation Party (NPP) joined the PA in 1963.

term.[4] Before the election of 1999 the parties of the left - the SDP, the PA, and the Women's Alliance (WA) - formed an electoral alliance, the Alliance (AL). The alliance became a formal political party in May 2000. The left arm of the PA formed the Left Movement augmenting its leftist platform with environmental issues.

The four parties have dominated the parliamentary party system, although several attempts at altering the face of the party system have been made. At the left end of the political spectrum parties have suffered from internal disputes, which have led to the formation of splinter parties, as well as efforts to unify the left, which to this day have not resulted in a reduction of the number of parties. On the right, splinter parties have been of a different nature. They have generally been formed around politicians that have either fared poorly in their parties' primaries, e.g., The Association for Equality and Social Justice, or for other reasons of personal nature, e.g., The Citizen's Party (CP).

The IP has been the largest parliamentary party, usually holding 35%-40% of the parliamentary seats. Ideologically the IP is the most right-wing party, emphasizing economic liberty with a conservative and nationalistic strand (Grímsson 1977). The IP has the greatest cross-class appeal among the Icelandic parties. It draws its support from professionals and entrepreneurs as well as the working classes. The party has strong ties with both the employers' associations and the trade unions.

For most of the post-war period the PP has been the second largest parliamentary party and is normally ranked next to the IP on the left-right scale. Its parliamentary strength has decreased in the period from about 25%-35% to about 17%-24%. The party's declining fortune can in part be explained by changes made to the electoral system that at the beginning of the period was particularly favorable to parties that drew their electoral support disproportionally from the more rural areas. The PP has its roots in the Farmer's Party and relied, and still does albeit to a lesser extent, heavily on support in the rural areas. In recent years the PP has de-emphasized its rural ties. The PP is frequently depicted as a pragmatic center party (e.g. Kristinsson 1991).

The SDP's parliamentary strength has been in the 12%-17% range. While the changes in the electoral system have benefited the SDP, owing to its relative strength in urban areas, the party has suffered from declining influence in the Trade Union Association. In latter years its appeal appears to have been the greatest among the middle and upper classes (Harðarson 1995). It can be argued, especially during the second half of the period, that the SDP's platform has become economically

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[4] Technically this is not true. During the previous legislative term the parliamentary parties of the SDP and Þjóðvaki - The People's Movement (ÞV) merged to form a parliamentary party under the label "Jafnaðarmenn" or Social Democrats. The ÞV was formed before the 1995 election and was a splinter of the SDP.

more liberal than that of the PP, and perhaps even that of the IP.[5] The SDP and the PP probably differ the most on rural-urban issues that have become increasingly important in Icelandic politics. The importance of urban-rural politics has been becoming increasingly important, and has surpassed foreign policy as the second most important policy dimension.

Finally, the SP/PA has normally held between 13% and 20% of the parliamentary seats. The party is at the left end of the political spectrum. Traditionally, its voters have belonged to the working and lower-middle classes but like the SDP, the party has witnessed an erosion of its class-based electorate. The party has strong ties with the Trade Union Federation (Alþýðusamband Íslands or ASÍ).

Table 1a lists, by cabinet, all the Icelandic parties that have been represented in the Icelandic parliament, Alþingi, since 1945. The parties are ordered according to their ranking on a left-right policy dimension, based on Laver and Hunt (1992) and a survey of a few experts on Icelandic politics. The second column of the table indicates whether the cabinet was formed immediately following (F) an election and whether an election signaled the end (E) of the cabinet. Cabinet party seats are boldfaced. The table also identifies, for the two most important policy dimensions, the median legislator's party – the second policy dimension being rural-urban issues.[6] Finally, the table displays the effective number of legislative parties, the number of seats held by the cabinet parties, and the total number of seats in the Alþingi.

[Table 1a approximately here]

Table 1b places each of the Icelandic parties in a scheme of familiar party families and provides information about the parties' origin and demise.

[Table 1b approximately here]

The PP has consistently been the median legislator's party on the left-right policy dimension. The central location of the PP has lead to its participation in 14 of the 26 cabinets formed since 1945 – a substantial participation rate, although perhaps less than one would expect. When the PP is not in the cabinet, the SDP is (with one exception). Hence, one of the two centrist parties on the left-right dimension is almost always in the cabinet. Foreign policy may have played a role in this as a coalition of the IP and the PA was unthinkable for a long time due to the parties' differences. The

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[5] This applies, in particular, to issues of economic openness and views on membership in the European Union.

[6] If all the legislators were ranked on a policy dimension the median legislator is the legislator who has an equal number of legislators to his left and to his right. The importance of the median legislator derives from the fact that his support is needed for a bill to pass the legislator. In identifying the party of the median legislator it is assumed that the legislators of each party are grouped together on the policy dimension, i.e., each legislator sits next to at most one legislator that is not a member of his party.

IP and the PP have taken turns being the median party on the second dimension, urban-rural issues.[7] Four minority cabinets were formed in the post-war period, but only one was a serious attempt at forming a working cabinet – the other three had more specific purposes detailed below. Cabinet majorities are modest and have generally not been super-majoritarian since 1949.

In terms of the frequency of coalitions and majority cabinets, Iceland is near the top when compared with the Western European democracies, and an outlier compared with the Nordic countries. The average frequency of coalition cabinets equals 69% in Western Europe and 47.5% in the Nordic countries. In Western Europe 37% of all cabinets are minority cabinets, 63.8% in the Nordic countries. The corresponding frequencies for Iceland are 85% and 15%. Finland does not follow the 'Nordic pattern' either – single party (11%) and/or minority (30%) cabinets are rare compared to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The contrast between Iceland and the three countries is thus even sharper than the averages indicate.

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Institutions influence coalition politics. Although institutions are themselves political constructs, they are not reinvented each time a coalition is formed. For the most part the process of coalition formation takes place under a fixed institutional framework. Certain institutional changes require qualified majorities or a referendum to take effect. A constitutional change takes effect after being passed by Alþingi twice with an election held in the interim. Certain changes to the electoral system, i.e., changes in district boundaries and seat allocations, require a 2/3 majority since 1999[8].

Below I focus on two institutional structures that directly influence coalition formation and governance. First, *the electoral system* determines the representation of the political parties in the Alþingi. The electoral system, as we will see, has on occasions become an important factor in the coalition bargaining process. Second, *parliamentary procedures* can influence coalition governance in a variety of ways. Generally speaking, they determine the extent to which the parliament can influence policy-making. Parliamentary procedures specify, e.g., under what circumstances the government has lost the confidence of the parliament, when and how parliament is dissolved, and who can call elections.

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[7] If foreign policy is considered the second most important issue dimension, the SDP and the PP alternate in having the median MA. In fact, one can simply substitute the SDP for the IP in the column of the median party of the second policy dimension.

[8] Certain changes to the electoral system only require a simple majority, e.g., changes in district magnitude as long as it does not fall below six.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The electoral law has changed substantially since 1945 when 33 of the 52 members of Alþingi (MA) were elected in single or two-member district. Eight members were elected from the district of Reykjavík by proportional representation and the rest (11) were distributed among the parliamentary parties to increase proportionality.[9]

Dissatisfaction with the electoral system intensified as the urban areas grew and became increasingly underrepresented in Alþingi. The dissatisfaction stemmed from the parties' unequal support in the rural areas. The PP benefited from the overrepresentation of the rural areas at the cost of the SDP and the IP. After resignation of the PP-PA-SDP cabinet in 1958 both the IP and the SDP declared that they would not participate in the formation of a cabinet unless there was a prior agreement on electoral reform, and on immediate actions to combat inflation. The PP objected to the former and the PA to the latter. As a result the SDP formed a minority government with the IP guarding it from a defeat on a vote of no confidence. The SDP and the IP did not have a working majority in the Alþingi and had to rely on the PA to adopt the new electoral law.

The new electoral law increased the number of MAs from 52 to 60, twenty of which sat in the upper house. Forty-nine seats were now allocated in eight multimember districts by proportional representation. The remaining eleven seats were allotted based on parties' vote share in the country as a whole.

Although the electoral system had not designated any seats for the upper house since 1934, Alþingi nevertheless remained divided into two chambers and a vote was taken in a 'joint' session to determine which MAs take a seat in the upper chamber. Although a seemingly innocuous arrangement it is not necessarily without consequence. A working majority in the parliament requires a majority in each chamber. Thus, if the parliamentary session starts before a cabinet forms, the existence of the two chambers effectively acts as a constraint on coalition formation. The set of possible coalitions with a working majority before the vote is larger than after.[10]

The electoral law underwent another revision in 1984. The district magnitudes were changed to reflect population changes but fell short of creating equal regional representation. The regional disparity was far from negligible – in the 1999 elections the ratio of seats to voters was about four times higher in the district Vestfirðir than in Reykjavík. The number of seats in Alþingi was also increased to 63. Of the 63 seats 54 were elected in the 8 districts, another 8 were allotted to the

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[9] The supplementary seats were adopted in 1934. Until 1959 the parties had the option to present a list for the country-at-large from which every third supplementary seat the party won was drawn from. Harðarson (forthcoming) provides a detailed discussion.

districts based on the number of registered voters before each election to increase the proportionality of regional representation, and the final seat was allotted after the election to increase the proportionality. The system also aimed at achieving proportional party representation in the legislature. To do so one-fourth of the seats within each district were designated as supplementary seats and were allotted to the parties in proportion to their support in the country as a whole. This was intended to strike a balance between party and regional representation, e.g., a party strong in an underrepresented region, such as Reykjavík, is compensated by rural party MAs.

Alþingi became an unicameral legislature in 1991 – a change that was long overdue by many accounts.[11] The move to an unicameral legislature has generally been seen as inconsequential, as since 1934 there were no differences, neither in terms of composition nor role, between the two chambers.[12] Whether the adoption of an unicameral legislature was indeed inconsequential is an open question. The differences between the working majority, and the number of MAs needed to defend the government from a vote of no confidence, is smaller in an unicameral legislature.[13]

Finally, the electoral law was amended in 2000. An upper bound on regional disparity, 2:1, was established and the number of districts was reduced to six more equally sized districts. Other changes included using d'Hondt's rule for the allocation of district seats and increased opportunities for voters to influence the rank of individual candidates on the party lists.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

While Alþingi was bicameral the political parties may have felt pressure to conclude coalition bargaining before the membership of the upper chamber was determined. Another factor that may exert pressure on the parties is the election of the Speaker of Alþingi at the beginning of the parliamentary session.

The Speaker wields certain powers over parliamentary procedures. His primary role is to coordinate the work of the parliament and its standing committees. The Speaker has some control over the agenda – he can for example remove issues from the parliamentary schedule.[14] The Speaker also has some say in how long the MAs are allowed to speak on certain matters and in whether an MA is allowed to ask a minister a question.

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10 In 1979 the election of MAs to the upper chamber turned out to be essential condition for the formation of the cabinet that formed. See Ragnarsson 1981:176-177, Indriðason 2000.

11 Kristinsson (1994), for example.

12 Note that there may exist differences in the composition due to the selection of MAs to the upper chamber within Alþingi. The differences can, however, not be derived from the electoral system.

13 Bicameralism may constrain coalition formation and increase the number of veto players. See Indriðason 2000.

14 The Law on Alþingi's Parliamentary Procedure, gr. 63.

If an opposition member serves as the Speaker he can potentially cause the cabinet some difficulties.[15] Exactly how important the position is, and to what extend the Speakers has used his power, has not been studied in detail. The work of the Speaker has remained largely uncontroversial. On rare occasions it has proven convenient for the cabinet to have the Speaker on its side – as when Prime Minister Ólafur Jóhannesson dissolved Alþingi in 1974 causing a great controversy.[16]

The Speaker is elected by a majority run-off but the six deputy speakers and the members of the twelve standing committees are elected proportionally by d'Hondt's rule. Normally the coalition parties and the opposition parties each offer a list of candidates. Nothing in the parliamentary procedures imposes any restrictions on who offers such lists other than that MAs indicate to the Speaker that they intend to vote for the same list of candidates.[17]

The jurisdictions of the twelve standing committees correspond roughly to that of the ministerial portfolios of the cabinet. A legislative bill becomes a law after it passes three readings; each followed by a vote, and is signed into law by the President. The bill is referred to a committee after its first reading, and can be referred back to the committee after its second and third reading if amended. The committees can introduce legislative bills in the parliament on their own initiative, as can any MA. They are also allowed to introduce new issues to the parliament by reporting to the parliament on its activities. Finally, cabinet ministers frequently have a committee introduce a legislative bill to the parliament on their behalf.

The committees elect their chairman and deputy chairman. This procedure guarantees the coalition parties – if they work together and are backed by a parliamentary majority – the committee leadership. Committee chairmanships have only been given to opposition MAs between 1993 and 1999. The coalition parties, however, retained a majority on each of the committees.

The influence of the parliamentary committees derives mainly from their ability to specialize. After a legislative bill leaves the committee it can be amended on the floor under an open rule. The committee must therefore rely on its power of persuasion, and its claim to be the Alþingi's expertise on the matter, or the government's majority – if a government bill – to pass the bill. Since the coalition parties almost always have a parliamentary majority the committees cannot be considered an important channel for oppositional influence. First, the extent of oppositional influence on policy making can be no greater than the committee's ability to influence policy, and it has been argued above that this ability is limited. Second, the opposition is in a minority on the committee and can,

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15 Although the opposition parties are rarely in this position it is not unheard of. Sverrir Hermannsson (IP), for example, was the president of the lower chamber 1979-1983 during the Thoroddsen PP-PA coalition's term.

16 The opposition claimed that the Speaker disregarded the opposition's wishes to address the Alþingi and offer a motion of no confidence. Instead the Speaker allowed Jóhannesson to dissolve Alþingi.

17 This voting procedure does not appear to be resolute – it is not clear what happens when no lists are offered and each MA casts a vote without coordinating with anyone else.

thus, not expect to have much influence. The opposition may, however, benefit from having access to information that is considered by the committee. Finally, as the legislative bill ultimately must be accepted by a legislative majority, committee members regularly report to, and consult with, their parliamentary parties to ensure the bills passage.

If the committee's opinion is not unanimous the committee minority is allowed to present their own opinion. Overall, the lack of any substantive restrictions on the amendment process on the floor of the parliament renders the standing committees fairly powerless. Similarly, the oppositional influence through the standing committees can hardly be considered to be significant.

The ability of the opposition to influence policy making has been considered a factor influencing the likelihood of minority governments forming (Strøm 1990). The opposition may gain such influence through the parliament's committee system. It is, however, important to note that the committees' membership and agenda setting powers are an important determinant of their influence. I have argued here that although Alþingi's committee system is highly institutionalized it lacks substantive powers to influence legislation.[18]

Much of the work of the legislature is centered on the parliamentary parties. Historically there is not a clear division between legislative and executive powers in Icelandic politics. When Iceland attained legislative power in 1874, the executive power remained in Denmark. Partly out of need and partly because it could, the legislature usurped some of the tasks that normally fall under the executive. The development of clientalistic politics in Iceland owes much to this additional role of the legislature. The legislature has naturally been loath to give up its ability to cater to its voters. In this respect Alþingi resembles the U.S. Congress more than the Nordic countries' legislatures.

The parliamentary parties have always had a strong position vis-à-vis the cabinet. While the strength of the cabinet may have grown with the size of government and increased specialization within the ministries,[19] its power has been moderated by the advent of primaries in the 1970's and diminished party cohesion (Kristjánsson 1994). One can argue that policy making in parliamentary systems is best viewed as simultaneous bargaining between i) the parties in the cabinet, and ii) between the coalition parties in the cabinet and their parliamentary parties. The importance of clientalistic politics, combined with the strength of the parliamentary parties, and the fact that party leaders have formally little to say about the MA's chance of reelection makes this view of parliamentary politics especially pertinent to Icelandic. It should be noted that the strength of the

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[18] Strøm (1990) places Iceland higher on his index of oppositional influence than Denmark and Finland. It may be useful to think of oppositional influence through committees in terms of sufficient and necessary condition. In my argument they are not sufficient but leave open the possibility that they are necessary.

[19] Evidence of this can be found in the increase of legislative bills that are government sponsored and a corresponding decline in the number of bills sponsored by individual MAs.

parliamentary parties is not a substitute for cabinet membership. The parliamentary parties' ability to engage in clientalistic politics, on the contrary, depends on the cabinet.

Finally, the defining feature of any parliamentary system is that the cabinet must be tolerated by the legislature to stay in power. No investiture vote is required in the Alþingi. Hence, like its Nordic counterparts the legislature operates under 'negative parliamentarism', which is considered conducive to the formation of minority cabinets (Bergman 1995). The procedure for the removal of a cabinet is the vote of no confidence.[20] The prime minister has the authority to dissolve Alþingi and call an election. Only twice, in 1931 and 1974, has this right been used unilaterally by the prime minister, in both instances creating a controversy.

COALITION FORMATION

Various institutions, such as investiture votes and rules of recognition, have implications for the coalition formation process. The empirical literature, as Müller and Strøm (1997) point out, has suggested that the formation process itself may have implications for the coalition's performance. In this section I describe the formation process in some detail.

Table 2 provides information about the formation of every cabinet since 1945, including the number of bargaining rounds, the participants in each round, the formateur's party, and the number of days required to form a cabinet. An effort has been made to provide as accurate information as possible but often the bargaining takes place behind closed doors. I focus on 'serious' bargaining rounds, i.e., official bargaining between parties that considered a coalition possible. The formal exploratory meetings that take place at the beginning of the formation process are not counted unless there is evidence to that fact that serious bargaining took place.

[Table 2 approximately here]

The President of Iceland has the role of an informateur. While his constitutional powers are greater than that of an informateur - he appoints the ministers of the cabinet and decides on the number of ministries - his role has traditionally been much more limited.[21] The divergence between the President's constitutional role and its practice is thus in many ways similar to that of the Norwegian and Swedish (before 1975) royality. There is only one known instance in which the President has actively exercised his constitutional role – in the formation of the IP-SDP cabinet in

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[20] The vote of no confidence has no clear foundation in Icelandic law. According to the first clause of the constitution, the government shall be parliamentary but nowhere, neither in the constitution nor in other law, is the notion of parliamentary government clarified. After Thors' 1949 minority cabinet lost a vote of no confidence the cabinet resigned but apparently was not required to do so (Johannessen 1981).

[21] Formally, the President also has the power to dissolve Alþingi.

1959. Normally the formateur is appointed according to established norms that generally favour the larger parties and/or parties that reasonably can claim to be the winners of the preceding election.[22] If the coalition formation process drags on the President uses his discretion to a greater extent in appointing formateurs. If no progress is apparent, he sometimes waits to appoint a new formateur, thus placing no restrictions on the bargaining, or appoints a formateur with a mandate to form a non-parliamentarian cabinet. Once a coalition has been formed, the President appoints the cabinet's ministers according to the coalition agreement.

After an election the President often waits a few days before appointing a formateur. The President customarily meets with each party leader before appointing a formateur. Next, the formateurs first meet individually with the leaders of the other parties for general discussions. The informal discussions are a mixture of a formality and an opportunity for the parties to express their interest in further discussions.

At this point the formateur either returns his mandate – if he determines that a coalition under his leadership will not form – or he invites one or more parties to formal negotiations. These negotiations are normally held between the party elites – usually the party chairman, the deputy chairman, and a senior party member.

Grímsson (1977) has termed the first two stages of the bargaining process the *presidential stage* and the *exploratory stage*. These are followed by formal bargaining stage, which he divides into two parts: the policy stage and the portfolio stage. The implementation of policy agreements cannot, however, be considered independent of the distribution of portfolios.[23] A minister can have considerable independence – especially if the prime minister does not hold the reins tightly.

In bargaining over policy the actors are bound to have some expectations about the distribution of portfolios and its importance for policy implementation. The PA, e.g., prevented its exclusion from coalition bargaining by avoiding to lay a claim to the ministry of foreign affairs, which was unthinkable because of their opposition to the U.S. Base in Keflavík (Grímsson 1977). Policy agreements can only be considered important to the extent that they can be enforced and various methods of enforcement have been experienced with. In Pálsson's 1987 cabinet, e.g., the portfolios were consciously distributed in a manner such that each party held a portfolio in each of the following four groups of ministries: i) economic ministries, ii) social policy ministries, iii) procedural ministries, and iv) other ministries (Hannibalsson 1999).

The final phase of the coalition formation process is the ratification of the coalition agreement by each of the coalition parties' parliamentary parties, or the parties' central committees.

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[22] Iceland's first president, Sveinn Björnsson, is known to have committed to paper a rule that he followed in appointing formateurs.

[23] This is the crux of Laver and Shepsle's (1996) argument.

In most instances the party's decision is made by a majority vote. Grímsson (1977) argues that the acceptance of the party is largely a formality. It is important to note, however, that the appearance of a formality does not imply that the parties are not influential. Differences may simply be settled, or anticipated, before a formal vote is taken.

Table 3 lists the dates of election, formation, resignation, cabinet leaving office, and next scheduled election for each of the 26 cabinets. Maximum and actual cabinet duration are also calculated. Together tables 2 and 3 show that government coalitions lasting longer than one electoral term are a rarity. Only three government coalitions have survived an election with their majority, and the willingness to cooperate, intact. These are the 1944-1947 IP-SP-SDP coalitions, the 1959-1971 IP-SDP coalitions, and the current IP-PP coalition (1995-). Excluding these cabinets, as well as the SDP minority cabinet of 1979 and the PP-PA-SDP-CP coalition of 1989 – leaving us with the cases that represented 'actual' bargaining situations[24] – the formation of a coalition takes on average 26.7 days in an average of 3.3 bargaining rounds!

[Table 3 approximately here]

[Table 4 approximately here]

Table 4 compares the Nordic countries on various aspects of coalition politics, which are discussed below. According to *hypothesis 1* Iceland is expected to experience prolonged coalition bargaining. Table 4 reveals that coalition formation takes considerably longer in Iceland and Finland on average than in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

The average duration of an Icelandic cabinet is 776 days, or just over two years. The average cabinet duration in the Nordic countries is only slightly lower – with the exception of Finland. Care should be taken in measuring cabinet durability, as some cabinets do not form following an election. Comparing the cabinets' duration with their maximum possible duration (the number of days left of the legislative term when a cabinet is formed), the cabinets last on average 63.7% of their maximum possible duration. There are different ways of measuring cabinet survival. If our interest is in how long an average cabinets *can* last, the fact that some cabinets are caretakers has to be taken into account. Likewise, non-political cabinet terminations, such as the death, or retirement, of a prime minister, should not be counted. Calculated based on this criteria – excluding the SDP minority cabinets of 1958, 1959, and 1979, and counting the cabinets of Thors VII and Benediktson I, and Benediktsson II and Hafstein each as a single cabinet – the average duration equals 950 days, or about 2.6 years. The average duration as a percentage of maximum duration is 72.8%. Finally, it may be of interest to consider only cabinets that form immediately after elections

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[24] This is not intend to imply that no bargaining takes place in the cases that have been excluded – the idea is to look at the cases where no obvious focal point is given (as the sitting cabinet), a new cabinet needs to be formed, and bargaining takes place.

and face close to a full legislative term, i.e., cabinets that face less than a full legislative term are in effect truncated observations which may inflate our measure of duration as a percentage of maximum duration.[25] Restricting our attention to these cabinets, and excluding the cabinets mentioned above, the average duration is 989 days or about 71.5% of maximum duration.

Less than half of the Icelandic cabinets are ideologically connected. Despite the fact that non-connected coalitions are common it is important to note that the parties at the opposite ends of the left-right spectrum rarely join hands in a coalition. The exceptions are the IP-SDP-SP coalition of 1944-1947 and the IP-PA-PP of 1980-1983. The IP-SDP-SP coalition dissolved after a dispute about the U.S. base in Keflavík. Normally the lack of IP-PA cooperation is attributed to the differences of the two parties on issues of foreign policy rather than economic matters. However, it seems likely that the differences in the parties' preferences in both policy areas reinforce one another – especially as the PA has generally not demanded big concessions on foreign policy as a condition for coalition participation.[26]

The predictions about the ideological characteristics of the coalitions, *hypotheses 3a and 3b*, are borne out by the data. In contrast with the low frequency of ideologically connected coalitions in Iceland, Finland comes second (79.5% connected) and Norway has no experience with non-connected coalitions. Only 53.8% of the Icelandic cabinets include the median party, which is somewhat lower than in the other Nordic countries (73%-85%) with the exception of Denmark (43%). Denmark therefore appears not to support the hypothesis. The prevalence of minority cabinets combined with the fact that the median parties of the Folketing have been two relatively small parties, Det Radikale Venstre and Centrum-Demokraterne, should be kept in mind. Although the Danish parties are willing to accept minority coalitions they may draw the line at a very small minority.[27] An alternative explanation might argue that if policy concerns are prevalent it does not matter who forms the cabinet as the details of legislations are eventually fought out in the legislature.

Hypothesis 2, concerning cabinet size, also finds some support. As mentioned above, Iceland's frequency of minority cabinets is the lowest among the Nordic countries. Four (15%) minority cabinets have been formed – all of them single-party cabinets. Three of them, all SDP cabinets, have been tolerated for very specific reason – the 1958-1959 cabinets to implement electoral reform and the 1979 cabinet was a caretaker cabinet. The 1949 IP cabinet was the only

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25 Consider, for example, a coalition that faces two years in office and remains in power for the whole period. Its contribution to the sample is then an observation of 100%. Now imagine that the same coalition faces a full legislative term of four years but terminates after two years and a day. Now its contribution to the sample is an observation of about 50%. The average duration as a percentage of maximum duration would be lower in the latter case, even though average duration was higher. Hence, truncation by shorter maximum duration, if not corrected for, would tend to bias our estimates of cabinet durability upwards.

26 After 1978 the PA has not made the removal of the U.S. base a condition for coalition participation.

27 Crombez (1996) shows formally that small minority cabinets are unlikely to form.

serious attempt at forming a minority cabinet but it survived for less than three months. A higher frequency of minimal winning coalitions is also expected but the low frequency of majority cabinets in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden makes inference difficult. Indeed, majority cabinets have always been minimal winning in the three countries. In Finland, on the other hand, 73.1% of all majority winning cabinets were oversized. The corresponding figure for Iceland is only 13.6%. This includes the 1944-47 wartime coalitions but such ideologically broad coalitions were not uncommon in the immediate postwar period (Grímsson 1977).

Two party cabinets are most common in Iceland. The 12 (46%) two party coalitions have all been coalitions of the IP and either the PP or the SDP.[28] If we restrict our attention to governments rather than cabinets the corresponding number of governments is only six (33%). Three party cabinets are the second most common, numbering nine cabinets (35%). In terms of governments they are, however, the most frequent, totaling eight governments (42%). This indicates that two party governments tend to be more stable.

Four of the three party coalitions can be classified as left-wing coalitions, i.e., they excluded the IP. Two can be classified right-wing coalitions. The remaining two are the 1944-1947 IP-SP-SDP cabinet and the 1980 coalition formed by a splinter of the IP with the PP and the PA. Since 1949 the IP has not been a part of a three-party coalition when it has had the strength to form a two-party coalition. Finally, the only four-party cabinet was the PP-SDP-PA-CP cabinet coalition of 1989-1991. During the formation of the 1988 PP-SPD-PA cabinet attempts were made to include the CP in the coalitions. These attempts were unsuccessful so the three parties went ahead and formed a three party coalition. The CP was later added to the coalition – presumably to boost the cabinet's slim majority in the Alþingi.

COALITION GOVERNANCE

Coalitions are not only formed, they need to be maintained (Müller and Strøm 1997). Exogenous shock, economic or otherwise, may topple any coalition but all coalitions are not equally vulnerable. Coalitions usually terminate because of internal disagreement (some coalition may decide to call an early election to take advantage of favorable conditions). More importantly, the disagreement must reach levels such that a sufficient number of coalition members, depending on the size of its majority, are willing to desert it. A coalition's cohesion is influenced by two factors. The first is through each of the coalition parties' ability to discipline its members. The second is through various

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[28] No other two party cabinets with a parliamentary majority could have been formed in the postwar period.

conflict resolution and management mechanisms, such as committees and coalition agreements (Müller and Strøm 1997). While the committee structure is used as a venue to keep a tab on the different portfolios, and to iron out any disagreements that may emerge in enacting policy, the coalition agreement can be seen as the blueprint for the coalition's policy – a coordinating device.[29]

Coalition agreements, and policy agreements to the extent that they are promises of future actions, are cheap talk in the language of game theory. Promises of future actions, by their nature, can be broken. Thus, the process of forming a cabinet coalition requires, at least in part, involves establishing credibility. Some commitment problems can be solved by institutionalization. That is, the parties can commit to certain policies through actions such as the allocation of portfolios and other non-cabinet positions to parties, or by adopting certain decision-making mechanisms. Such institutionalization is unlikely to be sufficient.

Public coalition agreements have been a part of the coalition bargaining process since 1971 in Iceland as table 5 shows. The prime minister's policy statement in Alþingi following the appointment of a new cabinet – or a transcript of the prime minister's radio address at the same occasion – is included when explicit coalition agreements have not been made.

[Table 5 approximately here]

Table 4 also lists some institutional features that may influence coalition governance. An election rule is an agreement that an election will be called if the coalition breaks down. Icelandic coalition cabinets have never operated under such a rule. The prime minister has the right to dissolve Alþingi and call an election although he rarely exercises that right unilaterally. Instead the coalition parties have usually settled on a *negative* election rule, which requires the consent of all coalition partners if an election is to be called. Normally this agreement is not public – with a few exceptions – but has been in place almost without exception.[30]

Formally, conflict within the coalition is managed within the inner cabinet. Occasionally sub-committees, or committees composed of a few cabinet members and a few outsiders, have been formed to deal with specific issues, such as privatization. In general, however, the inner cabinet is the arena in which conflict is dealt with, although it has not always been extremely effective in this respect.

Several factors may contribute to the failure of the inner cabinet as an effective conflict management mechanism. First, the Icelandic cabinet does not operate under the principle of collective ministerial responsibility. Although unanimity rule is the general decision-making rule

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[29] In theoretical terms the role of coalition agreements is unclear, i.e., it is unclear what the necessary conditions for credible coalition agreements are.

within the cabinet (Grímsson 1977) there are instances in which cabinet ministers have voted against government bills in the parliament. Second, if a government bill loses a vote in the parliament it is not necessarily construed as a vote against the government. Third, the formal role of the inner cabinet, or the State Council, is not explicitly stated in Icelandic law. It has therefore been up to the leader of the coalition, the prime minister, to take the initiative in coordinating the activities of the cabinet. The degree to which prime ministers have pursued this role has varied. For example, Þorsteinn Pálsson did not devote a lot of energy to managing his 1987 cabinet. Weeks are reported to have passed without the prime minister speaking with some of his cabinet ministers.[31] In other instances it has been noted how hard some prime minister, e.g., Steingrímur Hermannsson in his second and third cabinets, have worked to keep coalitions together.[32]

Grímsson (1977) points out that prior to 1959 the prime minister invariably held an additional portfolio. This can make the prime minister ill suited to mediate between conflicting interests within the coalition, as he also represents the interests of his portfolios. Since 1959 no prime minister has held an additional portfolio other than the Statistics Iceland (National Institute of Statistics) that by law has the status of a ministry but is in fact quite different from the rest of the ministries. Its involvement in policy making is minimal. Grímsson's observation is still largely valid. Note, however, that no coalition has been terminated since 1956 because of a disagreement over foreign policy begging the question whether this is a result of better coordination within coalitions, better foresight, reputation and risk aversion, or declining importance of foreign policy?

Although public coalition agreements have never explicitly required the coalition parties to agree to coalition discipline in legislative votes and in other parliamentary behaviour, it can be argued that the Icelandic cabinet coalitions are to some extent based on this principle. Certain expectations about the behaviour of the parliamentary parties are in place, and the coalition parties are expected to deliver parliamentary support for legislative proposals introduced in Alþingi by the government, or on its behalf.

The importance and the role of the parliamentary parties should not be underestimated. The relationship between the cabinet ministers and their parliamentary parties can be characterized as a principal-agent relationship in which the parliamentary party acts as the principal. In some cases, e.g. the IP, the parliamentary party formally picks the party's cabinet ministers. The apparent coalition discipline may thus reflect a constraint on the cabinet ministers rather than the ministers' ability to whip the parliamentary party into line. As mentioned above, a government legislative proposal that

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30 To the best of my knowledge the only time there has not been an agreement on a negative election rule is Þorsteinn Pálsson's 1987 cabinet. According to Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson (1999) no party brought this matter up although they, at least Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, were aware of the option.

31 Interview with Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson (1999).

fails to pass the parliament is generally not considered as a loss of confidence thus creating a credibility problem for the cabinet. Huber (1996) illustrates how the bargaining strength of a cabinet increases when it can attach a vote of confidence to their legislative proposal. The parties in the cabinet do not have the resources to discipline individual MAs – or at least have not been willing to do so extensively.

The MAs have always relied more on their constituencies than the party leadership for reelection. In the early part of the period they relied on the party organization in their district. In the 1970's, as the parties began adopting primaries, the grip of the party leadership on the MAs loosened even more. For example, the defecting IP members of Thoroddsen's 1980 cabinet fared well in the IP primaries held prior to the elections of 1983 (Kristjánsson, 1994). Individual members, after facing some perceived injustice on behalf of their parties, have done well by forming new parties or by running as independents.

This does not imply that cabinet ministers have no influence over policy matters – they still wield considerable proposal and agenda power, i.e., they may be able choose a policy from the set of policies that are acceptable to their parliamentary party. It is, however, difficult to disentangle the relative power of the parliamentary party and the cabinet ministers, as we rarely observe intra-party bargaining. To cast cabinet ministers as autonomous actors is, however, clearly erroneous. The situation of cabinet ministers may best be described as that of an actor in a two-level game in which the minister simultaneously bargains with his coalition partners in the cabinet and his parliamentary party.

The selection of cabinet ministers is usually left to the parties of the coalition. There are a few examples of ministerial appointees being debated during the coalition bargaining in the early part of the period.[33] In most instances it is difficult to tell whether the disagreement is of personal or political nature. The fact that the political parties have become more organized and professional may have played part in reducing disagreements about ministerial appointees.[34]

In contrast with the other Nordic countries, where in most cases these are addressed in coalition agreements, there is little evidence that the allocation of non-cabinet positions enters into the coalition bargaining. There are, however, well-established norms that guide the appointment of many of the major positions, such as ambassadorships and seats on the boards of the state banks.

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32 Interview with Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson (1999). See also Kristjánsson (2000).

33 This need not imply that this practice no longer takes place. Most of the examples come from the autobiographies of politicians and are usually not public knowledge during the bargaining. The availability of this information may thus be lagged.

34 The identity of ministers may be non-negotiable because the parties employ formal mechanisms to select ministers. An alternative explanation might emphasize the fact that the identity of the minister, besides party affiliation, has less significance when party organization is weak.

The norm guiding these appointments is fairly non-political in nature – it does not discriminate based on party affiliation.

The only known instance of non-cabinet positions entering the coalition bargaining was in the formation of the 1988 PP-SDP-PA coalition. The AESJ took part in the coalition bargaining – its only MA, Stefán Valgeirsson, eventually lent the coalition his support – in exchange for a seat on the Industries' Insurance Fund.

Grímsson (1977) discusses the importance of the appointments of non-cabinet positions and patronage as a resource for politicians. Cabinet ministers appoint the members of a number of committees and positions in the bureaucracy as they open up. It appears that the majority of such appointments, excluding the norm-guided appointments, fall under particular portfolios and are at the minister's discretion.[35] It should be noted that the Alþingi also appoints the members of numerous boards and councils and these appointments may be bargained over by the coalition parties.

Every new cabinet coalition has made some sort of a policy agreement – this excludes minority cabinets,[36] the 1946 IP-SDP-SP cabinet, and the 1963 IP-SDP cabinet. The latter two were in power the previous legislative term and did not renegotiate their coalition agreements. The extent of the public coalition agreements, which are almost exclusively about policy, has varied but they to get longer and more thorough, in the sense that by now they tend to address every conceivable issue area, but not necessarily more specific or detailed. In some cases the agreements have been quite specific – at least on some issues – while in other cases they only contain vague positions on various policy areas.

Table 6 shows the length of the coalition agreements and their breakdown in terms of procedural rules, distribution of offices and competences, and policy. A part of the explanation of the increasing length of the agreements has to do with the source of the agreements (listed in table 5). The prime ministers' addresses tend to be shorter than the written agreements. In 1959 and 1991 the coalitions published more detailed agreements or policy statements, 13500 and 14500 words respectively, a few months after the coalition has been formed. The agreements consist almost exclusively of the cabinet's goals in policy making – on average 98.7% of the agreements are devoted to policy. The remaining 1.3% is mostly devoted to specific procedural rules – most common are clauses on the negative election rule and the cabinet's jurisdiction over certain matters. In three cases, 1989, 1991 and 1999, the agreements have touched on the distribution of issue areas among the portfolios.

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35 Kristinsson (1996) is the sole study of patronage politics in Iceland. Kristjánsson (1994) also provides a wealth of examples of non-cabinet appointments by ministers.

36 The minority cabinets are excluded by definition since they have always been single party cabinets.

[Table 6 approximately here]

It is unclear how clientalistic politics will influence the writing of coalition agreements. On one hand policy issues might be expected to be de-emphasized. On the other hand, political competition is still fought on the basis of policy – whether a ruse or not. The overall effect is thus unclear, although it can be hypothesized that the coalition agreements will avoid restricting the politicians' ability to serve its cliental. This is consistent with the freedom in appointment of non-cabinet positions, the use of the inner cabinet as a primary solution mechanism, the general vagueness of policy agreements, and little emphasis on procedural rules in coalition agreements. Finally, the use of a negative election rule is also consistent with the general thesis about clientelism and the value of office. The differences between Iceland and the other Nordic countries should, however, not be overemphasized. Coalition agreements in the other Nordic countries tend only to be marginally longer in addition to the fact that single-party cabinets do not produce such agreement.

The number of ministries has doubled in the post-war period, from six in 1944 to twelve in 1999. The reason for this increase is twofold. First, the range and number of issues that the government has to deal with has grown hand in hand with the growth of the state. Second, additional ministerial portfolios are created out of political need that arises in the bargaining process. A ministerial post can work as a side-payment in bargaining over policy – allowing actors to be bought off. The creation of the Ministry of the Environment in 1989 was clearly a case of the latter.

The allocation of cabinet portfolios is an important part of the coalition formation. Control of a particular cabinet portfolio grants the political parties considerable powers over policy implementation within its jurisdiction, and over agenda setting as the drafting of legislation often takes place in the ministries, which both increase the ability of the minister to cater to his constituency.

The allocation of ministries to parties tends towards equality, i.e., the smaller parliamentary parties tend to be over-represented in the cabinet. The difference in the number of ministerships between any two parties has only once, in 1983-1987, exceeded a ministership.[37] After the Prime Ministership, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are regarded as the most important and tend not to be held by the same party. In two-party cabinets the prime minister's party usually holds two of the three portfolios.

Tables 7a and 7b show the allocation of ministerial portfolios by cabinet. In table 7a subscripts have been used indicate portfolios held by the same minister. Table 7b shows the distribution of ministries between the coalition parties.

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[37] In this instance the IP's parliamentary party faced a choice between the prime ministership and four other ministries, or handing the PP the prime ministership and getting six ministries. Not surprisingly, as the ministers are regularly drawn from the parliamentary party, it took the later option.

[Table 7a approximately here]

[Table 7b approximately here]

Certain regularities exist in the allocation of the ministries. The PP or the IP get the Ministry of Agriculture, the center and left-wing parties usually hold the Ministry of Social Affairs and Education, and the PA never holds the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. More generally, the parties seem to seek out the ministries most important to their constituency or most consistent with their image or platform. Holding one of those ministries may, however, impede the cabinet's ability to follow its more general policy platform.[38] The need to scale back subsidies to farmers, for example, has long been apparent but their strong ties with the PP, and the IP, have made such changes politically costly for the parties. During the term of the PP-SDP-PA coalition of 1988 important steps were taken to rationalize the system of subsidies to farmers while the PA held the Ministry of Agriculture. By giving the portfolio to another coalition party, the PP could distance itself from the decision. The party's MAs did indeed do more than distance themselves from the decision and put up a fight for the farmers. The party leadership had, however, constrained its influence in the matter by giving away its agenda power on the issue.

Coalition Termination

The literature on cabinet termination focuses mostly on the conditions under which a cabinet chooses to call an election, i.e., on the role of exogenous shocks. The literature has, however, begun to incorporate political institutions to a greater extent – most frequently, the power of dissolution. Balke (1991) and Heckelman and Berument (1998), for example, consider models of endogenous election timing. Lupia and Strøm (1995) consider the same phenomena in a coalition bargaining model. Lupia and Strøm's results suggest that neither exogenous shocks nor favorable electoral conditions are sufficient conditions for early elections.[39] Patterns of coalition termination in Iceland appear to confirm this intuition.

The end of a cabinet is signified by a scheduled election, a change in the cabinet's leadership, and/or a change in the cabinet's composition. Table 8 lists the causes of cabinet termination for each cabinet in the postwar period.

[Table 8 approximately here]

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38 Interview with Hermannsson (1999).

39 Diermeier and Stevenson (2000) find some support for Lupia and Strøm's model of cabinet termination.

Our interest lies in cabinet terminations that are political in nature. The retirement, or death, of a prime minister is an instance of cabinet termination that usually is not political in nature. There are two such instances in Icelandic politics, both of which occurred during in the 1959-1971 IP-SPD.

Another cabinet termination that might be considered of special nature, although not non-political, was the termination of Hermannsson's 1988 cabinet. The cabinet was terminated when the CP was added to the coalition to boost the parliamentary majority of the coalition parties. It did, however, not indicate a disagreement within the coalition.

Table 8 shows that about half of the cabinets terminate before scheduled elections. Subtract the minority cabinets of 1958-1959 and 1979, which were essentially caretaker cabinets,[40] the proportion of early terminations drops to one-third. Seven cabinets have terminated because of a conflict within the cabinet: five over economic policy and two over foreign policy. The remaining early termination was the resignation of Jónasson III in 1958 after ASÍ turned down the cabinet's request to postpone scheduled wage increases.

At first sight *hypothesis 4* appears to find little support. Icelandic cabinets terminate more frequently because of a policy conflict than the other Nordic countries, with the exception of Finland. This, however, is a function of the prevalence of minority cabinets. The potential for policy disagreements is much lower in, often single-party, minority cabinets. Minority cabinets need to retain the confidence of the legislature to stay in office – a loss of a vote of confidence can thus be construed, and counted, as a policy disagreement.[41] This changes the picture somewhat. Sweden has the lowest incident of fatal policy disagreement with Iceland second. The other three countries seem far more susceptible to policy related terminations (over 40%).

Finally, table 9 details the coalitions' electoral gains and losses after each election. Coalition parties tend to lose votes during their term of government, on average 2.7%. If we restrict our attention to cabinets in power at the time of election the loss increases to 4.1 %. These values are slightly inflated because of the CP's disappearance from political arena after their one term in government.

[Table 9 approximately here]

An election usually follows a cabinet resignation. Only once, in 1988, has a new cabinet formed without an election being held after cabinet termination, if 'caretaker' cabinets are not counted. There is little evidence of strategic electoral timing in Iceland – all early elections appear to be accounted for in terms of other reasons, such as disagreement within the coalition. Steinþórsson's

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40 The SDP minority cabinets of 1958-1959 were not, in the strict sense, caretaker cabinets since there was an agreement with the IP about revamping of the electoral system and certain economic policies.

41 A loss of a vote of confidence can, of course, have an entirely different meaning. If parties, for example, only care about office it naturally says nothing about policy disagreement.

1950 cabinet is the only possible exception. The coalition parties retained their parliamentary majority, although jointly losing one percentage point, and formed a new cabinet.

Considering the benefits of calling early elections for electoral gains, table 9 suggests that the possibility has been of little importance in Iceland. Gains, where they exist, are usually fairly moderate and seem unlikely to have prompted the coalition parties to call an election. Note, however, that these are imperfect measure of the incentive to call an early election. The incentive to call an early election depends on the parties expected vote shares relative their expectations about their fortunes for the rest of the legislative term.

It is difficult to predict what sort of effects clientalistic politics have on the electoral fortunes of the cabinet parties since the electoral success of clientalistic parities will depend on their ability to cater to their constituencies, which to begin with determines the parties' decision to pursue clientalistic policies. The pursuit of comprehensive policy platforms may take the form of a collective action problem, i.e., individual legislators or parties may benefit from provide particularistic benefits to their constituencies. If that is the case, the pursuit of clientalistic politics may indeed hurt the cabinet parties instead of benefiting them. Icelandic cabinet parties tend to suffer electoral loses, much like their Nordic counterparts. The Icelandic cabinet parties appear to suffer loses less frequently but the loses are on average slightly bigger.

CONCLUSIONS

Most efforts at explaining coalition politics have aimed at providing a parsimonious theory of coalitions, assuming uniformity in politicians' preferences. It may or may not be true that politicians around the world share the same preferences. Political institutions, however, do influence the strategies that politicians adopt do achieve their goals. As different electoral systems, for example, place different demands on what politicians must do to get elected they also influence the value politicians place on holding a particular office. More generally, where clientelism is important reelection prospects come to depend on the ability to satisfy clientelistic demands. Various factors may influence the importance of clientelism – here I have primarily focused on the role of electoral systems and their propensity to encourage the building of a personal vote. The presence of clientelism creates among the political parties a demand for access to the discretionary distribution of public resources, which is concentrated in the hands of the executive. In the presence of clientelism politicians are therefore more likely to behave *as if* they were office-seekers regardless of what their 'true' preferences are.

Using the insight that clientelism ought to lead to patterns of coalition formation predicted by office-seeking theories, I examine coalition formation in the Nordic countries and find preliminary support for my hypotheses. Patterns of coalition formation in Iceland, where clientelism is important, confirm closer to the predictions of office-seeking theories than in the other Nordic countries, where clientelism is less important. The results are suggestive and warrant a further investigation of the relationship between clientelism and coalition governance. Such research would include a larger sample of countries – allowing a more methodologically sophisticated approach. One of the obstacles in the way is the absence of good measures of clientelism. Kitschelt (2000) has suggested that available measures of corruption may serve as good proxies. While it seems likely that societies experiencing high levels of corruption will also be characterized by clientelism it is possible that clientelism can thrive in the absence corruption.[42]

An auxiliary purpose of this article has been to survey political institutions and patterns of coalition governance in Iceland. An attempt has been made to provide a clear account of the political structures that shape coalition politics in Iceland. The effects of many of the political institutions is difficult to ascertain in a study of a single country, as they remain fixed over the period of study, and is best suited for comparative studies. A main impetus for undertaking this study was to facilitate such comparative studies.

Unfortunately, the article can hardly serve as more than an introduction to Icelandic coalition politics for two reasons. First, the study of Icelandic politics is very much in its infancy. Many areas of Icelandic politics have simply never been studied in any detail. There exist, for example, hardly any studies of legislative behaviour or coalition governance. Second, the lack of research on Icelandic politics makes a thorough treatment of the subject matter beyond the scope of this article – the amount of research that would need to be presented is not suited for a short article. I hope, however, in this article to have identified some interesting areas of research some of which, in my opinion, are begging for attention.

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[42] The term 'corruption' carries with it a connotation of illegality or immorality, whereas clientelism often takes place within the constitutionally mandated powers of government and is often considered a natural aspect of politics, e.g., in the U.S.

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Table 1a. Left-right Placement of Parties, Party Strength (in seats), and Party Composition of Governments

Cabinet	Proximity to election	SP	LM	PA	WA	NPP	ULL	ÞPM	UF	SDA	SDP	AESJ	PP	LP	CP	IP	Median Party in Second Policy Dimension	Effective number of Legislative Parties	Government Strength	Total Number of Seats
1944	E	**10**									**7**		15*			**20**	IP	3.49	37	52
1946	F	**10**									**9**		13*			**20**	IP	3.61	39	52
1947	E	10									**9**		**13***			**20**	IP	3.61	42	52
1949	F	9									7		17*			**19**	PP/IP	3.47	19	52
1950	E	9									7		**17***			**19**	PP/IP	3.47	36	52
1953	FE	7				2					6		**16***			**21**	IP	3.44	37	52
1956	F			**8**							**8**		**17***			19	IP	3.48	33	52
1958	E			8							**8**		17*			19	IP	3.48	8	52
1959	FE			7							**6**		19*			20	PP/IP	3.20	6	52
1959	FE			10							**9**		17*			**24**	IP	3.44	33	60
1963	F			9							**8**		19*			**24**	IP	3.32	32	60
1963	E			9							**8**		19*			**24**	IP	3.32	32	60
1967	F			10							**9**		18*			**23**	IP	3.48	32	60
1970	E			10							**9**		18*			**23**	IP	3.48	32	60
1971	FE			**10**			**5**				6		**17***			22	PP	3.85	32	60
1974	FE			11			2				5		**17***			**25**	PP/IP	3.38	42	60
1978	F			**14**							**14**		**12***			20	IP	3.85	40	60
1979	E			14							**14**		12 *			20	IP	3.85	14	60
1980	FE			**11**							10		**17***			**21**[43]	IP	3.78	49	60
1983	FE			10	3					4	6		**14***			**23**	PP	4.06	37	60
1987	F			8	6						**10**	1	**13***		7	**18**	PP	5.34	41	63
1988				**8**	6						**10**	**1**	**13***		7	18	PP	5.34	32	63
1989	E			**8**	6						**10**	1	**13***		**7**	18	PP	5.34	38	63
1991	FE			9	5						**10**		13*			**26**	IP	3.78	36	63
1995	FE			9	3			4			7		**15***			**25**	IP	4.01	40	63
1999	F/n.a.		7						17				**11***	2		**26**	IP	4.98	37	63

The ranking is based on a mini-poll of the following Icelandic political scientist: Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson, Hannes Hólmsteinn and Ólafur Þ. Harðarson.

PARTIES

SP	Socialist Party	ÞPM	Þjóðvaki – The Peoples' Movement	LP	Liberal Party
LM	The Left Movement	UF	The United Front	CP	Citizens' Party
PA	People's Alliance	SDA	Social Democratic Alliance	IP	Independence Party
WA	Women's Alliance	SDP	Social Democratic Party		
NPP	National Preservation Party	AESJ	Association for Equality and Social Justice		
ULL	Union of Liberals and Leftist	PP	Progressive Party		

[43] The government coalition of 1980 was formed by Gunnar Thoroddsen, the IP's deputy chairman. The IP was split and did not join the government coalition as a whole. The government opposition was lead by the IP's chairman.

Table 1b. Parties and Party Families

			ICELAND	Founded, 'dead' Name changes or other comments.	FAMILY
1	*SP*	**SP** =	Sameiningarflokkur alþýðu – sósíalisaflokkur (United Socialist Party)	Joined the electoral alliance PA in 1956, which then evolved into a party.	1
2	*LM*	**LM** =	Vinstri hreyfingin (Left Movement)	Founded before elections 1999 – mostly the left wing of the PA that did not join the UF.	2
3	*PA*	**PA** =	Alþýðubandalag (People's Alliance)	Initially an alliance of the SP and a few members of the SDP (1956).	2
4	*WA*	**WA** =	Kvennaflokkur (Women's Party)	Joined the electoral alliance UF in 1999.	12
5	*NPP*	**NPP** =	Þjóðvarnarflokkurinn (National Preservation Party)	Dead.	12
6	*ULL*	**ULL** =	Samtök frjálslyndra og vinstri manna (Union of Liberals and Leftists)	Splinter of the PA. Dead.	2
7	*THPM*	**THPM** =	Þjóðvaki - Fylking fólksins (Thjodvaki - People's Movement)	Splinter of the SDP. Dead.	3
8	*UF*	**UF** =	Samfylkingin (United Front)	An electoral alliance of SDP, PA and WA.	3
9	*SDA*	**SDA** =	Bandalag jafnaðarmanna (Social Democratic Alliance)	Splinter of the SDP. Dead.	3
10	*SDP*	**SDP** =	Alþýðuflokkur (Social Democratic Party)	Joined the electoral alliance UF in 1999.	3
11	*AESJ*	**AESJ** =	Samtök um jafnrétti og félagshyggju (Association for Equality and Social Justice)	Dead.	6
12	*PP*	**PP** =	Framsóknarflokkur (Progressive Party)		5
13	*LP*	**LP** =	Frjálslyndi flokkur (Liberal Party)	Splinter of the IP.	7
14	*CP*	**CP** =	Borgaraflokkur (Citizens' Party)	Splinter of the IP. Dead.	9
15	*IP*	**IP** =	Sjálfstæðisflokkur (Independence Party)		9

Party Family Coding

1. Communist Parties
2. Left-Socialist Parties
3. Social Democratic Parties
4. Green Parties
5. Agrarian Parties
6. Regional, Separatist or Ethno-Nationalist Parties
7. Liberal Parties
8. Christian Parties
9. Conservative Parties
10. Right-Wing Parties
11. Extreme Right-Wing Parties
12. Special Interest Parties and Others

Table 2. Cabinet Formation

Cabinet	Number of Parties in Parliament	Number of Previous Formation Rounds	Parties involved in previous formation rounds	Number of days required for government formation
IP-SP-SDP 1944	4	2	(1) IP-SDP-PP-SP (2) **IP**-PP[44]	36
IP-SP-SDP 1946	4	0	-	1
SDP-PP-IP 1947	4	4	(1) IP-SDP-SP (2) IP-SDP-PP-SP (3) PP-SP-SDP (4) **IP**-SDP-SP	117
IP 1949	4	3	(1) **PP**-SDP (2) **PP**-SDP-IP (2) **IP**-SDP-PP[45]	44
PP-IP 1950	4	3	(1) **PP**-IP (2) **Vilhjálmur Þór** (3) V.Þ. – non-parliamentary[46]	13
IP-PP 1953	5	0	-	76
PP-PA-SP 1956	4	0	-	31
SDP 1958	4	1	(1) **IP**-SDP/PA/PP (2) **SDP**-IP/PP/PA[47]	20
SDP 1959	4	0	-	1
IP-SDP 1959	4	0	-	26
IP-SDP 1963	4	0	-	1
IP-SDP 1963	4	0	-	1
IP-SDP 1967	4	0	-	1
IP-SDP 1970	4	0	-	1
PP-PA-ULL 1971	5	0	-	32
IP-PP 1974	5	2	(1) **IP**-SDP-PP (2) **PP**-SDP-PA-ULL	3
PP-PA-SDP 1978	4	6	(1) SDP-PA(-?) (2) **SDP**-IP-PA (3) **SDP**-PP-PA (4) **IP**-SDP-PP-PA (5) **IP**-SDP-PP (6) **PA**-PP-SDP	69
SDP 1979	4	0	-	4
IP-PA-PP 1980	4	5	(1) **PP**-PA-SDP (2) **IP**-PA-SDP-PP (3) **PA**-PP-SDP (4) **SDP**-IP-PP (5) SDP-IP-PP	68
PP-IP 1983	6	6	(1) **IP**-PP-SDP (2) **IP**-PP (3) **PP**-IP (4) **PA**-PP- SDP-WA-SDA (5) IP-SDP-SDA (6) PP-IP-SDP[48]	34
IP-SDP-PP 1987	7	5	(1) **PP**-? (2) **IP**-SDP-WA (3) SDP-PA-WA (4) PP-CP[49] (5) **SDP**-IP-PP	75
PP-PA-SDP 1988	7	3	(1) **PP**-SDP-PA (2) **PP**-SDP-PA-CP (3) **IP**-?	12
PP-PA-SDP-CP 1989	7	0	-	1

[44] No one was appointed a formateur in the first bargaining round – instead the president asked each party to appoint three members to "The committee of txwelve" to try to form a government of all parties.

[45] No information is available as to which parties the PP approached when Hermann Jónsson was the formateur. Ólafur Thors was then appointed the formateur with the condition he try to form a majority coalition. No bargaining as such took place. Ólafur Thors sent the PP and the SDP letters outlining the IP's policy positions and asked whether they would be willing to form a cabinet based on those. When neither party was willing to accept the IP's platform without discussions Thors claimed not to be able to form a majority government and was allowed to form a minority government. Note that the number of days required for government formation may not reflect the actual length of the bargaining process since Thors feel ill just before the cabinet was formed which delayed the formation for about a week.

[46] The President appointed Vilhjálmur Þór, who had been the minister of foreign affairs and labour affairs in the non-parliamentary cabinet between 1942 and 1994, a formateur. First, the President wanted Vilhjálmur Þór to form a cabinet consisting of parliamentarians and non-parliamentarians. When Vilhjálmur Þór returned his mandate, he was asked to form a cabinet of non-parliamentarians.

[47] In both cases the formateur had informal, or preliminary, discussions with the leaders of the other parties but the importance of these is unclear. At no point does it seem like a particular cabinet was in the picture.

[48] The discussions under (5) and (6) took place while Gestsson (PA) was the formateur.

[49] With a PP-CP-IP coalition in mind.

IP-SDP 1991	5	0	-	11
IP-PP 1995	6	1	(1) IP-SDP	16
IP-PP 1999	5	0	-	1

NOTE: The number of days required for government formation includes the day of formation. Hence, the lowest number of days possible is 1 - even when no changes are made in the government coalition after an election.
NOTE: The number of days required for government formation is not an accurate measure of the length of bargaining process. For example, the coalition bargaining after the 1991 election took only two days (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson 1999). Various formalities tend to delay the formation of governments.

Table 3. Cabinets since 1945

Cab. No.	Prime Minister	Date of Previous Election	Last Date for next Scheduled Election	Date of Formation	Formal resignation	Cabinet leaves office	Maximum Potential Duration	Duration (in days)	Government composition
1	Thors II	19.10.42	19.10.46	21.10.44	-	30.06.46	729	598	IP-SP-SDP
2	Thors III	30.06.46	30.06.50	30.06.46	10.10.46	04.02.47	1461	102	IP-SP-SDP
3	Stefánsson	30.06.46	30.06.50	04.02.47	02.10.49	06.12.49	1244	974	SDP-PP-IP
4	Thors IV	24.10.49	24.10.53	06.12.49	02.03.50	14.03.50	1333	86	IP
5	Steinþórsson [50]	24.10.49	24.10.53	14.03.50	11.09.53	11.09.53	1321	1278	PP-IP
6	Thors V	28.06.53	28.06.57	11.09.53	27.03.56	24.07.56	1387	929	IP-PP
7	Jónasson III	24.06.56	24.06.60	24.07.56	04.12.58	23.12.58	1432	864	PP-PA-SP
8	Jónsson I	24.06.56	24.06.60	23.12.58	-	28.06.59	550	188	SDP
9	Jónsson II	28.06.59	28.06.63	28.06.59[51]	19.11.59	20.11.59	1461	145	SDP
10	Thors VI	25.10.59	25.10.63	20.11.59	-	09.06.63	1437	1437	IP-SDP
11	Thors VII	09.06.63	09.06.67	09.06.63	14.11.63	14.11.63	1461	158	IP-SDP
12	Benediktsson I	09.06.63	09.06.67	14.11.63	-	11.06.67	1303	1303	IP-SDP
13	Benediktsson II	11.06.67	11.06.71	11.06.67[52]	10.07.70	10.07.70	1462	1125	IP-SDP
14	Hafstein	11.06.67	11.06.71	10.07.70[53]	15.06.71	14.07.71	337	337	IP-SDP
15	Jóhannesson I	13.06.71	13.06.75	14.07.71	02.07.74	28.08.74	1431	1085	PP-PA-ULL
16	Hallgrímsson	30.06.74	30.06.78	28.08.74	27.06.78	01.09.78	1403	1400	IP-PP
17	Jóhannesson II	25.06.78	25.06.82	01.09.78	12.10.79	15.10.79	1394	407	PP-PA-SDP
18	Gröndal	25.06.78	25.06.82	15.10.79	04.12.79	08.02.80	985	51	SDP
19	Thoroddsen	03.12.79	03.12.83	08.02.80	28.04.83	26.05.83	1395	1176	IP-PA-PP
20	Hermannsson I	23.04.83	23.04.87	26.05.83	28.04.87	08.07.87	1429	1429	PP-IP
21	Pálsson	25.04.87	25.04.91	08.07.87	17.09.88	28.09.88	1388	438	IP-SDP-PP
22	Hermannsson II	25.04.87	25.04.91	28.09.88	-	10.09.89	940	348	PP-PA-SDP
23	Hermannsson III	25.04.87	25.04.91	10.09.89	23.04.91	30.04.91	593	591	PP-PA-SDP-CP
24	Oddsson I	20.04.91	15.04.95	30.04.91	18.04.95	23.04.95	1447[54]	1447	IP-SDP
25	Oddsson II	08.04.95	08.05.99	23.04.95	-	28.05.99	1497[55]	1497	IP-PP
26	Oddsson III	08.05.99		28.05.99	-	-	-	-	IP-PP

NOTE: Maximum Potential Duration and Duration include day of election/resignation.

[50] The Cabinet called an early election (held June 28th, 1953). The end of the legislative term was October 24th, 1953. The Cabinet did, however, not resign until September 11th, 1953.
[51] The same qualifier applies here - an early election was called.
[52] Date of election. The Cabinet remained unchanged.
[53] Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson died July 10th 1970 and Jóhann Hafstein became the Prime Minister.
[54] The Constitution of Iceland was amended in 1991 and a definition of the term of the legislature was inserted. The beginning and the end of the four year term is defined as the same weekday in a month, counting from the first day of the month. For example, the 1999 election was held the second Saturday in May. The next election therefore has to take place before the second Saturday in May 2003. The table reflects this fact.
[55] The date of the 1999 election was set in a law passed by the legislature in 1995. This accounts for the unusually high maximum potential duration of the government.

Table 4: Coalition politics in the Nordic countries

	Days taken to form a coalition (all cabinets)	Duration of cabinet (days)	Connected cabinets (%)	Includes median party (%)	Minority cabinets (%)	Oversized cabinets (% of majority cabinets)	Termination: Policy Conflict (%)	Termination: Policy or Vote of NoCo (%)
Iceland	26.7	776	46.2	53.8	15.4	13.6	24.0	26.9
Denmark	8.3	626	85.2	42	87.1	0.0	10.0	43.3
Finland	26.9	453	79.5	81	29.7	73.1	41.7	47.2
Norway	4.2	755	100.0	73	65.4	0.0	16.0	44.0
Sweden	5.4	771	95.5	85	73.1	0.0	12.0	12.0

Data: Various chapters of Müller and Strøm, eds., (2000).

Table 5. Coalition Governance

Coalition	Coalition agreement	Agree-ment public	Election Rule	Conflict management mechanisms	Management mechanisms for most frequent conflicts	Management mechanisms for most serious conflicts	Coalition discipline in legislation	Coalition discipline in other parliamentary behavior	Freedom of appointment	Policy agreement	Non-cabinet positions	Source
1944	Y	Y		IC	IC	IC	2[56]	2	Y	2	N	Alþingi
1946	N[57]	-	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	-	-	-
1947	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	2	N	Alþingi
1949	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	1	N	Alþingi
1950	Y	Y	N[58]	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	1	N	Alþingi
1953	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	1	N	Radio address
1956	Y	Y		IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	1	N	Radio address
			5									
1958	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	1	N	Radio address
1959 I	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1959 II	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	1[59]	N	Alþingi
1963 I	N	-	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	-	N	-
1963 II	N	-	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	-	N	-
1967	Y	Y		IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	2	N	Alþingi
1970	N	-	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	-	N	-
1971	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1974	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	2	N	Agreement
1978	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1979	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1980	Y	Y		IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1983	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1987	Y	Y		IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1988	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1989	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1991	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1995	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement
1999	Y	Y	N	IC	IC	IC	2	2	Y	3	N	Agreement

[56] This is based on observation rather than a reading of the coalition agreement - no coalition agreement explicitly mentions this but this seems to be the case. Party leaders ask their parties for formal approval of the cabinet and party members have been known to announce that do not consider themselves by the coalition agreement.

[57] The parties did not write a new coalition agreement but the cabinet continues on the basis of the previous agreement. This also holds for the cabinets of 1963 and 1970.

[58] In most cases the parties agree on a negative election rule, i.e. elections will not be called except with the consent of all coalition parties. These agreements, in general, do not appear in the coalition agreements themselves, and in later years have not been made publicly. My list is not exhaustive but in 1950 and 1956 this agreement was public though not a part of the coalition agreement itself.

[59] A couple of months later the coalition published a long and detailed programme that would be classified as a comprehensive policy agreement.

Table 6. Size and Content of Coalition Agreements

Coalition	1 Size	2 General Procedural rules (in %)	3 Specific Procedural Rules (in %)	4 Distribution of Offices (in%)	5 Distribution of Competences (in%)	6 Policies (in%)
IP-SP-SDP 1944	1145		2%			98%
IP-SP-SDP 1946	-					-
SDP-PP-IP 1947	950		2%			98%
IP 1949	277[60]					100%
PP-IP 1950	600		3%			97%
IP-PP 1953	571		6%			94%
PP-PA-SP 1956	697		4%			96%
SDP 1958	482					100%
SDP 1959	-					-
IP-SDP 1959	319[61]					100%
IP-SDP 1963	-					-
IP-SDP II 1963	-					-
IP-SDP 1967	2200					100%
IP-SDP 1970	-					-
PP-PA-ULL 1971	2300					100%
IP-PP 1974	942					100%
PP-PA-SDP 1978	1750		2%			98%
SDP 1979	-					-
IP-PA-PP 1980	2750		1%			99%
PP-IP 1983	1700					100%
IP-SDP-PP 1987	4900					100%
PP-PA-SDP 1988	3850					100%
PP-PA-SDP-CP 1989	2700			1%[62]		99%
IP-SDP 1991	750[63]					98.9%
IP-PP 1995	1800					100%
IP-PP 1999	2100		1%	3%		96%

[60] No coalition agreement was made here. I include the prime minister's speech after the cabinet was formed for completeness sake. The speech was more or less a justification for why a minority government had to be formed with the necessary references to policy issues that had to be addressed immediately.

[61] About two months later the cabinet published a more detailed (about 14500 words) programme.

[62] The coalition agreement stated that a ministry of the environment should be formed. The new member of the cabinet, the CP, was given the ministry once established.

[63] A little later the coalition published a more detailed statement (about 13500 words). About 0.5% of that statement addressed specific procedural rules and 1% distribution of offices. The coalition agreement only addressed the distribution of offices indirectly in that the agreement specified changes in the jurisdiction of one or more ministries.

Table 7a. Distribution of Cabinet Ministerships

Cabinet	1 Prime Minister	2 Finance	3 Foreign	4 Industry	5 Commerce	6 Fisheries	7 Social Affairs	8 Education	9 Environment	10 Agriculture	11 Health and Social Security	12 Justice	13 Ecclesiastical Affairs	14 Communications	15 Statistics	16 Aviation	17 Energy
Thors II	IP_1	IP_2	IP_1	SDP_1	IP_2	SP_1	SDP_2	SP		IP_2		SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_1		SP_1	
Thors III	IP_1	IP_2	IP_1	SDP_1	IP_2	SP_1	SDP_2	SP		IP_2		SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_1		SP_1	
Stefánsson	SDP_1	IP_2	IP_1	SDP_2	SDP_2	IP_2	SDP_1	PP_1		PP_2	PP_1	IP_1	PP_1	SDP_2		PP_1	PP_2
Thors IV	IP_1	IP_3	IP_2	IP_4	IP_3	IP_4	IP_1	IP_2		IP_5	IP_4	IP_2		IP_4		IP_5	IP_5
Steinþórsson	PP_1	PP	IP_1	IP_3	IP_2	IP_3	PP_1	IP_2		PP_2		IP_1	PP_2	PP_2		IP_2	PP_2
Thors V	IP_1	PP	PP_1	IP_3	IP_3	IP_1	PP_2	IP_2		PP_2	IP_3	IP_2	PP_2	PP_1		IP_3	PP_2
Jónasson III	PP_1[64]	PP_2	SDP_1	SDP_2	PA_1	PA_1	PA[65]	SDP_2		PP_1	SDP_1(S)[66]	PP_1		PP_2			PP_1
Jónsson I	SDP_1	SDP_2	SDP_2	SDP_4	SDP_4	SDP_1	SDP_3	SDP_4		SDP_3		SDP_3		SDP_1			SDP_1
Jónsson II	SDP_1	SDP_2	SDP_2	SDP_4	SDP_4	SDP_1	SDP_3	SDP_4		SDP_3		SDP_3		SDP_1			SDP_1
Thors VI	IP	IP	SDP	IP_1	SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_1	SDP_2		IP_2	IP_1(H)	IP_1		IP_2			IP_2
Thors VII	IP	IP	SDP	IP_1	SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_1	SDP_2		IP_2	IP_1(H)	IP_1		IP_2			IP_2
Benediktsson I	IP	IP	SDP	IP_2	SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_1	SDP_2		IP_1	IP_2	IP_2		IP_1	IP_2		
Benediktsson II	IP	IP	SDP	IP_2	SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_1	SDP_2		IP_1	IP_2	IP_2		IP_1	IP_2		
Hafstein	IP_1	IP_3	SDP_1	IP_1	SDP_3	SDP_2	SDP_1	SDP_3		IP_2	SDP_2	IP		IP_2	IP_3		
Jóhannesson I	PP_1	PP_2	PP	PA_2	PA_1	PA_1	ULL_1	ULL_2		PP_2	PA_2	PP_1		ULL_1	ULL_2		
Hallgrímsson	IP_3	IP	P	IP_1	PP_2	IP_2	IP_1	PP		PP_1	IP_2	PP_2		PP_1	IP_3		
Jóhannesson II	PP_2	PP	SDP	PA	PA	SDP	SDP_1	PA_1		PP_1	SDP_1	PP_1		PA_1	PP_2		
Gröndal	SDP_1	SDP_6	SDP_1	SDP_2	SDP_3	SDP_3	SDP_4	SDP_5		SDP_2	SDP_4	SDP_5		SDP_5	SDP_6		
Thoroddsen	IP_1	PA	PP	PA	PP	PP_1	PA_1	PP		IP?	PA_1	IP		PP_1	IP_1		
Hermannsson I[67]	PP	IP	IP	IP	IP_2	PP	PP	IP		PP_1	IP_1	PP_1		IP_1	IP_2		
Pálsson	IP	SDP	PP	IP	SDP_1	PP	SDP	IP		PP	PP	SDP_1		IP	SDP_1		
Hermannsson II	PP_2	PA	SDP	SDP_1	SDP_1	PP1	SDP	PA		PA_1	PP	PP_1	PP_1	PA_1	PP_2		
Hermannsson III[68]	PP_1	PA	SDP	SDP_1	SDP_1	PP	SDP	PA	CP	PA_1	PP	CP	CP	PA_1	CP / PP_1		
Oddsson I	IP_3	IP	SDP	SDP_1	SDP_1	IP_1	SDP	IP	SDP	IP_2	SDP	IP_1	IP_1	IP_2	IP_3		
Oddsson II	IP_2	IP	PP	PP_2	PP_2	IP_1	PP	IP	PP_1	PP_1	PP	IP_1	IP_1	IP	IP_2		
Oddsson III	IP_1	IP	PP	PP_1	PP_1	IP	PP	IP	PP	PP	PP	IP	IP	IP	IP_1		

NOTE: The portfolios of Aviation and Energy did not exist as ministries but were issues that particular ministers were in charge of. Aviation eventually became a part of the Ministry of Communication and Energy a part of the Ministry of Industry.

NOTE: To preserve information about the number of ministers held by each party subscripts are used to indicate that a minister held more than one portfolio. For example, in Oddson's first cabinet both the IP and the SDP had five ministers. The IP held seven portfolios and the SDP six.

[64] Also Ground Transportation.

[65] Also Price Controls.

[66] Indicates that the Minister only held the portfolio of Social Security

[67] Statistic moved over to the Minister of Finance during the term.

[68] The Ministry of the Environment was created on February 23rd 1990. In the first five and half months of the Cabinet, and until the Ministry's creation, a member of the Citizens' Party acted as the Minister of the Institute of Statistics. After the Ministry's creation, the Institute of Statistics became a part of the Prime Minister's portfolio.

Table 7b. Number and Allocation of Ministerships.

Cabinet	Number of Ministers	Cabinet composition	Allocation between parties
Thors II	6	IP-SP-SDP	2-2-2
Thors III	6	IP-SP-SDP	2-2-2
Stefánsson	6	SDP-PP-IP	2-2-2
Thors IV	5	IP	5
Steinþórsson	6	PP-IP	3-3
Thors V	6	IP-PP	3-3
Jónasson III	6	PP-PA-SP	2-2-2
Jónsson I	4	SDP	4
Jónsson II	4	SDP	4
Thors VI	7	IP-SDP	4-3
Thors VII	7	IP-SDP	4-3
Benediktsson I	7	IP-SDP	4-3
Benediktsson II	7	IP-SDP	4-3
Hafstein	7	IP-SDP	4-3
Jóhannesson I	7	PP-PA-ULL	3-2-2
Hallgrímsson	8	IP-PP	4-4
Jóhannesson II	9	PP-PA-SDP	3-3-3
Gröndal	6	SDP	6
Thoroddsen	10	IP-PA-PP	3-3-4
Hermannsson I	10	PP-IP	4-6
Pálsson	11	IP-SDP-PP	4-3-4
Hermannsson II	9	PP-PA-SDP	3-3-3
Hermannsson III	11	PP-PA-SDP-CP	3-3-3-2
Oddsson I	10	IP-SDP	5-5
Oddsson II	10	IP-PP	5-5
Oddsson III	12	IP-PP	6-6

Table 8. Causes of Cabinet Termination

Cab. No.	Cabinet	Mechanism of cabinet termination									Terminal events				Policy area(s)	Comments
		Technical			Discretionary											
		1 Regular parliamentary election	2 Other constitutional reason	3 Death of Prime Minister	4 Early parliamentary election	5 Voluntary enlargement of coalition	6 Cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament	7 Conflict between coalition parties: Policy conflict	7 Conflict between coalition parties: Personnel conflict	8 Intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties	9 Elections (non-parliamentary)	10 Popular opinion shocks	11 International or national security event	12 Economic event	13 Personal event	14	15
1	Thors II	x															
2	Thors III							SP-SDP, IP					U.S Air Base			Foreign Policy	
3	Stefánsson				x			PP-SDP, IP		PP						Economy	
4	Thors IV				x		x										
5	Steinþórsson	x															
6	Thors V				x			PP-IP								Foreign Policy	
7	Jónasson III				x									x		Economy	ASÍ
8	Jónsson I				x												
9	Jónsson II				x												
10	Thors VI	x															
11	Thors VII		x[69]														
12	Benediktsson I	x															
13	Benediktsson II			x													
14	Hafstein	x															
15	Jóhannesson I				x			ULL-PP, PA								Economy	3 ULL withdraw support
16	Hallgrímsson	x															
17	Jóhannesson II				x			SDP								Economy	
18	Gröndal				x												Formed only to call an election
19	Thoroddsen				x												

[69] Thors retired for health reasons.

20	Hermannsson I	x															
21	Pálsson							IP-SDP, PP	IP-SDP, PP							Economy	
22	Hermannsson II					x											
23	Hermannsson III	x															
24	Oddsson I	x															
25	Oddsson II	x															
26	Oddsson III																

Table 9. Electoral costs/benefits of government parties (in % of votes)

Cab. No.	Cabinet	In office at time of election	Election Year	PA	SP	ULL	SDP	PP	IP	CP	Cabinet
1	Thors II	Y	1946		+1.0		+3.6		+1.0		+5.6
2	Thors III	N	1949		0		-1.3		0		-1.3
3	Stefánsson	Y	1949				-1.3	+1.4	0		+0.1
4	Thors IV	N	1953						-2.4		-2.4
5	Steinþórsson	Y	1953					-2.6	-2.4		-5.0
6	Thors V	Y	1956					-6.3	+5.3		-1.0
7	Jónasson III	N	1959	-4.0			-5.8	+11.6			+1.8
8	Jónsson I	Y	1959				-5.8				-5.8
9	Jónsson II	Y	1959				+2.7				+2.7
10	Thors VI	Y	1963				-1.0		+1.7		+0.7
11	Thors VII	N	1967				+1.5		-3.9		-2.4
12	Benediktsson I	Y	1967				+1.5		-3.9		-2.4
13	Benediktsson II	N	1971				-5.2		-1.3		-6.5
14	Hafstein	Y	1971				-5.2		-1.3		-6.5
15	Jóhannesson I	Y	1974	+1.2		-4.3		-0.4			-3.5
16	Hallgrímsson	Y	1978					-8.0	-10.0		-18.0
17	Jóhannesson II	N	1979	-3.2			-4.6	+8.0			+0.2
18	Gröndal	Y	1979				-4.6				-4.6
19	Thoroddsen	Y	1983	-2.4				-5.9	+3.3		-5.0
20	Hermannsson I	Y	1987					-0.1	-11.5		-11.6
21	Pálsson	N	1991				+0.3	0	+11.4		+11.7
22	Hermannsson II	N	1991	+1.1			+0.3	0			+1.4
23	Hermannsson III	Y	1991	+1.1			+0.3	0		-10.9	-9.3
24	Oddsson I	Y	1995				-4.1		-1.5		-5.6
25	Oddsson II	Y	1999					-4.9	+3.6		-1.3
26	Oddsson III	na	-					-	-		-
Mean				-1.5	+0.5	-4.3	-1.4	-0.7	-0.3	-10.9	-2.7[70]
Mean (in government at time of election)				-0.05	+1.0	-4.3	-1.4	-3.0	-1.3	-10.9	-4.1
Mean (not in government at time of election)				-2.0	0	-	-2.5	+6.5	+0.8	-	+0.3[1]

NOTE: The means of electoral performance after an party has been in government during the legislative term.
IN THE TABLE ABOVE THE MEAN FOR PARTIES WHEN CABINET WAS NOT IN POWER AT TIME OF ELECTION INCLUDED THOSE CABINETS THAT WERE SUCCEEDED BY CABINETS THAT THE PARTY WAS STILL A MEMBER OF. BELOW ARE THE MEANS FOR ONLY THE CABINETS THAT ARE NOT IN POWER AT THE TIME OF ELECTION *AND* THE PARTY IS NOT A MEMBER OF THE CABINET IN POWER AT THE TIME OF ELECTION:

Mean (not in government at time of election)	-3.6	-	-	-	+9.8	+11.4	-	

[70] If the cabinets of a) Thors II and Benediktsson I, and b) Benediktsson II and Hafstein are counted as one (Thors retired in 1963 and Benediktsson died in 1971) the overall average becomes –2.6 and the average for cabinets not in office at election time is +1.9.