



Updating the *Party Government* data set



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ABSTRACT

Scholars have identified the crucial role of government characteristics in studies of political behavior, comparative institutions, and political economy. An invaluable data source for government characteristics is the Woldendorp et al. (2000) *Party Government in 48 Democracies* data set. We describe our update to this data set from the late-1990s through 2011. We then present a variety of additions to the data set that are intended to increase its usage by reducing the obstacles associated with using the data in conjunction with other popular data sets. We illustrate the utility of this update by providing a variety of means of conceptualizing government stability.

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1. Introduction

In the study of politics, the government (or “cabinet”) occupies a central link in the representation of voters’ preferences. As such, the government—as either an influence on politics or a consequence of—has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. A notable example of this is Budge and Keman’s (1990; see also 1993) general theory of party government, which explains a variety of political phenomena related to government formation, the distribution of cabinet ministries, government termination, and the policy consequences of these phenomena. A by-product of Budge and Keman (1990) is the creation of an extremely valuable data set on the composition of governments (further updated in Woldendorp et al., 2000; hereafter “WKB”). The availability of these data has allowed the exploration of the formation of cabinets (e.g., Warwick and Druckman, 2001), their duration (e.g., Somer-Topcu and Williams, 2008), and termination (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009). In addition to being the subject of these

studies, the composition of governments has been shown to influence nearly every substantive area of politics, ranging from economic policy (e.g., Brauninger, 2005) to foreign policy (e.g., Clare, 2010) and ideological shifts (e.g., Bawn and Somer-Topcu, 2012), as well as electoral accountability for economic performance (e.g., Duch and Stevenson, 2008).

Unfortunately, the WKB data collection ends in the late-1990s, which limits the ability of scholars to test their hypotheses after this period. We feel that this prevents scholars from adequately incorporating government characteristics into empirical analyses that use a wide range of more recent data sets—such as the Comparative Manifesto Project (Klingemann et al., 2006) and Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). In this project, we describe our extension of the WKB data set, which applies the same coding rules to 35 democracies from the late-1990s through 2011.

We present a number of innovations to further our goal of increasing the utility of the WKB data set. First, we make the entire data set (1945–2011) available in electronic format, including the more recent sample (1991–2011) of detailed information regarding the distribution of cabinet portfolios (such as minister name, gender, party, duration, etc). Second, we include a series of variables that have been

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useful in studies examining cabinet duration (such as different categorizations of cabinet terminations). Third, we produce variables that uniquely identify observations such that the merging of other commonly-used data sets in political science is made considerably easier. Finally, we offer Stata code that produces the desired data set in a variety of units of analysis (e.g., country, government, minister level, etc) and time periods (e.g., annual, quarterly, daily, etc).

In the next section we briefly describe the original WKB data collection and provide a general survey of its usage in political science. In the second section we compare and contrast this data collection to its primary alternatives, and raise some potential limitations. We then highlight our additions to the WKB data set that are intended to increase its applicability. Next, we present some alternative methods to characterize patterns of government stability in advanced democracies. In the final section, we conclude.

2. Overview of the WKB data set

The WKB data set represents the first systematic effort to provide cabinet composition data on a wide range of democracies.¹ For each of 48 countries in the post-World War II period, the WKB data set describes the start date of each government (typically the date of investiture), its duration (the government lasts until the next government's investiture),² the parties that control ministries (and thus comprise the government) as well as their distribution of seats, the type of government (in terms of government and supporting parties, majority support, and ideological complexion), the reason for termination, among others.³ Data on the ministers (and their gender) who occupy each cabinet are also available. Though the number of “reshuffles”—instances of simultaneous movement or replacement by two or more ministers—is available, the exact resignation or appointment dates of individual ministers are not given in the original WKB data. These data are available for the updated time period (early-1990s–2011), and are therefore included in the update.

Table 1 shows the various end dates for the 48 countries in the sample. Fortunately, in each December issue of the *European Journal of Political Research* dating back to 1992, a collection of authors write country-specific articles for the Political Data Yearbook, detailing the “election results, national referenda, changes in government, and institutional reforms in all of the EU member states plus Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United States” (accessed 9-6-12). Of

particular interest to scholars includes the dates of cabinet resignations and appointments, which are not available in WKB (as shown in the last column of Table 1).

Though some of the original countries are unavailable (most notably, India, Turkey and Russia) (see Table 1), we are able to use the Political Data Yearbook to update the variables in the WKB sample through 2011. Scholars interested in a much broader sample are encouraged to use the *Keesing's World Archives* to fill in the gaps, which is a beneficial source for verifying the accuracy of other information.

Until now, scholars interested in using the WKB data in a cross-national empirical analysis have had to put the approximately 450 pages of tables in the original volume into a machine-readable format. If their research question required more recent data, scholars have had to cobble together the 21 years of Political Data Yearbooks (covering 1991–2011) containing over 20 country-specific articles each. The next step is then to marry the WKB data (and updates) with other data sets of interest, which often have different codes indicating parties, governments and countries. Once these labor-intensive steps are completed, scholars are unlikely to change the unit of analysis (i.e., going from a government/month unit of analysis to a government/year or government party/year) because of the additional hand inputting required.

We hope that these obstacles have not deterred scholars from using this valuable resource in their empirical investigations. We are therefore encouraged by the following survey, which broadly categorizes the various ways in which the WKB data set has been used in published work in the last decade and a half.⁴ Table 2 reveals 149 instances that scholars have looked to the WKB data set as important elements of their research. The first section of Table 2 shows that the *ToG* variable (i.e., type of government) and the *cabinet summary* variables (i.e., summarizing the parties in the cabinet) are used far more often than *RJT* (i.e., reason for termination) and *minister summary* (i.e., the specific composition of the cabinet in terms of ministers).⁵ In the second section of Table 2, we categorized the WKB variables in terms of whether they were used as the dependent, key explanatory variable of the theory, a control, or as a robustness check. While the WKB data are most often used as either control variables (37.6%) or in robustness checks (28.6%), in a substantial portion of the cases scholars either seek to explain the WKB variables as their outcomes of interest (12.8%), or use them as their key theoretical variable (24.2%).

We are encouraged by the observation that scholars have overcome the difficulties listed above in their efforts

¹ WKB is an update to, and encompasses previous versions like Woldendorp et al. (1993, 1998), which are partly derived from the annual *European Journal of Political Research* Political Data Yearbook. Basic government composition data is updated through 2008 in Woldendorp et al. (2011).

² See Conrad and Golder (2010) for potential problems with inferring cabinet stability from this duration.

³ Chapter 2 of Woldendorp et al. (2000) offers a detailed survey of the institutional features that distinguish among the different forms of parliamentary and semi-presidential regime types.

⁴ This simple survey aggregates all the scholarly publications that have referenced the Woldendorp et al. (2000) volume with the Google citation index and Web of Science. From this list of citations, we then exclude unpublished manuscripts and non-English texts. This simple method most likely underestimates the actual usage of the WKB data set because it does not incorporate earlier versions of the data (Woldendorp et al., 1993, 1998), and therefore only includes research published since 2000.

⁵ Other valuable data were used even less often. We identified only two projects out of 149 that incorporated the institutional features data contained in Chapter 2 of WKB.

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