



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# COALITION GOVERNMENTS AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONFLICT STRUCTURES

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## Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i HUM.D.220 (Hjortronlandet), Humanisthuset, fredagen den 24 januari, kl. 13:15.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

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**Organization**

Umeå University  
Department of Political Science

**Document type**

Doctoral thesis

**Date of publication**

20 December 2024

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**Title**

Coalition governments and multidimensional conflict structures

**Abstract**

In the last several decades, European party systems have seen the entry of 'new' parties, such as green parties and radical right parties, competing on novel issues largely unrelated to the dominant economic left-right dimension of conflict. Alongside the development of a multidimensional arena for ideological conflict between parties, matters of affect between voters and parties have also come to the fore, where not only disagreement over policy but also dislike towards other parties and partisans may influence party behavior. At the same time, coalition governments continue to be the predominate form of government across Europe, and by their very nature necessitate compromises between different parties to form, govern, and remain in office. With 'new' issues in play along more dimensions and inter-party hostilities, this may have adverse consequences for the functioning of coalition governments.

In this thesis, I set out to study how multidimensional ideological polarization, focusing on the two dominant dimensions of economic policy and sociocultural policy, in concert with affective polarization among political elites affect party positioning, government formation, coalition governance, and government termination. The potential impact of multidimensional polarization has received little empirical attention in the literature on coalition governments, and this thesis aims to remedy this deficiency by showing how greater levels of multidimensional ideological and affective polarization create a more complex bargaining environment which ought to have several impacts on the life cycle of governments, from their formation until their demise. I pursue the topic in five papers which cover party strategic positioning in a multidimensional space (Paper 1), assessing the impact of different operationalizations of policy space on the predictive capabilities of empirical models of government formation (Paper 2), the effects of elite affective polarization on which government forms (Paper 3), what mechanisms variously polarized coalition governments use to resolve conflicts (Paper 4), and how ideological polarization in the opposition impacts the survival of minority governments (Paper 5).

The results from the papers point in a mixed direction. While parties behave in a way that is consistent with them exploiting the multidimensional character of modern politics in their positioning, there are few predictive gains to be made in modeling policy space as consisting of more than a general left-right 'super dimension'. Still, the sociocultural dimension does seem to affect which government forms. The role of elite affective polarization receives considerable support, indicating that how party elites feel about their potential coalition partners matters as much — if not more — than any ideological disagreements. Finally, minority governments facing a divided opposition fare better in terms of survival than minority governments facing a united opposition. On the whole, the results indicate that while multidimensional conflict structures do matter, it is not to the degree that it upends the functioning of government by coalition.

**Keywords**

Coalition government, multidimensionality, political cleavages, party politics, political parties, political behavior, polarization, affective polarization

**Language**

English

**ISBN**

print: 978-91-8070-579-0  
PDF: 978-91-8070-580-6

**ISSN**

0349-0831

**Number of pages**

96 + 5 papers