

Description for the general public

Cabinet coalitions are an integral part of numerous political systems. Many authors consider their persistence as an indicator of the stability of a political system. Although functioning of the coalition cabinet is complex and multithreaded, it is believed that the formation stage plays a special role within.

Studies on the creation process of cabinet coalitions are conducted according to two approaches –logical-mathematical – which is based on a parliamentary arithmetic, and empirical – which takes into account many elements that affect the process and highlight its sequencing. The second one is a direct response to too abstract assumptions of logical-mathematical approach, however taking into account the complexity of modern political relations, one can see at least two imperfections of this approach. Firstly, modern political parties should not be seen as a monolithic entity, but rather as a network of actors both within the formal structure of a political party and outside it. Secondly, current models of cabinet coalition formation process were created on the basis of the experiences of Western European continental countries, where there is a fixed – though very diverse – coalitional practice and where the dominant form of competition is competition within the multiparty system. There is no evidence, however, that these models are applicable to countries that do not have such experiences in which the cabinet coalition formation process is a completely new form of political practice or in which such process is run rarely.

The aim of the project is to develop a new - network model of a cabinet coalition formation process, which on the one hand reflects the structural properties of this process (its complexity and multilevel structure), and on the other hand indicate the number, intensity and quality of linkages, which decide about this structure. Also main research assumptions should be different – we have to focus on ongoing dynamics of interactions and we should regard it as the main determinant of the process of cabinet coalitions formation.

In order to develop such a model the classics for political science research methods and tools will be adapted to the requirements of the network perspective, which emphasizes the importance of social networks. The most important stages of conducted researches constitute: 1. review of previously developed models of process of cabinet coalitions formation, 2. creation of a new network model of cabinet coalitions formation process, 3. verification of the network model by deviant (non-standard) cases analyses:

- a) the case of formation of an alliance between the British Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats in 2010, which was the first cabinet coalition in the UK since the end of World War II;
- b) the New Zealand case of the coalition agreement between the National Party and the New Zealand First Party in 1996, which was preceded by a significant change in the electoral system (before it in New Zealand there was two-party system, in which there was no need to form cabinet coalitions);
- c) the Canadian case of the coalition agreement between the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party in 2008, which was aimed to remove from power the minority government of the Conservative Party, and which have not been realized because of the intervention of the General Governor of Canada;

Hopefully, such solution will help to recognize political parties as specific social networks, identify the number and types of actors involved in the coalition cabinet formation process, define key communication channels and channels for exchanging resources between the negotiating parties and to analyze and interpret formal and informal links outside the structures of the coalition parties. Reconstruction of the complexity of the process of forming a coalition of cabinet, will highlight the importance of the dynamics of interaction as the primary source of knowledge about how cabinet coalitions are created.