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The Vote of Confidence in Parliamentary Democracies

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I present a formal model of the confidence vote procedure, an institutional arrangement that permits a prime minister to attach the fate of a particular policy to a vote on government survival. The analysis indicates that confidence vote procedures make it possible for prime ministers to exercise significant control over the nature of policy outcomes, even when these procedures are not actually invoked. Neither cabinet ministers, through their authority over specific portfolios, nor members of parliament, through the use of no-confidence motions, can counteract the prime minister's policy control on the floor of parliament. The analysis also illuminates the circumstances under which prime ministers should invoke confidence vote procedures, focusing attention on the position-taking incentives of the parties that support the government, rather than on the level of policy conflict between the government and parliament.

The institutional underpinning of parliamentary democracy is the government's dependence on majority support in the legislature. Scholars often note that this institutional arrangement ensures that directly elected members of parliaments can control policymaking activities by the executive. If the government attempts to implement policies that are opposed by the majority, then the majority can vote the government out of office (e.g., Beer 1966, Crick 1964, Mezey 1979, Polsby 1975, Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993, Wheare 1963).

The "confidence relationship" between governments and parliaments is a two-way street, however. Members of parliaments can certainly attempt to control policy outcomes by submitting, or threatening to submit, votes of no-confidence in the government. But the prime minister and the cabinet can also take the initiative by demanding that parliament participate in a vote of confidence in the government. In fact, governments can generally invoke what I call a confidence vote procedure, which is an institutional prerogative that permits the government to attach the vote on a specific policy or program to an up or down vote on the government. This procedural possibility, I argue, must play a central part in how we understand policymaking processes in parliamentary democracies.

An example from Great Britain illustrates how government-initiated confidence vote procedures operate. On July 22, 1993, the British House of Commons voted on a government motion to adopt the Maastricht Treaty for European Union. The two major opposition parties, the Liberal Democrats and Labour, were generally favorable to the treaty, but they opposed the government's motion because it affirmed Britain's "opt-out" from the treaty's Social Chapter (which guaranteed certain rights to European workers¹). Conservative

Prime Minister John Major therefore needed solid backing from his own party, including the support from approximately twenty Euro-rebels—dissident Tory MPs who openly opposed any legislation that ceded further authority to European institutions. Unfortunately for Major, however, the Euro-rebels decided not to follow their party's leader, voting instead with the opposition and thereby defeating the government's motion to ratify the treaty.

But the fate of Maastricht was not sealed by the defeat of the government's motion. Immediately following the negative vote, Major tabled a motion of confidence on his Maastricht policy, announcing at the same time that if he lost the vote of confidence, Parliament would be dissolved, and new elections would be held. With the most recent polls showing certain electoral defeat for the Tories, the Euro-rebels toed the party line and backed Major in the confidence vote (which succeeded by 339-299). The attempt to torpedo Maastricht therefore ended with a whimper rather than a bang, and Britain ratified the treaty in precisely the form desired by its prime minister.

Major's use of a confidence vote to adopt his Maastricht policy was exceptional parliamentary theater as well as a vivid portrayal of the effect confidence vote procedures can have on parliamentary bargaining. But such dramatic instances of a prime minister putting his job on the line to achieve particular policy objectives do not represent the only ways in which these procedures affect legislative bargaining. Even in the vast number of cases in which confidence vote procedures are not employed, it is likely that these procedures shape behavior because MPs must anticipate the possibility that a prime minister may, at any time, make a particular policy a question of confidence.

Political scientists, however, have little understanding of how confidence vote procedures influence parliamentary behavior because scholars rarely examine how institutional arrangements shape strategic bargaining processes in parliamentary legislatures. Instead, comparative research typically asserts that almost all important policymaking power lies in the cabinet, with the parlia-

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¹ These rights include, among others, establishing a maximum 48-hour work week, increasing government worker training, providing guaran-

teed maternity leave, and enacting specific rights for part-time workers. In negotiating Maastricht, John Major had won the right for Britain to be excluded from these provisions.

ment playing at most a marginal role.² Studies of strategic bargaining processes in parliamentary systems therefore typically ignore legislatures, focusing instead on government formation and cabinet stability.³ And comparative research on legislatures typically ignores strategic bargaining processes, focusing instead on measuring the relative weakness of parliaments in policy-making, identifying the roles of individual representatives, and delineating the "system functions" that parliaments play across polities.⁴

The propensity to assume away the relevance of bargaining processes that occur between the births and deaths of governments is unwise. Although cabinets clearly hold substantial policymaking powers, the most serious conflict in parliamentary systems generally does not lie primarily between one institutional arena, the government, and another, the parliament. Instead, the most serious conflict generally lies between parties and party factions that are represented both in the government and the parliament. In Great Britain, for instance, there were Euro-rebels in Major's cabinet and among backbenchers in Parliament. Conflict between these factions certainly played itself out in the party caucus, in private debates among cabinet ministers, and on the floor of Parliament. What was significant about the resolution of the intraparty conflict, however, was that Major held control of an important institutional weapon, the confidence vote procedure. Of course, in the many parliamentary systems that routinely produce coalition or minority governments, conflict across governing parties will be on-going, making the role of institutional arrangements in shaping bargaining even more important than in Britain's majoritarian system. It is therefore essential to explore the effect of institutional arrangements on how political parties and party factions reach and maintain policy agreements after government formation is complete.

This paper takes a step toward filling this lacunae in our understanding of parliamentary institutions by focusing specifically on the confidence vote procedure. I first describe the precise structure of confidence vote procedures in eighteen advanced industrial democracies. I then use this description to develop a formal model which analyzes strategic interactions in a multidimensional policy space between a cabinet minister, a prime minister, and the prime minister's majority in parliament. I explore these interactions under several alternative assumptions about the policy, office, and electoral motivations of the agents.

The analysis makes two contributions to the study of parliamentary democracy. First, the model indicates that confidence vote procedures should make it possible for

prime ministers to exercise significant control over the nature of policy outcomes, even when the procedure is not invoked. Neither cabinet ministers, who manage specific portfolios, nor MPs, who can vote motions of no confidence, can counteract the prime minister's control on the floor of parliament. It is therefore impossible to understand fully the institutional underpinnings of parliamentary democracy without considering the effect of confidence vote procedures on legislative behavior.

The second contribution of the analysis concerns the actual use of confidence vote procedures. In principle, the procedure could be used on every bill a parliament considers. In practice, it is used with great discretion. Why, then, are confidence vote procedures invoked on particular bills?

Some might expect that a prime minister's decision to use a confidence vote procedure will be influenced by the cost of losing his or her job, by the costs to the MPs of throwing the government out of office, by the dimensionality of the policy space, or by the level of policy conflict between MPs and the prime minister. But the analysis indicates that none of these factors directly affects procedural choice. Instead, the model focuses attention on the exogenous costs that prime ministers pay when they use confidence vote procedures, and, more important, on the electoral incentives of MPs. In the model, if the various parties or party factions supporting the government benefit electorally from clearly distinguishing their policy positions from one another, then they can adopt position-taking strategies on the floor of parliament (with each party or faction publicly supporting the policies most preferred by its constituents). In adopting such strategies, the parties or factions communicate valuable information about policy positions to voters, and they *compel* the prime minister to invoke a confidence vote procedure. Consequently, although the procedure clearly provides the prime minister an important tool for favorably resolving disputes among members of the government, the actual use of confidence vote procedures should not be viewed as a strong-arm tactic that a prime minister employs against parliament. Rather, the procedures arise in response to exogenous electoral considerations that encourage position-taking strategies on the floor of parliament.

THE STRUCTURE OF CONFIDENCE VOTE PROCEDURES

The confidence vote procedure is part of a broad class of institutional arrangements that formalize a prime minister's dependence on majority support in the legislature. As noted above, these institutional arrangements are usefully divided into two categories. The first includes procedures that enable members of legislatures to initiate votes on government survival. These procedures, typically called motions of censure or motions of no confidence, exist in a variety of forms, but all share a distinguishing feature: They permit a majority in parliament to vote up or down on the continuation in power of the prime minister and the cabinet. Although I do not formally model votes of no confidence, the existence of such procedures plays an important role in developing

² See, for example, Almond and Powell 1978; Bryce 1921; Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 1992 (p. 32); Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Mezey 1979; Polsby 1975; Rose 1984; see also the various essays in Loewenberg 1971 and Norton 1990.

³ An excellent review of this literature is found in Laver and Schofield 1990.

⁴ On the relative importance of parliaments, recent examples include Olsen and Mezey 1991 and essays in Copeland and Patterson 1994a. Searing 1994 is an excellent recent example of research on the roles of legislators. Research on the system functions of parliaments includes Copeland and Patterson 1994b, Wahlke 1971, and Packenham 1970.

TABLE 1. Confidence Vote Procedures in Eighteen Democracies

Country	Source of Prime Minister's Authority	Prerequisites for invoking procedure	Voting Rule
Australia	Convention	Consultation in Party Room	Simple majority of those voting
Belgium	Standing Orders, Article 91	None	PM's motion carries unless a majority of the legislature's members vote No
Canada	Convention	None	Simple majority of those voting
Denmark	Convention and the Standing Orders, Article 24	None	Simple majority of those voting
Finland	Constitution, Section 36 of the Parliamentary Act	Cabinet approval necessary	Simple majority of those voting
France	Article 49 of Constitution	Consultation with cabinet	PM's motion carries unless a majority of the legislature's members vote No
Germany	Article 68 of Constitution	None	Chancellors motion carries unless a majority of the legislature's members vote No
Iceland	None	N/A	N/A
Ireland	Convention and Standing Orders (PM's control of agenda, Standing Order 25)	None	Simple majority of those voting
Italy	Article 116 of Standing Orders, see also Constitution, Article 92	Cabinet approval necessary	Simple majority of those voting
Luxembourg	Convention	Cabinet approval necessary	Simple majority of those voting
Netherlands	Convention	Cabinet approval necessary	Simple majority of those voting
New Zealand	Convention	None	Simple majority of those voting
Norway	Convention	None	Simple majority of those voting
Portugal	Article 196 and 203-204 of the Constitution, and Article 235-237 of the Standing Orders	None	Simple majority of those voting
Spain	Article 112 of the Constitution; Sections 173-174 of the Standing Orders of the Congress	Cabinet approval necessary; Consultation with Council of State.	PM's motion carries if supported by a majority of the Congress's members.
Sweden	Convention	Cabinet approval necessary	Simple majority of those voting
United Kingdom	Convention	None	Simple majority of those voting

Note: For all countries except Portugal, sources of data include the Constitution, the standing orders of the lower house, and interviews with at least one member of the permanent staff of the legislature. For Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway, interviews with specialists on parliamentary politics provided additional information. For Portugal, information is taken only from the Constitution and the standing orders.

the assumptions in the model of confidence vote procedures analyzed below.

The second category of institutional arrangements includes procedures initiated by the government. The confidence vote procedure is obviously in this category, as are several other types of confidence votes. In some countries, for example, the prime minister must receive a formal vote of confidence at the time of government investiture.⁵ Many countries also permit prime ministers to request a general vote of confidence in the government, without attaching a specific policy declaration to the vote. Some countries permit votes of confidence in specific cabinet ministers, which typically occurs when there are questions of unethical behavior. What distinguishes the confidence vote procedure from these other types of confidence votes, however, is that the confi-

dence vote procedure is used after government formation is complete and in the context of legislative debates on specific policy issues or specific aspects of the government's program.

Table 1 provides data on the institutional structure of confidence vote procedures in eighteen democratic systems. The first column indicates that confidence vote procedures generally exist in parliamentary democracies and that there are three sources of authority for such procedures: constitutions, standing orders, and convention. In Germany, Finland, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the constitution authorizes the government to make policies questions of confidence.⁶ In Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Portugal and Spain, provisions in the

⁵ Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland all require formal investiture votes (Laver and Schofield 1990, 64).

⁶ In Spain, confidence vote procedures are intended to be used on the government's program rather than in the context of specific bills, although no provisions explicitly preclude the use of such procedures on narrow policy issues or particular aspects of the government's program.

standing orders of parliament establish or clarify confidence vote procedures.⁷ By convention, the government can make the vote on a specific policy a question of confidence in Australia, Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.⁸ Only in Iceland is there neither a written rule nor a convention that permits the government to make a specific policy issue a question of confidence.

Where confidence vote procedures exist, they share three important structural features. First, as column two in Table 1 indicates, prime ministers can generally, at least in principle, act unilaterally. In Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway,⁹ Portugal, and the United Kingdom, there are no formal institutional constraints on the prime minister (although consultation with the cabinet is generally presumed). In Australia, France, and the Netherlands, the prime minister must formally consult the cabinet but is not bound by these consultations. In Finland, Italy, Spain, and Sweden, the prime minister must receive the formal support of the cabinet before a confidence vote procedure can be invoked. Of course, even if a prime minister is not formally constrained by institutional arrangements, s/he will often be constrained by political factors and may pay large personal costs if s/he attempts to proceed unilaterally to invoke a confidence vote procedure. These political constraints will play an important role in the model analyzed below.

The second important feature of confidence vote procedures is that a prime minister can use them to propose any policy s/he wishes. An example from Italy illustrates. In March 1995, nonpartisan Prime Minister Lamberto Dini submitted a "mini-budget" to the lower house specifying various austerity measures (including increases in the gasoline tax and the VAT). Members of the lower house proposed more than 150 amendments, many of which undermined Dini's goal to contain the Italian budget deficit to 8% of GDP. After several "expensive" amendments were adopted, Dini invoked a confidence vote procedure on his budget package. His motion excluded the adopted amendments as well as many that had not yet been voted. The confidence vote passed, allowing Dini to obtain the austerity measures he desired.

An example from Fourth Republic France further illustrates the lack of constraints on a prime minister's proposal under a confidence vote procedure. During the budget debate in December 1957, numerous amendments opposed by the government were adopted. In response, Prime Minister Félix Gaillard posed the fol-

lowing question of confidence to the National Assembly:¹⁰

Vote number 748 on the question of confidence: to move to the general discussion of the articles; to adopt articles 1 through 13 of the government's budget according to the text reported by the Finance Committee, modified as follows: (1) by the adoption of article 2 through 6 of the original government text of the budget; (2) by the addition of the Gaumont amendment to Article 7; and (3) by the addition of the Brusset amendment to Article 8; to exclude all other motions and amendments; and for the adoption of the entire bill (Avril 1965, 403).

As these examples illustrate, a prime minister not only can use confidence vote procedures to propose any policy s/he wishes but also can do so at any time in the legislative process, including at the very end. In fact, confidence vote procedures can be used by a prime minister to reverse parliamentary defeats. The Maas-tricht example from Great Britain illustrates how this can occur.¹¹

The final important institutional feature of confidence vote procedures is the voting rule. In most countries, a prime minister's motion carries if it receives a majority of the votes cast, but there are three exceptions. In Belgium, Germany, and France, abstentions always count for the government because a prime minister's motion carries unless a majority of the members elected to the lower house vote against the motion. In Spain, abstentions always count against the prime minister because a motion of confidence is adopted only if it receives the votes of a majority of the members elected to the lower house.

A MODEL OF THE CONFIDENCE VOTE PROCEDURE

The discussion in the previous section can be used to guide the development of a formal model of confidence vote procedures. The legislative process in parliamentary systems typically begins when a cabinet minister (such as the minister of finance or agriculture) submits a bill to the parliament (although MPs can initiate legislation even if there is no proposal by a cabinet minister). Legislative consideration of a bill then begins in a committee, where amendments are made before a report to the floor. On the floor, the bill is debated, additional amendments are submitted and voted, and

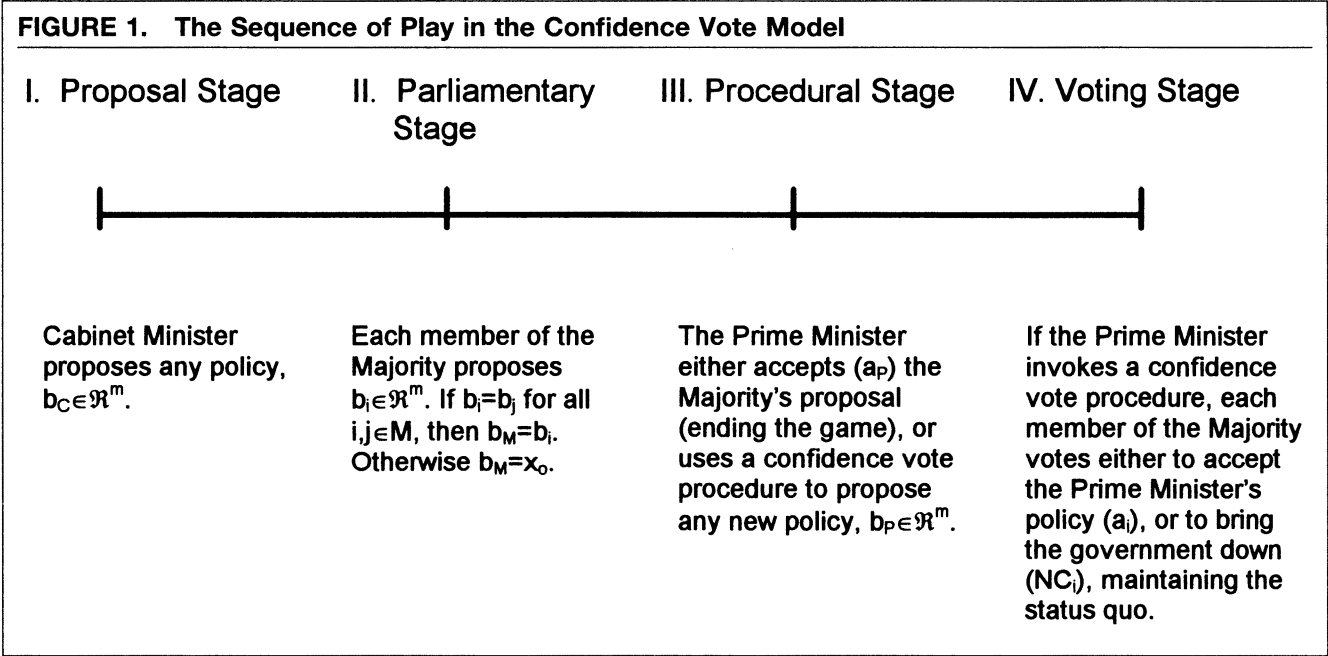
⁷ In Italy, the standing orders permit confidence votes not only on specific issues but also on specific articles or amendments. This procedure formally entered the Italian standing orders in 1971. Prior to that time, it existed by convention. In Belgium, a confidence vote procedure was not established in the standing orders until 1995.

⁸ In some countries, there are particular types of bills, such as budgets or supply motions, that by convention are treated as questions of confidence. In each such country, there also exists a convention establishing the confidence vote procedure. Cox (1987) discusses the use of confidence votes and dissolution threats in nineteenth-century England.

⁹ In Norway, the Labour Party imposes formal constraints on the autonomy of the prime minister.

¹⁰ The confidence vote procedure in Fourth Republic France was flawed in an important way: It was possible for the government to invoke a confidence vote on a particular policy, for the policy to be defeated, but for the government to survive. This could occur because a simple plurality could defeat a bill, but an absolute majority of members was necessary to defeat the government. There were several efforts to amend this provision during the Fourth Republic, and the procedure was a major issue in the drafting of the Fifth (which corrected the problem). For a discussion, see Lascombe 1981 and Huber forthcoming. The problem in the Fourth Republic is atypical because most countries use the same rule for voting on bills as they do for voting on questions of confidence. Where differences exist, constitutional rules ensure no ambiguity.

¹¹ Another example of the prime minister using a confidence vote procedure to reverse a parliamentary defeat comes from the 1989 budget debates in Fifth Republic France. See *Journal Officiel*, 1989, 3961.



ultimately there is a vote on the entire bill. As discussed, in countries where a confidence vote procedure exists, the prime minister can generally demand a vote of confidence on a specific policy at any time during this process, including after parliament adopts or defeats a bill.

To analyze how confidence vote procedures shape legislative bargaining, the model presented here focuses on the interactions between a cabinet minister (C), the prime minister (P), and the prime minister's majority (M) in parliament, where M is a finite set of n members, the generic element of which is i .

M is assumed to have ex ante identifiable members because, in practice, exogenous constraints associated with government formation almost always prevent a prime minister from crafting ad hoc majorities on a bill-by-bill basis. Instead, the prime minister must be able to find a bill that is supported by a set of parties who are defined when a government forms in support of the prime minister. Thus, in the model each member of M must agree before any legislation is adopted, and each member can ensure that the prime minister falls in a vote of confidence. One may think of these members of M as the parliamentary parties (or factions) in a governing coalition, as the parties in government and the opposition support party (or parties) during minority government, or as some subset of pivotal parties during surplus majority governments. In the case of a strongly unified, single-party majority government, one may wish to think of M as having a single member.

I would underline that the assumption of ex ante identifiable members of M is made only to capture the important constraints that government formation processes typically impose on parliamentary behavior. For those uncomfortable with the assumption, it will become clear below that the analysis would not be fundamentally altered if one were to ignore the constraints imposed by government formation and were to assume instead that,

on any policy, any majority of members could accept or defeat a bill.

The model has four stages, which are summarized in Figure 1. First, during the proposal stage, the cabinet minister submits a bill to parliament. C can propose any policy he wishes in a multidimensional policy space. Let C 's strategy, then, be a mapping $b_C : x_0 \rightarrow B$, where x_0 is the status quo policy, and B is a nonempty, convex, and compact subset of \mathcal{R}^m .

Second, in the parliamentary stage, the bill undergoes the normal legislative process. Formal amendment and voting rules vary across countries, making it impossible to capture all the subtleties of these procedures in a single model. Typically, however, amendment rules in parliamentary systems are quite open, permitting MPs to submit and vote on almost any amendment they wish. The model thus makes two substantive assumptions about the parliamentary stage. First, it assumes that each member of M must go on record for a specific policy. Put differently, each member must vote for a specific policy outcome.¹² Second, the model assumes that, through the amendment process, all members of M can go on record for any policy they wish. In practice, an MP could go on record for his or her most preferred policy by proposing it in an amendment, voting for the amendment, and voting against any policy that differs from the one proposed in the amendment. Similarly, an MP could use the amendment process to go on record for any other policy or could go on record for the status quo by voting against any proposal to change existing policy.

Rather than formally modeling amendment processes and voting on the floor of parliament, I call a member's strategy in the parliamentary stage a proposal and assume that each member proposes any policy s/he

¹² Abstention is, of course, always a possibility in practice, but vote counting rules ensure that abstentions count either for the yeas or the nays.

wishes. Formally, the proposal strategy for each member is a mapping, $b_i: B \rightarrow B$. The individual proposals by the members of M determine the final policy adopted in the parliamentary stage (called b_M). Since any member of M can veto a bill, to change the status quo, all members of M must agree. Thus, if all members of M propose the same policy, then this policy is the outcome from the parliamentary stage (i.e., $b_M = b_i$, if $b_i = b_j \forall i, j \in M$). If any two members make different proposals, then the policy produced by the parliamentary stage is the status quo (i.e., $b_M = x_0$, if $b_i \neq b_j \forall i, j \in M$).

After the parliamentary stage, the game moves to the procedural stage, where the prime minister can either accept b_M (denoted a_p) or propose any new policy by invoking a confidence vote procedure. The model therefore ignores situations in which there are formal institutional constraints on the prime minister, focusing instead on the more common possibility that the prime minister can act unilaterally. The general logic of the model will apply to situations in which there are institutional constraints on the prime minister, but the model is silent on how members of the government as a whole may arrive at specific confidence vote proposals. Formally, let P 's strategy be a mapping $b_p: B \rightarrow Q$, where $Q \equiv \{a_p\} \cup B$. I assume that if P is indifferent between accepting b_M and proposing some other policy by using a confidence vote procedure, then P will accept b_M .

If P accepts the bill adopted by the majority in the parliamentary stage, the game ends, and the policy outcome is the majority's bill. If P proposes a new policy using a confidence vote, then in the voting stage, each member of M must decide whether to accept the policy or vote the prime minister out of office. Formally, let a_i be the strategy for i to accept b_p , and let NC_i be the strategy for i to vote (no confidence) against the government. The voting strategy for all i is a mapping $s_i: B \rightarrow \{a_i\} \cup \{NC_i\}$. Thus, I assume there are no abstentions. The prime minister will fall, retaining the status quo, if any member votes against the prime minister (i.e., if $s_i = NC_i$ for any $i \in M$). I assume that if P invokes a confidence vote procedure, member i will accept P 's proposal if i is indifferent between accepting and voting no.

The equilibrium concept is subgame perfect Nash equilibrium. Formally, let $b_c^*(x_0)$ be the equilibrium proposal by C ; let $b_i^*(b_c)$ be the equilibrium proposal strategy for each $i \in M$; let $b_p^*(b_M)$ be P 's equilibrium procedural strategy (where b_M is defined by b_i as noted above); and let $s_i^*(b_p)$ be the equilibrium voting strategy for each $i \in M$.

The standard assumption in spatial models is that legislators are motivated exclusively by the desire to achieve the best possible policy outcome from the legislative process. In the confidence vote model presented here, the standard assumption is a special case. More generally, following studies of party motivations in parliamentary systems,¹³ I assume that although the agents in the model always care about the nature of final policy outcomes, they also may be concerned about the

electoral implications of their actions as well as the induced outcome if the government falls in a confidence vote. The problem facing the agents is that pursuit of optimal policies in any particular legislative debate may jeopardize future electoral success or future policy success if the government falls.

The utility functions of the agents, therefore, include several parameters. First, I assume that the policy preferences of each agent ($k = C, P$, and i) over the issue space B are represented by strictly quasi-concave utility functions, $u_k(\bullet)$. Let $x_k = \arg \max_{x \in B} u_k(x)$ be k 's ideal point, and assume $u_k(x_k) = 0$. For simplicity and without loss of generality, I assume that $x_i \neq x_j$ for all $i, j \in M$.

Agents in parliamentary systems may be concerned about final policies for electoral reasons: Voters often use policy outcomes to reward and sanction political parties. But it may also be that in bargaining for the best possible policy outcomes, parties will actually decrease their electoral support because of the signals they send to voters about policy positions. In parliamentary systems, particularly those with a high incidence of coalition or minority governments, parliamentary agents face the unique challenge of being forced to cooperate in the legislature with their electoral competitors. If Christian Democrats and Liberals, for example, form a coalition government, these parties must reach policy agreements and vote together on a wide range of issues, and they must then campaign against each other for votes in the next election. This obviously creates problems for voters and parties alike. Voters face the problem of assessing which parties are responsible for which policy outcomes and of determining the policy positions of political parties on various issues. Parties face the problem of communicating information about issue positions and political responsibility to the voters. Of course, on some legislation, consensus exists, political debate is innocuous or nonexistent, and communication therefore is unimportant. But on many other issues, voters are attentive and will use party positions on particular issues to determine their choices in subsequent elections. Consequently, the legislative process is important not only as a channel by which policies are chosen but also as a forum for communicating information to voters about issue positions.

I do not explicitly model the behavior of voters. Instead, I assume that the ideal points and utility functions of the agents in the model are induced by the agents' constituencies. Thus, there may be electoral costs associated with making policy proposals that diverge from these ideal points, particularly on those issue dimensions most valued by constituents. Formally, $\alpha \geq 0$ is a parameter that taps voter sensitivity on a particular bill. The electoral penalty from proposals for C is given by $\alpha[u_c(b_c)]$, and the electoral penalty from proposals for all $i \in M$ is given by $\alpha[u_i(b_i)]$. Thus, for any $\alpha > 0$, the electoral penalty associated with any proposal increases as the proposal diverges from an agent's ideal point.

Since the prime minister is chosen by the majority rather than by the voters, and since she makes policy proposals using the extraordinary device of confidence votes (rather than the normal legislative process), the prime minister's electoral implications from making

¹³ See especially Harmel and Janda 1994; Laver 1989; Lupia and Strom 1995; Strom 1990a, 1990b, 1994; and Tsebelis 1990.

proposals are somewhat different than those faced by C or M . The prime minister, for example, may be sanctioned by voters for using a confidence vote procedure to make policy proposals that are distant from the prime minister's ideal point (i.e., pay $\alpha[u_P(b_P)]$). But the electoral implications may also be important even if α is zero or if P makes a proposal very near her ideal point. The use of confidence vote procedures is a very serious political event that generally receives front-page attention—often of the negative variety. The prime minister often wishes to avoid this kind of attention, fearing that the use of confidence votes will signal to the voters that the government does not have a majority for its policy or is not respecting the wishes of the voters' directly elected representatives. In addition, using the confidence vote procedure may alienate other members of the government. Since adopting strategies that create divisions within a governing party or coalition may be electorally costly (Jennings 1961, 496; King 1976, 1981), the prime minister will often wish to avoid these procedures when their use exacerbates internal conflict. Thus, the prime minister may be willing to make concessions simply to avoid the use of confidence vote procedures.

Although rare, there may be exogenous electoral benefits from using the confidence vote procedure. This may occur when the use of a confidence vote suppresses debate on specific provisions in a bill, thereby limiting the appearance of internal party divisions. Duverger (1987, chapter 4) and Baumgartner (1989, 178–83) argue that this use of confidence votes has occurred in France.

Since many factors (in addition to the precise nature of the prime minister's proposal) may influence the electoral implications of invoking a confidence vote procedure, I do not focus exclusively on $\alpha[u_P(b_P)]$. Instead, I assume that the prime minister may pay some exogenous electoral "cost," $e \in \mathbb{R}$, for invoking a confidence vote procedure, where e includes all exogenous costs or benefits from invoking a confidence vote. Since e may be zero or negative, I assume that there may be no electoral implications from using the procedure or that there may actually be benefits from using the procedure to obtain a particular policy.

Next consider the preferences of the agents over induced outcomes from the defeat of the government in the voting stage. When the government falls, the cabinet ministers and the prime minister generally lose not only their job but also important opportunities to influence policy and the distribution of government resources in the future. It is therefore reasonable to assume that C and P may pay a positive cost if the government falls, and thus they may be willing to make policy concessions in order to keep their job.

Similarly, if the government falls on a vote of confidence, there may be costs to the members of M —and there should never be benefits. The justification for assuming that there are no benefits is straightforward. As previously discussed, a parliamentary majority can remove a prime minister from office at any time by submitting and voting a motion of censure. Thus, the existence of any government in power suggests that, other things equal, a majority places a nonnegative value

on keeping that government in place. The costs of bringing down the government are equally straightforward. Throwing the prime minister out of office may lead to a government that implements undesirable policies in the future, may entail loss of access to governmental sources of patronage, and may lead to loss of one's seat if an election ensues. The members of M may therefore be willing to make short-term policy sacrifices to ensure that the prime minister is around in the future.¹⁴ Formally, let $c^k \geq 0$ be the censure costs to agents $k = C, P$, and i if the government falls in the voting stage.

I can now summarize the utility functions, U , for each agent in the game. Let y be a final policy outcome from the confidence vote model. Then, the utility function for C is given by:

$$U_C(y, c^C, \alpha) =$$

$$\begin{cases} u_C(b_M) - \alpha[u_C(b_C)] & \text{if } P \text{ accepts } b_M \\ u_C(b_P) - \alpha[u_C(b_C)] & \text{if } P \text{ proposes } b_P \\ & \text{and all } i \in M \text{ accept} \\ u_C(x_0) - \alpha[u_C(b_C)] - c^C & \text{if any } i \in M \text{ censures } P. \end{cases}$$

The utility function for each $i \in M$ is given by:

$$U_i(y, c^i, \alpha) =$$

$$\begin{cases} u_i(b_M) - \alpha[u_i(b_i)] & \text{if } P \text{ accepts } b_M \\ u_i(b_P) - \alpha[u_i(b_i)] & \text{if } P \text{ proposes } b_P \\ & \text{and all } i \in M \text{ accept} \\ u_i(x_0) - \alpha[u_i(b_i)] - c^i & \text{if any } i \in M \text{ censures } P. \end{cases}$$

The utility function for P is given by:

$$U_P(y, c^P, e) =$$

$$\begin{cases} u_P(b_M) & \text{if } P \text{ accepts } b_M \\ u_P(b_P) - e & \text{if } P \text{ proposes } b_P \text{ and all } i \in M \text{ accept} \\ u_P(x_0) - e - c^P & \text{if any } i \in M \text{ censures } P. \end{cases}$$

Note that when $e = c^k = \alpha = 0$, the utility functions of the agents take the form of the standard spatial model.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S PROCEDURAL DECISION

Under what circumstances will the prime minister invoke a confidence vote procedure? If the procedure is invoked, what policy will the prime minister propose? To answer these questions, one must solve the model by backward induction, beginning with the strategy for each member of M in the voting stage.

If the prime minister invokes a confidence vote procedure, then a member's voting decision depends solely on the location of the status quo, the member's censure costs, and the prime minister's proposal. Let $A_i = \{x \in$

¹⁴ This argument is frequently made by scholars of parliamentary government (e.g., Goguel 1971, 85; Jennings 1957, 7, 136; King 1981, 88).

$B: u_i(x) \geq u_i(x_0) - c^i$. A_i defines all policies that member i would prefer to accept in the voting stage rather than bring down the government with a vote of no confidence. I therefore use A_i to establish the strategies of members of M in the voting stage of the model. Proposition 1 draws on the definition of A_i and is stated without proof.

PROPOSITION 1. *During the voting stage, the best response for all $i \in M$ is given by*

$$S_i^*(b_P) = \begin{cases} NC_i & \text{if } b_P \notin A_i \\ a_i & \text{if } b_P \in A_i. \end{cases}$$

Since any proposal by P in the procedural stage must be accepted by *all* members of M , the set of policies that P can propose using a confidence vote procedure and that will not lead to the fall of the government is $A = \cap_{i=1}^N A_i$. Note that for all $i \in M$, A_i is a closed and convex set containing x_0 . The set A is therefore nonempty, closed, and convex. The prime minister will be defeated if she proposes any policy that is not in A . Thus, the best obtainable policy that the prime minister can achieve by invoking a confidence vote procedure is $\hat{x} = \arg \max_{x \in A} u_P(x)$. Since A is nonempty, closed, and convex, by strict quasi-concavity of u_P , \hat{x} always exists and is unique. Note that if the model assumed that P could create ad hoc majorities, then the same logic would permit P to identify \hat{x} (which may or may not be unique), although she would have to compute the set A for all possible majorities.

The utility the prime minister receives from proposing \hat{x} during the procedural stage depends on the exogenous electoral implications, e , associated with actually invoking a confidence vote procedure on a policy issue. One can use \hat{x} and e to define the set of policies that the prime minister prefers to accept in the procedural stage rather than invoke a CVP to propose \hat{x} :

$$E = \{x \in B: u_P(x) \geq u_P(\hat{x}) - e\}.$$

It is useful to note that if there are large electoral benefits associated with invoking a confidence vote procedure ($e < 0$), then E may be empty.

The strategy for P in the procedural stage follows from the definitions of \hat{x} and E .

PROPOSITION 2. *Let $Z = \{x \in B: u_P(x) \geq u_P(x_0)\}$. During the procedural stage, P 's best-response strategy is given by:*

$$b_P^*(b_M) = \begin{cases} a_P & \text{if } b_M \in E \\ \hat{x} & \text{if } E = \emptyset, \text{ or} \\ & E \neq \emptyset, b_M \notin E \text{ and } (\hat{x} \neq x_0 \text{ or } c^P > 0) \\ x \in Z & \text{if } E \neq \emptyset, b_M \notin E, \hat{x} = x_0 \text{ and } c^P = 0. \end{cases}$$

For proof, see the appendix.

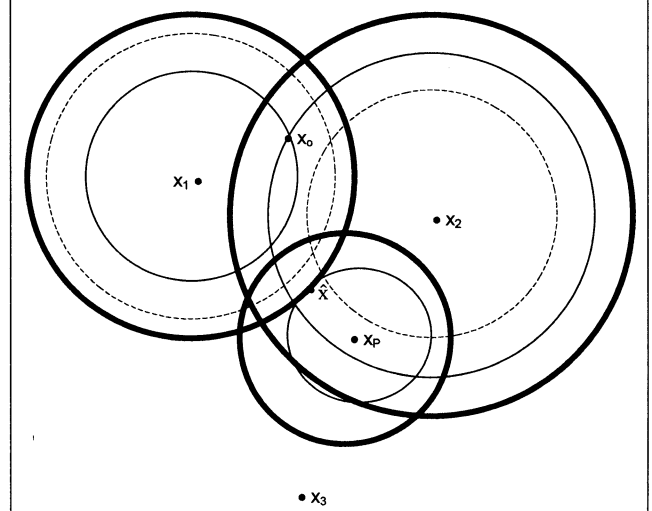
The logic behind proposition 2 is simple. The policy preferences and censure costs of the members of M , together with the status quo, determine the set of policies that all members would prefer to accept rather than bring down the government. The prime minister

can always, without fear of being voted out of office, obtain the policy (\hat{x}) she most prefers from this set of obtainable policies by invoking a confidence vote procedure. But since using a confidence vote may trigger an exogenous electoral cost or benefit, there may also exist a set of policies that P would prefer to accept rather than use a confidence vote to propose the best obtainable policy. Thus, if P 's policy utility from accepting M 's proposal is greater than the total utility—policy and electoral—that P receives from using a confidence vote, the prime minister will accept M 's proposal. Otherwise, with one exception, P will invoke a confidence vote procedure to propose the best policy from this set of obtainable policies. The one exception occurs when the best obtainable policy for the prime minister is the status quo (so that $\hat{x} = x_0$), and P pays no cost of being thrown out of office (so that $c^P = 0$). In this case, if M adopts a policy that is not at least as good for P as the status quo, then P can propose any policy that she weakly prefers to the status quo. If P proposes a policy that she strictly prefers to the status quo, she will provoke censure. Remarks 1 and 2 in the appendix indicate that it should be quite unlikely for this to occur.

Figure 2 depicts the logic of these interactions. Assume there are only two members of M , with ideal points at x_1 and x_2 . The set of policies that a member of M would prefer to accept (if proposed by the prime minister under a confidence vote) rather than censure the government is a function of the location of the status quo and the censure costs of the member. This set (A_i) is depicted by the area inside the (bold) indifference curves surrounding the (thin) indifference curves of each member through x_0 . The intersection of these two (bold) indifference curves is the set of policies that both members of M would prefer to accept rather than censure the prime minister (the set A).

The best policy from this set for P is \hat{x} . The set of policies that P would prefer to accept rather than use a confidence vote procedure (the set E) is a function of

FIGURE 2. An Example of the Confidence Vote Model



the location of \hat{x} and P 's electoral costs. In Figure 2, for some arbitrary and positive electoral cost, this set is depicted by the area inside the (bold) indifference curve that surrounds the prime minister's indifference curve through \hat{x} . Of course, if P bears no costs of using a confidence vote ($e = 0$), then the set E is defined simply by P 's indifference curve through \hat{x} .

PARLIAMENTARY STRATEGIES AND THE USE OF THE CONFIDENCE VOTE PROCEDURE

The members of M can make two different types of proposals: those that provoke a confidence vote ("provoking proposals") and those that do not ("acceptable proposals"). To understand when one should observe actual confidence vote procedures, it is necessary to describe the circumstances under which members of M will make each type of proposal during the parliamentary stage.

The utility for each member i from making an acceptable proposal, b_i , is $u_i(b_i) - \alpha[u_i(b_i)]$. The utility for each member from making a provoking proposal depends on whether $\hat{x} = x_0$ and $c^P > 0$. The greatest utility that a member could ever receive from making a provoking proposal, however, is $u_i(\hat{x})$, which occurs when $b_i = x_i$, proposing x_i provokes a confidence vote procedure, and the prime minister's confidence vote proposal does not lead to her fall. Let D_i be the set of policies which, if proposed by M and accepted by P , give member i a (weakly) greater utility than i could ever receive from making a proposal that provokes a confidence vote. Then,

$$D_i = \{x \in B: u_i(x) - \alpha[u_i(x)] \geq u_i(\hat{x})\}.$$

Let $D = \cap_{i=1}^N D_i$. If $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$, then there exist policies which would be accepted by P and which would give each member a higher utility than could ever be achieved by making a provoking proposal. The sets D and E play a central role in shaping the strategies of the members in the parliamentary stage.

PROPOSITION 3. *The members of M can make an acceptable proposal that alters the status quo if and only if $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$.*

For proof, see the appendix.

Proposition 3 indicates that members of M can adopt a change to the status quo during the parliamentary stage when two conditions are met. First, policies exist that P would prefer to accept rather than use a confidence vote to propose the best obtainable policy (i.e., $E \neq \emptyset$). Second, policies exist in this set that all members of M prefer to propose rather than make position-taking proposals of their respective ideal points (i.e., $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$). Two factors directly affect whether such policies exist: the prime minister's electoral costs and, more important, the electoral implications associated with proposals by members of M .

To understand the logic, return to Figure 2. In the parliamentary stage, a member of M must determine which policies, if proposed unanimously by the members

of M and accepted by P , would provide a greater utility than the member would receive from proposing his or her ideal point and obtaining an outcome of \hat{x} (because the prime minister invokes a CVP). In Figure 2, this set (D_i) is depicted for both members (and for an arbitrary α) by the dashed indifference curve that is inside the indifference curve of each member through \hat{x} . The intersection of these two sets (D_1 and D_2) is the set of proposals (D) that, if proposed by M and accepted by P , would give both members a higher utility than proposing their ideal points and obtaining \hat{x} following a confidence vote. If $\alpha = 0$, then the set D includes the policies that all members of M prefer to \hat{x} .

Note that for the arbitrary α and e depicted in Figure 2, the conditions for the members of M to make an acceptable proposal are met (i.e., $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$). In this case, the electoral value of position-taking by the members of M is not sufficiently large for the members to propose their ideal points, pay no electoral penalty from the proposal, and receive \hat{x} following a confidence vote procedure. Instead, they can propose some policy that lies in the intersection of the prime minister's acceptable set (depicted by the bold indifference curve surrounding P 's indifference curve through \hat{x}) and M 's feasible set (the intersection of the two dashed indifference curves). As rewards for "position-taking" increase (as α increases), however, the probability of observing a confidence vote increases. In Figure 2, as these rewards for position-taking increase, the dashed indifference curves will decrease, shrinking the set D , which will become empty as these rewards become sufficiently large. Thus, other things equal, the use of confidence vote procedures should increase as the rewards for position-taking increase. It is important to recognize that if there are no rewards for position-taking, the members of M can avoid the confidence vote procedure by simply proposing \hat{x} (if the prime minister's electoral costs are nil) or proposing some policy in E (if the prime minister bears some cost of using the confidence vote procedure). The position-taking incentives of the members of M therefore play the central role in determining whether confidence vote procedures are used.

But the prime minister's electoral costs are also very important. As these increase, the likelihood that the set E intersects the set D also increases. As noted, for the positive e depicted in Figure 2, the two sets intersect, and the members can make an acceptable proposal that moves the status quo. But if the electoral costs decrease, then given the position-taking incentives depicted in Figure 2, at some point no policy will be acceptable to P and also in M 's feasible set. In general, as P 's electoral costs increase, as long as there are feasible policies for the members of M (i.e., D is nonempty) the likelihood that M can make an acceptable proposal also increases. Thus, the use of confidence votes should increase as a prime minister's electoral costs of using the procedure decrease.

So far I have considered only the factors that should lead to the use (or avoidance) of confidence vote procedures. It is also important to highlight factors that the model predicts should be irrelevant to predicting the use of confidence votes. Two factors unexpectedly have

no effect on the incidence of confidence vote procedures. The first is the prime minister's censure costs. Some might expect the use of confidence votes to decline as the prime minister's censure costs increase, but the model indicates that those costs will never influence the decision to use a confidence vote procedure because of the sequence of decision making. Since the prime minister can always identify a unique policy that represents the best obtainable outcome from a confidence vote procedure, she never need consider censure costs in formulating legislative strategy.

The second irrelevant variable is the dimensionality of the policy space. Scholars who have studied restrictive amendment rules in Congress may suspect that confidence vote procedures should often be used to stabilize legislative choices that are made on more than one policy dimension, much as closed rules are said to stabilize log-rolls in Congress.¹⁵ On the one hand, this intuition is useful because the prime minister's possibility of using a confidence vote defines in multiple dimension policy spaces a reversion policy around which policy bargaining must be structured. On the other hand, it turns out that the strategic considerations of the prime minister are the same for any dimensionality of the policy space. That is, regardless of whether policy choices can be made on one dimension or many, there exists a unique best obtainable policy which is central to the prime minister's procedural decision.

Several other variables have no direct influence on the use of confidence vote procedures, but may have an indirect effect through an interaction with the position-taking incentives of the members of the majority. These variables include the heterogeneity of the majority, the censure costs of the members of the majority, and the level of policy conflict between members of the majority and the prime minister.¹⁶ Consider the heterogeneity of the majority. If a third member of the majority is added at x_3 in Figure 2, and if there are no electoral implications associated with making proposals, the members of M can adopt \hat{x} , and no confidence vote procedure will be used. But if there are any position-taking incentives for the members of M , then there will exist no policy that the members could propose, that would be accepted by P , and that would give all members a higher utility than they receive from proposing their ideal points (i.e., $D = \emptyset$). Thus, for this majority of three members, if position-taking incentives exist, one should expect to observe position strategies in parliament and the use of the confidence vote procedure by the prime minister. It is important to bear in mind, however, that if the ideal point of the third member of the majority were very close to the ideal point of either of the first two members, then it would be more likely that even with positive position-taking incentives, the members of the majority could make a proposal that would be acceptable to the prime minister. It is not, then, the size of the

majority coalition but, rather, the heterogeneity of its members' preferences, along with the importance of position-taking incentives, that influences the use of confidence vote procedures.

Similarly, the magnitude of the majority members' censure costs and the level of policy disagreement between members of M and the prime minister influence procedural choice only if (1) these variables take values that move the best obtainable policy away from the members' ideal points, and (2) there are position-taking incentives for the parties supporting the government. If there are no such incentives, then regardless of the level of policy conflict or the magnitude of censure costs, the members can propose the prime minister's best obtainable policy and avoid a confidence vote procedure. If position-taking incentives are positive, then to propose a policy that is near the best obtainable policy will result in a larger electoral penalty than would be the case if the best obtainable policy were not so distant from the members' ideal points. Thus, censure costs and policy conflict can only indirectly influence the incidence of confidence vote procedures. If position-taking incentives are positive, and if increases in censure costs or policy conflict move the prime minister's best obtainable policy away from the member's ideal points, then these variables may trigger position-taking strategies. The role of these variables in the analysis, therefore, highlights the fundamental link that exists between position-taking incentives in parliament and the incidence of confidence vote procedures.

THE ROLE OF CABINET MINISTERS

An important implication of the model is that opportunities for members of the majority to make acceptable proposals are *never* influenced by C 's initial proposal. Instead, for any b_C , the members must undertake the normal legislative process, whether it be to adopt the same proposal made by C , offer a different proposal, or preserve the status quo. Since a confidence vote proposal by the prime minister can follow any proposal emerging from this legislative process, P 's preferences and procedural prerogatives—not C 's initial proposal—shape legislative strategies in the parliamentary stage. Thus, in this model, C 's proposal never directly affects the outcome of the game. The optimal proposal strategy for the cabinet minister thus depends solely on whether there are electoral implications associated with proposals. Proposition 4 summarizes this logic and is stated without proof.

PROPOSITION 4. *The subgame perfect equilibrium proposal strategy for the cabinet minister is given by*

$$b_C^*(x_0) = \begin{cases} x & \text{if } \alpha = 0 \\ x_C & \text{if } \alpha > 0. \end{cases}$$

Of course, the position of cabinet minister is highly coveted in parliamentary systems, and it is extremely doubtful that individuals seek these positions solely because they wish to signal policy preferences to voters. How, then, may cabinet ministers influence legislative

¹⁵ See, e.g., Shepsle 1979, Shepsle and Weingast 1984, and Weingast and Marshall 1989.

¹⁶ Empirical evidence from France supports the model's results regarding the irrelevance of policy conflict, censure costs, and the dimensionality of the policy space (Huber 1992, forthcoming).

outcomes? The answer suggested by the confidence vote model is that a cabinet minister's proposal can assist the members of the majority in coordinating on a particular equilibrium in the parliamentary stage.

Coordination is important for two reasons. First, all the members will desire to avoid inefficient equilibria that exist even when the necessary and sufficient conditions for acceptable proposals to change the status quo are met. For example, assume there are three members of the majority and that $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$. It is always an equilibrium for each member to propose his ideal point. In this case, the majority's proposal is the status quo, and since there are at least three distinct proposals by the members, no member can propose any policy that will change the nature of the majority's proposal.

But each member of the majority and the prime minister prefer the outcome from an equilibrium with acceptable proposals to the outcome from this alternative equilibrium that provokes a confidence vote procedure. More generally, any equilibrium that provokes a confidence vote when the necessary and sufficient conditions are satisfied ($D \cap E \neq \emptyset$) is inefficient. Members of the majority will therefore prefer to coordinate on the efficient equilibria that avoid confidence vote procedures. *C*'s proposal could facilitate this coordination.

Second, even if the members coordinate on an acceptable policy, the model is silent on how the members of *M* reach agreement on a particular policy proposal. That is, the model lends no insight into how the members may reach agreement on proposing a particular $\bar{x} \in D \cap E$.¹⁷ Again, *C*'s proposal can signal which acceptable policy the members of *M* should propose.

The model, therefore, identifies different opportunities that the prime minister, cabinet ministers, and members of parliaments have to shape policy outcomes. The prime minister's prerogative to invoke a confidence vote procedure permits the prime minister to define the set of acceptable policies from which any final policy outcome must be chosen (the set *E*). The preferences of the members of the majority determine whether there exist acceptable policies (policies in *E*) that are also feasible (policies in *D*). The cabinet minister's "first move advantage" lies in the opportunity to signal to the members of the majority which feasible policy, if one exists, they should propose. Although the cabinet minister is often constrained by the preferences of the prime minister, the opportunity to facilitate coordination on particular policies in the parliamentary stage will often have important benefits for the cabinet minister and his party.

It is important to note that the results from the model presented here lead to quite different conclusions about the role of cabinet ministers than we find in previous models that analyze the distribution of cabinet portfolios. The standard assumption in previous models is that

cabinet ministers can dictate policy outcomes on issues within their portfolios (see, e.g., Austen-Smith and Banks 1990, Laver and Shepsle 1990, 1995). The model here suggests that when we integrate prime ministers and confidence vote procedures into the analysis, this assumption in previous research is too strong. Instead, in systems in which the prime minister can unilaterally invoke confidence vote procedures, one should assume that cabinet ministers can only choose policy outcomes from within a set of feasible policies defined by the preferences of the prime minister. In systems in which the prime minister cannot unilaterally invoke confidence vote procedures, one must model the precise decision-making structure that leads to the collective decision to invoke confidence vote procedures in order to understand the institutional constraints on individual ministers. Consequently, integrating the prime minister into models of portfolio distribution and analyzing the mechanisms of cabinet decision making should lead to a deeper understanding of portfolio distribution in multi-party government.

DISCUSSION

By allowing the prime minister to make the final policy proposal, confidence vote procedures give the prime minister substantial influence over final policy outcomes, even when these procedures are not invoked. If members of the majority bear no censure cost, confidence vote procedures enable the prime minister to choose any final policy outcome from the set of policies that the majority prefers to the status quo. And if members of the majority pay an exogenous cost of censuring the government (which is likely the case if parties exercise strong discipline or if the prime minister controls dissolution), then the confidence vote procedure is even more valuable to the prime minister because she can use it to extract—in policy currency—the majority's censure costs. Consequently, confidence vote procedures ensure that the ability of political parties in parliaments to shape policy outcomes after government formation is complete will be sharply constrained by the policy preferences of the prime minister.

Several observations about this claim are warranted. First, parties and factions in the legislature will find it difficult to use the institutional arrangements of parliamentary government to negate the effect of confidence vote procedures on policy outcomes. Suppose, for example, that the prime minister bears a cost if she falls in a censure vote. One might expect that in some circumstances the majority could turn the tables, forcing the prime minister to make policy concessions in order to avoid being thrown out of office. After all, members of the legislature can always threaten to vote a motion of censure. Is it not possible for the majority to use the threat of censure to extract policy concessions from the prime minister?

The negative answer to this question lies in the structure of censure motions, which unlike confidence vote procedures are used to veto the government, not to implement a new policy. In other words, when members

¹⁷ One possibility for addressing this shortcoming would be to model explicitly the legislative structures that constrain decision making in the parliamentary stage. Of course, these structures will differ across countries, and including such structures would not alter the insights from this paper into how confidence votes constrain parliamentary decision making (because for any structure, the government can always make the last move).

of parliament submit and vote a motion of censure, the immediate policy implications of the vote on this motion are nil. Either the government survives or falls, but in neither case do specific policy changes follow directly from the voting outcome. Confidence vote procedures, because they permit the prime minister to make a take-it-or-leave-it policy proposal, therefore play a more important role than censure motions in influencing parliamentary bargaining processes. As long as the prime minister uses confidence vote procedures only to propose policies that all members of the majority prefer to the induced outcome from censure, majority members cannot credibly threaten censure to obtain a better policy.

It is interesting to observe that this proposal power that a prime minister enjoys thanks to confidence vote procedures creates a relationship between the executive and the legislature that is the inverse of what is found in most presidential systems. In the United States, for example, the legislature typically makes the final policy proposal, and the executive can only veto, not alter, this proposal.¹⁸ In parliamentary systems with confidence vote procedures, although the legislature often appears to be able to propose and vote the final policy, the executive can use confidence vote procedures to make the final policy proposal. If the parliament does not anticipate that the prime minister could use a confidence vote procedure, it will find itself in the same position as the presidential executive, that is, with an ability only to veto someone else's proposal (in this case, by vetoing the executive itself).

A second useful observation about the prime minister's proposal power is related to the previous discussion of cabinet ministers and portfolio distribution. Since the structure of confidence vote procedures grants crucial proposal powers to prime ministers, choosing the prime minister will obviously be among the most important decisions that parties in parliaments ever make. The potential for the prime minister to use confidence vote procedures to move policy outcomes away from those that might be chosen by the parliamentary majority obviously depends not only on the costs to the prime minister of using a confidence vote procedure, but also on the level of divergence between the preferences of the prime minister and the majority. It would seem that high levels of divergence will seldom occur in countries that routinely produce cohesive, single-party majorities (although, as we have seen, even in countries like Great Britain, majorities are at times incohesive). In countries in which coalition or minority governments are the norm, it will be more difficult for members of the legislature to choose a prime minister who will share the policy preferences of all members of the majority across issues and over time. It seems likely, then, that in such countries, parties will be more likely to develop norms that constrain the prime minister's ability to act unilaterally (or, in the language of the model, that make the

costs of acting unilaterally very high). The model thus underscores the importance of including the policy preferences of prime ministers and the institutional structures of cabinets in theories of government formation.

Third, although confidence vote procedures give prime ministers a significant last-move advantage, the use of a confidence vote procedure should not be interpreted as an act by the prime minister against the parliament. Since agents in parliament must always anticipate that a prime minister could make a policy a question of confidence, these agents must also weigh the policy gains of cooperation with coalition partners against the electoral gains of adopting position-taking strategies. When position-taking incentives are sufficiently strong, parties can go on record in parliament for the precise policies that their constituents most prefer, knowing that in adopting this strategy, they will trigger a confidence vote procedure. In this sense, the use of confidence vote procedures is not decided by the prime minister. Instead, it is decided by the parties in parliament, who knowingly force confidence vote procedures for electoral reasons.

This model points to the need for empirical research on the factors that influence the exogenous electoral implications associated with legislative strategies. Scholars have analyzed these factors in the U.S. context (e.g., Bianco 1994; Denzau, Riker, and Shepsle 1985; Drotning 1993; Mayhew 1974; Wilkerson 1990), but little is known about this issue in parliamentary systems. An important place to begin would be certain systemic variables, such as the timing in the electoral cycle, the majority status of the government, the organizational structure of the prime minister's party, or the popularity of the government coalition. Other factors may be related to the type of policy under consideration. Policies that must be voted each year, for example, such as budgets, may influence electoral costs differently than do policies that are debated sporadically. Or policies that are closely tied to the government's formal policy program may be treated differently than other policies. The more general point, however, is to underline the need for careful empirical study of the factors that influence the electoral consequences of legislative strategies.¹⁹

In closing, this analysis underscores the importance of focusing careful attention on the rules and procedures of parliamentary democracies. Scholars have devoted thousands of pages to parliamentary forms of government, and a good share of these pages have stressed the subordination of members of parliaments to leaders in governments. What is absent is an account of how the institutional structures of parliamentary systems shape the strategic incentives of individuals in the legislature and the government. The confidence vote model presented here begins to provide such an account, and in so doing it raises issues that are central to understanding political interactions in parliamentary systems.

¹⁸ An obvious exception occurs when a president enjoys a line-item veto. A president also often enjoys various types of decree authority which can entail significant policy proposal power (Carey and Shugart 1995).

¹⁹ For a discussion of this issue in the case of France, see Huber forthcoming.

APPENDIX

This appendix provides the proofs for propositions 2 and 3 as well as the proofs of two remarks related to the circumstances under which the prime minister will fall in a vote of confidence.

PROPOSITION 2. Let $Z = \{x \in B : u_P(x) \geq u_P(x_0)\}$. During the procedural stage, P 's best-response strategy is given by:

$$b_P^*(b_M) = \begin{cases} \alpha_P & \text{if } b_M \in E \\ \hat{x} & \text{if } E = \emptyset, \text{ or} \\ & E \neq \emptyset, b_M \notin E, \text{ and } (\hat{x} \neq x_0 \text{ or } c^P > 0) \\ x \in Z & \text{if } E \neq \emptyset, b_M \notin E, \hat{x} = x_0, \text{ and } c^P = 0. \end{cases}$$

Proof of Proposition 2. By Proposition 1 and the definition of \hat{x} , all members of M will accept \hat{x} if it is proposed by P . The utility P receives from using a confidence vote to propose \hat{x} is therefore $u_P(\hat{x}) - e$, and the utility P receives from accepting any b_M is $u_P(b_M)$.

Consider $b_M \in E$. By definition of E , P prefers accepting any policy in E to proposing $b_P = \hat{x}$. Since \hat{x} is the best policy P can propose using a confidence vote, P also prefers accepting any $b_M \in E$ to proposing any $b_P \neq \hat{x}$.

Consider $E = \emptyset$. If $E = \emptyset$, then by definition of E , the utility P receives from proposing \hat{x} ($u_P(\hat{x}) - e$) is positive (which implies $e < 0$). Since the utility for P from accepting any b_M is at most zero (if $e = 0$ and $b_M = x_P$), P receives a higher utility from proposing \hat{x} than from accepting any b_M . P prefers proposing \hat{x} to proposing any $b_P \notin A$ (because $b_P \notin A$ results in censure, yielding a utility of $u_P(x_0) - e - c^P$). And by definition of \hat{x} , P prefers proposing \hat{x} to proposing any policy other policy in A . Thus, the optimal strategy for P is to propose \hat{x} .

Consider $E \neq \emptyset$ and $b_M \notin E$. By definition of E , P receives a higher utility from proposing \hat{x} than from accepting $b_M \notin E$. Thus, P will never accept $b_M \notin E$. P 's optimal strategy depends on the relationship between \hat{x} and x_0 , and on P 's censure costs.

(a) If $\hat{x} \neq x_0$, then, since $x_0 \in A$, P prefers proposing \hat{x} to proposing x_0 . By definition of \hat{x} , P also prefers proposing \hat{x} to proposing any other policy in A . Finally, since proposing any policy that leads to censure results in an outcome of x_0 , P prefers proposing \hat{x} to proposing any policy that is not in A .

(b) By definition of \hat{x} , if $\hat{x} = x_0$, then P can make no acceptable proposal that yields P a better outcome than the status quo (because proposing any policy that P prefers to x_0 will result in censure). Since P will not make a proposal that results in a worse outcome than the status quo, P will either propose \hat{x} (yielding x_0) or a policy she prefers to the status quo (also yielding x_0 , but resulting in censure). If $c^P > 0$, then proposing $\hat{x} = x_0$ gives P a higher utility than proposing any policy that leads to censure. Thus, P will propose \hat{x} . If $c^P = 0$, then proposing any policy that leads to censure gives P the same utility as proposing $\hat{x} = x_0$. Thus, P can propose any $x \in Z$. Q.E.D.

REMARK 1. If $x_0 \neq x_P$ and $c^i > 0$ for all $i \in M$, then P strictly prefers \hat{x} to x_0 .

Proof of Remark 1. Assume $c^i > 0 \forall i \in M$. Since $A_i = \{x \in B : u_i(x) \geq u_i(x_0) - c^i\}$, there exists a positive $\epsilon < c^i$ such that the open ball, $B_i(x_0, \epsilon)$, is a subset of A_i for all i . Since the intersection of a finite number of open sets containing x_0 is open and contains x_0 , it follows that A is nonempty and that x_0 is in the interior of A . Thus, given $x_0 \neq x_P$ and $\hat{x} = \arg \max_{x \in A} u_P(x)$, for any location of x_P , there exists some $x \in A$ that P prefers to x_0 , implying $\hat{x} \neq x_0$. Q.E.D.

Remark 2 follows directly from the proof of Remark 1.

REMARK 2. If $x_0 \neq x_P$, then $\hat{x} = x_0$ implies $c^i = 0$ for at least one $i \in M$.

PROPOSITION 3. The members of the majority can make an acceptable proposal that alters the status quo if and only if $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$.

Proof of Proposition 3.

Necessity. We must show that if $D \cap E = \emptyset$, then the members of the majority can never make an acceptable proposal to alter the status quo. By proposition 2, if $E = \emptyset$, then any proposal by the members of the majority will provoke a vote of confidence. Thus, we need only

concentrate on cases in which $E \neq \emptyset$ but $D \cap E = \emptyset$. If $E \neq \emptyset$ and $\alpha = 0$, then $\hat{x} \in D$, and $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$. Thus, when $E \neq \emptyset$ and $D \cap E = \emptyset$, it must be true that $\alpha > 0$.

First, consider the case in which there is only one member, i , of the majority ($|M| = 1$), so that $b_i = b_M$. I show that this member will never make an acceptable proposal. By proposition 2, the utility i receives from proposing any $b_M \notin E$ is $u_i(\hat{x}) - \alpha[u_i(b_i)]$ (because $E \neq \emptyset$, and by remark 2, if $\hat{x} = x_0$, then $c^i = 0$). Since $x_i \in D_i$ and $D_i = D$ (when $|M| = 1$), $D \cap E = \emptyset$ implies that $x_i \notin E$, which implies that $b_M = x_i$ will provoke a confidence vote by P . Thus, given $\alpha > 0$, the utility i receives from proposing x_i ($u_i(\hat{x})$) is strictly greater than the utility i receives from proposing any other policy x that provokes a vote of confidence ($u_i(\hat{x}) - \alpha[u_i(x)]$). It only remains to show, then, that i prefers proposing x_i to proposing any policy that is accepted by P . By proposition 2, the utility i receives from proposing any $b' \in E$ is $u_i(b') - \alpha[u_i(b')]$. If $b' \in E$, then $D \cap E = \emptyset$ implies that $b' \notin D$. Thus, by definition of D , $u_i(\hat{x}) > u_i(b') - \alpha[u_i(b')]$, and member i strictly prefers proposing x_i to proposing any $b' \in E$.

Next consider $|M| > 1$ when $D \cap E = \emptyset$. In this case, the proposal by the majority, b_M , is determined by the individual proposals of each of the members. In a subgame perfect equilibrium, each member must make a proposal that maximizes his utility given the proposals by the other members and given the best reply by P . I show that if $\alpha > 0$ and $D \cap E = \emptyset$, then each member must propose his or her ideal point.

(a) When $\alpha > 0$ and $D \cap E = \emptyset$, it cannot be a subgame perfect equilibrium for all members to make the same collective proposal, $b' \in E$. If $b_i = b' \in E$ for all i , then since $|M| > 1$, there exists some $j \in M$ such that $b'' \neq x_j$. I show that j can never propose b'' in equilibrium. Assume $b_i = b' \notin E \forall i \neq j$ and that $b'' \neq x_j$. By proposition 2, the utility j receives from proposing $b'' \notin E$ is either $u_j(\hat{x}) - \alpha[u_j(b'')] \text{ or } u_j(x_0) - \alpha[u_j(b'')] - c^j$. If j proposes x_j , then given $b_i = b' \forall i \neq j$, the majority proposal is $b_M = x_0$. Thus, the utility j receives from proposing x_j is $u_j(\hat{x})$ (because by proposition 2, if $\hat{x} = x_0$, then, since $x_0 \in E$, P will accept x_0 ; if $\hat{x} \neq x_0$, P will propose \hat{x}). Thus, given $\alpha > 0$, for any location of \hat{x} and any value of c^j , j strictly prefers proposing x_j to proposing b'' .

(b) When $\alpha > 0$ and $D \cap E = \emptyset$, it cannot be a subgame perfect equilibrium for all members to make the same collective proposal, $b' \in E$. Suppose $b_i = b' \in E$ for all $i \in M$. By proposition 2, P will accept b' . Since $b' \in E$, $D \cap E = \emptyset$ implies there exists some member j of the majority such that $b' \notin D_j$ (and thus that $b' \neq x_j$). The utility j receives from proposing b' is $u_j(b') - \alpha[u_j(b')]$. If j proposes x_j , the proposal by the majority will be x_0 , yielding j a utility of $u_j(\hat{x})$. Since $b' \notin D_j$, by definition of D_j , $u_j(\hat{x}) > u_j(b') - \alpha[u_j(b')]$. Thus, j strictly prefers proposing his ideal point to proposing any policy that is accepted by P .

By (a) and (b), there always exists some j such that for any collective proposal not equal to j 's ideal point, j has a strictly dominant strategy to propose x_j . Consequently, in any subgame perfect equilibrium when $D \cap E = \emptyset$, the majority's proposal will be $b_M = x_0$. By proposition 2, therefore, the utility for each member from any proposal, b_i , is $u_i(\hat{x}) - \alpha[u_i(b_i)]$. Given $\alpha > 0$, each member maximizes his or her utility by proposing his or her ideal point. Since $b_M = x_0$, by proposition 2, if $\hat{x} \neq x_0$, P will invoke a confidence vote to propose \hat{x} ; if $\hat{x} = x_0$, then P will accept $b_M = x_0$, retaining the status quo. Thus, if $D \cap E = \emptyset$, the members of the majority cannot make an acceptable proposal to change the status quo.

Sufficiency. Assume $D \cap E \neq \emptyset$, and let $\bar{x} \in D \cap E$. I show that $b_i^*(b_C) = \bar{x}$ is an equilibrium for any b_C . If the majority proposes \bar{x} , then by proposition 2, P will accept \bar{x} (because $\bar{x} \in E$). By definition of D , $\bar{x} \in D_i \forall i \in M$, and by definition of D_i , all members prefer making a common acceptable proposal that is in D_i to making any acceptable proposal that is not in D_i . Thus, we only need to show that the utility for each member from proposing \bar{x} is greater than the utility from proposing any policy that provokes a vote of confidence. The utility for each member from proposing \bar{x} is $u_i(\bar{x}) - \alpha[u_i(\bar{x})]$. The greatest utility that a member could ever receive from proposing a policy that provokes a confidence vote is $u_i(\hat{x})$. Since $\bar{x} \in D_i \forall i \in M$, $u_i(\bar{x}) - \alpha[u_i(\bar{x})] \geq u_i(\hat{x})$ for each member. Thus, proposing \bar{x} gives each member a greater utility than any member could ever obtain from making a provoking proposal. Q.E.D.

The following corollary follows directly from the proof of proposition 3.

COROLLARY 1. If $D \cap E = \emptyset$ and $\alpha > 0$, then the members of the majority will propose their ideal points in any subgame perfect equilibrium.

Proof of Corollary 1. See proof of necessity in proposition 3.

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