# Coalition preferences in multiparty systems

Meffert, Michael F.; Gschwend, Thomas; Schütze, Nora

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Konferenzbeitrag / conference paper

**Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:**
SSG Sozialwissenschaften, USB Köln

# Coalition Preferences in Multiparty Systems

Michael F. Meffert
Leiden University
mmeffert@gmail.com

Thomas Gschwend
University of Mannheim
gschwend@uni-mannheim.de

Nora Schütze
University of Mannheim
nora-im-netz@gmx.de

**Abstract**

Coalition preferences in multiparty systems have received increasing attention in recent years, both as an additional political identity beyond parties and as another explanatory factor for vote decisions above and beyond party preferences. In this paper, we use survey data from the 2006 Austrian election to investigate the accessibility of party and coalition preferences and the extent to which coalition preferences can be explained by party preferences and other affective and cognitive factors such as candidates, ideology, and issue positions. The evidence suggests that questions about coalitions are associated with longer response times than similar questions about party preferences, that is, respondents must make more of a cognitive effort to form and/or retrieve them. Finally, coalition preferences are only partially predicted by party preferences and candidate evaluations, while policy preferences are mostly unrelated. Coalition preferences emerge as a fairly independent factor in multiparty systems.

Paper prepared for the annual conference of the International Society of Political Psychology, Dublin, Ireland, July 14 – 17, 2009.

Coalition preferences in multiparty systems have received increasing attention in recent years, both as an additional political preference or even identity beyond parties and as another explanatory factor for vote decisions above and beyond party identification. Because most multiparty systems are governed by coalitions, it is perfectly reasonable for voters to consider coalitions when casting a ballot, even if the actual vote is still for a specific party and not a coalition. In this paper, we use data from a nationally representative survey conducted before the 2006 Austrian General Election to compare the accessibility of party and coalition preferences and investigate the extent to which coalition preferences can be predicted by party preferences and other affective and cognitive explanatory factors such as ideology and issue positions.

## Coalition Preferences and Vote Decisions

Despite the prevalence of coalition governments in Western parliamentary democracies, the role of coalition preferences has received surprisingly little attention. In recent years, a number of studies have shown that coalition preferences do matter and that they predict vote intentions above and beyond party preferences and other common control variables. There is supportive evidence from different countries such as Austria (Meffert and Gschwend 2008, Pappi 2007), Belgium (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008), Israel (Blais et al. 2006, Bargsted and Kedar 2009), and The Netherlands (Bäck and Rosema 2008, Irwin and Van Holsteyn 2003). These studies succeed in demonstrating the predictive value of coalition preferences but they do not address very basic questions about the origin and nature of coalition preferences themselves. If they are merely a function of party preferences, their explanatory value would be very limited. However, if they are a fairly independent or even unique factor, even dominating party preferences, they would add a valuable explanation to voting behavior in multiparty systems.

## Preferences for Parties and Coalitions

In two-party systems, the psychological concept of party identification, a long-term identification with a single party (on a unidimensional scale), has been very useful and successful to explain all kinds of political behaviors (Bartels 2002). The PID concept does not translate very well to much more complex multiparty systems with many parties and potential coalitions. For this reason, the concept of preferences is more flexible and much more useful because it can reflect both a clear ordering of preferences but also multiple preference ties, and it imposes no

priority of parties over coalitions or vice versa. These preferences are not necessarily fundamental long-term identifications but rather reflect the short-term political preferences in the upcoming election. These preferences might be based on affective social identifications or, in Downsian political world of rational behavior (Downs 1957), they might be based on ideology or underlying policy preferences. In either case, they assume that the party and coalition preferences of voters can be ordered in some way on a unidimensional preference scale, or much more likely, located in some multidimensional space. This requires the assumption, of course, that voters possess both party and coalition preferences, and that they can be compared with each other. This needs to be shown first.

The problem can be demonstrated very well if we consider party and coalition preferences in the context of a spatial model (Downs 1957, Austen-Smith and Banks 1988, Linhart 2007, Schofield and Sened 2005). Parties and voters have locations, or ideal points, in a one-, two-, or n-dimensional space, and the distances of voters to parties and coalitions reflect a preference ordering. The necessary assumption is that voters are familiar with their own location as well as the locations of parties and coalitions. For parties, this should not be a problem. During campaigns, voters receive information about party positions, and party platforms with detailed information are available as well. For coalitions, this is not so easy. The locations of coalitions are much more ambiguous as they represent, for the most part, hypothetical constructs. From a rational perspective, the coalition location would most likely reflect a compromise or midpoint between the coalition partners, weighted by the electoral strength of the coalition member parties. With backward induction, a sophisticated voter would be able to start with the plausible and likely coalitions and determine his or her best vote decision given the likely outcomes (Linhart 2007). This, of course, is problematic. Such decision making makes considerable (unreasonable) demands on voters' political knowledge and inferential ability. But more important, coalition preferences are essentially a function of the member parties, not an independent factor (though, in fairness, voters might primarily have coalition preferences from which they merely derive party preferences that guide their vote decision).

From a psychological perspective, a more useful conceptualization would consider both parties and coalitions as evaluative objects, or even as objects of social identification, that can both be related to each other or be fairly independent. If we consider parties and coalitions as symbolic evaluation objects, parties would appear to have a clear advantage. They are, after all, a

real, physical object, represented by candidates, organizations, messages, and salient symbols. Coalitions, on the other hand, are mostly hypothetical constructs that do not exist, except for currently existing coalitions or coalitions that have been formed in the recent past. Consequently, coalition preferences are for the most part based on abstract constructs. Similar to the rational argument, coalition preferences might merely reflect an evaluative average of the member party preferences. In addition, if coalitions are not readily available evaluation objects, voters will have to retrieve the relevant party preferences from memory and integrate them in a coalition preference. Consequently, such preferences would be more time-consuming to construct. If, however, coalitions are salient constructs that voters already had time to form an opinion on and develop an informed preference for, they should have no problem to quickly retrieve such an evaluation from memory.

In party systems with a tradition of coalition governments, different coalitions have been formed over time and/or are discussed during political campaigns. Thus, voters might very well have an idea about likely coalitions after an election, and they might even have formed some preliminary judgment. Evidence in favor of independent coalition preferences would require that they are not just averages of party preferences but rather take distinct locations in a policy or evaluative space, and at minimum that that are readily retrievable from memory.

In summary, we assume that party preferences have primacy and are the most important political preferences that influence other political attitudes such as coalition preferences. The question is rather the extent to which coalition preferences are independent of party preferences and other explanatory factors.

An alternative argument is made by González et al. (2008) who consider coalition identifications as superordinate and predictive of party preferences. The authors draw on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986) and make a compelling case that coalitions can be social identities that can easily set into motion motivational processes that in favor of the own group while derogating the outgroup, in order to protect and defend their group identity. In fact, "…social identity explanations may explain why political coalitions survive, even when the instrumental value associated with a coalition is low" (González et al. 2008: 94). This argument is well taken but rests on the assumption that coalitions are salient entities that can provide identifications for voters. In a political system such as Chile where coalitions are very salient, stable, and enduring, and effectively form two salient and opposing blocks—more or less

substituting for a two-party system—coalitions might very well take precedence over parties. The same applies to recent elections in Italy where coalitions appeared as choices on the ballot. In these cases, coalitions may very well play a powerful and superordinate role, inducing powerful identifications and intercoalition competition and rivalry. In most multiparty democracies, however, it is rather doubtful that coalitions are so salient, unless they are real in the sense that they exist as current or very recent government.

The question of which identity is more important can easily be settled by data. A salient identity should be readily accessible. Thus, if coalition identities dominate, voters should recall them faster than party identities, and vice versa. Because we consider party identities more important, we clearly expect that voters are quicker to express party preferences than coalition preferences. Only highly salient coalitions, such as a current governing coalition, should be highly accessible.

## Parties and Coalitions in Austria 2006

Our data comes from a pre-election survey conducted before the 2006 general election for a new *Nationalrat* in Austria (see Müller 2008 for a detailed summary). Six parties played a central role in this campaign, starting with the two major parties in Austria, the governing conservative People's Party (ÖVP) and the oppositional Social Democrats (SPÖ). Two additional small but well established parties were the nationalist and populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the environmental Greens (Die Grünen). Finally, two more recently established parties were the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) and the Liste Dr. Martin (Liste Martin). The BZÖ, however, was founded in the spring of 2006 by former members of the FPÖ, including all FPÖ ministers of the coalition government with the ÖVP, and most FPÖ members in parliament. As a consequence, the BZÖ replaced the FPÖ as the junior coalition partner of the ÖVP at that time. The Liste Martin, on the other hand, was primarily a one-man show by an independent member of the European Parliament who hoped to repeat his very successful run in the 2004 European election, mostly as a protest against the established parties.

The incumbent coalition of ÖVP and BZÖ was neither popular nor likely to get a new mandate, but the polls still suggested that the ÖVP would stay ahead of the SPÖ by a few percentage points. With two parties close to the 4% minimum vote threshold, the outcome of the election was fairly open and a strategic Austrian voter faced a difficult choice. The parties

contributed to this uncertainty by sending out only few and mixed coalition signals. The ÖVP as the likely winner refrained from explicit or official coalition signals. It only ruled out a coalition with the FPÖ while both the Greens and the SPÖ were seen as possible partners. The SPÖ also refrained from making explicit and official statements but saw Greens and ÖVP as possible coalition partners, clearly ruling out the two nationalist, far-right parties FPÖ and BZÖ. The attitudes toward Martin, a former member of the SPÖ, remained ambiguous but rather negative. The Greens explicitly campaigned without a coalition statement and tried to keep equal distance to both ÖVP and SPÖ, though the Social Democrats were seen as the slightly favored partner (e.g., Debus 2007: 57). The FPÖ ruled out any participation in a coalition government while BZÖ and Martin would both consider a coalition with ÖVP and SPÖ. In short, the three most likely outcomes included a grand coalition between ÖVP and SPÖ (which would have a certain majority of seats) or a coalition of ÖVP or SPÖ with the Greens as junior partner. This ambiguous context provides an excellent opportunity to investigate the coalition preferences of voters.

## Data and Methods

The pre-election survey interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1501 respondents and an additional and smaller sample of 450 respondents in the state Carinthia. The survey was conducted by phone during the three weeks preceding the election on October 1 (September 18-30). Respondents were asked to rate not only the six main parties but also seven specific coalitions that either had a realistic chance of reaching a majority in the election or were discussed during the campaign. The 11-point rating scale for parties and coalitions ranged from -5 (“don’t like the party/prefer the coalition at all”) to +5 (“like the party very much/absolutely prefer the coalition”). A similar question was asked about the leading candidates of the six parties. The survey also included questions about political predispositions and sociodemographic characteristics.

During data collection, the response times were measured by interviewers and reflect the time interval from the end of the question to the beginning of the answer by the respondent. The response time measures have a number of limitations. First, they were only measured in the rather large interval of seconds. Second, they were only collected for political questions, not sociodemographic characteristics. Finally, measurement started only in the last week of the

campaign and they are thus not available for all respondents. As a consequence, we combine the Austria and Carinthia sample in order to use all available data (which limits the generalizability of the results).

## Results

### Party and Coalition Preferences: Descriptive Assessment and Spatial Representation

The first and very basic question is whether respondents have not only party preferences but also clear and meaningful coalition preferences. To assess this question, we summarize in Table 1 the distribution of both party and coalition preferences of Austrian voters in 2006. We distinguish respondents with unique preferences, that is, a single party or coalition is rated highest, from those with two or more rating ties. We further distinguish respondents with two-party or coalition ties from those who are indifferent (three or more parties/coalitions ranked highest), and those who are alienated (only negative ratings). The results show that a vast majority of respondents has not only fairly clear party preferences but that coalition preferences follow a very similar pattern. 76.1% prefer a single party and 68.0% a single coalition, followed by two-party ties (15.7%) or two-coalition ties (19.3%). Only very few respondents are indifferent, alienated, or did not provide any answers. With the exception of Martin (Liste Martin), who was less known and could not be rated by more than 20% of the respondents, Austrian respondents were clearly able to provide ratings for all parties and coalitions, suggesting well-developed political preferences.

It should also be noted that 29.9% of respondents (with non-missing ratings) rated a coalition higher than a party. At least for some respondents, coalition preferences appear to be more than simple averages of the member party ratings. 34.9% rate a party higher, and 36.1% give equally high ratings to parties and coalitions. In short, respondents were not only opinionated about coalitions but some even rated them higher than parties.

More important than the mere ability to rate coalitions is how coalition preferences compare to party preferences, and more specifically, whether coalitions more or less align with party preferences. We used multidimensional scaling to place the five parties and six coalitions in a two-dimensional space (Liste Martin was not included due to the large number of missing values), based on the Euclidian distances between the attitude objects. The solution provides two readily interpretable dimensions. As shown in Figure 1, the first dimension separates the two

populist right-wing parties FPÖ and BZÖ as well as all coalitions that include them from all the other parties. The second dimension reflects the traditional left-right dimension, with Greens and SPÖ on the left and ÖVP on the right. Notable are the locations of the coalitions. In two cases, the grand coalition between ÖVP and SPÖ as well as the coalition of ÖVP with the Greens, the coalitions are located approximately midway between the two member parties, reflecting some kind of party average.

Very different, however, is the location of the SPÖ and Green Party coalition. The coalition is not midway between these two parties but moves further out to the "left" of the second dimension. Thus, two moderately left parties combine to a more extreme coalition. In the case of the ÖVP, any coalition with either or both of the two right-wing parties leads to a placement more or less identical with the location of the two small extremist parties. At least in the perception of the Austrian respondents, it is not the ÖVP which dominates these coalitions, but it is the association with the extreme small parties that dominate the view of these options. The latter two cases suggest that coalition preferences are more than just party averages.[1] It also has to be noted that the solution in Figure 1 represents the average evaluations across the whole sample but can differ for subgroups of the sample such as supporters of different parties.

To better represent the coalition preferences of different party supporters, Figure 2 shows a "coalition popularity chart" for respondents with single-party preferences. While it supports the general tendency that any coalition that includes the preferred party is rated favorably or at least neutral, there are several exceptions to this rule. First, the grand coalition is rated favorably by all respondents except BZÖ supporters (as it would require an end of the incumbent ÖVP-BZÖ coalition). Martin, Green Party, and FPÖ supporters give the grand coalition on average a positive rating. Thus, the grand coalition has appeal across the whole political spectrum. Second, supporters of the two parties that signaled no interest in participating in government, Martin and FPÖ, give also the lowest average ratings to all the coalitions. Finally, the two right-wing parties FPÖ and BZÖ have a clear dislike for each other and rate a coalition of the ÖVP with the other party as negative. In these cases, the evaluations do not reflect simple political averages but more complex preferences and considerations. In summary, the actual distribution of coalition

[1] A similar solution and presentation that also includes the leading politicians of each party is given by Pappi (2007: 450).

preferences differs considerable among the supporters of different parties, and they reflect more than just party averages.

**Parties vs. Coalitions: A Response Time Analysis**

The primacy of party or coalition preferences can be analyzed by looking at the accessibility of both preferences using response time. Figure 3 gives an initial summary and overview of the response times for party and coalition ratings. The averages are based on the natural log of the response times, after removing all response times longer than three standard deviations above the mean (Mulligan et al. 2003). The parties and coalitions are listed in the order in which they were asked. Thus, the first response (ÖVP rating) takes longest but the ratings speed up as interviewers go over the list.[2] The first impression suggests that the expression of coalition preferences took somewhat longer than for party preferences, even though they were asked later during the interview. Only one coalition is a clearly visible exception, the incumbent coalition of ÖVP and BZÖ. Respondents were able to evaluate this coalition (on average) as fast as they evaluated individual parties.

For a more systematic assessment, we turn to a multivariate regression model. For the analysis, the data was stacked, that is, the response time for each individual party or coalition rating constitutes a separate case. A respondent who provided a complete set of ratings contributes 13 measurements to the data set. The key independent variable is a dichotomous indicator for coalition ratings, but its effect is controlled by a series of control variables. First, accessibility of both party and coalition ratings might be affected by the strength or extremity of the evaluation. Consequently, the model includes both the rating itself (assuming that more favorable attitude objects are retrieved faster) as well as the folded scale to capture the extremity of the rating (assuming that more extreme ratings are retrieved faster than moderate and/or ambivalent ratings).

---

[2] A randomized order of parties and coalitions would have been more appropriate for the current analyses, but because participants were asked to provide not only evaluative ratings but to respond to several sets of additional questions about the parties and coalitions as well. A random order of parties and coalitions would have been confusing to respondents and would have slowed down the interview.

Besides the ratings themselves, two individual differences are expected to facilitate the retrieval of ratings, political interest and political knowledge. Both variables are operationalized as indexes, interest based on four variables (political interest in general, interest in election campaign, vote intention, and importance of election outcome) and knowledge on two dichotomous variables (knowledge of the correct unemployment rate and the correct minimum vote threshold for seats in parliament).

Two contextual variables indicate the incumbent ÖVP-BZÖ coalition as well as the campaign day. Both should facilitate retrieval, either because the incumbent coalition is much more salient than other, hypothetical coalitions or because the intensity and visibility of the campaign will increase towards the election day.

Finally, three variables are included to control for methodological artifacts. First, the baseline response speed captures individual differences in responding to survey questions. Because no response times for non-political questions were available, the baseline is based on five questions distributed across the interview (campaign interest, importance of election outcome, government performance, attention to polls, and party identification). The baseline is the average log of these response times. A second control variable with a similar purpose to capture individual differences in response speed is the overall duration of the interview (in minutes). Finally, a question order variable captures the increasing response speed within a set of similar questions, that is, the party and coalition ratings, respectively.

The results of the OLS regression model confirm mostly the expectations (Table 2). Political interest is one of the exceptions by having no effect on response times at all. The key effect, of course, are the longer response times for coalition ratings. Even though coalition ratings were asked after the party preferences, participants still required more time to express an evaluation of these hypothetical constructs. One exception is the only real and existing coalition of ÖVP and FPÖ. The effect of the incumbent dummy essentially reverses the coalition dummy effect, putting the incumbent coalition on par with the party ratings.

Both the positivity of the evaluation as well as the extremity of the evaluation have significant effects on response times, but in different directions. Evaluative extremity facilitates retrieval, or in other words, extreme evaluations, whether positive or negative, are more accessible. The rating itself, however, predicts longer response times with more positive

evaluations. Negatively evaluated coalitions are rated faster. This effect, however, is much smaller than the extremity effect.

Unlike political interest, respondents with a higher level of political knowledge are able to rate parties and coalitions faster. Note that an interaction effect of knowledge with coalitions was tested but did not have any effect on the model. Knowledge affects both party and coalition evaluations in similar ways (results not shown).

The remaining control variables perform as expected. The baseline response speed and interview duration both affect individual response time positively while the campaign day and question order both decrease response times as they increase.

The response time analysis answers the question about primacy of parties and coalitions very clearly. For Austrian voters, party preferences are more accessible than coalition preferences. At best, the incumbent coalition is rated as fast as parties, but there is no indication that coalition preferences precede party preferences.

**Predicting Coalition Preferences: Parties, Affect, and Ideology**

Even if coalition preferences do not precede party preferences, the initial MDS analysis suggests that they are more than just averages of party preferences. Other factors must explain coalition preferences as well. We test five sets of plausible explanatory factors. First, party preferences should obviously matter a great deal because they constitute the coalition members. However, it is reasonable to assume that not only the preferences for the parties in a given coalition matter but also the preferences for parties outside the coalition. For example, a voter might consider the exclusion of a disliked party from government highly desirable, leading to a higher evaluation of any coalition that might accomplish this goal. In short, all party preferences could matter in the evaluation of specific coalitions. The party preferences are operationalized by their rating scales, with the exception of Martin. To avoid dropping many cases due to missing ratings, the Martin preference is operationalized as a dichotomous indicator coded “1” if Martin had the highest rating among all parties (and “0” otherwise).

Second, the leading candidates of the parties might play an important role as well. In Austrian election campaigns, the leading candidates have a high degree of visibility. For example, they square off in a series of pairwise television debates, providing a lot of visibility and identifiable leadership for the parties. Following the operationalization of the party

preferences, all leading candidates (without the less known Martin) are included in the models as well.

The third set of variables represents ideology and specific policy preferences. The survey allows us to operationalize three predictor variables, each reflecting the self-placement of a respondent on a given scale. The scales represent the classic left-right dimension as well as two political issues that played a major role during the election campaign, immigration (quick residency permits vs. immediate deportation of illegal immigrants) and the economy (taxes vs. spending). Austrian parties were perceived as sharply different on the former but fairly similar on the latter issue (see Pappi 2007 for details).[3]

A fourth set of variables reflects retrospective evaluations of government performance and the economy. The satisfaction with the incumbent government was measured on a four-point scale, and the economic evaluations were based on the perceived economic development (better or worse) since the last election on a five-point scale.

The fifth and final set of predictors reflects common socioeconomic variables that have been found to predict party preferences, in particular age (in years), sex (male), high level of education, catholic denomination, regular church attendance, and labor union membership. Except age, all variables are operationalized as dichotomous indicators.

The results suggest that party preferences are indeed the most important predictors of coalition preferences (Table 3). Without a single exception, party preferences for the coalition member parties always predict these coalition preferences. And if non-coalition member preferences have significant effects, they are always negative. For example, a high rating of the BZÖ leads to a more negative view of the grand coalition, a high rating of the Greens works consistently against all coalitions that involve right-wing parties, and a high rating of ÖVP or SPÖ works against a coalition of the Greens with the other party, respectively. Thus, party preferences predict coalition preferences very consistently and as expected.

Candidates matter as well, also as expected but more narrowly than party preferences. Again, the dominant pattern is a positive impact of the party leaders of the relevant coalition

---

[3] A better operationalization would be based on individually perceived distances between self and party placements on these issues. However, respondents provided only issue placements for parties but not coalitions.

member parties. These effects are very consistent except for the leader (and incumbent chancellor) Schüssel of the ÖVP. In fact, a dislike of Schüssel rather translates into a higher rating of SPÖ-Green Party coalitions.

The effects of the remaining variables are rather weak. Ideology and issue positions have hardly any effect. Only a position in favor of more liberal immigration policies translates into more support for the left-of-center SPÖ-Green Party coalitions. Retrospective evaluations of government performance benefit all right-of-center coalitions with the ÖVP, but in particular the incumbent ÖVP-BZÖ coalition. The perception of a declining economy helps again the SPÖ-Green Party coalition. Sociodemographic indicators have hardly any effect but suggest that older, less educated, and catholic respondents looked more favorably on a grand coalition. Overall, the models explain only a modest amount of the variance of coalition preferences (between 19 and 55%), suggesting that other factors not captured in the model play an important role as well. Thus, coalition preferences are predicted by party preferences, but only to a limited degree. The considerable unexplained variance suggests that coalition preferences are a partially independent or even unique factor.

## Conclusion

The paper explored the origins and nature of coalition preferences in multiparty systems based on Austrian voters in 2006. The evidence strongly supports the notion that voters have well developed coalition preferences, or at least are able to form them if asked. In fact, more respondents were able to provide evaluations of coalitions between established parties than to rate a new and less known party (Liste Martin).

The response time analysis contributes an important piece to the puzzle. The argument by González et al. (2008), that coalition preferences are a superordinate category, can safely be ruled out for Austria and probably most other multiparty systems as well. The response times for hypothetical and abstract coalitions are significantly longer than for real and concrete parties. Coalitions appear to be secondary to parties. The only exception is the incumbent coalition of ÖVP and BZÖ. This suggests that only if a coalition is an existing and real entity with considerable presence in the media, it becomes a salient evaluation object that is comparable to parties.

In terms of the origins of coalition preferences, the analysis raises as many questions as it can answer. It is clear that party preferences as well as party leaders play a very important role in the formation of coalition preferences, but they predict only a limited amount of the variance. Ideological and policy-based explanations, on the other hand, largely fail to explain coalition preferences. This might in part be a measurement problem. If respondents would be asked specifically about the ideology and policy positions of specific coalitions, better proximity measures could be operationalized. However, it is rather doubtful that a better measurement would dramatically increase the explanatory power of these measures. The considerable unexplained variance rather suggests that other factors must play a role as well that were not captured in the analysis. But most important, it implies that coalition preferences are to a considerable degree independent of party preferences and a unique and necessary predictor of vote decisions.

The challenge to future research is clear. Not only have these findings to be replicated for other countries with multiparty systems, but better explanations about the sources and origins of coalition preferences are necessary.

**References**

Austen-Smith, David, and Jeffrey Banks. 1988. "Elections, Coalitions, and Legislative Outcomes." *American Political Science Review* 82 (2): 405-422.

Babad, Elisha. 1995. "Can Accurate Knowledge Reduce Wishful Thinking in Voters' Predictions of Election Outcomes?" *Journal of Psychology* 129 (3): 285-300.

Bargsted, Matias A., and Orit Kedar. 2009. "Coalition-Targeted Duvergerian Voting: How Expectations Affect Voter Choice under Proportional Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 307-323.

Bartels, Larry M. 2002. "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions." *Political Behavior* 24 (2): 117-150.

Blais, André, John H. Aldrich, Indridi H. Indridason, and Renan Levine. 2006. "Do Voters Vote for Government Coalitions? Testing Downs' Pressimistic Conclusion." *Party Politics* 12 (6): 691-705.

Debus, Marc. 2007. *Pre-Electoral Alliances, Coalition Rejections, and Multiparty Governments*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper Collins.

González, Roberto, Jorge Manzi, José L. Saiz, Marilynn Brewer, Pablo de Tezanos-Pinto, David Torres, María Teresa Aravena, and Nerea Aldunate. 2008, “Interparty Attitudes in Chile: Coalitions as Superordinate Social Identities.” *Political Psychology* 29 (1): 93-118.

Gschwend, Thomas, and Marc Hooghe. 2008. “Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Experimental Study on Voter Responses to Pre-Electoral Coalitions.” *European Journal of Political Research* 47(5):556-577.

Irwin, Galen A., and Joop J. Van Holsteyn. 2002. "According to the Polls: The Influence of Opinion Polls on Expectations." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (1): 92-104.

Irwin, Galen A. and Joop J. Van Holsteyn. 2003. *They Say It Can't Be Done? Strategic Voting in Multi-Party Proportional Systems: The Case of the Netherlands.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia.

Linhart, Eric. 2007. “Rationales Wählen als Reaktion auf Koalitionssignale am Beispiel der Bundestagswahl 2005.” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 48 (3): 461-484.

Meffert, Michael F., and Thomas Gschwend. 2008. *Strategic Coalition Voting: Evidence from Austria.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, August 28 – 31, 2008.

Müller, Wolfgang C. 2008. "The Surprising Election in Austria, October 2006." *Electoral Studies* 27 (1): 175-179.

Mulligan, Kenneth, J. Tobin Grant, Stephen T. Mockabee, and Joseph Quin Monson. 2003. "Response Latency Methodology for Survey Research: Measurement and Modeling Strategies." *Political Analysis* 11(3):289-301.

Pappi, Franz U. 2007. "Partei- und Koalitionskriterien der österreichischen Wählerschaft für die Nationalratswahl 2006." *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 36 (4): 445-469.

Schofield, Norman J., and Itai Sened. 2005. "Modeling the Interaction of Parties, Activists, and Voters: Why is the Political Center so Empty?" *European Journal of Political Research* 44 (3): 355–390.

Tajfel, H., and J. Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel. Monterey: Brooks/Cole. Pp. 33–48.

Tajfel, H., and J. Turner. 1986. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. S. Worchel and W. Austin. Chicago: Nelson-Hall. Pp. 7–24.

**Table 1: Distribution of Party and Coalition Preferences**

| **Party Preferences** | **%** | **Coalition Preferences** | **%** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Single Party | 76.1 | Single Coalition | 68.0 |
| *ÖVP* | *28.7* | *ÖVP-SPÖ* | *27.1* |
| *SPÖ* | *21.4* | *ÖVP- FPÖ* | *4.7* |
| *Greens* | *15.8* | *ÖVP- BZÖ* | *4.2* |
| *FPÖ* | *4.4* | *ÖVP-FPÖ-BZÖ* | *2.1* |
| *BZÖ* | *3.0* | *ÖVP-Greens* | *13.0* |
| *Martin* | *2.8* | *SPÖ-Greens* | *14.5* |
| | | *SPÖ-Greens-Martin* | *2.5* |
| Two-Party Ties | 15.7 | Two-Coalition Ties | 19.3 |
| Indifferent | 4.7 | Indifferent | 7.3 |
| Alienated | 2.1 | Alienated | 2.8 |
| Missing | 1.5 | Missing | 2.6 |
| N | 1951 | N | 1951 |
| Party > Coalition[a] | 34.9 | Coalition > Party[a] | 28.9 |

Note: A unique preference is assigned if a single party or coalition has the highest rating. Multiple preferences are assigned to up to two parties or coalitions with highest rating. Indifferent respondents have multiple ties and alienated respondents have only negative ratings.
[a] Respondents with non-missing preferences only, N=1883.

**Table 2: Response Time Model**

| | **Log of Response Times** | |
|---|---|---|
| | b | se |
| Preference Type (Coalition) | .120*** | (.009) |
| Preference Rating | .006*** | (.001) |
| Preference Extremity | -.030*** | (.003) |
| Political Interest | .037 | (.044) |
| Political Knowledge | -.115*** | (.025) |
| Incumbent Coalition | -.140*** | (.014) |
| Campaign Day | -.017* | (.007) |
| Baseline Response Speed | .148*** | (.009) |
| Interview Duration | .002** | (.001) |
| Question Order | -.027*** | (.002) |
| Constant | .737*** | (.050) |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .18 | |
| Cases (Cluster) | 13606 (1106) | |

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is the natural log of the party and coalition rating response times, after removing all response times exceeding three standard deviations above the mean. Cases represent individual party or coalition rating response times, and all responses from a single respondent form a cluster (up to 13 ratings for six parties and seven coalitions; not all respondents provided all ratings).
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

**Table 3: Explaining Coalition Preferences**

| | ÖVP-SPÖ | ÖVP-FPÖ | ÖVP-BZÖ | ÖVP-FPÖ-BZÖ | ÖVP-Greens | SPÖ-Greens | SPÖ-Greens-Martin |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Party Preferences** | | | | | | | |
| ÖVP | .15*** | .13*** | .14*** | .09** | .20*** | -.12*** | .01 |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| SPÖ | .25*** | -.05 | -.07* | -.03 | -.14*** | .16*** | .10** |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| Greens | -.05 | -.09** | -.12*** | -.07* | .39*** | .34*** | .19*** |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| FPÖ | .03 | .26*** | -.11*** | .10** | -.00 | -.07* | -.00 |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| BZÖ | -.11** | -.00 | .43*** | .20*** | -.03 | -.03 | -.03 |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| Martin[a] | .49 | .43 | -.51 | -.08 | .16 | -.53 | 1.83*** |
| | (.35) | (.31) | (.27) | (.29) | (.30) | (.31) | (.35) |
| **Candidates** | | | | | | | |
| Schüssel (ÖVP) | .09* | .06 | .02 | -.01 | .12*** | -.09** | -.18*** |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| Gusenbauer (SPÖ) | .19*** | .01 | -.02 | .01 | -.03 | .21*** | .18*** |
| | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) |
| v.d. Bellen (Greens) | -.03 | -.02 | .02 | -.02 | .25*** | .17*** | .13*** |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| Strache (FPÖ) | -.02 | .26*** | .02 | .07* | .01 | .09* | .07 |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| Westenthaler (BZÖ) | .01 | .08* | .30*** | .27*** | -.05 | .02 | .04 |
| | (.04) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| **Ideology/Policy** | | | | | | | |
| Ideology | .02 | -.02 | -.05 | -.00 | .03 | -.06 | -.07 |
| | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.03) | (.04) |
| Immigration | .01 | .00 | -.00 | -.01 | .03 | .10*** | .09** |
| | (.03) | (.03) | (.02) | (.02) | (.02) | (.03) | (.03) |
| Welfare | -.03 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | -.04 | -.06 |
| | (.03) | (.03) | (.02) | (.02) | (.02) | (.03) | (.03) |
| **Performance** | | | | | | | |
| Government | .12 | .31** | .49*** | .26** | .21* | -.13 | -.22 |
| | (.12) | (.10) | (.09) | (.10) | (.10) | (.10) | (.12) |
| Economy | -.03 | -.12 | -.04 | -.06 | .13 | -.18* | -.13 |
| | (.08) | (.07) | (.06) | (.07) | (.07) | (.07) | (.08) |
| **Demographics** | | | | | | | |
| Age | .01*** | -.00 | -.01 | -.00 | -.00 | -.00 | -.01 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Male | -.07 | -.20 | .19 | -.01 | -.09 | -.23 | -.08 |
| | (.14) | (.13) | (.11) | (.12) | (.12) | (.13) | (.14) |
| High Education | -.54** | -.10 | .09 | -.00 | .25 | -.41* | -.00 |
| | (.21) | (.18) | (.16) | (.17) | (.18) | (.18) | (.21) |
| Catholic | .14 | .08 | .01 | .10 | .21 | -.10 | .12 |
| | (.16) | (.14) | (.12) | (.13) | (.14) | (.14) | (.16) |
| Church | .45* | .02 | -.04 | -.12 | -.03 | -.11 | .06 |
| | (.20) | (.18) | (.16) | (.17) | (.18) | (.18) | (.21) |
| Labor | .02 | .02 | .14 | .01 | -.16 | .11 | -.03 |
| | (.15) | (.13) | (.11) | (.12) | (.13) | (.13) | (.15) |

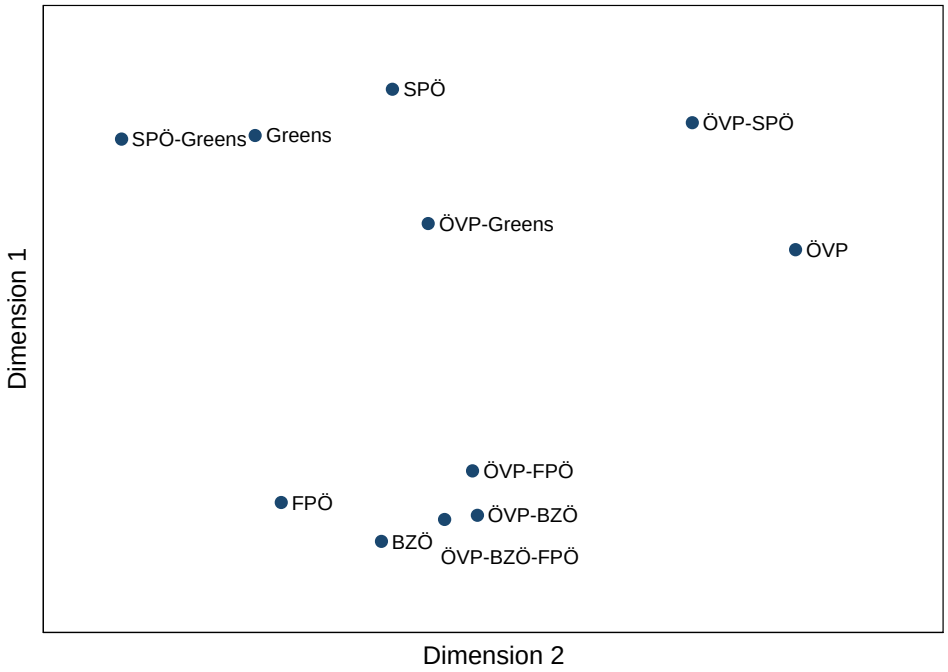
(table continues on following page)

**(Table 3 continued)**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | -.30 | -.50 | -.76* | -1.18*** | -1.70*** | .46 | -.27 |
| | (.42) | (.37) | (.32) | (.35) | (.36) | (.37) | (.43) |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .19 | .40 | .55 | .39 | .46 | .55 | .33 |
| N | 1460 | 1456 | 1459 | 1452 | 1459 | 1456 | 1425 |

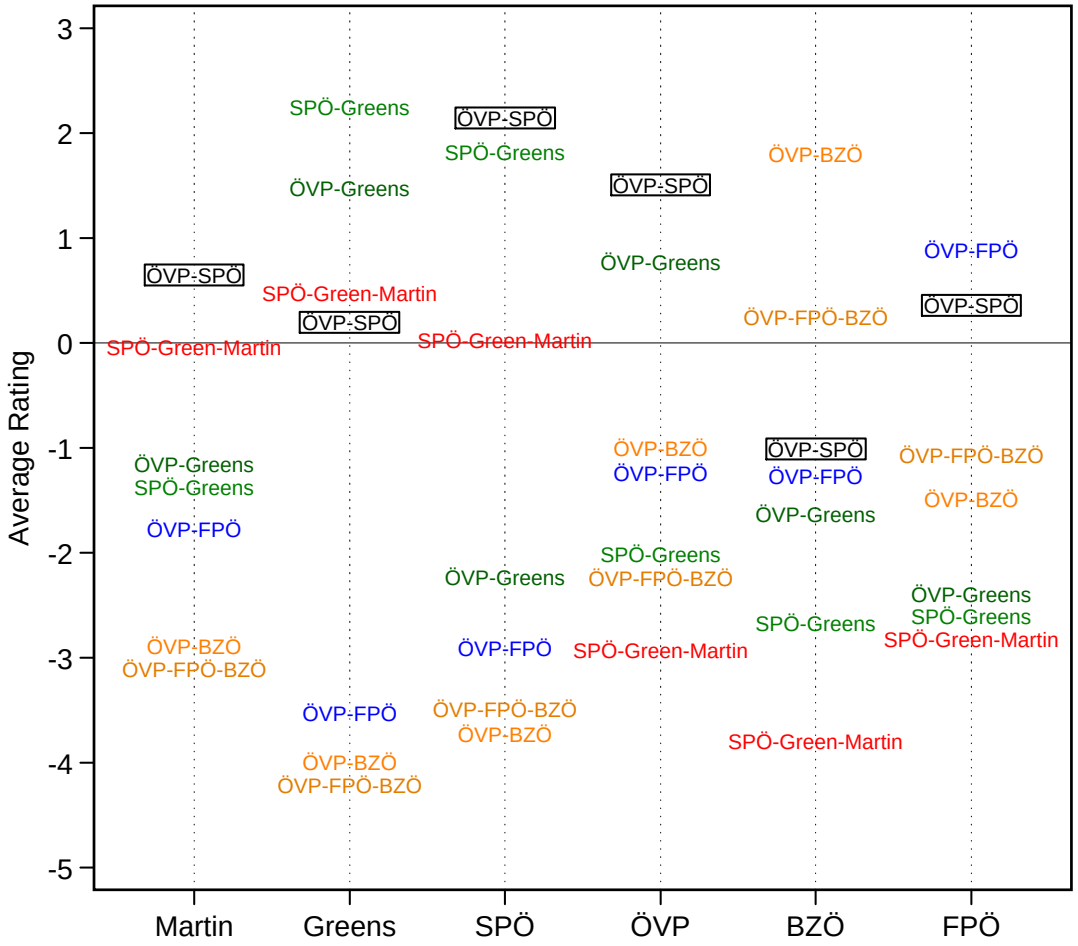
Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables measure the degree to which respondents prefer a given coalition government on an 11-point rating scale, ranging from -5 (“not at all”) to +5 (“absolutely”).
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
[a] The Martin preference is a dichotomous indicator coded 1 for respondents that rated the Liste Martin higher than other party preferences (and 0 otherwise).

**Figure 1: Parties and Coalitions in a Two-Dimensional Evaluative Space**



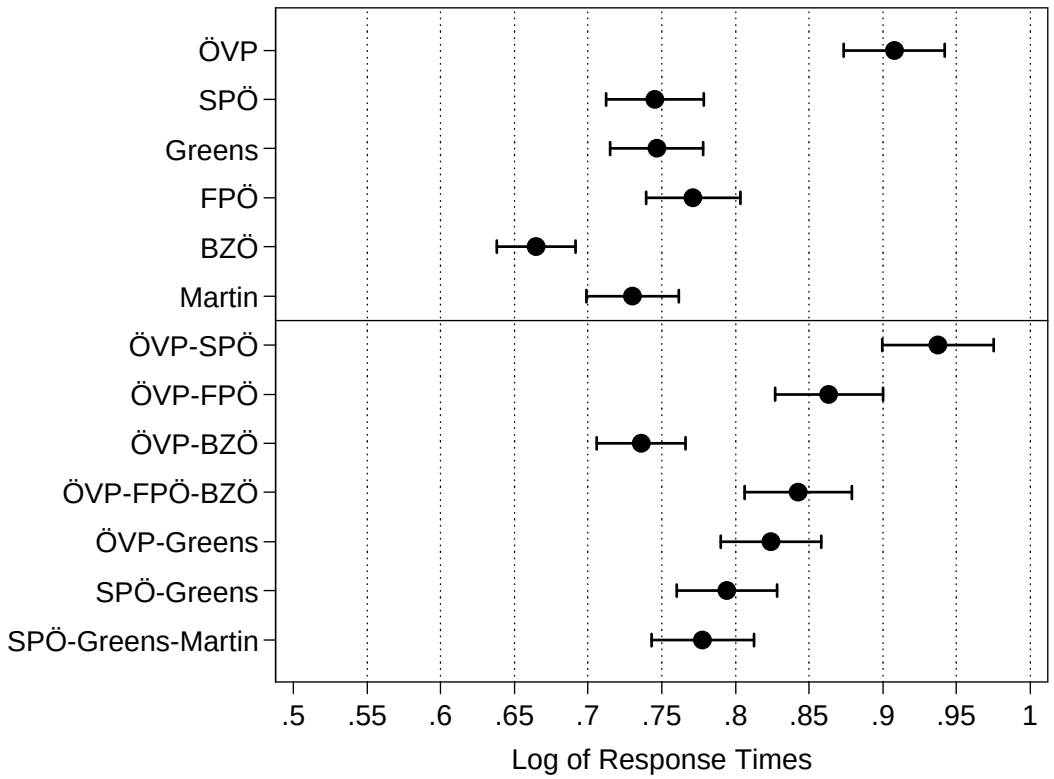

Note: The spatial placement is based on a classical multidimensional scaling of the preference ratings of five parties and six coalitions (N=1790).

**Figure 2: "Coalition Popularity Chart" by Party Preference**




Note: The coalition labels indicate the average evaluation of a given coalition (on a -5 to +5 rating scale) by respondents with single-party preferences. Overlapping labels were moved apart to equal degrees to make them fully readable. (Martin: n=54, Greens: n=301, SPÖ: n=410, ÖVP: n=547, BZÖ: n=56, FPÖ: n=85).

**Figure 3: Average Response Times of Party and Coalition Ratings**




Note: Dots represent the average natural log of the response times of party and coalition ratings and spikes represent the 95% confidence intervals. Results based on respondents with response times for all parties and coalition ratings (N=950).