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The Effects of Co-governing and Party Size on Ideological Convergence

By

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The Effects of Co-governing and Party Size on Ideological Convergence

Jorge Olmos Camarillo

Previous literature has investigated how coalition parties diverge ideologically during elections while converge in-between elections. However, less attention has been devoted to the ideological convergence of co-governing parties in the long term. Using data from 36 parliamentary democracies in the 1948-2019 period, I demonstrate that cabinet parties tend to converge ideologically across elections. I claim that such strategic behavior is due to the coalition bargaining process and the design and implementation of common public policies that pushes parties to internalize diverse views. Additionally, I show that parties' relative size—a variable until now neglected by the literature—is also associated with such convergence. Specifically, as the difference of vote share between parties increases, we observe higher levels of ideological convergence regardless of cabinet/opposition membership. This suggests that smaller parties have incentives to adopt policies that have proven popular when implemented by mainstream parties.

INTRODUCTION

How do parties update their ideological positions after they participate in coalition cabinets? Is party size correlated to ideological convergence? While some authors have studied how parties adjust their policy positions in response to voters' preferences (Adams et al. 2004, Somer-Topcu 2009), other body of literature has explored how governing in coalitions shapes party ideologies (Budge and Laver 1986; Strøm and Müller 1999; Klüver and Spoon 2017). Yet these studies have not examined whether collaboration in government impacts ideological convergence among coalition partners. Even rarer are works that consider relative party sizes as a possible determinant of ideological convergence. My intention is to fill this gap in the literature by arguing that both co-

governing and increments in vote share difference between parties in parliament are associated with higher levels of ideological convergence.

Figure 1. Parties' Incentives to Diverge and Converge Ideologically during Electoral Cycles



Coalition partners face different incentives to update their policy positions during the electoral cycle. Figure 1 shows a timeline of the electoral cycle faced by parties in parliamentary systems. At the beginning of the cycle, they write their manifestos which provide the policy platform they will pursue in the upcoming elections. At this point, parties have incentives to differentiate from one another to gain voters' support and achieve office. Then, elections take place and parliamentary seats are assigned according to the vote shares and electoral rules in each country. If no party get sufficient votes to form government by itself, parties in parliament will have incentives to converge ideologically as they engage in coalition bargaining to determine which parties will accede to the ministerial portfolio.

However, as exposed by the *collegial* model of coalition formation, parties face the fundamental problem of agreeing upon a common platform given that their ideological positions over issues often diverge (Müller and Strøm 2000; Martin and Vanberg 2011; 2014). Hence, at this point of the electoral cycle, parties' motivations to diverge are attenuated and ideological convergence is incentivized through the ministerial loot. In sum, Figure 1 illustrates how party incentives to converge (diverge) ideologically change at different points of the electoral cycle.

Moving away from the literature that shows how parties converge in-between elections and diverge during elections (Klüver and Spoon 2017), I propose that parties that participate in coalition governments converge ideologically in the long term. Using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2020) and ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2020) which cover the period 1947-2019 and include 462 parliamentary elections across 36 countries, I show that co-governing parties move ideologically closer to each other when compared to parties that do not collaborate in government. I propose four main mechanisms for explaining this finding. First, coalition partners are more exposed to different ideological positions than parties in the opposition. During the coalition administration, cabinet partners are constantly dialoguing with each other in order to advance their common political agenda. Second, parties in the coalition were forced to engage in coalition bargaining and to make compromises to reach a jointly agreed platform. Such behavior is indicative of openness to hear and understand different policy positions. Even more important, this shows that coalition parties are willing to adjust their positions and are not ideological rigid. Third, co-governing parties will need to defend their issue stances from the media, the public opinion, and/or the opposition in the legislature during their administration. This constant exercise helps to internalize the ideological positions they are supporting. Finally, cabinet parties will need to design and implement common policies which reinforces their ideological unity.

My second argument is that party size correlates with ideological convergence. I posit that small parties fall into the ideological grip of big parties. Specifically, as the difference of party size increases, party convergence also increases regardless of cabinet/opposition membership. I propose two mechanisms to explain such relationship. First, small parties might have incentives to copy policies from mainstream parties that have been electorally successful in previous terms.

Second, big parties might force compromises upon small parties which do not have the political leverage to escape from these unfavored terms. At this point, I cannot provide empirical evidence to support these mechanisms, but such explanations are theoretically feasible. At most, I can provide empirical evidence that supports a positive relationship between vote share difference and ideological convergence.

Note that my second argument is not intuitive as we should expect small parties to differentiate themselves from big ones. The substantive reason is that mainstream parties have a clear advantage over small parties when considering their valence attributes (Stokes 1963; Stone 2017). If voters perceive mainstream parties as more experienced, honest, and competent than smaller ones, then the latter will need to offer electoral platforms that diverge from those advanced by their dominant counterparts. This ideological divergence from bigger parties can be electoral valuable for small parties which need to attract voters. However, I find quite the opposite: as the difference in vote share between two parties increases, we will observe higher levels of ideological convergence. Thus, my finding directly contradicts that small parties' dominant strategy is to adopt policies that deviate from those proposed by larger parties given the valence advantage of the latter.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In the next section I show how my theory moves away from the traditional literature and state my hypotheses. In the third section I describe the research design, the data, and my variables. Next I present my statistical analysis and interpret my results. The final section draws a general conclusion and addresses the main limitations of my research so far. Specifically, I am not able to provide sufficient empirical evidence to argue causality between my explanatory (co-governing and party size difference) and outcome (ideological convergence) variables. I am only able to show a strong correlation among these. Further research is needed to identify a causal relationship.

THEORY: How co-governing and party size lead to ideological convergence

The central actors in my analysis are parties in parliament. I distinguish two kind of parties in parliament: those in government and those in the opposition. Specifically, I examine how coalition partners adjust their policy positions after working together in government. “Coalition parties are political parties that govern in a multiparty government with at least one other party” (Klüver and Spoon 2017, 794). Hence, coalition cabinets occur when no party by itself reaches an absolute majority of the parliamentary seats, so parties are forced to make alliances to install government. My aim is to study whether coalition dynamics shape the way parties update their ideological positions. In particular, I examine how collaborating with other parties in government affects the writing of election manifestos which are the main focus of this study.

The literature has explored how parties’ policy positions respond to several sources such as past election results, prospective voters, and public opinion. For instance, Somer-Topcu (2009) evaluates the trade-off parties face between shifting their ideological positions to attract new voters and adhering to their existing positions to reduce risks derived from change. In contrast, Adams et al. (2004) examine whether parties modify their electoral platforms in response to two factors: past election results and shifts in public opinion. Both of these works fall into a wider body of literature that explores the representative link between citizens and government. In order to understand how representative democracy works, we need to examine how parties’ goals agree or conflict with citizens’ objectives. There are two classic explanations to unveil parties’ objectives: parties as vote share maximizers (Downs 1957) and/or parties as legislative seats maximizers (Robertson 1976).

A second body of literature has focused on studying the goals of parties in coalition governments. Budge and Laver (1986) examine what are the parties’ motivations in coalition theories. On the one hand, they evaluate Riker’s (1962) influential theory which proposes that

parties are office-seeking actors. However, parties might have two different types of incentives: intrinsic and instrumental (Strøm 1990; Strøm and Müller, 1999). First, the office-seeking objective might be intrinsically motivated due to the benefits obtained through ministerial positions such as economic rewards or reputation. Second, ministries may serve as instruments to shape public policies that reflect the parties' preferences in the ideological space. On the other hand, Budge and Laver (1986) explore in what cases policy can be pursued both as an end in itself and as a means to achieve office.

How does co-governing lead to ideological convergence? Just like any political parties, coalition parties have to engage in party competition to achieve office. Their preferred result is to get enough seats in parliament so they can govern by themselves. However, dependent on electoral rules, this outcome might be unlikely in some parliamentary systems. Nevertheless, parties still need to get as much seats as possible to position themselves as strong candidates to be a cabinet party. Whether parties' behavior conform to the spatial paradigm by adjusting their ideological positions to the distribution of voters' preferences (Downs 1957; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Meyer 2013) or by engaging in selective issue emphasis (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994), parties have incentives to update their strategies in each electoral cycle.

“In the coalition government literature, there are two different theoretical views of cabinet decision making that are prominent, the *collegial* model and the *ministerial* model” (Klüver and Spoon 2017, 795). The collegial model asserts that coalitions are constituted around a jointly agreed platform that reflects both the preferences and compromises of the parties involved (Müller and Strøm 2000). Following Martin and Vanberg (2011; 2014), coalition governments confront a fundamental challenge: coalition partners must adopt only one common position on any specific issue even when their policy preferences often diverge. In contrast, the ministerial model

emphasizes the division of the ministerial portfolios as a way to evade the central problem of the collegial model. In other words, coalition partners divide the ministerial loot among them gaining full control over these which in turn allows them to implement their preferred policies in such domains (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Therefore, policy making among coalition partners is not driven by interparty negotiation and collaboration, but decisions are taken independently across the ministerial portfolios.

Following the collegial model, I claim that co-governing parties do need to reach policy agreements and make compromises across relevant issues in the political agenda. However, as described above, the vast majority of the literature has focused on how voters' preferences influence the ideological agenda of parties in the legislature. Although the representative linkage is of utmost importance to understand modern democracy, there are less developed approaches to study ideology. For instance, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) study how voters perceive party policy positions rather than the actual parties' strategies. Specifically, they show that coalition partners are perceived as more ideologically similar than non-coalition partners. I advance a similar argument but not on the grounds of voters' perceptions. I claim that cabinet parties converge ideologically due to the nature of government collaboration.

I identify four mechanisms by which coalition partners move ideologically closer to each other. First, coalition partners are probably the parties that are more exposed to other positions over issues. Coalition bargaining puts them in direct and constant contact with other parties and force them to hear and understand such positions. Second, cabinet negotiation not only pushes parties to hear a diverse arrange of political stances but also force them to reach agreement and abide compromises. This in fact might move their policy positions away from those stated in their party manifestos. However, I am not simply arguing that parties experience an ideological shift between

elections and go back to their original attitudes when writing their new manifestos for the upcoming elections (Klüver and Spoon 2017). I am posing that such ideological changes persist across elections. Third, once cabinet parties have designed and agreed upon a coalition agreement, they will need to defend and support such issue stances from dissenting views such as those from the media, the public opinion, or the opposition in parliament. Fourth, coalition partners will need to design and implement common policies during their government. All four mechanisms create incentives for parties' ideologies to coalesce in-between elections. I am taking a step further and presuming that some of this ideological convergence will survive across elections. Thus, I present my first hypothesis:

H1. *All things equal, parties that participate in a coalition government will move closer ideologically to each other than parties that are not coalition partners.*

For my second hypotheses, I investigate how party size affects ideological convergence, not only between coalition partners but for all parties in parliament. Specifically, I look how vote share difference between parliamentary parties shape their ideologies. To my knowledge, the literature so far has not explored how differences in party size impacts ideological shifts across elections. I propose two mechanisms by which vote share difference in parliament may incentivize ideological convergence between parties.

First, small parties might want to copy the success of their bigger counterparts by adopting the same popular policies of such competitors. The smaller the party, the greater the incentives to rely on strategies that have proven attractive to the electorate. Thus, at the verge of extinction, electorally unfavored parties might want to shift towards ideological positions already populated by successful parties. Whether the small party and the big one are in cabinet together, in the

opposition together, or in opposite sides, smaller parties would have motivations to reach out for popular ideological points, presumably those which are closer to their preferred positions.

Second, as the difference in party size increases, bigger parties might impose their preferred views over smaller parties. As the smaller party does not have the numbers or the political leverage to carry on its preferred policies in the coalition government, bigger parties might force compromises which, in turn, lead to ideological alignments. The same logic may apply to small parties in the opposition. In order to counter the policies advanced by the government, opposition parties have incentives to organize themselves into a common front which, in turn, would likely put aside small parties' preferences. Finally, small parties in the opposition might want to cross the aisle and participate with governing parties to influence public policy or gain popularity/reputation. Therefore, I theorize that vote share difference affects all kinds of parties in parliament regardless of their cabinet or opposition membership. In general, smaller parties will fall into the ideological grip of bigger parties. Hence, I present my second hypothesis:

H2: *All things equal, parties will move ideologically closer as their difference in vote share increases, regardless of cabinet or opposition membership.*

It is worth noting that I cannot offer empirical evidence to support that smaller parties are responsible of the ideological convergence with bigger ones. In other words, all I can show is that as the difference in party size increases, we will observe a greater ideological convergence. Thus, it is possible that big parties are also moving towards their small counterparts. In addition, it is also worth mentioning that H2 defies the role of party valence (Stokes 1963; Stone 2017). Specifically, one can argue that small parties do not have the incentives to copy the policy positions of mainstream parties as the latter has a clear advantage when it comes to reputation, honesty, or competence. If citizens see big parties as more experienced or competent, then they will have no

reasons to vote for smaller parties that lack such virtues and offer similar policies. However, I claim that the arguments exposed above outweigh these valence concerns.

RESEARCH DESIGN: Assessing the effects of co-governing and party size across countries

I use the ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2020) and Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2020) (CMP) datasets to build my own dataset which uses party dyads as unit of analysis. The dataset covers the time period 1947 through 2019 and includes 462 parliamentary elections in 36 democratic countries for a total of 4,590 observations. So, the dataset has all the possible unique pairwise combinations of parties for each election.

My outcome variable is the change in ideological distance between the two parties in each dyad. This is calculated in two steps. First, I calculate the absolute value of the difference of the parties' ideological positions at the previous term ($t - 1$) and the current one (t). Second, I subtract the ideological distance in time $t - 1$ from the ideological distance in time t . The resulting quantity constitutes the change in ideological distance between the two parties across two consecutive elections. Hence, smaller values of my outcome variable mean that parties are getting ideologically closer from the previous term to the current one. For instance, if the ideological distance between parties A and B in the previous period was 10 and the current distance is 5, then the change in ideological distance will be $5 - 10 = -5$. In contrast, if the ideological distance between parties A and B was 5 and the current distance is 10, then the change in ideological distance will be $10 - 5 = 5$. In sum, smaller values of my DV imply ideological convergence between parties while greater values imply ideological divergence across consecutive periods.

My key explanatory variables are *co-governing* and *vote share difference*. Co-governing is a dummy variable that takes value of 1 if both parties in the dyad are cabinet parties and 0 otherwise.

Vote share difference is calculated as the absolute value of the difference between the vote shares (measured in percentages) of the two parties in the dyad. Thus, greater values of vote share difference mean a greater difference in the size of the parties in each dyad.

I also add one explanatory variable, *co-opposition* which takes value of 1 if both parties in the dyad are in the opposition and 0 otherwise. Therefore, there are three different dyads with respect to government and opposition: (1) co-governing, (2) co-opposition, and (3) adversaries. The last case refers to dyads where one party is in the government while the other is in the opposition. This “adversaries” category represents the baseline in the models I present below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

VAR	MIN	1ST Q	MEDIAN	MEAN	3RD Q	MAX	NA’S	SD
Ide. Chg.	-102.42	-10.83	-0.15	-0.46	10.75	83.68	1258	19.85
Co-gov	0	0	0	0.13	0	1	1230	0.33
Co-opp	0	0	0	0.35	1	1	1230	0.47
Vote dif.	0	3.70	10.40	13.29	20.49	52	1305	11.12

I include four controls in all the specifications: *Previous Ideological Distance*, *Number of Parties in Election*, *GDP Growth Rate*, and *Co-governing Count*. The first is self-explanatory, it is the ideological distance between the parties in the dyad in $t - 1$. The logic for including this variable is that parties that are further away from each other in the previous term are more likely to experience greater variations in ideological distance across periods. The second control refers to the number of parties that participate in the election of the parties currently in parliament. The reason for controlling for this is that a higher level of fractionalization in the legislature might be accompanied by greater ideological polarization. The third control is codified as the GDP growth

rate in the last year before the next parliament is elected. I include this control as economic crises may trigger higher levels of ideological polarization among co-governing parties and between the government and the opposition. Finally, the fourth control, co-governing count, is a continuous variable that counts the number of times that the two parties in the dyad have co-governed previously. This might have diminishing returns, that is, the first time that parties work together in government will move them closer ideologically than subsequent collaborations. In the extreme, parties that have been in government together repeatedly might want to differentiate from each other in later periods. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for my main variables.

Figure 2. Timeline of Variables in the Electoral Cycle

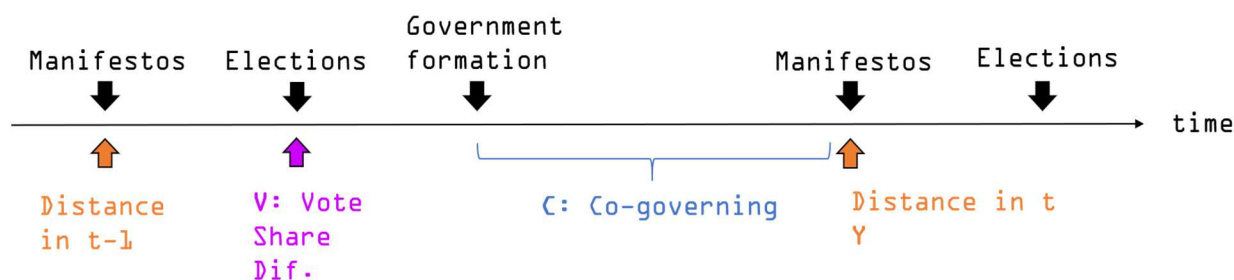


Figure 2 situates my measures along the timeline of electoral cycles. At the leftmost point (Manifestos), parties design and publish their manifestos from which their ideological positions are calculated. At this point in time, I calculate the first component of my DV, the ideological distance between the parties in the dyad at time $t - 1$. In the next point in time (Elections), elections take place, so vote shares are determined. At this point, I calculate one of my two explanatory variables: party size difference for each dyad. If no party obtains the absolute majority in parliament, then parties need to form a multi-party government. At this central point in time (Government formation), my second explanatory variable is derived differentiating among dyads which contain parties that are (1) co-governing, (2) in the opposition together, (3) or in opposing sides. Finally, the next point in time (Manifestos) is where parties write their new manifestos for

the next elections (time t). At this point, I calculate the new ideological distance between the parties in the dyad and my DV, change in ideological distance, is measured.

Whereas I expect that *Co-governing* shows a negative coefficient in my analysis, I expect a positive one for *Vote Share Difference*. A negative coefficient of *Co-governing* implies that parties in government are moving closer ideologically than parties that are not governing together. That is, dyads composed by cabinet parties are converging ideologically when compared to the other two kinds of dyads: (1) those composed by both parties in the opposition or (2) those composed by one party in government and the other in the opposition.

A positive coefficient in *Vote Share Difference* indicates that as the difference in party size increases, the ideological convergence of the parties in the dyad also increases. That is, parties that are more unequal in size tend to move closer ideologically than parties that are similar in size *regardless* of the type of dyad. This means that the interaction between *Vote Share Difference* and the types of dyads (*Co-governing* and *Co-opposing*) should not be statistically significant.

Note that I do not expect a statistically significant coefficient for *Co-opposing*. In other words, I do not expect that parties in the opposition converge ideologically as their coordination does not require the same level of compromises among cabinet members described in the previous section (e.g. design and implement public policies).

Finally, I include a second interaction between *Vote Share Difference* and *Previous Ideological Distance* (ideological distance in period $t - 1$). This interaction tests whether the difference in vote share between parties has a different effect on ideological convergence at different levels of the previous ideological distance between them. My expectation for this interaction is that even at different values of ideological distance in the previous term, parties will still converge

ideologically as their party size difference increases. The only difference is that they will converge at different rates according to the level of moderator variable *Previous Ideological Distance*.

Table 2: Co-governing, Party Size and Change in Ideological Distance

	Change in Ideological Distance				
	H1	H1 + H2	Int. 1	Int. 2	No Extreme
Co-governing	-2.666** (1.167)	-2.765** (1.168)	-1.875 (1.684)	-2.821** (1.168)	-1.745* (1.038)
Co-opposition	0.010 (0.677)	-0.600 (0.714)	-1.014 (1.075)	-0.674 (0.715)	-1.354** (0.669)
Vote Diff.		-0.080*** (0.031)	-0.083** (0.038)	-0.003 (0.046)	-0.072** (0.028)
Co-governing*Vote Diff.			-0.070 (0.094)		
Co-opposition*Vote Diff.			0.039 (0.067)		
Vote Diff.*Prev. Ideo. Dist.				-0.003** (0.001)	
Prev. Ideo. Dist.	-0.518*** (0.016)	-0.515*** (0.016)	-0.515*** (0.016)	-0.478*** (0.023)	-0.600*** (0.015)
Co-governing Count	0.053 (0.187)	0.012 (0.187)	-0.020 (0.189)	0.007 (0.187)	0.018 (0.171)
GDP Growth Rate	0.179 (0.116)	0.170 (0.117)	0.168 (0.117)	0.166 (0.117)	0.109 (0.108)
Num. Parties in Elec.	0.155 (0.205)	0.092 (0.207)	0.101 (0.208)	0.085 (0.207)	0.255 (0.192)
Constant	5.789*** (1.937)	7.856*** (2.048)	7.924*** (2.086)	7.068*** (2.076)	7.612*** (1.974)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,033	2,963	2,963	2,963	2,483
R ²	0.277	0.277	0.277	0.278	0.408
Adjusted R ²	0.269	0.268	0.268	0.269	0.399
Residual Std. Error	16.505	16.466	16.469	16.455	13.883
F Statistic	31.929***	30.290***	28.757***	29.669***	45.494***

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

RESULTS: Co-governing and party size are associated with ideological convergence

I use an OLS model with country fixed effects to study how collaboration in government and party size affect ideological convergence. In all specifications I include the four controls described in

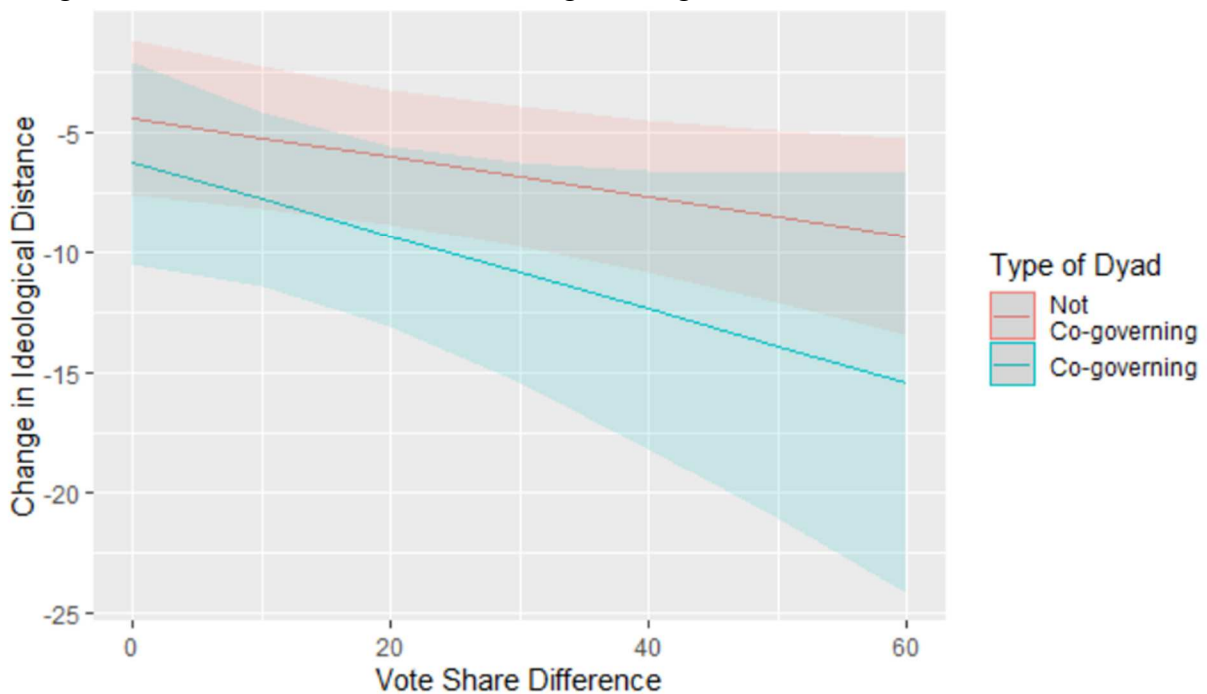
the previous section and use country fixed effects to account for unobserved country heterogeneity. Table 2 shows the results of five different specifications. The first two models test H1 and H2, while the third and fourth models include the interactions described above. The final column tests for an alternative explanation: ideological convergence is explained through the moderation of extreme parties over time.

The first column refers to the simplest model where I only include the variables that differentiate dyads with respect to government and opposition. *Co-governing* (being in government together) shows a statistically significant negative coefficient at the 0.05 level. In contrast, the coefficient of *Co-opposing* (being in the opposition together) is not statistically significant and in the wrong direction (a positive sign means that parties in the opposition move away from each other in the ideological space). This suggests that opposition parties do not form an ideological coherent front to face the government coalition. The baseline is the *adversaries* dyad which contains one party in government and the other in the opposition. Therefore, the coefficient of *Co-governing* means that cabinet parties move ideologically closer to each other in approximately 2.67 units when compared to the baseline. This finding provides empirical evidence to support H1.

The second model is the full specification that includes my two explanatory variables. The coefficient of *Co-governing* does not only hold its statistical significance and sign but increments its intensity from 2.67 to 2.77. As in the previous model, there is no evidence to support that parties in the opposition tend to converge ideologically as suggested by the coefficient of *Co-opposing*. In contrast, the coefficient of *Vote Share Difference* is statistically significant at the 0.01 level and with the expected negative sign. This provides empirical evidence to support H2: as the difference in party size increases, parties tend to converge ideologically regardless of their government or opposition status. Specifically, a one percent increase in vote share difference is associated with a

decrease of 0.08 units in the ideological distance separating the parties. For instance, this suggests that a 10 percent increase in party size difference will move, on average, the parties' ideological positions closer by 0.8 units. Further research is needed to unveil whether the bigger, the smaller, or both parties are moving ideologically towards the other. Presumably, the smaller parties are the ones responsible for the majority of the movement, but at this point I do not have evidence to support this claim.

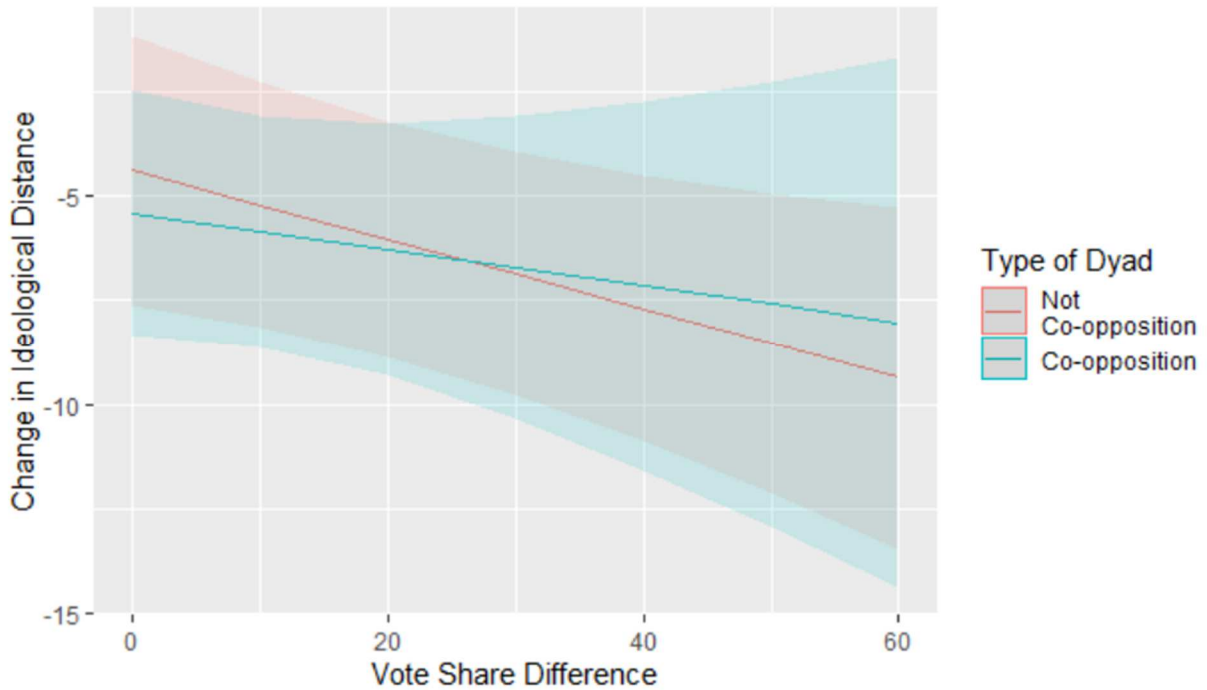
Figure 3. Interaction Effects between Co-governing Parties and Vote Share Difference



The third model of Table 2 shows the interaction between my key explanatory variables. Both interactions are not statistically significant which indicates that the effect of vote share difference over ideological convergence cannot be differentiated between parties in government, in the opposition, or even as adversaries. In other words, I do not find evidence to reject that the difference in party size affects all parties equally regardless of their government-opposition status. While Figure 3 shows the interaction between *Vote Share Difference* and *Co-governing*, Figure 4 shows the interaction between *Vote Share Difference* and *Co-opposition*. Although both

interactions are not statistically significant, both plots show a negative relationship between *Vote Share Difference* and *Change in Ideological Distance* for all types of dyad.

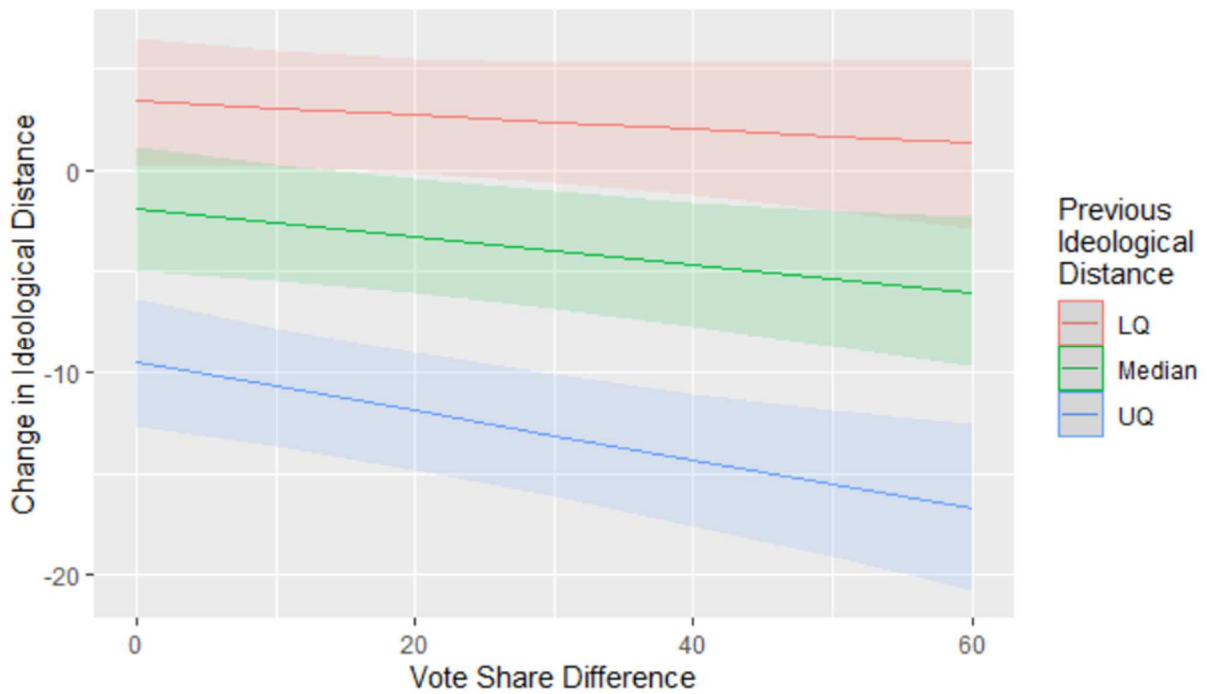
Figure 4. Interaction Effects between Co-opposition Parties and Vote Share Difference



The fourth model in Table 2 includes an interaction between *Vote Share Difference* and *Previous Ideological Distance*. The reason to include this interaction is to test whether the difference in party size is moderated by the ideological distance between parties in the dyad. As described above, *Previous Ideological Distance* refers to the absolute difference between party ideology positions before the elections that generate *Vote Share Difference*. That is, it measures how electoral platforms differ between parties just before citizens vote on such platforms and decide the party distribution in the legislature. Table 2 shows that such interaction is statistically significant at the 0.05 level with a negative sign. Figure 5 shows how the effect of *Vote Share Difference* on ideological convergence depends on the level of *Previous Ideological Distance*. Figure 5 plots three different lines at three distinct levels of this moderator variable: (1) low quartile (*Previous Ideological Distance* = 9.9), (2) median (20.9), and (3) upper quartile (36.9). As the

value of *Previous Ideological Distance* increases, the effect of *Vote Share Difference* on ideological convergence also increases. Therefore, we observe a larger negative slope for higher values of the moderator variable. For example, we observe an almost horizontal line when *Previous Ideological Distance* is set at its lower quartile. This means that as the party size difference increases, we will observe marginal changes in ideological convergence. In contrast, the line becomes steeper when the moderator variable is set at its upper quartile. At this level, increments in party size difference predicts higher ideological convergence between parties. In sum, at all levels of *Previous Ideological Distance*, we observe that greater differences in party size led to greater ideological convergence which supports H2.

Figure 5. Interaction Effects between Prev. Ideological Distance and Vote Share Difference



There are two substantive reasons that can explain this interaction. First, party size difference affects more heavily those parties that are ideologically further away than parties that are closer simply because there is more space between them. Second, parties that are already at the opposite extremes of the ideological spectrum will be less likely to move away from each other than parties

that are closer because they are bounded by the limits of the ideological index. Additionally, it can be argued that parties which are closer ideologically will be more inclined to consider their positions relative to one another than those far apart from one another. However, we can also posit a counterargument: parties at the opposite extremes might be more concerned to differentiate their policies from one another than from other parties at the middle of the spectrum. Given these contrasting reasonings, I cannot advance an argument based on either.

Finally, the last model in Table 2 tests for the alternative explanation of regression to the mean. That is, parties converge ideologically because extreme parties moderate over time instead of converging due to party size difference and co-governing effects. So, the fifth specification is the same than that of column two, but it uses a subset of the data. For this model, I exclude the dyads with extreme parties using as cutoff points the 5th and 95th percentile (excluding the 10% most extreme parties). The number of observations (dyads) decreases from 4,590 in the original data to 3,745. The results indicate that regression to the mean is a plausible alternative explanation of my theory. Specifically, *Co-governing* stops being statistically significant at the 0.05 level (although it is still significant at the 0.1 level with the expected negative sign). It also decreases in magnitude when compared to Model 2. However, *Vote Share Difference* is still statistically significant at the 0.05 level with the expected negative sign and with similar magnitude. This suggests that while H2 finds empirical support for all specifications, H1 fails short when considering regression to the mean as an alternative explanation. In addition, when dropping extreme ideological parties, the coefficient of *Co-opposition* is statistically significant at the 0.05 level and with negative sign. This suggests that moderate parties in the opposition tend to form a common ideological front against the government coalition. This makes sense when extreme parties are excluded as those at the center might be more willing to negotiate

among them than those in the extremes. Further research is needed to uncover other possible explanations when using a sample of moderate parties.

CONCLUSION

My empirical analysis has provided evidence that co-governing and difference in party size are associated with higher level of ideological convergence between parties in parliamentary democracies. My argument fills a gap in the literature which has focused on explaining ideological shifts due to voters' preferences over issues. By using party dyads as my unit of analysis, I can measure to what extent ideological convergence is achieved among parties in coalition governments and among parties of different size. In short, we will observe that parties converge ideologically in the current period if they have co-governed in the previous one and if there is a relative significant difference in their vote shares.

However, there are two main limitations in my research. First and foremost, my research design does not allow me to advance a causal relationship between my DVs (party size and co-governing status) and my IV (ideological convergence). For example, there are at least two alternative explanations for H1. First, it might be the case that parties which enter into a government coalition with each other are already on a trajectory to converge ideologically even if they are not cabinet partners. A possible way to test for this alternative explanation is to track parties' ideological trajectory by going back several elections and see whether they are moving closer even when not collaborating in government. Second, another possible explanation for H1 is regression to the mean. In other words, extreme parties tend to moderate their views in the long run. I have tested for this alternative explanation in the previous section and my results

indicate that this might be the case. In sum, further robustness checks are required to claim a causal relationship between government status and ideological convergence.

Second, for H2, I have to examine who is responsible for the ideological convergence between small and big parties. In order to achieve this, I would need to examine a different kind of data where the unit of analysis are individual parties. By calculating the change in their positions from one election to another I can determine whether the junior partners are the ones moving closer to the senior partners. This will provide empirical evidence to support the mechanisms exposed for H2.

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