Winning is Not Enough: A Reconceptualization of Single-Party Dominance in Established Democracies

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Introduction

Dominant party regimes – a frequent phenomenon in authoritarian and transitional systems (Bogaards 2000; Giliomee/Simkins 1999; Solinger 2001) – are "not supposed to happen" (Pempel 1990b: 5-6) in established democracies, and in the literature, the phenomenon of single-party dominance is indeed widely treated as an "uncommon," puzzling, and normatively troubling anomaly (Pempel 1990c).[*] Empirically, two-party or multi-party systems with regularly alternating single-party or coalition governments should be the rule where no formal restrictions on electoral competition are imposed and the political environment corresponds to Dahl's (1971) polyarchy model. Moreover, if genuine choices for voters and periodic changes in government are considered key *normative* criteria for the evaluation of a political order's democratic quality, the legitimacy of dominant party regimes has to be cast into doubt (O'Leary 1994: 3; but cf. Arian/Barnes 1974).

The empirical material used in this conceptual paper – part of an ongoing research project on the incidence and causes of single-party dominance in Canada, Australia, Germany, and Austria – indicates that the phenomenon is not nearly as infrequent as the literature suggests if the regional and national levels of government are considered jointly. The negative impact of dominant party regimes on the legitimacy of established democracies may thus often be under-estimated. In this paper we neither deal with the normative assessment nor with the explanation of single-party dominance, though, concentrating instead on a set of more basic questions. For valid descriptive and explanatory inferences on the prevalence, causes, and impact of single-party dominance have so far been hampered by the notoriously vague, convoluted, and arbitrary *definitions* of the phenomenon.

In the main section of the paper we review and criticize extant definitions, present our own alternative, and draw on an original dataset comprising several hundred electoral outcomes and instances of government formation to illustrate its use. We argue that the incidence and extent of single-party dominance may be captured in two dimensions – a power and a temporal dimension – which are introduced and discussed in turn. Simple and plausible qualitative indicators of relative power – a party's dominant bargaining position vis-à-vis its parliamentary competitors – may be derived from the dominant player concept. By contrast, no obvious qualitative thresholds are readily available for the temporal dimension. Here cut-off points have to be developed in an empirical fashion, based on the analysis of a sufficiently large and clearly delimited population instead of an ad hoc sample of cases. In the third and final part of the main section we briefly consider *national* data from the four countries to further validate our operationalization of single-party dominance.

Overall, then, we intend to demonstrate, with the help of preliminary descriptive inferences on single-party dominance in four countries, that our reconceptualization yields more intuitive results than many of the definitions employed in the literature, enabling us to distinguish types as well as gradations of dominant party regimes. This firmer conceptual grounding – together with a larger number of cases – is a prerequisite of more ambitious hypothesis-testing and normative work in the field. In the conclusion we briefly speculate on the causes and impact of single-party dominance, sketching an agenda for future research.

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Defining and Measuring Single-Party Dominance: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Illustrations

Even if the purview is restricted to established democracies, it is fair to say that the concept of single-party dominance has been defined and operationalized in a rather bewildering variety of ways. The vagueness, arbitrary and even tautological character of some widely used definitions has been rightly criticized (Bogaards 2004: 192; Caulier/Dumont 2005: 2; Dunleavy 2005: 3, 6). Just consider Maurice Duverger (1963: 308-9), according to whom

> "[a] party is dominant when it is identified with an epoch; when its doctrines, ideas, methods, its style, so to speak, coincide with those of the epoch. […]. Domination is a question of influence rather than of strength: it is also linked with belief. A dominant party is that which public opinion *believes* to be dominant."

Flawed definitions such as Duverger's not only defy operationalization; they also have a strong tendency to mix up *descriptive* indicators of single-party dominance itself with indicators of its presumed causes or effects, and hence largely preclude the testing of related causal hypotheses. To be sure, the more recent literature has converged on a 'generic' definition that seems plausible and uncontroversial enough: In a dominant party regime, one and the same party controls government over an extended period of time, whether alone or as the most powerful member of a coalition (for similar formulations, cf. Boucek 1998: 103; Cox 1998: 238; Weaver/Rockman 1993: 20).

This definition contains one unproblematic definitional feature: government participation – opposition status is treated as a sufficient indicator of *non*-dominance. While some authors distinguish between electoral, parliamentary, and executive dominance (Boucek 1998: 105-8; Nyblade 2005), the focus of the specialized literature on dominant party regimes is, in other words, on a party's sustained ability to join and dominate *government*. Mere electoral dominance (the ability to gain a particularly high share of the vote) and parliamentary dominance (the ability to translate electoral success into a disproportionately high number of seats) may be *prerequisites* of executive dominance. However, the literature on dominant party regimes is not primarily interested in the two former phenomena as such, and it does not offer much value added beyond extant work on voting behavior and electoral systems in this regard. Our own definitional approach neither breaks away from this entirely appropriate focus on executive dominance nor from the two-dimensional 'architecture' of the standard definition.[1]

[1] We are aware of no more than a single contribution (Dunleavy 2005) that dismisses the logic of this definition entirely. According to Dunleavy, we need a "theory-based, analytical definition which can identify parties as dominant independently from their tenure of office" (2) rather than the inductive, retrospective, and outcome-based definitions prevalent in the literature. While we share some of his concerns, Dunleavy's alternative does not convince us, though. For him, "[p]arties do not become dominant by holding government incumbency for prolonged or unbroken periods, but by creating a relatively long-lasting effectiveness advantage over all opponents" (25). Fair enough. But note that this definition, first, reverts to the very same two-dimensional 'architecture' that is criticized at the beginning of his paper. Secondly, we do not see how a party's effectiveness could be *deduced* ex ante, in an essentialist fashion, without reference to empirical measures of its success. Dunleavy himself must admit that effectiveness is a vague concept that arguably raises even more difficult issues of operationalization than the ones discussed here. When he states that "[t]he key to further research in this vein will be our ability to develop effective, independent empirical measures of the leading party's effectiveness advantage, […]" (26), his argument comes full circle.

A government party may or may not be dominant – depending, first, on its relative bargaining power vis-à-vis coalition partners and other parliamentary competitors, and secondly, on the length of its government experience. Put differently, the point where mere relevance (as defined by Sartori 1976: 300-4) turns into dominance is not easily defined – much unlike the two ends of the underlying scale, absolute irrelevance (a party's consistent lack of electoral success) and total dominance (permanent one-party rule). In any case, the indicators typically used to operationalize the power and temporal dimensions of single-party dominance lack a strong theoretical justification or empirical grounding.

Moreover, it is often not quite clear to which universe of cases they apply. Although much of the literature supposedly refers to the world of established democracies, Canada, Australia, Germany, Austria, and various other countries have so far not figured prominently in the literature on single-party dominance. Pempel, for instance, mentions Germany as a borderline case but ignores Canada – arguably a prime example of (Liberal) single-party dominance throughout much of the 20th century. Potential omissions like this one not only shed doubt on the indicators of single-party dominance employed by this literature but also on some of its inferences – Pempel's (1990a: 336-9) questionable claim that PR electoral systems are a necessary *precondition* for the emergence of dominant party regimes is a characteristic example (but cf. Boucek 2001). In any case, the operational criteria of single-party dominance must not be developed or validated on the basis of such restricted ad hoc samples.

This is why we mainly draw on a large dataset of *subnational* cases in the empirical illustration of our own approach to the definition and operationalization of single-party dominance. With the notable exception of Key's (1949) classical study of the American South, most extant research (Boucek 1998; Pempel 1990c) has concentrated on the national level. By contrast, we not only contend that national and subnational cases of dominance should be understood as instances of essentially the same phenomenon, and that the analysis of dominant party regimes at both levels can use the same definition.[2] Instead, our examination of party system developments is also based on the premise that dominant parties at the subnational level are an under-researched topic that merits greater attention precisely because they are both frequent and substantively important, especially in federations (Dunleavy 2005: 5-6). Where (popular) sovereignty and political responsibilities are divided between the citizens, legislatures, and executives of national and subnational jurisdictions, the partisan complexion of regional governments may have a strong impact on the nature and dynamics of national politics, and on the democratic quality of the entire political order (Weaver 2004).

Yet the *methodological* rationale for an extension of the research agenda to subnational jurisdictions is more important in the context of this paper. An increased pool of cases strengthens our leverage both in the development of operational criteria and – ultimately – in the explanation of single-party dominance. Together with the theoretical rationale of our approach, the high number of cases examined and the fact that we draw on a sample that includes various electoral systems (SMP, Alternative Vote, PR) and forms of parliamentary government (Westminster-style v. more consensus-oriented) should give a certain robustness to the criteria proposed in the next two

[2] This does of course not imply that a party dominating one or more subnational jurisdictions will also be dominant at the national level. Hence subnational dominant party regimes are 'embedded' and may not always have a strong impact on national politics. Moreover, the range and weight of explanatory factors is likely to vary between the national and subnational levels.

parts of this chapter. However, to the extent that these criteria also have an empirical grounding, their transfer from one universe of cases (the subnational jurisdictions of our four parliamentary federations since 1945) to another (the national level of these countries) must not be 'automatic.' In the final part of the chapter we therefore examine how well our indicators fare at the national level.

Operationalizing the power dimension: As documented by Bogaards (2004: 174-5), two sets of criteria have been advanced to capture this dimension, and most authors employ some combination of them to identify dominant parties.[3] Vote and seat shares – or thresholds derived from them – are the most prominent indicators of single-party dominance. According to Pempel (1990b: 3), a government party that has won a plurality of votes and seats in the previous election may be considered to have a dominant bargaining position vis-à-vis its coalition partners and other parliamentary competitors. Blondel (1968: 186) and Ware (1996: 165) suggest a minimal vote share of 40 percent and a minimal seat share of 45 percent (for 'dominant' parties), respectively. Stricter rules have also been proposed, with seat shares anywhere between 50 (Ware's 'predominant' parties) and 70 percent (Coleman 1960) as cut-off points.

These cut-off points are problematic for several reasons. First, they tend to be introduced in an ad hoc fashion without further justification or validation, even if our subsequent empirical illustration demonstrates that most of them are at least not way off the mark (Bogaards 2004: 192). There is certainly no *theoretical* rationale, though, for the implicit claim that there is a *qualitative* difference between the bargaining position of a party with 40.1 % of the vote and one with 39.9 %, or between parties with seat shares of 59.9 % and 60.1 %, respectively. The continuous nature of vote and seat shares promises a kind of 'accuracy' that is not there. As suggested below, it is not even plausible to expect a *linear* or some other strictly monotonous relationship between vote and seat shares, on the one hand, and the strength of a party's bargaining position, on the other. From a conceptual point of view, and keeping in mind that the goal is to identify cases of *executive* dominance, it is also unclear why *vote* shares – or any other measure based on them – should play a role in the first place. Why should we, for instance, exclude parties from our purview that consistently gain a plurality or majority of seats with vote shares below 40 percent, or even without a plurality of votes (a familiar scenario for Canadians…)? The presumptive *effects* of a party's dominance (long-term control of government), including the 'epoch-shaping' impact described by Duverger and others, are obviously not a (direct) function of its vote shares.

In short, the link between a party's relative *power* and most of the thresholds enumerated above is tenuous at best. Only criteria on the basis of *seat* shares are worth considering, and only the plurality and majority criteria imply a relevant piece of qualitative information. While a plurality or majority of seats may, in principle, be obtained with *any* vote share (depending on the number of competitors, the thresholds and disproportionality effects of voting systems, etc.), no a priori numerical value (i.e., seat share) can be attached to the plurality criterion. By contrast, and trivially, the value is 50 percent + x for the majority criterion. Finally, a party with a seat *majority* can (almost) be assumed to participate in government, and hence to satisfy the most basic pre-

[3] The third aspect mentioned by Bogaards – namely, whether definitions are applicable to presidential systems – is irrelevant for our purposes.

condition of dominance. Because they contain these elements of qualitative information, the plurality and majority criteria will be retained in our own definitional approach.[4]

A second group of criteria employed by many researchers aims to capture the *relative* size of dominant parties and their competitors, or the fractionalization of the opposition. Blondel (1968: 196), O'Leary (1994: 3), Sartori (1976: 197-9), and Ware (1996: 159-60, 165-6) all propose to include a divided opposition, or a minimal distance between the largest party and the runner-up, among the definitional criteria of single-party dominance. Blondel, for instance, suggests that the former should at least have double the vote share of the latter, O'Leary uses a vote gap of ten percent, and Sartori states that the dominant party "outdistances all the others" (193). In Ware's terminology, the single-party majority governments of 'predominant' parties are aided by the existence of a divided opposition that is unable to challenge their power (e.g., Japan until 1993) while other parties have a realistic chance of government participation in "systems with one large party and several smaller ones" (e.g., Sweden). These criteria appear to make intuitive sense. There is undoubtedly a difference between a highly competitive two-party scenario in which one party manages to beat its main contender in several consecutive elections, if barely, and a multi-party scenario where the vote or seat margin between the strongest party and its opponents is pronounced. In the first scenario, relatively minor electoral shifts may quickly change the picture and bring single-party dominance to an end. In the second one, by contrast, a reversal of fortunes from one election to the other is a long shot, and a dominant party's opponents have to engage in an uphill battle to change the situation.

Yet here we already touch upon the temporal dimension examined below, and in any case, this group of indicators is plagued by technical and conceptual problems, too. To begin with, some of the proposed cut-off points are, once again, arbitrary – read: they do not imply relevant pieces of qualitative information. As for measures on the basis of *vote* shares (vote gaps or ratios between the strongest party and the runner-up, etc.), the same argument that was made above holds. And while it may seem plausible to expect that a party's bargaining position will be dominant if its *seat* share is, for instance, twice as large as the runner-up's, no theoretical rationale is in sight either. Would a ratio of 1.9 or a margin of ten percentage points *not* suffice? Worse, the idea that this kind of numerical dominance, however operationalized, *always* translates into a dominant bargaining position may be strongly questioned. Consider three scenarios. First, a party that dominates in this sense may nevertheless be excluded from government (perhaps a coalition government made up of its many small competitors), thus failing our – and the bulk of the literature's – basic criterion of government participation. Empirically, this may be unlikely, and hence strict criteria like Blondel's should distinguish between government and opposition parties reasonably well, but they are likely to produce many 'false negatives.' The Italian DC in the postwar era may serve as an illustrative example for this second objection. Given the low coalition potential of the PC and other factors, the DC could safely assume to be included in every government. Thus it undoubtedly had a dominant bargaining position without necessarily profiting from a large margin in terms of seat or vote shares, and definitely without meeting Blondel's vote ratio criterion. Conversely, the German Liberals (FDP) – a minor party in terms of vote and seat shares

[4] A supermajority may be a non-arbitrary threshold, too, if it enables a government to legislate constitutional reforms on its own. Such is, for instance, the case in the German *Länder*, although seat shares above the required two-thirds majority are exceedingly rare. Conversely, in the Canadian provinces, seat shares well above 50 percent are quite frequent, but no such supermajority requirements exist. While our own approach could, in principle, be adapted to supermajority criteria, we chose not to do so because they either seem irrelevant or overly restrictive (Bogaards 2004: 175).

– may be said to have enjoyed a dominant (pivotal) bargaining position, rewarded with a role in government, throughout much of the postwar era.

What this boils down to is that the second group of criteria, including measures of party system or opposition fragmentation like the effective number of parties, does not fully capture the dimension of relative power either, however strong the *correlation* between these measures and genuine power indicators may be. Put differently, opposition or party system fragmentation as such does not necessarily determine a party's bargaining position. Does it make a difference for a government party holding two thirds of the seats whether the opposition consists of one, two, or ten parties? We argue that its power exclusively depends on the majority of seats (and internal party discipline) in this scenario, and that the information contained in differential effective numbers of parties (for one, two, and ten opposition parties) is irrelevant, if not misleading, for our purposes.[5] Once again, continuous measures represent a loss of information over qualitative ones in the tradition of Sartori's relevance concept (Bogaards 2004: 174, 188). Moreover, some of the literature inappropriately uses opposition fractionalization both as a *definitional* criterion and as an *explanatory* variable, which all but guarantees tautological findings in the testing of related causal hypotheses.

For all these reasons, we draw on the dominant player concept and indices of voting power to operationalize our alternative definition.[6] The game-theoretical literature has modeled processes of decision-making and government formation in parliamentary systems as weighted majority games with at most one so-called dominant player. The power structures of dominated and non-dominated games differ qualitatively. Since dominant player status is merely an a priori indicator of power that neglects policy-based coalition formation and the effects of ideological polarization, a party enjoying it may be excluded from government. Yet a dominant player has strictly more options to form a winning coalition than any of his competitors. This comparative advantage in government formation processes should turn into a particularly credible exit threat vis-à-vis less powerful coalition partners once a dominant player joins government. If the exclusion of dominant players from government were anything but rare and short-lived in the real world, one would nevertheless have to reconsider the usefulness of this a priori concept for empirical research. Yet data on national elections and party systems (Deemen 1989: 314; Caulier/Dumont 2005), as well as our own findings, suggest that this is not the case. The rational and unitary actor assumptions implicit in the concept also seem unproblematic in the context of parliamentary systems.

Some minimal vote share, and hence *electoral* dominance, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient precondition of dominant player status, and a plurality of votes is not required either – the status may thus be grounded in a manufactured or even artificial plurality or majority of seats.

[5] Bogaards (2004: 184) correctly points to the fact that the effective number of parties is, by force of the underlying formula, 'driven' both by the number and the relative size of parties. One and the same index value may be obtained for scenarios that greatly differ in terms of power structures, and hence the best we can hope for in the empirical world is a strong correlation between the presence of a dominant party (as defined by us) and a specific (i.e., low) value of the effective number of parties. It should, however, be underlined that the problem with this indicator is not merely a technical but a conceptual one. It is not a measure of dominance or power structures to begin with.

[6] We are grateful to Patrick Dunleavy and Jean-François Caulier, participants in the 2005 ECPR Workshop on Dominant Parties and Democracy, for bringing the dominant player concept and power indices to our attention. More detailed and technical presentations of the game-theoretical background can be found in Deemen (1989: 316-25) and Roozendaal (1992: 6-11).

A plurality of *seats* and a weight (seat share) of at least half the (50 percent + x) majority quota of parliamentary games are necessary but insufficient preconditions. Among the members of a government coalition only the formation with the largest weight may thus be a dominant player. However, even a government party with a plurality of seats is no more powerful than some or all of its coalition partners and competitors if it *lacks* this status. By contrast, a dominant player with a majority of seats is a 'dictator' and its competitors are entirely powerless 'dummies.' In short, a party's relative power may be much lower or higher than suggested by its weight. This is why the power differentials between dominated and non-dominated games, or between a dominant player and its competitors, are not captured – and may even be obscured – by indicators of a party's relative *size* or opposition fractionalization. A party may clearly "outdistance[…] all the others" in terms of its seat share without being a dominant player or a dictator, and vice versa. By the same token, and despite their intuitive plausibility, measures of opposition fractionalization may not appropriately convey the power structures of parliamentary games. A dictator, for instance, is not made any less powerful by a divided opposition than she is in a two-party scenario (Bogaards 2004: 175).

The dominant player concept is easily linked with power indices based on the related idea that power in parliamentary games "rests on how often [a party] can add [its] votes to a losing coalition so that it wins" (Leech 2002: 5). The normalized Banzhaf index used in this paper (in line with Caulier/Dumont 2005: 3, 9) takes values between 0 for dummies and 1 for dictators. The values of dominant and non-dominant players in games without a dictator vary with their number and relative weight. We therefore use an alternative measure *derived* from power indices. A government party has a 'power surplus' if its own value is larger than any other player's – this is the case if, and only if, the party is a dominant player, and the power surplus of a dictator is, again, 1. If at least one other player has the same value, the power surplus is 0, indicating a non-dominated game. Finally, the government party with the largest weight – and a fortiori, any smaller coalition partner – has a 'power deficit' if the dominant player is in the opposition.[7] Our operationalization of single-party dominance, then, combines the criterion of government membership with the necessary preconditions of dominant player status. In the subsequent analysis, we examine a population consisting of the sole or major government party in each parliamentary game (instance of government formation) and divide it into four groups of positive and negative cases:

- The party is a dictator, with a majority of seats and a power surplus of 1 (D1).
- The party is a dominant player, with a plurality of seats and a power surplus of $0 < x < 1$ (D2).
- The party – which may or may not have a plurality of seats – has a power surplus of 0 (D3), and no dominant player exists.
- The party – which holds less than a plurality of seats – has a power deficit of $-1 < x < 0$ (D4), and the dominant player is in the opposition.[8]

[7] To be precise, the index value of the largest government party and the highest value achieved by any of its coalition partners or competitors are used for the calculation of the power surplus or deficit.

[8] For our purposes, an instance of government formation occurs whenever government responsibility shifts from one party or group of parties to another, or when parties join or leave an existing government. The identity of the major government party may or may not change in the event.

Table 1: Types and gradations of dominance in subnational parliamentary games, 1945-2006

Type	N	(%)	Vote share (%)		Seat share (%)		Power surplus/deficit	
				(SD)		(SD)		(SD)
Canada								
D1	151	92.1	49.5	6.2	70.6	13.0	1	0
D2	5	3.0	36.6	7.1	46.8	4.5	0.35	0.17
D3	7	4.3	37.7	1.9	42.8	4.3	0	0
D4	1	0.6	44.4	-	47.6	-	-0.40	-
	164	100.0	48.6	6.9	68.5	14.4	0.93	0.25
Australia								
D1	69	57.0	46.9	5.7	57.5	5.8	1	0
D2	16	13.2	41.4	5.6	48.6	1.3	0.43	0.20
D3	27	22.3	35.8	10.4	40.3	6.2	0	0
D4	9	7.4	29.9	13.4	31.6	10.8	-0.09	.13
	121	100.0	42.5	9.4	50.7	10.5	.63	.46
Germany								
D1	86	38.7	51.3	4.7	56.2	4.9	1	0
D2	80	36.0	41.2	5.9	43.9	5.6	0.31	0.14
D3	51	23.0	40.5	6.1	43.3	5.6	0	0
D4	5	2.3	29.2	7.8	30.7	7.9	-0.18	0.04
	222	100.0	44.7	7.8	48.2	8.5	0.49	0.43
Austria								
D1	76	59.8	54.0	4.8	57.7	5.2	1	0
D2	28	22.0	46.4	2.7	48.3	2.4	0.41	0.15
D3	23	18.1	43.2	3.2	44.7	3.3	0	0
D4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
	127	100.0	50.4	6.1	53.3	7.1	.69	.41
Overall								
D1	382	60.3	62.4	11.3	50.3	6.0	1	0
D2	129	20.3	45.6	5.1	42.2	5.8	0.35	0.16
D3	108	17.0	42.2	6.7	38.9	8.8	0	0
D4	15	2.3	34.7	8.9	34.4	7.0	-0.17	0.13
	634	100.0	54.9	13.4	46.4	8.3	0.67	0.43

SD = standard deviation.

This ordinal ranking captures non-arbitrary, genuinely qualitative power differentials. The D1 and D2 scenarios represent the major types and gradations of single-party dominance for our purposes. A player in the D1 category (which is equivalent to Sartori's and Ware's operationalizations of 'predominant' parties) can govern alone while players of the D2 type may be found in coalition or minority governments (Bogaards 2004: 188). Finally, players of the D3 and D4 type are forced to govern in the presence of one or more competitors whose bargaining position is at least as favorable as their own. How frequent, then, are dominant party regimes in the subnational jurisdictions (provinces, states, and *Länder*) of Canada, Australia, Germany, and Austria? Which types and gradations of single-party dominance occur? How do the various indicators and thresholds 'perform' in the context of our empirical material? In order to answer these questions, we

first identified the major government party in all subnational parliamentary games since 1945. This step yielded 164 Canadian, 121 Australian, 222 German, and 127 Austrian cases.[9]

As shown in Table 1, the share of government parties in the D4 category (i.e., with a dominant player in the opposition) is exceedingly rare in all four countries – a confirmation of the dominant player concept's empirical relevance.[10] Secondly, and again in each of the four nations, the major government party usually has dominant player status. That is, even the D3 scenario (no dominant player exists) is rather infrequent. However, there is some variation in the shares of D1 and D2 cases. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of D1 games (the dominant player is a dictator) is by far highest (and exceeding combined D1 and D2 shares elsewhere) in Canada, where the SMP electoral system and other features have enabled the largest party to form a single-party majority government in more than 90 percent of all cases. Conversely, the percentage of dictatorial scenarios is lowest, and the share of non-dominated games highest, in Germany with its PR electoral system. But note that there are even more D1 and D2 cases in Austria, which also uses a PR sys-

[9] In Canada, government formation always occurred in the wake of elections; each of the ten provinces has held between 15 and 17 elections since 1945. Newfoundland, which did not have responsible government after 1934, joined Canada in 1949. Alan Siaroff (2005) kindly provided us with the provincial election data. In Australia, there were 116 cases of post-election and five instances of mid-term government formation; each of the six states has experienced between 18 and 24 instances of government formation since 1945. Australian election data are from http://elections.uwa.edu.au. In Germany, there were 190 cases of post-election and 32 instances of mid-term government formation; each of the western *Länder* – which were (re-)established *before* the creation of the Federal Republic in 1949 – has experienced between 16 and 23 instances of government formation since 1946. The subnational elections of 1946 and 1947 were included in our dataset if they led to government formation and omitted if voters were merely called upon to choose the members of constitutional assemblies. There was one free postwar election in the whole of Berlin in 1946; election results between 1948 and 1989 are for West Berlin. The Saarland joined the Federal Republic in 1957; we included elections from 1947 onwards although the regional government was still appointed by French authorities in that year. Baden-Württemberg is the result of a merger of three *Länder* in 1952; elections in its predecessor jurisdictions were not included in the dataset. Finally, the five eastern *Länder* (re-)established after reunification have experienced four or five instances of government formation since 1990. German election data are from www.statistik-bund.de/wahlen (a central website that gives access to *Länder* websites); www.aicgs.org; *Die Fischer Chronik Deutschland: Ereignisse, Personen, Daten* (Frankfurt/M.; Fischer 2001); Ritter/Niehuss (1987). Finally, in Austria, there were 121 cases of post-election and six instances of mid-term government formation; each of the nine *Länder* has experienced between 12 and 16 instances of government formation since 1945. Austrian election data are from www.parties-and-elections.de.

[10] Most *Länder* governments in Austria are constitutionally required to proportionally include members of all parties represented in the legislature (*Proporz*), provided that they are able to overcome the effective threshold determined by the size of the respective cabinet. The following *Länder* currently have *Proporz* governments: Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Styria, and Upper Austria; Salzburg and Tyrol had proportional governments until 1999; Vienna is a special case that combines a theoretical *Proporz* rule with de facto majority government. Where *Proporz* arrangements are used, cases in the D4 category are excluded by definition. However, this institutional feature does not make dominant player status meaningless. The majority rule is used to determine the all-important position of the premier (*Landeshauptmann*) and, of course, in regular legislative votes. In each case, a dominant or dictatorial player may be expected to have an advantage, even as member of an oversized coalition. In Australia, the relatively large share of D4 cases has to be interpreted in the context of the longstanding partnership between the Liberals and the Country/National Party. While both usually govern together if they can, neither one has ever joined a coalition with Labor. Thus the ideologically blind dominant player concept, which assumes that every coalition is equally likely, does not seem entirely appropriate in the Australian context. Given the virtually guaranteed availability of the Country/National Party for coalitions with the Liberals, one might even consider the two parties as one for the purposes of this calculation, which would reduce the number of D4 cases. However, we did so only where the two parties actually established a joint slate of candidates. For a similar argument as the one made for Austria holds in the Australian case as well – namely, that the power indices of the two coalition partners should tell us something about their relative bargaining position while in government, even if there is no credibly exit threat for any the two parties (or a realistic hope for Labor to break up these coalitions from the opposition benches).

tem, than in Australia (Alternative Vote). And even in Germany, D1 cases are slightly more frequent than D2 scenarios, and certainly more widespread than some of the literature suggests (Weaver 2004: 232).

Table 2: Indicators and types of dominance, Canada

	D1	D2	D3	D4	Overall
Plurality of votes	143 (94.7)	2 (40.0)	7 (100.0)	0	152 (92.7)
Vote share >= 40.0 %	144 (95.4)	1 (20.0)	1 (14.3)	1 (100.0)	147 (89.6)
Vote gap >= 10.0 %	84 (55.6)	1 (20.0)	0	0	85 (51.8)
Vote ratio >= 2.0	17 (11.3)	1 (20.0)	0	0	18 (11.0)
Plurality of seats	151 (100.0)	5 (100.0)	5 (71.4)	0	161 (98.2)
Seat share >= 45.0 %	151 (100.0)	4 (80.0)	3 (42.9)	1	159 (97.0)
Seat share >= 60.0 %	111 (73.5)	0	0	0	111 (67.7)
Seat share >= 66.7 %	84 (55.6)	0	0	0	84 (51.2)
Overall	151 (100.0)	5 (100.0)	7 (100.0)	1	164 (100.0)

Table 3: Indicators and Types of Dominance, Australia

	D1	D2	D3	D4	Overall
Plurality of votes	57 (82.6)	10 (62.5)	9 (33.3)	0	76 (62.8)
Vote share >= 40.0 %	58 (84.1)	10 (62.5)	12 (44.4)	1 (11.1)	81 (66.9)
Vote gap >= 10.0 %	40 (58.0)	4 (25.0)	1 (3.3)	0	46 (38.0)
Vote ratio >= 2.0	12 (17.4)	2 (12.5)	2 (7.4)	0	16 (13.2)
Plurality of seats	69 (100.0)	16 (100.0)	11 (40.7)	0	96 (79.3)
Seat share >= 45.0 %	69 (100.0)	16 (100.0)	8 (29.6)	3 (33.3)	96 (79.3)
Seat share >= 60.0 %	42 (60.9)	0	0	0	43 (35.5)
Seat share >= 66.7 %	6 (8.7)	0	0	0	7 (5.8)
Overall	69 (100.0)	16 (100.0)	27 (100.0)	9 (100.0)	121 (100.0)

Yet we do not intend to pursue the explanation of these outcomes here. Instead, our purpose is to demonstrate that arbitrary cut-off points on the basis of vote and seat shares often fail to distinguish between groups of cases that differ qualitatively in the power dimension. Simple inspection of Table 1 together with Tables 2-5 (which indicate the percentage of D1 to D4 cases that satisfy each of the criteria used by Blondel, Pempel, Sartori, and Ware) suggests that this is less true for the dictatorial type – as well as the bulk of the D4 cases – but readily apparent when the figures for the D2 and D3 scenarios are examined. In Canada, for instance, both D2 and D3

cases often miss Blondel's 40 percent vote share criterion, and quite a few of the dominant players in the D2 category have less than Ware's 45 percent seat share. The single Canadian occurrence of the D4 type – after the 1971 election, the Liberal government of Newfoundland held on to power for several months against the Conservatives, which had gained exactly 50 percent of all seats – provides an even starker example of the potentially misleading character of indicators based on vote and seat shares. Turning to Table 2, we see that several dictatorial players have no plurality of votes, and their vote share is below 40 percent. On the other hand, a vote gap of more than ten percent is a relatively demanding – and Blondel's vote ratio criterion an exceedingly demanding – criterion even in Canada and the D1 category.

Table 4: Indicators and Types of Dominance, Germany

	D1	D2	D3	D4	Overall
Plurality of votes	86 (100.0)	79 (98.8)	30 (58.8)	0	195 (87.8)
Vote share >= 40.0 %	86 (100.0)	52 (65.0)	32 (62.7)	1 (20.0)	171 (77.0)
Vote gap >= 10.0 %	71 (82.6)	36 (45.0)	3 (4.2)	0	110 (49.5)
Vote ratio >= 2.0	15 (17.4)	3 (3.8)	0	0	18 (8.1)
Plurality of seats	86 (100.0)	80 (100.0)	28 (54.9)	0	194 (87.4)
Seat share >= 45.0 %	86 (100.0)	41 (51.3)	24 (47.1)	0	151 (68.0)
Seat share >= 60.0 %	19 (22.1)	0	0	0	19(8.6)
Seat share >= 66.7 %	2 (2.3)	0	0	0	2 (0.9)
Overall	86 (100.0)	80 (100.0)	51 (100.0)	5 (100.0)	222 (100.0)

Table 5: Indicators and Types of Dominance, Austria

	D1	D2	D3	D4	Overall
Plurality of votes	76 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	21 (91.3)	0	98.4 (125)
Vote share >= 40.0 %	76 (100.0)	27 (96.4)	19 (82.6)	0	122 (96.1)
Vote gap >= 10.0 %	62 (81.6)	14 (50.0)	6 (26.1)	0	82 (64.6)
Vote ratio >= 2.0	0	0	0	0	0
Plurality of seats	76 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	20 (87.0)	0	97.6 (124)
Seat share >= 45.0 %	76 (100.0)	22 (78.6)	14 (60.9)	0	112 (88.2)
Seat share >= 60.0 %	24 (31.6)	0	0	0	24 (18.9)
Seat share >= 66.7 %	7 (9.2)	0	0	0	5.5 (7)
Overall	76 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	23 (100.0)	0	127 (100.0)

The picture in terms of average vote and seat shares is somewhat clearer in Australia, although the considerable standard deviations of the D3 and D4 groups also indicate problems. Turning to Table 2, we see, once again, that criteria based on vote shares may be rather misleading, and how restrictive Blondel's vote ratio criterion is. Many criteria do not differentiate between the D2 and D3 cases very well: For instance, 62.5 % (100.0 %) of the D2 cases have a vote (seat) share above 40 (45) percent, but so do 44.4 % (29.6 %) of the D3 cases; the entire D2 group has a plurality of seats (by definition), but the same is true for 40.7 % in the D3 category. In Germany, the average vote and seat shares of the D2 and D3 scenarios are even less distinctive than in Canada, and while vote shares are, on average, above Blondel's 40 percent, seat shares are below Ware's 45 percent in both cases. Finally, in Austria, even the D3 category almost reaches Ware's 45 percent cut-off point. And Tables 4 and 5, once again, show that many of the literature's standard criteria do not differentiate between the groups, especially D2 and D3, particularly well.

Subjecting these data to an ANOVA (with the type of dominance as group variable, and vote and seat shares as dependent variables) confirms these observations. While the overall findings *are* significant in each national case, inspection of the pairwise differences of means shows that this outcome is mostly based on significant differences between the average vote and seat shares of the D1 category, on the one hand, and the remaining three groups, on the other. A similar picture emerges for the other indicators suggested in the literature – namely, vote gaps and ratios as well as effective numbers of parties. As it turns out, there is also a highly significant and sizable correlation between the major party's vote or seat share and the effective number of parties. Our empirical data, then, allow for a partial qualification of Bogaards' argument that the effective number of parties is an inappropriate measure of dominance. At least the D1 and D2 groups can be differentiated reasonably well on the basis of this indicator. But his and our general argument remains valid: If one accepts that the D1 to D4 groups indeed describe *qualitatively* different scenarios (i.e., meaningful differences in power structures), then it may well be true that most of the criteria proposed in the extant literature can be shown to be relatively plausible, and to correlate with each other. Yet their use also produces a considerable number of 'false positives' and 'false negatives.' There is no point in employing these 'approximate' indicators if power structures can be directly read off the number and weights of players in a given parliamentary game. And a look at the temporal dimension provides further evidence for the relevance of power differentials.

Operationalizing the temporal dimension: There is much agreement in the literature that single-party dominance has a temporal dimension. As suggested by Coleman (1960: 294), "one can make valid judgements regarding the character of a party system only on the basis of an analysis of the structure and interaction of political parties within that order over a reasonable period of time." Few authors would therefore qualify a party as dominant that regularly participates in government, often or always crossing one or another of the thresholds outlined above, but never holds office for more than a term or two. In other words, one can imagine a fully competitive scenario in which the major government party always falls into the D1 or D2 category but its *identity* changes from election to election (Bogaards 2004: 187). Convesely, the largest member of a coalition or minority government could defend its rule for a long time without ever achieving a dominant position vis-à-vis its parliamentary competitors. Thus a party has to *control* government over a "substantial period" (Pempel 1990b: 4), and hence must win several consecutive elections, or rather dominate and win several instances of government formation in a row, to be considered dominant.

Unfortunately, temporal criteria that are equally plausible as the ones used in the power dimension are hard to come by. The ad hoc nature of temporal cut-off points ranging from O'Leary's (1994: 4) ten and Blondel's (1968) twenty years to Pempel's (1990b: 1-2) "three to five decades" with "as many as ten, twelve, or more successive governments" is particularly obvious (Dunleavy 2005: 7). Bogaards (2004: 175) and Sartori (1976: 196, 199) opt for a minimum of three consecutive terms.[11] Ware (1996: 159, 165) expects 'dominant' parties to win "usually" and 'predominant' ones to "regularly" gain a majority. The requirement of a disproportional tenure of governmental office (O'Leary 1994: 3) also leaves the question of an appropriate threshold open. A further complication is created by the fact that dominance is often considered to end with a party's electoral defeat, as suggested by Sartori (1976: 196), while Pempel (1990: 15-20, 335) and others allow for occasional and short absences from power that are followed by the party's rejuvenation and another long period of dominance, as in the case of Sweden's Social Democrats.[12]

Thus we are not only faced with arbitrary criteria in the temporal dimension. Worse, the proposed thresholds are also very controversial. Thresholds like O'Leary's seem motivated by nothing but the pronounced desire to consider specific cases like the British Conservatives after 1979 as dominant. But no theoretical rationale or empirical grounding is provided for any of the other cut-off points either. Moreover, no attention is paid to the fact that criteria formulated in terms of years or decades, on the one hand, and of elections won, on the other, may not be fully equivalent. Where legislative terms are fixed to five years, as is now the rule in the German *Länder*, Blondel's criterion amounts to winning 'only' five elections in a row as opposed to at least seven in the Australian states with three-year terms. Where governments are free to choose electoral dates, a party's decision and ability to call and win several consecutive early elections may signal a dominant position and considerable strategic capacity, as exemplified by Chrétien's Liberals after 1993, or indicate a rather precarious hold on power.

All this being said, it may be difficult or even impossible to establish and justify non-arbitrary, genuinely qualitative cut-off points in the temporal dimension – unless, of course, one uses the criterion of a permanent hold on power, which appears overly restrictive (Bogaards 2004: 194). We can, however, do better than using completely ad hoc thresholds. If a theoretical justification of 'one size fits all' temporal cut-off points is impossible, and perhaps not even desirable, they should at least be grounded in a systematic examination of pertinent empirical data. Instead of a mere ad hoc sample, a large number of relevant cases from a clearly delimited population should thus be considered. Once the average length of government episodes – defined with reference to the identity of the major government party – has been established for a population and period of interest, one may, for instance, speak of long-term dominance if the duration of such an episode is exceeded by one or more standard deviations.[13]

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[11] Sartori initially advocates at least four consecutive terms (196), acknowledging the arbitrary nature of such a temporal measure. Later (199) he contends that "[t]hree consecutive absolute majorities can be a sufficient indication, provided that the electorate appears stabilized, that the absolute majority threshold [of seats] is clearly surpassed, and/or that the interval [between the largest party and the runner-up] is wide."

[12] Dunleavy (2005: 22) even allows for "a prolonged period." In our view, this latitude in the operationalization of dominance turns his concept into a metaphysical one for good.

[13] Whereas our power criteria are applicable in the context of every parliamentary system, minor differences in institutional arrangements notwithstanding, the temporal cut-off points may thus vary, and their appropriateness may have to do, with the time window considered, and with the average length of government episodes in a given politi-

But how large is the power differential enjoyed by the sole or major government party during its time in office? We suggest to use its cumulative power surplus – adding the surplus values for each consecutive instance of (post-election or mid-term) government formation during the respective episode – to measure this aspect of long-term dominance, again establishing a threshold one or more standard deviations above the mean cumulative power surplus for all episodes. Unlike the temporal criterion, this indicator does not directly capture the varying *duration* of governments and legislative terms in different political contexts and systems. While the two indicators are likely to be highly correlated, as confirmed below, a party can have a high cumulative power surplus without crossing the temporal cut-off point – for example, in a situation of great political instability with several instances of government formation occurring in a short period. Conversely, the major government party may defend its role for a long time without ever being a dominant player, and hence without achieving a cumulative, or average, power surplus. Thus government episodes may, again, be divided into four groups:

- Both the length of the episode and the cumulative power surplus are above the respective threshold (L1).
- The length of the episode is below the temporal cut-off point while the cumulative power surplus is above the threshold (L2).
- The length of the episode is above the temporal cut-off point while the cumulative power surplus is below the threshold (L3).
- Neither the length of the episode nor the cumulative power surplus is above its respective threshold (L4).

The L1 scenario may be qualified as indicating unequivocal as opposed to marginal (L2 and L3) long-term dominance. While the number and share of D1 and D2 cases in each of these four episode types is not fixed a priori, the L1 and L2 cases should consist of episodes in which D1 and D2 instances of government formation are the rule. In addition, the average power surplus may be considered to gauge the level of dominance achieved by a party during its government experience, comparing the average surplus of a particular episode with the overall values presented above in Table 1. And while we subsequently ignore parties that have not achieved long-term dominance of either kind at least once, the entire record of our positive cases in the 1945-2005 period, including their shorter government episodes and opposition years, might ultimately be considered.

The overview in Table 6 shows the number of government episodes in each category, and for each of the four countries. We used two ways (shown in the upper and lower half of the table) to classify the episodes – first, on the basis of *national* averages of years in office and cumulative power surplus values, and secondly, deriving the averages from our entire universe of cases. We see, first, that the overall number of government episodes is relatively even in Canada, Australia, and Germany; it is much lower in Austria. These figures show that the identity of the major government party does *not* change very often at the subnational level. Using the actual number of government formation processes between 1945 and 2005 as a benchmark, and hence assuming that the largest player in government could have alternated 163 (Canada), 120 (Australia), 221 (Germany) or 126 (Austria) times, the calculation of a 'relative reduction in competitiveness in-

cal system or groups of cases. We could assess the length of a government episode against the average of all or just a subgroup of cases, etc.

dex' yields a figure of 63.3 % for the Australian states, 66.9 % for the Canadian provinces, 77.9 % for the German, and a whopping 90.5 % for the Austrian *Länder*.

Table 6: Overview, types of government episodes

		#	O'Leary (%)	Blondel (%)	Sartori (%)	Pempel (%)	Av. # of years	Av. cum. power surplus	Av. vote share	Av. seat share
Classification 1										
Canada	**L1**	5	100.0	100.0	100.0	40.0	28.1	7.34	49.9	74.0
	L2	1	100.0	0	100.0	0	17.01	5.00	53.2	70.9
	L3	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L4	49	42.9	0	38.8	0	9.0	2.26	47.6	65.9
		55	49.1	9.1	45.5	3.6	10.9	2.77	47.9	66.7
Australia	**L1**	5	100.0	20.0	100.0	0	17.9	4.83	55.9	44.6
	L2	4	75.0	0	100.0	0	10.9	3.82	58.2	47.4
	L3	2	100.0	0	100.0	0	16.2	0.84	40.3	26.2
	L4	34	17.7	0	23.5	0	5.4	1.00	46.4	41.0
		45	35.6	2.2	42.2	0	7.8	1.67	48.2	41.3
Germany	**L1**	7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	47.2	8.04	46.2	49.9
	L2	1	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	25.4	5.00	50.2	53.6
	L3	1	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	39.1	3.33	47.5	49.3
	L4	41	29.3	2.4	43.9	2.4	8.4	1.06	41.1	44.9
		50	42.0	20.0	54.0	16.0	14.8	2.16	42.1	45.8
Austria	**L1**	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L2	4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	60.75	13.11	53.8	58.1
	L3	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L4	9	55.6	44.4	66.7	55.6	33.8	3.89	46.5	48.5
		13	76.9	69.2	76.9	69.2	42.1	6.73	48.8	51.4
Classification 2										
Canada	**L1**	2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	37.2	9.50	48.5	71.8
	L2	3	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	22.0	5.89	50.8	75.5
	L3	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L4	50	42.0	0	40.0	0	9.2	2.31	47.7	66.0
		55	49.1	9.1	45.5	3.6	10.9	2.77	47.9	66.7
Australia	**L1**	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L2	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L3	1	100.0	0	100.0	0	16.3	5.70	61.1	46.1
	L4	44	7.1	2.3	40.9	0	7.6	1.58	47.9	41.2
		45	35.6	2.2	42.2	0	7.8	1.67	48.2	41.3
Germany	**L1**	6	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	48.8	8.54	47.9	51.5
	L2	3	100.0	100.0	100.0	33.3	35.4	3.66	40.1	42.8
	L3	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L4	41	29.3	2.4	43.9	0	8.3	1.12	41.4	45.2
		50	42.0	20.0	54.0	16.0	14.8	2.16	42.1	45.8
Austria	**L1**	7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	59.7	10.72	51.4	54.8
	L2	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	L3	2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	50.5	3.65	47.1	48.5
	L4	4	25.0	0	25.0	0	7.1	1.27	44.9	47.1
		13	76.9	69.2	76.9	69.2	42.1	6.73	48.8	51.4

At first glance (i.e., looking at our classification 1), one might think that long-term dominance is less prevalent in Austria than in the other three federations, as the L1 category is empty. But this is, of course, an artefact of the extremely long *average* duration of government episodes (more than 42 years) in that country. Our cut-off point of one standard deviation above the mean is beyond the examined time window in this case. Elsewhere, the average durations range between less than eight (Australia) and almost 15 years (Germany). We qualified the Canadian, Australian, and German episodes as unusually long if the major government party has survived for more than 18.0 years in the provinces, 14.2 in the states, and 30.2 in the *Länder*, respectively. At least for Austria and Germany, the claim that there has been "a fair amount of competition (i.e. rotation of parties in power, over time)" (Gaines 2004: 292) is certainly debatable. Only here do we find jurisdictions in which the major government party has *never* changed after 1945. Given these differential average durations, the thresholds proposed by O'Leary (ten years), Blondel (20 years), Sartori (at least three won elections in a row), and Pempel (at least ten consecutive elections) appear more or less plausible in the four national contexts. While an overwhelming majority of government episodes meets all four criteria in Austria, the percentages are lower elsewhere. And in general, the O'Leary and Sartori thresholds appear overly 'liberal.'

Consideration of the respective values of the average cumulative power surplus as well as the bottom half of the table (classification 2) helps us to put these findings, and especially the Austrian case, in perspective. With an r^2 of 0.92 (Canada), 0.49 (Australia), 0.86 (Germany), and 0.65 (Austria), the bivariate correlation between years in office and cumulative power surplus is generally strong and highly significant. Overall, episodes with a cumulative power surplus of 0 or less have an average duration of only 4.3 years while the mean duration of episodes with a surplus above 0 is 15.2. We employed the following national power surplus values as thresholds: 4.62 (Canada), 3.37 (Australia), 4.96 (Germany), and 11.91 (Austria). Inspection of the table also illustrates how far out the Austrian mean is in comparison with the other federations. And once the thresholds on the basis of our entire universe of cases (27.9 years, a cumulative power surplus of 5.42) are used to assess the national experiences, the number of L1 scenarios is highest in Austria, followed by Germany, Canada, and Australia as a distant fourth. Table 7 enumerates the (unequivocal and marginal) long-term episodes thus identified (on the basis of classifications 1 and 2), with years in office (post-1945) and power indicators. The cases are sorted by type of long-term dominance (L1 to L4) and cumulative power surplus. As suggested above, the average surplus provides additional information on these cases. It would be tempting to immediately speculate about the causal factors behind the greater or lesser prevalence of single-party dominance in each of these countries and subnational jurisdictions. This is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

A Brief Consideration of the National Picture: Instead, we return for a moment to the national level of the four examined federations. First, Table 8 shows a marked difference in the relative power of the largest government parties in all countries – namely, a shift from the D1 to the D2 or D3 categories. In Germany, for instance, only the CDU has ever won a seat majority, and only once. Even in Canada, the D1 group shrinks considerably – many national governments in the postwar era, including the current one, have been minority governments. Cases of the D4 type do not exist anywhere.

Table 7: Subnational episodes of long-term dominance, 1945-2006

Jurisdiction	Cl. 1	Cl. 2	Party	Start	End	Cons. years in office	Cum. power surplus	Av. power surplus
Canada								
Alberta	L1	L1	CON	1971	…	34.34	10.00	1.00
Ontario	L1	L1	CON	(1945)	1985	39.91	9.00	0.82
British Col.	L1	L2	SOC	1952	1972	20.22	6.08	0.87
Alberta	L1	L2	SOC	(1948)	1971	23.03	6.00	1.00
Newfoundland	L1	L2	LIB	1949	1971	22.83	5.60	0.80
Newfoundland	L2	L4	CON	1972	1989	17.07	5.00	1.00
Australia								
Queensland	L1	L2	LAB	1989	…	16.33	5.70	0.95
NSW	L1	L4	LAB	(1947)	1965	18.00	5.33	0.89
Victoria	L1	L4	LIB	1967	1982	15.00	5.00	1.00
S. Australia	L1	L4	LCL	(1947)	1965	18.00	4.67	0.78
Tasmania	L1	L4	LAB	(1946)	1969	22.46	3.47	0.50
NSW	L2	L4	LAB	1976	1988	12.00	4.00	1.00
Queensland	L2	L4	LAB	(1947)	1957	10.42	4.00	1.00
Victoria	L2	L4	LCP	1955	1967	11.92	3.74	0.95
S. Australia	L2	L4	LAB	1970	1979	9.30	3.55	0.89
Queensland*	L3	L4	NAT	1974	1989	14.98	1.68	0.34
Queensland*	L3	L4	CTR	1957	1974	17.34	0	0
Germany								
Bavaria	L1	L1	CSU	1958	…	48.21	11.79	0.91
Bremen	L1	L1	SPD	1946	…	59.22	11.66	0.69
Hamburg	L1	L1	SPD	1957	2001	43.87	7.67	0.59
Rhineland-P.	L1	L1	CDU	1947	1991	43.93	7.33	0.61
Baden-W.	L1	L1	CDU	1956	…	52.48	7.21	0.63
Hesse	L1	L1	SPD	1946	1987	40.34	5.60	0.40
Schleswig-H.	L1	L3	CDU	1950	1987	37.83	5.05	0.50
Berlin	L2	L4	SPD	1946	1981	26.43	5.00	0.71
NRW	L3	L3	SPD	1970	2005	39.07	3.33	0.42
Saarland	L4	L3	CDU	1955	1985	29.23	2.61	0.47
Saxony	L4	L4	CDU	1990	…	15.22	3.48	0.87
Thuringia	L4	L4	CDU	1990	…	15.22	2.55	0.64
Austria								
Tyrol	L2	L1	ÖVP	1945	…	60.75	13.60	0.97
Vorarlberg	L2	L1	ÖVP	1945	…	60.75	13.60	0.97
Vienna	L2	L1	SPÖ	1945	…	60.75	13.24	0.95
Lower Austria	L2	L1	ÖVP	1945	…	60.75	12.00	0.92
Styria	L4	L1	ÖVP	1945	2005	60.00	8.73	0.58
Carinthia	L4	L1	SPÖ	1945	1999	54.00	7.00	0.54
Upper Austria	L4	L1	ÖVP	1945	…	60.75	6.90	0.58
Burgenland	L4	L3	SPÖ	1964	…	42.00	4.73	0.47
Salzburg	L4	L3	ÖVP	1945	2004	59.00	2.57	0.21

CON = Conservatives; SOC = Social Credit; LIB = Liberals; LAB = Labor; LCL = Liberal and Country League; LCP = Liberal and Country Party; CSU = Christian Social Union; SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany; CDU = Christian Democrats; NRW = North Rhine-Westphalia; SPÖ = Social Democratic Party of Austria; ÖVP = Austrian People's Party.

* These two episodes are actually a *single* one, with the Country Party merely changing its name to National. Given the respective cumulative power surplus values, even the merged episode would only be in the L3 category, though.

Table 8: Types and gradations of dominance in national parliamentary games, 1945-2006

Type	N	(%)	Vote share (%)		Seat share (%)		Power surplus/deficit	
				(SD)		(SD)		(SD)
Canada								
D1	11	55.0	45.3	4.6	61.8	9.5	1	0
D2	8	40.0	38.3	2.1	45.5	3.5	0.35	0.21
D3	1	5.0	38.4	-	41.3	-	0	-
D4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
	20	100.0	42.2	5.0	54.2	11.2	0.69	0.38
Australia								
D1	11	45.8	44.9	4.7	54.8	2.9	1	0
D2	1	4.2	40.5	-	49.3	-	0.43	-
D3	12	50.0	41.7	4.9	46.0	2.2	0	0
D4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
	24	100.0	43.1	4.9	50.2	5.0	0.48	0.50
Germany								
D1	1	5.6	50.2	-	53.6	-	1	0
D2	7	38.9	42.2	5.6	44.8	5.1	0.32	0.15
D3	10	55.6	44.4	4.3	45.9	3.9	0	0
D4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
	18	100.0	43.9	4.9	45.9	4.6	0.18	0.27
Austria								
D1	7	35.0	49.9	0.8	51.4	0.4	1	0
D2	2	10.0	44.2	2.6	46.5	4.6	0.33	0
D3	11	55.0	42.1	4.9	44.0	5.2	0	0
D4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
	20	100.0	45.0	5.2	46.8	5.3	0.38	0.47
Overall								
D1	30	36.6	56.5	7.2	46.4	4.4	1	0
D2	18	22.0	45.6	4.1	40.6	4.3	0.34	0.17
D3	34	41.5	45.2	3.9	42.5	4.7	0	0
D4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
	82	100.0	49.4	7.6	43.5	5.0	0.44	0.45

Secondly, if we calculate and use national averages on the basis of national and subnational data combined, a similar picture emerges in the cumulative power and temporal dimension: Long-term dominance is more frequent and pronounced at the subnational level. Using benchmarks derived from all our cases, there has not been a single national episode of long-term dominance in any of the four countries, although one may still come to a different conclusion if the thresholds for individual episodes are relaxed, shorter ones are combined, and the overall record of a party like the Canadian Liberals or the German CDU over the last couple of decades is considered. But this is not the approach pursued here. Employing national benchmarks instead, a single case of (L1) long-term dominance can be identified in Australia (Labor between 1983 and 1996), which is otherwise the least dominance-prone nation, and one L3 episode in Austria (the Social Democrats between 1970 and 1999).

Conclusion

This paper introduced a reconceptualization of single-party dominance that we consider more intuitive and less dependent on ad hoc criteria than standard operationalizations of the phenomenon. Illustrating our approach with data from the national and subnational jurisdictions of Canada, Australia, Germany, and Austria, we could draw a couple of preliminary descriptive inferences and notably show that dominant party regimes in these nations, arguably with the exception of Australia, are hardly an anomaly. Given that electoral democracy is much less competitive than first meets the eye if the subnational level is considered, one task of future work in the area will be to expand on, and further substantiate, normative assessments of single-party dominance: Does it hollow out democracy, or is it a desirable element of stability? In a normative or empirical perspective, one might also want to ask which impact dominance at the *subnational* level has on the dynamics and quality of *national* politics.

Our own interest lies with the empirical dimension and causes of the phenomenon. As indicated above, the varying frequency, types and gradations of dominant party regimes may be partly linked to institutional features like different electoral rules or models of federalism. Our first forays into the material, however, suggest that single-party dominance may develop and unravel under a variety of circumstances. There do not seem to be any individually necessary or sufficient preconditions for the rise or fall of dominant party regimes. An explanatory framework will have to examine the interaction of structure- and agency-related, systematic and contingent factors in the emergence, stabilization, and demise of single-party dominance.

A combination of statistical and qualitative methods may thus be the most promising research strategy (Lieberman 2005). It could, on the one hand, follow the vast body of work on government survival by using event history analysis (Nyblade 2005: 20; Warwick 1994). While event history analysis is undoubtedly better suited to the modeling of temporal dynamics than standard techniques, research into dominant party regimes should, on the other hand, not rely on statistical methods alone; interaction effects and the positive and negative feedback processes that play such a crucial role in sustaining or eroding dominance remain difficult to model, and statistical techniques do not easily handle multiple conjunctural causation (Ragin 2000). Qualitative methods, then, may be expected to have a comparative advantage in exploring the varying circumstances under which dominant party regimes thrive and fall.

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