

# Commissioned Book Review

## **The Cycle of Coalition: How Parties and Voters Interact under Coalition Governance** by David Fortunato.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 225 pp., \$99.99 (hardback), ISBN: 9781108834803.

The central focus of David Fortunato's 2021 book *The Cycle of Coalitions* is the cycle of the actions of the parties in a governing coalition and the interactions of parties among each other and with voters during a coalition government. In a coalition government, parties included are forced to negotiate with each other in policy formation processes and often have to compromise their ideological positions supported by their voter base. Voters are generally dissatisfied and disappointed if their preferred party compromises their policy positions, and they interpret this as a weakness of the party in standing its ground in the coalition. This brings about serious penalties, according to the author, for the parties and the parties must adapt in some way so as to not lose the voters' support. Therefore, parties face a dilemma of conflicting interests between collective cabinet responsibility and the need for communicating with the voters about their sustained ideological stand. Fortunato finds out that the parties attempt to mitigate this dilemma by utilizing the legislative review phase of the policy-making process through vociferous debate, criticism and amendment proposals signalling the voters about their effort to represent their policy interests.

Fortunato divides the book into nine main chapters, five of which address five different sides of the central argument with separate approaches and separate datasets. It begins with a micro-level analysis of the voters' perception of the compromises in a coalition government based on an experimental model, a panel study on the consequences for the parties due to coalition compromise, an examination of the differentiating actions of the parties during the legislative review phase using a cross-national analysis, a detailed case study

on a coalition government in the United Kingdom, and a macro-level test on the previous findings using media narratives and electoral outcomes. This multi-level analysis adds robustness to the study strengthening all the conclusions with empirical evidence from a variety of perspectives.

The classical voting models put great emphasis on the policy positions of the political parties and the voters in determining the interaction between the two (Downs, 1957; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). The ideological positioning and the policy statements of the parties are taken to be the major determinants of the voting behaviour of the electorate. Voters' perception of the parties' ideological positioning plays a key role here in determining whom they are going to vote for. From this premise, Fortunato makes an important contribution by examining the *post-electoral* scenario of the ideological and policy positions of the parties in a multi-party government and how its consequences are based on the voters' reaction. Indeed, voters keep a close eye on the policy stands of the parties they voted for and check if they stay true to their promises.

Fortunato empirically shows that voters feel betrayed and disappointed if the parties make compromises in the coalition for reaching a policy decision and are prone to punish the parties for it. The compelling study could be further effective if it made a deeper analysis of the comparative policy positions of the coalition parties on the ideological scale. Taking essence from the spatial model (Downs, 1957) of party proximity, it will be interesting to view the differences in the voters' reaction to the compromises in a coalition between two closely situated parties and in a coalition between two distantly situated parties.

On a different note, party-voter interaction is a continuous process. Fortunato explains that compromise and conflict in governing process and outcomes shape and are shaped by the voter perceptions of party brands and competence, which in turn determine the electoral outcome

for the parties in the next election. However, it needs to be remembered that policy agendas are not static, and many external factors may shape the motivations and preferences of both voters and the parties regarding the policies (Adams et al., 2004; Dinas et al., 2016).

Coalition study is closely associated with the spatial model of policy positions, and previous studies have extensively researched how parties orient themselves in coalition formation before and after elections. Fortunato's latest work is a salient contribution to the field, adding a new dynamic to the debate and moving the focus to the party-voter interaction within the constraints of collective cabinet responsibility and unavoidable compromises. The methodical writing of the book provides a detailed account of this cycle of interactions. This offers an answer to how the parties try to give signals to their voters regarding their effort to stand true to their policy commitments. However, it also opens up many new questions to be addressed, delving deeper into the dynamics of voters' responses based on the comparative distance and direction of the party positions as well as the effect of the agenda-setting of the parties on newer issues specific to the next election.

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