Coalition Politics and Inter-Party Conflict Management: A Theoretical Framework

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Inter-party conflict management is a typical coalitional problem in parliamentary governments. To study how and why conflicts in coalitions emerge and how parties cope with them can enhance our knowledge of coalition governance. Here, I propose a framework for comparative studies on the topic. The framework is based on the conception of coalition politics as politics of exchange. It looks at inter-party interactions, but also accounts for the impact of intra-party politics. Moreover, I provide a classification of inter-party conflicts in coalitions and point out when they are more likely. The process of conflict management is operationalized with two proxies—actors, and arenas—and a taxonomy of conflict terminations is presented. The viability of the framework is tested both by mapping coalition governments according to their modes of managing internal conflicts and, after deriving research hypotheses, through empirical inquiries of conflict management in diverse coalitions.

Keywords: Political Parties, Mapping Coalition Governments, Intra-Party Politics, Parliamentary Government Coalitions, Inter-Party Conflict Management, International Comparative Politics, Coalition Theory, Rational Choice Institutionalism, Conceptualizing Coalition Politics.

Related Articles:

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El manejo de conflictos dentro de un partido político es un problema típico coalicional en los gobiernos parlamentarios. Entender cómo y por qué surgen los conflictos en las coaliciones y cómo lidián los partidos políticos con éstos puede mejorar nuestro conocimiento de la gobernanza de las coaliciones. En este estudio propongo un marco teórico sobre el tema para un contexto de política comparada. Este marco teórico se basa en la concepción de las coaliciones políticas como una política de intercambio. Se estudian las interacciones dentro del partido pero también toma en cuenta el impacto de las políticas interpartidarias. Además, se estipula una clasificación de conflictos intrapartidarios y se indica cuándo éstos son más propensos a suceder. El proceso de manejo de conflictos se estudia en dos dimensiones, actores y arenas, y se presenta una taxonomía de resoluciones de conflictos. La viabilidad de este marco teórico se pone a prueba identificando los métodos de manejo de conflicto de gobiernos los de coalición y a través de una investigación empírica del manejo de conflictos en diversas coaliciones.

The literature on coalition politics has shown that inter-party conflicts are very common in the life of parliamentary government coalitions; that some of them can pose serious threats to cabinet stability; and, consequently, that conflict management lies at the core of coalition governance (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008; Marangoni and Vercesi 2015; Müller and Strøm 2000a; Nousiainen 1993). In addition, as Kaarbo (2008, 59) has asserted, “what goes on in the life of the cabinet—how parties manage conflict and negotiate political and policy disagreements—is critical for a full understanding of coalition cabinets, their policy choices, and democratic stability and governance.” This study contributes to the research field through a framework for the analysis of inter-party conflict management in parliamentary systems. Despite the importance of the topic, a framework of this type is to date absent in the literature. Thus far, works on conflict management have mostly focused on the mechanisms (i.e., procedures) that parties use for conflict resolution (e.g., Andeweg and Timmermans 2008; Miller and Müller 2010). However, it has been argued, an actual understanding of this phenomenon requires—as long as it is viable—a mix, on one hand, of quantitative studies on conflictuality (how many conflicts? Of what kind?) and structural mechanisms and, on the other, more qualitative analyses to unlock the process (Vercesi 2012b, 283-4). In a nutshell, systematic data should be enriched with new in-depth information on how parties behave.
The aim of this work is to provide an analytical tool for studying the topic of inter-party conflicts in a coherent and comprehensive way. The developed framework provides a new perspective on coalition politics and provides insights that are useful for compiling aspects of coalition politics that are usually scattered among coalition studies. Thus this article presents a reference for analyzing probably the most puzzling aspect of coalitional life (i.e., conflicts in a cooperative context) parsimoniously but exhaustively.

The next section briefly specifies the theoretical background of the framework, i.e., rational choice institutionalism. Subsequently, the conceptualization of political parties in coalitions and how intra-party politics affects coalition politics are addressed. Coalition studies frequently assume parties as unitary actors or neglect the importance of the conceptualization of parties as collective actors in explaining societal facts. Building on both types of studies, I provide an argument connecting intra-party and inter-party politics in which parties are considered the main units of coalition politics. In the following section, I first advocate the usefulness of the framework within the existing relevant literature and then propose a conception of coalition politics as a game characterized by exchange between partners. This conception stresses the cooperative facet of coalitions and simultaneously highlights the puzzling nature of intra-coalitional conflicts. Moreover, this conception functions as a platform to understand how and why conflicts emerge and why parties manage conflicts and attempt to solve them. Inter-party conflicts are then defined and categorized, and insights about the conditions that foster different types of conflicts are presented. The second part of the framework focuses on conflict management itself. As a first step, I define and operationalize the process by means of two proxies: actors and arenas. The second part of the framework therefore permits the phenomenon to be studied empirically. A first application is made by mapping Western European countries with a tradition of coalition formation and the cabinets within such countries based on their characteristic conflict management modes. I then provide a taxonomy of types of conflict management terminations, with some empirical examples. Finally, the article derives some hypotheses from the preceding argumentation and tests them preliminarily through both quantitative data and in-depth qualitative case studies drawn from Italian coalitions. This analysis allows us to focus on a country traditionally affected by a tendency toward intra-coalition conflict (Marangoni and Vercesi 2015). Existing works have been used as touchstones for comparative purposes. The findings are then discussed, and the conclusions presented, along with research outlooks and a brief summary.

**Political Actors’ Rationality and Theoretical Background**

The framework assumes that political actors are rational and choose their actions rationally. I do not assume that individuals always adhere to such a principle in real life. Rather, I attribute this characteristic to social actors in its
ideal-type sense (Weber 1949). In particular, I assume that political actors have a “bounded rationality” (Simon 1957).

The theoretical background of the framework is rational choice institutionalism (Shepsle 2006). This strand is quite established in coalition literature. It takes individual preferences (and, broadly understood, human intentionality) into due consideration, and, at the same time, does not neglect the impact of institutions (Keman 1999, 251-7; Shepsle 1989). Following Shepsle (1989, 134), rational choice institutionalism goes beyond the “overly atomistic conception of political life” typical of classical rational choice theories.

The four main characteristics of such institutionalism have been presented by Hall and Taylor (1996, 944-5) as follows: (i) it posits that actors have a fixed set of preferences and aim to their maximization instrumentally; (ii) it conceives politics as a set of collective action dilemmas; (iii) actors behave in a strategic manner; and (iv) institutions structure the behaviors and can be both constraints and instruments to bring more benefits from cooperation. It is worth noting that the fourth point is particularly important for the study of political coalitions, where “cooperation is seriously threatened by distributive conflict over the choice among cooperative solutions (or over the allocation of the costs and benefits of cooperation)” (Scharpf 1989, 162).¹ The fact that coalition members are veto players (Tsebelis 2002) exacerbates the threat.

The Units of the Framework: Political Parties and Intra-Party Politics

The Concept of Political Party

I have said that the framework should be of service to study a typical coaltional problem, in which governing parties are involved. Before developing the argument, I need to make a short claim about how the word “party” is understood here. First, I consider parties as those organizations typical of modern politics, which channel participation (Huntington 1968), express societal interests (Neumann 1956), and fill government posts and produce public policy (Castles and Wildenmann 1986). Because the framework should travel across countries and different types of coalitions, I refer to them irrespective of their structuration and degree of institutionalization (Panebianco 1988). In the last decades, new parties with thinner and/or leader-centered organizations were born (Müller-Rommel 1998) and have been increasingly part of government coalitions (Deschouwer 2008). Often, they are not well institutionalized (Vercesi 2015). Furthermore, even traditional parties have moved from a more classic mass-party-based organization to lighter structures (Katz and Mair 1995). For all these reasons, I borrow the minimal definition of political party of

¹Scharpf (1989, 152) defines institutions as “configurations of organizational capabilities (assemblies of personal, material and informational resources that can be used for collective action) and of sets of rules or normative constraints structuring the interaction of participants in their deployment.”
Sartori (1976, 64), according to whom, “[a] party is any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office” (italics in the original).

After defining parties, we must conceive parties theoretically because parties can be viewed both as *collective actors*—as entities on their own—with a system for collective decision making (see Boudon 1981) and as a set of individual politicians behaving under the same label more or less coordinately. The relevant debate is well developed and cannot be avoided in developing this framework.

**Parties, Factions, and Politicians: How Intra-Party Politics Affects Coalition Politics**

In building a theory of coalition politics in parliamentary systems, one of the first decisions scholars face is who plays the coalition game (Laver and Schofield 1990), that is, the units of the theory. The framework I propose addresses interactions *between parties*, but this raises the unresolved question of whether parties should be treated as unitary actors.

Although often employed, the notion of parties as unitary actors has had to face growing criticisms, in particular from scholars focusing on American politics or, more generally, relying on rational choice theories and devoted to methodological individualism. According to them, coalition politics would be a two-level game (Putnam 1988), where the problems of collective action arise both within parties and between members of different parties. Sartori (1976) has focused on the meso-level of parties and underlined how parties are just a set of factions (or fractions, as he called them). Conversely, some have provided good empirical arguments for treating political parties as unitary actors, especially in parliamentary systems, where party discipline is “so much more the rule, rather than the exception” (Laver and Schofield 1990, 34-5; Müller and Strøm 2000b, 7). Studies on party switching, for example, provide some evidence. Some have demonstrated that the likelihood of switches is strongly dependent on the structure of constraints and opportunities and that politicians opt for this path, whenever it is more convenient, according to their personal policy motivations and ambitions (Di Virgili, Daniela, and Luca 2012; Heller and Mershon 2009; O’Brien and Shomer 2013). Landi and Pelizzo (2013) have shown that the more party competition becomes institutionalized, the more party switching decreases.

So what is the best choice? The answer is: no best choice exists; in fact, the appropriateness depends largely on the research question. Scholars who treat parties as unitary actors usually focus on a specific phase of the coalitional game: government formation (see Laver 1998; Vercesi 2012b, 234-47). As Laver and Schofield (1990, 17-24) have noted, “the initial outcome of the politics of coalition... tends to be brought about by legislative parties voting as unified blocks on the investiture of a government. However, it may still the case that
intra-party politics affects the politics of coalition.” Furthermore, “parties only seem to be unitary actors because existing theoretical accounts do work with snapshots of the system at particular moments.” This means that the unitary assumption can be a fruitful methodological principle as long as we look for the outcomes of party interactions at a given point in time. It works less well once we decide to study the process of conflict management: how and why coalition partners reach joint decisions.

A party that behaves as a united block in coalitional negotiations is not necessarily internally cohesive. Party cohesion is a product of the extent to which party members share preferences on different issues; party unity is indicated by how much party members, particularly legislators, coordinate their party behavior (Giannetti and Benoit 2009, 5). Party unity can originate from either an actual sharing of political viewpoints or effective party discipline. Krehbiel (1998) has argued that parties are only a set of politicians with their own preferences. According to Krehbiel (1993), genuine party behavior occurs only when party discipline forces party members to adhere to decisions that are not in harmony with their preferences. Following this argument, we should explain why individuals with divergent preferences often adapt their behaviors to arrive at a single “party decision.”

In this respect, Laver and Shepsle (1999, 26-47) have proposed a heuristic model based on formal theory comprising five basic blocks that I use as a reference for my analysis. According to Laver and Shepsle, the model should consider the following: (a) the environment and the role of the party (in our framework, parties in coalition governments); (b) politicians’ tastes “on issues that will certainly, or might conceivably, come up for decision by governments within the time horizons of the actors concerned”\(^2\); (c) factions of party members “with similar tastes in public policy;” (d) intra-party decision-making procedures (autocratic vs. majority vote); and (e) party discipline. Laver and Shepsle have argued that even party members with divergent interests and preferences have strong incentives to create factions and ultimately remain in an organization dominated by someone else because such activities augment their bargaining power. In this sense, losing autonomy is rational. Larger bargaining units, in fact, “are able to drag eventual government outputs on a wide range of issues closer to the ideal points of those subjecting themselves to the discipline” (Laver and Shepsle 1999, 29). Accordingly for these authors, party discipline is a “strategic force that binds factions together into larger and more effective players in the coalitional game” (46-47). Undermining this argument are institutional environments that provide incentives for creating factions and party splits and decrease the costs of disobedience (Ceron 2015; Sieberer 2006). However, parties remain attractive organizations overall for ambitious politicians. Even in electoral campaigns, parties (still) function as crucial devices for

\(^2\)Italics in the original.
candidates who run under their labels and want to be elected (Dalton, Farrel, and McAllister 2011).

The degree of “factionalization” varies among parties, and Laver and Schofield (1990, 26-7) have defined four types. First, coherent parties most approximate actual unitary actors. The second type includes parties that are threatened by likely splits but have high discipline and thus can be treated as if they were unitary actors without serious theoretical and empirical pitfalls. The third type are considerably factionalized and rarely behave as one party. The fourth type comprises electoral coalitions.

Greater internal division within a party increases the difficulty of formulating final decisions that encompass—if they do—the requests of factions (and individuals) with divergent preferences. Party leaders make the final decisions or are at least the highest representatives of their own parties in the coalition game. They must accommodate divergent positions and negotiate coalitional addresses with their counterparts. Luebbert (1986) has provided an explanation of the process, arguing that party leaders are primarily interested in remaining in office and that retaining their post significantly depends on the support they receive within the party. If we assume that those party members who are not part of the party leadership are more policy oriented than the leaders themselves, then leaders must take party fellows’ policy positions seriously. In particular, party leaders should seek to uphold those requests that minimize intra-party dissent and do not weaken their position. What happens inside parties has important consequences for coalitional dynamics, both in terms of reaching an agreement and conducting credible negotiations. For example, Ceron (2014) has demonstrated that stronger leadership within a party enhances the bargaining strength of the party as a whole.

In summary, when we analyze inter-party conflict management in coalitions, we must consider intra-party politics to disentangle the process and the development of the process. Parties comprise factions (if any), and factions comprise politicians, who are the real-world actors who conduct the negotiations. I propose a framework for coalition bargaining that allows us to enter the black box of conflict management and provides coordinates for analyzing politicians’ actions toward their own parties and toward the coalition. However, the framework remains a framework for studying coalition politics and hence treats parties as the main units of analysis and factions as their sub-units. Coalition politics is the nesting game on which I primarily focus, whereas intra-party politics is the nested game within it (McCain 2010, 326; Tsebelis 3Following Müller (2000b, 317), I define party leaders “those who internalize the collective interest of the party and monitor the party’s other office holders.” Party leaders are assumed to be the key actors when it comes to take party decisions. The assumption is theoretically sustained by the principal-agent theory applied to democratic institutional settings, where party leaders, because of their central role in parties, are crucial figures of party politics. See the special issue on parliamentary democracy and the chain of delegation of the European Journal of Political Research 37 (3).
In the next section, I shift from intra-party politics to the upper level by proposing a conception of coalition politics as a particular game of strategic exchanges.

**Coalitions and Coalition Politics: A Different Perspective**

**Relevance of Government Coalitions and Rationale for a New Framework**

Party systems are the products of the sedimentation of centuries-old social cleavages and subsequent developments (Flora 1999). The more different cleavages pass through a polity, the more multi-party systems find fertile conditions to emerge. Moreover, the electoral system can limit or foster the developments of parties (Sartori 1994). Especially where elections are held with a proportional rule and there are no disproportional mechanisms, the electoral competition is likely to produce more fragmented legislatures and, eventually, the need to form coalition governments. Overall, this is a very common outcome (see e.g., Blondel, Müller-Rommel, and Malová, 2007, 102-4; Müller, Bergman, and Strom 2008, 8), which scholars have studied from several perspectives (see Vercesi 2012b).

A very well-developed strand concerns studies on government formation, which aim to explain (and predict) what coalitions will develop under certain conditions. Two main research traditions exist. The first proposes deductive rational choice theories, whereas the second prefers an inductive approach that focuses on context as an explicative variable. Some classic theories have assumed that parties are office-seeking actors that, because coalition formation is a zero-sum game, are prone to form minimum winning coalitions (broadly understood) or, at least, coalitions with the lowest number of parties (Gamson 1961; Leiserson 1968; Neumann and Morgenstern 1947; Riker 1962). Others have added another principle: inter-party proximity in terms of policy preferences. In this sense, parties will seek to form more or less extended coalitions in which the heterogeneity of preferences is limited (Axelrod 1970; de Swaan 1973; Leiserson 1966). These studies all predict majority governments, and, with few exceptions, do not allow oversized coalitions. Some scholars have retained nomological-deductive approaches and instead discarded the size assumption to propose multidimensional theories, such as the core theory (Schofield 1993, 1995) and the win set theory (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Both theories argue that some parties have such a strong position in terms of their ideal policy positions in a Euclidean space that they cannot be excluded from any governmental alliances. Finally, inductive theories have focused on several variables that affect the outputs of government formation. To name a few: Luebbert (1986) has stated that minority governments are more likely in consensual systems, where the legitimacy of the system is higher. Strøm (1990) has noted that a strong opposition together with decisive elections foster such
governments. Bergman (1993) has shown empirically that also negative parliamentarism favors minority governments. According to Ieraci (1994), the institutionalization of the political system plays the major role: minimum winning coalitions should emerge where institutions are strong and the cost to exclude is lower. A further variable can be the role of the head of state in choosing the formateur: this position gives an advantage because the formateur can safeguard his or her party’s entrance in government and propose coalitions, in accordance to his or her positions (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988; Baron 1991, 1993). The need to approve bills in two chambers, then, would force one to find coalitions with a majority in both houses of the legislature (Druckman, Lanny, and Michael 2005). In addition, the coalitions ratified through a pre-electoral deal would have more chances to enter the government (Golder 2006). Parties such as anti-system parties are typically parties that are out of government by definition (Budge and Keman 1990). Finally, Franklin and Mackie (1983) have argued that former experiences of joint government make parties keener to seek alliances with former partners, rather than with others.

Briefly stated, coalition studies have observed a great variety of possible outcomes and reasons behind coalitions and have validated the high frequency of coalition governments in a large number of countries. Coalitions are hence important phenomena because they are crucial for governing in many political systems. The literature has also stressed the impact of coalitions on the quality and sustainability of democracies. For example, Lijphart (2012) argued that those countries in which coalitions are the norm are “better” according to several quality indicators, such as female representation, political equality, participation, satisfaction toward democracy, and shorter distance between voters and government. By contrast, Sartori (1976) emphasized that not all coalition systems are equally sustainable. A party system characterized by polarized pluralism is indeed doomed to function with “low performance” and risks downfall because of its inherent centrifugal drives.

Although extensively studied, coalitions have been categorized mostly from the perspectives of their formation, allocation of portfolios, and likelihood of terminating (Vercesi 2012b). Regarding coalition governance, the literature has focused mainly on governance mechanisms (Strøm, Müller, and Smith 2010) and cabinet decision making (Vercesi 2012a). For classification purposes, references to their functioning (if any) have been only indirect.4 The aforementioned Sartori (1976) is an example. Another is Tsebelis (2002), who distinguishes coalitions based on the number and the nature of veto players and, consequently, their potential to change the status quo. Mair (1996, 2002) has stressed the importance of party systems in shaping the function of government. He has mapped party systems by examining party access to the cabinet and closure of the system. According to Mair, new structures of competition will affect electoral behaviors. In general,

4I acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for the suggestions on this point.
shifts in traditional patterns of government formation produce greater electoral uncertainty and a higher number of “coalitionable” parties. However, the insights in these studies are not sufficient to classify countries (and single coalitions within countries) according to how political actors behave within conflict management mechanisms and their impact on the management (and the solving) of intra-coalition conflicts. This gap is a serious weakness of the literature. Presumably, the conflicts that emerge and how governments cope with them are crucial issues for defining policy outputs and for system performance. Therefore, I propose a theoretical framework that permits the categorization of coalitions according to their performance—in terms of conflict management—in a more straightforward manner. This framework is constructed both from a general and more static perspective and by means of analyses of how the process is shaped in an ongoing basis within different coalitions at different moments. The framework, an original and informative research device absent from coalition studies, could add predictive power to existing studies by clearly indicating from a new perspective the coalitions that are more likely to perform in a certain manner.

**Coalition Politics as Strategic Politics of Exchange**

Broadly understood, government coalitions are unifications of political parties. Coalition partners have somewhat different goals but choose to converge on goals that are shared and cooperate in pursuit of these goals. Parties opt to enter coalitions when they cannot pursue these common goals on their own or if the pursuit of these goals is too costly (cf., Vercesi 2013a, 84). The interactions between coalition parties and their partners are the foundation of what we can label as coalition politics.

Political-institutional features, both exogenous and endogenous (Müller and Strøm 2000b, 4), structure coalition politics. Constitutional rules, party systems and other features of the political environment are exogenous. By contrast, coalition features (e.g., number of parties in a coalition, coalition ideological range, and coalition agreements) are endogenous.

Political parties in coalitions, represented by their party leaders (see above), aim to obtain the compliance of coalition partners. Both common coalitional goals and the goals of the party must be achieved. Parties in coalitions are dependent on each other, and coalition governance is a nonzero sum game in the guise of mutual exchange. “On the one hand, through the exchange of commitments, we aim to make the behaviors of others predictable, by constraining our own behavior. But, on the other hand, the more B is able to keep unpredictable—in the eyes of A—his or her (or its) own future behavior, the more the exchange will produce benefits for B” (Cesa 2007, 74-5). Parties seek to avoid the costs of coalition (Mershon 2002) as much as possible while maximizing their benefits (cf., Narud and Valen 2008; Rose and Mackie 1983). As long as the (actual or prospective) benefits are higher than the costs, parties will be very careful to avoid crossing the coalitional breaking point and to keep the alliance alive.
Coalition parties’ decisions are interdependent, and parties must be strategic. Parties consider the environment and the past and party decisions are based on the foreseen actions of their allies. For Schelling (1980, 160), a strategic move “is one that influences the other person’s choice, in a manner favorable to one’s self, by affecting the other person’s expectations on one’s self will behave. One constrains the partner’s choice by constraining one’s own behavior.” In other words, coalition politics is the politics of anticipation. Coalition politics is the result of both offensive strategies (attempts to constrain) and defensive strategies (attempts to be “free”) (cf., Crozier and Friedberg 1980).

Promises and threats are typical strategic moves and must be plausible to be effective. Moreover, threats should not be implemented because implementation can be viewed as the failure of the attempt to change the other’s behavior. So, if implemented, threats become sanctions caused by a lack of compliance. However, such sanctions could also function as a warning for the future and increase the sanctioner’s power to constrain (Stoppino 2001, 73-7). Overall, all moves have an informational function and are channels to communicate one’s own values and, simultaneously, attempt to obtain informational advantages (Arielli and Scotto 2003; Schelling 1980).

The exchange of compliances may be more or less equal; the degree of inequality depends on the strategic strength of coalitional actors, that is, “for every single resource, a mix of the degree of control exercised by the holder and the degree of importance (in terms of the obtainable benefit) that others bestow to” the resource (Stoppino 2001, 167). Attempts to constrain allies are continuous bargaining and conflictual processes (195).

In government coalitions, the most important resources that parties hold (what parties “offer” for the achievement of the common goal) are (a) the share of parliamentary seats, and (b) the “position relative to the other parliamentary parties in policy space” (Müller and Strøm 2000b, 7). The opportunity to gain in terms of coalitional pay-offs (office and policy) impels party actors to the investment and the use of these resources. However, parties must also confront two strategic problems: (a) forming and maintaining agreements with partners, while (b) satisfying actual and potential voters (Lupia and Strøm 2008). Divergences between party goals and a lack of information make the coalitional balance precarious and the relationship uncertain.

**Conditions for Conflict Emergence**

These factors all foster inter-party conflicts, that is, political relationships between coalition parties that mutually stop or threaten to stop

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5 Party position is not fixed; it changes in accordance to strategic behaviors and affects chances to get votes. The same votes, in turn, will become parliamentary seats (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009).
cooperating with one or more allies to achieve their own party goals (Vercesi 2013a, 85-6). Parties will seek to avoid conflicts as long as remaining together appears convenient and attempts to resolve conflicts are made when they occur. Inter-party conflicts hinder the expected policy production of the government and often are ultimately detrimental for the life of the coalition. Conflict management is an unavoidable aspect of coalition governance empirically, if not theoretically. Although typical of coalition politics, conflicts vary both in terms of their own probability and in terms of seriousness: the threat posed to cabinet survival. The literature on coalition agreements reveals that even written inter-party deals do not prevent conflicts but rather circumscribe the area of conflict topics by functioning as political agendas (see e.g., Timmermans and Moury 2006). Luebbert (1986, 62-4) has noted that coalition partners can have convergent, tangential, and divergent preferences. By definition, convergent preferences do not produce disagreements on the content of decisions. At most, we can expect disagreements on procedures to affect the decision or timing, and disagreements can be safely treated as not overly dangerous for the coalition. Tangential preferences instead imply that parties confer different saliences to a specific issue. Finally, parties have divergent preferences when parties attribute the same salience to an issue but do not agree on the content of the relevant decision. For Andeweg and Timmermans (2008, 276), divergent preferences most likely foster the most dangerous conflicts. Concerning the likelihood of conflicts, we can argue that parties are more likely to enter conflicts if the parties consider the issue at stake important and, all else being equal, coalition partners have divergent preferences. This is a very intriguing point in regard to assessing the “work conditions” of a coalition: the more important an issue, the more parties will tend not to acquiesce in their attempt to obtain their desiderata. When preferences are deeply divergent, parties will exhibit rigid behaviors, and mutual agreements will be more arduous to obtain. Such conditions are conducive to more radical conflicts. Therefore, divisive issues are not only threatening per se but also tend to foster radical behaviors within coalitions, for which cooperation is assumed. In particular, the more a party wields a high strategic strength vis-à-vis its allies, the more it will be able to radicalize the conflict to achieve its goals. Andeweg and Timmermans (2008, 297) highlighted this relationship by stating that a high party’s walk-away value increases the potential to “win” a conflict. According to the framework, party blackmail potential depends on both the party’s ideological position within the coalition and the party system’s configuration and competitiveness. The reliability of potential threats to leave the coalition decreases when the party has only a few or no possibilities to enter government in the future (cf., Mershon 2002).

After dealing with the conditions that foster and shape inter-party conflicts and arguing when a coalition is more likely to be conflictual, the framework notes the objects of these inter-party conflicts.
What Do Parties Struggle For? Office and Policy

From an ideal-type perspective, political parties in polyarchies struggle for political power and those public positions from which it is wielded (Stoppino 2001). They search for the necessary votes and produce policies as instruments to reach political power. As Downs (1957, 28) stated, “parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies;” policies could be conceived of, then, as political investments. Often, parties have to face a trade-off between party goals (Müller and Strøm 1999; Sjöblom 1968) and the task of leaders is to choose the best strategy.

Office and policy are the two main objectives of inter-party conflicts in coalitions and the likelihood a party has to achieve its own goals depends on the distribution of the aforementioned resources. Two types of inter-party conflicts are therefore locatable as long as party goals are concerned: office conflicts and policy conflicts. It is worth noting that parties can be involved also in another type of conflict, whose objects are intra-coalitional procedures and relationships (Marangoni 2013, 98-108; Marangoni and Vercesi 2015, 25-6). However, the analytical level is different: procedural conflicts do not concern party goals. On the contrary, they are meta-conflicts concerning mechanisms to prevent and cope with office and policy conflicts.

Office conflicts can be “qualitative” (who gets what) or “quantitative” (who gets how much). They appear both during government formation or later. For example, sometimes parties struggle during cabinet reshuffles. In 1986, the Irish Fine Gael Taoiseach (prime minister) decided to move the Minister for Health, deputy leader of the Labour Party, to another department. The Labour Party firmly stood against the decision and threatened to leave the cabinet and, eventually, the Taoiseach was forced to desist (Mitchell 2000, 145). All conflicts over governmental policies are, instead, policy conflicts. They are more likely to focus on issues of “high” politics, such as significant financial reforms, denationalizations of public enterprises, military deployments, civil rights, and so forth. The reason is that “high” politics includes issues that characterize the performances of cabinets and define the policy profile of each party toward voters. Usually, “high” politics issues are discussed at the coalitional level, whereas “minor” routine issues are dealt with at the departmental level. The significance of decisions varies in accordance with the relevant policy field as well; some sectors are more important for the evaluation of governments (and for public visibility) than others.6

I have indicated the conflicts that are more likely to appear and the conditions that are conducive to more serious and radical conflicts. Party preferences often concern preferences on policy issues, but parties can also disagree on how to allocate offices. Laver and Shepsle (1996) have stressed the extreme

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6The distinction between high politics and routine issues refers to what Nousiainen (1993, 260-1) has called vertical dimension of the policy space (policy level), whereas the distinction between fields to the horizontal dimension (policy field).
relevance of portfolio allocation in giving a party an opportunity to affect government policy, and patronage logics can enter the game. Decisions on portfolio allocation can be intertwined with policy preferences (see Vercesi 2012b, 250-2), but, nonetheless, inter-party office conflicts tend to emerge as long as the available posts are finite and the costs to compensate losses with other posts increase. Marangoni and Vercesi (2015) have studied the topic extensively with regard to Italian coalitions. In their analysis, they have demonstrated that office conflicts are more likely when government coalitions do not clearly stem from the elections and are the result of inter-party parliamentary bargaining. Such coalitions are forced to continually negotiate their power bases. By contrast, those coalitions that can rely on straightforward electoral legitimacy usually enter conflicts over policy issues because this type of government works under conditions of clearer party mandates and responsiveness. Marangoni and Vercesi have also demonstrated that the type of coalition also has an impact on the involvement of prime ministers. Chief executives tend to be more active in policy conflicts when governments have a programmatic mandate. Prime ministerial involvement introduces the topic of conflict management, which is discussed in the next section.

The Process of Inter-Party Conflict Management: Who Participates and How it Is Structured

Definition of Conflict Management

Inter-party conflict management is a process and a set of actions of two or more coalition parties (in conflict or outside the conflict) that aim to attenuate the effects of a conflict that is collectively evaluated as detrimental. Moreover, the parties aim to preserve the coalition and find agreement between all parties. Throughout the process, parties pursue their own best outcome by calculating the actual and prospective costs of the conflict. A mix of cooperative and bargaining aspects characterizes such processes. Although conflict and conflict management are analytically distinguishable, they are often intertwined in empirical terms. Via conflict management, parties demonstrate that they want to cooperate and reach an agreement.

The process develops within the coalitional game, and its outcome is affected by decision rules and (conflictual and/or cooperative) actors’ approaches. Following these premises, the concept of inter-party conflict management can be essentially operationalized using two proxies: participants and arenas. Actors’ preferences, characteristics, roles, and resources affect the interaction style. In turn, interactions occur inside arenas which structure the process and imply particular decision rules.  

The latter point is highlighted by Andeweg and Timmermans (2008). The distinction between types of game, decision rules, and decision styles is drawn from Sharpf (1989), and rearranged for the purposes of the article.
Participants

As said above, the units of the framework are political parties; to put it differently, they are the units of the conflict because an inter-party conflict is a conflict between parties. Nevertheless, who concretely conducts the process—who meets and take decisions—are party politicians and government members. The process can be unlocked only if we focus on individuals and the relationships between them. The sense of single actors’ behaviors is provided by their personal goals and by party goals, which are mediated by their institutional and party roles. In regard to entering the black box of conflict management, we must first identify the participants and understand what role they have in the process: are they crucial players or just “supporting actors”? Second, we have to observe their behavioral style toward others, whether they impose or mediate. Finally, we should detect their role within the party, the coalition, and in government.

Because the framework addresses government coalitions, a focus on prime ministerial actions is unavoidable. Prime ministers are chiefs of cabinet and, often, party prominent. They can be activists or arbitrators (Blondel 1988). An activist shapes the process of conflict management. Sometimes, his/her behaviors are sources of conflict, but he/she is powerful enough to solve that conflict. Contrariwise, arbitrators seek mediations. Typically, they try to avoid conflict. Prime ministers who are also party members can manage inter-party conflicts as government members or as party representatives. They have to balance party interests (especially when their own parties are parts of the conflict) and cabinet interests. If the prime minister’s party is scarcely involved in the conflict, the chief executive will be similar to a third part (cf., Arielli and Scotto 2003, 168-70), able to solve the conflict or only to mediate. Similarly, senior and junior ministers sometimes behave as representatives of their own departments and sometimes as party actors. They can participate only as departmental actors when they are nonpartisan ministers.

The more the conflict develops along party lines, the more party leaders are expected to be involved in the management, ceteris paribus. Moreover, parties are ruled by more or less monolithic party elites, which can join the leaders and participate to the process. In factionalized parties, elite members can be factions’ representatives. Factions can be in conflict on the same issue of the inter-party conflict. In this case, following what have been said above, party leaders will have to play a two-level game and be the turning points between factions’ leaders and other party leaders. All party members can also be government members (prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, ministers). Whatever the role within the party is, the post of parliamentary leader provides more opportunities to enter the process. Parliamentary leaders are the bridges between extra-parliamentary party organizations and parliamentary groups, whose discipline is, in fact, necessary for the approval of several policies.

Overall, the degree of involvement and the impact of actors on conflict management vary across time and space. However, those mentioned can be supposed to be the major actors, on whom analyses should primarily focus.
Other individuals, such as simple members of parliament (MPs), civil servants, and personal advisers can back them up (Müller and Strøm 2000a). The gap between theory and facts is a matter for empirical inquiries. The next subsection addresses the arenas that individuals use during conflict management.

Arenas

Conflict management participants opt for several types of arenas. Here I present these arenas mostly by using the arguments of Andeweg and Timmermans (2008, 271-3). Some of the historical examples that follow—together with the relevant references—are drawn from this work. In addition to those presented by Andeweg and Timmermans, I consider two further arenas: bilateral contact and full cabinet. Within the arenas, the weight of participants and their impact depend on the political context and the issue at stake. Arenas can be formal or informal; they can gather a large or a small number of actors; their scope can be larger or narrower; they can be more or less open to nongovernment members. Following Andeweg and Timmermans, I subordinate the first three criteria to the fourth, on the basis of which a classification is proposed. The main distinction is between internal arenas (where only government members participate), mixed arenas (both internal and external actors), and external arenas (only nongovernment members). Internal actors are both senior and junior ministers (together with their personal advisers); civil servants are instead external (Barbieri and Vercesi 2013). However, all the arenas considered are internal with respect to the coalition and therefore arenas, such as parliamentary arenas—where members of the opposition attend—are excluded.

An arena that can be internal, mixed, or external is the bilateral contact. Cabinet decision making often relies on it (Vercesi 2012a). With regard to conflict management, a clear example of coalition that used it is the Irish coalition made up of Fine Gael and the Labour Party in 1982-87. More than one policy conflict was solved through private meetings between the two party leaders, who were cabinet members (Mitchell 2000, 140). Stable meetings of a small and very influential group of cabinet members are indicators of inner cabinets. Typically, inner cabinets comprise (at least) the prime minister and the deputy prime minister(s), and discussions can focus on any topic, depending on the moment. The Belgian Kerncabinet is a clear-cut example (De Winter, Timmermans, and Dumont 2000, 327). Other inner cabinets were the Italian Cabinet Council during the Craxi premiership (Barbieri 2001, 199-201) and the Dutch Pentagon of the Van Agt II cabinet (Andeweg 1988, 146). Cabinet committees are internal arenas as well (if civil servants or other external actors do not enter). Committees are formal or informal, sometimes ad hoc. Their importance varies across countries and on the basis of the circumstances. Usually, a higher number of individuals attend the meetings. Compared to inner cabinets, cabinet committees are less generalist. A formal committee was established by the Conservative-Liberal coalition, which entered office in 2010 in the United
Kingdom. The arena included senior government members from both parties and was co-chaired by Prime Minister Cameron and Liberal Democrat leader Clegg (Bennister and Hefferman 2012, 784). The most inclusive internal arena is the full cabinet. In most cases, it is only a ratifying place, or, at most, a ministerial court of appeal (Thiébault 1993). Nonetheless, it is possible to find some cases of full cabinets working as arenas for conflict management, for example, in Luxembourg in the 1960s (Dumont and De Winter 2000, 417).

Often, parties opt for coalition committees for managing inter-party conflicts. They are mixed arenas and have broad competences. The participants are party leaders and other party prominents. The Italian Majority Summits (Criscitiello 1996) and the Austrian Coalition Committees in the 1950s and 1960s (Müller 2000a, 104) are part of this category. Committees of ministers and parliamentary leaders are similar, but in this case the external actors are always parliamentary leaders, who are sometimes joined by other MPs, as is the case with the Dutch “Turret consultations” (Timmermans and Andeweg 2000, 383). The German Kressbronner Kreis of the 1966-69 Grand Coalition (Helms 2005, 108-9) and the Round Tables of the French Fourth Republic (Anders 1962) shared these features.

If, instead, only parliamentary leaders meet, the arena is fully external (other MPs may enter the arena, without changing its external nature). The German CDU/CSU-Liberals coalitions between 1961 and 1965 relied on it (Saalfeld 2000, 61-2). Years later, the parties of the Slovak Moravčík cabinet formed in 1994 followed this path, by establishing the Coalition Council (Malová and Sivakova 1996, 115). Finally, we may find party summits, which gather high party prominents who are outside the government. The Belgian coalition of the Tindemans IV cabinet used a party summit for managing a conflict over an institutional reform (De Winter, Timmermans, and Dumont 2000, 328).

Other arenas can be employed, but those listed are the most common. All arenas can be classified on the basis of the role that—in that specific moment—bestow the “right” to participate. Once more, the only way to assess the role is through an empirical inquiry.

Mapping Coalition Politics According to Inter-Party Conflict Management

The discussion of the process of inter-party conflict management allows coalition politics to be mapped according to the prevalent type of management by country and by coalition. Among proxy “participants,” it can be useful to focus on those actors that have an important influence in the process. The literature has demonstrated that party leaders are very important across countries,
without significant variations. Therefore, party leaders are the first variable in explaining the choice between internal and external arenas. Coalitions will opt for internal arenas as long as party leaders are cabinet members and will move to external arenas when party leaders are out of the government (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008; Marangoni and Vercesi 2015). Party leaders’ participation can thus be considered relatively constant in conflict management, whereas we can assume greater variation in the role of prime minister (who may also be a party leader).

The literature on cabinet governance has repeatedly noted that powerful prime ministers have a pronounced impact on governmental decision making (see e.g., Poguntke and Webb 2005; Vercesi 2012a). Explorative studies have confirmed the importance of the power of prime ministers in conflict management as well (Vercesi 2013b). Consequently, I list government coalitions first on the basis of the strength of prime ministers. Second, I observe whether coalition governments mainly rely on internal, mixed, or external arenas for managing conflicts in general and for managing the most threatening conflicts in particular. For the sake of simplicity, I have narrowed the focus to Western Europe. Referring to secondary sources, I have covered the post-war period from 1945 to 1999. Empirical studies have highlighted that the coalitional nature of governments seriously constrains maneuvering by heads of governments (Jones 1991). Moreover, single-party cabinets tend to internalize the management of conflict more than coalition governments (Nousiainen 1993). We therefore require a set of countries characterized by a minimum level of homogeneity in the coalitional nature of their governments. For this reason, I have limited the set of countries only to those systems treated in Strøm, Müller, and Bergman (2003) in which, during the given period, at least 50 percent of all cabinets were coalition governments. The only exception is Ireland, whose pattern of government moved from a mainly single-party cabinet to a coalitional cabinet in 1989. Between 1989 and 1999—the period under consideration—only five coalitional cabinets ruled Ireland. France has been excluded because of its fully-fledged semi-presidential functioning (making France a deviant case).

Prime ministerial influence is operationalized by referring to the results of the expert survey in O’Malley (2007), which correlates well with similar measurements. Prime ministers are assessed on a scale from one (the weakest) to nine (the strongest). As for Ireland, in O’Malley (2007), the first government taken into consideration for the survey dates to 1982. This government was a coalition, and only one executive of the sample was a single-party cabinet. Therefore, the findings on Ireland should be reliable, even if our observations are limited to the period 1989-99. Second, I have used Andeweg and Timmermans’ (2008, 274) data to establish which type of arenas characterized conflict management. Table 1 maps ten European countries according to these criteria. It also shows the cabinet “degree of cohesiveness” in each country. Numbers are drawn from Strøm and others (2003, 662-3), and specify “the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>PM Influence</th>
<th>Most Commonly Used Arenas (%)</th>
<th>Arenas for Most Serious Conflicts (%)</th>
<th>“Cohesiveness” of Coalitional Commitment</th>
<th>Terminations Due to Inter-Party Conflicts (%)</th>
<th>Coalitions in Post-War Period</th>
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</table>

Sources: Own revision of Andeweg and Timmermans (2008, 274); Mitchell (2000, 139); Mitchell and Nyblade (2008, 206); O’Malley (2007, 17); Strom and others (2003, 662).

Notes: Irish cabinets are counted only for the period 1989-99. Data on cabinet type are calculated excluding nonpartisan cabinets and other cabinets that cannot be easily classified. Slight differences in the N of cabinets can occur between the sources. The percentages of arenas refer to the percentage of cabinets using those arenas. The “cohesiveness” of coalitional commitments was originally calculated for two periods: 1950-74 and 1975-99. In this table, the numbers are the mean between the two values. For Ireland, only the second period is taken into account.
coalition rules governing policy cohesion on a four-point scale, from the most comprehensive and committal (scored 1) to the most informal and partial (scored 4).” Policy cohesion is considered “as pertaining to ordinary legislation as well as to other parliamentary decisions” (663). Finally, I have indicated the percentage of cabinet terminations due to inter-party conflicts out of all government terminations. A change of cabinet is recorded when there was a new prime minister, a change in the cabinet party composition, or a general election.

We see that in some countries prime ministers have more influence in the process of conflict management, but none has a very strong prime minister. To a large extent, this stems from the fact that we are observing countries where cabinets were ruled mainly by coalitions. Germany ranks first regarding influential heads of government, whereas Italy and Iceland are at the bottom, in line with findings of single case studies (see e.g., Strom, Müller, and Bergman 2003). Some countries, then, are accustomed to managing conflicts inside the cabinet, such as Austria, Denmark, and Iceland. Others bring the process to mixed or external arenas, as is the case with Germany, Ireland, and Italy. I reproduce graphically the map of countries in Figure 1. It refers to the management of conflicts in general, not only to the most serious ones. The vertical axis indicates the degree of externalization of conflict management. I have calculated it as the sum of the percentages concerning external arenas and the half of the percentages of mixed arenas. The figure clearly shows that most countries tend to have a management that tends to develop internally and within which prime ministers have a medium/strong impact.

However, each cabinet can have an own “placement” in terms of how conflicts are managed, and, hence, within-countries comparisons may be made as

Figure 1.
A Map of Coalition Governments in Western Europe by Conflict Management

Source: see Table 1.
well. For instance, Table 2 maps 56 West European cabinets on the basis of the same two proxies used for the cross-country analysis.

Information on prime ministerial influence has been drawn from O’Malley’s (2007) appendix, whereas the arenas are those indicated in the respective chapters of Müller and Strom (2000a). The type of coalition has been extracted from the Parliaments and Governments Database, edited by Döring and Manow (2015). I have selected, among the countries listed in Table 1, all coalition cabinets for which data could be found in all the relevant sources. These cabinets are counted according to the three criteria already mentioned with regard to Table 1 (change of prime minister; change of party composition; general election). Overall, Table 2 shows that the main variations are those that occur between countries but also that even within countries different coalitions can rely on different ways of managing conflicts, as, for example, the German, Irish, and Italian cases witness.

Before moving to the qualitative analysis, the next section completes the presentation of the framework. As shown in Table 1, inter-party conflicts are very common sources of cabinet termination. However, these conflicts can end in many other ways, as analyzed in the next section.

**Inter-Party Conflict Termination: A Taxonomy**

The outcome of a conflict cannot be inferred from conflict features as far as the units are (potentially) willing to or, actually, manage the conflict. Indeed, any management process could be conducive to some agreements, which changes the *status quo* and cannot be unquestionably foreseen. Furthermore, coalition partners can always leave the coalition when this strategy is valued as most convenient. This type of opportunity is a source of greater uncertainty. However, it is possible to classify conflict management outcomes. Such a classification takes the shape of a taxonomy, as instructed by Sartori (1975), who defines a taxonomy as any hierarchical classification established on two or more criteria. The result is a set of classes and subclasses distinguished by *per genus proximum et differentiam specificam* analysis.

First, conflict management can end with a *nondecision*. Parties cannot agree on any change of the *status quo*, but they think that the conflict is too costly and/or that an unwanted cabinet termination is likely to occur. In brief, the parties think that the conflict is not worth the trouble. The parties can decide to maintain the *status quo* (although the conflict can appear again at a later time) or bring the issue to an extra-coalition arena (cf., Andeweg and Timmermans 2008, 294-5). For instance, in the early 1950s, the Australian Country Party, which was in coalition at the time with the Liberals, firmly stood against the proposed appreciation

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9Available at www.parlgov.org
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
<th>Date in (Year)</th>
<th>Type of Coalition</th>
<th>PM Influence</th>
<th>Arena (Most Common)</th>
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<td>3.71</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andreotti VI</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amato I</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ciampi</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berlusconi I</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
<td>Party summit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prodi I</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D’Alema I</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>Werner IV</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued.
of the Australian currency. After several debates, the liberal prime minister, Menzies, decided to avoid any decision regarding the issue (Costar 2011, 36-7).

The second type of conclusion is conflict resolution. In this category, we find (a) victories; (b) exchanges; and (c) compromises. The more party preferences are divergent, the more unlikely a resolution. There is a victory (of the “innovator”) when the party or the parties that want to change the status quo achieve the goal fully, as defined at the beginning of the conflict. No agreement on any compensation occurs. The “loser” recognizes the defeat and values it more highly than leaving the coalition. In May 1985, the Political Cabinet arena created by the Israeli national unity coalition was attempting to reach a decision regarding a dispute with Egypt about Taba’s border. The cabinet soon split along party lines between those who wanted international arbitration and those who supported direct negotiations. Labor Prime Minister Peres, who supported international arbitration, threatened to take the issue to the full cabinet.

\[10\]However, the “losers” could believe themselves to be able to make up for the defeat in the mid/long term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
<th>Date in (Year)</th>
<th>Type of Coalition</th>
<th>PM Influence</th>
<th>Arena (Most Common)</th>
<th>Arena (Most Serious Conflicts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Santer I</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>5.50</td>
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<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Santer II</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Santer III</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juncker I</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lubbers I</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>Inner cabinet</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lubbers II</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>Inner cabinet</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lubbers III</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>Inner cabinet</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok I</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>Inner cabinet</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok II</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>Inner cabinet</td>
<td>Coalition committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources:* Döring and Manow (2015); Müller and Strøm (2000a); O’Malley (2007).

*Notes:* aThe arena named as “other” refers to meetings held prior to the full cabinet between junior ministers, personal advisers, and civil servants. MW, minimum winning coalition; M, minority coalition; S, surplus coalition. When the parliament is bicameral, the type of coalition concerns government’s seats in the lower chamber.
and even declared his readiness to resign. The outcome was unanimous approval of the prime ministerial position (Arian, Nachmias, and Amir, 2001, 47-8). The exchange (cf., Arielli and Scotto 2003, 77-8) is instead a *do ut des*, which produces a mutual benefit. It can be one of the hardest solutions to attain because it can be (at least theoretically) the result of distinct processes of conflict management. The object of the exchange can be an office (or more), a policy (or more), or any other inter-party decision. Finally, compromise is the most complex outcome. Actors must modify their goals in the course of events and must enlarge their own ranges of accepted outcomes to obtain agreement and make the ranges meet (Arielli and Scotto 2003, 78), and the result must be more convenient than the conflict and any other expected outcome. The compromise is a suboptimal solution.

We may identify *cabinet termination* as a third type of conclusion (remind that I assume that a change in the party composition is an indicator of a change in government). One or more parties in conflict consider leaving the cabinet less costly than continuing the conflict (cf., Warwick 2012) or any other type of agreement. Consequently, the coalition is broken. Not all cabinet terminations are equal with respect to the damage to coalitional health. A termination conducive to the implosion of the coalition is more serious than a termination that is followed by a new government ruled by the same coalition but with a different prime minister. Similarly, the “survivors” of the coalition can decide, if possible, to continue governing without their former ally/ies. This scenario occurred in 2014 in Denmark after the withdrawal of the Socialist People’s Party from the cabinet led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt.¹¹

**Making the Framework Work: Hypotheses Formation**

So far, scholars who have explicitly focused on intra-coalition conflicts management from an empirical perspective have provided mostly “static” information. In addition to the findings mentioned earlier, one can think of those of Nousiainen (1993), according to whom inter-party conflicts tend to last longer than intra-party conflicts and several conflicts end with resignations of ministers. Andeweg and Timmermans (2008), for their part, have stated that the presence of party leaders in the cabinet is the crucial explanatory variable for the internalization of conflict management. However, they have found the seriousness of conflicts to be a concurring factor: the more a conflict is dangerous, the more it will be likely to be managed within external arenas. With regard to the conclusion of conflicts, Timmermans and Moury (2006) and Moury and Timmermans (2008) have shown that, usually, intra-coalitional

¹¹The leader of the Social People’s Party (Annette Vihelmsen) admitted intra-party divisions concerning the decision to sell part of DONG Energy to Goldman Sachs that was the reason for cabinet termination. See Wenande (2014).
conflicts end with a decision in line with previous coalition deals (if any) and that, if the issue is not in the agreement, a nondecision will be more likely.

All these (few) empirical studies lack a genuine focus on the “dynamic” facet of conflict management. The framework presented here, on the contrary, allows us to derive and to test some hypotheses in this respect. First, building on Andeweg and Timmermans (2008) and Marangoni and Vercesi (2015), we can translate the “static” findings on process externalization into a “dynamic” hypothesis and posit that:

Hypothesis 1. The more parties spend time to settle the conflict (i.e., they become aware that it is hard to find a solution and the conflict is serious), the more the coalition tends to externalize the management.

With regard to the actors, the framework pays a particular attention to prime ministers. If we assume that junior coalition partners prefer mixed or external arenas because heads of governments are less dominant there (see Andeweg and Timmermans 2008, 298), we can state that:

Hypothesis 2. Strong prime ministers will try to keep the process inside the cabinet and weaker prime ministers will be—all else being equal—less able to resist to externalizations.

Moreover, powerful prime ministers are those who mostly shape decision-making processes and seek to lead cabinets to their preferred decisions. To reach these goals, they need to be in control of the process as much as possible. So, according to the framework’s premises regarding the types of prime ministers:

Hypothesis 3a. Activists will be keen to centralize the management, whereas arbitrators will choose more collective and consensual arenas.

As for other actors, I expect that:

Hypothesis 3b. Both government and party members will have a larger room for maneuver when the chief executive is weaker.

The same applies to the internal organization of coalition parties, within which:

Hypothesis 4. The substantial involvement of party members other than leaders will decrease as the internal power centralization increases.

Finally, the framework provides insights with regard to the likelihood of different outcomes of conflict management. Connecting argumentations on coalition politics as exchange and the outcomes taxonomy, it is reasonable to argue that, all else being equal, the type of conflict conclusion depends on the
resources a party have used and how much parties have been able to employ these resources to overcome the partners. This means that:

Hypothesis 5a. Balanced strategic strengths will produce outcomes that are more “balanced,” such as exchanges and compromises.

Conversely,

Hypothesis 5b. Victories (of innovators) and nondecisions (that is, victories of veto players) will be instead more likely when party resources are imbalanced in favor of one or more parties, which are able to “impose” their will on comparatively weak allies.

An extensive empirical analysis is beyond this study’s scope. Nonetheless, I propose a preliminary test of the hypotheses, by relying on both quantitative data and two qualitative studies of inter-party conflict management.

Making the Framework Work: Empirical Analysis

Coalition Features and Conflict Termination

The hypotheses concern the process of conflict management, and qualitative analysis appears more suitable for precise tests. However, Hypothesis 5 in particular provides opportunity for quantitative analyses as well.

To determine if exchanges and compromises are more likely as conflict outputs when the strategic strengths of parties are similar to those of their coalition partners, I calculated several indicators of the distributions of strategic strength for a number of coalitions, as defined in this article. For the selection of cases, I relied on Moury and Timmermans (2008, 2013), who observed how 114 inter-party conflicts ended in 12 coalitions in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands between 1989 and 2009. Table 3 reports these data and provides information on the salient features of the coalitions.12

The column of critical parties indicates the numbers of parties whose withdrawal from the alliance would have transformed the coalition from a winning coalition to a minority coalition. Coalition dominance is the largest party’s percentage of the total number of seats controlled by the coalition minus the respective value of the second largest party. In brief, coalition dominance reveals how much the largest coalition party “outdistances” the rest of the

12I have operationalized the concept of coalitions following Vercesi (2013b, 296) “as a group of political parties, in a legislature, that enjoys parliamentary confidence and staffs the executive. Each party must have at least one member in the cabinet (Council of Ministers) formally endorsed by the central body of the party.” Two or more parties as above defined, which, after the election, “form, in at least one of the two chambers, a single parliamentary group (Fraktion) with its own distinctive identity and a specific name,... are to be considered as one party.”
### Table 3. Parties’ Strategic Strength and Inter-Party Conflict Termination in 12 West European Coalitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Period in Office</th>
<th>Number of Parties</th>
<th>Critical Parties</th>
<th>Coalition Dominance</th>
<th>Ideological Homogeneity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Dehaene I</td>
<td>1992-1995</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dehaene II</td>
<td>1995-1999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verhofstadt I</td>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Schröder II</td>
<td>2002-2005</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merkel I</td>
<td>2005-2009</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Prodi I</td>
<td>1996-1998</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berlusconi II-III</td>
<td>2001-2006</td>
<td>4/6</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prodi II</td>
<td>2006-2008</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Lubbers III</td>
<td>1989-1994</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok I</td>
<td>1994-1998</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok II</td>
<td>1998-2002</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Power Imbalance</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Expected Victory</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Dehaene I</td>
<td>.0696</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dehaene II</td>
<td>.0878</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verhofstadt I</td>
<td>.0641</td>
<td>.798</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Schröder II</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merkel I</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Prodi I</td>
<td>.2507</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berlusconi II-III</td>
<td>.2592</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prodi II</td>
<td>.3884</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Government Turnover Inter-Party Conflict Termination (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Exchange/Compromise</th>
<th>Nondecision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Dehaene I</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dehaene II</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verhofstadt I</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Schröder II</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merkel I</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Prodi I</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berlusconi II-III</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prodi II</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued.
Table 3. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Power Imbalance</th>
<th>Government Turnover</th>
<th>Inter-Party Conflict Termination (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Lubbers III</td>
<td>.0894</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok I</td>
<td>.1398</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok II</td>
<td>.1854</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Own elaboration with data from Döring and Manow (2015); Moury and Timmermans (2008, 2013).

Notes:  
^aProdi I cabinet was a minority cabinet.
^bMean value of the Berlusconi II (2001-05) and the Berlusconi III (2005-06) cabinets.
^cFrom the Berlusconi II to the Berlusconi III cabinet there was a tiny turnover of 0.009.

All data refer to lower chambers. The labels of conflict terminations were modified to make them coherent with the framework. In the original works, “victory” corresponds with “imposition” and “exchange/compromise” simply with “compromise.” The sum of percentages for conflict termination can be slightly under or above 100 because of approximations. As for the absolute numbers of conflicts, the more recent source (Moury and Timmermans 2013) is conflicting with Moury and Timmermans (2008) with regard to the Verhofstadt I and the Prodi II cabinets. In this case, I have relied on the absolute numbers of the more recent source, whereas I have kept the proportions within the “decisions” category (victory + exchange/compromise) of the more dated source, since Moury and Timmermans (2008) is more comprehensive.
coalition in terms of parliamentary votes. Third, ideological homogeneity was calculated by subtracting the coalition ideological range on a ten-point left (0)-right (10) scale from ten. The higher the value, the greater the homogeneity. Moreover, I have calculated an index of the extent to which coalition parties have similar weights within the alliance, based on their seats in the parliament. Following the argument of Strom and others (2003, 667), I have opted to calculate the normalized Banzhaf (1965) Power Index for all parties and subsequently the average distance between the value of the largest party and each of its partners’ values. In this case, higher values indicate an imbalance among the parties’ bargaining powers. The Banzhaf index can be considered a proxy of a party’s walk-away value (see Lupia and Strom 2008, 63) or, in other words, its blackmail potential within the coalition. However, as stated, in the real world some coalitions are very unlikely for several reasons and, therefore, not all parties have the same potential opportunity to enter all theoretically possible alliances. Thus, even if a party had sufficient seats to enter alternative coalitions, specific political constraints could block the formation of some coalitions (e.g., the presence of anti-system parties). To include this aspect, I considered the degree to which switches among different coalitions and changes in governments are actually credible in the relevant party systems. Accordingly, I first provide an index of government volatility (Valbruzzi 2011, 309), which varies depending on both the party composition and the weight of the parties in the coalition. This index is equal to the sum of the gains in terms of weight in the government (based on parliamentary seats) of all parties with an increased weight and the losses in the same terms of all parties that have lost weight in the government. This sum, expressed in absolute numbers, is divided by two. The result indicates how much the coalition in office differs from the previous coalition. However, the behavior of party actors is also dependent on what they think will happen or is likely to happen. I distinguished between partial and total expected government turnover. Following once more Valbruzzi (2011, 326), these measures focus on the number of times that, through a general election, the cabinet party composition has partially or totally (i.e., total substitution) changed. For Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, I have examined all general elections from 1945 to the last before the government at issue, whereas for Italy, I have narrowed the analysis to the period subsequent to the breakdown of the former party system (1994 onward). Note that all information on coalition compositions, parliamentary seats, left-right placement, and general elections has been drawn from Döring and Manow (2015).

For the purpose of analysis, I dichotomized the types of conclusions into two categories: victory/nondecision and exchange/compromise. A nondecision is easier to obtain than a victory and simply requires that at least one actor is sufficiently strong to resist any change in the status quo. By contrast, a victory—as defined earlier—implies that party actors wield a sufficient amount of power that they can overcome resistance and change the status quo (cf., Zucchini 2013). In the latter case, political actors must do more than simply block
new policies. However, for simplicity, I consider victories and nondecisions as different facets of zero-sum outcomes: a victory is the victory of the “innovator,” and a nondecision is the victory of the “conservative.” Positive-sum outputs (exchanges and compromises) are more likely when no actors are sufficiently strong to impose their will and coalition partners have to come to terms.

A series of expectations can be derived from the framework. First, we can posit that a greater number of parties makes compromises between all coalition partners more difficult. Moreover, we can suppose that a greater number of critical parties increases the number of actors with the same possibility to credibly threaten to exit. Consequently, the coalition has to find compromises (and exchanges) to avoid conflict radicalization and partner withdrawal. Ideological proximity between allies, in turn, should foster the achievement of compromises. High values of coalition dominance and power imbalance within the coalition can be expected to increase the likelihood of “imposed” outcomes. In other words, there are actors with sufficient power (compared to the allies) to compel the coalition to follow their will. However, as stated previously, the probability of imposed outcomes depends also on the functioning of the party system. The greater the expectation of government turnover, the more likely parties may be to adapt their goals to stronger actors’ goals because of fear that they will be unable to enter the government again if they make the cabinet fall or enter office in the subsequent term. However, one could also argue that the more the expectation concerns a partial turnover rather than a total turnover, the less afraid the parties will be of leaving the cabinet and the more likely they will be to harden their behaviors. Parties know they are more likely to enter another coalition with different partners, and therefore their walk-away value approaches that of the stronger allies. Such conditions lead to more positive-sum outcomes.

I have excluded from calculations the two German coalitions because detailed information on conclusions other than nondecisions are not available. The N of our sample is quite small but still permits interesting observations. Except for the number of critical parties, all listed variables correlate with the type of conflict conclusion in the expected direction. In particular, the correlations hold for the number of parties, coalition dominance, and ideological homogeneity.\(^{13}\) However, these relationships do not indicate causality per se, and refer to the coalitions considered, and the impact of the variables can be

\(^{13}\text{In these cases, the correlation (.7, .7 and .6) is significant, respectively: for p < .05, p < .05, and p < .10. The variable “critical parties” presents a value of only .05, for example, a substantial absence of correlation. Throwing in the analysis also Germany, and hence concentrating only on nondecisions (without reference to victories), “number of parties” and “coalition dominance” lose significance, whereas “power imbalance” and “expected total alternation” become more correlated (.7), and significant for p < .05. “Current government turnover” (.6) becomes significant for p < .10.}
intertwined, but the findings provide some important indications consistent with theoretical expectations.

Case Studies Selection

Although not built on the basis of the framework, the analysis in Vercesi (2013b) of the Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi’s behavior during conflictual phases of his second coalition cabinet in 2001-05 can serve as a background for comparing other cases for hypotheses testing. Indeed, Vercesi (2013b, 301) provides insights summed as follows: Berlusconi was a key player in managing conflicts but was constrained by coalition partners, “especially when they refused to cooperate and opted for radical opposition leading to gridlock.” Moreover, Berlusconi sought to lead the process through bilateral contacts, and “his power depended heavily on two very important political resources: leadership of the coalition and leadership of his party” (Vercesi 2013b, 302).

I have selected two representative cases of inter-party conflict management within two other Italian coalitions whose features concerning the prime minister’s status, cabinet composition, and party leaders’ roles are opposite or similar to those of the Berlusconi II cabinet. This comparison allows us to test the hypotheses and use the literature mentioned as either corroboration or counterfactual, strengthening the findings. The coalitions at issue are those supporting the Prodi I cabinet of 1996-98 and the Berlusconi IV cabinet of 2008-11. Similar to the Berlusconi II cabinet, the prime minister was the leader of a pre-electoral coalition and held “direct legitimation” from the voters. However, the coalition led by Prodi differed because the prime minister was not a party leader (and was nonpartisan) and because most party leaders were not cabinet members (see Marangoni and Vercesi 2015, 21). By contrast, the Berlusconi IV cabinet was very similar to the Berlusconi II in these respects but comprised parties, particularly the main party, that were deeply divided in (conflicting) factions (De Giorgi 2010).

Several factors make the three cabinets comparable for the purpose of this study. First, they were close in time: because the literature highlighted path dependent trends in the choice of arenas (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008, 287-8), this allows to exclude possible changes of “habits” of mid-to-long term. Scholars have also stressed that coalitional governance mechanisms, such as coalition agreements, affect the outputs of a coalition (e.g., Schermann and Ennser-Jedenastik 2014); the Prodi I, Berlusconi II, and Berlusconi IV cabinets adopted pre-electoral coalition deals (Conti 2015). The seriousness of managed conflicts is another variable I have kept fixed, by operationalizing conflict seriousness as in Vercesi (2013b), through newspaper content analysis. Following in that study’s steps, I selected two cases of management of inter-party policy conflicts because this type of conflict is the most threatening for cabinet survival (Müller and Strom 2000c). Moreover, Nousiainen (1993) has argued that the most dangerous conflicts are those where the prime minister is involved; all the
cases at issue have this characteristic. Instead, I did not focus on the policy field of the conflicts because it has been argued that it is not relevant in shaping conflict management in coalitions (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008, 275).

The selected conflicts were disputes concerning a possible public withdrawal from the workers’ trattamento di fine rapporto, a sum of money that Italian employers keep from the salary of an employee and that is returned once an employee leaves the job as an end-of-service payout (Prodi I). I also focused on a conflict on a possible cut of the tax on enterprise income in which the inter-party conflict was intertwined with an intra-party conflict (Berlusconi IV). The relevant processes of conflict management were traced by reading the issues of the most widespread nonpartisan Italian newspaper (Corriere della Sera) from March 1-30, 1997 (Prodi I) and from October 18-27, 2009 (Berlusconi IV), that is, the periods in which the conflicts occurred. Examining the process rather than only the outcomes revealed how the intra-party politics of coalition partners eventually affected the inter-party bargaining and coalition outputs. The framework inspired the reenactment of the crucial steps of the conflict management, and I have focused specifically on the actors and arenas, as defined earlier.

An Analysis of Two Processes of Inter-Party Conflict Management

Prodi I Cabinet

The Prodi I cabinet entered office on May 18, 1996, approximately one month after the general elections, and tendered its resignation on October 9, 1998 because of the withdrawal of the support of the Party of Communist Refoundation (Partito della rifondazione comunista [RC]). This party had been part of a pre-electoral coalition with—from largest to smallest in terms of parliamentary seats—the Democratic Party of the Left (Partito democratico della sinistra [PDS]), the People’s Italian Party (Partito popolare italiano [PPI]), Italian Renewal (Rinnovamento italiano [RI]), and the Federation of Greens (Federazione dei Verdi). These parties formed a government coalition, whereas RC decided to provide only external support. This support was essential for the survival of the cabinet because the coalition did not have the absolute majority of seats in the lower chamber. At the time of inauguration, the cabinet comprised 17 partisan (nine from PDS, four from PPI, three from RI, one from the Verdi) and four nonpartisan ministers; prime minister Romano Prodi was one of the nonpartisans. Among party leaders, only Lamberto Dini of RI entered the cabinet, as minister for Foreign Affairs.

The conflict I consider emerged in the first half of 1997. After approving its first budget bill, the government was ready to decide further economic policies in March of that year to restore public finances in view of Italy’s entrance in the Euro zone. One of the prospective policies was the aforementioned withdrawal from the funds of the trattamento di fine rapporto (Tfr). The deadline for approving the decision within the government was fixed at the end of
March. On March 20th, withdrawal from the Tfr appeared certain. In the evening, the prime minister had a secret talk with all party leaders (including the RC leader, Fausto Bertinotti).

The conflict appeared two days later, only five days before the full cabinet had to make the final decision. On that day, RI expressed its disagreement. Its leader, Dini, stated that the possible decision was useless for recovering state finances. His party colleague and minister for Labor, Tiziano Treu, confirmed the position. Prodi supported the policy and invited the main employers’ representative association (Confindustria), which had a negative position toward the withdrawal, to propose effective alternatives. On March 23rd, PDS (and RC) replied to RI indirectly through the party member responsible for the topic of Labor, who stated: “I understand that, within the coalition, someone might be tempted to make a good impression at low cost, by saying only what should not be done. However, I think it will be quite difficult for that person to propose another policy measure, because the majority of the coalition would not approve it.” During a political meeting in Milan, Dini stressed that he did not want to propose any alternative because this was part of the duties of the cabinet, which had to present any alternative in the full cabinet. According to Dini, the government had to provide a credible decision and take it to the parliament, even without unanimity within the coalition.

On March 24th, more accommodating behaviors appeared. In particular, Prodi discussed at Palazzo Chigi (the building of the Presidency of the Council) a possible large down payment of future taxes with the ministers of Treasury (nonpartisan); Labor (RI); Education (PDS); Health (PPI); Industry, Trade, and Handcraft (PDS); and Defense (PPI). With regard to internal alliances, the PPI, pushed by its own leader Franco Marini, decided to support RI. On March 25th, Prodi met the economic ministers. The outcome of the talk was a proposal to block the Tfr of civil servants for that year and of a postponed payment in 1998. Moreover, the government opted to prepare the aforementioned down payment. The party leaders of the coalition partners and RC, Prodi, the deputy prime minister (PDS), and other ministers participated in the scheduled majority summit on March 26th, where the decision was made (small enterprises were excluded from the down payment). However, RI wanted other structural policy measures, and Dini stated that he wanted to review the decision in view of the full cabinet on the following day. The leaders of PPI and PDS expressed dissatisfaction, whereas the leaders of Verdi (and RC) approved the outcome. On March 27th, the full cabinet approved the decision with some changes. Dini, who had been about to leave the cabinet, stated that the decision lacked structural interventions (Prodi did not agree) and admitted that he approved only because he was isolated within the coalition and did not want to make the cabinet fall in view of more important coalitional goals concerning the entrance of Italy in the Euro zone.

\[^{14}\text{See Di Vico (1997, 4).}\]
The process of conflict management ended with a compromise. Those who initially wanted the withdrawal, such as PDS, accepted a circumscribed policy measure, whereas RI had to modify its positions despite attempting to exercise vetoes during the process. The status quo was altered, although probably less than what would have been possible without the internal opposition of one of the coalition partners. The prime minister played the role of arbitrator.

**Berlusconi IV Cabinet**

After winning a general election on April 13-14, 2008, Berlusconi formed his fourth cabinet, which was sworn in on May 8th and resigned on November 12, 2011. The coalition was a minimum winning coalition comprising only two parties: Berlusconi’s People of Freedom (Popolo della libertà [PDL]) and the Northern League (Lega Nord [LN]), whose leader, Umberto Bossi, was appointed as minister for Federalism. Overall, PDL was represented initially by 18 ministers (including Berlusconi as prime minister), LN was represented by four ministers, and no nonpartisan ministers were appointed.

The first signal of the conflict analyzed here arose in the second half of October 2009. At that time, cuts in the Regional Tax on the Productive Activities, Imposta regionale sulle attività produttive (IrA), were discussed. This tax, which was established by the first Prodi cabinet, concerned enterprises and was proportional to their sales volume rather than their profit. Its main purpose was to finance the public health system. The spark occurred on October 22nd: during a national meeting of the Confederation for craftsmanship and small- and medium-sized enterprises (CNA), the junior minister to the presidency, Gianni Letta (independent but very close to Berlusconi), read a letter in which the prime minister promised a gradual cut of IrA and, eventually, its suppression. At that time, Berlusconi was in Russia and sent this announcement without a prior agreement with the powerful Finance minister Giulio Tremonti (PDL), who was severely adverse to any tax reduction because of the possible lack of solidity of public finances. Tremonti was the reference for the so-called Tremontiani, a faction that also included his Finance deputy-minister, Giuseppe Vegas. After this event, Berlusconi attempted to reassure Tremonti in the evening by telephone. However, the tone of the conversation was very nervous. Tremonti threatened to leave the cabinet if the premier chose the line—close to the former AN’s leader and speaker of the lower chamber Gianfranco Fini—of public expenditure. Finally, the two contenders decided to meet on the following day, immediately before the full cabinet, where positions should have been reconciled.

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15 The PDL was presented as an electoral cartel comprising the former Berlusconi’s party Go Italy! (Forza Italia [FI]), the second largest center-right party National Alliance (Alleanza nazionale [AN]), and other minor lists; it became a formal party in 2009.

16 See Bracalini (2011).
With regard to the coalition, most of PDL was against Tremonti’s positions. The Minister for Economic Development, Claudio Scajola, considered Berlusconi’s announcement positive. Meanwhile, the Senate was discussing the upcoming budget bill, and PDL senator Mario Baldassarri and other former AN members had presented proposals to cut Irap. A document was prepared for submission to the prime minister, who assessed it as “interesting.”17 By contrast, LN supported Tremonti; according to Bossi, the cabinet could not survive without him.

On October 23rd, the atmosphere appeared to worsen. Berlusconi, returning from Russia, did not show up for the scheduled meeting and went directly to his accommodation near Milan (in Arcore) to avoid breaking the relationship with Tremonti; Berlusconi’s dissatisfaction was reported to Fini by Letta in a private talk. On the other side, Bossi visited Tremonti for a breakfast at the Finance department to discuss the controversial issues. Tremonti continued to ask for clarification of Berlusconi’s stance against those positions, which, according to Tremonti, could make the international markets worry (such as Scajola’s position on the reimbursement of the cut in Irap by \textit{una tantum} funding). Despite the atmosphere of conflict, a new meeting between the prime minister and the Finance minister was scheduled on October 24th in Arcore. Moreover, Letta sent some conciliatory signals: during a meeting with the presidents of regions, he noted that the cut in Irap was only a goal and not a final decision.

The Arcore meeting lasted more than two hours and was followed by another four-participant meeting with Bossi and LN’s minister for Simplification of Laws, Roberto Calderoli. Berlusconi asked for more flexibility, but Tremonti maintained an uncompromising position. Eventually, the Finance minister’s position, supported by Bossi, prevailed. However, on the same day, Fini had a conversation with Berlusconi in which he asked Berlusconi to pay attention to the dangers of concessions. According to Fini, these concessions could have brought a “compulsory administration” of the prime minister. Furthermore, the PDL’s minister for Transport, Altiero Matteoli, emphasized that the controversy was quite unusual because the cut in Irap was in the government agenda.

To overcome both intra-party and inter-party divisions, on October 26th, Berlusconi summoned a talk with the three PDL’s national party coordinators, which resulted in Berlusconi returning to the position of the party’s majority. The participants agreed that the Finance minister could not completely have free room to maneuver, and the prime minister stated that he was ready for Tremonti’s possible resignation. According to the prime minister, his minister had put himself “out of the party”18 by using LN as a shield. For these reasons, the prime minister proposed more collegiality within the party to settle

18See Galluzzo (2009, 6).
economic policies. Baldassarri’s proposal on the cut in Irap was still considered appropriate for discussion. Inside the party, Berlusconi’s change was appreciated by, for example, the other party prominent, Fini.

The situation did not undergo any substantial change the following day. Indeed, Berlusconi and Tremonti met once more for more than half an hour, but, overall, the divergences on the same positions persisted. Berlusconi emphasized that the cut was in the program and would be achieved as soon as more information on prospective revenues became available. PDL was therefore legitimated in continuing to search for ways to reach this goal.

The new proposal was first to prepare the cut only for those enterprises with less than 50 employees, provided that they would have maintained their own workers. However, Vegas reaffirmed that the necessary collaterals were not yet available, in line with Tremonti’s prudent line. Reconciliation of the two conflicting positions appeared impossible again, despite an attempt at mediation by Bossi. Even after a meeting in Arcore between Tremonti and Berlusconi on October 30th, Tremonti did not change his opinion. The coalition remained blocked in gridlock until November 5th, when Tremonti, during a meeting with the coalition’s parliamentary leaders, showed openness for a reduction of Irap for small enterprises, although Vegas had expressed doubts about the usefulness of such a reduction the previous day. Moreover, in mid-November, the deputy minister again highlighted the absence of sufficient resources, while Berlusconi officially reminded that the cut was a primary goal of the government.

On November 19th, there was a small crack in the PDL’s majority side. Scajola sent a letter to Berlusconi and Tremonti, proposing the reduction of Irap at least for those enterprises at a loss. The decisive day was November 25th. The first meeting of the recently created PDL’s Committee for Economic Policy, led by Tremonti and also attended by party coordinators, the speaker for the budget bill in the lower chamber and the party parliamentary leaders, brought an agreement within the party. Eventually, Tremonti’s position prevailed, and no cuts to Irap were planned. On the following day, the Finance minister met LN, and the coalition found common agreement.

This second inter-party conflict (intertwined with an intra-party conflict) therefore ended with a nondecision. The majority of the main party was unable to overcome the resistance of the strong minister for Finance, who could rely on the support of the other coalition partner. In particular, he could threaten to leave the cabinet and continue to advocate the decision to avoid any cut of the disputed tax. The prime minister, who was aware of the dangers of making the cabinet fall, was pushed to accept the status quo, and his party eventually followed him.

Discussion of the Findings

The analysis of the explorative case studies under the lens of the framework provides interesting findings, particularly in comparison with those of Vercesi
(2013b) on the Berlusconi II cabinet. The findings confirm that coalitions first tend to internalize the conflict before moving to more mixed or external arenas when the conflict becomes radical, that is, when the conflict threatens cabinet survival. However, differences between the cabinets have been observed. Berlusconi, who wielded more power resources within the coalition, centralized the process as long as possible, that is, until the conflict was not too radicalized. By contrast, Prodi preferred more collective arenas from the very beginning. Within his coalition, cabinet committees were used mostly to prepare polices that had to be discussed later in contexts with higher degrees of party-ness (i.e., arenas in which attendees participated mainly as representatives of their own parties). In the Berlusconi governments, the same function was fulfilled by bilateral contacts between the prime minister and the relevant minister or between the minister and party leaders. Overall, party leaders handled the issues, particularly when the management became complicated, and coalition committees were the arenas employed for the crucial steps of the process. The full cabinet was instead a ratifying chamber.

During conflict management, both prime ministers were forced to “enlarge” the number of participants during the most radical situations. However, in contrast to Berlusconi (particularly in his second cabinet), Prodi did not seek to push the decision. It was more arbitrator than activist, and thus other party leaders had a greater say in the process. However, even Berlusconi had to move toward the arbitrator ideal-type when confronted with a conflict that was not only an inter-party conflict but also (and mostly) a dispute within his own party. The tight alliance between his powerful finance minister and the coalition partner partially deprived Berlusconi of his opportunity to rely on a cohesive party. Therefore, he was forced to mediate to preserve both the party and the coalition. On the other hand, the Prodi I and Berlusconi II cabinets were characterized by very cohesive parties, which allowed the party leaders to concentrate on bargaining with allies.

Concluding Remarks

The framework that I have presented is an alternative tool for studying coalitions. Coalition studies usually focus on coalition formation, portfolio allocation, and coalition termination. Some scholars have instead dealt with coalition governance but have looked at mechanisms and outcomes and have not entered the process (with the notable exception of studies on cabinet decision making). By contrast, the present analysis provides insights on the study of crucial coalitional problems, that is, conflict and conflict management, by firmly grounding the argument in the existing theoretical literature as well as revisiting it from a new perspective. The framework lays theoretical bases for a theory of coalition politics as an exchange in which parties are the units of the game but the relevance of intra-party politics in coalition politics is not discarded. These bases facilitate the explanation of conflict and conflict
management. I have operationalized conflict management by not only examining management mechanisms (as in the literature) but also introducing the aspect of the behavior of actors. The first advantage is the possibility of mapping countries and cabinets according to their style of managing conflict. To further validate the viability of the framework, I have provided quantitative data as well as in-depth empirical inquiries of episodes of conflict management under the lenses of the framework. The analysis has corroborated the hypotheses with valuable information, thus increasing the strength and reliability of the theoretical argument. The variations among cabinets and the findings ensuing from the qualitative inquiries strengthen the applicability of the framework for comparative studies. Indeed, the results demonstrate that the framework can be applied to research on coalitions with different features in term of party composition, cabinet membership, prime ministerial power, and executive and party actors’ impact, suggesting that the framework can be extended to other cabinets outside Italy.

As demonstrated throughout, the framework can be used to enrich the literature on coalitions in a constructive manner by formulating new hypotheses. One possible research outlook is the connection of the theory of party mandate (Louwerse 2011) with the theory of coalition governance and conflict management. One could seek to observe whether different modes of conflict management enhance or undermine the opportunities of a government to fulfill its pledges when coping with conflicts. In addition, future studies could focus on conflict management proper in a twofold manner: horizontally, by comparing countries and coalitions and explaining differences; and vertically, by studying in-depth single countries with a history of coalition politics. Variations across time and even in the same coalition could be observed (and accounted for).

Years ago, in a classic piece on party government, Sjöblom (1986, 109) stated that specifications and distinctions—to be useful—should foster a better understanding of the topic and allow to formulate research problems and propositions more precisely than one could do without them. The content of this article aims at that.

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